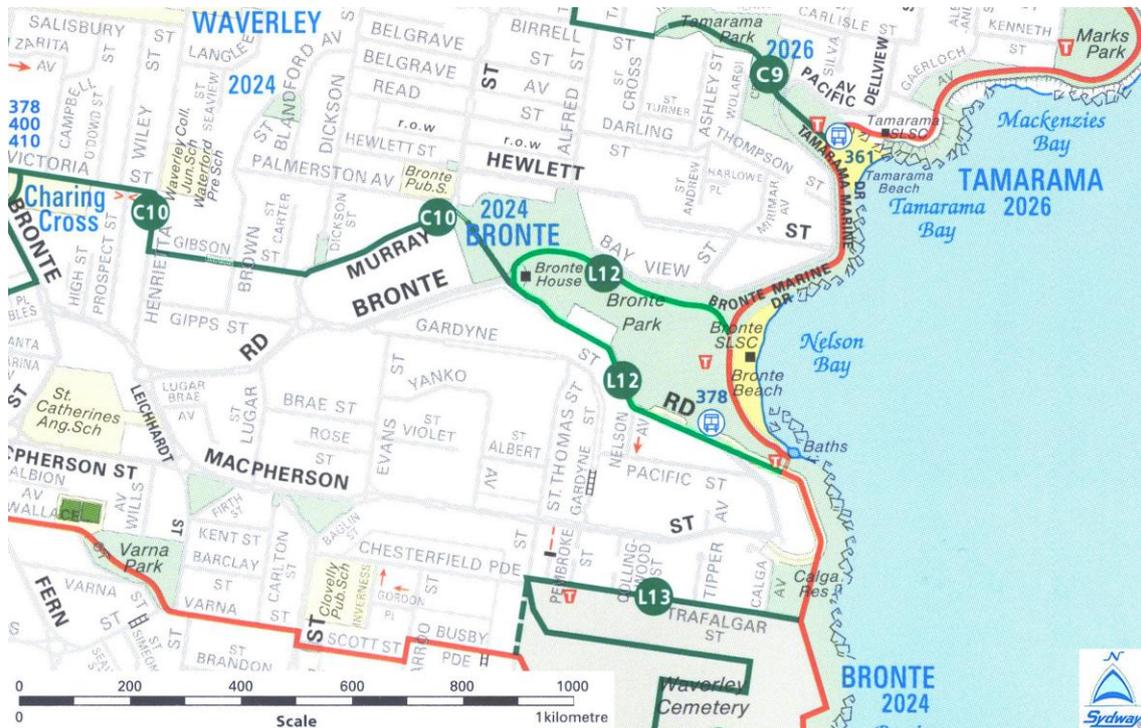


CIRCULAR QUAY TO SOUTH HEAD AND CLOVELLY

LOOP WALK L12: BRONTE PARK



- Main Walk:** — **Loop and Connecting Walks:** —
- Distance:** 1km (Bronte Park and Bronte Rd only; 1.2km complete loop (return to northern end of Beach))
- Time:** 20 mins green route only; 25 mins complete loop.
- Level:** Moderate, some steps.
- Transport:** Bronte buses.
- Connects with:** Main Walk; Connection Walk C10 (Bronte).
- Facilities:** *Toilets:* Bronte Park;
Picnic spots: Bronte Park;
Shops or hotels: Bronte.

Bronte Beach and Park are in the local government area of Waverley, which gets its name from Barnett Levey's 1824 *Waverley House*, named in honour of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Novels. The naming of Bronte also derives from a house. *Bronte House*, was named by its second owner - not after the literary sisters, however, but after Lord Nelson who was created Duke of Bronte by the King of Sicily in 1798. The new Duke also gained a small Duchy on the slopes of volcanic Mt Etna, no doubt accounting for the meaning of the name 'Bronte' which actually means 'Cyclops' or 'Thunder'. This whole area was originally named Nelson Bay for the same reason, but that name is now restricted to the Bay itself.

Steps lead down past the Surf Club and onto the concrete beach promenade. Bronte's beach is much smaller than Bondi's and the buildings less grand, but Bronte was also a pioneering site for surf-lifesaving, with the first surfboat and first use of the 'torpedo' flotation device. Across in Bronte Road café society is popular and growing, although it is physically unable to match Bondi here, either, but there is no contest about the parkland - Bronte Park is superb and well worth exploring - one of the finest beach parks to be found. The park as it now appears was mostly developed in the 1920s with the covering or channelising of the stream that runs through the valley. This short walk explores the reserve and finds the house from which it gets its name.

Leave the main walk immediately past Bronte Surf Life Saving Club House and follow the park up its valley almost as far as possible, before climbing steps to the left to its upper reaches. Cross to Bronte Road and follow this downhill, past Bronte House, back to Bronte Beach and the Main Walk.

More than 20 acres of the original 57-acre Bronte Estate are preserved in the fine Bronte Park valley, with picnic shelters, barbecues, playgrounds, even a miniature railway most weekends. There is a glorious variety of trees – Norfolk pines, Canary Island palms, figs, flame trees, gums and angophoras, banksias and bunya pines. Explore along its stone-lined creek where the valley narrows down between fig and flame trees. The valley head, where a waterfall usually cascades down to the stream, was known as Ebsworth Glen in the days when the Bronte Estate's ornamental gardens were here. This area, like much of the valley, is steadily being rehabilitated and gradually native species will replace exotic and introduced ones. The path climbs up through the former kitchen garden, vineyard and orchard and, left, through the trees to the stables of *Bronte House*.

At this point Connection Walk C10 joins this walk.

Up at Bronte Road, the house can be seen from a couple of angles. Bronte Road leads past the Gothic two-story stone lodge boldly marked "Bronte" which was added in the 1860s by the house's third owner. Behind that, the house rambles from the lodge through hallways to the turreted main building. From the split upper level of Bronte Road a better look at the house is possible. Owned now by Waverley Council and leased as a private residence, it opens to the public several times a year.

Bronte House is particularly associated with English barrister and politician, Robert Lowe, who bought the then 42-acre estate in 1843 (or 1844?) for £420 from Colonial Architect, Mortimer Lewis. Two years before, and not yet in personal financial crisis, Lewis had refused an offer for almost ten times that amount. Sited in the picturesque spot it is - then far away from Sydney - it was a rural retreat, hardly its status now. At least part of the house was designed and begun by Mortimer Lewis, with stables, outhouses, servants' cottages, cow-houses, pens and gardens added, but Lowe completed the house. Robert Lowe, a well-connected English lawyer, had come to Australia for health reasons in 1842. An albino with poor vision, he wore goggles to protect his delicate eyes and was soon immersed in colonial affairs, politics and intellectual life. His wife, Georgiana, established the fine gardens at the house and produced accomplished botanical drawings of many of the specimens. It is difficult from the street to get much sense of the significant formal garden which survives within the property boundaries but it can be visited on the several occasions when the house is open to the public each year. Lowe returned to England after he had defended and lost in the controversial trial of a Captain Knatchbull who had been arrested literally red-handed for the murder and robbery of Mrs Ellen Jamieson. Lowe attempted an original defence, citing moral insanity, but Knatchbull went to the gallows nonetheless. Lowe's final act in the story was to adopt the murdered woman's two children and to take them home to England with him. Their adoptee father later became Viscount Sherbrooke, Chancellor of the British Exchequer and finally, Lord Sherbrooke.

Bronte House was so named by its next owner, J. J. Falconer, who bought the property in 1854, and named it after Lord Nelson, Duke of Bronte. In the 1860s a third owner, J. B. Holdsworth, added many of the gothic touches now seen on the house, including the two-storey wing at the front. The final private owners, from 1882, were the Ebsworth family. They subdivided part of the property and the resulting road construction led to demolition of one turret of the original house. Various Ebsworths lived in the house for sixty years until selling it to Waverley Council in 1948. The house was then used for various purposes, including a reception venue, but by the 1980s was in a poor state. Waverley Council decided to lease the property to someone who would restore it according to proper conservation standards. From 1983, extensive work was carried out by the new lessee, Christopher Selmes, under the supervision of conservation architect, Clive Lucas. The lease was taken over between 1995 and 2004 by Leo Schofields, who continued its restoration. It was leased again in 2004 to magazine publisher, Matt Handbury.

*Bronte Road now leads back downhill to the cafes, beach, and there are also steps just past the house which lead back down into the park. Either way, a return to the **Main Walk** at the Beach is not far ahead.*

At the southern end of the beach are Bronte Baths, built in 1887, the same year as the baths at Bondi. The small promenade beyond them does not link up with the Coast Walk and an Aquatic Reserve covers the coastline south from here to Coogee.

To return to the start of Loop Walk L12, turn left and cross the Beach promenade to the northern steps.