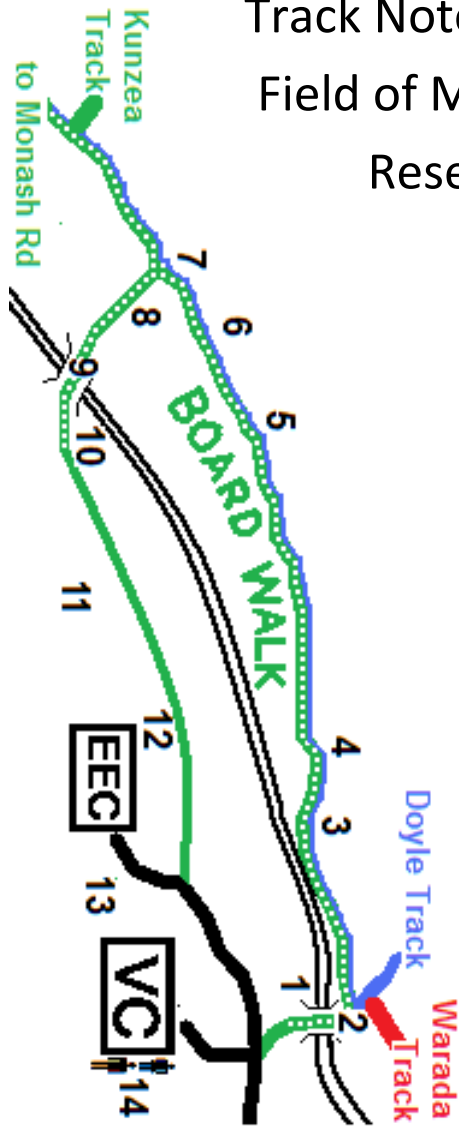


Buffalo Creek Board Walk

Track Notes – Field of Mars Reserve



1. Start at the footbridge near the visitor information centre. The first permanent bridge here was a timber bridge without handrails, built by volunteers of the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society in 1970. On the computer in the visitor centre, you can see photos of it being built. The timber bridge was replaced as part of the boardwalk project, whose details are on the plaque on the rock to your left before crossing the bridge.
2. As you cross the bridge, see if you can spot any fish, waterbirds and insect life. The creek here is tidal, so the water is sometimes salty and sometimes fresh, depending on tides and weather. It is a great place for young fish, and the mangrove trees are among the many saltmarsh plants 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*].
3. Turn left to follow the boardwalk along Buffalo Creek.

On your right is a stand of paperbark trees [*Melaleuca linariifolia*]. Under them on the swampy ground are bracken ferns [*Pteridium esculentum*], commelina [*Commelina cyanea*] with papery blue flowers, and the invasive weed plant wandering jew [*Tradescantia albiflora*]

which appears almost identical but has strong white flowers. To your left you will notice reeds and several invasive weeds growing among the she-oaks. These originate as garden plants in properties within the creek's catchment and seeds are washed down at times of heavy rain.

Just before the first bend, there is a sweet pittosporum tree [*Pittosporum undulatum*] on your right. These grow well in areas not affected by bushfires. Nearby, there is a NSW Christmas bush [*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*] with its 3-lobed leaves and showy flowers which appear during late spring and summer.

4. The rocks are Hawkesbury Sandstone which is a general feature of the Sydney area and the Blue Mountains. Unfortunately the soil that comes with these rocks is not very fertile, and is generally unsuitable for farming, as the early settlers from England quickly discovered. However, aborigines found sandstone to be great for rock carvings; later, white settlers used it for buildings and it proves ideal for road cuttings and tunnelling.

Here, you can see the rocks have interesting patterns. Notice how the moss, algae and lichens give the rocks some interesting colours. When the boardwalk was built, these rocks were valued by the builders who carefully cut the plastic decking to shape so it fits around the rocks.

5. The tall smooth-barked gum trees along the boardwalk were planted. Most are Sydney blue gums [*Eucalyptus saligna*] which grow very well in this habitat. Others include one example of a flooded gum [*Eucalyptus grandis*], the same species as the tallest known tree in NSW.

6. Before the widened observation area of the boardwalk, there is a patch of native right-angle grass [*Entolasia stricta*]. Can you tell how it got its common name?

7. At the seat junction, look at the natural bushland up the hill to your right. Most gum trees have rough brown bark, but the Sydney red gum trees [*Angophora costata*] have orange trunks. They are supported by large root systems which cling to and break up sandstone rocks.

Now look straight ahead at the bushes along the creek. There is a long section of moist gully vegetation, known as wet sclerophyll forest. Plants with dark green soft leaves flourish in the cool, moist, rich soils and shade. They create habitat for animals like finches, wrens, whip birds and ringtail possums.

8. Turn left.

You are crossing an area where the creek widens out into several muddy watercourses, vegetated by a mixture of native saltmarsh plants and weeds. Professional resources are needed but have not yet been available to clear the weeds from this area.

9. At the end of the boardwalk you recross the main course of the creek on a bridge identifiable by the hand railings. To your left is a section of the creek which serves a special purpose...

10. Read the interpretive sign on your left. What is a riffle?

11. The path meanders through the large open grassy area which was used as a landfill area in the 1950s, before the value of tidal estuaries was appreciated. You will notice a number of trees were planted about 40 years ago. Many have interesting patterns and colours in their bark. Some colours are the result of lichen growing on the tree trunks. There is a theory that more lichens grow on the south side of trees and rocks, but you can't rely on it to tell direction!

Over to your right, you will notice a lone tall palm tree. This is a reminder of a family home and garden which was occupied until the 1960s... and, yes, there is a photo of the old house on the computer in the visitor centre.

12. Nest boxes in the trees around the environmental education centre building are for birds, microbats and possums. Can you identify which one would be for microbats?

The gardens around the environmental education centre have Australian native plants, many being native to this area. Overhanging the path are wattles [*Acacia*

spp.], spider flower bush [*Grevillea spp.*] and kunzeas [*Kunzea ambigua*].

13. Between the two buildings is a gum tree surrounded by a garden of bushes and groundcovers - a memorial to former Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society members who made a significant contribution to protecting the natural value of the Field of Mars Reserve.

14. Just past the visitor information centre is a native garden planted as a memorial to Rod Wallace, a hard-working local environmentalist.

There's lots more information, as well as refreshments, available inside the visitor information centre which is opened by volunteers on weekends and at other times by arrangement.

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