

4: Elouera Walk

Thornleigh to Hornsby, one way

Route:

By car: De Saxe Close, Thornleigh, to Rosemead Road, Hornsby

By train: Thornleigh Station, then Wells St, cross Lovett St; turn left into Tillock St and right into Morgan St. Turn onto the track at the signpost.

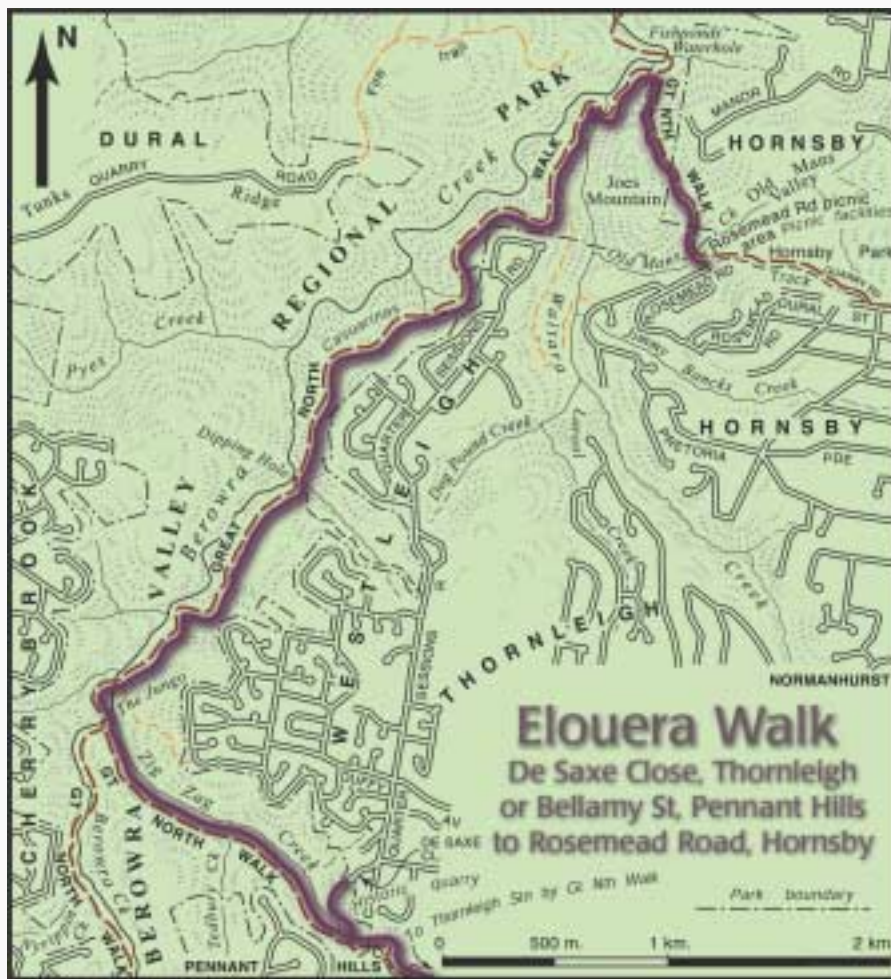
Distance: 9 km

Grade: Moderate, with a few short hard sections

Time: 5 hours

Transport: Rail, or two cars, one at each end

Track status: Official track with fire trail sections



Synopsis:

At 9 km, this is one of the longer walks through the Park and most of the attributes of the upper reaches of the valley can be appreciated along the way.

It will take most of the day at a medium pace.

MAIN POINTS OF INTEREST ARE::

- Historic quarry
- Berowra Creek
- Dipping Hole
- Sandstone ridge)
- Waitara Creek
- Fishponds Waterholes
- Old Mans Valley, Hornsby.

ELOUERA WALK GUIDE

De Saxe Close, Thornleigh, to the Historic quarry

Start from the Park entrance off the turning circle at the end of De Saxe Close. The track begins behind the stone wall marking the park entrance and descends by steps beside the stone embankment supporting the turning circle.

As you go down, note the large tree with pinkish, smooth bark. This is one of many Sydney Red Gums *Angophora costata* that you will see on the walk.

A concrete channel leads into the bush from the base of the turning circle, to take run-off from the nearby housing directly into

the creek bed. It is crossed halfway down the log-formed steps. The channel was built as an experiment, by the then Department of Lands at the request of the *Elouera* Bushland Trust, to inhibit invasion by exotic weeds.

On the steps, just at the concrete channel, are traces of an old road built in about 1890 to carry stone removed from the quarry, now discernible as a bush track.

The concreted roadway at the bottom of the steps was constructed in 2004 as a cycleway. The roadway was constructed on top of a 1912 sandstone-cobbled bullock track. Downhill it heads to the quarry; uphill to the right it passes a sandstone escarpment, then the *Wirreanda* Guide Hall, *Thornleigh*, and ends at the *Timbarra* Road entrance to the Park after about 140 m.

Continue left down the fire trail, along which are a number of well-grown *Sydney* Peppermints *Eucalyptus piperita* and *Sydney* Red Gums *Angophora costata*. After 100 m you will reach the historic sandstone quarry on the left. This a semicircular feature about 50 m in diameter, fashioned into the semblance of an amphitheatre complete with log seating and a few barbecue fireplaces. There is a slight echo effect.

Practically opposite the quarry, beside the site of the former hopper, a track descends steeply to *Zig Zag* Creek and a waterfall, from which the sound of water can be heard in all but the driest conditions.

The quarry was the purpose and end of the old zigzag railway beginning above *Thornleigh* Station. Sandstone was quarried for the construction of the *Main Northern Railway*. [For details see the *Historic Quarry* section in *Chapter 2*.]

Quarry to Zig Zag Creek

Follow the roadway from the quarry down to *Zig Zag* Creek. A substantial bridge for the cycleway crosses the creek beside a vehicle ford and litter trap. The creek here is typical of the headwaters of creeks rising in sandstone country near *Sydney*. The bed is rocky with occasional pools and sandy deposits. Most of the sand in the pools downstream results from disturbance and clearing for building in the residential areas at the head of catchment. Cross the creek and turn right at the tall sewer vent.

Zig Zag Creek to the Jungo

WALK 1: JUNGLO AND WALK 4: *ELOUERA* OVERLAP STARTS

The track leaves the fire trail and becomes a narrow path following *Zig Zag* Creek. Soon you pass through an extensive patch of *Lomandra longifolia*, herbaceous plants with long straplike leaves.

There are views of a steep sheltered cliff on the right. The sunlight slants down through the canopy of *Sydney* Peppermints *Eucalyptus piperita*, *Sydney* Blue Gums *Eucalyptus saligna* and *Sydney* Red Gums *Angophora costata* to highlight leaves, plants and rocks in the dimness of the gully. Old Man *Banksia* *Banksia serrata*, as well as Hairpin *Banksia* *Banksia spinulosa* and Heath-leaved *Banksia* *Banksia*



George Foster

The concrete cycleway and emergency roadway was built in 2004 on top of the 1912 bullock track. That track, as seen in this 1983 photograph, was surfaced with cobbled sandstone. This provided a heavy duty paving of the day for the bullock teams hauling loads of quarried stone ballast.



Hornsby Shire Council

Litter racks installed by the Park managers prevent the worst solid litter from residential areas entering the Park waterways.



John Noble

Spiny-headed Mat-rush *Lomandra longifolia*

Alternative routes to the tall sewer vent

The following are good alternative routes, but they do not pass by the Historic quarry. The description for all routes is the same from the heading 'Zig Zag Creek to the Jungo'.

From Morgan St

For those arriving in

Morgan St on foot from Thornleigh Station, follow the signpost and walk at the rear of properties until the path joins a fire trail. Continue to the tall sewer vent.

From Bellamy St

It is also possible to arrive at the tall sewer vent from Bellamy St. exactly as described at the start of the Jungo Walk



George Foster

Waterfall near the Historic quarry showing the result of a thunderstorm



George Foster

Many overhangs in the Park acquire a veil of water on rainy days.

ericifolia, all grow along here and can be seen flowering from summer to winter. There are also ferns and grass trees.

After about 300 m and just before a walk-marker-post, a side path to the right descends to the sound of running water, opening onto a 10 m-diameter rocky clearing through which the creek passes, trickling down a broad waterfall cascade into a pool of similar size. This is the waterfall below the quarry and hopper site mentioned in the section on the 'Historic quarry and zigzag railway'.

Continue along the main track. Many of the trees have burnt-out trunks where bushfire has reached the central heartwood. When the outer part, the sapwood, survives, so does the tree.

About halfway to the Jungo, just after a pair of 1 m-diameter Sydney Red Gums, you cross a timber bridge over north-flowing Tedbury Creek, which rises beyond Pennant Hills High School in the vicinity of Observatory Park, Pennant Hills Road, Pennant Hills. This bridge and others like it make access easier and prevent disturbance to the plants growing on the banks. Note the soft-leaved fern Common Maidenhair *Adiantum aethiopicum*. Fallen trees and a few large tree stumps along the track remind walkers of the timber-getting era in this area. Eventually the logs decay and add nutrients to the soil, and new trees grow to replace them.

The track rises slightly and you pass through open-forest of Sydney Red Gums and Sydney Peppermints. The valley closes in with the sandstone piling up on both sides, steeper on the right or north-east; this is one of the prettiest sections of the walk.

WALK 1: JUNGO AND WALK 4: ELOUERA OVERLAP ENDS

Jungo to the sandstone ridge

At the Jungo, the walk briefly joins the route of Walk 2: *Callicoma*. Follow the sign pointing to Fishponds, 5.5 km, cross the stream (Berowra Creek), and continue up the steep fire trail, which is concreted as far as the top of the ridge. There, leave the *Callicoma* Track by taking the right fork Great North Walk track, which descends rapidly over sandstone outcropping to Berowra Creek. The small trees lining the banks, with grey bark and yellow flowers, are Water Gums *Tristaniopsis laurina*.

Cross Berowra Creek and turn left (the route to the right goes to Duneba Drive). The next stretch of several hundred metres along the shady creek bank may be the most exciting for the bird watcher, especially in the early morning.

After swinging away from the main stream, cross a small tributary creek bed by a wooden bridge. The path gently undulates. At the next creek crossing, the rocky ridge that has risen on the right becomes a waterfall site of some 12 m height, flowing on rare occasions.

Further along the track there is a rather stiff climb of about 200 m to the top of the valley side. At the summit you will soon realise it was all worthwhile as this is the beginning of the sandstone ridge stretch. Immediately, to the north, there are good views of Thornleigh Gully from the track as it follows the top of a sheer cliff line on the eastern side of the creek.

Sandstone ridgetop and heathland

The change in environment is matched by a change in vegetation, Broad-leaved Scribbly Gums *Eucalyptus haemastoma* being the dominant trees. These are medium-sized trees with smooth white-grey bark. The surface bark is shed annually, revealing the residual signature 'scribbles' from the activities of insect larvae. The other common large shrub is the Dwarf Apple *Angophora hispida*.

A blue haze that may be detected comes from oils given off by the eucalypts. Because of the small bushland area here, the haze is not as obvious as in the large and deep valleys of the Blue Mountains to the west.

Several successive stretches along the edge of the sandstone ridge, with good examples of ridgetop heathland, follow in this section of the walk. Care should be exercised with younger walkers as the track runs on the exposed rock parallel to the top of the cliff line. The valley drops away precipitously and picturesquely to the left, down to the creek far below. Here on the uplands the terrain is dry, sandy and exposed.

Elouera Road track access

During the second and longer cliff section, and a few minutes after reaching the top of the valley side, there is a turn-off to Elouera Road in Westleigh. This is a popular place to pause for refreshment and enjoy the view. The access from Elouera Road also provides an alternative exit or entry for walkers unable to complete the full walk or wishing to do so at another time. There is parking adjacent to the Sydney Water facility at Elouera Road.

Dipping Hole to Blackfellow's Head

After one or two short cliff sections the path drops for a period to a large flat sandstone outcrop with *Banksia*, then falls sharply to an unnamed tributary creek, which you cross first by negotiating the rocks, then one of the early timber bridges installed by Thornleigh Rotary. Here the vegetation, typical of a creekline including Black Wattles *Callicoma serratifolia*, is much denser.

After about 100 m, a rough unofficial track used as a firebreak joins from the right. This is a marker for the next landmark, the Dipping Hole, the turn-off to which is not easy to find. Barely 30 m after the unofficial track, look for 3-4 stone steps down in the path, then a sandstone outcropping surface and finally a 1.8 m high tree stump on the left. Here if you take the track to the left, which may be overgrown, you will, after about 25 m, reach the Dipping Hole.

The Dipping Hole is a broadening of Berowra Creek at a sharp bend, marking the confluence of two creeks. Here you can see Coachwoods *Ceratopetalum apetalum* and Black Wattles *Callicoma serratifolia*. Storm debris may be seen as high as 3m above normal water level.

Continue along the Great North Walk by a timber bridge over the second unnamed tributary creek and a pair of double plank crossings. Follow Berowra Creek through an area dominated by Sydney Red Gums and Sydney Peppermints, many of which have



Look on the ground in this part of the walk for these buds (left) and fruit (right) of *Eucalyptus haemastoma*



Buds (left) and fruit (right) like these of *Angophora hispida* should also be present near the trees that shed them.



Paul Fredrickson

Walkers resting after the steep climb up to the top of the ridge line near the access track from Elouera Road Westleigh.



George Foster

The Dipping Hole shows signs of management issues common in urban areas. Weed infestation exists on the banks and aquatic weeds slow and clog the watercourse itself. Siltation provides the shallower habitats the weeds prefer.



Jamie Wright

Grass Trees *Xanthorrhoea* species carry masses of tiny flowers heavy with nectar sought by birds and insects.



George Foster

Dense and very beautiful concentrations of Grass Trees such as this one create a wonderfully vibrant ambience.



Lyndal Wilson

After fire, Casuarina groves are carpeted only with ash having generally discouraged growth of other species under the mat of "needles". Trees that have lost their canopies do not survive wildfires but the seed cones are activated by fire, restarting the process. During the cycle, other plants occupy the open forest floor, but fail once more as the grove matures.

hollows that are havens for fauna. By-pass a turn-off to the right to Quarter Sessions Road, and pass through numerous large grass trees *Xanthorrhoea arborea* and climb out of the valley, aided by some log-formed steps.

Casuarina country

Descend again. Cross the creek with the sandstone rock-ledge waterfall on the left, below which is a shady valley.

On the other side of the creek the track rises through a glade of Black Sheoak *Allocasuarina littoralis*, which continues for a kilometre or more. Note the characteristic sparse understorey, due to the suppressive effect of the fallen pine needle - like leaves inhibiting the growth of groundcovers, shrubs and other plants. The track rises to higher ground, below Western Crescent, Westleigh, then drops steadily followed by a short rise to another timber bridge over another creek. This bridge is recognised by a Sydney Red Gum *Angophora costata*, which seems to hold it up on the lower side.

One hundred metres later the path crosses yet another tributary, rising fairly steeply through dry, sandy, rocky country, with *Banksia*. This is one of the more difficult parts of the route. Half way up the climb and to the right is a side track to Quarter Sessions Road.

The track wends its way along the slope with good views to the opposite side of the valley. After a while, at a water board inspection cover, housing looms above the track on the right. Fifty metres later a canopy of Black Sheoak *Allocasuarina littoralis* is followed by a tributary crossing where the track bends sharply.

Blackfellows Head to Blue Gum Walk turn-off

The track goes on around Blackfellows Head, the steep-sided end of the long sandstone ridge along which runs Quarter Sessions Road. Prior to urban development, several groups of Aboriginal engravings were present on open rock areas there.

After leaving Blackfellows Head, the track continues along the lower extension of the main ridge where the Fannel flower *Actinotus helianthi* is plentiful. After 100 m or so a rough track joins from the right. A further 70 m, along, Walk 5: *Blue Gum* separates to the right.

Blue Gum turn-off to Rosemead Road

For an alternative description of this section in the reverse direction, see Walk 5: *Blue Gum*.

From here on the track follows the ridge between two converging valleys of Berowra Creek on the left and Waitara Creek on the right, the ridge narrowing and the path favouring first one valley then the other. The track drops steadily, down sections of hewn, formed rock and pine-log steps, around boulders and through dry vegetation.

Waitara Creek is reached after you descend to pass first under a rock overhang, then through ferns and between a pair of Turpentines on the left and a Sydney Red Gum on the right. Immediately cross Waitara Creek at a natural tumble-wash rock system. This place, one

of the highlights of the walk, is an ideal point at which to pause and enjoy the sight and sound of cascading water.

The area now being entered, known as Joes Mountain, was donated to the Trust by the late Dr Joyce Vickery, a botanist with the NSW Department of Agriculture in the Herbarium at the Botanic Gardens. The area of land was approximately twice the size of the more recent \$26,000,000 Hornsby Quarry acquisition by Hornsby Shire Council. (For details see Chapter 1 of the *Guide*.)

Waitara Creek to Fishponds

In the next and interesting stretch to Fishponds, water, rocks, light and sound combine to beautify the setting. The path passes between the creek on the left and Joes Mountain on the right. The confluence of Berowra and Waitara Creeks is easy to miss, occurring below a relatively smooth flat rocky outcrop some 10 m in diameter crossed by the path. Tumbling Waitara Creek makes all the noise as it joins slow-flowing Berowra Creek. Another point of interest is an eroded and colourful rock overhang, with deep honeycombing in the striated sandstone. Water Gums *Tristaniopsis laurina* and Coachwoods *Ceratopetalum apetalum* are common along the banks. After a final 5 m timber bridge and half a dozen log steps you will have reached the picturesque Fishponds Waterhole junction of the tracks.

Fishponds to Rosemead Road

Take the track from Fishponds that leads to Rosemead Road and Hornsby. The branch to the north proceeds to Mt Kuring-gai via Galston Gorge and Crosslands, a walk of around 15 km.

The track to Rosemead Road, Hornsby, joins a fire trail after about 250 m. This continues for nearly a kilometre through sandstone gully forest, among Sydney Red Gums *Angophora costata*, Blackbutts *Eucalyptus pilularis*, Black Wattles *Callicoma serratifolia*, Turpentine *Syncarpia glomulifera* and grass trees. It descends into Old Mans Valley where the vegetation is not only different from the rest of the Park, but also rare in the Sydney basin because of the rich soil developed from the volcanic breccia of the Hornsby diatreme. This vegetation community is known as glen forest. Tall Sydney Blue Gums *Eucalyptus saligna* are common and most of the other scrub is thick and lush. (For details, see Chapter 3: Landscape.)

Rosemead Road to Hornsby Station

When you reach the small park at the end of Rosemead Road, you can continue to Hornsby railway station climbing the old sandstone bush steps that begin in this park. The bush track emerges in Quarry Road. All that remains is several hundred metres by road and footpath to reach Hornsby station.



Jeremy Steele

Eroded section of creekbed reminiscent of old-style laundry tubs.



Marc Thumm

G'day mate! Net-casting spiders like this one will probably have noted you as you pass by, so it is probably best you didn't hear its greeting. Just as well that they're quite small and harmless - at least to monsters like us.

Sandstone steps and 1930s rock graffiti

The steps were built during the depression years of the 1930s, to provide labour for those out of work. The 230 or so steps are the most strenuous part of this walk. Near the top, rock graffiti of a pierced heart (about a square metre in size), a whale, a superman, a kangaroo, a human figure with outstretched arms and a dog — as well as the hammer-picked-out message '*Prosperity around the corner*' are there to be spotted by the truly sharp eyed. It is probable that these were carved around the time the steps were constructed.