

Parramatta River Three Islands Paddle

Saturday 13 December 2014

Our paddle starts out from the Woolwich Peninsula, the suburb's name being derived from its namesake Woolwich, by the banks of the Thames in London. Parramatta River had been known as the 'Thames of the Antipodes' and other nearby suburbs, also named after Thames localities of Greenwich, Putney and Henley Point. The area's Aboriginal name is 'Mookaboola', which means 'meeting of waters', that being, the Lane Cove River and Parramatta River.



After paddling down the northern side of the peninsula we round the eastern tip where we make our way over to the Woolwich Dock, a former dry dock and shipyard. The site was purchased by Morts Dock and Engineering Company in 1898. It was the biggest dry dock in Australia, at 188 metres long and 27 metres wide. The dock opened for business in 1901 and although no longer operated as a dry dock is still used for maritime purposes as a large yacht marina and boat yard.

After close up and personal inspection of the dock we head southward to visit Spectacle Island which was once an explosives powder magazine and armament depot while in later years it became a training facility of the Naval Reserve Cadets. As this is a naval facility, boats are required to keep a clearance of 60 meters from its shores, but through special negotiations with the Navy, we have been granted permission to go ashore to take photographs of the heritage listed buildings and view the island's surrounds.



Our next island we visit is Snapper, which is the smaller, of the three islands.

This Island was once used as a storage facility then later by Sydney's naval cadet groups and the Navy League from 1932 to 1977, and as such provided a voluntary step towards recruitment in the



Australian Navy. The buildings on the island house various maritime artefacts but are now currently closed to the public.

Our third island that we will be visiting is Cockatoo Island which is Sydney Harbour's largest island, a former convict prison and industrial shipyard. This is where the real part of our journey begins. Once ashore we take time to stretch our legs and relax over morning tea

before taking in a one and half hour island tour to absorb the history and resonance of this magnificent place.

Cockatoo Island has a long and illustrious history dating back to the time of first settlement, playing a significant role in the development of Sydney and the nation.

Frequented by sulphur-crested cockatoos, the island's first visitors were most likely the Eora people, the Aboriginal people of Sydney's coastal region. They called the island Waremah. It would have been a great base to fish from for them, in their bark canoes made from the red gum forests that once covered the island's hill.



Cockatoo Island Spectacle Island Snapper Island

In 1839 the Governor of the colony of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, chose Cockatoo Island as the site of a new penal establishment to alleviate overcrowding on Norfolk Island. Convicts were put to work building prison barracks, a military guardhouse and official residences.



The Fitzroy Dock and a workshop were built in 1850 by prisoners to service Royal Australian Navy and other ships.

Between 1870 and 1880 prisoners were relocated to Darlinghurst Gaol and the island was used for an Industrial School for Girls and a reformatory. The ship, Vernon, was anchored nearby to train wayward and orphaned boys.

From the late 1800s shipbuilding and repair activities expand steadily and Sutherland Dock was completed. The island reverted back to a gaol from 1888 to 1908 due to overcrowding elsewhere.

Cockatoo Island became the Commonwealth Naval Dockyard in 1913 and Australia built its first steel warship on the island.



In the mid 1900's, the island became the major shipbuilding and dockyard facility for the South West Pacific in WWII following the fall of Singapore.

Between 1945 and 1965: Additional buildings are constructed for shipbuilding and repair. The refit of T-Class submarines occurred and the Navy destroyers, HMAS Voyager and HMAS Vampire, were built.

From 1965 to 1992 the island's work included service and refit of Oberon Class submarines and construction of HMAS Success. The dockyard closed in 1992, machinery was sold off, and about 40 buildings and several wharves were demolished.



Cockatoo Island lays dormant for over a decade until the Sydney



Harbour Federation Trust assumed control of the island and embarked on major restoration works. After extensive remediation works, Cockatoo Island was opened to the public in 2007.

In 2010 Cockatoo Island, together with 10 other historic convict sites in Australia, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Please see our program for a summary of event information and bookings, or [click here](#) to make an advance booking. Comprehensive event information including maps is e-mailed to all participants.