

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB
SEVEN ISLANDS OF THE LOWER HAWKESBURY
SATURDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2021



Showers around, but that wasn't a deterrent to the 26 of us who were very much looking forward to the day. Mal McDermott, who runs McDermott Chartours, was our driver. We actually left Penshurst a few minutes early, taking around 30 mins to arrive at our morning tea stop, Rhodes Park at Concord West and its main attraction, The Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway. Not many of us had been here previously and were very impressed. As it was early and there were very few visitors around, we were able to make use of the huge sheltered area, although it wasn't raining at this stage. The website states:

The Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway is a living memorial and a principal site of commemoration honouring all those who fought for Australia during World War II. A principal focus is on the sacrifices made during key Papua New Guinea battles which took place in 1942-43 along the Kokoda Track, at Milne Bay on the south-eastern tip of Papua, and at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda on the northern coastline.



The Walkway covers more than 800 metres from Rhodes Station to Concord Hospital in Sydney's inner-west, and runs along the mangrove-studded shores of Brays Bay on the Parramatta River. At the centrepiece are magnificent granite walls bearing photographic images of the Kokoda campaign. There are 22 audio-visual stations along the Walkway, each describing a significant place or military engagement. The Walkway has been planted with lush tropical vegetation simulating the conditions of The Kokoda Track.

Of course, there wasn't time to take the walk, but we enjoyed what we saw. Joining up with the M1 further north, we'd arrived at Brooklyn by around 10 am. After the compulsory temperature check (we all passed), we were permitted to board M.V. "Zarapito" for the 10.30 departure. To our delight, we were the only group on the boat, so heaps of room to spread ourselves out. Justin was in charge of the boat and gave the commentary, ably assisted by three very friendly crew members who supplied morning tea almost immediately – their ANZAC biscuits are to die for!

Our three-hour cruise headed upstream to begin with, passing Dangar Island and under the railway bridge to Long and Spectacle Islands. As we headed under the road bridge, Peat and Milson Islands were on the right, and on the left was the tiny settlement of Milson's Passage which is actually a



Sydney suburb only accessible by boat. The quaint Bar Island was next. Some years ago, we'd had spent a few hours here and were amazed by the history on this tiny island. No settlement here, but it does contain some building ruins and at least 59 grave sites in its cemetery. Close by was Bar Point popular with anglers and it was here that our boat turned around. As we cruised past the other side of Milson Island, there was a photo opportunity at the heritage-listed HMAS Parramatta Shipwreck at Cascade Gully. The ship was commissioned in 1910, paid

off in 1928, and wrecked in 1934. The bow and stern sections were subsequently converted into memorials and were added to the New South Wales State Heritage Register on 15 December 2006.

Milson Island, only accessible by ferry, was first settled over a century ago and has seen many uses: bacteriological station, quarantine station, a hospital to treat soldiers from WWI with VD, a mental hospital, a rehab for alcoholics, a women's jail, and these days is a popular sports and recreation centre.

Nearby, the much smaller Peat Island has also seen some interesting times and began as Rabbit Island, but in 1936 renamed as Peat Island due to the nearby Peat's Ferry that was operating between Mooney Mooney and Kangaroo Point. (George Peat was an early settler and boat builder who established the first ferry across the Hawkesbury in this vicinity in 1844.) The NSW government wanted to establish an asylum for alcoholics and construction began here in 1902. That idea changed and eventually the facility became a mental hospital with the first male patients arriving in 1911. Despite being an awful place to live in those early years, the situation did improve as attitudes changed towards mental illness/disabilities. In more recent times, many patients lived out their entire lives here, with education facilities and dedicated staff providing a stable and happy home for most. The facility was decommissioned in October 2010 and still remains empty.

We passed under the road bridge and then Spectacle Island (formerly Goat Island) which, in 1978, was listed on the Register of the National Estate for its abundance of aboriginal sites plus diverse vegetation. The island was included on the Australian National Heritage List in December 2006.

Dangar, perhaps the best known of all the islands, was on the left, as we briefly popped into Brooklyn Wharf to collect our pre-ordered fish'n'chips/salad lunch. It has a permanent population of over 300 which can change dramatically at holiday times. Originally named Mullet Island by Gov Arthur Phillip, the island was purchased in 1864 and renamed by Henry Cary Dangar. There are no private vehicles on the island, but, being only 76 acres, it takes just a few minutes to walk in any direction. The island has a shop/café and bowling club, and is serviced daily by the Brooklyn Ferry.

As we headed towards the river mouth, we enjoyed our lunch with a wine or beer if wished, plus bottomless tea and coffee all day. Lion Island was in the distance, but across that open section it was rather choppy, so the boat stayed well within the confines of the river. We ended up at a delightful spot – Refuge Bay – complete with a waterfall and beach. Extremely popular, judging by the number of boats moored there for the weekend.



On the return to Brooklyn and just past Little Wobby, we stopped for a few minutes to admire some unusual fishhead-shaped sandstone rock formations!

A light shower as we disembarked, but fortunately our coach was only a few steps away. For a change, Mal drove us back along the Old Pacific Hwy to Cowan, commenting that where the toll gates used to be is now a bushfire spotting area. Around Wahroonga, we joined up with the new NorthConnex tunnel which

brought us out at West Pennant Hills. The traffic wasn't too bad until the Sydney Markets at Homebush, but, once we got through there, it was an easy run to Penshurst. Phyllis and Evelyn were the winners of the Lucky Seat Prizes. Thank you to Elizabeth for her organisation and morning tea - it had been a most enjoyable day, despite the rather gloomy weather!