



North Head Sanctuary Foundation Inc

Custodians of North Head

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Education Room - Bandicoot Heaven

We are closed until further notice due to COVID-19. Please have a look at our website if you need information regarding identification of plants etc.

Native Plant Nursery

It is spring and we are busy working in our areas. There is always a lot to do. We are currently revamping the area across from the Bandicoot Heaven which had to be cleared/thinned out as it was in a bushfire Asset Protection Zone.

If you would like to join us, please call in any Tuesday or Friday morning between 8am and noon to have a look.

To join us one needs to be a member of North Head Sanctuary Foundation. For more details, please send an email to northhead@fastmail.com.au

Controlled burns

On 4 September, there was a Prescribed Burn for the Harbour Trust land at North Head Sanctuary. The Trust burn was located east of North Fort Road and covers an area of 4.5 hectares. The Trust burn was carried out simultaneously with a National Parks (20 Ha in size) adjacent to the Quarantine Station. The results can be seen from North Head Scenic Drive.

The purpose of the burns is to mitigate the risk to life, property and the environment from unplanned bushfire. Fire will also assist in the regeneration of the Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub, that is listed as a Critically Endangered Ecological Community under State legislation, and as Endangered by the Commonwealth.

The last burn was on 29 May 2018 and one can see the

results of this burn by walking along the metal track and see the mass of flowers and the regrowth. See



https://www.harbourtrust.gov.au/media/2526/visit_nhs_no_v-2019.pdf for your map and start at number 11 and walk to number 16 which is our Information room. Well worth the walk.

The next botanical survey of this area is planned for October.

My North Head

John Neil Harris

With the threat of a Japanese attack on Sydney in 1942 many sensible Sydneysiders abandoned their harbourside homes in favour of safer locales. My mother, then living in Croydon with her three young sons, and her husband away in the Army, took advantage of the resulting vacancies to move into a flat right against the beach at Little Manly, alongside Laurie Farrell's boatshed.

But with the Allies' ultimate victory, what had seemed like a foolhardy decision proved to have been inspired. We were blessed to be living within easy rowing and walking distance of an enviable array of environmental treasures, sheltered by North Head in what I believe to be the richest corner of the world's finest harbour. Mum was still living in that prime location fifty years later.

From our backyard we looked past the towering buildings of the Gasworks over the water to Quarantine Station and Flagstaff Point; around the Gasworks Point were Collins Flat and Store Beach, and a short walk or bike ride away were the School of Artillery and North Head itself.

In the late 1940's and the 1950's the delights of Manly's Eastern Hill were, though not completely unknown, certainly under-appreciated by many of those living close by. Often, and particularly in school holidays, my brothers and I and our friends were the only people on the beaches of Collins Flat and Store Beach and in the bush around them. For the next fifteen years we roamed those places freely. We came to feel quite territorial about them, a protective sentiment I can still experience when I see the area misused all these years later.

My first visits to the base of North Head was to Collins Flat and Store Beach for wonderful family picnics, but soon my friends and I regularly headed there unsupervised to swim, camp, climb trees to swing on rope swings and to repel imaginary attacks from the Japanese. The bush provided the wood necessary for spears, bows and arrows and shanghais.

Later, as teenagers, we would be on these beaches helping the professional fishermen from Little Manly to haul for fish there, and in an unspoken agreement we were given free or very cheap access to their rowing boats in return. Each year we would cut down a tree to be used as a centre pole for our huge Cracker Night bonfire on Little Manly Beach. But every year we were overly ambitious in selecting a pole far too heavy to be dragged home and had to settle for a smaller one instead.

My earliest clear impression of the Quarantine Station is of standing on Smedley's Point to get a clearer view of the large ship that had berthed overnight off Quarantine Beach, totally dwarfing the other boats in this part of the harbour. As youngsters it was impossible not to be impressed by the sheer size of the vessels, and to wonder about the Station and what went on there for the lengthy periods of the ships' stays. Hearing stories of armed guards policing the Station triggered our imaginations, and contributed to its aura of mystery. We learned early then that this was a 'No Go Area', and we usually respected the Station's large "KEEP OFF" signs' injunction.

Regrettably however, as older and bolder teenagers we were occasionally less biddable. When spearfishing became popular we would row to Flagstaff and the Quarantine Station where fish were more abundant. Inevitably the boat took on water and we needed to empty it. Tempted by the empty level beach we ventured ashore to up-end the boat as quickly as we could. We knew a Quarantine Officer would hurry down to drive us off, but we counted on the distance the Officer needed to cover from the buildings at the top of the station to the beach giving us enough time to relaunch the boat and remove ourselves to the safety of the harbour.

People in Manly knew of the Aboriginal presence in the district, and the cairn erected at Collins Flat relating the story of the spearing there of Governor Phillip confirmed it for us. I cannot recall who advised us of the presence of an Aboriginal burial ground, in the adjoining bush, but it was made clear we should not go there. This was an injunction that we did respect and decades later I was pleased to have the advice authoritatively confirmed.

With the memory of World War II still strong the School of Artillery naturally attracted us. As primary school children we grew up watching planes towing targets to allow gunners at the School of Artillery to practise their skills, with small explosions of smoke getting closer and closer to the target. On one visit we invited ourselves in to scavenge for scraps of materiel. When we found an unlocked bunker near the Parkhill Arch we decided the old camouflage nets it contained were of no further use and helped ourselves to one that became hammocks in the bush.

In one regrettable episode a group of friends from the other end of our street had built themselves a cabin in the bush above Collins Flat and in a moment of testosterone-induced lunacy we agreed to lay siege to the cabin, using our shanghais. Predictably the incident ended badly when a stone hit my best friend just above the eye. Blood flowed freely so we carted him off to the nearby hospital to be stitched up. Sheepishly we delivered him home. That evening my enraged father knocked on the door of every boy in the street who'd been involved, and asked to see their shanghais, which he then destroyed on the spot. I

wonder with which group in "Lord of the Flies" we had most in common.

The road around Old Man's Hat made an excellent bike track, close to the huge naval guns on the cliff top which were still in their impressive emplacements when we carried out our uninvited and necessarily hurried inspection.

In the early 1950's my elder brother Philip and I shared an afternoon paper run that took in the Manly District Hospital, the School of Artillery and the Quarantine Station. We pushed our barrow containing a heavy load of newspapers and magazines up Darley Road in all weathers. At the School of Artillery Philip worked the Sergeants' Mess and the Officers' Mess. Meanwhile I, being the younger, had the task of walking a couple of hundred yards to the Quarantine Gatehouse to deliver a single paper to the officer on duty in the Quarantine Station Gatehouse. In the early dark of winter evenings and possessing a vivid imagination I was able to turn the squeaking of the branches in the wind into someone's screams of pain, so I covered the distance as speedily as possible, hurrying back to the cup of cocoa in the Sergeants' Mess. I always wondered whether it was worth it for just one paper!

So my view of 'My North Head' and especially that part of it occupied by the Quarantine Station has clearly been from the outside. In 1959 I left Manly and have spent the rest of my life in the country, but returned to Manly fairly regularly. North Head has remained a favourite destination, and through the admirable Sanctuary Foundation and visits to the Station we have come to realise how much we DIDN'T know about the Station's important operations, despite having lived so close. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic too has heightened our appreciation of the drama and heroics that were being played out over the years, out of our sight.

Interestingly, my partner has an ancestor who was quarantined in 1837 when the much-discussed "John Barry" with cholera on board arrived in Sydney. Robert Hodge was the elected representative of the steerage passengers and was responsible for the still extant extensive written representations to the authorities, seeking equal treatment across the classes of passengers. So expect to see us dragging our kayak ashore as we mine the records for more details. We anticipate a warmer welcome than we would have received in the 1950's.

In preparing this reminiscence my memories have been tested, and I confess in some cases found wanting. Regrettably, recounting and probably enhancing anecdotes over the decades doesn't increase their veracity, and with advancing age one's possible corroborative sources become fewer, so this version, misremembered though it may well be, is tendered tentatively.