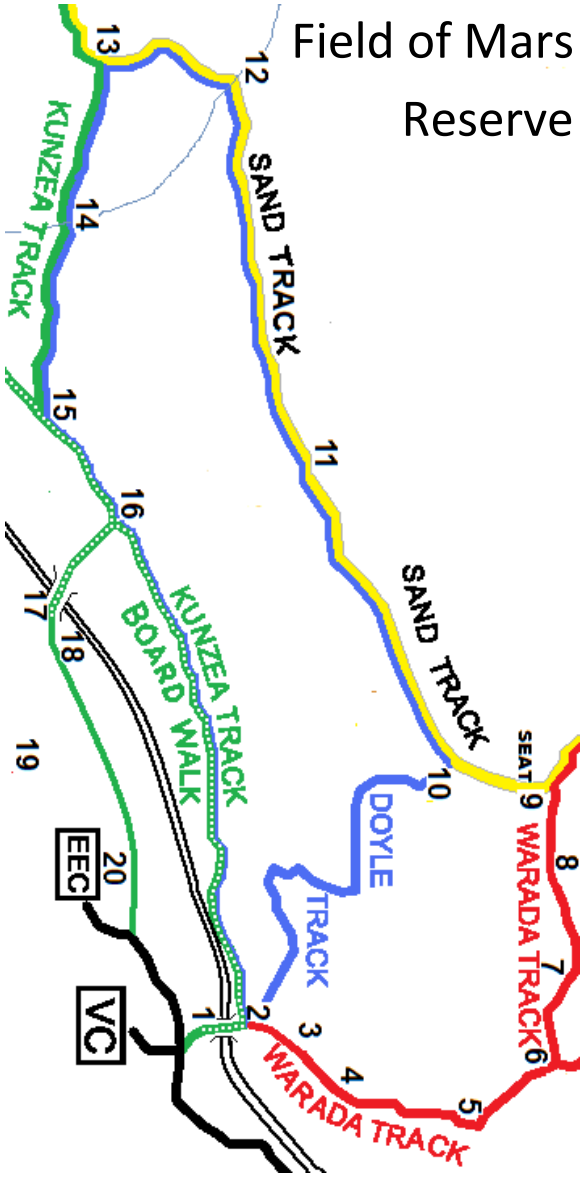
Warada - Sand - Kunzea Track Notes – Field of Mars Reserve



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, 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*].
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 bank on your left was planted with local native plants on National Tree Day 2017.
4. To your left is a former bush regeneration area where we deeloped 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 snakes and swamp wallabies. The flat grassy area was once an extensive saltmarsh until it was used as a garbage tip. When the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society became managers of the reserve in 1966, volunteers removed weeds, brought in topsoil and planted native trees and shrubs in this landfill area.
5. On your right is an activity area for children at the Environmental Education Centre. And before the top of the stairs is the Warada Track commemorative stone. A few steps take you down 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. They used to feast on 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. Turn left, and then you will find a seat on your right. Close by the seat and in the surrounding bush are some boronias [*Boronia ledifolia*] which display impressive pink flowers in late winter.

10. Veer right, to follow the Sand Track which is fairly level for the next 400 metres.

11. This section of track is mostly out of sight of civilisation, yet we are only 10km from the centre of Sydney! It is mostly dry sclerophyll forest, with some clay soil sections giving rise to areas of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF). Understorey includes wattles [*Acacia spp*.] *Zieria smithii*, mountain devils [*Lambertia formosa*], Woollsia [*Woollsia pungens*] and two of the several species known as eggs-and-bacon [*Bossiaea scolopendria* and *Pultenaea daphnoides*].

12. You will see a large sandstone rock on your right and then the track dips down to cross a small dry creek which runs down the hill from the cemetery ("Cemetery Creek 1"). Beyond the creek, the track takes you through dry sclerophyll forest with Sydney red gums [*Angophora costata*], red bloodwoods [*Corymbia gummifera*] and broad-leaved scribbly gums [*Eucalyptus haemastoma*]. Beside the track you will see some grass trees [*Xanthorrhoea arborea*].

13. After about 80 metres you come to the Kunzea Track junction. Turn left to go down the hill. The descent is rocky at first.

14. Cemetery Creek 1 crosses this track here. Because of the sandy nature of the soil, water is seen in it only during rainstorms. As you descend further you will notice the dry gives way to wet sclerophyll forest. Main plants are now *Zieria smithii* with their 3-lobed leaves and tiny white flowers, hakeas [*Hakea spp*.], prickly Moses [*Acacia ulicifolia*], purple coral pea vines [*Hardenbergia violacea*] and Sydney red gums [*Angophora costata*]. Look also for black wattles [*Callicoma serratifolia*] and heath bush [*Phyllota phylicoides*].

15. Turn left onto the boardwalk. This is part of a long section of moist gully vegetation. Plants with dark green soft leaves flourish in the cool, moist, rich soils and shade. Water gums [*Tristaniopsis laurina*], pittosporums and the understorey of bracken ferns [*Pteridium esculentum*] create habitat for animals like finches, wrens, whip birds and ringtail possums.

16. After 50 metres you come to a seat at the boardwalk junction. Look to your left at the natural bushland on the hill above you. 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 rocks. Listen and look for fairy wrens and swamp wallabies in the understorey. Turn right onto the boardwalk across the floodplain area of Buffalo Creek.

17. Handrails are on the bridge over the main channel of the creek. The many non-native plants and weeds here have grown from seeds and material washed down from residential gardens in the creek's upper catchment area.

18. The observation point here has interpretive signage… so now you know about riffles! The tall smooth-barked trees in this area are mostly Sydney blue gums [*Eucalyptus saligna*] which grow well in this habitat. Most trees on the grassy area were planted within the last 50 years.

19. There was once an old house, home of the Handley family, in the open grassy area to your right… formerly facing the end of Westminster Road. In the 1980s this house was demolished and the land was bought by Ryde Council to be added to the Reserve. You may view a photo of the house in the history photos at the Visitor Centre. The only remains of the house now are a few foundation stones and a lone palm tree.

20. The native gardens were developed and are maintained by staff of the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre, which is the large building to your right. It has many environmentally friendly and energy-saving features. Nesting boxes set among the trees are a feature in school environmental education programs. Boxes compensate for the scarcity of natural hollows in mature trees in urban areas; old trees with hollows are often felled for safety reasons.

Continue ahead to the Visitor Centre where you will have completed this loop walk.

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