

STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 91 Sept. 1998

COMING EVENTS

GRANNY SPRINGS RESERVE On Saturday 12th September, 1998, at 10.00 am the Granny Springs Reserve Bushcare group will officially unveil the new sign, which has been erected behind the Turrumurra Plaza Shopping Centre, to publicise and acknowledge the work being done and to encourage the community to take an interest in this and similar bushcare work. Morning tea will be served and all STEP members and guests are welcome to join the group, both for morning tea or as volunteers for future work.

STEP contributed to make the sign possible and to honour the late Pam Morse's keen interest in this beautiful patch of remaining high forest.

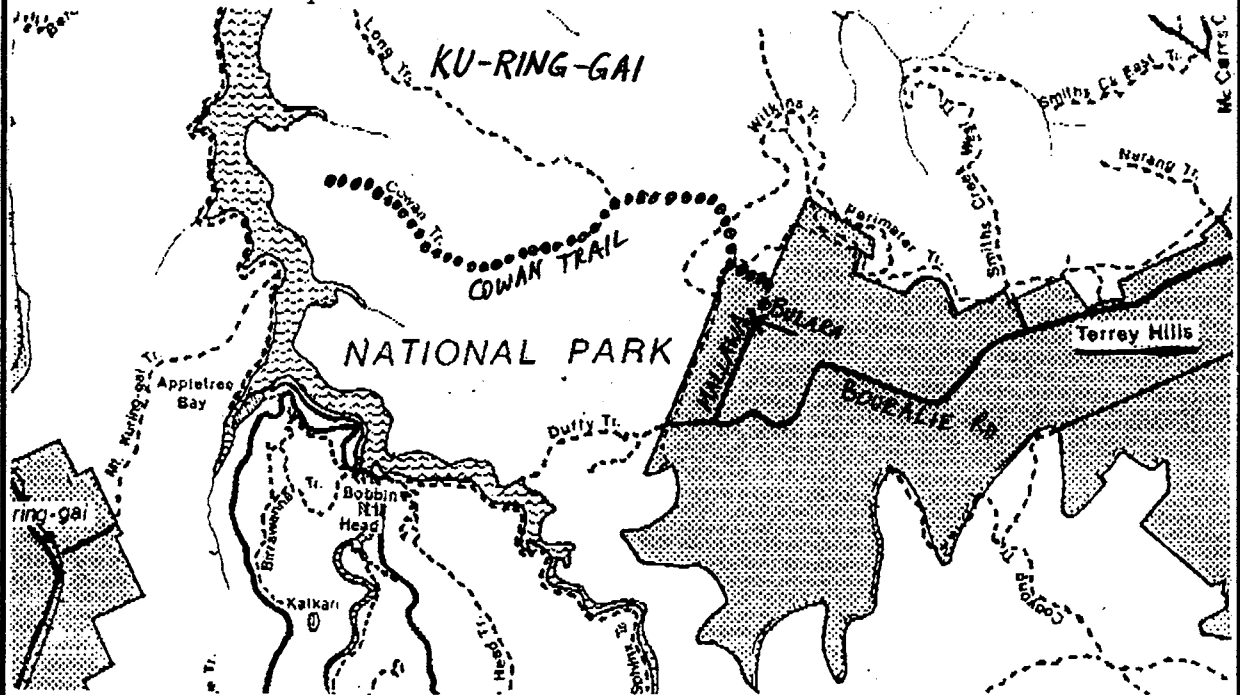
If it happens to be raining the launch will be postponed until further notice

SPRING BUSHWALK On Sunday 20th September, 1998, Neroli Lock will lead the STEP Spring Bushwalk along the Cowan Trail. Spring wild flowers and spectacular views of Appletree Bay will reward participants amply for the three hour walk.

It is all easy grade ridge top walking through that part of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

We will start at 1.45 pm at the corner of Mallawa Rd. and Bulara St., Duffy's Forest. Bring your own refreshments, and bring your friends or family too.

For further information please contact Neroli Lock on 9489 5794.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING STEP's Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 14th October, 1998. The guest speaker has not yet been confirmed, but the Committee is working on some interesting possibilities. Keep the date in mind.

COMMUNITY FAIR Ku-ring-gai Council's annual Community Fair will be held on Sunday 18th October, 1998, at the usual venue in Pymble.

NIGHT BUSHWALK On Friday 6th November, 1998, STEP will undertake a night bushwalk under the auspices of the "Chase Alive" program. This should be an exciting evening spotting the nocturnal wildlife.

CHRISTMAS BARBECUE STEP's Christmas BBQ will be at the usual location at the back of Leuna Ave., Wahroonga, on Sunday 13th December, 1998.

ANTARCTICA

On 22nd July Damien Gore addressed a STEP audience on the subject of Antarctica.

He augmented his talk with slides of the stunningly stark and beautiful landscape of ice and windswept snowfields.

But his subject matter did not only cover the usual aspects of the Antarctic research stations and the beauty of the continent.

He gave us an insight into the dark side of human presence in Antarctica.

The pollution surrounding the research establishments has now been recognised as a major problem. The waste material left behind includes not only hydrocarbon products and rusting drums, but also food scraps, and has the potential to distort the local biological balance. The problem is present at all the research bases, but is particularly bad at those of the former USSR, since they have suffered severe restrictions on funding in recent years.

Some bases seem to have adopted the practice of pushing the debris off the edge into the sea.

There are no easy solutions, since the quantity of material is such that it would take decades to load it into suitable transport units and remove it during the seasonal periods of access to the bases.

Damien is part of a team of scientists investigating the full extent of the pollution, its effect on the local environment and the options which might be available to resolve the problem.

While there is currently an international agreement not to engage in exploitation of Antarctic resources, there is growing pressure to increase access for tourism.

This has potentially serious consequences for the Antarctic environment due to the infrastructure and support services which would be necessary.

Proposals to establish an airstrip in the Australian sector capable of handling planes of the size of a

Boeing 747 have been mooted, for the purpose of easier access for scientific teams and their equipment.

One suspects, however, that if an airstrip of such proportions were established there would be immense pressure to utilise it to capacity by allowing tourism development.

This in turn would imply accommodation and catering facilities for hundreds of tourists, since the Antarctic weather could easily ground the return flight for days at a time.

It would also entail a large ground support contingent and would require all waste materials to be transported out as they are generated. There should be wider debate about these aspects of the Australian, and other national, research bases and the potential for, and detrimental impact of more intensive activity on the Antarctic continent to ensure that another case of major environmental degradation is not allowed to develop by default. Damien's presentation showed his dedication to the Antarctic and provided his audience with a thought provoking view of the impacts of human presence on Antarctica.



EXTENSION OF LANE COVE NATIONAL PARK

Earlier this year (NL issue No. 89, April 98) STEP's position on the incorporation of Council controlled bushland into the Lane Cove National Park was set out.

STEP's views about some of the bushland areas, which were not identified by the State's study, remain controversial.

Hornsby and Ryde Councils have

accepted the proposal in principle, but Ku-ring-gai has rejected the proposal.

While it can be properly argued that Council has built up a strong body of expertise and skilled staff for the management of the bushland under its control, and while there is room for concern that this expertise should not be dismantled in haste, the long term security of tenure would be best served by placing the bushland under the protection of the NPWS Act.

STEP has always argued that there should be continued involvement by Council in the management, and that the existing bushcare volunteer arrangements have served the community well, and STEP continues to contend that a solution must be found which accommodates the legitimate concerns of all the stakeholders for the welfare of the bushland.

There are other questions to be resolved, about the detail of such an incorporation, such as public access, dog-walking, etc.. National Parks and Wildlife Service are attempting to address these concerns in a very positive manner, as demonstrated by the officers present at the Hornsby public meeting.

That leaves the question of adequate funding for the management and conservation of such bushland areas. It appears that there is a genuine commitment on the part of the State Government, through Treasury, to provide funding for the additional area within the Park at the same rate as for existing areas.

Its adequacy can obviously be questioned, but it could be regarded as a minimum basis on which Councils could 'come to the party'.

A commitment from Councils to provide a similar level of funding, as they have allocated in the past to the bushland management, is part of the agreement to incorporate their bushland into National Park.

From the bushland conservation viewpoint this appears to be a good arrangement, with a good chance of providing adequate resources.

However, it supposedly presents Councils with the problem of committing the same level of funding as before despite having lost control of the bushland.

This needs to be seen in the context that the funds would now be applied to the control of surface water discharge to the surrounding bushland at the perimeter of residential areas, and other interface problems, which have such detrimental impacts on the bushland. This has been an aspect, which has been crying out for increased effort on the part of Councils.

Some Councillors, to their credit, have made great efforts to achieve greater budget allocations for this purpose, but Council has found itself handicapped because of external factors.

Nevertheless, it is essential that a long term view is taken. A vision for the future would clearly indicate that integrated control would provide the best management solution. STEP urges Ku-ring-gai Council to take a more positive stance towards incorporation of its bushland into the Lane Cove National Park. STEP also believes that there are areas additional to those proposed by NPWS which should be incorporated, as set out in our position paper and in Newsletter No. 89.



MAP

The task of checking the tracks has commenced with several volunteers having come forward and been allocated areas to check out. This process will take some time, and more volunteers could still be usefully engaged.

The map sub-committee under John Martyn's guidance is due to meet again in the near future to assess the progress and plan further action. In the meantime the number of enquiries for the map is very encouraging.



BUSHCARE PROJECT SUGGESTIONS

Funds continue to become available through the Government's Heritage Fund, and many worthwhile projects are initiated under these arrangements.

The merit of each application is now assessed by the Total Catchment Management Committee as part of the approval process. There are defined limits to the magnitude of funding to ensure community group access, and participation by the community is a basic criterion, as is support by the local Council.

There are many locations within Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby Council areas, which are in need of bushcare attention but not yet receiving any. We encourage STEP members to identify such spots and to discuss these with a view to setting up a group.

Further information can be obtained from Jennifer Schwarz, 9144 2106, and the STEP committee would be prepared to assist in the preparation of an application for funds.

But it does require the grass roots participation by the community. Please contact Jennifer or any member of the committee with your suggestions, even if you are unable to directly take part in a particular project, we may then be able to generate residents' participation.

B2/B3 CORRIDOR SURPLUS LANDS

Ku-ring-gai Council has formed a committee to consider the optimum use of surplus lands released from the abandoned B2/B3 corridor.

STEP has always taken a keen interest, firstly in the campaign to abandon the motorway through the Upper Lane Cove Valley, and since then in the preservation of the bushland in the various parts of the abandoned corridor.

Consequently STEP has sought participation in these deliberations and membership of the Committee. There are areas of high grade bushland, such as the portion between Muttama Ave., Wahroonga, and Canoon Rd., South Turramurra, or the hanging swamp in the patch bounded by Canoon Rd., Barwon Ave. and Lyon Ave.

This is an important issue for the environment in the Fox Valley and South Turramurra areas.



PORTER'S CREEK, NORTH RYDE

When this area was being used as a landfill site in the past, problems of leachate into Porter's Creek, which discharges to the Lane Cove River in the LCNP persisted for years.

There is now a proposal to use the site as a concrete crushing and aggregate recycling centre.

Apart from possible run-off the noise generated by such activity could impact on the amenity of the National Park itself and on residents in the Fiddens Wharf area.

An EIS is to be prepared.

Currently there are green waste recycling activities being carried on on part of the site.

THE URBAN FOX

A campaign is being mounted by NPWS to curb the urban fox population.

A pamphlet has been prepared by the Urban Feral Animal Action Group, with the support of NPWS and Councils and funded by the Lane Cove River Catchment Management Committee.

Foxes are predators of native wildlife, but their spread is also supported by food scraps, pet food and garbage near residential areas. Cage trapping, den fumigation and poison baiting are measures which can be used to control foxes. There are limitations on baiting because of the distance restrictions which must be observed near residential areas. Research into biological control is proceeding.

However the campaign draws attention to the fact that the support of the community may be one of the most effective measures in the Lane Cove catchment since baiting is not possible in the narrow portions of the valley.

Residents can assist by:

- * Never feeding foxes, even if they look cute,
- * Never leaving food scraps or pet food outside
- * Informing local Council of any sightings or den locations
- * Borrowing and setting a Council trap, if there are foxes on your property
- * Educating family and friends about the urban fox threat
- * Lobbying your Council to keep traps if they don't already do so.

Apart from such community support, it is also necessary to have:

- * Coordinated control programs
- * Research to improve the effectiveness of control programs
- * Legislative changes to assist the control of urban foxes.

Further information can be obtained from the NPWS Pest Species Officer, phone 9412 1811.

It is important if you want our native animals and birds to survive.



AUSTRALIAN BUSH HERITAGE

It is interesting to note that the Australian Bush Heritage Fund, established by Tasmanian Bob Brown, has now taken an interest in the Brigalow Belt in Queensland. The brigalow country is where the annual rate of land clearing still exceeds the total area of the ACT, in spite of general consensus that further land clearing should stop.

The continued clearing threatens the survival of fauna which has evolved in this habitat and depends on the features of the brigalow woodland, such as tree hollows, peeling bark, nectar, grassy ground layer and open structure of the woodland.

Clearing replaces these features with an increase in introduced grasses or with introduced crops, which are both more vulnerable to climatic conditions, as well as displacing the fauna.

The Australian Bush Heritage Fund has purchased a property of 600 hectares, minute in the total context, but with a view to conserving a portion of this particular flora community and fauna habitat.

COWAN CATCHMENT LECTURE SERIES

The Cowan Catchment Management Committee has arranged a series of lectures designed to help community members increase their understanding of environmental issues.

Past lectures were by Dr. John Powell, Coordinator of the Hawkesbury River Environment Society,

and Ms Eedra Zey, trainer for EPA's *Earthworks* waste reduction program.

Future lectures are:

15th September, 1998, Associate Professor Peter Mitchell on "*Sydney Landscapes: Geodiversity from Simplicity*".

20th October, 1998, Jack Munday on "*Can Ecology and Economics be Integrated?*".

17th November, 1998, Judith Rawlings on "*I Want an Exotic Garden, But I Want to Make My Garden Bush Friendly*".

The lectures are held in the Beatrice Taylor Hall, Willow Park Community Centre, 25 Edgeworth David Ave., Hornsby, at 7.30 pm. Entry is free, but RSVP is essential to the Catchment Centre on phone 9482 7187, to allow for seating and catering.

HAWKESBURY-NEPEAN WEEK

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust has organised a program of events for the H-N Week from 12th September to 20th September, 1998.

It incorporates activities including Berowra Creek Month, Men of the Trees treeplanting at Cattai Creek, bush regen and planting at Penrith, Bonnie Doon Fauna Study, South Creek tree planting, and various local land care groups, as well as a Family Fair and a Mock Trial set in the year 2038 entitled "Who Killed the H-N River?"

The contacts for the various events are too diverse to list here, but information can be obtained from Jooli Dumbrell or Laurel Tweedie on 02 4577 4243.

It sounds like fun.

CUMBERLAND FOREST

A well kept secret seems to be the Cumberland Forest, which can be accessed at 95 Castle Hill Rd., West Pennant Hills.

It has an Information Centre, Nursery and extensive walks trails, as well as an Arboretum with 250 species of trees and shrubs.