

WORKING WITH THE FRIENDS OF THE ESCARPMENT PARKS

A guide for volunteers

Last revised in January 2014

Welcome to volunteering with the Friends of the Escarpment Parks (Toowoomba) Inc. (FEP). We appreciate your support to help us achieve our vision for the future of Toowoomba's bushlands, and also value your company and your input into what we are doing.

Our vision is that

All remnant natural bushland in Toowoomba should be weed free, well managed, and valued by the community, in vigorous growth and contain a diverse range of plant and animal species.

To achieve our vision FEP is systematically removing environmental weeds from our urban bushland parks, allowing the native vegetation to recover and regenerate. We work closely with Toowoomba Regional Council and other landholders, since they are responsible for the parks and also provide us with support including tools, safety equipment and other supplies. Initial weed removal is carried out in the bushland areas before a monitoring and maintenance program is established to help maintain these parks.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended for people who are working with FEP as volunteers. We hope that the information provided will be useful to you. Please let us know if there are any other topics that you think should be included.

These notes consist of the following sections:

- About the Friends of the Escarpment Parks
- Insurance
- What to wear and what bring when working in the bush
- How we control environmental weeds
- Using tools
- Hazards when working in the bush
- Your individual work record sheet

ABOUT THE FRIENDS OF THE ESCARPMENT PARKS

One sunny weekend in the mid 1980's Dr John Swarbrick took his daughter to visit her friend at Spring Bluff Railway station. While there, John walked around the area with the Stationmaster and saw the big problem that the Lantana was creating. He invited a few friends to work in the area and so the seeds of Friends of The Escarpment Parks were sown.

Once the group achieved their goals there, they moved to Prince Henry Drive and then to Duggan Park. It was here that their success, enthusiasm and expertise impressed the then Director of Parks and Recreation of Toowoomba Council that in 1991 he proposed that they form a Friends group to help attract more attention to the Bushland parks at Council level and to increase funding for the Bushland park Management and share their expertise and local knowledge with Council. So the seed was germinated!

The emphasis at that time was on the parks along the eastern escarpment of the City, hence the name Friends of the Escarpment Parks. The group met regularly to control exotic woody weeds in small areas of Redwood Park (mainly Cat's-Claw creeper and Lantana), Jubilee Park (Cat's-Claw creeper), Picnic Point Park (Lantana), Tobruk Drive (Lantana), and Prince Henry Drive (Lantana). Considerable help was received in the early years from students from Gatton College (now part of the University of Queensland) as well as from local Scouts who undertook work to achieve appropriate badges.

The group became incorporated on 1st September 1994 as The Friends of the Escarpment Parks (Toowoomba) Inc., and continued working much as before. In 1995 we received a grant to prepare and publish the booklet 'Environmental Weeds of the Toowoomba Region', illustrating and describing 21 of our most serious bushland weeds and outlining their control.

In 1999 we worked with Council to prepare and plant Toowoomba's Millennium Forest, an area of Eucalypts, Wattles, Hoop Pines and other native trees in what was then a neglected filled quarry in Duggan Park. FEP continued to clear other areas in Duggan Park and assist Council with further planting. They were also responsible for the provision of Nesting Boxes in the trees adjacent to the picnic area.

Then FEP were approached by National Parks and Wildlife Services to clear the North Western half of Hartmann Reserve and upon completion moved into areas of private bushland adjacent to Nielsen Park that had been offered to the Council but was too heavily invested with Lantana and Privet for them to accept.

At this time FEP procured their first Shipping Container which was installed at Nielsen Park to store their increasing amount of tools and equipment.

Around this time several members attended a number of weekend Seminars to learn more about Weed and land control which resulted in a change from total to patchwork clearing to reduce the impact on the wildlife.

In 2004, after accepting the 2 areas into extensions of Nielsen Park, the Council suggested that FEP move into Echo Valley South Park a daunting area of some 7 hectares with monocultures of Lantana and Privet. The container was moved and a development program set up that would eventually have seen the western side of the gully cleaned and regenerated to include a picnic area and public amenities. With numbers then down to as few as 3 for a long period, the wishes of the local Bird Society and the other priorities of the Council, all this ambition was not fulfilled but the western area was left clean. Unfortunately lack of numbers has not allowed FEP to maintain this area as they would have wished although some regular maintenance is still being carried out there.

During their 5 years in Echo Valley South Park the Friends returned to Duggan Park and Nielsen Parks to respond to a request from University of Queensland to clear an area of Boyce Gardens of Cat's Claw. With the agreement of Council they even set up a propagating House to breed beetles that had proved effective against Cat's Claw in other areas, but after distribution it was found that they could not withstand our colder climate.

Friends of the Escarpment Parks now had Duggan Park, Nielsen Park, The Waterbird Habitat, Panorama Crescent Park to maintain as well as Echo Valley South Park and Hartmann Bushland Reserve at the request of the Hartman family.

At Hartmann Reserve under the leadership of Veronica Newberry (Council Parks Coordinator) and her assistant (Kristie Worthy nee Jenkinson) held a series of Open days with some groups set –up to maintain the Reserve.

However due to a lack of sustained public support, the project faded away.

During these years FEP assisted the Council in “Clean up Australia Days” and organising National Tree Planting Days in Tobruk Drive that involved up to 300 volunteers each year and the planting of approximately 6,000 plants.

In 2010, after over 20 years of devotion to the parks, John Swarbrick finally vacated the president’s chair and Friends moved on to a new and even greater challenge under the leadership of their new President Hugh Krenske. Hugh had been involved for many years with the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly project and so brought a new respect and interest to the society. Hugh’s lifelong association with Redwood Park lead him to persuade the rest of us to move into that park and in 2010, just before the Spring floods that washed away the bridge over the gully, the Friends commenced a project to establish signed paths through the two different forests adjacent to the Picnic area.

Since then the wide publicity that has been given to this work through the press, the establishment their own Web Site and the closer relationship developed with the Council including a place in their Website has brought this work more to the public’s attention.

Recently, under the umbrella of the Conservation Volunteers Australia, groups of young people from all over the world have spent time in Redwood Park assisting to prepare for the laying of paths. So far in addition to clearing along both sides of the lower part of the existing track, 2 new paths have been established that lead right into the forest and several acres of the forest have been cleared of Cat’s Claw, Madeira Vine, Climbing Asparagus, Coral Berry and other exotic plants all threatening to destroy this remarkable area and longer walks that will take the public to picturesque areas of rock-face and grassland are being developed.

A Grant of \$50,000 has been obtained to assist with the cost of laying better paths with signage and a Shelter together with a private offer accepted to provide a permanent Notice Board in the picnic area.

Open Days and Tree Planting days received the support of our Mayor and other Councillors.

New Maintenance groups have been established in Duggan Park, Nielsen Park and Panorama Crescent Park. A new groups is being formed to clear an area of Jubilee Forest at the end of Mackenzie Street north.

A Munitions Store and second Shipping Container were purchased and sited.

By the end of 2013, Friends of The Escarpment Parks has moved a long way from their early beginnings and are stronger than they have ever been before with over 80 subscribers and approximately 20 active volunteers and all involved can be proud of their achievements.

However, the urgent need for more volunteers has never been so great.

Through persistent efforts Toowoomba now has the opportunity of creating one of the finest forest walking areas in Queensland as well as offering a variety of bushland habitats for public access.

Whether or not they survive for future generations will depend on the future priorities of Council Parks Department and above all the support of the public.

INSURANCE

To work as a volunteer in our Escarpment Parks, you must register with Toowoomba Regional Council by obtaining a T.R.C. Volunteer Handbook for completion and return.

Toowoomba Regional Council has its own Volunteer Public Liability Insurance and Group Personal Accident Insurance, which only covers FEP Members if you are registered as an individual volunteer with Council and are acting within the scope of your duties ON behalf of the Council.

Each Claim is assessed individually.

Volunteer Insurance is provided by AON Insurance through Queensland Water and Land Carers (QWaLC), which is a statutory body set up by the Queensland Government to coordinate and support groups such as the Friends of the Escarpment Parks (Toowoomba) Inc. that are engaged in caring for our country. They provide us with insurance against Personal Accident, Public Liability and Association Liability. You can view all the insurance details on Q.W.aL.C. Web Site.

To be eligible for insurance cover you must be working on approved FEP projects and sites under a Bushcare Coordinator (FEP supervision) with your hours recorded on our timesheets. You must be taking proper care of yourself and be wearing appropriate clothing and safety equipment. You must not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs or be committing any unlawful or illegal act.

WHAT TO WEAR AND WHAT TO BRING WHEN WORKING IN THE BUSH

Your safety and comfort are of the greatest importance. We strongly recommend that you wear:

- solid covered shoes or boots, to provide balance and foot protection
- a light weight fully brimmed hat (preferably with a neck covering), to provide sun protection, stop debris falling down your neck and help to protect your face and neck against scratches and bites
- long trousers or overalls, to protect your legs against scratches and bites
- socks long enough to tuck your trousers legs into, to protect you against bites
- a long sleeved shirt, to protect your arms against scratches
- Safety glasses/sunglasses to protect your eyes.

Much of the work is done on the hands and knees, and you may also like to wear knee protectors and/or gaiters. Kneeling mats will be provided on request.

Gloves will be provided on request and must be worn. Insect repellent and sunscreen are available from the person in charge. FEP strongly advises using insect repellent when ticks are about (see below), and sunscreen on unshaded and unprotected skin especially during the summer.

Please also bring water or other drink and something to eat when we stop for smoko in mid morning.

We do insist that you do not smoke in the bush – it is a fire hazard.

HOW WE CONTROL ENVIRONMENTAL WEEDS

Most of the environmental weeds that we remove from the bush are woody – they are shrubs (eg. lantana), small trees such as broadleaved privet, vines (eg Japanese honeysuckle, passionfruit and cat's-claw creeper) or tough woody herbs like pavonia. Most such weeds can be controlled manually by using simple hand tools. We only use herbicide (glyphosate only) when necessary, and as an FEP volunteer you can of course choose not to use it yourself.

We use three main methods to remove weeds from the bush:

- pulling or digging them up by the roots,
- cutting them off close to the ground and immediately treating the stump with glyphosate weedkiller (*the cut stump method*), and
- Stem injection with glyphosate weedkiller.

We occasionally use other methods for certain tough or specialised weeds. Where possible and required the seeds or other regenerative parts of the weeds are collected for proper disposal elsewhere. The tops of the weeds are generally scattered over the ground as mulch which helps to reduce further weed invasion, keeps the soil cool and provide shelters for insects and small animals.

Pulling or digging the weeds up by the roots sounds simple, but some weeds can be tough and strongly rooted and do not pull up easily. Where necessary we use appropriate tools such as trowels, spades or Root Blades to dig out the roots. For plants that can be pulled up by hand please follow this procedure: kneel beside the weed (do NOT bend over it), grip the weed firmly with both gloved hands as close to the ground as possible, then using your own weight lean backwards and pull the weed out of the ground.

It is important not to break the weed off near the ground – it will only regrow later on from the stump and will be more difficult to control later.

It is also important not to bend over the plant and try to pull it out by using your back muscles, since this may result in a strained aching back.

Weeds that are too tough or too big to be pulled or dug up should be dealt with by either the cut stump or stem injection method.

The cut stump method consists of kneeling beside the weed, cutting it off close to the ground and immediately applying weedkiller to the exposed stump. Long handled loppers are used to cut off most weeds, since these are stronger and safer than secateurs. We use hand saws for small trees that are too big for the loppers.

It is important to cut off the weed close to the ground (not more than 5cm high) so as not to leave a stump to trip over later on. The weedkiller is also much more effective when the stump is as short as possible; longer stumps may reshoot and require retreatment, and are a tripping and spiking hazard later on, especially when hidden by regrowth.

It is also important to spray each of the cut stumps immediately (within 5 seconds of cutting) with the weedkiller provided. Delaying spraying for more than 10 seconds often means that the weedkiller will not be taken in properly and the stump will regrow later on and have to be controlled again.

We use 50% glyphosate (36% active ingredient) weed killer to control woody weeds by the cut stump method. Glyphosate weed killer is sold as Roundup and many other trade names. We use glyphosate because it is very safe to use – safe to us, and safe to the bush so long as it is used in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Volunteers are supplied with weedkiller in 500 ml plastic spray bottles. The nozzle should be set to give a coarse spray (not a jet or a fine spray). Wet the full area of the exposed cut with the spray, but do not spray the ground or other vegetation near by.

After spraying the stump the cut-off top of the plant may need cutting up and stacking or spreading over the ground nearby. Material spread over the ground should if possible be no higher than knee height so that people can step over it to access the area later on to remove any new weeds that may come up in the future.

Stem injection. Trees such as broad-leaved privet and celtis that are too thick to cut down can be killed by injecting their trunks with 50% glyphosate herbicide. Using a small axe or tomahawk make a series of downward sloping cuts through the bark and into the sapwood. The cuts should be as far apart as the width of each cut, and they should be low down on the trunk – at least below any side branches. Then spray two squirts of weedkiller into each cut. This will usually kill the tree.

USING TOOLS

Always wear gloves when handling and using tools.

Loppers or long-handled pruners are the tools we use most. They are good for cutting off weeds up the thickness of their handles only – thicker weeds should be sawn off. Loppers consist of a pair of long handles and two strong sharp jaws. The jaws are made of forged steel and are rather brittle, so take care not to snap them. Do not twist the handles up and down to cut off stubborn weeds since this may snap the blades of the jaws – use a saw.

Because you need to cut the weed off very close to the ground, kneel beside it or squat down. Open the jaws of the loppers fully, and place them round the stem close to the ground. Push the weed into the back of the jaws – this gives you most leverage and makes cutting easier. Squeeze the ends of the handles together. You may need to take several cuts at thicker stems. Have the spray bottle ready for immediate use when the stem is cut!

Loppers need to be kept sharp – if you think your loppers are not cutting well return them to whoever is in charge for sharpening. The nut and bolt that hold the jaws together also needs to be kept at just the right tension – if you find the jaws are loose return the loppers to whoever is in charge for tightening. If you use them when the jaws are sloppy you may lose the nut and bolt, which are hard to replace. Loppers also need to be kept oiled for easy cutting.

Saws – we mainly use bow saws, which have replaceable blades. These blades are very sharp, so take care when carrying and handling saws. Saws are used to cut stems over 3 cm thick, and can cut down small trees and cut up thick branches. These saws are designed to cut fresh wet wood – they do not cut dry wood very well. Bow saws can be used by either one or two people.

Because you need to cut the weed off very close to the ground, kneel beside the weed or squat down. Place the saw onto the stem close to the ground. If you are using the saw by yourself, push to cut the stem then relax the pressure as you pull the saw back towards yourself. If two people are using the saw (one on each end!) each person’s job is only to pull, not to push. When two people are using the saw only

put the cutting pressure on your pull stroke then relax whilst the other person pulls it back towards themselves. Have the spray bottle ready for immediate use when the stem is cut!

Saws blades need to be sharp – if you think your saw is not cutting well return it to whoever is in charge for a new blade.

The Root Blade. The Root Blade is a long-handled shovel which has been specifically modified for removing woody weeds from the soil. The blade is narrowed towards the tip, sharpened and reinforced. Place the tip of the blade beside the shrub or small tree to be removed, stamp it deeply into the soil with your foot to cut the weed's taproot, then lever the weed out of the ground. Once the weed has been removed you may need to fill in the hole with some of the surrounding soil and cover it with mulch. Root Blades do not work well in rocky soil and we do not use them on steeply sloping ground where erosion can be an issue.

Power tools. We are no longer allowed to use power tools including chainsaws, trimmers and mulchers in TRC parks. Powered equipment can only be used in areas approved by T.R.C. by fully trained and licensed volunteers with appropriate safety gear.

HAZARDS WHEN WORKING IN THE BUSH

Your safety is of prime importance.

- **Never do anything that you think is too hazardous or dangerous**
- **Never work alone – WORK AS A GROUP or IN PAIRS**
- **If you see a hazard or danger, report it to the person in charge of the group**
- **If you see another person doing something dangerous, warn and help them**
- **We are committed to working safely and have instituted a risk management process in which all volunteers are involved; so please be 'part of the team'.**

Before starting work you ensure that the FEP Bushcare coordinator knows that you are there. The coordinator (an experienced FEP volunteer) is responsible for the safety on site and ensures that activities are carried out safely.

**Any queries regarding safety should be directed to that person
And in an emergency phone 000 and ask for an ambulance.**

Biological Hazards

Most insect bites and stings result in a localised itch and swelling that settles within a few days. Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) to insects are relatively uncommon and are usually due to bees, wasps or bull ants.

Fortunately, effective treatments are available to treat allergic reactions to bites and stings. Anaphylaxis from stinging insect allergy results in an average of three deaths per year in Australia.

Older individuals and those with severe difficulty breathing are at greatest risk and should be seen by a medical specialist (Allergist/Clinical Immunologist).

A cold pack carried in an esky or at home may also help to reduce minor swelling of an insect bite, if available.

TICKS: Scrub ticks are the main biological hazard we face in the bush. They are active throughout the year, but particularly from October to March. Scrub ticks normally live on bandicoots and other native animals, which are largely immune to their effects.

Each tick goes through three life stages in the year - the very small larva or seed tick, the middle sized nymph, and the larger adult. Between each stage the tick leaves its host animal, sheds its skin and grows larger, then climbs up and perches on a plant. It attaches itself to the next animal (or person) that brushes past. It then moves around until it finds an area of thin skin, where it attaches itself very strongly by hooked mouth parts. It feeds by injecting saliva (which causes rapid blood flow to the bite) and sucking blood. Unfortunately we are not usually aware of the bite until an hour or so later, by which time the tick is very firmly attached and cannot be easily removed. Irritation at the bite site follows, which may be intense in sensitive people.

It is best to avoid or limit scrub tick bites by preventive action, eg. Applying an insect spray.

Avoid or limit scrub tick bites when working in the bush by:

- wearing long trousers, a long sleeved shirt, a broad brimmed hat and gloves,
- Placing the clothing to be worn in a bag and apply a little bit of insecticide spray. Cover the bag and allow insecticide to be absorbed into the material,
- spraying your ankles, cuffs, wrists, collar, neck, hairline and front shirt buttons with the insect repellent (eg Bushman's 40% DEET Heavy Duty),

When using avoid contact with eyes, skin or breathing in the fumes,

- taking off and storing your outdoor work clothes separately from your other clothes when you get home, and
- Having a shower immediately you get home and checking your body for ticks.

If you do get a tick bite: the Queensland Ambulance Service recommends that as soon as you become aware of it you

- grasp the head (not the body) of the tick firmly with fine tweezers then twist it out (do not pull it straight out),
- treat the area with a cotton wool pad soaked in an oily liquid cream such as Ti-Tree Oil to force the tick back out and this should make it easier to remove after 10 minutes.

Fine tweezers, tea tree oil cream and Stingose are available in FEP First Aid field boxes.

If you have a problem with a tick bite or a strong reaction, or if you cannot reach the tick or cannot remove it, visit a doctor or a hospital emergency centre as soon as you can.

(REFER ATTACHED PAMPHLETS)

Ants: On occasion we come across a bull ant or jumping ant nests. Keep an eye out for and avoid working around strange looking mounds or exposed soil. Wearing long trousers, a long sleeved shirt, gloves and repellent insecticide should give you reasonable protection. If ants do get onto you, move well away from the mound and brush off any ants from your skin and/or clothing.

Tea Tree oil cream is available in First Aid Kits.

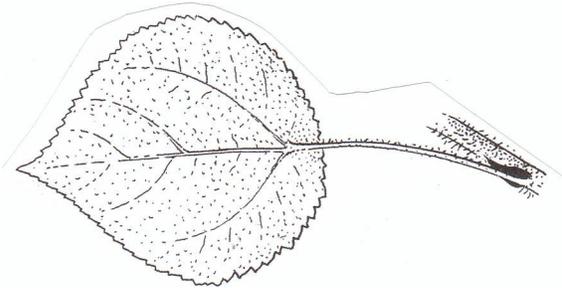
Feral bees or Wasps: Feral bees usually nest in small cracks in tree trunks, either near the ground or high up in the canopy. They are active during the warmer months, when they can usually be seen buzzing about the entrances to their nests. Look out for Feral Bees and Wasp nests. They build small nests that hang in bushes. Avoid working near them, and warn other volunteers of their presence and location.

Spiders: Are present especially in leaf litter. Wearing long trousers, a long sleeved shirt, hat, gloves and repellent insecticide should provide adequate protection. In the thousands of hours that FEP volunteers have been working in Toowoomba's bushlands over the years we have never had a problem with spiders.

Leave them be or brush them off you with a glove.

Snakes: There are snakes in our urban bushland, but the risk of snakebite is low. Move slowly and carefully through the bush, looking where you are putting your feet. Check logs and rocks before sitting on them, putting your hands on them or stepping over them. Most of our activities are slow and disturbing, and snakes move away ahead of us. We rarely see snakes in the bush. If you do see a snake stop, call out to warn others, and retreat carefully. Do not try to kill snakes. In the thousands of hours that FEP volunteers have been working in Toowoomba's bushlands over the years we have seen very few snakes and have never had a problem with one.

Stinging trees: Native Stinging trees grow mainly in rainforest, especially in the rainforest section of the Boyce Gardens but also in some gullies in Redwood Park and perhaps elsewhere. Seedlings and small plants which carry leaves within two metres of the ground are the main risk. Even lightly touching their leaves can give you a painful sting which can last for a week or more. There is no cure. Do not work under stinging trees for more than a few minutes – the very fine hairs are sometimes shed from the leaves above you. Learn to recognise stinging trees if you are working in rainforest. They have very distinctive leaves – the leaves are large, broadly oval to round and have toothed margins. Their usually greyish surfaces are covered with stinging hairs. Wear gloves, long pants and sleeves, and avoid touching stinging trees.



Physical hazards

Bushland is an untidy and uneven place. Move slowly and look up, look down and look ahead where you are going.

Beware especially of:

- falling over logs, branches, sticks, wire, stumps etc. on the ground – look down
- working under dead branches hanging in the trees above – look up
- catching on protruding twigs etc – look ahead
- falling on steep slopes – avoid or be very careful when working on steep slopes
- Scratches and splinters – wear the gloves provided.
- Broken glass and other litter – always wear gloves, be careful when kneeling, and keep your tetanus injections up to date.
- Syringes – do not handle syringes or other hazardous objects you may find; mark their location clearly and report them to the site supervisor, who will collect and dispose of them safely.

BACK STRAIN

Back Strain may occur if you lift heavy objects or twist or fall whilst carrying them. Take care of your back in the bush. Do not heave or strain to pull out weeds or lift heavy logs etc. when pulling woody weeds. It is best to kneel beside them, grasp them firmly at the base with one or both hands and use your body muscles to pull. If they do not pull out fairly readily then cut them off close to the ground and poison

them immediately leaving the roots in the ground. Only lift logs etc. when necessary and get someone else to assist you.

EYE PROTECTION

Eyes are vulnerable to injury from Lantana, other scratchy items, poky branches and from the sun.

Considerable protection is afforded by wearing a stiffly brimmed hat that largely protects your face from scratches, pokes and the sun. Normal glasses and sunglasses also give you good protection.

The Sun

When working outside any exposed skin is at risk of sunburn.

FEP provides sunscreen for volunteers Use it at your discretion, especially when working in the full sun. Wear a brimmed hat with a neck shade as provided by FEP on request.

Powered Equipment

Powered equipment can only be used in areas approved by T.R.C. by fully trained and licensed volunteers with the appropriate safety gear.

Tools

Some of the tools we use can be hazardous. Take care when carrying saws and loppers – always carry them with the teeth and jaws pointing downwards and away from you, in case you trip and fall.

Chemical hazards

The only weedkiller we use is 50% commercial glyphosate (36% active ingredient and sold as Roundup and similar brands) diluted with water. This is premixed and provided to volunteers in 500 ml spray bottles. Although glyphosate has a very low toxicity to people please avoid skin contact by wearing gloves when spraying. Take your gloves off during smoko. Shower when you get home. If you choose not to use weedkiller that is fine by FEP – discuss this with the site supervisor and either find some other way to kill the weeds or only do the cutting whilst someone else does the spraying.

