

KIAMA FIELD TRIP



Geographical Society and Geography Teachers' Association NSW

Bruce Ryan

The Geographical Society sponsored an undemanding walking tour of Kiama on Saturday, May 12, 2012. It was an educationally unpretentious event, after which no examination was required. Despite predictions of a cold day (who really needs weather forecasters when half those present were in the grip of arthritis?), the sun shone and the sky was blue and the sea was relaxed. Despite the moon's being at its perigee, the king tides had retreated, leaving only minor festoons of beach gravel and dwarf kelp along the promenade.

Sixteen punctual participants assembled at the Kiama railway station at noon, and got back there at 4:30 p.m., six kilometres later and six pounds lighter. Some came suitably attired for a Swiss Alpine challenge, not knowing what to expect, while others wore weekend fatigues, expecting only to sleepwalk. We ambled around the Blow Hole peninsula (averting vertigo), along the Black Beach promenade (shielded from wave-splash by the seawall), through the business district (cluttered with sidewalk coffee guzzlers), across the playing fields that now occupy the old Pike's Hill bluestone quarry, and past the hillcrest Victorian-era mansions of Bong Bong Street. Box lunches were consumed while sitting on the sunny seawall of Black Beach (despite the leader's preference for melanoma-

reducing shade), and afternoon tea was partaken in a few of the 37 assorted cafes along Terralong Street. Regrettably, the finest building in Kiama (the post office of 1879, not the Glenn Murcutt house) was sheathed in scaffolding and wrapped in blue plastic (like some Mothers' Day gift by Christo), in case conservative local residents died of shock after seeing the new pink paint.

Many participants made a photo record of the route, while some annotated the handout for later classroom use or student field trips. The guide was Bruce Ryan, a resident of Kiama for the past decade, who strove to garnish geographical features and historical developments with dubious spot-specific anecdotes, confirming Mark Twain's assertion that Australian history was all lies. As a fully-tenured retiree with a short attention span, he forgot to issue the evaluation questionnaires which contemporary educational practice mandates. The paper manufacturers and waste recyclers were furious at this omission.

Instead, some participants volunteered their own observations. A Japanese student was most impressed by the public assembly zone where the Anzac Day parade begins. A beach-runner from Bilgola was constantly looking for traces of Irish heritage. He and his wife came equipped

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with hiking staves, obviously prepared for Kiama's steep hills, infrequent pedestrian crossings, garden reptiles, unruly day-trippers from Western Sydney, and bogan hoons from Wollongong. [Fortunately, since the route climbed to only 60 metres above sea level, nobody contracted mountain sickness or suffered a nose-bleed.] An educator from Caringbah, accompanied by friends from Lismore, was pleased to see the lighthouse which his grandfather had painted—still white, still unspoiled by graffiti. Others paused at the "historic" Moreton Bay fig tree where the first church service had been held, and the first council chambers erected, relieved (or annoyed) that religion and government were now better housed. Several walkers liked the way the historic bluestone Infants School (1871–93) had been incorporated into the Sebel Hotel as its function centre. The Blow Hole itself merely sneezed that afternoon, disdainful of such distinguished visitors, although two days later there were four-metre swells that drenched spectators.

The only altercation occurred outside the Family History Centre, by which we paused just when

the Kiama & District Historical Society was going home from an afternoon talk on the town's former pharmacies. One of its members (absent-mindedly still wearing his pyjama pants) recognised our group leader as a tennis opponent, and expressed disbelief (and dismay) that anybody could endure his inanities and ignorance for half a day. Fortunately, the comment came only fifty metres from the railway station, where the walk terminated and the collective sigh of relief was lost in the south-easterly breeze.

Photograph: Kiama Walking Tour Participants

Front Row: Aika Kimoto, Shuichi Hamura, Christine Edwards, Patsy Holmes, David Holmes, Richmond Manyweathers, Mrs. Manyweathers

Middle Row: Pauline Dowd's friend, Mr. & Mrs. Lismore, John Bliss, Susan Bliss

Back Row: Andrew Poyitt, Bruce Ryan, Cheryl Brennan

Photograph by Pauline Dowd (location: steps between Terralong Street & Black Beach, Kiama)

