

# TURRELLA RESERVE TO GIRRAHWEEN PARK

## Overview

From **Turrella Reserve** to **Girrahween Park** is approximately 3 km and will take just over one hour to walk. The track is unpaved and generally safe for walkers. However, there are sections where extra care is needed crossing rocks and uneven surfaces.

Red-bellied black snakes are present in the valley but are rarely seen. In warmer months, spiders and webs are everywhere so it is best to stay on the track!

Overall, this is a relatively low-risk walk but as in any bush situation, caution is required.

The trail passes through a section of the **Wolli Creek Valley** that has been retained as natural bushland. There is a whole range of different plant communities: a rich heath shrubland on Nannygoat Hill, a 'rainforest' of Common Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*) and introduced species such as Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) in a damp gully that receives nutrient-rich runoff from the streets and gardens above and a beautiful ferny glade under Port Jackson figs. Further along, the track crosses open heathland then near Girrahween Park, a dense woodland of various Eucalypts (*E. pilularis*, *E. robusta*, *E. gummifera*, *E. piperita*), Angophoras (*Angophora costata*) and Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) with a rich understorey of shrubs.

Nearer the creek, there is a dense woodland of Paperbarks (*Melaleuca*). These plants are specially adapted to wet conditions.

For students, this track provides an opportunity to just enjoy being out of the classroom. They can use all their senses as they move, see, hear, smell and feel the magic of walking in the bush.

The different plants provide opportunities to hear about the ways in which the **Eora** may have used them for food, clothing, shelter and medicine while the plant communities provide opportunities to see the different layers (trees, shrubs and groundcovers) and the variety in the number of species (biodiversity), as well as understand the need to retain habitat as homes for the fauna in the park.

While this track is predominantly a natural environment there are some European and Aboriginal heritage features such as evidence of a previous weir at the Henderson Street crossing of Wolli Creek, stories of Chinese market gardens and a dipping well at Turrella Reserve, the remains of a rock pool, and rock shelters most likely used by the Eora and much later, by homeless people during the 1930s Depression.

## Access

Access is from Turrella Railway Station via Henderson Street, Turrella, or from the end of Finlay's Avenue, Earlwood. If you are coming by train, contact the station where you will be starting your journey and they can organise the tickets in advance.

## 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 tracks and walking in a group with adults at the front and the end of the line.

Inform the children about care of the bushland and the importance of not removing plants or picking flowers. They should not touch insects, spiders or other animals but inform their teacher. You may like to take magnifying lenses and perspex boxes for viewing small creatures safely and 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.

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. Drinks such as Poppas are not useful as they cannot be sealed once opened and children will need to drink throughout the walk. 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 carried in must be carried out.

As you'd realise, student groups tend to comprise racers and laggards. The guide at the front will need to slow children down and students who run or push should be warned and/or sent to the back of the group. The adult at the back will need to keep the laggards moving or send them to the front of the line so that they don't miss out on the guide or teacher's commentary.

### **Toilets at Turrella Station**

To ensure the toilets at Turrella Station are open, make contact on 9563 7768.

### **Facilities, Girrahween Park, Earlwood**

Girrahween Park has a toilet block, an open area, six tables (2100mm x 730mm), three with roofs, and 4 free barbecue plates.

The park is now administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) within the Department of the Environment and Climate Change. NPWS prefers at least a week's notice of groups intending to visit the park. Groups of over 40 people must have written permission.

Contact: Paul Ibbetson on 9337 5511 or by fax to: 9337 1303.

**Toilets, Bardwell Park Station**, contact, 9563 7428 and **Earlwood car park** (near the Senior Citizens Centre).

Begin each walk with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners (wording provided), and a request that students not disturb the bush: that they take only photographs and leave only footprints.

For a visual guide to the walking track from Turrella Reserve to Girrahween Park, refer to the TVT Orientation Powerpoint presentation.

# TURRELLA RESERVE TO GIRRAHWEEN PARK

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 'Making A Journey Map' 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: TURRELLA RESERVE

#### 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.' They were most likely the **Bidjigal** clan of the Eora language group in the **Dharug** nation. 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 leave them in the park. *Take only photos, 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.)

### STOP 2: WOLLI CREEK

Who knows the name of this **creek**? (Yes, it's Wolli.)

Wolli may have meant 'camping place'. And for the Eora this **valley** with the kangaroos, possums and lizards and a plentiful supply of fish and shellfish would have been a good camping place.

When the British settlers first saw this creek, it wasn't like this. It was a 'chain of ponds' so you probably could have walked where the water is today.

What stops it from being a chain of ponds today? (The **weir**, which blocks the flow of water. Also, the extra water that runs off all the hard surfaces such as bitumen and tiles after rain. Formerly most of this water seeped into the land surface and only reached the creek after many days or weeks.)

What do you notice about the bridge? (It's bent.)

What do you think has caused the bridge to bend? (Floodwater that has surged down the creek after heavy rain.)

Find two more pieces of evidence that this creek floods. (The stream height marker and the wire baskets with rocks inside.)

The wire baskets are to stop the surging water from washing away the creek bank but some stones are missing, either having been washed away during flood or through people taking them.

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 creek? (No, it's too polluted and you could get very sick.)

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.)

We call this **brackish** water because salt water is mixed in with fresh. It's brackish below the weir, and fresh above the weir.

Name three living things you can see. (Fish, tadpoles, ducks, spiders, skinks.) Mark these on your 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

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

### **Casuarinas next to the creek**

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

A local Aboriginal girl remembers her mother telling her, 'if you get lost, sit under a Casuarina tree. Snakes don't like it there and you will be safe.' The needles are soft to sit on and your mother would be able to see you.

TICK CASUARINA ON THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

STOP 3: NEAR THE <b>POND</b>
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### **Turrella Reserve**

'Turrella' is said to be an Aboriginal word for 'reeds growing in water'. Can you see any **reeds** today? (Yes, but only along the creek bank.)

Much of this area was once a **wetland**: a wet area full of reeds. Try to imagine this.

As the British settlers moved south from Sydney, the rich soil (**alluvial**) on both sides of the creek was cleared for farming. 115 years ago (1883), there were poultry and pig farms along the creek. Who knows what **poultry** is? (Chickens mostly, sometimes turkeys.) Who knows what we call the meat from pigs? (Pork.)

With chickens and pigs here, imagine what it smelt like.

Where do you think the rubbish went? (Yes, into the creek.)

### **Chinese market gardens and dipping pond**

Just 80 years ago (in the 1930s), there were Chinese farmers living here. They grew vegetables such as beans, cabbages and tomatoes on the river flats (**floodplain**) and sold these in Sydney. Some records also mention trees with peaches, nectarines, lemons and oranges.

Point out the pond. This may have been a **dipping pond** (where vegetables were washed) used by the Chinese market gardeners.

WALK TOWARDS THE WEST.

### **Where is west?**

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.

STOP 4: NEAR THE SCRUB ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE MOWN PATH FROM THE POND

POINT TO AND NAME SOME OF THE PLANTS YOU'LL BE SEEING DURING THE WALK. HAVE STUDENTS TICK THEM OFF THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

POINT OUT THE DIFFERENT **LAYERS: GROUNDCOVERS, SHRUBS, TREES**

Coral Tree (*Erythrina*) – introduced tree (not native)

Matt Rush (*Lomandra*) – a groundcover, we know Aboriginal people in other areas crushed the seed heads to make a flat bread like Pitta so they probably did the same here. The dried leaves were woven to make excellent carry baskets.

Paperbark (*Melaleuca*) trees. The soft bark was used to make **coolamons** (carry baskets), huts and toys. It was probably used to wrap newborn babies and to make cloaks to keep warm when it was cold.

Wattle (*Acacia*), shrubs and trees. This had many uses. The seeds were crushed to make a type of flat bread and the leaves and bark could be thrown into the waterways to stun any fish, making them float to the surface where they were easier to catch.

Bracken Fern (*Pteridium esculentum*), a groundcover – juice from the stems was rubbed on mosquito bites.

Bangalay or Southern mahogany (*Eucalyptus botryoides*), a tree – some coastal Aboriginals used sections of the thick bark to make canoes or shields.

Banksias (*Banksia serrata*, *Banksia integrifolia*), a shrub or tree – the woody cones could stay alight from one camp site to another. *Banksia serrata* (has serrated edges on leaves).

STOP 5: DETOUR ALONG THE MOWN TRACK

**Dump of dirt**

At one side of the mown track there is a mound of dirt, the site of a hut of a Chinese market gardener and his family. The sandy mound back from the creek would be an ideal nesting site for turtles if it weren't for the feral cats and foxes that live in the valley.

STOP 6: THE CREEK NEAR DRAGON ROCK

**Weeping Willows**

These are not native trees. They were brought to Australia by homesick Chinese and British settlers in the early settlement. Does anyone have Greek or Italian grandparents? Lebanese or Turkish? Do they grow figs or grapes? (It's very likely that many do, because they like them and because they remind them of where they came from. Chinese and Asian groups may grow Chinese vegetables like Bok Choy or Chinese Broccoli.)

In warmer months, look for a colony of Grey-headed flying-foxes across the creek in the 'Triangle' between the water and the train line. Why is this a good place to camp?

This is a good place to stop, sit down and gather as a group (possibly for a food break) before the narrow walking track to Girrahween).

STOP 7: ALONG THE TVT TRACK

From Turrella Reserve, enter the Girrahween Track at the TVT marker. The low thick bushes are typical of **sandstone heath**. Plants such as kunzea and banksia are plentiful here and so are **Wattlebirds**. Can you hear them?

## Grass Tree

There is a grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*) opposite the next TVT marker. Aboriginals had many uses for this tree. Can you think of any? (The flower spike was used to make spears and the 'leaves' were woven to make carrying baskets. **Resin** from inside the stem was used to glue stone arrowheads to spears and bone hooks to fishing lines. The tender growing shoot inside the tree was sometime eaten but this led to the death of the tree.)

### STOP 8: THE 'MUSIC LOG'

This is where the children in Nadia Wheatley's 'Going Bush' sat and made an orchestra of the noises they could hear around them. What noises can you hear? (Planes, different birds, maybe a train and cars.)

## Grey-headed flying foxes

In warmer months there are thousands of grey-headed flying foxes roosting in the trees on the other side of the creek. Has anyone seen them at night? (They fly out of their valley roost and into the suburbs each night at dusk, to feed.)

### STOP 9: THE MELALEUCAS

## Melaleucas

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

What were they used for? (Huts for shelter, 'blankets' for newborn babies and cloaks for when it was cold. It was also used to make coolamons and strips were rolled to make balls. Sometimes an oval of bark was cut to make a **shield.**)

### STOP 10: THE ROCK POOL

What do you think this is? (Yes, it's a **frog pond** now but it was once a swimming pool.)

What evidence do we have that it was used as a swimming pool? (The remains of paving around the edge.)

If you look carefully you might see a Striped Marsh Frog or Skink. And if you can't see them, you can probably hear them.

## Prickly Pear

To the north of the pool there is a very large Prickly Pear (*Opuntia*). Greek and Italian people eat these fruits but they don't touch the spikes. These can be very painful so don't touch!

Prickly Pear is a weed in the bush. Where has this plant come from? (Probably from someone's garden – it will spread from pieces that break off.)

## Are we there yet?

How far have we walked? Pedometer reading.

### STOP 11: SHEER SANDSTONE CLIFFS

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

How high do you think these are? (Approx 20 metres). Compare against the height of a person.

## Rock formations

Half close your eyes and what do you see? What does this remind you of? (One rock could be a lizard's head or perhaps the head of a man. What will students 'see' here?)

## Sometimes the creek floods

Look down to Wolli Creek.

After heavy rain, the **creek** sometimes floods.

What do you think happens to the fish and turtles then?

What happens to the weeds that are growing on the **riverbanks**?

STOP 12: <b>ROCK SHELF AND OVERHANG</b> WOW!
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THIS IS A GOOD SPOT TO STOP AND TAKE IN THE VIEW. STUDENTS COULD DRAW WHAT THEY SEE IN FRONT OF THEM. IF THEY MATCH COLOUR SWATCHES TO THE COLOURS IN FRONT OF THEM THEY CAN COLOUR THEIR DRAWINGS BACK AT SCHOOL.

What evidence tells us that people cooked here? (The rock 'ceiling' is black from smoke. This may be from the Depression Years (1929-1933) when many people didn't have homes and they camped in the valley.)

It's also very likely that Aboriginal people used this as a **shelter** from heat and rain.

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

Explain the difference between natural and built features. (Built features are made by people.)

What are three natural features you can see? (Eg trees, rocks, bushes, creek)

What are three built features? (Eg train line, roads, houses, sewer ventilation pipe).

Mark these on the 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST.

What can you see from here? (Lots of trees, shrubs and groundcovers, the railway line in the middle distance and houses on the far side of the valley.)

What can you hear? (Maybe planes and trains, different birds, perhaps cars.)

STOP 13: STRAIGHT-EDGED ROCKS EITHER SIDE OF TRACK
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What evidence is there that this stone has been cut? (The rock edges are straight whereas the natural edges tend to be uneven.)

Why do you think the stone has been cut? (Some will say to make a pathway but it was probably to place the sewer pipes underground and the path came after.)

## Are we there yet?

Pedometer reading.

STOP 14: <b>FERN GULLY</b> WOW!
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How would you describe this?

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

Does this look like your supermarket? (unlikely). But for Aboriginal people this represents a great many of their food sources: lilli pilli; bracken fern; possums, birds and fish.

STOP 15: **NESTING BOXES** IN TREES ALONG TRACK

Can you see any nesting boxes? Who do you think lives there? (Birds, maybe possums.)

Are they natural or built features? ('Built' because they have been made by people.) Placed in the trees because there aren't enough old trees with **hollows** for birds to nest in.

Mark this on the 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST.

STOP 16: **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.)

Mark these on the 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST.

**Listen**

What sounds can you hear? (Trains, different birds, cicadas in summer)

STOP 17: **NEAR A POP-TOP LID**

These are inspection traps for the sewer pipes that run underground taking **sewage** from toilets to the treatment plant at Malabar. How do they get their name? After heavy rain, the lids pop off and you can guess what happens. The sewage spills out. So don't go near the river after heavy rain!

STOP 18: **WEEDS**

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. They can be spread via birds, animals, the wind, water.)

Point out some plants here that are weeds. Privet, Lantana, Asparagus Fern etc

TICK THEM OFF THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

STOP 19: **LARGE EUCALYPT**

**Eucalypt**

Stop at a large tree. Tell the students to draw it in their head.

Notice the bark. Is it rough or smooth? What shape is it? What colour? Is it the same colour all over?

What are the leaves like? What shape, colour, texture are they?

Guess how far it is around the tree (its **girth**). Using a measuring tape, measure the girth. Measure a volunteer's waist. Compare the two.

**Once upon a time**

Once upon a time there were tall palm trees all through the valley. They were called **Cabbage Tree Palms** (*Livistona australis*) because the centre of the top of the palm was

like a cabbage that could be eaten. Both the Eora and British settlers ate the growth point. Unfortunately though, once eaten, the palm died. In the early days of the colony, the **fronds** from the palms were also used to make Cabbage Tree hats.

**STOP 20: WETLAND**

Stand on the bridge and look over the wetland. Here's where lots of frogs, turtles, birds, fish and dragonflies live. If you're very quiet you might see some.

TICK THEM OFF THE 'LIVING THINGS' CHECKLIST.

Is it smelly? (Yes.)

Would you drink this water? (No. This is a de-nitrification wetland built to filter the water but if it's smelly or murky it's not good to drink.)

Mark this on the 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST.

Can you see any **litter**?

Where do you think it's come from? (The streets and drains from Bexley, Bardwell Park, Earlwood and Kingsgrove).

**STOP 21: GIRRAHWEEN PARK**

'Girrahween' means, 'place of flowers'. Can you see any flowers today? (In spring and summer there are lots.) Are the flowers mostly on the trees or shrubs?

The park has been here for nearly 75 years (since 1935) and extra bits were added in 1957.

The early British settlers cut many trees for timber and had their farms along the creek.

It was probably Ngurra (Country) of the Bidjigal.

Volunteers (bush regenerators) have been working in the valley clearing weeds since 1984.

Repeat the difference between natural and built features. What are three natural features you can see? (Eg trees, birds, bushes)

What are three built features? (Eg toilet block, picnic tables and shelters, paths, sandstone walls.

Mark these on the 'NATURAL OR BUILT?' CHECKLIST.

**Are we there yet?**

Pedometer reading.

COMPLETE THE 'MAKING A JOURNEY MAP' ACTIVITY SHEET.

This can be done as an individual or group activity. Since Girrahween Park has tables, group work would be possible. There are six tables (2100mm x 730mm), with bench seats.

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.

**THE NEAREST TOILETS ARE AT GIRRAHWEEN PARK, EARLWOOD.** ARRANGE ACCESS WITH NPWS.

NOTE: Groups of over 40 people, or any commercial activity, require a written and signed Consent. Applications for Consents should be organised well in advance of the event.

At least a week's notice is needed to arrange keys for small groups.

Contact: Paul Ibbetson on 9337 5511 or by fax to: 9337 1303.

**Other toilets: Bardwell Park Station** (contact 9563 7428) and **Earlwood car park** (near the Senior Citizens Centre).