
1.6 Aesthetic values - a walk through Malabar Headland

Lying between Maroubra Beach and Malabar Beach, separated by the old ANZAC Rifle Range, now largely an equestrian school, are two glorious patches of bush, one bounded by the coast, and one bounded by the high-rise housing in Broome Street. These are the best of the last remnants of the once widespread Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub. It is amazing that in the middle of a huge city, there is an area so wild and unspoiled as Malabar Headland. This has been due, in large part, to the hideous crack of the rifles over the years and the unappealing entrance to this area.

As you walk beyond the somewhat polluted stormwater channel at the South end of Maroubra Beach, or along the weed-lined track at the end of Fisherman's Road, (on the Malabar side), or through the Tea-tree on the edge of Pioneer Park, it would seem very unlikely that you would come to places of great natural beauty.

Beyond the storm-water channel at the South end of Maroubra Beach, lies Magic Point, the southernmost point on the Maroubra side. Here the bush track leads to a place guarded by impressive, naturally formed sandstone sculptures which gaze out to sea much as do the Easter Island statues. The waves of the Tasman crash against the formidable cliffs and swirl into a huge cave below. Grey Nurse sharks breed in the underwater caverns, and nowadays tourist vessels are usually there in the mornings with keen divers on board. The sea-life is reputed to be very rich; weedy sea-dragons, sea-horses and pipe-fish flourish. Fishermen weave their way along the beautiful rock ledges above the rock platform to shelter behind huge slabs of fallen rock. There they fish in the swirling waters in the channels made by the hollowing out of the volcanic dykes which forced their way through the ancient sandstone many aeons ago. The richness of these waters is in no small part due to the lack of urban run-off from the cliff tops.

A huge dyke divides Magic Point from Boora Point. Here the sandstone cliffs are even higher, dropping about 40m into the sea below. Above the rock platform at Yellow Rock, they curve under, leaving a frightening overhang. In parts of these vertical cliffs, the golden-pinkish sandstone is spectacularly layered, showing the stratification of the original sediments as they were laid down in the ancient lake that formed the Sydney Basin about 200 million years ago.

From above Yellow Rock to Malabar Beach, the exposed rocky slopes provide little shelter. It is a tough environment for land plants. They have adapted to harsh conditions, as salt-laden air, carried by cold winds, or cool breezes and the hot sun assault the surface. The resulting coastal heath, which fringes the headland, and the banksia scrub behind it, rival the rock structures for beauty.

In spring, in particular, this is an Australian coastal Garden of Eden. Flowers, from large banksia to tiny heaths, are multi-hued, exquisite, varied. Wax flowers, wedding bushes, orchids, irises, sundews, bladderworts, cycads, ferns, flannel flowers, peas, wattles, mallees, and other gums, are among the botanical treasures which grow here. As the soil, and the microclimate changes, so the plant community changes. Each area of sandstone, sand, peat, volcanic gravel, or clay, has its own particular community. For example, the endangered Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub is found only on the white Pleistocene sands.

Between South Maroubra and Pioneer Park, and bounded by Broome Street, lies the more inland, and more sheltered, bush remnant. It is renowned for the different vegetation it has compared to the coastal section. On the exposed rocky tops, there are glorious views to the East, across the riding school and the Headland, and to the South, Malabar Beach, and all the golf courses to Botany Bay National Park. Here on the escarpment above the old rifle range, one can forget the concrete and asphalt, the hustle and bustle, and the somewhat cramped living conditions of the big city. Here one can feel freedom, space and peace, and give thanks that we still have such a place available for public use and enjoyment.