

Hidden war history of Port Stephens' Tomaree Mountain uncovered

1233 ABC Newcastle By Karen Shrosbery

Posted Tue 20 Dec 2016, 12:14pm



PHOTO: Tomaree Mountain played an important role in WWII. (Karen Shrosbery: 1233 ABC Newcastle)

Tomaree Mountain stands proudly at 161 metres above Shoal Bay in the New South Wales Port Stephens region.

MAP: Shoal Bay 2315

The land mass played a pivotal role in World War II, and now more of its secrets are being revealed.

Walkers in the national park may be aware of the history of Fort Tomaree — it was built to stop the Japanese invading the coast — but few will know of the hidden war treasures off the beaten track.

For the first time, trekkers can now take a guided tour to uncover the World War II remnants such as gun emplacement weapon pits, and operation rooms.





PHOTO: Shane Goodwin has a passion for trekking and war history. (Supplied: Shane Goodwin)

Hours spent rummaging through the bush

It was the idea of businessman Shane Goodwin, who is a keen war history enthusiast.

He recounted stories about the 500 men who crewed the mountain in 1942.

"Tomaree defended the coast all the way to Jervis Bay," he said.

"Its role was to stop a Japanese landing force taking over the steel works and access to the coal mines as well as the Tomaree sand beds."

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) runs discovery tours about the wildlife on the mountain and there are signs guiding walkers to some significant military structures, but it is off the beaten track where you find the gems.

Mr Goodwin has spent hours rummaging around the bush to find the original wartime patrol paths.

"There are different tracks and trails that many people won't know about, including a battery plotting room," he explained.

"All over the mountain nestled in the bush there are remnants of that time.

"I was scratching around one day and I found a 1942 penny, old plates, medicine bottles and an internal piece of one of the three-pound artillery rounds."

Just a few metres off the track Shane pointed out a machine gun pit, which to the untrained eye is just a hole covered with leaves and scrub.

"Camouflage netting was used to cover the mountain to make it look like a fishing village and, to confuse the Japanese they made a decoy on the other side of the bay," he said.



PHOTO: Shane Goodwin runs tours in the national park and wants to restore the battery plotting room for everyone to see. (1233 ABC Newcastle: Karen Shrosbery)

A pivotal role in defending Australia during war

The track shares similarities with the Kokoda Track. As well as its links to the military history, the landscape and steep gradients offer walkers two-kilometre hike practice before taking on the Papua New Guinea experience.

Tomaree Mountain had a pivotal role in 1942. Although no guns were fired in anger at Tomaree, it had a great viewpoir which meant much of its work was ship recognition.

The area was also used as a training facility for 20,000 troops, mostly American, practising landing strategies.

Half way up the mountain Mr Goodwin sets his walkers a task.

"Somewhere in that piece of bush is a battery plotting room that doubled up as an observation post — can you spot it?"

Fewer than 40 metres off the main trail, hidden behind thick scrub, is a big concrete structure that offers stunning views the bay out to sea.

Mr Goodwin said it was the main command post on the mountain.

"The battery plotting room controlled the entire mountain; it oversaw all the ship movements and would give the guns their direction on how far they would fire the projectile on encroaching vessels," he said.



PHOTO: A picture of a wartime map Shane Goodwin has used to locate the pits and sights on Tomaree Mountain. (Supplied: Australian Army)

Preserving the past for the future

This building on top of the mountain sits quietly forgotten, overgrown and covered in graffiti, but Mr Goodwin wants to change that.

"As we increase the turnover of people who come through here, the more NPWS fees [will grow]," Mr Goodwin said.

"Then I can lobby the council and NPWS to use those park fees to refurbish the battery plotting room for everyone to see."

Meanwhile, every time Mr Goodwin climbs the mountain he continues to uncover another piece of Tomaree's war histo

Topics: world-war-2, shoal-bay-2315

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