

BERKELEY PUBLIC SCHOOL ABORIGINAL STUDENT SUPPORT & PARENT AWARENESS BUSH TUCKER TRAIL

overview of the project

Berkeley Public School on the New South Wales south coast is part of the Tharawal Aboriginal country and language group. In this project, the school's Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness group (ASSPA) developed a bush tucker trail in the school grounds. The project was part of a plan to develop an educational resource to teach children how local people had used native plants. It also formed a meeting place for Aboriginal students and their families. Prior to the project commencing the site was completely obscured by a thick infestation of weeds such as Japanese honeysuckle, privet, lantana and many exotic grasses. With the help of a bush regenerator, the group restored the site and constructed the trail. They created an attractive and hospitable natural place, giving the school and the wider community a connection with the traditions of the past and an awareness of the environment for the future.



Learning about native plants



Painting a mural

how the project was carried out

A creek near the bush tucker trail site was overgrown with weeds, which provided a source of infestation to surrounding areas. The team, assisted by a Landcare group, the ASSPA and volunteers, spent a total of 470 hours removing weeds from the site. The thickest weed growth was Japanese honeysuckle, which overlaid a variety of other weeds. The area was initially sprayed with herbicide, with a follow-up application when weed regrowth occurred. Participants planted 200 seedlings of local native species such as black wattle, coastal banksia, she-oak and tussock grass. All of the 13 species planted have some potential bush tucker value as food or medicine, or can be used as building material.

A snake-like pattern was created for the track by observing the natural flow of the land. A paved pathway was laid, winding around a planted island and leading to a circular discussion area with handmade benches. Finally, the children painted murals based on traditional Aboriginal stories, and these now line the fences around the site.

outcomes now and in the future

The most valuable outcome of the project for the indigenous community was the creation of a place for relaxation and group work from a degraded and unused part of the school.

For the environment, native plants have been returned to the area, these will provide materials for study by the school community. During the process of developing the site, the children were able to learn about native plants, their uses and how to plant and grow them. A launch was held to celebrate the completion of the trail. Many members of the Aboriginal community, including a local Elder, as well as ASSPA members and their families attended the launch and were entertained by didgeridoo music and Aboriginal dancing.

The group is committed to providing ongoing maintenance of the site to keep it weed free, and is planning another planting day. The nearby creek will unfortunately continue to be a source of windborne and bird-dispersed weed seeds, but a small amount of regular weeding will control future infestations of the site.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The creation of the bush tucker trail benefits the whole school community as it provides an area for outdoor classroom activity and a meeting place. The Aboriginal students have a renewed pride in their environment and culture, and respect for their ancestors. Although a small site, the habitat value has been improved by the revegetation with native plants, which will attract birds and animals. Since the project commenced, bird counts have shown an increase in activity around the site.

The project did not suffer any major difficulties apart from differing expectations of the urgency of timing for some activities. This was overcome with discussion among the parties.