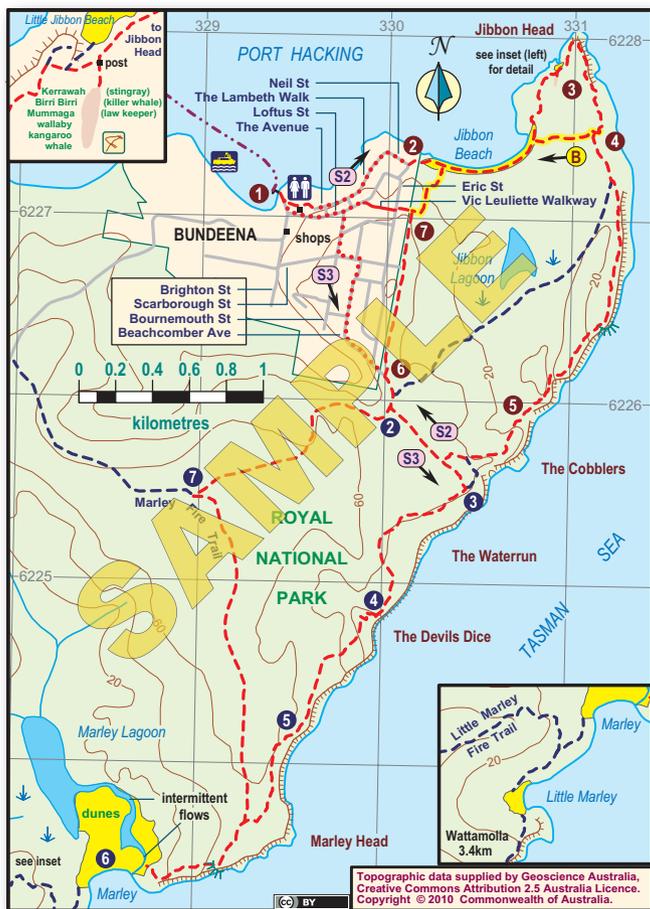


## S3 Marley Beach



**Distance:** 12km

**Climb:** 200m

**Difficulty:** Medium

**Time:** 5hr + ferry



**Start and finish station:** Cronulla

**Line:** Illawarra

**Central** 35km; 60min **Frequency:** W<sub>D</sub> 20min W<sub>E</sub> 30min

**Features:** Beach, dune, clifftop and heath landscapes, wildflowers. Whale watching in season, bird life at any time.

**Hazards:** Unfenced cliffs, unpatrolled beach, UV exposure.

**Summary:** Clifftop walk in the Royal National Park to the dune system at Marley Beach, optional swim at Little Marley.

**Variation:** Combine with S2 for a 16km medium/hard round trip.



See Walk S2 for ferry details. From the Bundeena wharf turn left to Loftus Street, right to Bournemouth, left to Scarborough and right to Beachcomber Ave, which takes you to the park entrance. Follow the signs for the Coast Walk, a classic 28km two-day walk (or a hard one-day walk for the very fit). It traverses the whole park, merging with Walk S7 at the southern end, and exiting at Offord. You'll get a taste of the spectacular scenery encountered on the full trek from this, the first 6km.

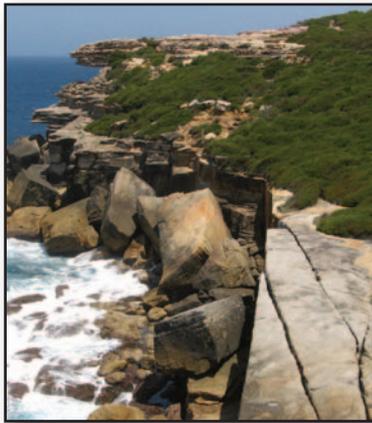
- 2 1.6km** Ignore the first left after the park entrance (Jibbon Fire Trail), take the next one 70m further on. The wide path gradually descends through low shrubs and heath, which put on a stunning wildflower display in late July through to November. Look for **guinea flower**, **darwinia**, **spider flowers** and **mountain devils**. The only trees able to withstand the windswept landscape this close to the coast are the stunted, mallee form of eucalypt.
- 3 2.2km** Near the cliffline there is a junction with the track to The Cobblers, passed on walk S2, on the other side of a huge cleft in the cliffline to your left. Turn right along the well-defined southward path. It ducks in and out of patches of hardy vegetation and onto sandstone slabs thirty metres above the waves. Spectacular views to the south show terraced headlands projecting out into the Tasman Sea. The last of these is Providential Head, around which lies the popular car-accessed picnic spot of Wattamolla.



Due to erosion parts of the original Coast Track have been diverted inland, including the next section. It makes a wide semicircle around the gully known as The Waterrun. Although the swathe of decimated shrubs looks unsightly, in time it will appear more natural, and certainly better than the trenches on the old track scored by water and countless boots. The flash of black and yellow will be New Holland Honeyeaters, common birds here.

- 4 3.4km** Soon after the track regains the cliffline you reach an

interesting geological formation. Overlooking a wide gap you can see that huge blocks have been carved from the deeply fractured bedrock by incessant wave action. These are popularly, if unofficially, known as the *Devils Dice*. Descend to the rock platform, explore a bit if you like, and start the 45m climb on the other side. Turn around for an impressive view of the heathlands as they densely cover the landscape down to the cliffline.



- 5 4.2km** The path levels out and rejoins the escarpment at a remarkably pure white sandstone ledge. A well crafted photo could be passed off as an Antarctic scene! Shortly afterward you reach the junction with the Marley Fire Trail (the return leg), and 300m further look for a buttress on the left of the track. You can climb it for stunning views of the Marley surrounds: from the left, Providential Head 3km distant, Little Marley Beach, Marley Beach, the dune system enclosing a small lagoon (depending on recent rains), and the larger Marley Lagoon beyond. In June and July you may catch a glimpse of whales migrating northwards.

Note how the landscape has changed since the white cliffs. Marley Head has significant amounts of ironstone, giving the

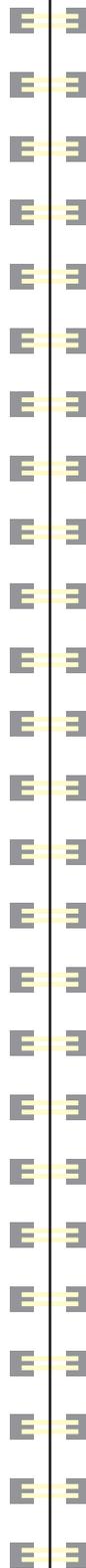


rock and weathered soil a reddish appearance. In summer you may find the succulent pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) flowering both on the headland and at the dune fringes, where it helps to stabilise the shifting sand. The

leaves were used as an anti-survy treatment by early explorers. The juice is said to provide relief from insect bites.

- 6 5.6km** Descend the 60m to Marley Beach, following the marker pegs. Marley (the *Big* adjective often attached to the name is superfluous) is a south-facing beach with dangerous rips, do not swim here. Swimming is much safer at Little Marley, a kilometre further on. Fishing is fairly popular despite its remoteness, as the nearest trackhead is 4km away.

Exploring the dune system is a highlight of a visit to Marley. As with many non-permanent features, the dunes are quite fragile, and you should particularly avoid walking on the upper seaward side, as it's the most unstable. Spinifex does its best to grow in



*Black swan and dunes at Marley*

this harsh environment, and helps to keep the sand in place.

Marley Lagoon lies in a depression behind the dunes, and is fed by several intermittent creeks that open out into a network of impassable marshes. You can observe from a distance, but don't expect to be able to walk around the lake or even approach the shoreline. Depending on recent rains, there may or may not be a continuous channel from the lagoon to the sea: most often there is a smaller isolated lagoon (above) about 150m from the shore.

There isn't much shelter for lunch, so the whole day you'll be in the sun. If you want a swim, take the well-worn track south, past the link to Little Marley Fire Trail and onto Little Marley Beach. As the beach is not patrolled, swimmers must be fully self-sufficient.

When you've had enough for the day head back up to Marley Head. You should allow two hours for the return trip to catch the ferry, so start just before the hour (assuming the present timetable), and no later than 4pm. If you like you can simply retrace your route along the cliffs, but for variety try the inland route, up the fire trail. The heath is more dense and varied, and there are views across the landscape that give an idea of the scale of the park. In early summer the dwarf apple *Angophora hispida* flowers profusely, its large clusters attractive to insects of all kinds.



- 7 8.7km** After a 3km stroll across the moors look for a (currently unmarked) junction with a well-defined foot track on the right. This leads back to Bundeena, through casuarina and banksia groves, and eventually sandy red gum forest. Follow the road back to the park entrance, and return to the wharf from **6** as described on page 97.