

AN ACCOUNT OF THE DAY ROAD BUSH REGENERATION GROUP  
BY FLORENCE DWIGHT

In 1974, a year after we had moved to Norma Crescent, Cheltenham, a small group of local residents decided to do something about the infestation of Privet near the Day Road entrance to Pennant Hills Park. The organiser was Joy Connor who lived near there and Marie Byles was a very enthusiastic supporter. This area several years later was made into a car park.

In December 1974 Geoff Armstrong called a meeting of parties interested in preparing a management plan for Pennant Hills Park, to be presented to Hornsby Shire Council by Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust. Throughout 1975 quite a large number of people were engaged in historical research, map preparation, data collection and composition of the plan under Geoff's competent leadership. It was during this year I learnt about Joan and Eileen Bradley's investigation of different ways of dealing with weed invasion of bushland. On August 11th I went to a specialist natural studies bookshop at Crows Nest and bought Joan's booklet "Bush Regeneration". I read it in the bus coming back to Epping. It was such an illuminating revelation that I recorded the purchase in my diary. We saw immediately that the method she recommended made much more sense than attacking weeds where they were the dominant vegetation. Bush regeneration according to the Bradley method was recommended in the management plan of Pennant Hills Park.

Joan was invited to speak at a public meeting of the Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust on 4th May 1977. We arranged a display of the common weeds in the local bushland, and at the close of the evening's programme asked people to leave their names and addresses if they wished to join a bush regeneration group to work in Pennant Hills Park near Day Road.

On 11th of June we held our first Bush Regeneration morning near the Day Road picnic clearing. There was a big roll up, about 26 people, and on 9th July 20 people, but subsequently the group settled down to a steady 10 or so regular 'weeder's'. Not everyone was convinced that it was feasible to recover good bushland from weed invasion, and Bush Regeneration was considered by many as a rather eccentric occupation.

We met on the first Saturday of each month for just one hour, 10-11am. This allowed people to still have time for other pursuits on that Saturday, but it did limit the amount of work we were able to do.

Some of the members of our group who came regularly for many years were Marie Byles (until her death in 1980), Frances Nichols, Eva Jones, Sally Atkinson and Elwyn Donald from North Epping, Victoria Pearce, Charlotte Thompson (both from Epping), Emily Scott (from Eastwood), Florence and Alan Dwight. There were others who helped occasionally.

We did not achieve a great deal. We never progressed from the Day Road area. Privet was the major weed and although we tried to keep to the Bradley method we found it necessary to use a herbicide, supplied by Hornsby Council for larger Privet. The herbicide used was Roundup, carefully applied by scraping the bark in a ring and using a paint brush for application.

The group continued meeting into the late 80's. We enjoyed each other's company very much and always finished the morning's work with a drink of cordial, a biscuit and a chat.

Meanwhile bush regeneration was slowly gaining more recognition. the first training courses were set up by the National Trust. Later certificate courses for teachers of bush regeneration and workers were introduced to the curriculum at the Ryde School of Horticulture. Councils began to employ bush regenerators.

I think it is wonderful and almost beyond belief, that today, bush regeneration has widespread acceptance and support. And Beecroft is very fortunate to have such a skilled leader as Sheila Woods caring for Chilworth Reserve.