



THE EVANS STREET NATIVE GRASSLAND, SUNBURY



Where is the Evans Street Native Grassland?

The Evans Street Native Grassland is on the southern edge of Sunbury, 30 km north-west of Melbourne (Melways Reference Map 113 B10). It is about 4 ha, bounded by the rail line and Evans Street.



Entrances to the site are next to the Depot at the southern end and at two places along Evans Street. Information boards providing notes on the significance and history of the grassland, what to see and dates of walks and meetings are located near the Depot and at the northern entrance.

The grassland is predominantly open and flat with a slight fall from south to north. A knoll with some shrubs, roughly in the centre of the site, provides the only significant landscape feature.

History of the reserve

In the mid 1970s the Friends of the Organ Pipes set about attempting to reinstate the natural vegetation of the Organ Pipes National Park. The Friends searched rail lines, gullies and cemeteries of the district for relatively intact areas of natural vegetation as a source of both inspiration and seeds. In 1983 they made an amazing discovery—the Evans Street Native Grassland. The Friends immediately wrote to the Shire Council urging them to protect the site.

The land was then owned by the Victorian government rail authority but its past use by the railways is unclear. Later the land was purchased by the Shire of Bulla as a potential car park for the Sunbury shopping centre.

Dr Jim Willis, the Assistant Government Botanist, upon seeing the grassland, wrote that:

... it carries the best example I have ever seen of an original grassland flora typical of the Keilor basalt plains. It is remarkable that this community of native plants has survived to the present day in such a vigorous and relatively pure condition. ... This is an astonishing wildflower area, if not quite unique in Victoria ...

Ten years later after a long campaign by local conservation groups and the VNPA an agreement between the Shire and the Friends of Evans Street Grassland was signed to ensure that the bulk of the grassland would remain undeveloped for a further ten years.

Uses and threats

The site is managed to preserve and conserve the Western Plains Grassland community and its rare species, provide educational opportunities for schools and tertiary institutions, provide a source of seeds for

restoration and revegetation projects and to be a wildflower park for Sunbury residents.

The major threats to the site are weed invasion, lack of burning, inappropriate recreational uses, incremental loss of biodiversity due to its small size and potential future development. These threats are addressed in a management plan for the site. Under the agreement signed in 1993, one-eighth of the site is available for development in conjunction with the adjoining privately owned land.

The invasion and spread of weeds is the single biggest threat to the grassland. Weed species constitute 33% of all species (a typical contribution to the flora of grassland remnants) but their frequency and cover is generally low except along fence lines. Weeds are controlled by promoting healthy growth of native plants, by spraying, physical removal and by avoiding soil disturbance.

A tour of the grassland

1. (20 m south of the Knoll)

The Evans Street Native Grassland is a diverse remnant of the original grassland flora and is home to more than 100 native plant species including many that are uncommon in the Melbourne area and four that are of high conservation significance. In the richest parts of the site up to 14 different native species can be found in a single square metre. The site is of very high significance due to its unusual combination of species and its high diversity. It has been nominated for inclusion on the Register of the National Estate.

Typical basalt plains families predominate: grasses, daisies, peas, lilies and sedges. Kangaroo Grass is the dominant grass although other native grasses including wallaby grass, spear grass and plume grass contribute substantially to the cover. Prominent non-grass species include Sheeps Burr, Blue Grass-lily, Lemon Beauty Heads, Bluebells, Common Everlasting, Pink Bindweed, Sundews, Blue Devil, Scaly Buttons, Mat-rush, Golden Moths Orchids and Rice Flowers. These non-grass species live in the spaces between the grass tussocks—without regular burning these spaces would disappear and so would the wildflowers.

2. (top of the Knoll)

The Knoll is a lens of Ordovician silcrete. Sunbury is at the eastern end of the Western Basalt Plains that were formed by a series of volcanic eruptions from 5 million to 8000 years ago. When the molten basalt flowed from volcanoes such as Mt Holden and the hill where Caloola stands, it just failed to cover an existing hill of sedimentary rock. The hot lava fired the sedimentary rock to silcrete. Kooris used this hard, flinty material for

tools. The Knoll supports an open shrubland of Hedge Wattle and tussock grassland with a recognisably different array of species including attractive flowering herbs such as Chocolate Lilies, Blue Pin-cushion, Grey Parrot Pea and Magenta Storks Bill. The Plains Trigger Plant grows on the north-east side of the Knoll; it is an undescribed (new) species of very high conservation significance.

3. (the flats north of the Knoll)

The Evans Street Native Grassland was burnt every two years or so by Kooris in pre-European times and by the railways for the past hundred years. Without burning the Kangaroo Grass becomes thick and crowds out almost all the other plants. The grassland is divided into four burning zones: one half (two zones) of the grassland is burnt each year in late summer in a sequence which varies the fire interval between one, two and three years for each zone. Varying the interval allows the different plants in the grassland to flower and seed.

North-west of the Knoll is a small population of the Small Milk-wort which is vulnerable to extinction in Victoria. Its small purple pea-like flowers sit on a fine stem of blue-green leaves.

Little is known of the fauna of the grassland as no formal studies have been conducted. The accounts of Isaac Batey of the animals of this region in the mid 1800s reflect the enormous richness that has been lost. The Australian Bustard and Plains-wanderer, Eastern-barred Bandicoot and Eastern Quoll were formerly found in grasslands of the Sunbury district along with many other species now excluded by agriculture, introduced predators and urbanisation.

4. (western fence line)

Along the western boundary of the site topsoil has been removed along a strip approximately 10 m wide. Such disturbance would normally cause terrible weed invasion but in this case the reduced soil fertility allows a specialised suite of species to survive including Showy Podolepis, Pussy-tails, Eutaxia and New Holland Daisy.

5. (the Depot)

The Depot is used by school and community groups for educational activities associated with the grassland. There are permanent displays in the Depot and a small seed orchard outside. The seed orchard provides seed for conservation projects and also provides an attractive educational feature when in flower.

Friends of the Evans Street Grassland

Management is the responsibility of the Friends of the Evans Street Grassland, a volunteer community group. The Friends are committed to the conservation of the grassland and its use as an educational and recreational resource. The Friends also conduct planting days and wildflower walks in the spring.

The Friends of Evans Street Grassland Inc.
PO Box 604, Sunbury 3429
Phone: (03) 9744 9130

References

- Batey, I. (1907a) 'Animal Life of the Sunbury District 60 Years Ago', *The Victorian Naturalist* 24:69-74.
- Batey, I. (1907b) 'On 15,000 Acres in the Sunbury District, Its Bird Life Sixty Years Ago', *The Emu* 7(1):1-16.
- Gott, B. & Conran, J. (1991) *Victorian Koorie Plants*, Aboriginal Keeping Place, Hamilton.
- Lunt, I.D. (1991) 'Management of Remnant Lowland Grasslands and Grassy Woodland for Nature Conservation: A Review', *The Victorian Naturalist* 108(3): 56-66.
- Morgan, J.W. & Rollason T.S. (1995) 'Baseline Monitoring of a Significant Grassland at Evans Street Sunbury', *The Victorian Naturalist* 112 (4).
- Ross, J.R. (1995) *The Evans Street Native Grassland Sunbury: Management Plan*, Victorian National Parks Association, Melbourne.
- Society for Growing Australian Plants (1991) *Flora of Melbourne: A Guide to the Indigenous Plants of the Melbourne Area*, SGAP Maroondah, Melbourne.
- Society for Growing Australian Plants (1995) *Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains: A Gardener's Guide to the Original Flora*, SGAP Keilor Plains, Melbourne.
- Zoological Board of Victoria Education Service, (1996) *A Land of Sweeping Plains*, Grassland Teacher Resource Materials, Zoological Board of Victoria, Melbourne.

Information prepared by James Ross.

Map drawn by Sally Heeps.

