



Keeping on top of coastal vegetation

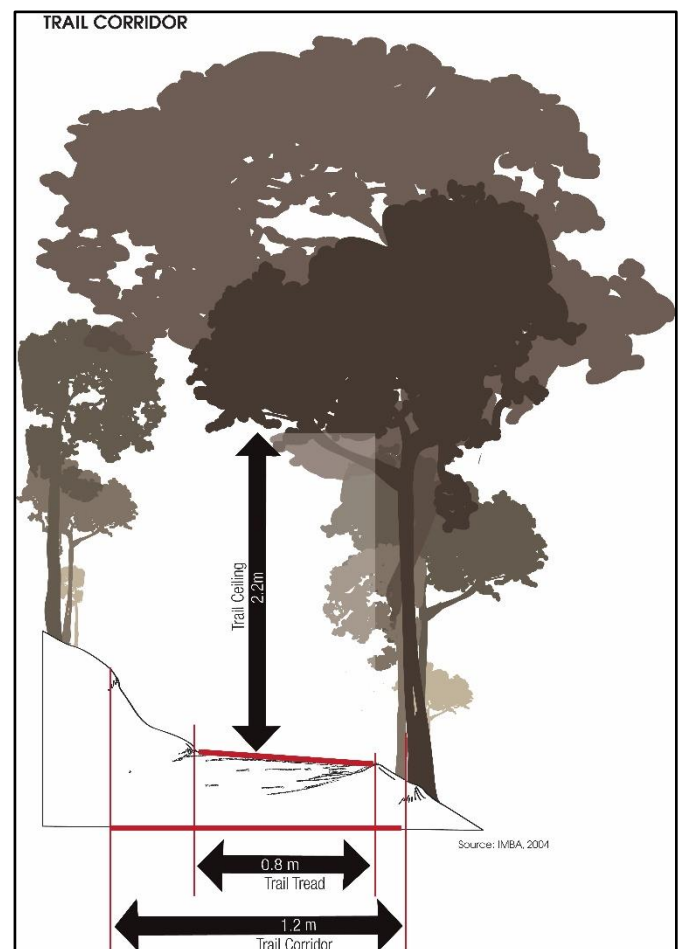
A key feature of maintenance in the south-coast heath environment is keeping on top of the constant regrowth. The tough, dense and woody scrub can be difficult to cut back and requires regular attention to keep the tread clear and safe.

The generic Track corridor is 1.2m wide and 2.2m high, with a tread width of 0.8m (below). However, this is a basic design standard, open to interpretation depending on the vegetation type, terrain, etc.

In the context of the south-coast heath vegetation type, the corridor beyond the tread is usually cut to stubble and short plants, leaving root structures in place to hold the soil together and help prevent erosion. The tread at ground level will likely be kept clear by foot traffic. The challenge is preventing regrowth in the sides of the corridor from intruding on the tread.

The primary responsibility for creating the Track corridor lies with the PaWS District. This will likely need to be done periodically, by machine (a slasher). **Your role is to maintain the trail corridor once created.**

The overall classification of the Track as a Class 4 trail indicates that walkers need to be self-reliant, prepared for obstacles and risk (see article in the latest Bibbulmun News magazine, Issue #84, page 13). So while a completely open trail corridor may enhance safety aspects such as the ability to see snakes, it is not to be expected – and virtually impossible – that you can achieve it by yourself as a volunteer. You should do your best to keep it cut back, especially in the tread zone, and request help as soon as you feel it is getting away. We don't want you to feel overwhelmed or unsupported!



Some useful tips

- Techniques for maintaining the trail corridor may be found in section 6.1 of your volunteer maintenance handbook (page 44-46)
- If you can, make frequent visits tackling short stretches at a time – this helps break up the workload
- Vigorous growth in swales (gullies between dune ridges) needs extra regular attention
- Even peppermint suckers can be controlled if trimmed regularly



Over-grown vegetation typical of the south coast heathland

- Once you are familiar with the rate of regrowth in your section, stretches with more rapid regrowth can be cut back more aggressively if you are comfortable to do so eg. prune branches right back to the main stem, grub out shrubs. Please contact us for advice if you are in any doubt – email maintenance@bibbulmuntrack.org.au
- In general, place cut vegetation out of view if you can (at least 4m from the edge of the Track). Very light cut material can be left on the track surface. Heavier material should be used as ground cover in adjacent bare areas where possible. Woody vegetation should have the sawn end pointing away from the Track to give the Track a more natural look.
- Exposed large roots that could cause injury should be removed
- Focus on removing any obstacle to the preferred tread route, to help prevent the inevitable deterioration of trail edges made by walkers taking an easier option
- Focus on the upslope vegetation where the Track crosses a slope. This tends to intrude more on the tread and pushes walkers to the downslope edge (and the resulting migration over time of the tread downslope may push it beyond the end of existing water bars, which will then need rehabilitating). This vegetation may be woody and will require appropriate tools.

Tools

Hand tools such as secateurs, hedge clippers and loppers are used to prune regrowth, especially at mid-heights. Pruning the low regrowth is more difficult, due to the low working angle required. A mattock or pick will be needed to remove stumps, exposed roots, etc.

Access to fairly compact and lightweight battery-powered pruning tools brings a new level of efficiency to the task. Considerations around use of such tools by sectional volunteers can be found in the factsheet ***Using battery-powered pruning tools***.

You should always use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) appropriate to the task and the tools you are using.

Reporting

When reporting overgrowth, please include photos demonstrating the severity and extent. These should be emailed – with a clear indication of location – to maintenance@bibbulmuntrack.org.au. The information in the

photos will make the planning of clearing by Support Volunteers and/or the PaWS District crew much more efficient.

Going to the next level

Intermittent treatment by a brush cutter may help delay the necessity to slash the corridor. Sectional volunteers are not authorised to use brush cutters, so you should let us know if you think cutting is warranted. One of our Support Volunteers may be able to assist; alternatively a work crew from the regional prison may assist in Frankland District. Unfortunately we don't have access to a similar prison crew in Albany District. The Support Volunteer local to Albany District has a heavy-duty mower with the capability to trim previously slashed corridors.

Once a slasher is required it would be provided by PaWS either directly or via a contractor. The slasher is typically mounted on a bobcat or small tractor. Some sections may be difficult for the slasher to access due to steps. Avoiding damage to steps/water bars is also problematic. The slasher does create a much larger impact on the vegetation, but the debris is automatically mulched and left where it falls, providing some cover for the ground. Brush cutting requires removal of the coarser cut material from the trail corridor.

Resourcing and access for a slasher does vary by PaWS District; be assured that we do our best to request assistance for your section when you have reported significant overgrowth.