



STEP Matters

Number 125, August 2004

In this Issue

Diary Dates	1
Walk Bobbin Head Track.....	1
Australian Native Orchids	1
UTS Ku-ring-gai Campus	2
STEP Committee	2
Map Progress.....	3
Phytophthora	3
Pam Morse Bequest Fund	4
Recently Spotted	4
Guide to Bird Habitats	4

STEP Committee

President

Michelle Leishman

Treasurer

Thérèse Carew

Newsletter

Bruno Krockenberger and
Helen Wortham

Publicity

Jenny Schwarz

Web, Membership, Publications

Helen Wortham

Committee Members

Neroli Lock

John Martyn

Tony Morrison

Ann Perry

Diary Dates

25 Aug	UTS Ku-ring-gai Campus public meeting (see page 2)
19 Sept	Walk in Blue Gum High Forest, St Ives (meet at Rosedale Road entrance at 1:45 pm)
26 Sept	Walk along Bobbin Head Track (see next column)
19 Oct	Annual general meeting and talk

Walk Bobbin Head Track

Date: Sunday 26 September

Time: 1.15 pm for 1.30 pm

Place: End of Bobbin Head
Road, Turramurra
(just before entrance to
National Park)

Duration: 2 hours

Grade: Easy

Contact: Bill Jones (9498 6052)

We will follow the Bobbin Head
Track down to Bobbin Head.

The beginning of the track
usually provides a good
opportunity to see a variety of
birds which we will try to
identify. We will also observe
changes in vegetation and
concentrate on the spring
wildflowers. Given time, we will
take in the Aboriginal carvings
and the views over extensive
bushland areas along a side
track.

Remember to bring water, and
to wear appropriate walking
shoes, a hat and sunscreen.
Binoculars are optional.

Australian Native Orchids

As promised in our last
newsletter, Ron Howlett gave
us a fantastic presentation of
the beauty and diversity of
Australian native orchids at
our last talk in July.

The audience just managed to
squeeze into the meeting
room on a cold night and
really appreciated Ron's
magnificent photography and
his description of the
characteristics of the different
species. Ron's enthusiasm for
native orchids was evident in
his explanation of the various
habitats where they are to be
found and indeed where the
individuals photographed
were found.

Long after his formal
presentation and question and
answer session were finished,
Ron was besieged by
members of the audience,
eager for more information.

When thanking Ron for his
wonderful talk Neroli Lock
presented him with a copy of
the STEP map, jokingly
suggesting that he might like
to use it to record future finds
of native orchids.

Note:

A more detailed report of the
talk will be given in our next
newsletter.

Would you prefer to receive
your newsletter by e-mail?
If so, please advise
secretary@step.org.au

STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978
PO Box 697, Turramurra, NSW 2074

secretary@step.org.au

www.step.org.au

ABN 55 851 3472 043

UTS Ku-ring-gai Campus

A public meeting has been called by a community group, Community Against University Sell-off (CAU\$), and the UTS Students Association on Wednesday 25 August at 7.30 pm, to protest against the proposed sale of the campus for high density housing.

CAU\$ was formed in response to a series of meetings in what the University styled 'community consultation'. CAU\$ members are outraged at some of the procedures adopted in the administration of the Community Reference Group (CRG) meetings and the refusal to engage in dialogue with the community about the matters which really concerned the community.

John Burke is STEP's representative on the CRG and he has raised a series of matters which are of particular concern to STEP, in addition to the complaint that the CRG meetings with UTS were a sham.

STEP, in the person of John Burke, has been involved in negotiations with UTS, together with Ku-ring-gai Council, NPWS, residents and other environmental groups, since 1990, when UTS first lodged a DA for an access road. As a result the DA was rejected and after further proposals in 1993 a new DA was submitted in 1994, which had substantially addressed residents' and environmental concerns.

An 'in-principle' approval for a new access road route was issued in 1995, with many issues remaining to be solved. Eventually in 1998 Council granted development consent with 25 stringent conditions relating to environmental issues, including the requirement to develop and implement a Bushland Management Plan.

STEP had provided the concept of a Conservation Agreement, which had found acceptance from the UTS negotiators at the time. It was fairly described as a win-win-win situation; UTS having achieved its access road, residents having had their traffic problems ameliorated and the most valuable bushland having been preserved in perpetuity. However the road wasn't constructed, and neither the Plan, nor the Agreement were formalised. Extraneous developments since 1998 have changed the UTS view of the campus.

Now the bushland is under threat again, the residents see their problems being exacerbated and a higher education site is being alienated for high residential development.

Matters raised by STEP are:

- UTS has broken all promises regarding the preservation of the bushland on the site
- the concept plan encroaches on, and will have an adverse impact on, the bushland

The CRG was briefly shown proposals and data but never given access to vital data.

The CRG formed the view that the decision to sell the site was made before discussions commenced but was never disclosed.

UTS never engaged with the CRG on matters such as the ecological value of the bushland on the site or other matters of community concern.

A review of the history of this site has led to the view that the site is not the University's to sell, morally, or perhaps even legally.

Certainly STEP hopes that it is not UTS's intention to imply that through the 'community consultation' the CRG has approved of the proposals presented to it.

The public meeting will be held at the bottom of Eden Road, Lindfield, just after Film Australia through the boom gates to the campus parking areas.

The meeting will be addressed by:

- Dr Terry Metherell, NSW Minister of Education at the time of the UTS amalgamation
- David Turner, architect of the Ku-ring-gai Campus (which won the Sulman Award)
- Prof James Weirick, Professor of Landscape Architecture, UNSW
- Rebekah Doran, President of the UTS Students Association
- Jim Colman, town planner, architect and university lecturer
- Robert Pallin, Chair of the NSW Nature Conservation Council

STEP urges members to attend the meeting to ensure that the community's voice is heard.

STEP Committee

From time to time STEP needs new members for its management committee to promote its goals of preserving the natural bushland and the enjoyment of this natural asset.

STEP is currently in good shape organisationally and has the public profile and the credibility to exert a positive influence in environmental matters, but it needs more hands on the committee to ensure that it can deal with the challenges and the opportunities that arise.

If you are willing to join the committee or know of someone who has the capacity and willingness, please contact secretary@step.org.au, Helen (9144 2703), Neroli (9489 5794) or Bruno (9449 1985).

Since all committee members are volunteers, the more hands the easier the task for the individual.

Map Progress

The Middle Harbour map project is now near completion. The data have been sent to Land and Property Information (LPI) in Bathurst for printing.

It is particularly important to achieve a good colour balance for Janet Carter's two beautiful cover landscape paintings. LPI have updated their printing technology since the Lane Cove maps were printed, achieving better and sharper colours, so we can be assured of a good result.

It looks as though we are on-track for a launch in November and steps are being taken to find a suitable venue and speaker.

Phytophthora

New Scientist (5 June 2004)¹ featured an article on the worldwide effects of the fungal plant pathogen *Phytophthora* and also devoted their entire editorial to it. The article makes alarming reading and the following is a digest and commentary.

The plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is familiar to many Australians as the cause of the dieback that has rampaged through the jarrah forests of Western Australia. It was also recently shown to be responsible for dieback in *Angophora costata* at Middle Head and other bushland reserves around Sydney Harbour. But the problem of *Phytophthora* is global and growing.

Deaths of oaks around San Francisco Bay and rhododendrons in Europe due to *Phytophthora ramorum* have refocused on the disease, and on the main cause of its recent spread, the nursery trade.

The more familiar *P. cinnamomi*, and most others of the genus, attack the roots of plants and produce spores that are carried by water. *P. ramorum* however attacks the soft tissue beneath the bark of the above-ground part of a plant and spreads by aerial spores.

Phytophthoras belong to a group of alga-like fungi called oomycetes. In their native habitat (mainly Asia) they live in harmony with their hosts and cause little damage, but huge numbers of our horticultural plant species originated in SE Asia and *Phytophthora* species travelled with them. Having caused the Irish potato famine and the extinction of the southern Appalachian chestnut forests the alarm over phytophthora is understandable.

P. cinnamomi is thought to attack up to 20% of the species of the biodiverse heathlands and woodlands of southwestern Australia and its presence is also starting to be felt in the comparable floral domains of South Africa. The *New Scientist* article makes the comparison between *Phytophthora* and the spread of animal diseases through habitat destruction and change, and the effects of global travel.

Although they reproduce asexually, *Phytophthoras* can also do so sexually, and hybridise with related strains and even between species to produce virulent offspring. The death of riverside alder trees in England has been shown to be due to a virulent hybrid of two *Phytophthora* species, and a single pot in a nursery in Bavaria was shown to contain five different *Phytophthora* species.

Fuelled by magazines and TV lifestyle programs, the demand for exotic plants in Europe and North America is now so great that plants are imported in bulk from as far away as New Zealand and China where production costs are lower ... does this represent a threat to Australia under the US Free Trade Agreement?

According to the *New Scientist* article, fungicides do not kill *Phytophthoras* and so fungistatic chemicals that merely suppress them are used in nurseries. It is their opinion that only strict quarantine controls, and limitations on propagation, transport and sale of plants will avert the development and spread of a rash of new and deadly plant diseases.

Note:

In Issue 119 of *STEP Matters* it was stated that phosphite was a fungicide that has been used to a limited extent in WA to control *P. cinnamomi*. Over there it is sprayed onto foliage, and also injected into trunks where a specific tree is threatened. It acts by boosting the plants defence system against the disease. BUT it is not licensed for use on native vegetation in NSW. It must be used with a surfactant when sprayed. The concentration has to be pre-assessed on a plant-by-plant basis because it is toxic to vegetation at high levels. It does not seem to be adversely toxic to beneficial fungi. In NSW it is used to sterilise soil in nurseries but there is a fear that this may selectively create a *Phytophthora* super-race just as overuse of antibiotics has bred superbugs.

¹ John Martyn (9449 7962) has a copy of the article for limited loan to anyone interested.

Pam Morse Bequest Fund

Last year Warrawee Public School was one of two recipients of STEP's Pam Morse Bequest Fund, which is awarded for environmental education projects. They received the grant to help them establish an arboretum in the school grounds. Warrawee Public School is fortunate to have some endangered Blue Gum High Forest within their grounds and many large remnant trees.

On 31 July the children participated in a native tree planting and environment day, where one of the activities was to find the twenty trees of the arboretum, which are tagged with their common and scientific name. Ku-ring-gai Council staff helped with tree identification and also with tree planting on the day. A great day of environmental education was had by all!

Recently Spotted

On 8 August, Turramurra resident Alan Deitch video taped and photographed two echidnas next to the fire trail leading down to the Lane Cove River from the netball and tennis courts on Canoon Road.

The same weekend STEP committee member, Anne Perry (see photo) saw a solitary black kite fly overhead 'weird as they usually keep company ... the drought is bringing some odd company here' commented Anne.

Guide to Bird Habitats

You may know your birds, but what do their habitats look like?

NSW Bird Atlassers Inc has published a wonderful book *A Guide to Bird Habitats in New South Wales* by R.M. Cooper and J.A.W. McAllan. The Guide contains descriptions and photographs (over 200) of bird habitats, three of which are from South Turramurra!

The Guide costs \$32. If you would like to obtain a copy contact secretary@step.org.au for more details.



Anne Perry (STEP committee member and Warrawee parent) and students planting native trees



Mayor of Ku-ring-gai Council, Adrienne Ryan, planting a tree