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# LAonline — Projects

## Celebrating Sydney Olympic Park

To celebrate the landscape architecture involved with the creation of the Sydney Olympic Park, LAonline has asked Bruce Mackenzie to provide comments — and LAonline has also republished several articles originally published in Landscape Australia in 2000.

### Sydney Olympic Park

#### A product of remarkable human invention

Bruce Mackenzie

The conception, design and building of Sydney Olympic Park in conjunction with the management and nurturing processes that followed, constitute a truly remarkable human achievement. Earlier decision making by government visionaries and planners has proved to be quite heroic, enabling this internationally unique production to become a reality, the Green Games and their aftermath. The end result, still building, is one of a transformation of urban wasteland into a human resource of great complexity and interest.

More than twice the area of Sydney's Centennial Park, its vastness and diversity contribute grandly to the recreational and educational opportunities of inner western Sydney. Closer to the demographic heartland of the big city than to its periphery it is made the more valuable as a resource. I mention Centennial Park in this context because I remember so well as a child being appropriately awed by the vastness of that place. For children it provided all the license needed to explore the imagined worlds of such classic heroes as Robin Hood, Robinson Crusoe and even Tarzan.

Like Centennial Park, Sydney Olympic Park offers its array of intimate spaces alongside contrasting zones of broadfield areas and panoramic vistas creating venues for all ages as solitary explorers or small and large groups. Its success to date and its popularity are borne out thoroughly by statistics that have recorded a visitor population expanding from 750,000 in 2002 to 2.2 million in 2007, a 300% increase in just five years. Cycling too, features strongly in visitor terms, the large park and its comprehensive network of trails being a magnet for enthusiasts, serious peddlers and mum, dad and the kids.

The environmental circumstances for walkers and cyclists offers a constantly changing pattern or sequence of objects and elements, a kaleidoscope of experiences. The circuitry draws into its web, the pomp and ceremony of George Hargreave's grand boulevard, stream and harbourside trails, the network of roadways, sports fields, and a mosaic of woodlands, forests and mysterious wetlands...all enhanced by the ever-changing characteristics of preserved or re-created landscape vegetation.

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It is important to keep in mind that much, perhaps most of this product of human endeavour, is built on top of a deep clay capping designed and compacted to seal off and make manageable, not simply the undesirable contamination of the city's old waste deposits below, but as well, residual components of somewhat lethal proportions. All of this has been done very well. But let us consider the implications for a landscape that had to be created on top of it. And by landscape I mean roads, buildings, sportsfields, bridges, wetlands and wetland corridors, forests and woodlands, built on what is effectively a base equal to that of a concrete slab. Imagine too that much of the overlying soil provision for this new complete landscape condition, was made up of imported waste materials of another kind...excavated spoil from city building sites, crushed, processed and mixed with organic wastes to provide both sub-soil conditions and a growing medium for the new landscape. Not without difficulties along the way, it has generally come together well. With each passing year the vigour of the introduced planting changes the scene spectacularly. During this time, including periods when severe drought prevailed, harvested rainfall stored in semi-permanent ponds was redistributed, contributing significantly to the irrigation needs of the very substantial planting and grassing programs.

It was my pleasure to work with some of the many skilled and enterprising practitioners who brought this huge task to fruition, including HASSELL, Peter Walker and Partners and SOPA's (previously OCA—Olympic Coordination Authority,) management team.

It was eventually my further great pleasure to compile a document entitled 'Site Wide Planting Strategy'. This document ultimately achieved formal status when adopted by the OCA as its ongoing planting policy statement for the broad site. The objective of the policy was to establish planting themes, species, and associations representative of the regional endemic characteristics of the parklands site, in its original Sydney context.

**To view the republished 2000 Landscape Australia articles:**  
**[www.aila.org.au/projects/NSW/olympic](http://www.aila.org.au/projects/NSW/olympic)**