

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB
BARE ISLAND FORT
(with lunch at Yarra Bay Sailing Club)
THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2023



As the weather had been unpredictable over the past weeks, we were delighted to be blessed with a beautiful day which was essential for today's tour. Malcolm and his coach arrived early and, after buying his much needed coffee, 28 of us departed Penshurst on time at 8 am. This time, we headed through the heart of Hurstville (which is really looking very tired), through the equally tired Bexley and past Sydney Airport where roads are being upgraded to help improve traffic flow in the area, as well as Port Botany. It certainly looks a huge/expensive project.

We reached our morning tea spot, Sir Joseph Banks Park, Botany just before 9 am to find construction happening there also - a new and large children's playground. From the Sydney – Sydney and Suburbs website: *The Sir Joseph Banks Pleasure Gardens, which are part of the park, were the main attraction of the old Sir Joseph Banks Hotel in the 19th Century. In the 1840s and 1850s the Sir Joseph Banks Zoological and Botanical Gardens at this site featured the colony's first zoo with such animals such as kangaroos, elephants, tigers, bears, camels and gorillas. These days, it is commemorated by these large contemporary sculptures of elephants and sculptured life-sized, life-like cement zoo animals.* We spent about an hour here, enjoying Elizabeth's morning tea and a stroll around the area which also includes a pretty lake and accompanying ducks.



The La Perouse area, within Kamay Botany Bay National Park, is a popular spot, but, as it was still early, parking our coach wasn't a problem. After admiring the nearby oldest surviving watchtower in Australia, Macquarie Watchtower, we walked over the spectacular 1887 wooden bridge to meet the very knowledgeable Peter, our NPWS guide for a 1.5 hr tour of the fort. As Peter walked us around (a few stairs, but relatively easy), he conveyed heaps of information which was impossible to note down, but briefly (from Wikipedia which had the most comprehensive info):

Bare Island, a natural sandstone island, is a tiny outcrop just 30 metres off the coast in Botany Bay and is the sole island in the bay. Among the first Europeans to spot Bare Island were Joseph Banks and Captain James Cook who, on sailing into Botany Bay in 1770, recorded in his journal that he passed a "small bare island". The name stuck. In 1853, France and Britain declared war on Russia and fears of a Russian invasion of Sydney took hold. By the 1880s, the NSW colonial government decided it was necessary to fortify Sydney's coastline which included the Bare Island Fort.

Designed by Peter Scratchley, colonial administrator and military engineer, and Gustavus Morrell, a civil engineer, most of the fort's concrete works were completed by 1883 and four guns mounted. The fort is one of the earliest examples of mass concrete work in Australia. But the colony's inexperience with the building material became evident in the fort's poor workmanship and the builder faced the consequences.

Ships approaching from the ocean couldn't see the fort, which gave resident troops an advantage over the enemy they thought would soon turn up. The barracks were manned by 70 soldiers, but the Russians never came, and by 1908 all military activity on the island had stopped. In 1912 the fort began a new chapter as a war veterans' home, the very first in Australia. When World War II broke out the fort was recommissioned for military purposes. While around twelve veterans remained at the fort throughout the war, the veterans' home was closed altogether in the 1960s. Movies have been filmed there, the most notable was in 2000 when the fort starred in one of cinema's most memorable action scenes in Mission: Impossible 2. Bare Island is also a popular place for snorkelling and scuba diving, and also hosts small events, private functions, wedding ceremonies and receptions.





Peter took us through the tunnels snaking through the island's interior, past small dingy rooms that had been used for storage (including gunpowder), accommodation etc. We were amazed at the two massive guns which had somehow been installed using manpower only, after being brought to the island by barge. *(In the 1930s, the guns on the island were sold for scrap metal during the Depression, but the larger two were left on the island because they were too heavy to be brought back across the bridge.)* Thank goodness these guns were left, as they are of huge interest to the tours. After admiring the wonderful views from the top of the fort, it was time to head back down via their small museum. Then a big thank you to Peter, before the trek across the

bridge and up the hill to our coach. That hill was the hardest part of the day!

Next stop was lunch at the Yarra Bay Sailing Club just a few minutes drive away. The selection of meals had been pre-ordered and were brought out very promptly, even though we'd arrived a little early. Of course, we made use of the bar! Taken from the Australian Travel Questions website: *Yarra Bay Beach is located on Botany Bay. However, it is on the northern side of the bay, just round from the La Perouse beaches. It is technically in the little-known suburb of Phillip Bay, and is about 850 metres long. The reason that most Sydneysiders will overlook Yarra Bay Beach is that it is next to Port Botany and nobody really wants to look out towards shipping containers and cranes from the beach. On the flip side, Yarra Bay Beach does offer remarkably calm and usually clear water. The slope of the beach is gentle, too, making it a good place for swimming, particularly for children, as they can practice swimming without having to contend with waves or nasty currents. The real star attraction of Yarra Bay Beach, however, is the white sand. It's not quite at the level of Callala Beach, Cave Beach, Blenheim Beach or Greenfield Beach in Jervis Bay, but the sand here is unusually white by Sydney standards and there are a few pretty shells mixed in too.*



Our meal which included dessert, tea & coffee, was leisurely and most enjoyable, but by 2.30 it was time to leave. By 3.30, we were back in Penshurst. Lorraine R and Susan L won the Lucky Seat Prizes. A good day, made especially great by the gorgeous weather.