

# Detailed Maps and Background Notes for the *HARBOUR BRIDGE TO MANLY VIA THE SPIT WALK*

Notes written by Graham Spindler - This edition 2012

Part 2 of the Walk has two options – Part 2a The Harbour (East) Route; and Part 2b, The Middle Harbour (West) Route.

## **PART 3: The Spit Bridge to Manly**

**Total Distance:** 10km **Time:** Approximately 3hours 10mins



### The Walk

**Distance:** 10km

**Level:**

Level at beaches (sand walking at Clontarf) and waterfronts. Many steps between Clontarf Beach and Grotto Point area on good bush tracks. Fairly level boardwalks and paths to Tania Park, then sandstone steps down towards Dobroyd Head. Fairly level bush tracks to 40 Baskets Beach, and the beach mostly level bitumen or concrete paths to Manly Wharf.

**Transport:**

Buses: The Spit, Manly – buses services also in Balgowlah Heights; Ferries: Manly

**Facilities:**

**Toilets:** The Spit Reserve, Clontarf Beach, Tania Park, Reef Beach, 40 Baskets Beach, North Harbour Reserve, Manly Beach and Wharf.

**Shops or hotels:** The Spit, Manly

### Other or Connected Walks

**Time:** 3hrs 10 mins

*This is a well-marked route. Cross The Spit Bridge on the Middle Harbour (west) side, walk into the car park and find the steps leading down under the Bridge to the start of the Track. The tracks skirt the waterfront around Fisher and Sandy Bays and into Clontarf Reserve. Beyond the large concrete Sewer Syphon walk down the beach between houses and water to the end and steps leading into Bushland.*

On the north-eastern side of The Spit Bridge look for the signs of the former tram ferry service which operated here between 1911 and 1939. The first part of the track is the old permanent way of the tramway as the levelled blue metal surface indicates. The tramway disappears into bush just after the walking track departs the permanent way to drop down towards Fisher Bay, a

little sub-tropical rainforest wilderness with a waterfall and tiny natural beach (other than the pipe bridge). Another houseboat clings to the eastern side. After passing through bush and Bradys Point with its remnant Aboriginal shell midden, the track steps down to the roadway around **Sandy Bay**. This large expanse of sand here is exposed at lower tides, making it popular with kids, crabs and dog exercisers.

**Clontarf** gets its name from a suburb of Dublin, the site where Irish hero, Brian Boru, successfully drove back a Viking invasion in 1014. Sydney's Clontarf was the site of yet another of the Harbour pleasure grounds which became notorious for the pleasures exhibited at them. Up to 5,000 people at a time arrived here by ferry in the 1870s, drinking, dancing and playing games. When *The Bulletin* published an account of decadent behaviour at Clontarf in 1881 („it was not just an excursion – it was an orgy...”), the dance hall operators took libel action against the paper. The result was a sensational and confusing court case where witnesses contradicted each other and themselves, the police condemned dancehalls and picnic grounds generally and the freedom of the press was at issue. The judge found in favour of the Dance Hall operators but awarded them a nominal one farthing in damages. *The Bulletin* faced court costs of 1,500 pounds, which proprietors Haynes and Archibald could not pay, and so both went to gaol. A public subscription soon had them out again. The dance hall continued to operate until 1900.

At the eastern end of the reserve is the great concrete Egyptian-style Syphon for the Northern Ocean Outfall Sewer which crosses the Harbour at this point, mirroring a similar structure on the Spit side. Just beyond it and back up on the grass is a small memorial at the base of a tree to Australia's only known attempted royal assassination.

In October 1866, to the surprise of the locals, HMS *Galatea* arrived off Adelaide, its captain being Alfred, **Duke of Edinburgh**, the 23 year-old fourth child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The colonies went into a flurry of preparation for this unexpected Royal visit. After Adelaide, though, things started to go wrong. There were riots in Melbourne and Geelong – some between Protestant Orange supporters and Irish Catholics, and others because free banquets were cancelled. At a torchlight parade in Bendigo three little boys were burned to death when an over-eager crowd set off a fireworks display prematurely, and at a military review at Flemington Racecourse one of the volunteer naval ratings blew his own hand off. An Albert Hall, built in Melbourne, burnt down the night of an intended Royal ball. In Brisbane, Catholics and Protestants clashed again over an Orange banner. Finally, no doubt hoping for something a little quieter, the Duke returned to Sydney and attended a picnic at Clontarf on 12 March, 1868. Quiet it wasn't to be. An Irish republican named Henry James O'Farrell came out of the crowd, produced a pistol and fired two shots at the Duke. One hit the foot of a person nearby while the other thumped into the Duke's chest, but apparently through his Indiarubber braces, reducing the impact. The Duke was rushed to Sydney Hospital where he recovered quickly. O'Farrell was lucky not to have been lynched on the spot but his luck didn't last long, being hanged at Darlinghurst Gaol barely 5 weeks later. Obviously the legal system was a little speedier those days.

The rest of the walk along Clontarf beach should be pleasantly uneventful, only marred by envy towards those living with gates onto the sand. Steps at the end climb to Clontarf Point and the appropriately named Duke of Edinburgh Reserve which soon leads into the Sydney Harbour National Park section of the walk.

*At various times in this narrow strip of undulating, rocky rainforest-like bush between houses and harbour, steps lead to the beach or up to the streets, but the onward track markings are clear. The steps in this section can be substantial. Beyond Castle Rock, a short climb leads onto the flatter Grotto Point Reserve. Signs indicate the downhill return track to Grotto Point and its lighthouse. From the track intersection, the main track is slightly uphill – with a short side track to Aboriginal engravings soon after. Thereafter, follow the track and boardwalks above the headland and around under Tania Park with its lookouts down onto the Heads and Crater Cove.*

At some points in the first part of this walk the distinction between impressive houses and their yards and the parkland is a bit hard to tell, but as it clambers down and up through rainforest, that distinction at least becomes easier. Steps occasionally lead up to the streets of Clontarf. A street or two back is a house which played a part in one of the sadder sensations of the 1960s. Trying to mop up the financial bleed from spiralling construction costs for the Sydney Opera House, the State Government had instituted the Opera House Lotteries in 1960, and Lottery No 10, with its 100,000 pound prize (worth closer to \$2m these days), was won in June by a travelling salesman, Basil Thorne. Five weeks later his son, Graeme was kidnapped – something then quite unknown in Australian crime annals, and a ransom asked for. After several weeks, the 8-year-old's body was found on a rock ledge at Seaforth. Dogged police forensic and other investigation pinned the kidnapping and murder on Stephen Bradley, who was then arrested en route to England. The rest of Bradley's family had moved from their Moore St, Clontarf home the day of the kidnapping and the evidence suggested Bradley had held and murdered the boy there. This tragedy understandably transfixed the Sydney public for weeks and still brings a sobering moment to one of Sydney's finest walks.

The track down to **Grotto Point** is easy, the point bounded on the western side by Middle Harbour and on the east partly by the incredible disappearing Washaway Beach (OK, it's just the tides), access to which is not encouraged. The cliff edge warning signs on this walk should be taken seriously. Grotto Point itself was named by Captain Hunter and Lt Bradley in 1788 during their first survey of the Harbour, the grotto apparently being a now eroded sea arch. Its cute lighthouse was built in 1911 and works in conjunction with the Parriwi Light (*see Part 2a(iv)*) to guide ships through the Harbour Heads.

Return up same way to the main track junction. Just beyond is a short rack leading right (east) to an extensive area of **Aboriginal engravings**. There seem to be about 10 engravings enclosed within beams, including whales, a shark and other fish, an emu and other less clear shapes. There are also several footprint-like shapes, which could be natural but have been called ghost footprints, probably to add interest.

The main track across rock outcrops and hanging swamps leads below another glimpse of houses and around through bush below Tania Park to some outstanding Harbour views. A couple of well-protected lookout points have been established with Dobroyd, North and South Heads stretching out ahead and the Tasman Sea taking up the backdrop. The flatter land below at Dobroyd Head is the direction the track takes after the upcoming descent. The Harbour immediately below is mostly part of the North Harbour Aquatic Reserve and just near Dobroyd Point, the rough water of the unpredictable Gowlland Bombora can usually be seen. It has accounted for a few marine mishaps, the one giving it its name being that of Royal Navy surveyors, Commander John Gowlland and Henry Peterson who drowned here in 1874. Manly Ferries tend to pass one another out in the Harbour here, nearly always without incident despite the plethora of small craft often out there on weekends. The Bombora has little effect on them but there can be other hazards. Rough crossings of the Heads can be dramatic and occasionally cause services to be suspended. In 1934 the ferry *Baragoola* collided with a whale which seemed to be determined to make the Harbour its resting place as its carcass had to be towed out to sea three times because it kept floating back.

Directly below the lookout is the understandably named **Crater Cove** – it does look like the land half of a meteor or volcanic crater, even though it isn't. Easily seen are a number of small shacks built down there by locals from the 1920s onward as fishing huts. When the land became part of the National Park, it was proposed to remove them, as had happened on other sites, but by agreement with families of original owners, the huts are maintained by the families as fascinating heritage items.

A few steps up from the track is Tania Park, its breezy location making it popular with kite and model plane flyers. The park was named after Tania Verstak, a Manly girl who was crowned 'Miss International Beauty' in 1962, becoming the Princess Mary of her time in popular and women's magazines.

*The track below Tania Park continues through the bush to a signposted junction, the track to the right (east) soon heading downhill on excellent steps and ledges. About 60m or so after the descent is over, there is a track junction but continue ahead 100m towards Dobroyd Point lookout where there is another track junction. After visiting the lookout, follow this second track around to Reef Beach. From the Beach, the track continues through bush until leaving the National Park and stepping across stones onto 40 Baskets Beach. Follow the beach and path past the swimming enclosure until it rises to meet bitumen Gourlay Av climbing away slightly above the North Harbour Sailing Club. Gourlay turns left and slightly uphill and as houses on the right are reached, take the track and footbridge to the right between them to North Harbour St. At the northern end of this short North Harbour St drop down to North Harbour Reserve.*

The climb down from Tania Park begins in wildflowers (in season) and emerges to wonderful views to Manly, the Harbour and the Dobroyd headland. The large sandstone blocks making steps and drains were helicoptered in. Once the track levels out, the first track junction to be met is a slightly higher level track which leads into the streets above 40 Baskets Beach, but the lower level track, 100m further on, is the one to take to Reef Beach. At its junction a short continuation of the original track leads to a lookout called **Dobroyd Head** (but actually a little way east of it). The bush here is typical coastal heath - tea-tree and banksia scrub, often providing a luxurious canopy for hot days. After a bad bushfire, and there have been some here, it retreats to being black sticks and somehow the whole expanse of the area seems to shrink.

Soon the track steps down to **Reef Beach**, a quiet and mostly natural bush beach (except for some palm trees, changing sheds and toilets) which looks towards Manly. The land around was an early land grant to the Hely family who never developed it in any way. Others did, creating camps and fishing shacks of wood and iron. Even the forerunners of Manly Rugby Club had a camp there by 1900. The famous 100 foot public reservation was proclaimed along it in 1903 and the surrounding area added to the reserve in 1912. Nonetheless, the campers stayed and expanded, even creating a two hole golf course. The 1930s Depression saw an expansion of shacks as people moved in on a longer term basis, the local name 'The Pirates Camp' being adopted. However, recurrent bushfires burnt out most of the buildings, Manly Council finished the job and it all became part of the new Sydney Harbour National Park in the early 1970s. By 1976, its popularity as a nude bathing beach had been officially recognised. The result was an ongoing battle with local residents, which they eventually won when nude bathing was revoked in the 1990s – undoubtedly to the relief of local sports commentator Rex Mossop (1928-2011) who famously declared: "I don't think the male genitals or the female genitals should be rammed down people's throats ... to use a colloquialism..."

The track through the bush reaches the end of the National Park and drops down to a rocky corner of 40 Baskets Beach. Sometimes the tide is too high to make this crossing without getting wet – the high level alternative is to return up the track towards Reef Beach but climb uphill on the link track to the high level track met earlier and then come back down on steps from Beatty St. It's a longer and more strenuous alternative.

**Forty Baskets Beach** is an encouraging name for the occasional fisherperson who visits this pleasant, sandy space below the houses stepping down from Balgowlah Heights. Supposedly the name comes from a catch of 40 baskets of fish made there in 1885 and sent to troops interned at the Manly Quarantine Station after NSW's first overseas military expedition. In February 1885 news was received of the death of British General Gordon at Khartoum during the Dervish Revolt. The NSW government rushed to the aid of the mother country, sending a battalion of volunteers off to the Sudan in barely two weeks. The troops saw little action. There was plenty of scepticism and cries of political jingoism at the time, but also great enthusiasm with large crowds sending the contingent off and then welcoming it on its return – after a spell at the Quarantine Station, which was where the only fatalities of the expedition occurred, with two privates dying of typhoid.

The last patch of forest before the little pedestrian bridge is Wellings Reserve and the bridge is something of a surprise with the unlikely spectacle of a real waterfall tumbling into the Harbour between houses.

**North Harbour Reserve** is obviously reclaimed but even allowing for that, it does seem something of an exaggeration to call this inlet a 'harbour' alongside Middle and the main Harbours. It was the original area to be called 'Manly', Governor Phillip coining the name in honour of the manly behaviour of the local Aboriginal men. He was apparently impressed by the women as well, naming what was to become Manly Cove 'Eve's Cove'. Phillip came back here in later in 1788 to begin his overland exploration towards Pittwater and in 1822 the first road north, The Jenkins Road, also commenced here.

*The path crossing the Harbour end of the Reserve leads to steps up to little King Av, which zig zags up to busy Lauderdale Av. Only about 50m along, a concrete path then turns into the grassy waterfront reserve which effectively is followed all the way along the Fairlight foreshore to Manly Cove and down to Manly Wharf.*

This is a pleasant amble along the green sloping lawns linking houses and flats on the high side with rock platforms at the Harbour side, eventually curving into the crescent of **Fairlight Beach** and its baths. The shallow waters here are popular for snorkling and diving schools, some of whom might still look for bits of the Dutch submarine *K12* which came to grief here in 1949. With the Japanese invasion of 1941-42 overwhelming the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), most surviving Dutch forces retreated to Australia. The 800 ton *K12* had managed to sink at least three enemy ships but had been badly damaged and barely made it to Sydney. Tests and repairs showed she was no longer operationally worthy and she spent the rest of the war in Fremantle assisting anti-submarine training. Sold privately after the war, she was brought back to Sydney and moored off Manly Wharf for a paying public to visit. However after storm damage in 1949, she was being towed to Neutral Bay when the towline broke and she drifted onto rocks at Fairlight. Eventually the remains were salvaged but parts were being found at Fairlight for many years afterwards.

Fairlight is named for a Georgian mansion which once stood above the beach, the home of **Henry Gilbert Smith** (1802-1886). Smith is thought of as the real founder of Manly. The English-born entrepreneur, built *Fairlight House* in the 1850s and named it after the English home of his first wife who had died of TB a few months into their marriage. Living there with his second wife (also to die later of TB), he could see the commercial possibilities of Manly as a seaside town and established a ferry service, built cottages and The Corso, gardens and baths, a hotel, church and school, as well as being involved in the planting of the ocean-front Norfolk Pines. He never used the name 'Manly', however, preferring English imports such as Clifton or Brighton, but over time Captain Arthur Phillip's choice of name (albeit for a slightly different location) asserted itself.

Phillip had named the area for the local Aborigines – members of the Gayimal clan of Guringai language group, around Manly-North Harbour. In a marine environment, the Gayimal exploited the rich marine resources of the area, and a beached whale was a cause for a feast. In September, 1790, three Europeans from the now almost starving new colony were drowned trying to harpoon a sperm whale in the Harbour. The whale later beached at Manly Cove. This occasioned a major gathering and feast and dozens of Aborigines had gathered, including Bennelong, who had recently decided he had had enough of his enforced residence with the Governor. However, he let Phillip know that he had a present of whale meat for him and Phillip and his party went ashore. All went well until one man misinterpreted Phillip's actions and speared him in the shoulder. The result was a short panic on both sides. Fortunately, other spears that followed missed and the Europeans' guns mostly failed to work, and so a catastrophe was averted. Phillip recovered in about 6 weeks and Bennelong made a reappearance in the settlement, but it was another moment in the almost inevitable tragedy of failing relations, cultural misunderstanding and violence that were to characterise future relationships between the original and new inhabitants.

At Federation Point, the end is literally in sight – Manly Cove and the Ferry Wharf. After H. G. Smith established the **ferry service** in 1854, patronage began to boom. In 1888 ferries carried more than half a million passengers despite fares being relatively high. Competition brought fares down in the 1890s and Manly became a popular day excursion as well as a practical place to live. The 1920s ferry slogan "Seven miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care" helped drive patronage up - hitting 100,000 on Australia Day, 1936. Almost from its beginnings, the Manly service has been Sydney best known and most popular with current passenger numbers each year around 6.5million.

The first **Manly Aquarium** was built in The Corso in 1886 and operated for a few years. The second aquarium, opened on the present site in 1962 but was significantly expanded to become Oceanworld in the present circular building in 1988 - the first in

Australia with an underwater glass tunnel for getting close to the sharks, stingrays and other fish. The Manly Art Gallery and museum had its origins in the 1920s with local artists pressuring Council to begin a municipal art collection - probably the first in NSW - quickly gathering works by major Australian artists of the time. It relocated to the present site adjacent to the walkway in 1930, using the Council concert pavilion previously leased by a variety show run by the 'Poster King'. The latter was a flamboyant showman, escapologist and artist, part of whose act was to do Rolf Harris-like high speed paintings of popular advertising posters (demonstrating that product placement was alive and well in the 1920s).

In NSW, daylight bathing in public places had been banned since the 1830s and local newspaper editor, William Gocher's famous defiance of the rule at Manly Ocean Beach in 1902 led to the overturn of the ban and a rapid expansion in **baths** and bathing. By the 1930s a huge timber promenade and shark net stretched between the wharf and the aquarium area creating a massive family-friendly enclosure of lawn, sand and water. There were slides, water wheels, pontoons, a multi-level diving tower and in 1933 the Spanish-style dressing pavilion (Manly Pavilion) was constructed at the western end (now mostly restaurant and cafe). The ferry wharf itself was reconstructed in 1903 with a promenade, and later the old adjacent cargo wharf (which had closed after the Spit Bridge opened in 1924) became Manly Fun Pier, adding to the reasons Manly attracted tens of thousands of ferry-borne visitors in every weekend. The Fun Pier area has bowed to modern priorities to become restaurant and cafes. A series of violent storms in the 1970s wreaked havoc on the timber promenade along the Cove and in 1978 it was demolished and replaced by the current modest beach enclosure.

Along the final stretch of beach to the wharf, there are various historic and commemorative plaques, including plaques commemorating Manly's many Olympians. Some of them tend to be claimed by other places as well, such as Andrew 'Boy' Charleton, one of the several athletes with Manly connections who between them won all three gold, and most of the other, medals won by the Australian team at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

The ferry wharf ends the walk from Circular Quay, and it would only take about 30 minutes back there by ferry. Meantime, Manly offers, as it always has, refreshment and attraction. The information centre opposite the Wharf is a useful port of call.