

Monday 20th May 2024

Taronga to Middle Head

It's roughly an 8km walk but with the additional side trips we may have walked 9km; maybe even a little more. In any case, that cold wind might have made it feel even longer!



Our ferry to Taronga, the 8.18, never admits that it will go to that destination. Its signage always confuses and even confuses their staff but go there it does, via Mosman and the tourist route, and gives us lazy travellers the treat of watching suited people, men and women, board at Mosman on the way to the office. It always makes the day more pleasant, knowing that are being supported in our post-retirement life by at least some people on full-time work!

Having gathered the entire party, a NPA group (7, after there were three late withdrawals), we then headed off through Sydney Harbour National Park towards Middle Head – Gubbuh Gubbuh. Much of the route is within the national park but this harbour walk is always a touch confusing as to when one is within national park or within Council reserve. It certainly confuses some dog walkers who manage never to see the NO DOGS signs!

I raised the issue of signage on the field trip with my RAC yesterday and I commended Campbelltown Council with their positive signage. One classic one told park users that koalas live here before proceeding to tell them what they should do with their dogs. NPWS is getting better but here, still, it is a blank “NO Dogs” message without the initial positive reason why this should be so!

My party love the walk past Athol Hall, and along under the Angophora Forest towards Bradley Head but we all noted that the drainage along the track has failed to keep pace with increased rainfall.





Every time I walk along this section, I photograph a different sign of the record of naval ships that have sunk and I report their story. Today, it is the turn of the HMAS Patricia Cam.¹ The fate of the ship and its crew, along with its history as a ship, is held within the footnote and if interested, do look it up. It is a powerful story.

¹ [HMAS Patricia Cam - Naval Historical Society of Australia \(navyhistory.au\)](https://navyhistory.au/hmas-patricia-cam/)
<https://navyhistory.au/hmas-patricia-cam/>



The survivors who were rescued after their ship was sunk.

The ship was hit by a single bomb from a Japanese Naval Air Arm twin-engine floatplane on Friday 22 January, 1943.

“The explosion blew the ship and her people skywards and much of her remains sank almost immediately. Her two boats were destroyed but one life-raft and the native canoe remained intact.”

The rescue story of the survivors is worth taking the time to read!



By the time we had reached Taylors Beach, I discovered that Mosman Council had installed an “art trail”, showing art painted by famous Australian painters along this part of the harbour. One here was by Elioth Gruner. I don’t blame him for painting Taylors Beach. It is picturesque.



Chowder Bay and Clifton Gardens is a good spot for morning tea!



From here on, the entire focus was on the strip of land within Sydney Harbour National Park through to Gubbuh-Gubbah, Middle Head and its many fortifications. Ironically, so many of them were completed after they had already become obsolete (let's not mention AUKUS). Despite that, they certainly provide for interesting industrial archaeology.





Those rail tracks make it less likely that the shells will explode from careless handling!



Viewing spot provided courtesy of NPWS



Paving on the new walking track away from the road



I won't mention the asparagus fern!



Looking back into Obelisk Beach



There are still steps!!!!



At this point the track is as yet incomplete and we followed the old track back east into the Sydney Harbour Trust lands. Staff informed me that this is soon to be finished and then signage will be erected. At this stage that is missing and the sites along the way could also do with some interpretive signage (QR Codes?). Not everyone can have the benefit of Rob Newton when visiting the sites!

After lunch, and after the skies cleared once more, we ended our visit to the Middle Head fortifications². The first Battery was constructed in 1871 to the design of J Barnet, colonial architect. The Fort was a strategic site which received many additions until 1911. This was mostly aimed at the Russians. The UK and Russia was in competition in Central Asia (often called The Great Game) but there was also still some imperial rivalry with the old foe, the French! The whole is linked by underground tunnels, ancillary rooms and magazines. There is also an interesting underground power room with iron columns and it was the last section that is in the process of repair. The iron has been treated to remove the lead paint (happening on our last field trip here) and there is now a new waterproof skin. Soon, the covering will secure it once more and underground tours can recommence! It's been a long and – no doubt – costly process. Ensuring that heritage assets are maintained is a cost!



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² [Middle Head Fortifications - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Head_Fortifications)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Head_Fortifications

See also
[HMS - ViewItem \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.hms.heritage.nsw.gov.au/App/Item/ViewItem?itemId=5045689)
<https://www.hms.heritage.nsw.gov.au/App/Item/ViewItem?itemId=5045689>