

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING 2

WONDERS IN THE BACKYARD : A COASTAL WALK FROM LITTLE BAY TO CAPE BANKS

Little Bay Geological Site: This is about 6 ha in area and located at 1408 Anzac Pde, Little Bay. The site is listed on the Register of the National Estate for its very high biogeographical significance. It is the only site containing peat of the Miocene age known on the coast of New South Wales. Twenty-two million years ago the sea level was 26 metres higher than today and studies of pollen on this site testify to rainforests and the occurrence of Wollemi Pines.

Prince Henry Hospital: The first use of the Little Bay area for medical care was in 1879, when three Chinese lepers were isolated in huts near the Bay. The winter of 1881 saw an outbreak of smallpox in the colony. The isolation facilities at North Head Quarantine Station proved inadequate so 500 acres were reserved at Little Bay. The first hospital facilities were bell tents near the beach and admissions began on 5 September 1881.

The Norfolk Pines, which define Pine Avenue were planted in 1886 under the supervision of the Director of the Botanic Gardens, Charles Moore who was also responsible for the plantings in Centennial Park around the same period.

Little Bay: Ted Bryant from the University of Wollongong, points to 10-tonne boulders at Little Bay as evidence of Tsunamis occurring along the coast. Tsunamis can travel at speeds of nearly 1,000 kilometres per hour and carry billions of tonnes of water. The most common trigger is an undersea avalanche or earthquake. The sudden shift of a huge volume of water sends the tsunami on its way. As the front of a tsunami hits shallow water near shore, it slows. Faster moving water at the back catches up, and builds the wave to a height of 30 meters or more. 'Signatures' of a tsunami include piles of shells where they shouldn't be, ocean sand on hilltops, and peculiar rock formations and in the case of Little Bay, the boulders.

Little Bay was an important Aboriginal camping ground between Sydney and Botany Bay, and six Aboriginal pathways reportedly led to it. There are a number of Aboriginal sites located within the area. They include an axe grinding groove site, a discontinuous band of shell midden following the beach on the southern side of Little Bay, a

sandstone shelter with shell midden and a number of engraving sites.

The Coast Cemetery: From 1881 until 1897 burials were undertaken at a spot near the present cemetery and in 1897 burials began at the current location, which is around two kilometres southeast from the present day hospital. From 1897 to 1952 around 3000 burials took place at this spot. Today only about 90 graves are visible.

Buried at the site are many migrants who had only recently arrived in Sydney to start a new life but were struck down by illnesses stemming from overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. Also buried are local Aboriginal people who either came from the hospital or from settlements at nearby La Perouse. Not only were patients buried at the Cemetery, but so too a large number of doctors, nurses and related family members. The Cemetery also contains the remains of early Chinese settlers in New South Wales, many of whom died of infectious disease.

Cape Banks Battery: During the second half of the 1930s a series of gun batteries was installed along the Sydney coast. By 1938 Cape Banks was operative. During the war Fort Banks became a major operation complete with protected observation points, strategy rooms and the gun batteries, and was surrounded by a 4-metre high sandstone wall. With Henry Head, this formed the defence system for Botany Bay. If you are interested in the Botany Bay Defences (Cape Banks, Henry Head, Bare Island, and Macquarie Tower) contact

BotanyBayDefences@hotmail.com



Cape Banks Aquatic Reserve: includes the whole foreshore from the bridge at Cape Banks to the Endeavour Light at Henry Head, and extends 100m seaward from mean low water. Cape Banks

was established as a marine research site in the 1940s, and has been Australia's most prominent and world recognised site for marine research since the 1960s. All five major habitats are found here, including platforms, crevices, rock-pools, boulders and cobbles, resulting in a diversity of intertidal communities. It is prohibited to collect cunjevoi, commonly used as bait, and all invertebrates (dead or alive), including anemones, barnacles, chitons, cockles, crabs, mussels, octopus, pipis, sea urchins, starfish, snails and worms, and empty shells. The first inlet inside the Bay is Cruwee Cove, also known as Pussycat Bay. This inlet is managed by a department from the University of Sydney as a scientific control against other more accessible areas of coastline. The maximum depth is only 15 metres but there are plenty of marine life with colourful sponges and kelp gardens widespread. Groper, moray eel, cuttlefish, red morwong, mado, common bullseye, wobbegong, bream, Maori wrasse and starfish are found here.

Cruwee Cove is apparently named after a local Aboriginal who saw the arrival of Lt. Cook in 1770. On the headland overlooking Cruwee Cove just beyond the 18th tee on the NSW Golf Course is the first of six sources of fresh water that Cook discovered during his explorations around Botany Bay. This is where 'some fresh water...came trickling down and stood in pools among the rocks.'

Cape Banks is the perfect vantage point for whale watching. Between May and November, whales such as the Humpback and the Southern Right can be seen along the coastline and occasionally can be sighted entering Botany Bay. Dolphins also enter the Bay in schools and can be observed easily from this vantage point. Further information on whale watching is available at www.orrca.org.au or contact CapeBanksWhalewatchers@hotmail.com



Cape Banks is listed on the register of the National Estate for the "exceptionally fine exposures of large scale cross stratification in sheet facies of the Hawkesbury sandstone. The laterally continuous three dimensional nature of the outcrops are crucial to an understanding of

the environment of deposition of this formation and as such are used for research and educational purposes by university groups." It is listed also for its entry into Botany Bay.

Off Cape Banks lies the wreck of the collier, **S.S. Minmi**. The *Minmi* was on its way from Melbourne to Newcastle when it hit the outside of Cape Banks on 13 May 1937. The main hulk of the wreck now lies above high water mark on the rock platform, but pieces of the ship can be found over the eastern side of Cruwee Cove and around the Cape. These remains include metal plate, timber pieces and steel.

There are over 200 species of **birds** in the National Park and at Cape Banks the raptors include the Collared Sparrowhawk, Brown Goshawk, Swamp Harrier, Black-Shouldered Kite, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Whistling Kite, Little Eagle Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, Australian Hobby and Peregrine Falcon. For further information www.birdsaustralia.com.au

ORICA UPDATE

At a recent community meeting, Orica representatives informed those present that HCBd, hexachlorobutadiene, is escaping from the Orica car park where HCB contaminated soil, sand and coal ash is buried. The Hypalon membrane used to contain the waste has proved unsatisfactory and will have to be replaced or the waste material removed. According to a BBC report HCBd, used as a solvent and in making rubber, has been linked in animal tests to problems affecting the kidneys and liver, and to foetal development. In the UK town of Weston, where ICI first detected a problem in December 1999, residents had to be evacuated and the company required to buy up homes. The North Cheshire Health Authority tested 70 people from the 26 homes with high levels of HCBd and discovered that half were suffering kidney abnormalities.

COMMUNITY GREENING

'Community Greening' is the name for a range of activities to promote community gardens that is undertaken by the Botanic Gardens Trust. Since 1999 Gardens staff have been involved in the establishment of more than 60 Community Gardens. If anyone is interested in starting a local project please contact me through the Kooloola Community Centre.