

Green branch work glows

By Monica Heary

IF Captain Cook's botanist Sir Joseph Banks could see the two-hectare nature reserve at Kareela that was named after him it would warm his heart.

Thanks to the work of volunteers from the Sutherland branch of the Australian Plants Society, the reserve is one of the few places in Sydney that has such a varied collection of native plants.

The branch has been lovingly caring for the reserve since 1970.

Publicity officer Ralph Cartwright said Sutherland Shire Council took up the continuing care for the reserve and today it has barbecue and picnic areas, a two-kilometre path and identification labels on 430 species.

Parts of the reserve have already begun to sprout new growth after the NSW Fire Brigades conducted a hazard reduction burn-off recently. Mr Cartwright said it had been left alone for several years and ground litter had been building greatly.

The society branch has 120 members of whom 30 to 40 are "hard-core" members, he said.

Australia-wide the society has 6000 members and in NSW there are 1200.

The Sutherland group had been able to raise funds by the sale of a CD featuring information about the plants on the coastal walk of the Royal National Park.

They also hold open days, selling cakes and plants.

The work of member Aileen

BURN-OFFS

A Rural Fire Service spokesman said that in Sutherland Shire most hazard-reduction burns on large tracts was done through co-ordination with the main land managers such as national parks, the Department of Lands, Sutherland Shire Council and fire agencies.

"Fire hazard-reduction on private land was relatively rare," he said.

In the case of Joseph Banks Nature Reserve, the NSW Fire Brigades' bushland section attended to the job.

Phipps, of Oyster Bay, who joined the society in 1982, was acknowledged recently when she received a Cook Community Award from the federal MP for the electorate.

Although she doesn't refer to herself as such, the work Ms Phipps does in labelling the different plant species in the reserve makes her a type of "plant librarian".

She also does volunteer labelling work at the Royal Botanic Gardens herbarium.

Leonie Hogue, of Jannali, the society's president for three years and a member for 20-plus years, had been able to work closely with Sutherland Shire Council.

"The reserve is a tranquil place to walk around," she said.



Natural wonderland: Cook Community Award winner Aileen Phipps at Joseph Banks Reserve, Kareela, where she volunteers her skills. Picture: Jane Dyson