

7: Heritage Bridges Walk

Clarinda St. Wetlands, Steele Military Bridge, Tunks Ridge, Galston Gorge and McDonald Truss Bridge

Start: Clarinda Street Wetlands, Hornsby.

Route: Clarinda Street, Steele Military Bridge, Tunks Ridge Rest Area

Distance: 5.4 km one-way

Grade: Moderate to hard

Time: 3 - 6 hours

Transport: Car at each end if walking one way

Track status: Begins on one fire trail then a steep track to join the next fire trail, includes sections of Great North Walk. The last 500 metres is difficult.

Synopsis

This walk begins at the western end of Clarinda Street, where cars may conveniently be left in the street. Most walkers would probably prefer to walk one way and arrange for a car to be available at Galston Gorge picnic area where there is parking for three cars. There is mobile phone coverage at Tunks Ridge Rest Area.



HERITAGE BRIDGES WALK GUIDE

Introduction

The Clarinda Street Constructed Wetland

This is an example of how Hornsby Council is controlling and treating storm water run-off. The area is now populated by a variety of frogs and birds, including wood ducks. Near the wetland is a population of the rare eucalypt *Eucalyptus camfieldii*. The wetland also contains a variety of sedges and rushes, and open water.

Take the fire trail to the right. Trees along the top of the ridge include Silver-top Ash *Eucalyptus sieberi*, Sydney Peppermint *Eucalyptus piperita*, Grey Gum *Eucalyptus punctata*, Red Gum *Angophora costata* and Black Sheoak *Allocasuarina littoralis*.

Lyndel Wilson



Members of the Qarinda Wetlands Remediation Group assisting Council in the ongoing maintenance of the area

Jeremy Steele



Large Sydney Peppermint *Eucalyptus piperita*

Jeremy Steele



Downstream view from the Steele bridge shows the dense foliage of the Water Gum, Black Wattle and Coachwood trees along the creek.

Lookout and westerly valley view

About 200 metres on the left a lookout on an interesting split rock shelf gives good westerly views into the valley. Continue downhill, veer left, cross a small creek, then proceed uphill to a junction at a large clearing. Take the left fire trail. Notice a large burl about four metres up the trunk of a Red Gum. The trail crosses a concrete watercourse and sewer line. After a big rock outcrop on the right, houses on Meredith Avenue are visible at the top of the cliff.

At the round sewer manhole, turn left from the fire trail onto a track which leads down the slope to a Casuarina forest on the left. Negotiate your way around fallen trees, then go down the constructed steps to the rocky creek lined by Coachwoods *Ceratopetalum apetalum*. Notice the unusual shape of the Coachwood to the right of the waterfall. Climb up the stone steps on the other side of the gully and turn right onto the fire trail which leads to Steele Military Bridge. There is a sign at this point indicating the distance to Galston Gorge (4 km) and Fishponds (4 km).

Gradually as the fire trail drops into the gully, the trees become taller. Sydney Peppermints, characterised by bark hanging in strips from the upper branches, and the large smooth barked Sydney Red Gums become more prevalent.

The sound of the creek can be heard as you advance and the undergrowth becomes more characteristic of rainforest. There are ferns, water gums, and stands of Grey Myrtle *Backhousia myrtifolia*. You may hear a tree creeper, a whipbird or a lyrebird.

Steele Military Bridge

At the foot of the hill the Steele Military Bridge¹, now one of only four remaining in service, crosses Berowra Creek.

Here the track joins the Great North Walk. A sign points left to Fishponds (a route that crosses the hazardous Rifle Range Safety Zone). For this walk, take the fire trail to the right, following the Great North Walk. Beside the fern lined trail are tall Coachwoods with patches of pale green lichen on the trunks. Other trees are Black Wattle *Callicoma serratifolia*, White Sally *Acacia floribunda*, Christmas Bush *Ceratopetalum gummiiferum*, Blueberry Ash *Elaeocarpus reticulatus*, Water Gum *Tristaniopsis laurina*, and Forest Oak *Allocasuarina torulosa*. The Sydney Red Gums seem to increase in magnificence.

After a steep climb you encounter low open woodland with a scrubby understorey of heath species, dominated by white trunked Scribbly Gums *Eucalyptus haemastoma*. There are also Heath-leaved Banksia *Banksia ericifolia*, Dwarf Apple *Angophora hispida* and a paperbark teatree *Leptospermum trinervium*. A rare plant species, *Melaleuca deanei*, found here is a haven for honey eaters and other birds.

1. For more information see "Rare examples of Australian bridge engineering preserved in the Park", at the commencement of this walk description.

The Tunks Ridge Rest and Camping Area

The Tunks Ridge Rest Area, a large semi-cleared area where camping is permitted, is at the junction of the Great North Walk and another fire trail which leads to Quarry Road, Dural, along Tunks Ridge. Please be aware that the route of this fire trail crosses the Rifle Range Safety Area at an elevation similar to that of the range. If you wish to explore this long trail, do not enter the sign posted restricted area. From the rest area, proceed along the Great North Walk toward Galston Gorge 1.9 km away.

The track passes through shady open forest with a mature shrub layer. Trees include Red Bloodwood *Corymbia gummifera*, Yellow Bloodwood *Corymbia eximia*, Narrow-leaved Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus racemosa* and Black Sheoak *Allocasuarina littoralis*. Three species of Geebung may be noted: Fine-leaved Geebung *Persoonia pinifolia*, Narrow-leaved Geebung *Persoonia linearis* with dark flaky bark and the Broad-leaved Geebung *Persoonia levis* with smooth pale green leaves and red branches. There are a few Grey Gums *Eucalyptus punctata*. In the understorey you can see Conesticks *Petrophile pulchella*.

Disturbed soil could be the scratchings of lyrebirds or echidnas. At a shady clearing at the summit the trees are unexpectedly tall, probably owing to the presence of deeper soil than usually found on ridge tops. The fire trail divides to become a short loop to enable fire fighting vehicles to turn around. Take either branch of the loop. Within the loop is a rock platform heath community where the plants have adapted to the shallow sandstone soil.

Walkers' register and steep final descent to Galston Gorge bridges

At the far end of the loop leave the fire trail to take the narrow rugged track 500 metres down to the creek in Galston Gorge. This picturesque section of the walk is suitable only for the very fit. Not far from the beginning of the track is a clearly marked metal box containing a register in which walkers are encouraged to record their journey and make appropriate comments. The track passes along a level rock ledge for about forty metres then resumes its steep descent, passing rock overhangs and squeezing through crevices. A scramble over rocks is made easier by eight or so metal rungs.

The McDonald Truss Bridge

Towards the end a section with a safety fence affords a good view of Galston Gorge with the bridge crossing Berowra Creek. Finally the picnic area and the road through Galston Gorge is reached. There are two bridges here as this is the confluence of Berowra and Tunks Creeks. The Tunks Creek Bridge¹ is of historical significance as it is now one of only five McDonald Truss Bridges remaining in use. The larger bridge over Berowra was replaced some years ago by a modern concrete bridge.

1. See "Rare examples of Australian bridge engineering preserved in the Park" page 181 of this Guide



Part of the steep section down to the Galston Gorge bridges

Jeremy Steele



Walkers must be willing and able to negotiate this steel-rung ladder.

Jeremy Steele

Extended 6.8 km Rocky Fall Rapids Walk to Crosslands

From the Galston Gorge picnic area the walk can be extended along The Great North Walk to Crosslands, some 6.8 km away.

The walk traverses the deep gorge environment, climbs over rocky sparsely vegetated ridges and passes the present head of tidal influence at the location known as Rocky Fall Rapids.

From there the walk continues along the wooded flats beside the widening marine headwaters before reaching Crosslands.

A full walk description is not included in this guide but details are included in the Great North Walk brochure available from NPWS or Hornsby Shire Council.