

Walking the Lake

Wetlands Wiggle

Correct as at 9th January, 2020

Overview and Track Information

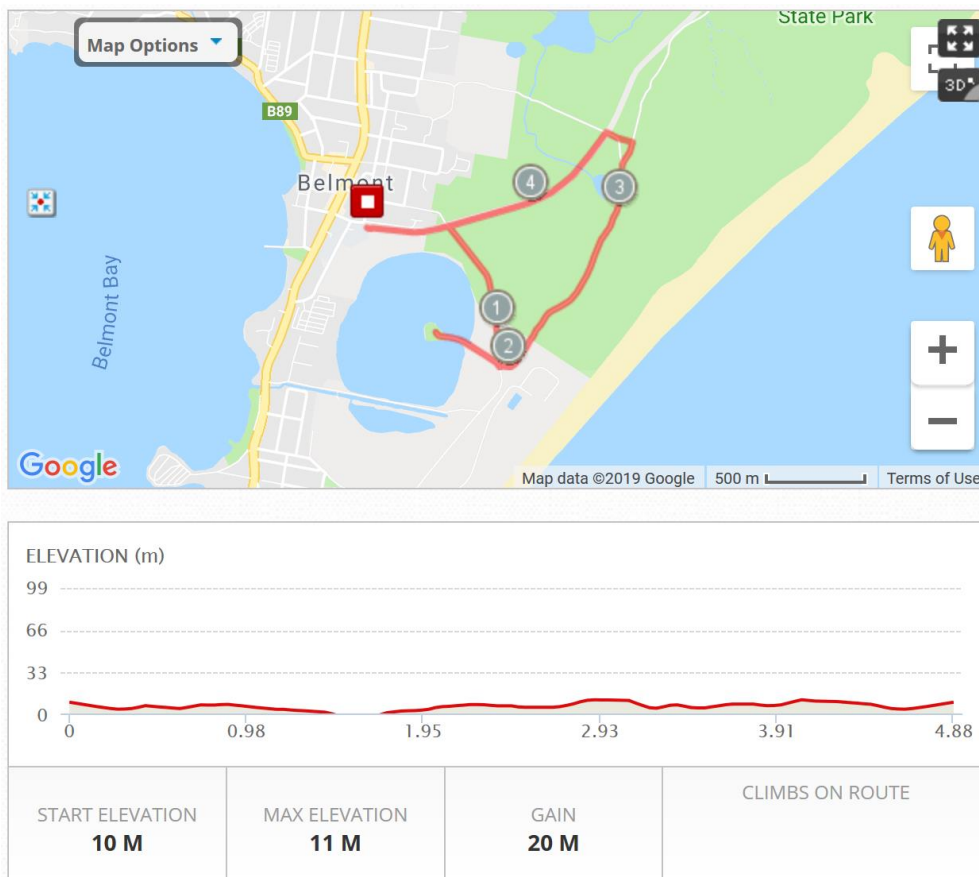
This very easy, 4.9km tour of the Belmont Wetlands State Park follows the George and Kalaroo Trails to view Belmont Lagoon, then returns to the start point by the Fernleigh Track. Along the way we should see the endangered swamp sclerophyll forest and, hopefully, wildflowers in the dune area.

Meeting Point & Getting There

The meeting point is the public carpark in Railway Parade, Belmont, near the start of the Fernleigh Track. There are public toilets near the meeting point.

Map and Elevation Profile

The walk begins and ends at the meeting point, which is below the red square on the map.



Background Information

The Redhead Coal Mining Company was granted land on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie in 1883 and in 1886 it received permission to build a railway line on a raised embankment through the wetlands. That railway line is now the Fernleigh Track.

BHP took over the site in 1925. As well as local coal mining, in the 1950s and 60s there was dredge mining of minerals in the sand dunes and the extraction of sand for the construction industry in the mid-1970s. When mining ceased in the 1990s various options were considered including a by-pass road through the site, a tourist resort and a residential development (the 'Belmont Sands' project). With strong community support the 549 hectare site was acquired by the State Government in 2002 and dedicated as the 10th NSW State Park in 2006.

Track notes

From the car park follow the signs to the Fernleigh Track, which starts at the landscaped remains of the Belmont train station platform.

Follow the sealed track, which is the old railway line that opened in the late 1880's. The line was used to transport coal from mines in the Lake Macquarie area to the Port of Newcastle. Evidence of some of the mines is still visible from the track. It was also used as a passenger service between Belmont and Newcastle with stations at Kahibah, Whitebridge and Redhead. The last passenger train ran in 1971. Coal mines along the corridor began to close down during the 1980's and the line ceased to be used in 1991.

The Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie councils bought the land of this former private coal railway to Belmont and opened the first section of the rail trail, Adamstown - Kahibah (Burwood Rd), in 2003. Stage 3 of the Fernleigh Track from Whitebridge to Redhead opened in 2009. Stage 4 from Redhead to Jewells Station was completed in mid 2010 and the completed rail trail to Belmont was opened in March 2011.

Follow the Fernleigh Track for 400m to a track junction, with a locked gate on your right. Through the locked gate is a gravel fire trail with a large pipe running alongside it. This is the George Fire Trail. Turn right, go through the gate, and follow the fire trail.

Note the paperbark swamp on your left. This is an endangered habitat that was once widespread along the NSW coast. The dominant trees are *Eucalyptus robusta* (swamp mahogany) and *Melaleuca quinquenervia* (paperbark).

The pipe on your right is carrying sewage to the Belmont Wastewater Treatment Works, which serves the areas of the eastern side of Lake Macquarie from Charlestown and Redhead in the North, to Swansea in the South. The plant provides secondary treatment of wastewater and is designed to remove nutrients (nitrogen & phosphorus). All biosolids produced at the plant are beneficially used in minesite rehabilitation and pasture improvement projects. The treated effluent is discharged to the Pacific Ocean through a 1.5 km ocean outfall. The Belmont Wastewater Treatment Works currently treats 30 megalitres per day and can handle wastewater from a population equivalent to 115,000 people.

Follow the fire trail for 800m to a track junction, crossing four small creeks along the way. At the track junction turn right, then immediately turn right again. Follow this track out along the Belmont Lagoon spit.

Human history of the lagoon began with the Awabakal people who occupied the area for perhaps the last 6000 years. The ancient Awabakal legend of The Teardrops of the Moon tells how Belmont Lagoon was formed. The Moon was a man spirit and the Sun was a female spirit. The Awabakal people were active in the day, but not so in the night, and the Moon spirit reasoned that his people didn't care as much for him as they did for the sun. This made him so sad he went away and cried. His tears fell down to Earth and formed Belmont Lagoon. When he stopped crying he began to think maybe his people were missing him and he decided to return. As he got closer to Earth he looked down and saw his reflection in the Lagoon and his happiness made his face beam. From that night the Moon's full face was a time of celebration.

During World War II, the Department of Defence dredged Cold Tea Creek to provide an anti-tank barrier and defence line. As part of these modifications, the lagoon was divided into two parts, and it now has a permanent connection to the saline waters of Lake Macquarie, thereby altering its salinity and circulation pattern.

Follow the track 450m to the end of the spit, where there are some derelict buildings left over from the coal mining days. This is a fabulous place to enjoy the surrounding bird life; you're likely to see black swans, royal spoonbills, the superb blue wren and the variegated wren, blackfaced cuckoo shrikes and, sometimes, international migratory waders such as the bar-tailed godwit.

Return to the end of the George Fire Trail and turn left along the Kallaroo Trail. On your right you can see the Belmont Wastewater Treatment Works. Continue along the trail for 1.8km to a very well-defined track junction with a fire trail on your left. Turn left and follow the fire trail 150m to the junction with the asphalt Fernleigh Track.

Turn left onto the Fernleigh Track and follow it for 1.4km back to the start point, enjoying the many viewpoints of the wetlands along the way.