



—Peter Stekel

A SECLUDED nude beach in Australia's historic Royal National Park (about two hours south of Sydney), Werrong is legal, scenic, accessible by public transportation and a perfectly lovely place to spend the day.

Australian Naturist Locations: Werrong Beach New South Wales

Peter Stekel

I WAS THE ONLY ONE to get off the train in Otford, two hours south of Sydney. I took a look around. The metal-topped buildings of old brick houses winked at me through the crowns of eucalyptus trees and the silent macadam streets bid me up into the surrounding hills. Not a soul wandered the streets of town. After getting my bearings, I shouldered my daypack and headed off to Werrong Beach.

Raucous cawing of parrot-like *galahs* and Australian ravens followed me as I climbed the foot track from the station to Fanshawe Road. Fanshawe took me to Lady Wakehurst Drive, up a steep hill to

the Princes Highway, Otford Gap, and the beginning of the trail to Werrong Beach. From the Gap could be seen views of Wollongong and about a dozen hang gliders and parasailers making use of the updrafts along the Illawarra escarpment.

I crossed the highway, found the trailhead easily, and stopped to read the orientation sign. There I learned that Werrong is the only authorized nude beach in Royal National Park. That was good news. Though clothed people may use the beach as well, I knew I wouldn't be annoyed by pesky uniformed purveyors of public taste telling me what to do.

I took note that Werrong is also known as Hell Hole because of dangerous rip currents. "Bathers should beware," the sign said. I took that to mean there would be no lifeguards on duty.

The trail took me down a steep descent of about one kilometer, past a trail junction and along a cliff that plunged down into the Pacific Ocean, probably 1,200 meters below. This trailhead is also the beginning of the 26K Coastal

Walk, a popular overnight trip that takes hikers through palm jungles, eucalyptus forests, and past high sandstone cliffs, river mouths, and bays to end in the tiny town of Bundeena. A ferry and train from there returns hikers to Sydney afterwards.

Through the heat and humidity of mid-day, I walked under a forest of red gum and *bangalay* (two kinds of eucalyptus trees) and through patches of cabbage tree palms in the gullies. There are supposed to be ring-tailed possums and a variety of birds to be found, but I think they knew better than to be out and about during the hottest time of day.

I finally got to the beach, none too soon I might add, and stripped off my sweaty clothes and ran across the sandy beach for a waist-deep plunge into the ocean. Remembering the sign's warning about Hell Hole, I didn't venture far. After a refreshing dunk, I gathered up my gear and looked around.

Werrong Beach is a mixture of sand and gravel with groups of smoothed rock

sticking out in patches. Behind the beach is a bench land with grass and shade trees which afford good places not only to get out of the sun, but also to nap and picnic. At the bottom of the trail is a pit toilet with a great view, but with no walls, so everyone else has a great view too. The cove surrounding the beach rises quickly into cliffs and is large with many places to spread out and find privacy. I resolved to carry my trash out as the bins at the beach were overflowing.

I had the beach pretty much to myself. There was a family on holiday from France. The parents went sans clothes, but their two pre-teen daughters romped around in swim suits. An Australian family was nude, and their two-year-old son was having a great time playing in the sand. A couple of teenage boys tried to skip stones across the swells and a group of men, who might have been body-builders, had erected a shade canopy on the far side of the beach so they could enjoy the view without the sun.

Australians are pretty sensitive to the dangers of too much sun. The famous (or infamous, depending upon your viewpoint) hole in the ozone is above the Australian continent and the country is said to possess the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world. For that reason, and because of their fair-skinned English heritage, beach goers wear wide-brimmed hats and are constantly slathering sunscreen over themselves.

I ate my lunch, drank my drink, and delved into my book. A few hours passed by quickly. So, after basking in the sun and absorbing a healthy dose of UV rays, and taking a couple of more dips in the sea, I figured it was time to explore Werrong and the hillside behind the beach. For that I put on shoes and more sunscreen, but didn't remove my hat.

A few minutes spent in the bush convinced me that the beach was a much nicer place to be. Quite a few plants in Australia have sharp points and they gouged into my flesh, doing a good job of scratching my arms and legs. The local population of biting flies and a squadron of mosquitoes ("mozzies" in local parlance) took to me quite nicely, as did more than my fair share of ticks. Off with the shoes and back into the water for me!

As I had little choice in when my return train ride for Sydney left, I was able to enjoy a long day of leisure at Werrong Beach. Unfortunately, even a day spent in idleness must end, so late in the day I dressed and made my way up the steep hill to Otford Gap and then



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SIGNS WILL LEAD one in the proper direction of the "unclad" beach. Heed warnings about strong rip currents; bring sunscreen and water and, as anywhere, take your trash with you when you leave.

retraced my steps to the train station. All in all, it was a fine day.

For those interested in a trip to Werrong Beach, the two-hour train trip from Sydney is not to be missed. After leaving the suburbs of Sydney, you'll wind through the hills of Heathcote National Park on its eastern boundary with Royal National Park. Royal was the first Australian National Park, proclaimed in 1879, making it the world's second-oldest national park. Originally called The National Park, its 16,000 hectares were renamed following Queen Elizabeth's visit to Australia in 1954.

Services are slim in the Otford area so it's best to bring your own food and drinks. If you're lucky, you'll find a restaurant open on the Princes Highway, opposite Otford Gap, but don't count on it.

If you choose to drive, rental cars can be hired through Bayswater Car Rental in Kings Cross (120 Darlinghurst, phone 9360 3622 to reserve your car in advance). They have the best rates but they still aren't cheap. Get yourself a good street map of Sydney (you'll need it to get out of town) and an even better map of the surrounding area so you end up in Otford and not somewhere else. Australian highway maps are notoriously poor and will often not include all the smaller roads or towns of an area.

If you do drive, there are some wonderful places to stop and visit on your way between Werrong and Sydney. Detour through Royal National Park and visit

their excellent visitor center near Audley. Audley itself is a nice stopping place. The dinky historic town has canoe and bike rentals and a lovely spot to picnic alongside the Kangaroo River. If you've lots of time, bike the 10-kilometer (one-way) Lady Carrington Drive Track, between Audley and Lady Wakehurst Drive. By all means avoid the town of Bundeena unless you're badly in need of fuel or groceries. Public transport by ferry, train, or bus is a natural and accepted form of getting around in Australia. It's inexpensive (less than A\$5.00 will get you just about anywhere by train), fast, efficient, and obviates the need to drive expensive rental cars in a country where the driving rules are different.

Taking the train from Sydney isn't necessarily tricky, but it does require a modicum of planning as all southbound trains don't go all the way to Otford. Pick up a City Rail schedule at any station to check the timetable or call the City Rail information line at 131 500 between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., daily. They'll supply you with information regarding fares, timetables, and tickets. Information about Royal National Park can be obtained, once you are in Sydney, by calling 9542 0648 or by writing to P.O. Box 44, Sutherland NSW 1499.

For the Australian traveler in search of a secluded and beautiful clothing-optional beach, Werrong Beach in Royal National Park is a great place to visit. Coupled with good friends, a picnic lunch, and public transportation, Werrong Beach makes for an excellent full day activity.