

# Peter Bentley

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## Reflections on walking the Sydney de Camino (Part 2)

My walk along the Sydney de Camino during 2021 provided a time to reflect on some of the wider cultural changes that have been occurring in the Greater Sydney region.

I was reasonably familiar with a fair part of the walking area as I have been a resident for four decades and have travelled over Greater Sydney more than most people. I mainly utilise public transport, and in doing this, one experiences and becomes aware of terrain and related issues with the necessary walking sections of a journey

### **People rarely walk distances.**

I rarely encountered people out walking in most areas, with the main area exceptions being the beach suburbs and the mountains. Another though shorter based exception, particularly on weekends and during Covid lockdowns is the walk to the local café or take-away coffee shop.

I think part of this would be the difficulty for some people simply of walking in areas with significant hills and inadequate shoulders and/or paths. Overall though I put this factor down to a reliance on the car (the car is no longer the instrument of travel for the middle class as more Australians are middle class now in any case).

It is an irony to note that with the proliferation of gyms, people will drive to a gym to work out when once they may have simply walked to their paid work and also undertaken more physical work.

### **Non-car transport and exercise**

Cycle ways are being increasingly developed across areas and intentionally included in new areas or in the revamping of roads in older areas. These are usually dual pedestrian/cycle paths, with the hope of encouraging more non-car-based transport and exercise.

On the subject of exercise, I was intrigued to see an increasing number of outside gym areas. These modern wooden and metal creations have been provided by local councils in parks or side areas to facilitate further patterns of exercise, though I did not see anyone using them (unlike in Singapore where it almost seemed the in-thing particularly among older people). Perhaps in Sydney these Covid times have made people a little more circumspect?

While I don't think I will be starting a walking company, I am now reasonably placed to give advice for others who may venture in this way. One small tip from the Northern Beaches walk and some readers may already be aware of this section, as it is a popular tourist walk. There are two paths up to the Barrenjoey Headland or Lighthouse. The Smugglers Track path outlines 400 metres and 'steps' and is a beautiful scenic walk, but there are I think approximately 518 steps. The other way is a steady and quite steep climb, but evenly graded for access.

### **Public Art**

Another area that has been developed by councils often in collaboration with developers and artists has been public art, particularly contemporary styled installations in parks, walkways, and outside public buildings. I noted St Mary's Cathedral has continued their nativity scene in the foreground area and wondered if this was now seen as 'public art'?

### **Cross Cultural diversity**

Cities have always attracted the bulk of immigrants and Sydney has had waves of people arriving and moving into distinct areas over the time of its European settlement. Some areas are still quite Anglo in their demographic profile, and some like the inner west, have changed from being the dominant immigrant area in the 1960s to 1980s back to a more Anglo and now younger age area. The amazing diversity of cultural expression is vividly and publicly highlighted in the food on display in all the suburbs, the style of the cafes and the coffee offered, and the languages illustrated and spoken.

**Next time:** Reflections on cafes, church life and creation.

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