STORIES BEHIND THE NAMES
“FIELD OF MARS”

In 1792, Governor Phillip gave the name “Field of Mars” to the entire area north of the Parramatta River from Dundas to the Lane Cove River. Mars was the Roman God of War, so the name reflected the military background of settlers who received the first land grants. This was in contrast to “Field of Concord”, land south of the Parramatta River where grants went to non-military people.

As time went by and the land was gradually settled, residents in these settlements adopted other names for their localities to replace the name. The railway station named Field of Mars in 1886 is now Epping. All later names (including Ryde) remain.

A notable variant of the original name is “Marsfield” and this is now used for the suburb to the north of Eastwood and Macquarie Park. There was also the “*Marsfield Brick, Tile & Pottery Works Pty Ltd* ” whose works were in Ryde to take advantage of the superior quality clay quarried from a 9-acre site in and around what is now Gannon Park, making the name, “*Quarry Road*” appropriate.

Field of Mars Common was an area of public land set aside by Governor King in 1804 for use as a traditional English common. It covered most of what is now North Ryde and parts of Lane Cove National Park. By 1874 it had been resumed as crown land and most was cleared for allotments, streets and the **Field of Mars Cemetery**. Funds raised from sales of the land were used to build the first Gladesville Bridge which opened in 1881.

Field of Mars Park was the remaining 85 acres (35 hectares) of unsold land. Originally dedicated as a park in 1887, it was intended to be the main park for the Municipality of Ryde, but Ryde Council deemed it to be too far away and inaccessible for the purpose so instead they obtained Salters Paddock which was opened as Ryde Park in 1908.

Boundaries of the Field of Mars Park were Cressy Road at Tyrell Park, the two creeks, the cemetery and the alignments of Wellington Road and Monash Road near Buffalo Creek. The cemetery was granted extra land in the 1960s, thus reducing the area of the Field of Mars Park. Natural bush extended further west along the Buffalo Creek valley and north over Candle Hill, now known as the Dress Circle Estate in East Ryde, but these areas were not part of the park.

Access was gained by boat along the Lane Cove River, or via Pittwater Road from Gladesville. Pittwater Road was so named because of a proposal to build a tramway linking Gladesville to Pitt Water. In the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, the stone bridge in Cressy Road was built to improve access over Buffalo Creek and a rough road was constructed from the bridge along the north side of the valley into the park. Until the 1950s it was used for logging and sandstone quarrying operations. Remnants of this road are now part of the Kunzea Track. Wellington Road was accessible from Cressy Road near Quarry Road and, until the 1980s, formed the main access to properties in that area. It was never a sealed road but it was capable of carrying heavy vehicle traffic.

Field of Mars Wildlife Refuge was dedicated in 1975. It embraces the original Field of Mars Park with additional parcels of land so it now extends between Buffalo Creek and the cemetery west to Cressy Road, and north of Strangers Creek to the south boundary of the houses in East Ryde: a total of 49.83 hectares. “Wildlife Refuge” is the official classification, but it is commonly known as the “Field of Mars Reserve”.

On the next page are the stories behind other names around the Field of Mars Reserve…

CREEKS

Buffalo Creek and Buffalo Road are believed to be named after the HMS Buffalo, a convict then emigrant ship that came from England in two voyages in the 1830s before becoming wrecked off New Zealand in 1840.

In 1928 Buffalo Creek became the subject of a poem written by John le Gay Brereton, a friend and colleague of famous Australians including explorer Ludwig Leichhardt and author Henry Lawson. Brereton lived at Osgathorpe, a grand home on the corner of Osgathorpe and Victoria Roads and whose upstairs veranda overlooked the Buffalo Creek valley. Sadly the building was demolished in 1956 before its heritage significance was realised.

Strangers Creek was so named because some homeless people lived around the bush until the 1950s. Local residents – mostly farmers – warned children not to wander there alone. The concept of Stranger Danger is not new!

TRACKS

Sand Track was a bridle track until the 1960s. Horses' hooves prevented plants from growing along the trail and eroded the sandstone rocks so the track was sandy for most of its length. Nowadays the traffic is human feet so the track has mostly lost its sandy appearance but the name remains.

Boardwalk for most of its length is really part of the Kunzea Track. It was built with funds from the Australian Government's Economic Stimulus Plan, and replaced and extended the former combination of ground-level tracks and timber boardwalks along Buffalo Creek. It also replaced two 40-year-old timber bridges built across Buffalo Creek by volunteers of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora & Fauna Preservation Society: one bridge near Monash Road and the other near the visitor information centre. Boardwalk was officially named upon its opening in November 2009.

Warada Track existed prior to its naming in 2001 when it was upgraded as a Centenary of Federation project. The name reflects the aboriginal heritage of the area and the track's proximity to the only known local indigenous waratah plants [*Telopea speciosissima*] in the reserve.

Doyle Track is named after former local resident Wal Doyle, who was one of the early members of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society and worked hard at our weekly working bees in the 1960s. His most significant contribution was the clearing of invasive weeds and opening up a track along the route of the Boardwalk on the north side of Buffalo Creek.

Kunzea Track was a Ryde Bicentenary Project in 1991. It was originally named the Canon Track as that company contributed to paying the construction cost. The track was built along the Buffalo Creek valley to link Ryde Park with the Great North Walk which had opened just three years earlier.

Ten years after opening, the Canon Track was needed some maintenance but the company declined the opportunity to pay for it. This prompted a proposal to rename the section of track in the Field of Mars Wildlife Refuge.

The track is named for the *Kunzea ambigua* bushes which grow along the section between Cressy Road and the Sand Track junction. When the local council wanted to turn the Field of Mars into a major garbage tip, we invited several aldermen to come and see the bushland they proposed to destroy. In the heat of a summer night the Kunzeas' white flowers shining in torchlight and rich nectar scent created a very favourable impression. This contributed to the aldermen deferring the decision and giving time for the intense successful campaign to save the bushland.

These notes prepared by Phillip Ward, 2015

For more information contact:
Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society
W: https://rydehhffps.org.au/
A: PO Box 552 Gladesville 1675
E: RHHFFPS@gmail.com