

RockSchool

20th

Anniversary

ANNIVERSARY

50th



Mission

RockSchool is a joint program between this regions Girl Guides and Southern Cross Adventurous Activities Scout Fellowship SCAASF (NSW Branch). It is run for eleven months of the year and is there to learn skills and to develop proficiency towards safe adventurous activities. In addition, we also provide youth members of both movements a chance to participate in abseiling and climbing.

History

The beginnings were driven by a recognised need to regularly practice skills and gain competency in rock skills.

Peter Quinnell, Ron Smith, and Gillian Hardy saw Noorumba as an ideal site at a time when National Parks were limiting access and activities in the cliffs in the Sutherland area. They started Rock School for Scouting and Guiding in Sutherland Shire.

Around the same time another group of Scouting leaders formed 'The Troglodites' with founding members Bob Leys, Marion Fisher, Leanne and Michael Minny, and Sam and Alan Ellis. Their aim was also to run regular skill practice but struggled to find an ideal location.

The two groups joined together and registered as the State based Southern Cross Adventurous Activities Scout Fellowship in 2003 in recognition of the multiple regions that were being represented. In that year, we were even featured on DMAG and the 'original' Cheez TV.

The Drops

There are around twenty drops and climbs used along the cliffs that range in height from 4 to 24 metres. Each drop has acquired a name e.g. Pete's Point, Ron's Run, Gillian's Jump etc. to honour our Founders and regular volunteers.



Achievements

Over the past 20 years there have been more than 5,000 visitors to RockSchool, many of whom are regulars. We run workbook weekends, have conducted sessions for the National Adventurous Activity Schools and hold Rescue Refresher weekends every year.

Two parallel programs are run, 'Activity Days' and 'Skill Development'.

Activity Days run to support Guides and Scouts who can set goals for themselves and work towards achievement badges. A popular program, we are usually booked up to 6 months in advance.



Skill Development is run for Venturers, Senior Guides, Rovers and other adults in Scouts and Guides to attain competency in advanced practical skills on and around the rock-face while working towards SIS qualifications. Priority is always given to people who want to complete training and skill development.

Environmental Stewardship

As Scouts and Girl Guides we have an Environmental Charter and procedures to minimise impact on the site, the camping areas, the rock-faces and access tracks.

At or around 2010 we noted that the gums were dying and the casuarinas were proliferating on the cliff tops. Earlier photos of the site confirmed this and following research and consultation with the local council, council nursery consultants and other experts in Australian forests, came up with an Environmental Management Plan. Our aim was to restore and rehabilitate the natural forest of gums, angophoras, shrubs and grasses by controlling the colonisation of the casuarinas.



The Casuarina (Australian pine or she-oak) although native to Australia, its habitation of sandy foreshores and rocky areas, results in dense forestation to the detriment of all other plant species.

Initially the small saplings were removed followed by clearance of the trees within 2-3 metres of the other trees, cutting to hip level to minimise trip hazards. The plan is ongoing and if you look around our site you will see stumps awaiting removal.

Since the start of our management plan we have seen recovery of the gums, the return of grassy areas and a myriad of new saplings from a greater variety of species.

Humour

Bob Leys with the Sculpture named after him, the "Bobleys". This sometimes humorous award is given out each month to the staffer whose contribution on the day is most deserving of it.

The Future

RockSchool is run by volunteers. The reward is seeing the joy, smiles and the relief of overcoming fear on the faces of the young people who try abseiling and climbing. Some of our Trainees have gone on to successful careers in the outdoor industry and others, as Scouting leaders, to inspire another generation. A record to be proud of.

Our path has not been smooth. The original group, despite different outside pressures, have maintained their drive and enthusiasm and are still helping out today.



Who knows what the future will be but our goal and vision is the same as when we started 20 years ago....