

The Great
North Walk
Companion

The Great North Walk Companion

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Dedicated to

the fourth member of the McGuin Walkers who completed the Great North Walk in the twelve months from October 2008 to September 2009.

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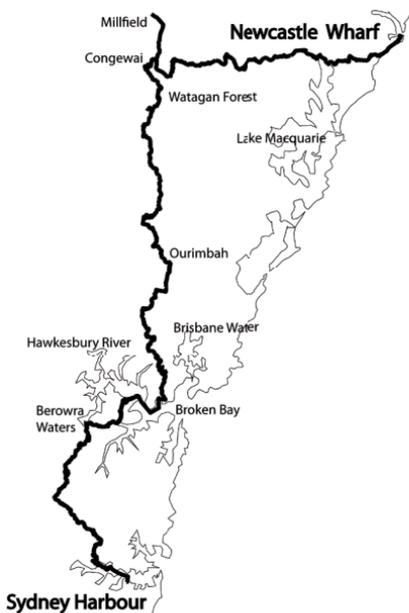


Preamble

This book is designed to be a ‘companion’ to a fantastic walk. It is a family story and reveals a mystery augmented by associated puzzles and landmarks. We learned a great deal by researching where we were going and who had been there before us. We hope that you appreciate some of these highlights that we share. While this book is neither a history nor a tourist guide, as a ‘companion’, it offers some insight into the social development of the area between Sydney and Newcastle from the time before white people laid claim to Australia to the end of the 21st century ‘noughties’, the 2000s. We suggest places and locations that are interesting to visit and have links to the history of the region you will pass through as you complete the *Great North Walk*. The details of these are up-to-date as we go to press but we advise checking with venues before you arrive. The title is, of course, a *double entendre*: the ‘hero’ or ‘heroine’ of our book is not identified, or perhaps we should say that the companion’s details are slowly revealed as our story progresses.

The *Great North Walk* is a truly wonderful trail. It is a combination of many tracks through a bewildering array of natural and urban environments. Formally, the *Great North Walk* starts in Macquarie Place in central Sydney where a short stroll is followed by the first water section in the form of a ferry from Circular Quay. Its southern sections pass historic locations and heritage homes in the

Sydney suburbs before arriving in the Lane Cove River National Park. The *Great North Walk* follows this river as far as Thornleigh and then the Berowra Creek before heading through part of the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park to arrive at Brooklyn, on the Hawkesbury River. Either the train or boat crossing of this majestic river are superb as are *The Walk's* middle sections through Brisbane Water National Park and the Ourimbah Valley before reaching the Watagan State Forest. After heading almost due north, the only serious 'bend' in the *Great North Walk's* route is near Congewai (about 10 km south of Millfield) where the track turns almost due east to follow the Myall Range as far as Teralba, passing many signs of the impressive industrial history of this region. The trail crosses Five Islands Bridge and skirts the northern end of Lake Macquarie, taking the scenic route around the bay's edge and then through the southern fringes of Newcastle to the official finishing point of *The Walk* at Queen's Wharf in central Newcastle, close to the main railway station.



This book is not a set of track notes and cannot replace good maps, a compass or a GPS system (that you know how to use). Due to road modifications and trail reorganizations, there are changes in the *Great North Walk's* route from time to time and therefore probably since the time of our writing. Each of our chapters begins with a small map that shows where on the overall *Walk* that passage describes. However, we mention very few specific

directions and, in any case, our best advice is always to follow the official *Great North Walk* signposting and direction markers, which

we have found to be clear and up-to-date. Each chapter includes a brief description of the walk completed together with a simple grading which runs from “Easy” (accomplishable by all walkers) to “Hard” (accessible for experienced and able walkers). The walk details are augmented in a single list in a Resources section at the end of the book. The walk lengths are from the tracks themselves and optional excursions and boat trip lengths are also mentioned. We strongly recommend that all walkers take a map of the trail they are walking on every trip. Full details of the *Great North Walk* are given in the New South Wales Department of Lands’ ‘The Great North Walk — Discovery Kit’ brochures and maps. We recommend these guides with real enthusiasm:

http://www.lands.nsw.gov.au/crown_land/walking_tracks/great_north_walk (accessed 22/9/09).

The *Great North Walk* can be undertaken all in one super trek (allow about 2 weeks with quite a few nights’ bush camping) or as several day or weekend walks. There are plenty of access points along the route and the spurs to/from the *Great North Walk* proper are often as interesting as the main trail. You can go in either direction or, as this book does, switch northward and southward journeys as the mood takes you and your time allows. En route there are a number of Walkers’ Registers to complete, which seek comments on the state of the track and personal views. The ‘Great North Walk Companion’ is not a history of the development of the trails and their combination into the one great walk of 250 km between Sydney and Newcastle. Gary McDougall’s and Leigh Shearer-Heriot’s 1988 book ‘The Great North Walk’ (now out of print) describes the story of the walk’s creation from their proposal for a ‘Sydney to Hunter Track’ to an award-winning Australian Bicentennial project. This complete trail was opened for the Bicentennial in 1988, since when the NSW Department of Lands has retained responsibility for maintaining *The Great North Walk*.

This book is a treasure hunt or geo-quest with three components: rock art and other engravings; obelisks and important memorials; and the unfolding of a life-tale of the narrator’s ‘companion’. As you locate and admire the art and architecture described, remember that indigenous, and indeed any, rock engravings are susceptible to damage. If you visit rock engraving sites, please be careful not to touch or damage the art and to show respect for the sites and their

surrounding areas. More information can be obtained from the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nswcultureheritage/RockArt.htm> (accessed 22/9/09).

As well as the rock art and obelisk locations, we also suggest some visits that may enliven the walking for you and give brief details of these places and how far they lie from *The Great North Walk* itself. The book highlights some mysteries that have occurred along *The Walk*: there are more than a dozen murders, disappearances and inexplicable deaths and all are worthy of further investigation. Bridges are another interesting geo-hunt item. There are plenty of these on the *Great North Walk* ranging from weirs and stepping-stones that can be surprisingly quickly covered by a rising river or creek to magnificent structures such as the Mooney Mooney Creek Bridge that carries the F3 Freeway. Among these are engineering masterpieces such as de Burgh's Bridge and the Brooklyn Railway Bridge and also fascinating footbridges about which there is more to learn than this story tells. For example, what is the history of the Steele Bridge over Berowra Creek? After Phil Houghton saved his colleague from the flash flood on Piles Creek was the new bridge (which bears his name) raised to ensure that no further floods would wash it away – the fate of its predecessor. We have counted more than twenty bridges plus many sets of stepping-stones. How many can you find?

We do not offer advice on bushwalking in the Newcastle to Sydney region; just mentioning a few cautionary tales. There are basic principles to which all travellers should adhere.

Hints for happy hiking

- Let someone know where you're going and approximately when you expect to be back;
- Make sure you have an up-to-date map;
- Check the weather forecast, possible fire danger and, where necessary, tides and river flood status;
- Allow plenty of time to finish the walk in daylight;
- Wear good walking boots;

- Pack extra water (always) and food in case of unexpected delays;
- In fire seasons, be aware of outbreaks, escape routes and emergency instructions;
- Watch out for falling branches and rocks, uneven or slippery surfaces, and cliff edges;
- Keep to tracks and stay behind safety fences;
- On longer walks, especially outside urban areas, take a GPS or compass, a space blanket, a first aid kit, raincoats, warm clothing, plastic bags for rubbish and torches;
- Long pants tucked into socks and long-sleeved shirts help avoid hitchhikers (e.g. ticks and leeches);
- Take a way of communicating e.g. mobile (or IPERB);
- Light-coloured clothing and a broad-brimmed hat are useful for noticing unwelcome insects etc.;
- Don't feed or touch native animals and leave your dog at home;
- Take a small towel for sweat and wet creek crossings;
- If you spray boots and socks with insect repellent (against leeches), do not splash through water as this transfers the poison to the environment.

A full, printable list of safe bushwalking suggestions can be found on the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service website. <http://www.npws.nsw.gov.au> (accessed 22/9/09).

Many people have asked us to write one more chapter on Billie's Companion. We aren't ready to do this. There are plenty of clues in the book that, in our view, reveal the secret. If you want to join those keen to complete a 'final chapter' elaborating on what is said about the companion in this book, we offer a web site that welcomes any and all 'conclusions': <http://www.TheGreatNorthWalk.com>

Ann Henderson-Sellers, Kendal McGuffie and
Brian Henderson-Sellers
October 2009





Before the Beginning: 1770 and 2009

From a dream-time

Alkira tells her daughter, “My mother, your grandmother, was a wise woman of the Awabakal. Once she took me to the very top of the highest hill and we looked east to the sea for a day and a night. Just before sunrise on the second day, she woke me and told me to look as carefully as I could out to the ocean. Then she asked me what I could see. ‘Your eyes are young, my child, and see faster and further than mine.’

It was hard to be sure because the before-dawn sunlight glistened on the waves and a smoky mist topped the blue water.

‘I can see a dark shadow, like a crocodile far, far away or maybe a big canoe paddled by many warriors.’

I was too young to understand how great was the distance and so how large the ‘canoe’ must really have been. It was then near the middle of what the people I now call my people say is ‘May’ in the year I think must be counted as 1770. My mother and I were as high as you can climb in our lands and we were many days’ walk away, further than I had ever been — at least further than I had been then. But then I was only six years old, just a child. I

was frightened when, as the Sun rose bright yellow in that massive morning sky, my mother entered a kind of trance and spoke to me of a future, my future:

‘I see your husband’s family, daughter, made captive by men with pale skins — men from that boat you see now or one like it. Your brother-in-law or his son has shiny silver snakes of hard rope on his wrists. He is beating the ground with his fists to try to remove them. Never allow anyone to place such ornaments on your arms, my daughter.’”



The companion

A family meeting is hardly what I’d call it but a few of us were together around Christmas time 2008 and the problem was raised once again.

“It boils down to not belonging,” said someone.

“Well — I don’t think I can solve it!” a quick, bitter contribution.

“And we must avoid Robyn getting the worst of it,” added an elderly voice. “That wouldn’t be fair at all.”

I worried as I listened to a sad story of disturbing youth turning to bitter anger. Did no-one want to help? I found myself muttering, “No wonder there’s such a lack of self-esteem.” That shut them all up. Now I had to say more — but what?

“OK, well, I’ll try, but I can’t promise anything and I’d appreciate some help.”

“I’ll help, Billie” smiled Bob.

“Me too” said Aunt Alice, “although I’m not up to lone stints any more.”



So that was it, fixed. I had volunteered. I decided we’d take a walk, a long walk, a walk back through time, from the beginnings as I knew or could guess them to today, in the hope that my companion could discover the fact of true belonging.



The first people

The first Australians, the Aboriginal or indigenous people, arrived in the north of Australia between 70,000 and 50,000 years ago. They probably walked across a land bridge from what is now Indonesia or perhaps came by canoe. Trade and cultural exchanges continued between these new Australians and their ancestral families in the north for many generations. Over time some indigenous people moved south, travelling across Australia's interior by what seemed to the Europeans who came much later to be magic. Although some groups chose to live a wandering life in the deserts, many more inhabited the Australian shoreline.

'Alkira' (female) Australian

b 1764 January, region around Wollombi

d 1802 February (aged 38), Glenrock

sees Captain Cook's ship 'Endeavour' from Mt Warrawolong in 1770

All over Australia there are sites of significance for its indigenous peoples. At many of these sites there are impressive displays of art including spray paintings, charcoal designs and, most often seen and admired, rock engravings. This 'rock art' is generally regarded as the oldest surviving human art form. In Australia it can be very ancient, many tens of thousands of years old.

Very early inhabitants of the region around Mount Warrawolong are believed to be the Darkinjung people, although the Awabakal and Wanaruah nations are also mentioned. This mountain top is thought to have been used as a ceremonial meeting place as people from hundreds of kilometres visited the area and made their way to Mount Yengo (25 km west of Wollombi), which is a place of great significance throughout the ancient nations of eastern Australia. There is frequent evidence of camping sites and the flat, exposed areas of Hawkesbury sandstone that occur in this region have provided an ideal 'canvas' for Aboriginal artists for thousands

HMB 'Endeavour': a magnificent replica of Captain James Cook's famous ship can be visited and explored at the Australian National Maritime Museum situated in Sydney's Darling Harbour, about 1.5 km from the start of the *Great North Walk* at Macquarie Place, Sydney.

of years. Of the very many rock art pictures to be seen, there are ancestral images of animals and warriors from the dream-time. Perhaps surprisingly, there are also fairly modern engravings that depict horses and even sailing ships. Maybe Alkira's mother created one of these.



Lasting impressions: odysseys and obelisks

Around fifty thousand years after the arrival of indigenous Australians in this land, but still over three and a half thousand

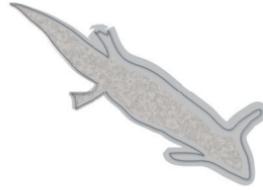
Discoverer's Obelisk: the Captain Cook Memorial Obelisk was erected in 1870 in what is now the Botany Bay National Park at Kurnell (about 18 km from Circular Quay on the *Great North Walk*). It recognizes Captain Cook's discovery, on the 29th of April 1770, of Botany Bay where he anchored the 'Endeavour' and made the first British landing on Australia to claim 'the Great South Land' for Britain.

years before Alkira and her mother journeyed to the summit of Mount Warrawolong, another traveller, named Herodotus, made a distant discovery. An educated Greek who had wandered far from his home, Herodotus was impressed by what he called *obeliskos*. Why he employed the diminutive of *obelos* (pointed pillar) for a structure such as the obelisk he saw at Heliopolis (one of the few that still remain where they first stood), which is 21 metres or 68 feet tall, we cannot know. Perhaps there were

taller edifices back home. Whatever his reason, the name from Herodotus' travel diaries, in which he described the tapering four-sided grand monuments across what we now call 'ancient' Egypt, stuck.

Later, but still before James Cook's 'Endeavour' sailed past Australia's eastern shore, other Europeans came to share Herodotus' admiration of these narrow towers with rectangular bases supporting pyramidal tops. They stole and moved many (of the 29 Egyptian obelisks that survive to modern times only half remain in their homeland) and took hostage the architecture. These explorers began erecting obelisks to commemorate great happenings and to act as way-markers in strange and frightening landscapes.

In ancient times, Australian artists drew their rock designs to describe stories, to connect people and customs with the land and to direct and describe journeys. Several hundred rock art sites exist between Newcastle and Sydney. These include different styles: paintings, drawings and also rock engravings. Drawings are chalked directly on to rock surfaces using dry pigments whereas paintings are executed in wet pigments with fingers or makeshift brushes or sprayed over stencils. The various pigments used for rock art are generally quite stable since they are made of naturally occurring minerals and, in places where there is adequate protection from the weather, such as in caves or under sheltered cliff faces, this art can be long-lasting. Rock engravings are much less vulnerable to the elements and so can be found in the open, frequently in very beautiful spots in the landscape. They are usually outlines or sometimes filled-in silhouettes that have been created on the surface of the rock by pecking, hammering or scraping. Outlined figures, with their own unique style, are typical of the very many sandstone rock art sites on or near the *Great North Walk*.



All family tales recall great events and have chapters about times when our ancestors witnessed historic happenings. I decided to try to spin a thread from Alkira to my companion with which to weave us into the grander cloth of Australia's history. In this story, old and younger art forms illustrate both Australia's new people and those who lived here for the many years before the Europeans and other immigrants arrived. After all, our family has members from all these tribes.