

Illawarra Escarpment Walking Track

Otford to Bulli Tops, part of the long-awaited Great Southern Walk



Length: Up to 19km Time: Up to 6 hours Grade: 3-4 Style: One way Transport: Car, train or bus to start, car pickup at end

The **Illawarra escarpment** provides an iconic bushwalking destination well under two hours travel from the centre of Sydney. About 30% is State Conservation Area and has several defined walking tracks.

The **Great Southern Walk** (GSW) is a newly established route from Botany Bay in the south of Sydney to Bulli Tops, northwest of Wollongong. A longer term view has the walk continuing to the southern Illawarra and maybe even to the Shoalhaven.

This brochure describes a section that can be completed as a medium to longish day walk and includes breathtaking escarpment and coastal views as well as bushland with high biodiversity.



Illawarra escarpment south from Bald Hill

Photo: Graham Burgess

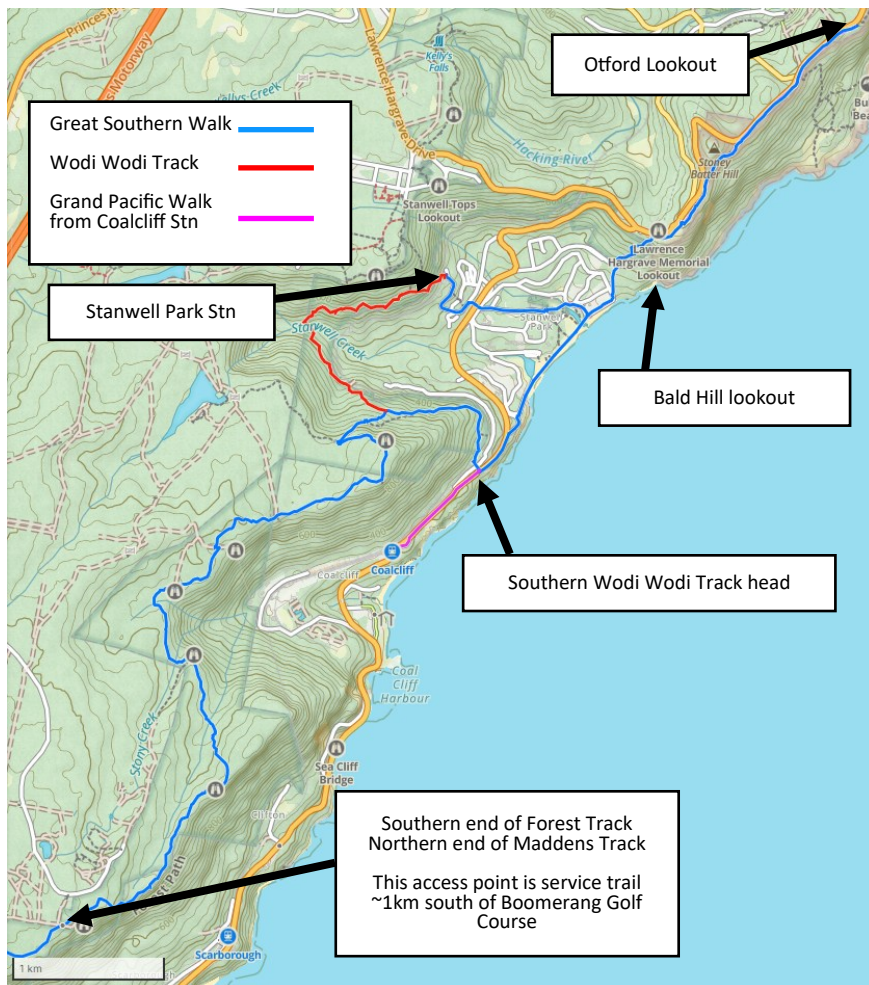
Getting started - There are several choices of starting point for the walk;

1) Otford lookout is at the southern boundary of the Royal NP. Parking gets very busy at times. There's also train access at Otford but a steep walk uphill to start. From here a roadside track goes south then stays east of the rocky knoll called Stony Batter Hill before arriving at Bald Hill lookout with fabulous views. From here a new track commencing at the western edge of the Bald Hill reserve steeply descends to Stanwell Park village and beach. The Great Southern Walk route then follows the beach and up the hill on the southern side to eventually join the Wodi Wodi track per 4) below.

2) Starting at Stanwell Park station provides two options. The recommended GSW route is down to Stanwell Park village to join the main route heading south, or;

3) A riskier (and not recommended till it is upgraded) option is to start from Stanwell Park station. From the western platform follow the signposted track, then a few hundred metres uphill southwest of the station turn left on to the main Wodi Wodi track. This track is well known in the area but can suffer from erosion and is inconsistently signposted. It involves a steep and slippery climb down through rainforest to Stanwell Creek and should not be attempted soon after heavy rain. Once at the creek it is possible to take a side trip downstream to the unique railway viaduct built in 1920. Back at the creek crossing there is a climb out to the south east. Eventually you reach a tee junction which is presently signposted 'Forest Track, Maddens Plains 6 km'. At this point you join the GSW heading up Mt Mitchell.

4) If travelling by car a logical starting point is the GSW (also southern Wodi Wodi) track head on Lawrence Hargrave Drive about 1 km south of Stanwell Park village shops. This can also be reached by walking 1 km or so along the pathway north from Coalcliff station, the Grand Pacific Walk. From here the Wodi Wodi track goes under the rail line then skirts north and west around the base of Mt Mitchell for about 500 m (easy rising). It meets the intersection presently signposted 'Forest Track, Maddens Plains 6 km'.



Northern section of Illawarra Escarpment Walking Track
Otford to Maddens Plains

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Delightful bush and waterways of the Illawarra escarpment

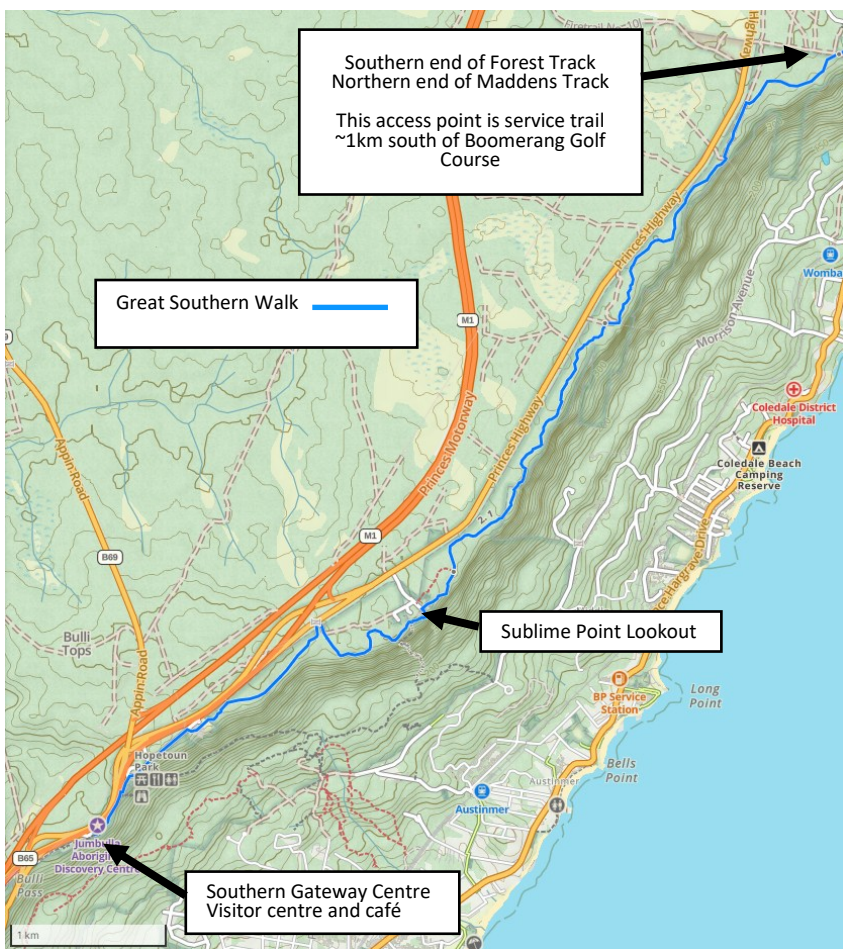
Photo: Graham Burgess

To the top of Mt Mitchell

On the Forest Track route you will ascend new sandstone steps some 130m in about 1km up to the top of Mt Mitchell to find a lookout point on an exposed rock slab at the highest point. Some refer to this climb as the Bullock Track, indicating its history. Here you can enjoy a break and admire the expansive views across Stanwell Park and Bald Hill. You may see hang gliders flying if the wind is good, with the Royal National Park further north.

Mt Mitchell lookout to Maddens Plains

The Forest Track, undulating for about 6 km, is a well established and popular section of the escarpment walk. From the northern end at Mt Mitchell follow the well defined track. It crosses a number of service roads and watercourses and passes through many vegetation communities, and is an excellent introduction to escarpment flora. The southern end of this section of track can also be accessed from a service trail on the Old Princes Highway, 4.2 km north of the Sublime Point turnoff/ 1km south of Boomerang Golf Corse.



Southern section of Illawarra Escarpment Walking Track
Maddens Plains to Bulli Tops Gateway Centre

Maddens Plains to Sublime Point lookout

The Maddens Track is a fairly flat, 5 km route with an extensive section of boardwalk to protect a swamp. Take care to follow the correct path at the power line easements though. A few hundred meters from the end you will meet the Woodward Nature Trail loop track. Either way on the loop takes you to Sublime Point lookout but the eastern route is the most interesting where you will find a good resting spot at the NPA donated picnic table along the way. The western side of the loop is the easier option with boardwalks. There are picnic and toilet facilities at Sublime Point.

Sublime Point lookout to Austinmer

This section closed for major works till mid 2026

At the southern side of the Sublime Pt picnic area a well defined ~1km track takes the very steep descent involving some 1200 steps down to Austinmer village and a further ~1 to 1.5km to the railway station and beach. Bus services are also available at Austinmer.

Sublime Point lookout to Panorama House and Bulli Tops Gateway Centre (fairly flat, 3 km)

At the time of writing some of this section of the GSW is under construction. The track is signposted from the southernmost part of the Sublime Pt picnic area towards Panorama House function centre, referred to as the Panorama or Lookouts Track. Once at Panorama House you can continue south following the access road to a more southern viewpoint, Bulli lookout at Hopetoun Park. The Gateway Centre is now just 400m away but there is no formal track till this section of the GSW is constructed in late 2025. Again we stress there is no public transport available at this end of the walk but hopefully with completion of the GSW will come a transport solution.

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