

THE ARC TRAIL

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This article describes the rationale behind the design and construction of a trail by pupils of Durban Girls' High School. The project was entered for the Natal Schools Symposium on the Conservation of the Environment and Natural Resources, where it came first in the finals.

INTRODUCTION

The project, carried out by the 1985 Conservation Team at Durban Girls' High School, consisted of three main aims - Awareness, Recreation and Conservation, which were incorporated into the naming of the ARC trail. The trail is situated in suburban Durban where it was felt that it was important to preserve this natural area which forms a vital link in the MOSS (Metropolitan Open Space System) network. (Refer to Figure 1). MOSS is planning a network of trails and green-belts throughout the Durban area, which will ultimately link up and substantially improve the quality of urban life in the area.

In 1983, a Conservation Team from Durban Girls' High School had researched aspects of the canalisation of the Umbilo River (which lies adjacent to the ARC trail) and how it has affected the ecology of the area. After completing their project, their main recommendations were:

- A trail should be plotted alongside the Umbilo canal to form part of Moss.
- The trail should be made use of by schools and the public.
- The area should be cleared of exotic vegetation.
- Indigenous trees should be planted to replace the removed exotic trees.

The establishment of the ARC trail in 1985 came about as a direct result of the 1983 team's recommendations.

AWARENESS

As the first aim was the promotion of awareness, it was decided to find out how the local residents would respond to a trail in the area. A survey was conducted which showed that 92% of the people interviewed were in favour of establishing a trail in the area. A paragraph concerning the trail was published in an information pamphlet.

The trail area has great educational potential as it contains three ecosystems - an open, natural area, a marsh, and a forest region which are all linked by the Umbilo canal. It was decided to take parties of school children, from Std. 1 to Std. 6, through the area to complete worksheets at specific spaces where various features of interest were explained. A copy of the Biology syllabus of each standard was obtained and worksheets and model answers relevant to the syllabi were compiled. Some of the answers to the questions on the worksheets were very amusing: one girl decided that streams were necessary for spiders to swim in and a Standard 1 boy, after deciding that trees made the world more beautiful, gravely warned us not to climb them, in case we broke our legs!

The Conservation Team also organised a conservation-related assembly at Penzance Road Primary School, where a short summary of the ARC trail was given as part of the proceedings.

RECREATION

The second aim was recreation. The people questioned in the survey listed their reasons for wanting to use the trail. The most popular reasons were 'enjoyment', 'relaxation' and 'walking'. Others included 'jogging', 'bird-watching', 'painting' and 'to be alone'.

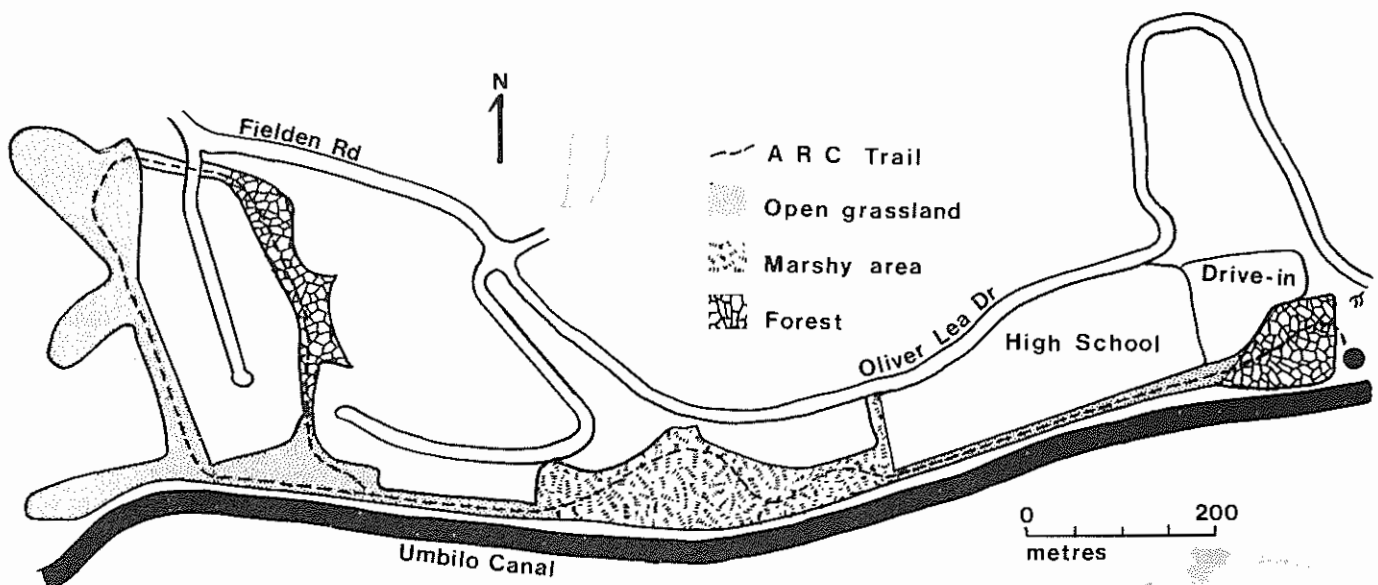


FIGURE 1 Location and map of the ARC Trail

Before plotting the trail, the team visited the area often in order to become thoroughly familiar with it. The ARC trail is approximately three kilometres long and crosses three streams and winds up two valleys, both of which are a haven for birds.

As it is a self-guided trail, arrows were painted on rocks to mark the trail as well as the letters A to G. These letters were placed at observation points at carefully chosen intervals along the trail, where visitors are able to learn a little more about their surroundings. The letters correspond with the ARC trail brochure, in which interesting points concerning each observation point are described. This brochure, compiled by the Conservation Team, consisting of an introduction, information on the flora and fauna, as well as bird and tree checklists, will be available to people at the start of the trail.

Many hours were spent studying the birdlife in the area in order to draw up a bird checklist. Leaf samples of plants were taken to the Botanical Gardens Herbarium for identification and the team gained invaluable knowledge concerning trees and birds while preparing for the symposium.

CONSERVATION

The third and final aim was conservation. An important asset of the area is that it forms a haven for birds and other animals. Approximately 60 species of birds were identified and the team are proud to boast a splendid Hamerkop nest as well as a few glimpses of the rare Burchell's Coucal. The wide variety of birdlife provide viewing for even the most avid of birdwatchers, as well as contributing greatly to the natural beauty of the area. The three main problems identified in the area were: the invasion by alien plant species; noise pollution; and littering.

The alien vegetation became a problem because the canalisation process left the area alongside the canal relatively bare, laying it open for an invasion by alien plant species. Alien plants establish themselves easily as they have no natural enemies and once established, they dominate an area, providing little ecological diversity. Together with the Parks, Recreation and Beaches Department, the team organised a mass clear-up, earning themselves blisters as they strove to chop down and remove alien plants! These aliens have been replaced by indigenous trees.

Noise pollution became a problem in the area when the busy Sarnia Arterial Road was built on the opposite side of the canal. In order to lessen the effects of this road, the Conservation Team organised a mass tree-planting ceremony on World Environment Day, when approximately 900 trees were planted alongside the canal by Durban Girls' High School, Brettenwood High and Saamwerk High School pupils. On Arbor Day, the tree-planting ceremony was repeated when 4 000 trees were planted adjacent to the Sarnia Arterial Road. These trees are being watered by the Parks, Recreation and Beaches Department.

The final problem was the littering of both the canal and trail area. Several litter clean-ups were organised including a mass clean-up during *Keep Durban Beautiful Week* in which 16 black bags of rubbish were collected. Pamphlets were sent to residents in the area, asking them to refrain from littering in the area.

FUTURE PLANS

The ARC trail project will continue throughout 1986. Already the notice board to be erected at the start of the trail has been designed and the team is in the process of forming a management committee to oversee the area. This committee will consist of local residents, teachers, and

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FIGURE 2 The 1985 Conservation Team
 Back row: Helen Zebert, Ildikő Plagányi, Lyndsay Boschoff
 Middle row: Colleen Barbour, Cheryl Gold, Tanya Josi, Alison de Valence, Catherine Gold, Lisa Gotte
 Seated: Eva Plagányi, Miss P. Carter, Tania Lowe, Miss C. Paxton, Elixabeth Peter