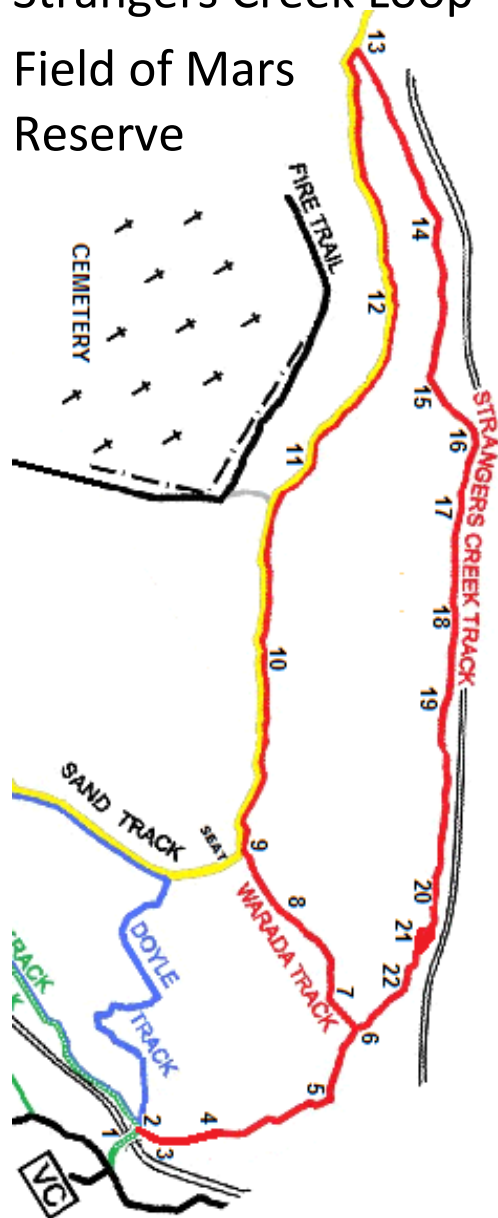


Track Notes – Warada & Strangers Creek Loop

Field of Mars Reserve



1. Start at the footbridge near the visitor information centre. As you cross the bridge, see if you can spot any fish, waterbirds and insect life. The creek here is a tidal estuary: a great place for young fish. Mangroves are among the many saltmarsh plants and trees that help to purify the water. You can see the mangroves' pneumatophores [snorkel roots] in the saltmarsh area on your right. It is a favourite feeding ground for ducks and the small black water hens with bright red bills. To your left, the creek's banks are stabilised by swamp she-oaks [*Casuarina glauca*].
2. Turn right.
3. On your right is a remnant of how this area appeared with saltmarsh plants before the area was used as a landfill site in the 1950s. The left bank was planted with local native plants on National Tree Day 2017.
4. To your left is a bush regeneration area where we are developing habitat for birds and other animals. Under the trees is a brush turkey mound which is often active but sometimes abandoned, depending on the weather and seasonal conditions. Some exotic weeds add habitat value. This area is a hideout for reptiles and swamp wallabies. The flat grass area was once an extensive saltmarsh until it was used as a garbage tip. When the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society started work on the reserve in 1966, volunteers removed weeds, brought in topsoil and planted native trees and shrubs on this landfill area.
5. To your left, just before the top of the stairs, is the Warada Track commemorative stone with some useful information. A few steps take you into the natural bushland.
6. At the track junction signs, veer left to continue up the hill. The rocks are Hawkesbury Sandstone which is a general feature of the Sydney area and the Blue Mountains. Soil with these rocks is not very fertile and generally unsuitable for farming, as the early settlers from England quickly discovered. However, aborigines found sandstone to be great for rock carvings; later, settlers used it for buildings and it is ideal for road cuttings and tunnelling.
7. There is evidence that the flat rock ledge was a meeting place for local aborigines, the Wallumadegal. Their diet included shellfish gathered from rocks of the nearby saltmarsh and along the Lane Cove River.
8. Among red bloodwood and scribbly gum trees are wattles, hakeas [*Hakea sericea*], banksias [*Banksia serrata* & *spinulosa*] and grevilleas [*Grevillea sericea* & *buxifolia*]. If you look carefully in the predominantly sandy soil you can see some seams of clay. This transition formation enables a variety of plants to grow around here.
9. After a short distance there is a signposted junction. Here you will turn right, but if you would like a rest there is a seat a few metres away to the left of the junction. In the bush near this junction are some boronias [*Boronia ledifolia*] which display impressive pink flowers in late winter.

10. Understorey shrubs along this track are wattles, hakeas [*Hakea sericea*], kunzeas [*Kunzea ambigua*], narrow leaf egg-and-bacon [*Dillwynia phyllicoides*] and grevilleas [*Grevillea sericea* & *buxifolia*]. Native grasses here include kangaroo grass [*Themeda australis*]. A feature of this section is the exposed sandstone rocks. After periods of wet weather, pools of water along here are populated by tadpoles and brown frogs.

11. After 300 metres you cross a second small creek ("Cemetery Creek 2"). This area has occasional infestations of weeds as seeds from garden plants wash down during wet weather. Note the two types of scribbly gum nearby.

12. After a short uphill slope the track continues on through dry sclerophyll forest. Here you can see some heath bushes [*Epacris spp.*] which need a bushfire for the seed to germinate, but they do not fare well if fires occur regularly.

Trees and bushes here were wiped out by a severe bushfire over 40 years ago, and were largely replaced by forest oaks [*Allocasuarina torulosa*] whose seeds rapidly germinated immediately afterwards. Natural forest has returned, but with no fires in recent years the area has been colonised by pittosporum trees [*Pittosporum undulatum*].

Look for termite nests high up in the gum trees in this area. Some of these nests have holes made by families of kookaburras who reside here. (They are probably laughing out loud as you pass.)

13. Turn right here. The Sand Track beyond this junction would take you over Cemetery Creek 3 and through Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest ("STIF"), a critically endangered ecological community, to exit at Tyrell Park.

14. Following the right hand track downhill, you will see more closely the termite nests in the trees. To your left you may glimpse a grassy clearing beyond the trees, and houses of East Ryde.

15. The track turns left and you descend to the rocky gully of Strangers Creek.

16. Garden weeds washed down the creek have colonised the gully, in contrast to the natural bushland on your right which features a remnant waratah, for which the Warada Track was named.

17. You now follow the creek closely and may see the rich invertebrate life of the rocky pools. Can you find where Cemetery Creek 2 crosses the track?

18. The area around the creek is rainforest and has many riparian plants which retard bushfires.

19. Now out of the rainforest, the creek is surrounded by dry sclerophyll forest.

20. There are some steep step-downs over rocks along the track. Look for a near-vertical rock on your left as you descend; when viewed from the lower (creek) side you will see a 50 year-old kangaroo carving. Notice how well the rock has been colonised by lichens.

21. At the small clearing, look for the pool below the small waterfall. The lower part of the Strangers Creek gully was once quarried for sandstone and the rock face that forms the waterfall marks the extent of quarrying. The main track once passed through the quarried gully area which is now largely impenetrable.

22. Here we pass along a clifftop and climb a rock near a grass tree [*Xanthorrhoea arborea*]. The short walk to the junction offers a good view of the grass flat area.

Turn left at the junction (6 on the map) to return to the start of your walk.

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