

Port Stephens News Of The Area 11 January 2024

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OPINION & LETTERS

News Of The Area

Tomaree Head and Lodge

DEAR News Of The Area,

OVER the Christmas - New Year break I spent a few mornings volunteering on a help desk set up by the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group at the base of Tomaree Head.

Several things are clear:

- The walk to the top is extremely popular. As an example, on 28 January between 9-00 and 12-30 (3 ½ hours) over 500 people climbed the headland. That does not count the many people who chose to walk or cycle along the foreshore and those who climbed earlier or later than the time the help desk was operating.

- The parking situation is appalling. There was a constant parade of vehicles coming to the end of the road and turning around. Some of them may have found a park back towards Shoal Bay but others may simply have given up and driven away. While this solution is not ideal, the old cricket oval just past the Lodge entrance could be converted to parking.

- Signage at the base is useless. The most common questions were:

- Where does the walk start? Our answer was to point, something a sign could do.

- How long will it

take? Our answer was 1 hour plus, information that could be given on a sign.

- Where are the toilets? Our answer was to point, something a sign could do.

- Where is access to Zenith Beach? Our answer was to point, something a sign could do.

- Where does the Tomaree Coastal Walk start? Our answer was to point up the road to the upper Zenith Beach car park with advice to go 20 metres further up the road and turn left, something a sign could do.

The only sign at the base is a sign indicating that

Tomaree National Park is somewhere in the vicinity.

That sign is frequently obscured by parked cars.

An arrow pointing to the beginning of the walk, and an indication of the time the climb would take would be simple.

The only sign indicating the location of toilets is on a post shared with parking signs and is easy to miss.

The signs on the actual toilet block are tiny.

The NPWS information board is out of sight about 50 metres from the beginning of the track and not visible from the path's beginning. I understand that there are three bodies controlling the area, but is it beyond the wit of various empire builders to talk to each other to ensure

information gets to their shared customers?

NPWS has spent millions of dollars improving the walk, but they have failed at the most basic level of indicating access to their improvements.

There is still huge community concern from locals and frequent visitors familiar with the area about the eventual fate of the Tomaree Lodge site. Although there is bipartisan commitment for community access to the site to remain, that commitment has not converted to any action by the government and Kate Washington, the local member and relevant minister. Meanwhile it is reported that annual maintenance of the site is costing in the region of \$1,000,000.

The Heritage Group has proposed that the site be operated to preserve public access and generate income.

It must be in the community's interest to move to do something quickly to achieve this.

Someone, possibly Destination Port Stephens whose remit is promoting tourism in the area, should get the three competing (I use that word advisedly) bodies - the council, the state government and NPWS - together to bang heads so that the most popular tourist site in the area can reach its full potential.

*Regards,
Ian SANDERSON,
Salamander Bay.*