

Eurong Bush Regeneration Project

Diary 4th to 10th March, 2012

Undertaken by a group of volunteers organized by the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation to pursue a project of cleaning our garden waste and weeds from public lands within the urban areas of Eurong and replacing weeds with native plants to encourage all Fraser Island landholders to use appropriate natives and not to bring any more alien plants to the island. The project was also to control and hopefully eradicate the lantana growing in the USL (unallocated state land) of Eurong

Participants

John Sinclair — Coorparoo
 Su Dawson — Camp Hill
 Michael Lowe — Tin Can Bay
 Keith Cordwell — Carindale
 Miles Prichart — Ashmore
 Skye Matthaei — Yamba
 Donna Bowe — Bowen Hills
 Rose Gray — The Gap
 Pam Alick — Red Hill
 Barbara Green

Sunday 4th March

While two of the team had already made their way over to the island in their own transport, the remaining eight assembled in Brisbane under a grey sky following a day of showers. With the weather looking so ominous all of the gear was well covered with tarpaulins in the trailer .

As we proceeded to the island stopping at the Caloundra turn-off for morning tea and Gympie for lunch and to collect Michael, the rain became heavier and more consistent. By the time we reached Maryborough there were no breaks and once we reached Fraser Island it was pouring very heavily with the sand being turned into a slurry and the roads down any slope being turned into rivers. By the time we reached Eurong at about 5.45 those rivers had become raging torrents.



The road in was a raging torrent

There was some pessimism as to whether we would have the opportunity to work in such conditions.

We were later to learn that during the afternoon and overnight 133 mls rain were recorded at the Eurong Ranger Station due to a low pressure system that moved from Maryborough to Fraser Island.

Monday, 5th March

In weather when people in paid employment would have found it against policy to venture outside much less work, our intrepid team were ready and waiting and even had to admonish the Fearless Leader for not advising him that he had started work at 7.30 am. They were all chomping at the bit to tackle the incredible weed load that had built up since the demo gardens were created. The group split into two teams one group of six working on Easton Street and a smaller group of three eradicating weeds in the roundabout.

Meanwhile a key member of the team, Michael Lowe had gone off with QPWS staff on a seed hunting expedition to renew the Eurong nursery and to familiarize rangers with the plants suitable for Fraser Island gardens.



Weeding the Roundabout in the rain

The Roundabout had been reinvaded by a lot of couch grass because of the lack of initial

preparation in November to clean the couch grass up. There were many other small weeds but the persistent workers had cleaned up more than half the garden by Smoko when work was called off because of the deteriorating weather. Despite the very challenging hot dry weather immediately after planting. The survival rate was estimated to be about 60%.

Meanwhile the larger team slipped into the cleaning up of Easton Street where the survival rate was less about 15% because the plants were not well watered in the establishment period and because of the huge invasion of large weeds that had sprung up from the seed beds below left after the rubbish was moved in November. The team set too with gusto removing lots of invasive grass, siratro and many unknown tall succulent weeds that fortunately had not set seed. Three trailer loads of weeds piled high were transported to the dump and by noon more than 80% of the demo garden area in Easton Street had been cleared ready for replanting in more suitable weather conditions to survive without the benefit of artificial watering.



Cleaning up Easton Street Demo Garden

During smoko the weather deteriorated and the group went to the QPWS office to collect the plants we hope to get into the ground. Unfortunately there is no midyim but a rich assortment of other plants suitable for demonstration purposes. On our return despite the weather weeding resumed and continued unto noon.

Following lunch the group went to Lake McKenzie to assess the extent of sedimentation resulting from the overnight downpour. The level of the lake had visibly risen by about 130 mls (the amount of the precipitation). However it appeared that none of

the road run-off had flowed into the lake. There was concern though with the movement of sand from the road and car park to the swale behind the lunette. Not all of the coir logs had trapped the flow of sediment.

The group contributed 4¼ hours each of work plus Michael's contribution

Total hours worked 48

Tuesday 6th March

While the wind howled for most of the night there was very little rain and by 7.30 am when we resumed work on the two respective projects the conditions were quite dry. In fact despite the low pressure system generating winds up to 90 kph being 90 kilometre east of Hervey Bay township, we had no rain interruptions for the whole morning. However our strength had increased because the weather prevented to Rainbow Beach contingent of QPWS Rangers reporting to Eurong and so Michael wasn't required to go seed hunting

The group working on Easton Street were really energetic. Apart from removing another six trailer loads of weeds to the dump the area of potential garden grew, new weeds and forms of rubbish were uncovered including a large Bougainvillia hidden in the thicket. A small garden bed was also established around an isolated remnant Banksia.

The Easton Street unfinished business from November included the removal of a large lantana in a backyard at the request of a resident. This was a significant challenge but not only was the lantana that filled two utility loads removed but so too was an large Easter Cassia .

It was a race against the clock to complete the Easton Street project by 12 noon but by then 66 plants had been put in the ground in Easton Street including 56 pots and 10 pigface and we are confident of a higher survival rate because of the wet state of the ground, the use of wetting gel, the reduced competition from weeds and the milder autumn weather. We won't know the results before May but we have three extra days to water them this time to help them get established.

Su, Pam, Barbara and Keith finished weeding the roundabout and also the Winnum Garden and though we anticipate more weeding will be required in May both demonstration gardens should be much more manageable then.

At the end of the days work the only chores remaining on Easton Street, is maintenance watering until we leave, and in the Resort gardens some replacements.

Several worked overtime after the projected 12.00 noon finish, particularly Michael who didn't join the rest of the group for a trip around the Southern lakes including a swim as Lake Birrabeen.

Total hours worked 55



Planting up Easton Street Garden

Wednesday, 7th March

The work again started at 7.30 am. Despite the strong howling most of the night it had delivered very little rain. The first job was mopping up the things not finished from the previous day and watering all of the plants to help them become more strongly established.

At 8.00 am we moved the centre of operations to the second valley where an area was delineated for cleaning up. The area was covered with a thick carpet of painted spurge but also managed to harbour many other weeds, including Mossman River grass, mother of millions and corky passion vine. However the major challenge was the Madiera vine that had managed to get established high in a cypress pine. Michael was determined to eliminate it with the aid of a tall ladder, agility and climbing skill to eventually amputate the host branch of the Madiera vine that couldn't be reached any other way. The area was then cleaned and stands ready for planting tomorrow.

Another task undertaken was to procure the chemicals for spraying to use FIDO's newly acquired knapsack spray. While the weather was dry we didn't proceed with this at this time because of the strong wind. It is our intention to spray weed in areas we intend to work more

diligently to clean up this work along the western end of Easton Street. This is the western entrance to Eurong and the density of weeds is not a good welcoming sight. Weeding here will be facilitated if the Green panic and Siratro is significantly reduced.

After smoko four of the team laid plans for removing Brazillian cherries from Anderson Street tomorrow while on the way to spend a heavy hour tackling the lantana between the Roundabout and the dump. Significant progress was made but there will need to be a heavier assault tomorrow. All of the lantana was removed by uprooting and the plants were left in situ to degrade.

Work ceased at 12.30. After lunch most of the group went to Wabby Lakes for an interesting walk.

Total hours worked = 55



Eliminating a madeira vine that climbed a cypres

Thursday, 8th March

The day was fine throughout and after watering the plants in Easton Street everyone except Michael went to work in the second valley. Here the group split into two teams — one working on Brazilian Cherry trees growing in Anderson Street and the second group working on weeding in a cleared area in Buffey street and preparing some areas for potential Demonstration gardens.

The Brazilian Cherry assault was heavy and resulted in at least eight trailer/ute-loads of Brazillian cherry trees being taken to the dump

Meanwhile Michael was busy spraying in the Easton Street area and around the toilet block preparing for the May operations. He was alarmed at the spread of Coral Creeper from the Eurong resort across the road in several places and it is now outside the dingo fence spreading into the bush rapidly. This calls for priority action in May to address this serious problem.

The Buffey Street Gang of four meanwhile beavered away scouring the area for any villainous unwanted plants and left the area looking quite immaculate.

After morning tea Michael joined the Brazillian cherry attack to spray many clumps removed previously that were coppicing and unable to be sawn any lower.

Anderson Street is a major mass of many potentially serious weeds that needs attention. Apart from the coral creeper it will be another priority for May.

There was a sense of urgency to finish as much of the work in the Second Valley today because it is the penultimate day and the final day has been assigned to eradicating lantana.

In the last hour before our late lunch the area in Jarvis Street identified as the site for a Demonstration garden was planted. There is now a problem of the unavailability of plants that could be more suitable for the areas we want to plant. Many of the seeds Michael collected in November are still to be planted and while the nursery is flourishing the demand is exceeding the supply

The group worked until 12.45 and even on the tour to Lake Allom Michael spent half the time seed hunting.

Total hours worked = 55

Friday, 9th March

Watering of all of the plantings continued but there have been some other positive gains. Michael found a few self-generated seedling pandanus in the Winnum demonstration garden and three of these have been relocated now to the Easton Street Demonstration garden in addition to fifteen relocated to the Eurong nursery.

One of the rewarding aspects of this job is being invited to eliminate some weeds on behalf of private landholders that they have been unable to manage. Before serious work began today we remove an unwanted Umbrella Tree from a backyard. We hope that this is the only one in Eurong. At the end of the day Michael also undertook some other weed elimination at “Talinga” because the Board was open to Michaels offer to improve the landscaping.

While Miles, Skye and Michael embarked on a clean up and finish off program for the morning in the Second Valley, the remaining Magnificent Seven undertook the toughest and heaviest assignment of the week and cleaned out the lantana between the Municipal Dump and the huge Eurong Resort dump. The technique used was to uproot all of lantana. While it was heavy work for Keith and John for the women being much lighter this was a very serious challenge but nobody shied from it and at the end the ground looked like a bomb site because of the wilting leaves of hundreds of uprooted lantana. The uprooted plants were left in situ to provide some short-term habitat.

An area of about three (3) hectares near the dumps has had the lantana cleaned out. Whilst there are still many more hectares to be cleared in Eurong Village because of the almost complete absence of recruitment in previously cleared areas, the total area cleared up becomes cumulative. It should be noted that we have also that the areas so far addressed have been some of the densest infestations and observations indicate that infestation is much thinner the further away we move from the urban part of the village.

Note most lantana wasn't in the hollows but on the higher ground.

Efforts to control the lantana next to the firebreak around the Eurong Resort dump site with chemical sprays seem to have been unsuccessful and while it may have temporarily knocked back the lantana there was no evidence of a single lantana plant to

die, . Likewise the few Easter cassia there also survived the spraying that seems to have been a totally futile effort.

It was noted that the lantana was much more vigourous and thicker near any disturbed ground. It seems to suggest that any earthworks of any kind need to be undertaken bearing in mind the risk of lantana invasion in consequence and a preparedness to address that problem.

The other noteworthy observation was the weakness in the lantana root system that enabled it to be uprooted at all. Some roots seemed to be hollow and suffering nematode infection. It was also noted that once areas of lantana on Fraser Island have been cleared of lantana using the uprooting method there is:-

- a. no regrowth from any root material left behind;
- b. No recolonization of the areas cleared up to 10 years earlier.
- c. Other native plants seemed to be minimally disturbed by the uprooting and seemed to respond quickly as this invasive competition was removed.

While the lantana was being attacked in the dump area Michael, Miles and Skye were assailing more Brazillian cherries and tidying up the work done in Second Valley.

After lunch while the remainder of the group went on an inspection of the Valley of the Giants, Michael remained behind. The work he did was finalizing the work in Easton Street and the packing up of equipment. He sprayed areas to be addressed during FIDO's next Eurong working bee in May.

The cooperation of the Eurong Resort has been outstanding. Manager John Wilkin agreed that the Roundabout Midyim garden should be watered at least twice a week and will now be done each Monday and Friday night.

Also included discussions with John Wilkins was the fate of the invasive Coral Creeper that had escaped from the resort's gardens into the bush. He has given FIDO permission to remove it and replace it with natives next visit in May.

While this was a wonderful team of volunteers two special mentions are due.

Su Dawson not only did 22 hours of bush regeneration work but in addition did all of the logistics preparing for the catering prior to the

week long program and prepared all of the meals which were universally appreciated.

Special mention must be made of the contribution of Michael Lowe who has been inspirational, instructive and indefatigable throughout the week. Today Michael worked a more than 10 hour day in the field and an additional four hours sorting seeds to be delivered to the QPWS Nursery.

Michael's skills and experience as an environmental consultant meant that he was able to oversee the weeding techniques, safely undertake the chemical spraying, plan the gardens and select and set out the plants to be planted and generally instructing the group on all of the aspects of bush regeneration we were engaged in.

Seed collection and the desire to build up the Fraser Island nursery stocks and variety has been a special mission for Michael not only on this week but during FIDO's previous week. Today Michael actually planted 60 piccabeen palms in the Eurong Nursery as well as at least 60 geodorams for the home gardens project. Overnight Michael finished sorting and labelling the seeds of many species to be added to the nursery and hopefully some may be ready when we return in May because we had just about exhausted the nursery stocks ready for the field.

Total hours worked = 60

Saturday, 10th March

There was a very early start to the day as tools and equipment had to be stowed and all of the plants watered to give them the best chances of survival and we had to leave by 8.00 am to catch the barge home.

Total hours worked = 3

Summary

This was a very satisfying week and we left the island with a sense of real accomplishment and much to show for the energy expended. The group also left the island with a greater familiarity with it and an understanding of it. The record of hours expended by the volunteers is an conservative on the conservative side

Total hours worked for the week = 276
This doesn't include all of the hours Michael spent collecting and processing seed for the nursery

