

After arriving on Bennetts Beach a 20 metre high mobile sandune "Baldy" is located behind the beach, metres to the south. Climb to the top for panoramic views of Yacaaba, Tomaree (South Head), Nelson Bay, Port Stephens, Bennetts Beach and the offshore islands. Return to the beach and head for the base of Yacaaba, 2km away. Constantly watch for dolphins as this is the southern part of "The Dolphin Playground", the chances of seeing dolphins on Bennetts Beach is amongst the highest of any beach in Australia. Upon reaching the base of the headland DO NOT take the more substantial track on your right. This is NOT the summit trail which is the left track and starts to climb straight away.



The track veers left soon after and levels, the summit is about 100m away. The view is one of the most panoramic on the NSW coast, taking in the Inner and Broughton Islands, 50km of ocean beaches to Seal Rocks in the north, all of Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest, Port Stephens, its southern volcanic hills and beaches, Fingal Head and Lighthouse and Stockton Bight and Newcastle beyond.

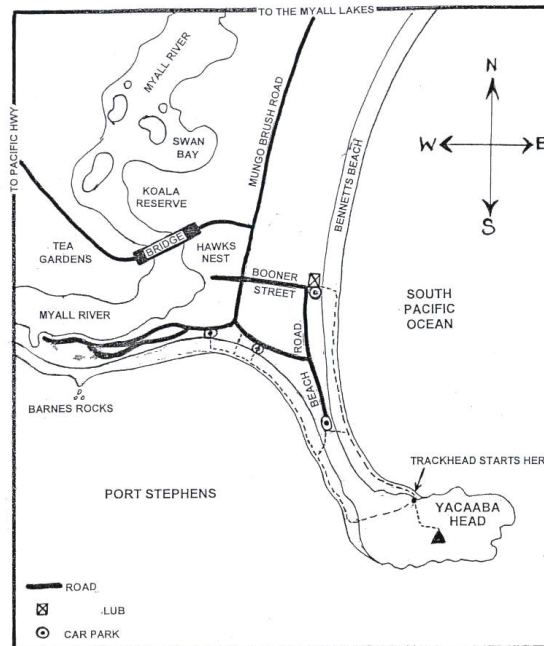
In June/July and October/November, look to the sea for whales on their migration route which is usually a couple of kilometres seaward of the Inner Islands.



Bottlenose Dolphins, South Bennetts Beach

The track starts off through Blackbutt and angophora forest on sandy soil overlaying the volcanic bedrock. Understorey plants include grasstrees, banksias and spring wildflowers. Keep an eye out for echidnas and goannas. After about half an hour is a small cleared area, large overhanging Blackbutt and a good view of the Yacaaba Isthmus and Hawks Nest through a clearing the trees. You are now about 2/3rds of the way to the summit.

Have a break before starting the steeper, rockier trail on the right. With the rocky soil there is an instant change in vegetation consisting of casuarinas and hakeas and different species of eucalypt. Approaching the top and on the right are some eucalypts almost completely stripped of leaves, the culprits being Koalas, which are there about 30 % of the time.



Return to the base and if time permits take the optional hour add-on walk via the boulders, Dolphin Hole and Jimmys Beach directly on the shores of Port Stephens. It is well worth it. Take the track you were advised not to take before, which is now on your left. Walk through swampforest and rainforest, which is unfortunately being spoilt in places by the invasive coastal weed bitou bush and rainforest weed lantana. After five minutes you will arrive at the tiny Boulder Beach, overlooking Tomaree and the southern villages of the Port. Boulders Beach is a famous surfing spot which only works well a few times a year. The rest of the time it is deserted apart from the dolphins. Walk to the left, to the southern end of the beach and out on to "the Boulders". Dolphin Rock is about 300m to the southwest (100m from the shore). While actually three rocks, the main one is distinctively flat, about 5m x 5m and protrudes about 1½m from the water at low tide. For a closer view proceed south along the thousands of piled up rocks which give the Boulders its name. They are unstable ankle twisters, only those who are sure footed should proceed.

Surfers Shelter Boulders Beach

Walk back along Boulder Beach. There are about 100m of uneven rocks before reaching Jimmys Beach. Take extreme care as these are also uneven rocks. (If in doubt, return via the rainforest track and Bennetts Beach). If you do make it across the rocks, there are then great protected swimming spots. After a well deserved dip, continue along Jimmys Beach 1km until Baldy and nearby dunes appear on your right 100m across the peninsula. Several small tracks, which are difficult to locate, will lead you across the low sparsely vegetated dunes to Baldy, Bennetts Beach and the nearby carpark. Around Dolphin Rock you will almost certainly see dolphins. They regularly play within a 300m radius of the rock, including off Boulder Beach, in a concentration that, along with Bennetts Beach, is almost certainly the highest on Australia's East Coast



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SAFETY FIRST

As with all walks, know your limits before you set off. Walking in midsummer heat can be dangerous.

Around rocky shorelines always watch for slippery surfaces, uneven rocks and ocean swells. Only experienced walkers should veer from the suggested track, people have become lost and even died on Yacaaba.

Dingoes—chances are high you could see a Dingo any where on this walk. Dingos are of the canine family and were brought to Australia by Aborigines some 5000 years ago. Today they are usually solitary and harmless, but very inquisitive. Unfortunately when they become accustomed to man and fed, they can become potentially aggressive. For yours and their protection keep them wild, observe from a distance, NEVER approach or feed them (\$500 fine and be extra cautious with small children.

ABORIGINAL AND EUROPEAN HISTORY

Yacaaba was sacred to the local Aboriginal tribe, the Worimi. This mystical headland supplied bountiful food, shelter from all weather and a lookout. Evidence of past occupation includes burial sites and middens. The meaning of Yacaaba is not certain but is most likely "Place of Lookout".

During World War II and the threat of Japanese invasion most of the forts, to protect from potential invasion, were located on the south head Tomaree. These are visible from Yacaaba. There were only very small forts on Yacaaba and little evidence of their existence remain. Yacaaba was included as part of the Myall Lakes National Park in the 1980's.

YACAABA PENINSULA AND HEADLAND WALK

The "Blue Water Paradise" and "Dolphin Capital of Australia" Port Stephens, is guarded by two large volcanic headlands.

Many international visitors liken these to the mountains behind Rio de Janeiro, or if sailing, the steep slopes resemble images of Tahiti.

The largest and most spectacular, North Head, is known better by its Aboriginal name of Yacaaba. The 217m peak is easily accessible from Hawks Nest, a must do for those with a morning to spare on the Myall Coast.

Apart from almost guaranteed chances of dolphin sightings on the beaches, walkers will cross a variety of vegetation zones and be rewarded with summit views of all of the coastlines geographic features.

Port Stephens 60km of dazzling beaches. The Myall Lakes and River, Alum Mountain and offshore islands.

Distance — 6km return

Duration—3 hours return (Dolphin Hole and Jimmys Beach detour—allow 1 hour extra)

Highlights—Spectacular views, spring wildflowers, dolphins, chance of seeing koala, dingo and other wildlife.

Grade—Moderate, steep and rocky near the summit

Best Time—Morning

Access—Start at the car park at end of gravel section of Beach Road, Hawks Nest (refer Map). Walk onto Bennetts Beach via the beach access on the eastern side of the car park, base of headland is 2km along the beach.

YACAABA

Yacaaba Headland Walk
North Shore, Port Stephens
Photograph ©Christian Patteson



GEOLOGY

Yacaaba is mostly volcanic rock but is not a volcano. A layer of granite-like andesite is overlain by toscanite. What remains of the dykes is basalt and dolerite. On the southern shoreline is a section of chunky conglomerate.