THE PONDS WALK

"The Ponds, a name which I suppose it derived from several ponds of water, which are near the farms."
Watkin Tench, 1789

Parramatta and the surrounding districts were places of significant Aboriginal occupation prior to European settlement. The Ponds area was the land of the Darug language speaking Wallumedda clan. The Ponds Creek, originally a series of swamps and soaks, and its tributaries are the headwaters of a creek network flowing through a valley and joining Subiaco Creek. This walk follows the two creeks for most of their journey to the Parramatta River.

In July 1791, Governor Arthur Phillip settled 14 former convicts and their families on 30-50 acre Crown Grants along these creeks. Street names such as Brand, Rope, Tilley, Marshall and Summers remind us of these settlers. These Crown Grants were confirmed on 22nd February 1792, the boundaries of which are shown on the map on the sign's reverse. In the late 1790s the wider district was named Dundas after Henry Dundas, however the name of Dundas was not officially used in the area until the late 1800s. In these early years of the settlement the area was known as Pennant Hills.

Many of the new settlers, unsuited to farming life, eventually gave up their grants, selling them to Lieutenant William Cox, of the New South Wales Corps in the early 1800s. Cox extended his Brush Farm Holdings into Dundas Valley, growing wheat and corn and raising sheep and cattle. Gregory Blaxland, who later explored the Blue Mountains, purchased Brush Farm in 1806. His family gradually sold it by 1900.

In 1832 at a site in the valley now known as Sir Thomas Mitchell Reserve, Major Thomas Mitchell examined the remains of a volcanic plug or pipe of columnar basalt and recommended that the site become a quarry (Pennant Hills Quarry). Due to the geological significance of the area famous scientists such as Darwin, Clarke, Dana, Mawson and David visited the site. Convicts quarried the 'blue metal' which was transported from the Ermington Wharf by boat to Sydney to be used in road construction. Local governments operated the quarry until it became uneconomic in the 1940s and it was later filled and dedicated as a reserve.

By the 1840s the valley farms had given way to orchards growing apples, oranges, lemons, apricots, peaches, pears and plums. One of the early pioneers of the orchard industry was George Spurway. During the 20th century, residential development gradually encroached on farming land which now included the seed nurserymen Yates and Rumsey. In the late 1940s most of the valley was resumed by the Housing Commission for post-war residential settlement.

The original vegetation in Carlingford, Dundas, Dundas Valley and Rydalmere is seen in the remaining bushland remnants along the Ponds Walk. Tall Blue Gum High Forest dominated the ridge-line along Marsden Road and gradually changed downslope into either Turpentine-Ironbark Forest or Shale-Sandstone Transition Forest. Along the lower reaches of Subiaco Creek, Sydney Coastal River-flat Forest is characterised by large Sydney Blue Gums. These bushland areas are small glimpses of the landscape that supported the Aboriginal people for thousands of years. All the bushland remnants are listed as endangered Ecological Communities under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 and are protected. The majority of these plant communities have been cleared or disturbed in the past and are now being restored. Similarly the creeklines have been severely degraded through ongoing development and are also being gradually restored.

* Refer to the signs reverse for the location of The Ponds Walk. Text by John McPherson