

EWEN PARK TO CUP AND SAUCER CREEK RETURN

Overview

The trail from Ewen Park, Hurlstone Park, to Cup and Saucer Creek along the Cooks River is a mostly level walk of nearly 3 km and without stops, takes just over one hour.

The trail at first follows the north bank of the Cooks River through reclaimed parkland and has sections of mangrove forest along the riverside and rocky sandstone outcrops and overhangs away from the water.

There are natural and built features along the walk including evidence of sandstone quarrying, the re-use of the sugar mill and foundations of an old tannery: opportunities to consider heritage features and changes in land use over time.

This section of the Cooks River is tidal and home to fish such as mullet and bream, small crabs and eels, and you'll see some of these. However, you wouldn't want to eat any—currently the river's too polluted.

Students can also see ways in which the river and its foreshores are being improved and be encouraged to think of further ways they can help to improve this waterway.

Access

Parking for cars and buses is available at Ewen Park in Tennent Parade, Hurlstone Park.

Safety Issues

A ratio of one adult to eight children is strongly recommended.

Teachers and guides need to give clear instructions regarding safety to the children before commencing any walk. Emphasis should be on the importance of keeping to the track and walking in a group with adults at the front and the back of the line.

Inform the children that they should not touch insects, spiders or other animals but inform their teacher. You might like to take magnifying lenses and perspex boxes for viewing small creatures safely. Take a camera to record any discoveries.

Teachers will need:

- a portable first aid kit
- a mobile phone in case of emergency (and written contact details for students)
- a map of the track with them.

Students should wear hats, sunscreen, comfortable clothes and covered walking shoes with good gripping soles. They will need at least one bottle of water each and morning tea and lunch. They will also need to bring a clipboard, 4 x A4 sheets of paper, pens and coloured pencils or crayons for writing and drawing. A small backpack will allow students to keep hands free and all rubbish must be disposed of thoughtfully.

Begin each walk with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners (wording provided).

Facilities in Ewen Park

Ewen Park has an open area with a toilet block, single gas barbecue and four tables (1510mm x 590mm) with bench seats. Note: only three tables are visible concurrently.

Toilets are open, Monday to Friday, 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. If you want toilets open outside these hours, contact Warren Smalls, Property Booking Manager, Canterbury Council, on 9789 9444, or via email: warrens@canterbury.nsw.gov.au, a week in advance.

Or try Team Leader, Steve Dinsdale, on 9789 9591 (Works Depot).

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These notes identify key points that can be discussed during the walk and suggested activities.

Students need:

- the 'Living Things' Checklist
- the 'Natural or Built?' Checklist
- the 'Amazing Mangroves' Activity Sheet.

How far is it?

Teachers might like to take a pedometer with them. A student can report the number of steps at different locations along the walk.

STOP 1: EWEN PARK

Respect for Country

'We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we live and learn. We pay our respects to them for their care of the land over countless generations. We hope they will walk with us on our journey.' These were most likely the **Cadigal-Wangal** people. Today we will call them **Eora** 'people' and their country, '**Ngurra**.' (Try saying 'sing' to get the 'ng' sound).

Take only photographs, leave only footprints

There are many lovely things to see during the walk: leaves and seed pods, funny-shaped sticks and bark, little insects and beetles.

Please, *take only photographs, leave only footprints*.

If you take seeds you can be spreading weeds and when you remove bark, leaves and twigs you are removing **habitat** (animals' homes). Students can probably think of other reasons why they shouldn't take seeds etc from natural areas (they are removing the 'seedbank' that new plants grow from as well as taking the food of ants, some insects and birds.)

Living things

PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST AND BEGIN POINTING OUT DIFFERENT PLANTS AND ANIMALS. THEY CAN TICK THESE OFF.

They can probably see most of the following:

Bangalay or Southern mahogany trees (*Eucalyptus botryoides*) – some coastal Aboriginal people stripped thick sections of bark off the trunks to make canoes

Matt Rush (*Lomandra*) – we know some Aboriginal people crushed the seed heads to make damper and dried the leaves to make carrying baskets

Paperbark (*Melaleuca*) – the soft bark was sometimes used to wrap newborn babies when it was cold

Plover – long-legged birds that are usually in pairs, in open areas often near water. They lay eggs in a nest on grass and will give a loud call if you attempt to get close.

Noisy Miner – these birds are common to open woodland, and dominate gardens in the city

Willie Wagtail – a small black and white bird found on the ground or in shrubs in open areas where it wags its tail from side to side to stir up insects

Magpie-lark – medium-sized birds found mostly in pairs, in open areas, near roadsides and often near water

Park use

Has anyone ever played here?

It's only been a park like this since the 1960s (about the time some of your parents were born).

In the 1800s it was used for farming and before that it was probably a **wetland** (a boggy place with reeds, frogs, little fish, eels and birds).

WALK TO PATH ALONGSIDE THE RIVER.

STOP 2: THE EARTH MOUND ALONGSIDE THE RIVER

Introduce the Cooks River

Who knows the name of this **river**? (Cooks River)

It's named after Captain Cook who first sailed into Botany Bay in 1770, nearly 240 years ago. We don't know what the Eora called it.

Who's been to Botany Bay? Where is it from here? (Approximately 4.5 km to the east)

If you were a bird up high, you'd be able to see it from here.

How long is the river? (Approximately 23km long, that's as far as from here to near Bankstown.)

Where does the water come from? (From the rain that has fallen on the land upstream and run into the river, over the land and also underground through the soil. Also from **stormwater drains**.)

Is it fresh or salty? (The river is fresh water but because it is **tidal**, salt water washes up the river two times every day. Where the fresh and saltwater are mixed we call it '**brackish**').

Which way is it flowing? Throw leaves or sticks in the water. Watch where they go. (The main flow of the river is from the west towards the coast, which is to the east. Of course this is reversed when the tide is coming in.)

The path winds between **Paperbarks**.

SIT THE STUDENTS ON THE EARTH MOUND.

What can you hear? (Different birds, maybe a plane, train and water slushing in the river.)

What can you see? (Trees, a path, water etc. The view through the Paperbarks is quite lovely.)

What can you feel? (Light breeze, coolness, etc)

What can you smell?

BRAINSTORM THE ADJECTIVES / NOUNS / NOUN GROUPS TO DESCRIBE WHAT YOU CAN SEE, HEAR AND SMELL. RECORD THIS BANK OF WORDS TO USE BACK AT SCHOOL.

STUDENTS CAN DRAW WHAT THEY SEE. PROVIDE COLOUR SWATCHES SO THEY CAN MATCH THE COLOURS THEN PAINT THEIR DRAWINGS BACK AT SCHOOL.

STOP 3: OPEN AREA ALONG TRACK

Which direction are we heading?

What direction does the sun come up in the morning? (East).

Where does it set (go down)? (West)

Point to the east. Point to the west.

If it's near midday, face the sun and place one arm to the left and one arm to the right. You are facing north, south is behind you, west is to the left and east is to the right.

Which direction are we heading? (West)

Which side of the river are you on? (North)

Lichen on She-oaks

ANOTHER PLANT TO TICK OFF THE CHECKLIST:

She-oak (*Casuarina*) – the Eora may have chewed on the young shoots to quench their thirst.

Point out the **lichen** growing on the She-oaks. More lichen grows on the moister, south side of the tree, away from the sunshine.

Clear view of river

How do you think the Aboriginal people used the river? (To fish, to swim, to travel, to wash.) They didn't change the river.

Europeans have used the river in many different ways and changed it over time.

What **evidence** can you see **of change** in the river? (Rocks along the opposite shoreline, trees planted and paths along the banks, rubbish in the river.)

We call the features made by people, '**built**' and if they are formed without people, '**natural**'. The rocks and planted trees and rubbish are built features. The river and birds are natural.

PROVIDE THE 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST

Would you drink this water? Would you eat fish from this river? (No to both because you could get sick.) People now look after the river and it is getting better all the time but there's still a lot of bad stuff (heavy metal poisons from factories) in the mud at the bottom and until this is cleared, the river is dangerous to swim in.

Mangroves

TICK CHECKLIST: MANGROVE (*AVICENNIA*).

STOP 3: FLAT AREA NEXT TO RIVER

Chinese market gardens

SHOW PHOTO OF MARKET GARDENS.

Imagine, at one time, you could pick peaches, nectarines, lemons and oranges from trees along the river, or vegetables like cabbage and beans from market gardens run by Chinese people.

Sometimes the river flooded

After heavy rain, the river sometimes flooded and came right up to the backs of where the houses are. In 1889 (nearly 120 years ago) the flood was so high across the valley that only fence tops, tufts of trees and the roofs of huts and houses were visible. Many of the farmers lost everything: their houses, cows, horses and crops.

Pop top lids

These are linked to the **sewer** pipes that run underground taking soil from toilets to the treatment plant at Malabar. How do they get their name? After heavy rain, the lids pop off.

Weeds

POINT OUT THE PLANTS HERE THAT ARE **WEEDS**. TICK THEM OFF THE CHECKLIST.

They include: Asthma Weed and Privet.

STOP 4: FOOTBRIDGE AT FOORD STREET

If there were no bridge, how would you get to the other side? When would it be easier to swim across, low or high tide? Would you swim in the river? (No, it's too polluted and you could get very sick.)

CONTINUE ON THE PATH.

STOP 5: NEAR MANGROVES

What can you see living here? (Generally spiders or spiders' webs and possibly birds in the **canopy**.)

What evidence is there that crabs might live here? (Holes in the mud, small balls of mud.)

What else could live in the mud? (Worms, bacteria.)

Explain some of the special features mentioned on the 'Amazing Mangroves' Activity Sheet.

What doesn't belong here? (Plastic bottles, polystyrene etc)

Where did they come from? (Ashfield, Summer Hill shops, from the gutters and drains in the streets)

HAVE STUDENTS COMPLETE THE 'AMAZING MANGROVES' ACTIVITY SHEET.

STOP 6: NEAR ROCK OUTCROPS

These are **sandstone**. Run your hand over the rock. What does it feel like? Is it rough or smooth? Does it feel gritty like sand?

Rock face with graffiti

Is the rock a natural or built feature? (Natural)

What evidence is there that stone was once cut from this rock? (Vertical drill marks cut into the rock were the first stage of separating blocks of stone from the main mass. The blocks were then cut into smaller blocks and 'dressed'.)

How high do you think this **cliff** is? You could get someone who's a metre high to stand up against it and then estimate from this. (Approximately 5m.)

Sandstone foundations on house

See how the house to the north is built on stone blocks.

Where do you think the sandstone came from? (Most likely from the 'quarry' they've just passed.)

A stand of Casuarinas

What do you notice about the ground underneath? (There's a 'carpet' of needles and not much else grows underneath.)

A local Aboriginal girl as a child was told by her mother that if she ever became lost she should go and sit under a Casuarina tree because the snakes didn't like it there.

More Melaleucas

What's the other name for these trees? (Paperbarks.)

And what were they used for? ('Blankets' for newborn babies and cloaks for when it was cold. Sometimes an oval of bark was cut to make a **shield**.)

Stormwater

What do you think this is? (Yes it's a pipe that carries water from the streets and homes, down to the river.)

Is it a natural or a built feature? ('Built' because people have made it.)

What else is it bringing into the river? (Litter and leaves and oil from streets and factories.)

Nesting box

See the box there in the Casuarina. Who do you think lives there? (Birds)

Is it a natural or a built feature? ('Built')

Steel sheeting

This sheeting was an attempt to 'tame' the river and stop water from flooding across the low-lying land. Built in 1943.

STOP 7: CLEAR VIEW OF RIVER

Is it low or high tide? How can you tell? (At low tide the **mudflats** in the **river** are visible. At high tide, the water is just below the top of the **sheet piling**.)

Point out the mudflats and **island** in the middle of the river. See how the island has water all around.

Who is living on the island? (Usually pelicans, seagulls, ducks.)

TICK THE BIRDS ON THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

Boat Harbour

HERE'S SOME **SALTMARSH**. TICK ON THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

Do you think the water is fresh or salty? How can you tell? (If the river is tidal then salt water is washing up the river two times each day. That's why saltmarsh grows here.)

We call this **brackish** water because salt water is mixed in with fresh.

Would you drink this water? (No! It's smelly and the river looks dirty.)

Boat Harbour was built for Sea Scouts in the 1960s but is no longer used. How can you tell? (There's lots of mud and the water looks murky. It would be difficult to move boats around in this.)

Railway

POINT OUT THE RAILWAY LINE ON HIGH GROUND TO THE NORTH. (Part of the Sydenham to Belmore rail line opened in 1895.)

More Casuarinas

Any plants underneath? (No, or very few.)

STOP 7: THE SUGAR MILL

This was the first **factory** along the river. It was built between 1841 and 1842 using sandstone quarried from the site. Sugar cane was brought all the way from the Phillipines to Sydney and from Botany Bay, up the Cooks River by barge. The cane was crushed and the sweet juice was dried to make sugar.

A wall to collect water for the mill, (**a dam**), was built across the river.

The **mill** only stayed open until 1855.

Some people wanted to knock the mill down. Do you think it was worth keeping? Why? (Because the stone and the building is beautiful and because it helps us to know what it was like a long time ago.)

See how the **heritage** panel tells us the story of this place.

STUDENTS COULD RESEARCH AND WRITE HERITAGE PANELS AS A FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY WHEN BACK AT SCHOOL.

Footbridge at the end of Sugar House Road

Look east back down the river. How far do you think it is to the next bridge? (500 m)

STOP 8: ACROSS THE RIVER FROM CUP AND SAUCER CREEK

SHOW THE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE STREAM WITH ROCKS AND TWO CHILDREN NEAR THE **WATERFALL**. This is what the creek looked like before it was concreted.

Which do you like best? Why?

So why did they concrete the creek? (It was done by the RTA formerly DMR, in the 1920s, when Bexley Road was changed from a local to a main road. The intention was to control the large flows of water that rush down the creek after heavy rain. The first concreted channel didn't carry enough water without flooding so it was widened in the 1930s.)

The name is from the sandstone formations in the bed of the creek.

THE 'VALLEY TALK' ACTIVITY SHEET HAS AN ACTIVITY RELATING TO THE BEFORE AND AFTER OF THIS CREEK.

STOP 9: GROSS POLLUTANT TRAP (GPT)

What is a gross pollutant trap? How does it work? (It traps bottles, bags and other rubbish travelling down the stormwater drain. This rubbish is then collected by a garbage truck and taken away to a **landfill** site.)

Where has this rubbish come from? (From all the streets and gutters and shops between here and Bexley Road.)

How can we make the river healthy? (In lots of ways: cleaning up the rubbish, not dropping papers on the street, adding plants along the banks, collecting oil from cooking, freezing it then putting it in the rubbish bin rather than down the sink...)

RETURN TO THE COOKS RIVER

STOP 10: DOWNSTREAM OF PROUT'S BRIDGE

Look **upstream** to Canterbury Road, approximately 300m to the west.

That's Prout's Bridge, built in 1841, 167 years ago when there were no cars.

Why do you think they built a **bridge**? (So people could cross the river with their horses and wagons.)

Who was Prout? (An Englishman with a farm on the south side of the river. He sold his fruit, vegetables and perhaps milk, in Sydney so he probably crossed the river many times each week. At first he used a **punt** (a barge that carried horses and wagons) then later built his bridge.)

When he sold the farm, he was offered 5 shillings per acre, about 50 cents in today's money.

RETURN TO EWEN PARK ALONG SOUTH SIDE OF RIVER UNTIL FOORD STREET FOOTBRIDGE

Lots of Mangroves along the river

Can you see any crabs or spiders? Any evidence of crabs or spiders? (Holes in mud, popping sounds, webs.)

STOP 11: NEAR WEEPING WILLOW

These trees grew from twigs brought to Australia by Chinese and British settlers in the early settlement. The Weeping Willows reminded them of their home countries. Today we use willow to make cricket bats and burn branches for artists' charcoal.

Who can think of plants that their family eat because they remind them of their 'home' country? (Eg, grapes and figs from Italy and Greece, Bok Choy from China.)

Unfortunately, Willows have taken over from native species along many of Australia's waterways and native insects and birds are left without food.

How old do you think this tree is? (Probably 20-30 years.)

Let's measure how big it is. Place measuring tape around the trunk to measure its **girth**. Measure a student's girth and compare.

STOP 12: NEAR REMAINS OF DENNIS'S TANNERY

There's evidence of an old building nearby. Who can find it?

Here are the clues:

From the footbridge, it's to the east, on the south side of the river.

It's about five metres from the walkway.

Watch you don't trip over it!

What is it? (The evidence is sandstone blocks set in the ground. They were the **foundations** of Dennis's Tannery, formerly Tebbutt's Tannery.)

The **tannery/knackery** was where old horses and cattle were boiled down and the skins were made into leather. What do you think they used the leather for? Hint: they rode horses then. (Saddles, boots and seats in carriages.)

A report from 1883 tells us that Dennis also kept 15 pigs and 100 poultry, all fed from scraps from the restaurants in Sydney. It was a very smelly place.

All early tanneries were next to rivers. Can you think of why? (They used lots of water to wash the hides.)

Where do you think the dirty water went? (Yes, back into the river, right up until 1917 when the tannery closed.)

More Chinese market gardens

Reports tell us that there were more market gardens near the tannery and the gardeners were King Young, Che Sing and Ah Chong. They stayed until the 1920s.

When the floods of 1889 came, the gardens were two metres under water. Imagine how high two metres above the top of the **riverbank** is.

What would you do if you found your land flooded like this? (Move if you could!) Notice how many of the today's homes are built on high ground.

STOP 13: NEAR CASUARINAS

See how the **Casuarinas** have two different types of leaves. That's because another plant called **Mistletoe** (*Amyema pendula*) is growing into the She-oak, releasing chemicals and making leaves distort and form clumps. (Mistletoe is a **parasite**.) Birds love the **nectar** from the flowers in spring and summer, and quickly spread the Mistletoe to other trees.

Sometimes too much Mistletoe can grow on one tree and it weakens and dies. If we have lots of different native plants then the Mistletoe will be spread over more trees which will survive and the birds will also have food.

The Eora may have eaten the Mistletoe berries and used it as a medicine.

White froth on leaves (seasonal)

Who's been frothing here? Patches of white froth on the branches hide small Spittlebugs (nymphs). If you scrape back the froth, you will see the nymphs. The black patches on each side are their wings.

Obscured view of river

Should there be sections with no trees so people can see the river? (This is what landscapers believe: that when people get occasional views of the river they seem to have a greater appreciation of what's there and are more inclined to care for a waterway.)

STOP 14: WITHIN VIEW OF WEED-COVERED FENCE

There's a series of fences with **exotic** (not native) plants. Where do the **weeds** in the valley come from? (Weeds are just plants in the wrong places so when exotics escape from gardens, they become weeds in the bushland.)

STOP 15: BACKYARD GARDEN

Point out or show the photo of the modern-day garden in the backyard to the south.

What foods are growing here? (Tomatoes, beans, oranges, figs, olives etc)

Look at how healthy the plants are. The soil next to the river is rich **alluvial** soil.

Stormwater

Notice the stormwater pipes and water entering the river. Why are there wire baskets filled with rocks? (To slow the water flow and stop soil on the riverbank from being washed away.)

Are we there yet?

Pedometer reading.

CROSS THE FOORD STREET FOOTBRIDGE AND RETURN TO EWEN PARK VIA THE PATHWAY

STOP 16: EWEN PARK

COMPLETE THE 'MAKING A JOURNEY MAP' ACTIVITY SHEET.

This can be done as an individual or group activity. Since Ewen Park has tables, group work would be possible. There are four tables, (1510mm x 590m), though for supervision, only three are visible concurrently.

Rolls of butcher's paper will need to be cut to size in advance. It is also a good idea to reinforce the edges with tape. These are the base for the journey maps.

TOILETS IN EWEN PARK.