

STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 65 Feb 1994

CLEAN-UP Australia Day is coming up again, on SUNDAY 6th MARCH. Last year John Martyn led a STEP team to clean up the area around the Blaxland Waterfalls on Shrimptons Creek. The recent bushfires have burnt out that area of bushland and revealed a whole lot more undesirable rubbish. Consequently we have agreed with CLEAN-UP, who have in turn coordinated with NPWS, to have another go at this area. John Martyn will again supervise the activities, and encourages all STEP members who can possibly make it, to put in a few hours on that day. There is a heap of work to be done. A word of warning :- The fires have made all glass objects extremely brittle, to the extent that they will shatter as they are picked up. Therefore please bring leather gloves for this purpose, and eye protection may also be advisable. The area is accessed from Alma Rd., North Ryde. For details please contact John Martyn, 449 7962.

BUSHFIRES 1

The January, 1994, bushfires have created havoc in the bush and in the minds of people who were in fear of their property being consumed, or even those who just witnessed the fierce display of energy release.

Consequently a lot of discussion has taken place about fire safety, control burning, and bushland management generally. Since STEP members have in the

past played a major part in showing how fire hazard reduction can be carried out without undue disturbance of the bushland, this issue of the Newsletter revisits the subject. A two page insert of BUSHFIRE HAZARD REDUCTION is enclosed with it. In fact the recent fires dominate the subject matter in this issue. Two STEP members have taken the trouble to put pen to paper on

the subject of bushfires.

We reproduce these here in a slightly abridged form. If editing has caused any distortions to the articles, we apologise to the authors.

Some comments may be controversial, but we should not shy away from debate, and any views or comments from other members would be most welcome. *The first contribution comes from John Martyn.*

BUSHFIRES 2

EFFECTS ON THE UPPER LANE COVE VALLEY

The bushfires started in the Brown's Waterhole area on Thursday 6th January, and moved up the valley as far as the Canoon Rd ridge, and down the valley towards West Pymble and beyond. The fires also moved up the Terry's Creek valley on Friday 7th, as well as in the direction of Devlin's Creek, and a new fire started in the Twin Creeks Reserve on the same day. Friday also saw the fire move further down valley to Lindfield/Killara, having crossed Ryde Rd at De Burgh's bridge. Saturday 8th saw further movement in the Devlin's Creek and Terry's Creek areas. The effects have been variable.

Twin Creeks Reserve

The fire extended from the fire trail between Howson and Mitchell Ovals to Rothwell St, Kissing Point Rd and approached the Comenarra Parkway. It was most intense on the rise towards Kissing Point Rd, the belt of weeds along there providing little protection to properties. Rainforest vegetation downstream from Brown's Field was not affected. The wind direction precludes the possibility of this fire having been caused by spotting from the main valley, and leads to the suspicion that it was locally started.

North Epping

The fire travelled upstream along the South slope of Devlin's Creek to below Woods St Oval. This observer is not able to conclude where it originated.

South Turramurra

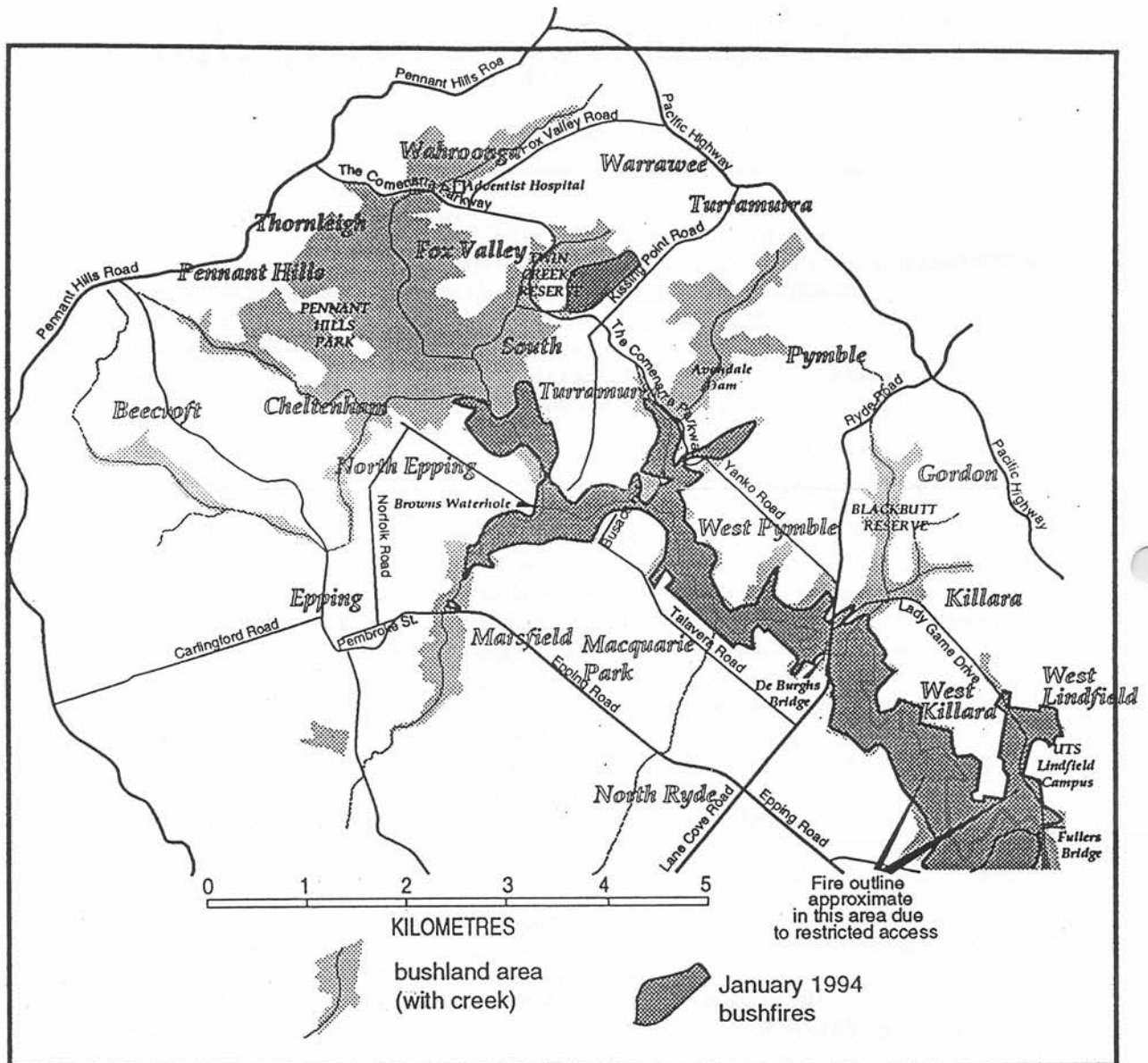
The fire burnt out most of the STEP track, a substantial part of the rainforest and regenerated vegetation along the Lane Cove River being destroyed. It was contained at its Northern edge by a backburn along the Canoon Rd fire trail.

A large patch of bush behind the High School was unburnt, due to a previous fire this summer and wind direction. The fire was contained at the Comenarra, except where it jumped with a local flare-up to cross into the Avondale Golf Course bush.

Green, unburnt corridors extend along the river and creek lines.

Marsfield

The fire spread down the river up to and past Busaco Rd on Thursday. The dense weeds and closed scrub along the bushland fringes in that



area are largely burnt out, but the rubbish they concealed is now exposed, such as the large dump of night-soil bins at the end of Busaco Rd. Intense fire on the Southern slope from Terry's Creek destroyed property at the end of Vimiera Rd.

Macquarie Park

The Marsfield fire extended along the South side of the valley as far as De Burgh's bridge and beyond, destroying the weedy fringes and exposing piles of rubbish, including numerous car bodies. We are hoping that sufficient heavy equipment will be made available during the Clean-Up day to remove these items.

West Pymble

There are large patches of unburnt bush along the river and wind shadow effect has protected bush on the Northwest side of Quarry and Rudder's Creeks. Weeds and grassed areas acted as a fire break along the bushland side of Gloucester Ave. Weeds and Pittosporum have clearly acted as fire barrier along the sandstone cliff on the West side of Kooloona Cr.

West Lindfield/Killara

The intensity of the fire resulted in property loss and damage in that area, including to the UTS campus. Closure of the Lane Cove River Park prevented a report on that side. Blackbutt Reserve was unaffected.

RECOVERY

The bush is already beginning its recovery. First to appear were Blady Grass shoots (*Imperata cylindrica*), a few days after the fire and mainly along the tracks. Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea spp.*) started growing from their crowns and various rush-like plants have sprouted. The first tree species to break out in epicormic buds has been *Angophora hispida*, which is also regenerating, mallee-like, from roots. Peppermint gums (*E. piperita*) are also starting to sprout from their trunks. Dead leaf matter from eucalypts and angophoras has fallen en masse as in a deciduous fall, and covers the ground in many places, providing some measure of protection against erosion.

Some good rain has now fallen, which should trigger the germination of seedlings.

What Price the Pittosporum?

Maybe the Sweet Pittosporum (*P. undulatum*) will be regarded differently after the fires?

Its increase as a natural consequence of long periods without fire has been documented in areas far from urban bushland. Because it is spread by birds, cohabits with weeds and shades out other native plants, it has become a target among bush regenerators. But it does not provide the explosive fuel that eucalypts and many other sclerophylls do, and

can be an effective fire barrier in some circumstances, especially in backyards adjoining bushland. It may be the lesser of several evils, and arguably it may pose no long-term threat to the larger areas of bushland, since it was destroyed by the fires that swept these areas and will inevitably do so again. Its strict control should perhaps be limited to those small areas of high conservation value, like Sheldon Forest, where its destruction by wildfire is less likely.

Although Pittosporum is the most effective coloniser among native trees and shrubs, that do not burn easily, others such as Cheese Trees (*Glochidion fernandi*), Bleeding Heart (*Omalanthus populifolius*)

and the various pinnate or feather-leaved wattles (e.g. *Acacia irrorata*) can also act as fire barriers. In creeks and gullies Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and Water Gum (*Tristaniopsis laurina*) also fit this category.

There may be a case for encouraging such species in areas adjoining properties, instead of attempting the impossible task of restoring all of these sites to their original condition.

This is a subject on which there are certain to be differing views among STEP members, and it would be interesting to hear of them.

Editor

BUSHFIRES 3

The second contribution consists of extracts from Alan Catford's debriefing report. Alan is a foundation member of STEP.

We should be concerned with both, the safety of our lives and properties and the continuing integrity and beauty of our native bushlands. Fire management should take account of both. The following points are important now and in the future:

Fuel Reduction

An adequate fire break comprising a fuel-reduced zone should be provided to protect every property, which adjoins bushland.

The amount of reduction of both dead and living plant matter, particularly the latter, should taper off away from the property.

The width of the firebreak and fuel-reduced zone will vary with such factors as aspect, slope and type and density of vegetation, but should be sufficient to protect from the direct flames of the severest fire.

The required operations should be carried out in such a way that environmental impact on the bushland is minimised.

Consideration should be given to

organising local residents to maintain the fuel reduction using hand tools rather than using control burning, which cannot be applied too frequently without severe impact on species distribution.

Education

There is still insufficient knowledge among residents and information should be distributed to all rate-payers on matters like:

**Protection measures*

The usual measures recommended by fire authorities including clearing of gutters, closing doors and windows, clearing flammable material from near the house, etc.

**Fire behaviour*

Enough to allow people to assess danger, which fires can be tackled by hand, the need for escape routes

**Fire fighting*

What to wear, what to have ready, how brigades work, etc.

**Evacuation*

Arguments for or against staying with your house, police authority,

**Responsibility*

Need for residents to accept responsibility for living near bush, without expecting "overkill" of the bush on their behalf.

**Fire ecology*

An elementary grounding on the effects of fire on plants and animals to give a better understanding.

Resident Fire Protection Groups

Consideration should be given to the formation of resident groups whose function would be to detect and report fires early, with alert on moderate to high fire danger days.

New Developments

All new developments near bushland should include provision for bushfire risk, e.g. should be built to standards relating to siting design and materials, and possibly perimeter roads with fuel reduction zones within the land to be developed.

The State Government should have a role in this through a new State Environmental Planning Policy. There is also a need for continuing discussion about fire resistant trees, the extent to which modification of the natural environment may be accepted, and fire management.

Finally, insurance incentives and adequate funding of fire brigades are important.

Editor's note: STEP has made a submission to the State Cabinet Committee on Bushfire Management and Control relating to selective hand clearing, new developments and the need for stricter building regulations.

DESTRUCTION BY MOTORWAY

While everyone is discussing the recent bushfires, our public servants appear to be hell-bent on destroying our environment by other means.

Not only is the RTA pushing ahead with the M2 motorway through Carlingford and Epping to North Ryde, but it appears that the schedule for its implementation has been greatly accelerated.

The RTA is also planning further extensions to the M5 Wolli Creek Motorway, as well as a Cook's

River Freeway, an F6 Southern Freeway and a connection from the Harbour Tunnel via the Eastern Distributor.

Put all those together and you have Sydney's version of a Los Angeles style "paradise".

Air pollution in the metropolitan area is acknowledged to be serious and to be due to the car dependence of our transport system.

Our major metropolitan river systems are acknowledged to be almost terminally polluted by the results of the urban sprawl.

Nevertheless there seems to be a

concerted push to impose these motorways, the urban sprawl and the deterioration of air and noise pollution on the community, not to mention the areas of natural bushland which will disappear. STEP has participated in the recent Department of Planning and Department of Transport workshops and has voiced the need to avoid further destruction by urban sprawl and motorways. But it is difficult to make any impact on the RTA or its political master, unlike the impact their policies will have on us.

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BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT

Rob Mather, Ku-ring-gai Fire and Bush Management Officer,

has agreed to present a **Talk and Slide Show** to us on

Thursday 24th March, 1994, 7.45 pm

at the St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall, Vernon St., South

Turrumurra.

VERY TOPICAL

ADVANCE NOTICE

Robin Buchanan
BA(Hons), Dip Ed, MAIH has agreed to lead a walk on Sunday 1st May, 1994, and talk about bush recovery and natural regeneration. Robin is a TAFE teacher at Ryde College, and a well-known author on bush regeneration.
Details in the next Newsletter.