

Chutes and Ladders

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Bondi Beach is one of many beaches that dot the coast along Sydney's eastern suburbs. Like the North Shore of Boston, most towns have some sort of access to the water; unlike the North Shore it is an extremely steep terrain. The beaches can be found at the lowest points along the coast, whereas much of the town and residential areas are built up and into the sandstone cliffs that run down southeastern Australia.

There is no main road that runs parallel to the coast of Sydney such as route 127 does from Beverly. If people want to see a continuous bit of scenery from town to town, they must do so by foot (or by stroller as the case may be). To accommodate this viewing desire, the various city councils thoughtfully installed a cliff-walk which runs along the tops of the bluffs, down the sides, and into the various beaches and towns below.

It'd be much like if the powers-that-be installed a walkway from Beverly to Gloucester that primarily hugged the ocean, jogging only briefly into the towns or parks along the way. For the most part, the eastern Sydney walkway is isolated and often the only thing you can see is the ocean on one side and a cliff wall or tidal pools on the other. At times, there is no sound of traffic, only the roar of the surf and the occasional fussy daughter.

We were told that from Bondi, heading south, we could easily walk a popular four-mile segment to the town of Coogee. What we weren't told, was that attempting this walk with a stroller was like playing a life size game of Chutes and Ladders. 10 yards flat, 25 stairs, 20 yards flat, 50 stairs, curve around an eroded cliff and cross through a small tidal pool and surprise . . . 8,000 stairs.

As most parents know, strollers and stairs do not naturally get along. What they also know, is that once a child comes out of the stroller it is nothing but a fight to get them back in. So when my husband and I encountered the stairs we sighed, disregarded the growing aches in our backs, and each took our end of the stroller . . . and lifted.

Stroller contortions aside, the walk was worth every pulled muscle. We first passed through Tamarama a small beach known mostly for serious sunbathers (by serious, I mean topless). The surf had a nasty riptide and was unsafe for swimming unless you had a strong desire to be pulled out to sea. We didn't and kept walking.

After a lovely flat stretch with sweeping views of the ocean and a winding path carved into the cliff wall, we came to Bronte, a large family beach. Bronte had multiple playgrounds and a children's tidal pool. It also seemed to be the local hangout for overly tanned, leathery retirees who, like Tamaraman's, took a minimalist approach to bathing attire.

Just past Bronte, the trail wound through Waverly Cemetery. Still cliff-side, this graveyard has been dubbed the 'world's most scenic' cemetery - not because the

headstones are such a riveting sight, but because it is perched literally on the very edge of the high cliffs. The fantastic views at least ensure that the graves are regularly visited.

Our next stop, as we battled the gusting winds which threatened to turn our stroller into a kite, was the Clovelly bowling club. It seemed that there was a tournament underway when we walked by the pristine green lawns with the polished little brown balls, but neither my husband nor I could figure out how one actually played. Regardless, it seemed like a lovely reason to stand atop a cliff in a nicely starched, white uniform.

From there, we spiraled back down to Clovelly beach, a long narrow inlet that was carved into the cliffs. Because it was so narrow, it had hardly any surf and was ideal for snorkeling and diving, as evidenced by the number of people engaged in those activities.

Our final destination, after one last exhausting march up and corresponding steep descent down, was Coogee. Coogee is a fairly large town. Its beach is nearly as big as Bondi but it has an overall less touristy, frenetic feel.

We celebrated completing our walk by ordering 'wedges and cream' at a beachside pub. The appetizer is simply large French fries covered in sour cream and sweet chili sauce - a heart attack in a bowl but so good and a regular favorite of ours down under.

It was a great walk. Our guide book says there is an equally scenic walk north from Bondi to Vacluse, but we might wait, oh say 16 years, till our daughter can drive and pick us up at the other end!