

Illawarra Escarpment Walking Track

Stanwell Park to Austinmer, part of the long-awaited Grand Escarpment Walk

Length: 13.5 - 16.5 km Time: 4 -6 hrs Grade: 3-4/6 Style: One way Transport: Train, car or bus on weekdays

The Illawarra Escarpment provides an iconic bushwalking destination well under two hours travel from the centre of Sydney. A large part is State Conservation Area and has a number of defined walking tracks. This article will describe one section that includes breathtaking escarpment and coastal views as well as bushland with high biodiversity.

Getting started - The walk can be commenced either from Stanwell Park Railway station, Coalcliff railway station or the track head on Lawrence Hargrave Drive, south of Stanwell Park village.

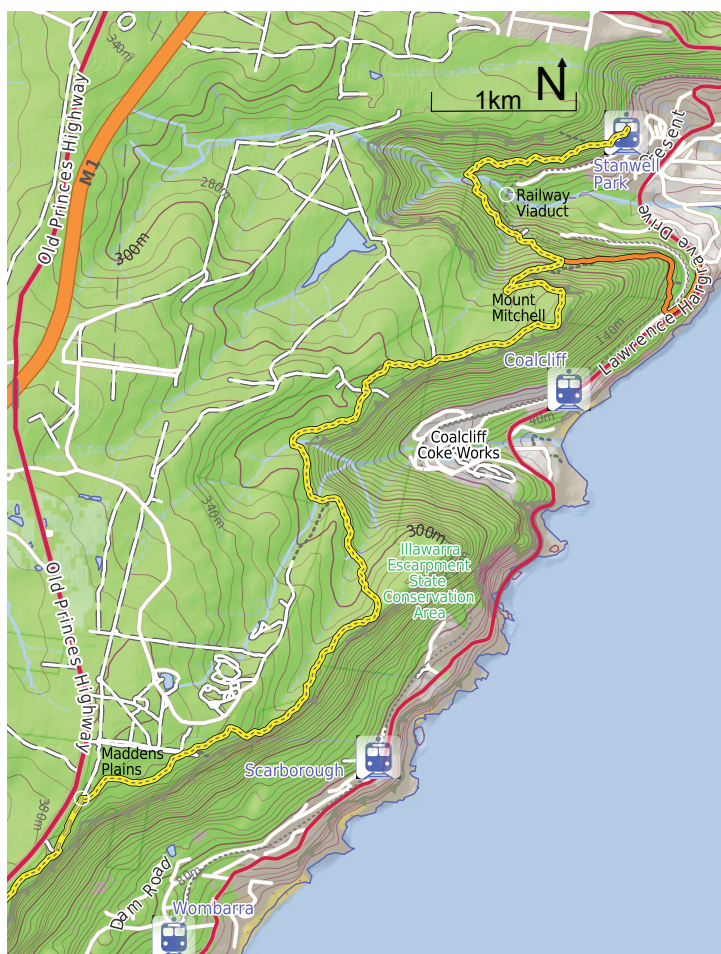
The most difficult option (steep 2 km) is to start from Stanwell Park station. From the western platform follow the signposted track, then a few hundred metres southwest of the station turn left on to the Wodi Wodi track. This track is well known in the area but can suffer from erosion and is somewhat inconsistently signposted. It involves a fairly steep and often slippery climb down through rainforest to Stanwell Creek and should not be attempted soon after heavy rain. Once at the creek it is possible to take a side trip downstream to the unique railway viaduct built in 1920. From the creek there is a climb out to the south. Turn right at the first T junction, then again at the second, which is signposted Forest Walk, Maddens Plains 6 km.

If travelling by car the logical starting point is the track head on Lawrence Hargrave Drive about 1 km south of Stanwell Park village shops. This can also be reached by walking 1 km or so along the road north from Coalcliff station, taking care on the busy road. There is limited and not well-defined parking at the Wodi Wodi track head on the western side of the road. From here the track goes under the rail line over a new bridge then skirts north and west around the base of Mt Mitchell for about 500 m (easy rising). It meets the intersection signposted Forest Walk, Maddens Plains 6 km.

Take the Forest Walk route and ascend some 130 m in about 1 km up the fairly steep sandstone ridge to the top of Mt Mitchell and find a lookout on an exposed rock slab at the highest point. Some refer to this climb as the Bullock Track, indicating its history. Here you can enjoy a break and admire the expansive views across Stanwell Park and Bald Hill. You may see hang gliders flying if the wind is good, with the Royal National Park further north.



Stony Creek **Photo:** Graham Burgess



Northern end of the Illawarra Escarpment walking track

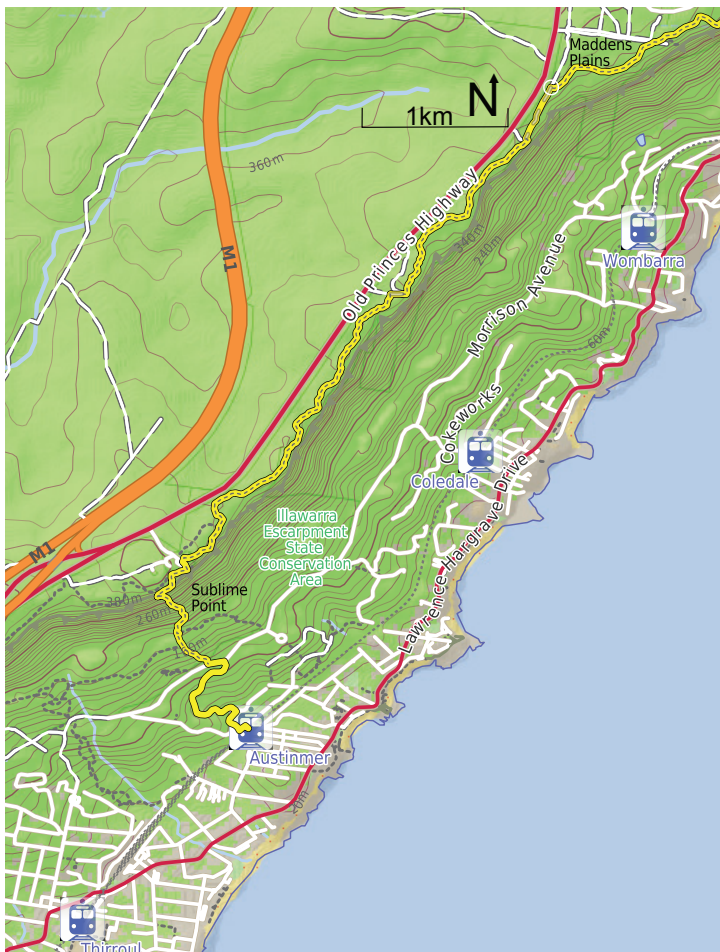
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South end of Mt Mitchell overlooking Coalcliff Village and Seacliff Bridge

Photo: Graham Burgess



Southern end of the Illawarra Escarpment walking track

Mt Mitchell lookout to Maddens Plains – Forest Walk (undulating, 6 km)

The Forest Walk is an established and popular section of the escarpment walk. From the northern end at Mt Mitchell follow the well defined track. It crosses a number of service roads and watercourses and passes through many vegetation communities. This section can get a little overgrown but is an excellent introduction to escarpment flora. NPWS has recently made a number of improvements including new steps and bridges. The southern end of this section of track can also be accessed from a service trail on the Old Princes Highway, 4.2 km north of the Sublime Point turnoff.

Maddens Plains to Sublime Point lookout – Maddens Track (fairly flat, 5 km)

This is a recently completed section over fairly level terrain, mostly well signposted and easy to follow with an extensive section of boardwalk to protect a swamp. Take care to follow the correct path at the power line easement though. A few hundred meters from the end you will meet the Woodward Nature Loop Track. Either way on the loop takes you to Sublime Point lookout. The café at Sublime Point can be an enjoyable opportunity for a rest, refreshment and to take in the stunning views up and down the escarpment and coast. There are picnic and toilet facilities here as well.

Sublime Point Track to Austinmer (very steep)

Commencing south east of the café there is a dramatic climb down, with constantly changing views of the coast, to Austinmer track head (1 km) which is at the top of Asquith St or Foothills Rd. The initial descent follows a new and well-constructed but very steep track which is mostly steps and ladders. The vegetation changes abruptly as you descend, with some beautiful subtropical rainforest at the bottom. This can be further enjoyed by taking the Gibson track loop in the lower section. Taking the sealed road a further 1 km brings you to Austinmer station and another 500 m to the shops.

As described it is possible to use only public transport and make a circuit between Austinmer and Coalcliff or Stanwell Park stations but be aware trains stop at these stations only every two hours at weekends. There are bus services between Stanwell Park and Austinmer only on weekdays. There is no public transport at Sublime Point.

In the not too distant future it is hoped this walk will form part of the multi-day Illawarra Escarpment Walk. NPA Illawarra are promoting this and have dubbed it The Grand Escarpment Walk. This walk has been talked about and planned for more than 30 years. Such a walk, connecting the Royal National Park to the southern Illawarra and even further south to Morton National Park has the potential to become an iconic great walk for NSW.