

Around the Lake. A reflection

I thought it would be helpful to add a few reflections about my walk around Lake Macquarie. Being reliant on public transport, my day-based walks were varied. Sometimes it took five to six hours of travel to arrive at a place I had previously ended on and start the next stage, and then return home. The bus schedule in many places is limited, and a few times I just made the last bus, enabling me to make it home for the day.

Appreciation

I acknowledge the wonderful work of NSW NPWS people, local councils, locals, and other nature enthusiasts who have developed parks, trails, walks and seating all around the lake. Many locals have contributed over the years to trails and 'steppingstones', with some along the foreshore require a nimble footing, but better than a deep wade or a swim.

I am also very appreciative of Scott Bevan's informative history, guide, and homage *The Lake: Exploring a Splendid Sheet of Water*, providing me with helpful advice, background information, ecological contexts, and local reference points.

Blockages or Stoppages

I was not able to walk on the foreshore at all times, though it was certainly my dominant focus and mostly used.

There were two principal areas that I had a more substantial detour around;

Point Wolstoncroft. The entrance sign is certainly not inviting, and related to its primary activity of being a sports and recreation camp (though I did go to a camp and walked all over the peninsula over fifty years ago, so perhaps that counts?)

Morisett Picnic Area. Again the Morrisett Hospital signs are not very welcoming, but also the NSW NPWS advises that the area has been closed.

I also went up and around at various times due to other reasons, with the most prominent reason being inaccessibility. Even the Argan Goats of Morocco would have difficulty in some areas, and I did not bring a wet suit, or was enamored with the idea of swimming around a barren rock outcrop. It was interesting and sometimes intriguing, walking close to the backyards of people, sometimes fenced, often not. In some areas the houses are well set back, at least the one hundred feet base, and one feels more like ambling. However, I was blocked a few times by people who have:

- built out over the foreshore with boatsheds or a form of fencing I could not jump over or manoeuvre around
- placed obstacles in the way, usually a boat or barricade of sorts. One time I climbed over the trailer support of a large boat after a friendly nearby resident said it was all fine as the person was from Sydney and did not know the meaning of hospitality (I won't report their exact wording, but I decided not to mention I had recently moved up from Sydney as well)
- had building structures established prior to the now established foreshore line arrangement and are possibly exempt from the changes.

Rubbish and Dumping

I have been astounded and sickened at the level of dumping in some places, mainly in the forest areas off some of the foreshore areas that are not inhabited, but sometimes extremely near the foreshore. Cars and bikes were a frequent example, but also deposits of paint cans, building materials and household goods. I would pick up insignificant amounts of litter, but carrying a fridge, or a television was beyond me.

Development and housing changes

The variety of housing is incredible, with areas transformed from a hive of fishing shacks to rows of glittering mansions. Battle-axe blocks abound in peninsula areas, making it necessary for one to drive the council bins up to the top for collection, or developing a small structure to house them. There is still an enormous amount of building being undertaken, particularly on hillsides, and in older areas, the replacement of older cottages with the new multi-story show home. Development is spurred on by an increasing number of housing estates, with these varying from Pleasantville style cookie-cutter arrangements to developer covenants that try to blend in or relate more to the natural environment.

Boats Galore and Fishing

I had not realised how many boats there are around the many waterfront suburbs, and how many people are now into fishing. I always regarded fishing as an existential activity, much like the concept of the beach, but it is a foundation now in this area since the conclusion of commercial fishing over a quarter of a century ago. We should give thanks to God for the continued excellent work of Marine Rescue Lake Macquarie.

Coffee Shops

While this is an Australian phenomenon in general, replacing the church as a centre for connection, one could almost navigate the suburbs around the lake by coffee shop, as they have appeared in increasingly regular fashion.

Sculptures and artwork

There are the well-known sculptures around Warners Bay and Speers Point, and also Booragul, but occasionally I found interesting local examples, and wonderfully handmade benches and seating structures.

Memorials for locals

Along many connecting roads, I passed memorials for those killed in car accidents, as well as plaques or displays recognising local citizens, usually for those who contributed to developing or maintaining a park or nature reserve, and the local forest or Landcare area.

Parks and Toilets

Always grateful for the network of parks, usually providing other helpful facilities.

Wildlife

I did not see much in the way of animal or reptile wildlife. Perhaps I am too noisy in my walking or singing? I do have a special fondness for the agile Lace Monitor.

Birds abounded, particularly on the lake itself, and it was an increasing pleasure to begin to be aware of the names of birds apart from the swan.

A Favourite Location?

Well, yes, I do, though while I am often regarded as eccentric or perhaps slightly crazy, I am not crazy enough to mention this in writing. I have enough problems on social media with some of what I think are generally reasonable articles without whipping up a frenzy of sincere impassioned (and perhaps parochial) responses.

There are certainly some areas I will re-walk, and have some I have already done, and in slightly different ways, but some areas I am leaving to my memory.

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