

# HISTORIC GUN BATTERY TO BE OPEN TO PUBLIC

More than two years of hard work will come to fruition soon when the West Head gun battery in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park is finally restored and opened to the public.

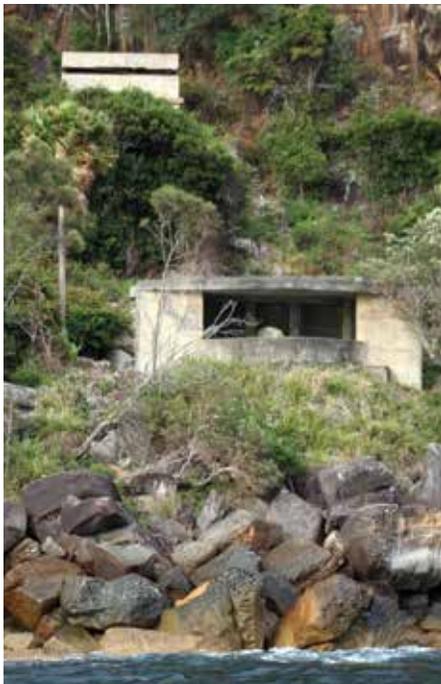
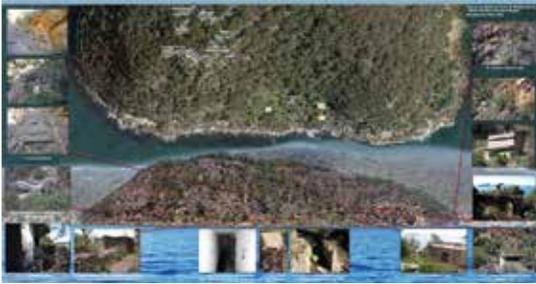
The two 4.7 inch guns are long since gone, sold for scrap metal after WWII, and searchlights and other equipment have also disappeared. But the gun emplacements, the observation post, an ammunition magazine and the tracks around the site are still there, now cleared of scrub and reinforced with sandstone slabs to make it safe for visitors.

The project has been carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, at the urging of Pittwater MP Rob Stokes and veterans' groups led by 92-year-old Jack "Bluey" Mercer.

Jack was only 18 when he enlisted

in January 1941 and was posted to the 1st Heavy Brigade, Royal Australian Artillery. Jack was in a team of 80 soldiers tasked with building the West Head fortifications, which, together with anti-submarine nets, were designed to





protect Pittwater and the Hawkesbury River Bridge.

“We were just boys,” says Jack, who celebrated both his 18th and 90th birthdays at West Head.

“We had to do everything by block and tackle. It was hard work and we knew how hard it was. But it was important work because Sydney had to be protected.”

Helicopters have been used to lift sandstone blocks into position during the restoration work and a stainless steel staircase has been erected to allow visitors to climb to the observation point from the beach below.

The Soldiers’ Track was used 3-4 times a day by soldiers moving between their sleeping quarters and the gun

position, winding its way from Battery Headquarters to the Battery Observation Post. A series of railways was built to supply the battery.

For almost 70 years the site was deserted and became covered in thick bush. It was only in 2012, when the NPWS was preparing for a fire reduction burn, that authorities became aware of its importance in Sydney’s wartime defences and the West Head Awareness Team was formed to guide the preservation of the battery site.

When the commemoration service for the reopening is held, one person determined to be there is Jack Mercer.

“There’s no way they’ll stop me,” he says. “That’s what’s keeping me going!”

*Photos courtesy Peter Rea*

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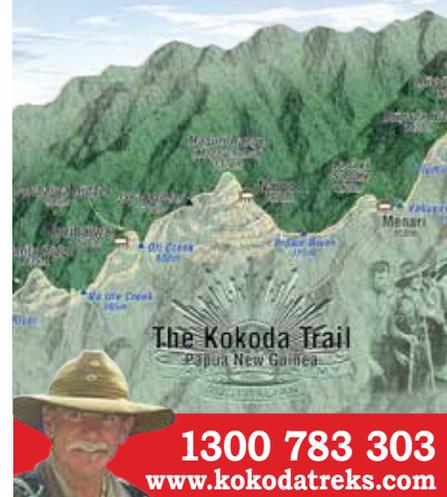
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