

The Sydney Harbour Islands

The islands of Sydney Harbour have a part in the industrial and engineering development of the city. In two ferry trips, on to the east from Circular Quay and the other to the west, you can view most of the islands from the harbour and appreciate some of their history.



Australasian Steam Navigation Company Shipyard, Darling Island 1860

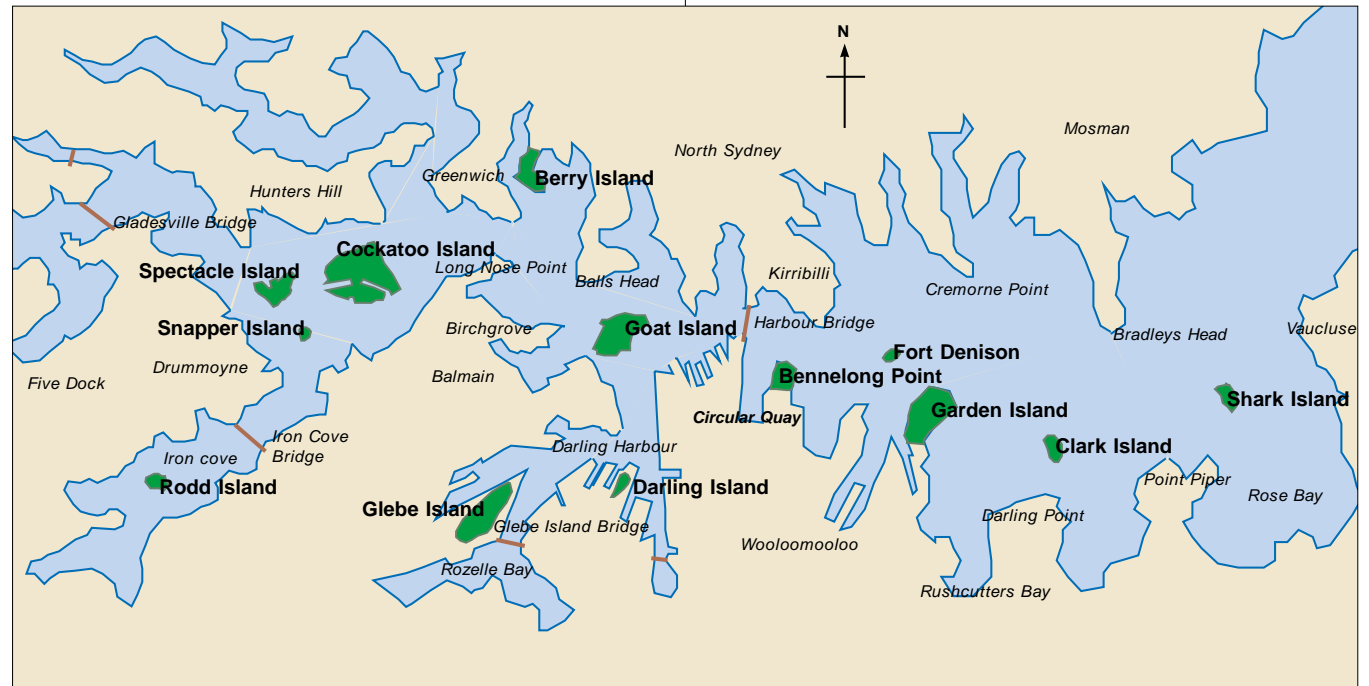


Picnic, Shark Island 1912

Self-guided tours by ferry



The Institution of Engineers, Australia Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee



The harbour islands

Originally there were 14 islands. Two, once separated by a narrow stretch of shallow water, have been joined to form the present Spectacle Island. Five others, formerly islands, Garden, Bannelong, Darling, Glebe and Berry Islands, have been joined to the mainland. The other remaining islands are Shark, Clark, Fort Denison, Goat, Cockatoo, Snapper and Rodd Islands.

All the islands east of Circular Quay can be seen from the harbour on a regular ferry trip to Manly or Watsons Bay. Those west of Circular Quay, except Glebe and Rodd Islands, are best seen from the harbour on a regular ferry trip to Birkenhead Point or Drummoine.

There are regular guided tours to three of the islands—Fort Denison, Goat and Cockatoo Islands. A companion brochure in this series *Engineering and Industry on Three Sydney Harbour Islands* provides additional information.

Fort Macquarie



The islands east of Circular Quay

Take a Manly or Watsons Bay ferry from Circular Quay. For information on services and times phone (02) 131 500 or visit www.sydneytransport.net.au.

On the right as the ferry leaves Circular Quay is Sydney Opera House built on what was once Bannelong Island, now Bannelong Point.

Bannelong Island

In 1819 Governor Macquarie built on the island a substantial fort designed by Francis Greenway and gave it his name. The island was joined to the mainland by a causeway and became Bannelong Point. The fort was demolished in 1902 and a tram depot erected in its place was in use until the early 1950s. In 1954 Bannelong Point was selected as the site for the Sydney Opera House, opened in 1973.



Tram Depot, Bannelong Point

As the ferry passes the Opera House Fort Denison is directly ahead. On the right just beyond Fort Denison is Garden Island, now joined to the mainland and easily identified by the naval ships always berthed there and by the large dockside crane.

Fort Denison

Fort Denison with its distinctive Martello tower was completed in 1862. The tiny island was formerly known as Pinchgut; in the earliest days of the colony recalcitrant convicts were marooned there.

Garden Island

Governor Phillip established a vegetable garden on the island when he arrived in Sydney. From 1884 the island was developed by the Colonial Government for the exclusive use of the Royal Navy which stationed an admiral and a squadron of ships in Sydney. Several fine buildings had been completed when the island was handed over to the Admiralty in 1896. In 1913 the Royal Navy transferred control to the Royal Australian Navy

During World War II the facilities for the servicing and maintenance of naval ships were greatly expanded. The Captain Cook Graving Dock, built during the war and first used in 1945, joined the island to the mainland. The facilities at Garden island are now shared between the Royal Australian Navy and Australian Defence Industries Limited which undertakes both naval and civilian work there.



HMS Illustrious in Captain Cook Dock 1945

As the ferry continues down the harbour it passes Clark and Shark Islands, both easily identified.

Clark Island

The island is named after a lieutenant of the First Fleet who established a vegetable garden there. Since 1879 it has been a public recreation reserve, except during World War II. At that time the British navy stored on the island spare barrels for the 14-inch guns on its four battleships stationed in the Pacific. After the war, when battleships became obsolete, the barrels each weighing around 100 tons were taken to Cockatoo Island and cut up for scrap.



Gun barrels on Clark Island, World War II

Shark Island

From 1832, following a case of cholera, ships arriving from Britain were required to anchor at Shark Island for quarantine inspection. In 1871 the island became the location of a quarantine station for livestock which was eventually moved to Athol Bight, the site of Taronga Zoo. Then the island became a public recreation reserve.

The islands west of Circular Quay

To view the islands west of Circular Quay take a ferry to Birkenhead Point or Drummoyne. After the ferry passes under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, beyond the Walsh bay finger wharves on the left is the entrance to Darling Harbour.

On the shore of Darling Harbour, close to the large bulk of the Sydney Casino building, is a prominent eight storey brick building which is on Darling Island, no longer an island.

Almost directly ahead as the ferry passes under the bridge is Goat Island. Not visible from the ferry, Glebe Island is located in Johnsons Bay off Darling Harbour beside the cable-stayed Anzac Bridge (formerly known as the Glebe Island Bridge).

Darling Island

Darling Island was a tiny rocky island, which disappeared completely as reclamation took place. From 1851 it was the site of the Australasian Steam Navigation Company shipyard. At the peak of its activity in the 1870s the company employed over 300 men there building and repairing the ships of its fleet.

The New South Wales Government purchased the island in 1899 and developed the area for wharves and railway yards. The two brick buildings on the edge of Darling Island are the Royal Edward Victualling Yard, built on timber piles over the water. They were opened in 1907 for use as stores by the Royal Navy and in 1994 were converted to offices.



Wool delivery to Darling Island



Royal Edward Victualling Yard

Goat Island

From the 1830s Goat Island was the site of the Queen's Magazine and also a base for the Water Police. The explosives were finally moved in 1900. In 1901 the island became the headquarters of the Sydney Harbour Trust, and later the Maritime Services Board, as a base for its fleet, which by the 1930s had 170 vessels including tugs, pilot vessels, dredges and barges. The facilities expanded to include shipbuilding. After the 1960s these activities wound down or were transferred elsewhere. Some of the facilities on the island are now leased for commercial ship servicing and repair.

Glebe Island

The name derives from the island's being part of a grant of land made to the colony's first chaplain, Richard Johnson, in 1789. Sydney's first public abattoirs opened there in 1860 when a causeway was built. Later the island became a part of the mainland. The first Glebe Island bridge, completed in 1861, provided a direct route from the city and Pyrmont to the abattoirs and to Balmain and Rozelle beyond. The abattoirs were closed and demolished in 1915. In 1918 work commenced on building storage and shiploading facilities for grain. Sydney's first container berths were on Glebe Island. Both the grain and container activities have moved elsewhere and the Glebe Island wharves are now mainly used by car-carriers. The grain silos remain, but are no longer in use.



Glebe Island Abattoirs

On your right after passing Goat Island is Berry Island, a tree-covered reserve now connected to the mainland. It can be identified as the headland to the right of the Shell oil terminal in Gore Cove.

Berry Island

The island is named after Alexander Berry, Scottish doctor, ships' master and merchant. From 1820 he owned the island which he joined to the mainland by a stone causeway. In 1906 it passed to the New South Wales Government and eventually became a public recreation reserve.

The ferry passes between Long Nose Point on the left and Balls Head on the right and enters the Parramatta River. Directly ahead is Cockatoo Island, largest of the harbour islands. Just beyond Cockatoo Island and close to the Drummoyne shore are Spectacle Island and tiny Snapper Island. Rodd Island is in Iron Cove and cannot be seen from the ferry.

Cockatoo Island

Convicts, kept on the island from 1839, were occupied in constructing substantial stone buildings and excavating 17 grain silos in the rock. From 1851 to 1853 they constructed the Fitzroy Dock, designed for use by the Royal Navy. From 1870, after the convicts left, the buildings housed a reformatory and school for girls. From 1888 to 1908 it was a 'temporary' prison.

A dockyard, mainly for the servicing and repair of naval and government ships, and from about 1870 for shipbuilding, was developed around the Fitzroy Dock. A second dry dock, the Sutherland Dock, for a short time the largest in the world, was built between 1882 and 1890. Cockatoo Island became an important shipbuilding, engineering and ship repair facility, reaching the peaks of its activity during the two world wars. The last ship built there was HMAS *Success*, an 18,000-ton naval supply ship, completed in 1886. The dockyard closed in 1991.

Spectacle Island

Between 1863 and 1865 the Colonial Government built the Powder Magazine, a substantial stone building, on the island and moved explosives there from Goat Island where the facilities were becoming overtaxed and considered dangerous. In 1885 Spectacle Island became the armament depot for the Royal Navy which added facilities for handling and manufacturing ammunition and explosive devices. The island was handed over to the Royal Australian Navy just before World War I. It was very busy during both world wars, with a work force reaching 600 during World War II. In the 1960s the armament depot was moved to Newington and the island became the site of the Naval Historical Collection. Since 1997 the island has also housed the headquarters and residential training facility of the Naval Reserve Cadets.

Snapper Island

The island was declared a public recreation reserve, along with Rodd and Clark Islands in 1879, but was little used as such, eventually becoming a scrap yard for the Cockatoo Island Dockyard. In 1930 it was leased to Leonard Forsythe as a base for his Navy League Sea Cadets. The Sea Cadets eventually became absorbed into the Naval Reserve Cadets, but Forsythe with some of the cadets and ex-cadets formed the Snapper Island Company, to continue the lease of the island and maintain the facilities. The company still holds the lease but there is little activity on the island.

Rodd Island

Brent Rodd, solicitor, merchant and landowner, gave the island his name and planned to purchase it, but it remains government property. In 1888 the Intercolonial Rabbit Commission established a laboratory there and installed a nephew of Louis Pasteur, Dr. Adrian Loir, who was experimenting with chicken cholera virus as an exterminant. The experiments were unsuccessful, but Dr. Loir's team succeeded in introducing to Australia an anthrax vaccine for sheep that Pasteur had developed in France. When Loir returned to France in 1893 the laboratory was closed. Parts of the original buildings were incorporated into a dance hall and caretaker's house, which still exist. The island is now a recreation reserve.

Visiting the islands

Fort Denison and Goat Island: These islands are now parts of the Sydney Harbour National Park. The National Parks and Wildlife Service operates regular tours, but other public access is restricted. For information visit www.npws.nsw.gov.au; for bookings phone (02) 9247 5033.

Cockatoo Island: Sydney Harbour Federation Trust operates regular tours of the island. For information visit www.harbourtrust.gov.au.

Spectacle Island: The custodians provide tours of the Naval Historical Collection for individuals and groups. For information and bookings phone (02) 9181 3308 or (02) 9810 0582.

Shark, Clark and Rodd Islands: These islands are public recreation reserves, parts of Sydney Harbour National Park controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Access is subject to conditions; for information visit www.npws.nsw.gov.au.

Garden and Snapper Islands: These are not normally open to the public.

Berry Island: The island is a recreation reserve, open to the public and accessible by road.

Darling and Glebe Islands: These former islands are accessible by road, but the industrial and commercial activities there are not open to the public.



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