

There is nothing  
hard about  
walking a creek.  
One starts at  
the sea and  
heads inland,  
following  
whatever  
path the creek  
suggests. There  
is always some  
kind of path  
— perhaps one  
that children or  
adults with their  
dogs follow.  
If the creek  
should veer into  
private property  
or descend  
through pipes  
underground,  
one only  
has to take a  
slight detour  
to rediscover  
it again. Soon  
enough the creek  
passes into the  
forest and ascends  
across boulders  
until it disappears  
properly beneath  
the escarpment  
cliffs. It is hard to  
precisely pinpoint  
the place of  
disappearance.  
There is simply  
the dawning  
uncertainty  
of where to  
walk next.

What are the  
impediments  
to a more  
general creek  
walking if not the  
disappearance  
of creeks  
themselves —  
repressed beneath  
industrial lots,  
suburban backyards,  
roads and railway  
lines? However  
this is not  
a sufficient  
explanation.  
Creeks are not  
simply repressed  
(scarcely possible  
given that water  
must somehow  
flow from the  
escarpment to  
the sea), they are  
directed and  
transformed  
into other  
states — drains,  
concrete flow  
ways, etc. They are  
at once hidden  
away and obtain  
an enhanced,  
linear  
directional  
focus, which  
renders the  
process of  
walking them  
often complex  
and difficult.



# Duck's Head

OCTOBER 17, 2014  
BROGAN BUNT

I should have known from the outset that this was going to be a slow walk in which we did not go very far. First there was the large roll of drawing paper that Kim removed from her bag just at we reached the beach, indicating a significant commitment to mapping the details of our walk. Then there was the duck's head poised pathetically on the sand between the mouth of Towradgi Creek and the sea. The number of photos that we took of this head – before we'd scarcely taken a single step along our journey from sea to escarpment – indicated a thorough concern with every small, accidental feature of our walk; a concern that would necessarily affect the nature of the walking, slowing it down, shaping it more as a whimsical environmental survey than as a walk.

I should explain that I have nothing against engaging in surveys. Furthermore, conceiving our project as a series of surveys makes good sense. If nothing else it is well suited towards producing all kinds of data and artefacts that lend themselves towards being assembled into an art exhibition. But conducting a survey is not quite the same thing as going for a walk. A survey may involve walking, but it is not directed towards walking as such. Walking simply becomes a means of locomotion that assists in making observations and obtaining samples.

My interest and aesthetic commitment to walking is different. I am interested in it precisely in terms of the tension it engages with processes of representation. Walking entails a willingness to let things slip by. I am simply walking. If I take a photo or pick something up along the way it is always positioned as a brief interruption to a process that entails continuing, rhythmic movement. On the whole I am more interested in recalling walks than in recording them, and in recalling them I am always aware that the experience of the walk itself escapes. This is an essential and compelling part of the process.

I must also confess that for me walking is a means of negotiating a relationship between my inner world and the wider environment. The dialogue this involves is not primarily social. Very often I go on walks alone. It is a form of private experience that forces me, at the same time, to engage with aspects of the world beyond myself. I am very aware of how this corresponds to aspects of romanticism and the dramaturgy of bourgeois identity, but can hardly deny

or altogether resist this ideological conception just by acknowledging its historical basis. This is not to say that I am unwilling to walk with other people. I often enjoy doing this (and often find myself longing for a companion), but it never quite engages with what captivates me in walking. My issue then: I must somehow come to terms with walking with other people up creeks. It is not quite the walking I know.

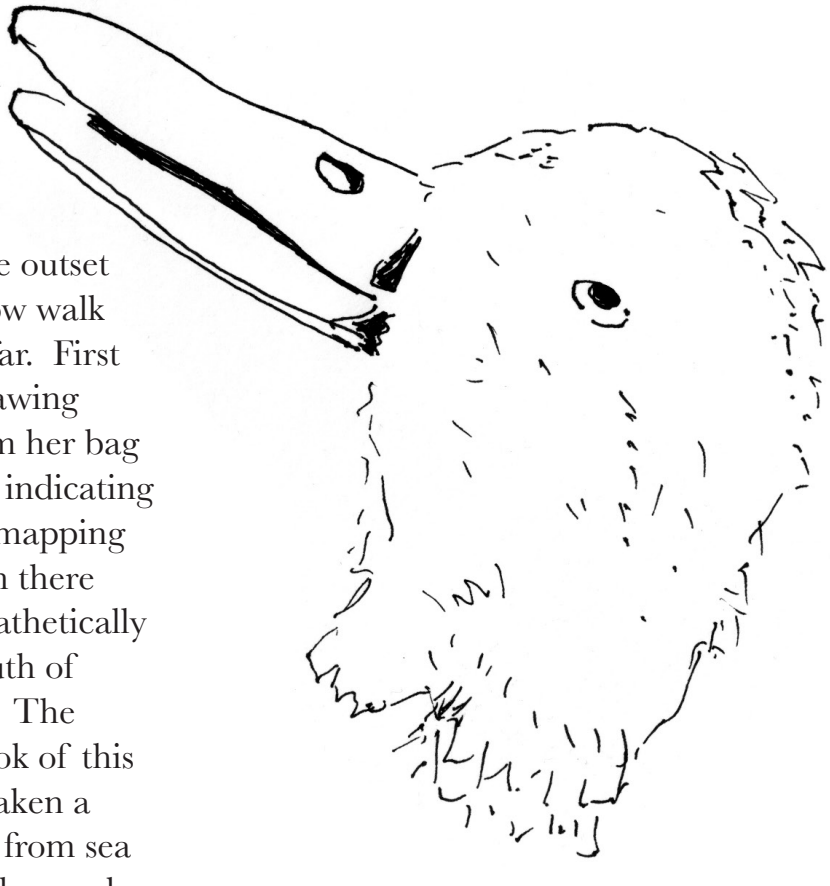
Actually it is not just dealing with my fellow walkers that is the issue, but also having to engage with the various land owners whose properties abut creeks. While Kim and Lucas, bold souls, are happy to walk through all manner of fenced and unfenced, dull and fanciful, overgrown and carefully tended creek-side backyards, I am always keen to avoid such trespasses wherever possible. While they are precisely intent to explore the boundaries between the creek as public property and the uncertain proprietary delineation of a backyard, I am much more focused on discovering the easiest pathway upstream. The fewer the backyard encounters, the fewer the physical and institutional impediments, the better. I have no other wish than to flow upstream like impossible water.

I guess a particular problem for me with our current mode of walking is that it does not holistically walk along an entire creek from the sea to the escarpment. I am aware that our path will often be blocked, that our creeks now are complex spaces involving all kinds of legal, concrete, tin and weed-infested barriers, but I would still like to try to walk their entire lengths. Our current mode of walking is too slow to accomplish this. In several hours we managed to walk roughly 1.2 km up Towradgi Creek. I'd hoped we'd walk much further than that – to high up in Tarawanna where the creek begin.

So I am proposing another strand of WOTI practice, one that genuinely involves walking (according to my evil and misguided conception of the term) and that may even, at times, involve solo walking events, which will of course be properly described here – demonstrating due regard for the social nature of our project.

I am distinguishing then between two branches of the WOTI project: SWOTI (Surveying Waterways of the Illawarra) and WWOTI (Walking Waterways of the Illawarra). The latter includes a sub-branch, SWWOTI (Solo Walking Waterways of the Illawarra). I am aware that these acronyms may confuse project members and participants, as well as the wider public, but believe that they are ultimately useful in terms of designating real differences in orientation and approach.

I would include a photo of the duck's head, but did not take one.



## 2 RESPONSES TO “DUCK’S HEAD”

1. Lucas  
OCTOBER 20, 2014 AT 5:14 AM

Spot on Brogan.

I hadn't previously thought of my own way of walking like that – but you're right, compared to “walking as walking”, which you espouse, my own preference (hitherto unconscious) seems to be for a more instrumentalised version of the walk.

Walking for me is a means to discover something. I guess that's implicit in the notion of ‘ground truthing’ – we go on the walk in order to uncover the truth about something that has up to now only been mapped in a general way, or in a rudimentary way, or in a way which is restrictively practical. Our walk hopes to contribute something new to the map, something about micro-observations, and of course other senses come into play (things heard, smelled, social interactions, etc).

When we walk like this – for example in this Towradgi Creek walk – our openness to mapping these other things actually floods our sensoria. There's no limit to the amount of things we could put on the map, but there is a limit to the size of the nib, the size of the sheet of paper, and our capacity to keep going without a toilet or food break.

I experienced a concrete case of this very early in our Towradgi Creek walk, where I was interested to know how many steps separated the shoreline from where the creek petered out into the sand. (It was 39 steps.) Then Kim suggested that I should operate as a human step-counter – my strides could be used to distribute, somewhat accurately, the phenomena encountered on the walk, so we could plot them on the map.

But after about 180 such steps I stopped counting – because when counting, I could only count – I couldn't chat, observe, photograph, even think about anything except counting my steps. It wasn't much fun.

Thus, walking in this way, there's a constant sense of anxiety – what has been left off? And also – if we include too much stuff, eventually our map isn't very useful at all (recalling Borges' tale of the map whose size approximates the territory itself).

All of which makes YOUR brand of walking, Brogan, (WWOTI or SWWOTI) seem quite attractive.

2. Kim  
OCTOBER 20, 2014 AT 10:16 AM

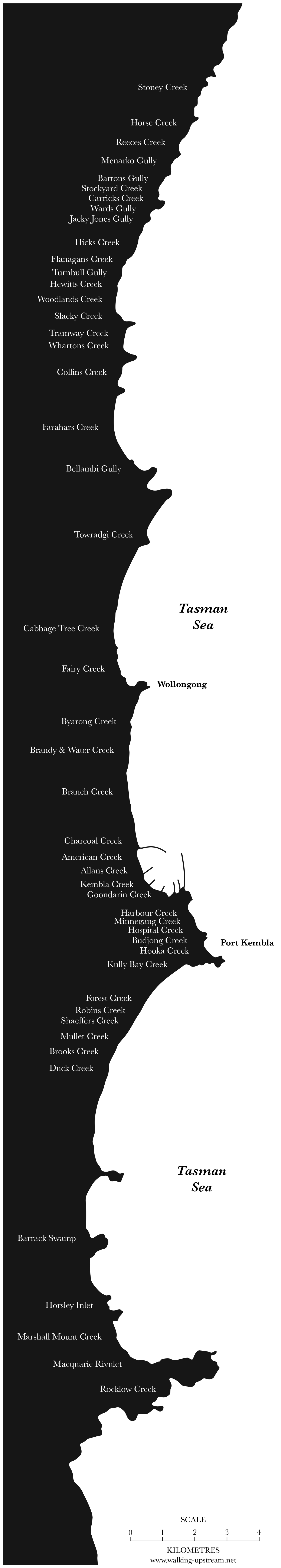
It's becoming apparent that not only do we have many possible creeks to walk but also that we have many possible ways to walk them. Certainly I reflected after the Towradgi Creek walk that perhaps I needed to do something more strenuous before or after our creek walk to burn off some energy. Like walking up Sublime Point – something to tire me so that I could then happily focus on the slowness of the process of creek discovery.

Perhaps we could adopt the WWOTI and SWOTI methods at different times. I personally would prefer that we all walked together, but in order to cater for individual interests, we could even do a combination walk: we all begin at the same point, Brogan does a SWOTI, while we do a standard WOTI walk, then report back to each other on these experiences. Brogan, I'd like to throw you a challenge to walk a whole creek without stopping until the creek has disappeared. I'd be quite happy to join you on this kind of adventure sometimes.

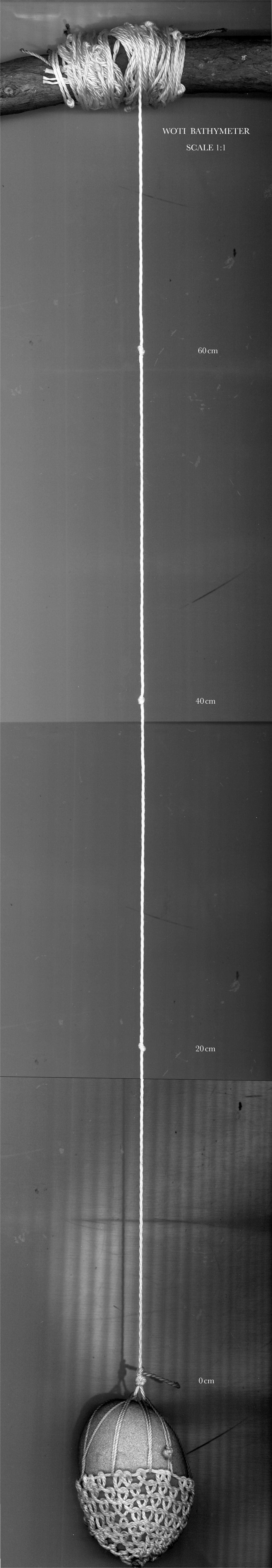
## LEECH TACTICS



"I'll read out a passage from *Walden* while you sneak round the back of 'em. Go for the one with the shaved head."







WOTI BATHYMETER  
SCALE 1:1

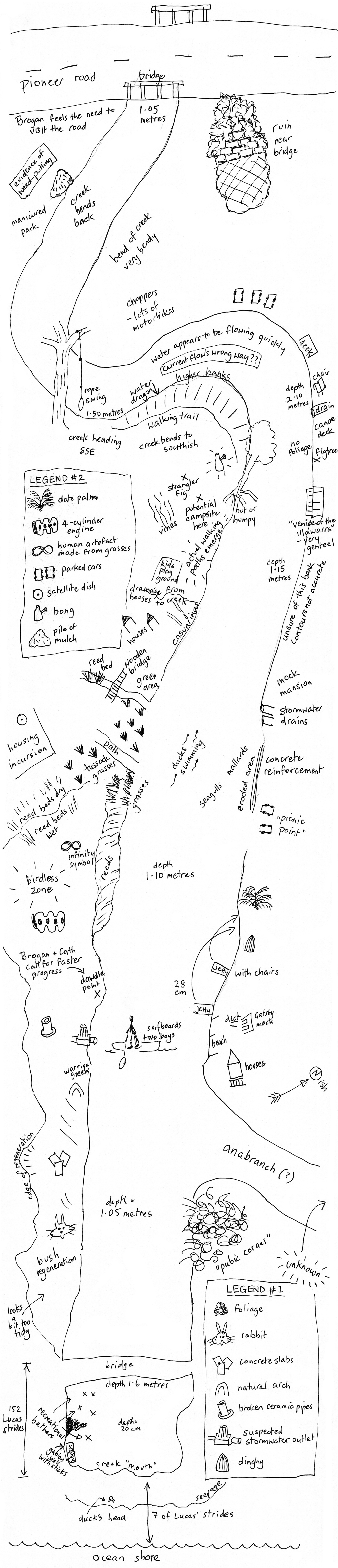
60 cm

40 cm

20 cm

0 cm





(Walkers: Brogan, Lucas, Kim, Shaz, Cath)

TOWRADGI CREEK WALK 12 OCT 2014 2:10pm



# What is a Waterway

APRIL 6, 2015 BROGAN BUNT

I just completed a longish walk today documenting all the waterways between the southern end of Stanwell Park and Clifton. It was raining so all the creeks and minor watercourses were running. There were even small waterfalls beneath the Sea Cliff Bridge. This experience suggests the need to consider how we define a waterway.

We are deliberately vague. We adopt a circular definition. A waterway is whatever we regard as a waterway. Most obviously a waterway is a permanent creek. It will appear as lagoon on a beach. It will wind away from the coast in a visible creek-like manner. While these iconic waterways are fairly common, in actually walking a sector we discover all manner of more uncertain waterways – minor tributaries flowing into larger creeks, drains beneath railway lines, trickles of water down rocky cliffs. Are these also waterways? Do they also deserve to be numbered, explored and documented fully? The problem here is in attempting to combine both a humanly legible conception of a waterway and a more nuanced, accurate and open ended one.

Not everything appears as a waterway, but in fact everything within a particular catchment area is at least potentially a waterway. The smallest dripping leaf is a waterway. Catchment areas are fields, not lines, yet we are searching for lines – both obvious and neglected ones. For my purposes, I will focus on the more apparent waterways. Where these appear minor, I will deal with them in groups as a collection. Rather than obtaining a distinct number they will be designated via the overall collection number plus a unique alphabetical suffix ( I am hoping that I will not find more than 26 minor waterways in a group, but who knows). Particularly minor waterways will not be recorded at

all. Today, for instance, I encountered a number of long retaining walls with many small drainage holes. Each of these holes could be regarded as a distinct watercourse, but this is to veer too far from our common sense understanding of the term. It is to simply make the point, once again, that catchment areas are fields, not lines – nonetheless it is lines that concern us.

These intermittently water-filled lines are discontinuous, hybrid things – in places scribbling down to the sea and at other times focused into concrete spillways and drains. Roads and railway lines transect the waterways. Industrial and suburban development renders them as repressed things, hidden away out of view. Yet despite this, water must somehow find a way down from the escarpment to the sea. In order to control this flow waterways are abstracted and materially reconstructed. Portions of them are rendered as tunnels, pipes and drains. When this happens there is no longer such confusion about what is and what is not a waterway. These artificial waterways are exclusively waterways. Linear, tubular, constructed of steel, concrete and brick, they are oriented entirely towards directing water efficiently towards the sea.

We willingly explore all manner of waterway. We do not privilege the natural or disparage the artificial. We recognise that every waterway is an assemblage. All we request is that we can follow a waterway – that we can pass along or beside it. We leave it to the next generation of WOTI practitioners to crawl and squirm through more inhospitable lines.



## Waterways of the Illawarra

### WHAT

Waterways of the Illawarra (WOTI): a series of “creek walks” undertaken in the Illawarra region (surrounding Wollongong, NSW).

The Illawarra is hemmed in by the sea to the east and a steep escarpment to the west. Rainwater seeps down the escarpment, forming countless waterways: rivulets, creeks, rills, gullies and brooks. Some are named, many are not. Often these creeks run through backyards, alongside sports ovals, through industrial estates and variously constitute picturesque (desirable) water features and unsightly concrete-lined drains.

We begin at the sea, at an identifiable “mouth”. We walk our way upstream, hacking through weeds and undergrowth, skirting along property boundaries, talking our way into people’s yards. We continue for as long as geography, topography, and social boundaries allow.

### WHERE

The geographical boundaries of the project are (roughly) Stanwell Park to the north, and Nowra in the south – about a 100km range.

### WHEN

Walks are undertaken on an ad-hoc basis, usually at weekends. We began in mid-2014 and have made sporadic walks ever since.

### WHO

Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein, Kim Williams with collaborators. Between July 2014 and October 2015 our co-walkers included Sharon Concannon, Mailin Suchting, Mick Douglas, Lizzie Newman, Laurene Vaughan, Karina Quinn, Bianca Hester, Vince Bicego and Cath McKinnon.

### MORE INFO

Unlike in large cities, where they are often paved over, the waterways of the Illawarra are visible. They criss-cross the landscape, intersecting with every aspect of life in this region.

By undertaking a relatively straightforward task – “to walk as far as possible upstream” – we envisage that our trajectories will intersect with key aspects of the Illawarra around cultures of land use: coal seam gas; black coal mining; bush regeneration; weed infestations; rapid gentrification; and land as “property”.

The walks are a form of ground truthing – a way of comparing official maps and aerial photographs with the lived experience of tramping through space, on the ground.

By definition, we cannot know what might emerge through this process. It is longitudinal – in terms of time,

the project could take many months, even years (there is no hurry) and is deliberately open ended.

We actively adopt Donald Brook’s definition of art as “unspecific experimental modelling”. In this way of understanding art, one does not stick one’s hand out the window “to see if it is raining” – rather, our hands are stuck out “to see...”

In other words, we do not know what we are trying to find out, but we trust that the process, set in motion by the score “to walk as far as possible upstream” will yield something revealing and new about our local environment. Our previous work in this area of practice demonstrates the potential for insights generated by unspecific experimental modelling.

### WHY THE ILLAWARRA?

Waterways of the Illawarra (WOTI) is a resolutely local project – born from the desire of the key walkers to engage more deeply with the topographical, ecological and social fabric of our own place. We are all artists and researchers at University of Wollongong.

The project has deep roots in the avant-garde of the past century: conceptual art, socially engaged art practice, land art and happenings for example. In Artificial Hells, Claire Bishop describes this sort of practice as possessing a “double finality” or “double ontology” – ie, it is work which speaks to an autonomous disciplinary field of art and also to the realpolitik of the world-beyond-the-artworld.

The project needs to be done – to be carried out – physically, by people. It cannot exist as a proposition or score without being performed. But it is also a score – something that could be carried out by other people and/or in other places.

### ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This broadsheet has been produced to celebrate our participation in the Fluid States: Performing Mobilities conference and exhibition program in Melbourne, October 2015. Published in a limited edition by Big Fag Press, and designed by John Causley, the broadsheet operates as a portal to the larger Walking Upstream project. Many more stories and pictures are available on our website: <http://walking-upstream.net>

While we’re at it... the broadsheet also officially launches the International Creek Walking Network (ICWaN), which promotes perambulation as a practice of inhabiting these oft-contested waterways. We’re keen to exchange tactics and stories from other creek walkers, and when visiting the Illawarra, please get in touch: [info@walking-upstream.net](mailto:info@walking-upstream.net)