

AN INTRODUCTION TO BEECROFT PENINSULA

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Beecroft Peninsula and Beecroft Weapons Range

The vast majority of Beecroft Peninsula, located on the northern side of Jervis Bay, is owned by the Department of Defence. Known as the Beecroft Weapons Range, the Range area covers an area of about 4,200 hectares. The land outside the Range is Currarong township, Abrahams Bosom Reserve and NSW Crown land, all in the north, and a strip of Jervis Bay Territory (part of the ACT) along the south-eastern edge of the peninsula. The Range is managed for Defence training, including ship to shore bombing exercises, and for public recreation and conservation. Various beaches and headlands are available to the public when the range is open, while a significant proportion of the area is restricted access due to unexploded ordnance. One of the most spectacular vantage points is the area around Point Perpendicular. Commonwealth land at Beecroft Peninsula is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List.

The peninsula is essentially a plateau of coarse sandstone in the Snapper Point Formation (Permian) surrounded by the sea, with a maximum height above sea level of around over 100 metres. This plateau is linked to the land to the north by a narrow strip of sand dunes, formed at the end of the last sea level rise, prior to which the plateau was an offshore island. The sandstone gentles slopes from near sea level at Currarong to over 100 metres in the south. Sand dunes of Quaternary age have been blown up onto the sandstone in the south during the last sea level rise, some of these dunes are quite large.



Historic lighthouse complex, built 1898.



Warning sign, Beecroft Weapons Range.



Most of Beecroft peninsula is surrounded by high coastal cliffs.
Point Perpendicular Lighthouse can be seen in the distance.

Point Perpendicular area

The aptly named Point Perpendicular is the northern headland to the entrance to Jervis Bay. A lighthouse was constructed on the top of the sea cliffs in 1898 and along with the other buildings in the lighthouse complex, is now listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List. In 1993 the old lighthouse was decommissioned and replaced with a solar-powered light on top of a steel tower.

The high, vertical cliffs of the point are about 80 metres above sea level and are a popular location for experienced rock climbers. Visitors can walk around the lighthouse complex and obtain views across Jervis Bay. The vegetation in this area is heathland and scrubland, typical of the peninsula as a whole. The large shrubs near the lighthouse are Bracelet Honeymyrtle *Melaleuca armillaris*.



One of the lighthouse keeper's cottages, constructed of solid, pre-cast concrete blocks.



Top of the cliffs at Point Perpendicular, showing the entrance to Jervis Bay and Bowen Island in the distance to the left. The historic and modern lights can be seen in the photograph.



Rock climbing is a popular activity on the areas coastal cliffs;
definitely only for the very experienced..



The adjacent deep water allows for shore-based game fishing;
Marlin are taken off this shell known as Outer Tubes.

Plants and plant communities of the area

A broad range of plant communities can be found in the area, ranging from littoral rainforest to saltmarsh and mangroves. The vast majority of the sandstone plateau, however, is covered in shrubland and heathland. Smaller stands of littoral rainforest, forest, woodland and swampland occur in scattered patches across the area, with typical sand dune vegetation on the coast in several places.

The road to Point perpendicular is largely through a low-growing heathland/shrubland, generally under two metres in height, and often below one metre tall. The shrubs frequently grow so densely it is difficult to walk through. The environment is very fire prone, and fires are a natural part of the area. On Beecroft, fire is managed for conservation and protection of life and property; this includes hazard reduction burning to reduce fuel loads and hence the intensity of a fire.

The plants of Beecroft Peninsula are typical of the sandstone soils of the Sydney Basin, one of the most diverse floras in Australia. Coastal species are a second component of the flora, including those of beach and estuary. Heathland plant species are prominent, particularly in the families Proteaceae and Myrtaceae.

Near the coast, sand dunes support typical coastal species, including Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia* (shown at right), stands of which are seen along the road into Currarong. Forest on the dunes is dominated by Bangalay *Eucalyptus botryoides*, which in some locations has a littoral rainforest understory. Patches of littoral rainforest growing on sand can be seen at Long Beach, Target Beach and Green Point. Several rainforest plants reach their southern limit in these stands of rainforest, which are towards the southern limit of littoral rainforest in Australia.



Several species are endemic or near-endemic to the Jervis Bay area, including Jervis Bay Grevillea *Grevillea macleayana*, Jervis Bay Teatree *Leptospermum epacridoideum* and Jervis Bay Dracophyllum *Dracophyllum oceanicum*, while many species are at their known southern limit in the area.



Above. Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia*, a very common tree of coastal sand dunes.

Left. Jervis Bay Teatree *Leptospermum epacridoideum*, endemic to the Jervis Bay – Nowra area, is common in some places on Beecroft Peninsula.



Saw Banksia *Banksias serrata*, a common shrub or small tree.



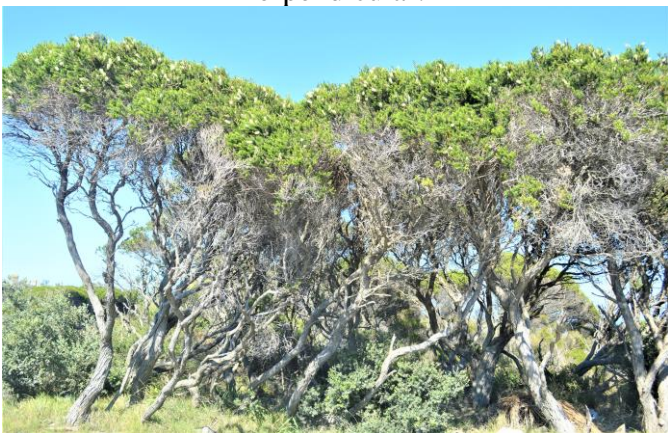
Flannel Flower *Actinotus helianthi*, often proliferates after fire.



Jervis Bay Grevillea *Grevillea macleayana*; many large shrubs occur along the road to Point Perpendicular.



Jervis Bay Dracophyllum *Dracophyllum oceanicum*, restricted to coastal cliffs.



Bracelet Honey-Myrtle *Melaleuca armillaris*, a common shrub at Point Perpendicular.



Port Jackson Mallee *Eucalyptus obstans*, a common mallee across the sandstone country.



Littoral rainforest behind Long Beach.
Typical trees here are *Podocarpus elatus*,
Elaeodendron australe and *Ficus obliqua* (two
large specimens in the photo).



Heathland north of Point Perpendicular.
Common species here are *Banksia serrata*,
Lambertia formosa and *Allocasuarina distyla*.



Bangalay Sand Forest at Long Beach South.
The large tree is *Eucalyptus botryoides*; there is
usually a strong component of 'rainforest species'.



Low heathland growing on shallow soils near Point
Perpendicular. The flowering plant is *Baeckea
brevifolia*.



Fresh swamp on the plateau.
Main species are *Sprengelia incarnata*, *Baeckea
imbricata* and several sedges.



Sparsely vegetated sandstone platform.
The main species here is *Baeckea imbricata*.

Currarong

Currarong is a town in the northeast corner of Beecroft Peninsula on the part of the peninsula not owned by the Commonwealth (Department of Defence); i.e., outside the Beecroft Weapons Range. Features of this area are the estuarine vegetation along Currarong Creek and the littoral rainforest in Abrahams Bosom Reserve. Typical south coast beach vegetation occurs behind Currarong Beach. Characteristic community zonation is exhibited on the fore-dunes, from *Acacia longifolia sophorae* and *Lomandra longifolia*, through Coast Teatree *Leptospermum laevigatum* to the Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia* thickets further inland. Zonation in plant distribution can also be observed on the estuary of Currarong Creek. This sequence from tidal water to upland is saltmarsh, mangroves, Casuarina Swamp Forest, Bangalay Sand Forest. An extensive *Gahnia* swamp can be seen next to Currarong Road, growing on water-logged soils between the dunes and the estuary of Carama Creek to the west.



Mangroves on Currarong Creek.



Gahnia swamp near road into Currarong.



Zonation in beach vegetation above Currarong Beach.



Casuarina glauca Swamp Forest on low-lying land next to Currarong Creek.

Plants of Currarong Creek

Currarong Creek is a small estuarine system on the edge of Currarong. Mangroves (two species) and *Casuarina glauca* Swamp Forest are common, while small patches of saltmarsh can be seen on the edges of the creek. The common eucalypt on the higher ground is Bangalay *Eucalyptus botryoides*.



Two species of mangrove; the shrub River Mangrove *Aegiceras corniculatum* in the foreground with the tree Grey Mangrove *Avicennia marina* ssp. *australasica* behind.



Swamp Lily *Crinum pedunculatum*



The saltmarsh herb Swamp Weed *Selliera radicans*