

CIRCULAR QUAY TO SOUTH HEAD AND CLOVELLY CONNECTING WALK C7: VAUCLUSE SOUTH HEAD CEMETERY TO VAUCLUSE HOUSE



- Main Walk:** — **Loop and Connecting Walks:** —
- Distance:** 1.5km.
- Time:** 30 mins.
- Level:** Moderate (downhill); many steps.
- Transport:** Edgecliff and Bondi Junction Stations; Edgecliff and Bondi buses.
- Connects with:** Main Walk (at Christison Park and at Wentworth Rd, Vaucluse).
- Facilities:**
Toilets: South Head Cemetery; Vaucluse House.
Picnic spots: Vaucluse House; Vaucluse House Beach Paddock.
Shops or hotels: New South Head Rd; Vaucluse House.

In Provence, the River Sorgue bursts dramatically from beneath the ground at the ancient village of Fontaine-de-Vaucluse which nestles gently against a rocky plateau known as The Vaucluse. And just what that – and a fourteenth century Italian poet, a nineteenth century abductor of heiresses, and the father of the NSW Constitution – have to do with a prosperous Sydney harbourside suburb is not immediately obvious. But like the stream, it will emerge.

Leaving the Main Walk at Clark Street at the southern end of Christison Park, follow Clark Street up to the gates of South Head Cemetery. The Cemetery walk (Loop 10) can obviously be combined with the walk at this point. Either way, cross Old South Head Road and a little way south, turn down Laguna Street. At New South Head Road, cross 50m south to lane-like Petrarch Avenue and continue on its descent across Hopetoun Avenue to Olola Avenue. Immediately across it steps lead down into Vaucluse House Reserve.

The former Vaucluse High School stood on the Old South Head Road / Laguna Street corner, opened as a boys' school in 1960. Later made co-ed, it later became part of the Rose Bay Secondary College which was consolidated on the former Dover Heights High site. The site was sold in 2011 for \$23.5m to be developed for residential aged care.

Down Laguna Street, New South Head Road has shops if provisions are needed. Across the road, the entrance to Petrarch Avenue is to the left. Harbour views open up as this drops to Hopetoun Avenue, named for Australia's first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun - and 'Petrarch' was named after a fourteenth century Italian poet. The descent

continues to Olola Avenue where steps plunge through ferns to meet a stream emerging from the ground into the Vauclose House Reserve. This area and the street name 'Petrarch' provide, at last, the clue to the suburb's naming.

From this point, the grassed flat surrounded by rock outcrops and trees, including the palm-lined stream in its stone confines, is a lovely quiet area from which to approach the buildings of Vauclose House.

Francesco Petrarch (1304-74), Italian Renaissance poet, scholar and humanist, spent much of his life around Avignon, and often at Fontaine-de-Vauclose – where the Sorgue River surges from beneath the ground. Here he wrote wrenchingly of his absent, idealized (and possibly mythical) love, Laura, pretty much perfecting the form of the sonnet in the process.

In 1803 this emerging stream may have evoked the image of Petrarch's isolation and lost love in the mind of a certain Sir Henry Brown Hayes, whose own love was well and truly lost and a long way away at this point. Hayes purchased 105 acres here for a farm, which he named "Vauclose", and on which he built an eight room cottage. Sir Henry, despite his title and property, was in fact a convict transported from Ireland in 1801 for the crime of abducting an heiress whom he was convinced was in love with him. She, apparently, was less convinced. Nonetheless, his pining for this absent love seemed to cause Hayes to identify with Petrarch and the stream of Petrarch's Vauclose. Being a wealthy convict, however, had its compensations and Sir Henry lived comfortably at *Vauclose*, complete with servants, indulging his curiously romantic traits. Plagued by snakes as well as absent loves and aware that St Patrick had banished snakes from Irish soil, he supposedly imported 150 tons of Irish turf in barrels and had it laid about the house as a snake barrier. Contemporary soil tests at *Vauclose House* have added some credibility to this story. After receiving a pardon in 1812, Sir Henry left the colony and *Vauclose* became part of Captain Piper's huge estate (see Loop 6).

After Piper's demise, William Charles Wentworth bought *Vauclose* in 1827 and greatly enlarged the house, adding the characteristic castellated Gothic appearance to the house. He also enlarged the estate five-fold until it spread across 540 acres (240 ha) of waterfront land, although he began subdividing again as early as 1838. Most was subdivided by 1910 when the NSW Government decided to buy *Vauclose House* and the remaining land around it, and to open the house as a memorial to the "father of the Constitution" in 1924. The house is now a Historic Houses Trust property and a visit to its elegant interiors is almost essential. However, the 10 hectare reserve is just as important, with its mixture of formal gardens, fine trees, paddock, lawns, kitchen gardens and outbuildings such as the wash-house and the 1829 Gothic stables. Even without the massive estate it once had, *Vauclose House* offers a unique opportunity to gain a sense of what an early nineteenth century eastern Sydney estate was like.

William Charles Wentworth (1790-1872) might well be the single-most important figure in NSW colonial history. His father, D'Arcy, a medical practitioner, was strongly encouraged to emigrate after facing charges of highway robbery. Aboard ship he took up with convict Catherine Crowley, and W. C. was born as the ship approached Norfolk Island. D'Arcy prospered and young William was sent to school in England. During one return to Sydney in 1813, 23 year old William joined the first party of Europeans to cross the Blue Mountains, ensuring that he would be remembered by generations of school children for that at least. Back in England he studied law and published a book promoting NSW. On his return to the colony in the 1820s he soon became the leading advocate for representative self-government, freedom of the press, trial by jury, state-provided education and native-born Australians. He co-founded and edited Australia's first independent newspaper, the *Australian*, in 1824, battling acrimoniously with Governor Darling over freedom of the press and other issues. When Darling departed the Colony in 1831, Wentworth held a celebratory party for 4,000 people at Vauclose House, lighting uncomplimentary bonfires on the headland as the former governor sailed by.

Wentworth played a major part in gaining NSW's first elected legislature in 1843 and led the drawing up of the constitution which brought responsible government in 1856. A leading "emancipist" – one of those supporting the rights of former convicts – he married Sarah Cox, daughter of a former convict, in 1829. A much loved mother and wife, Sarah suffered social ostracism amongst colonial society, which contributed to their moving to England in 1857.

Never a radical democrat, Wentworth's conservatism increased with age and property. He proposed, for instance, a hereditary upper house of parliament based on a locally created aristocracy, but the idea was laughed out of parliament as a "bunyip aristocracy". A complex and often contradictory man, he, nonetheless, led the way to contemporary Australian democracy. After his death in England, Wentworth's remains were returned to NSW and buried on the estate (see Loop 8).

*From the estate, move to the front gates at Wentworth Road and cross to the small park and beach to rejoin the **Main Walk**.*