

Estimated walking time: 60–90 minutes



12. Observatory Tower, 168 Kent Street

Now a luxurious residential building, it was originally built in 1964 as a 20-storey office tower for IBM. In the 1990s there was a commercially driven trend to convert office buildings to apartments. Architects Crone and Associates completed the conversion of this building in 1996, adding extra floors in the process. The Tower contains about 200 apartments.



13. Science House, 157–161 Gloucester Street

Architects Peddle Thorp and Walker designed Science House in 1931 for the three main scientific bodies in Sydney at the time, the Royal Society of NSW, the Institution of Engineers, Australia, and the Linnean Society of NSW. The societies moved out of the building in the 1970s and only the green bans of the Builders Labourers Federation saved the building from demolition.



14. Lands Department, 23–33 Bridge Street

Taking up an entire city block, this Victorian building was until recently the head office of the NSW Lands Department. Colonial Architect James Barnet designed the building that was completed in two stages: 1876–81 and 1888–91. An intriguing feature of the building is a small, six-metre wide, copper dome above the Bridge Street façade that was obviously designed for a telescope, though there is no record of one being used or installed there.



15. Macquarie's Obelisk, corner of Bridge and Loftus Streets

The obelisk, located in Macquarie Place, is by the celebrated architect Francis Greenway. Built between 1816 and 1818 from local sandstone by stonemason Edward Cureton, it is the spot from which distances along the colony's roads were measured. It is currently undergoing conservation.

Photo courtesy Heritage Branch, Department of Planning



16. Sydney Visitor Centre, corner of Argyle and Playfair Streets

The Sydney Visitor Centre provides information on local attractions as well as bookings for accommodation and tours. The historic Argyle Stores nearby were built from 1828 onwards and were one of Australia's first bond stores, storing merchandise essential for life in the colony.



17. Dawes Point, end of Lower Fort Street

Lieutenant William Dawes of the Royal Marines volunteered to join the First Fleet to NSW to look for a possible comet. By July 1788 he had an observatory set up at a place he called Point Maskelyne, after the Astronomer Royal, but Dawes Point became the accepted name. After a disagreement with Governor Phillip, Dawes sailed back to Britain in 1791. Today no trace remains of Dawes' observatory.

18. Pylon Lookout, Sydney Harbour Bridge walkway

The Sydney Harbour Bridge opened in March 1932 after 1400 men had laboured for eight years to build the structure. The south-east pylon of the bridge stands directly above Dawes Point. In 1934 the pylon was opened to the public. In the 1950s and '60s the lookout was famed for the white cats that lived there. Take the steps in Cumberland Street to the bridge walkway that leads to the Pylon Lookout and on to North Sydney.

19. Fort Denison (view only), seen from Sydney Harbour Bridge walkway

The fortified island is visible from the bridge walkway. Though completely unauthorised by the British Government, convicts started work in 1841 to flatten the rocky island and build fortifications on it. After the arrival of Sir William Denison in 1855 work began again and the fort, incorporating a martello tower, was completed. From 1906 a gun was fired at 1.00 pm each day as the Sydney Observatory time ball was seen to drop.



20&21. Transit telescope marker, Mount Street Plaza, corner Pacific Highway and Miller Street, North Sydney

This column is one of six from the old Sydney GPO that was demolished in 1863. It is believed to be the stone pillar that was erected three years later on Alexander Berry's property to serve as a north mark for Sydney Observatory's transit telescope. With a reference point due north of the telescope, astronomers could adjust it to great accuracy. To see the original location of the north mark, continue along the Pacific Highway to the corner of Bay Road (21) where the gates to Berry's property still stand.

Observatory Hill has been the astronomical hub of Sydney for over 150 years. It has also played an important role in the navigational and meteorological life of the city.

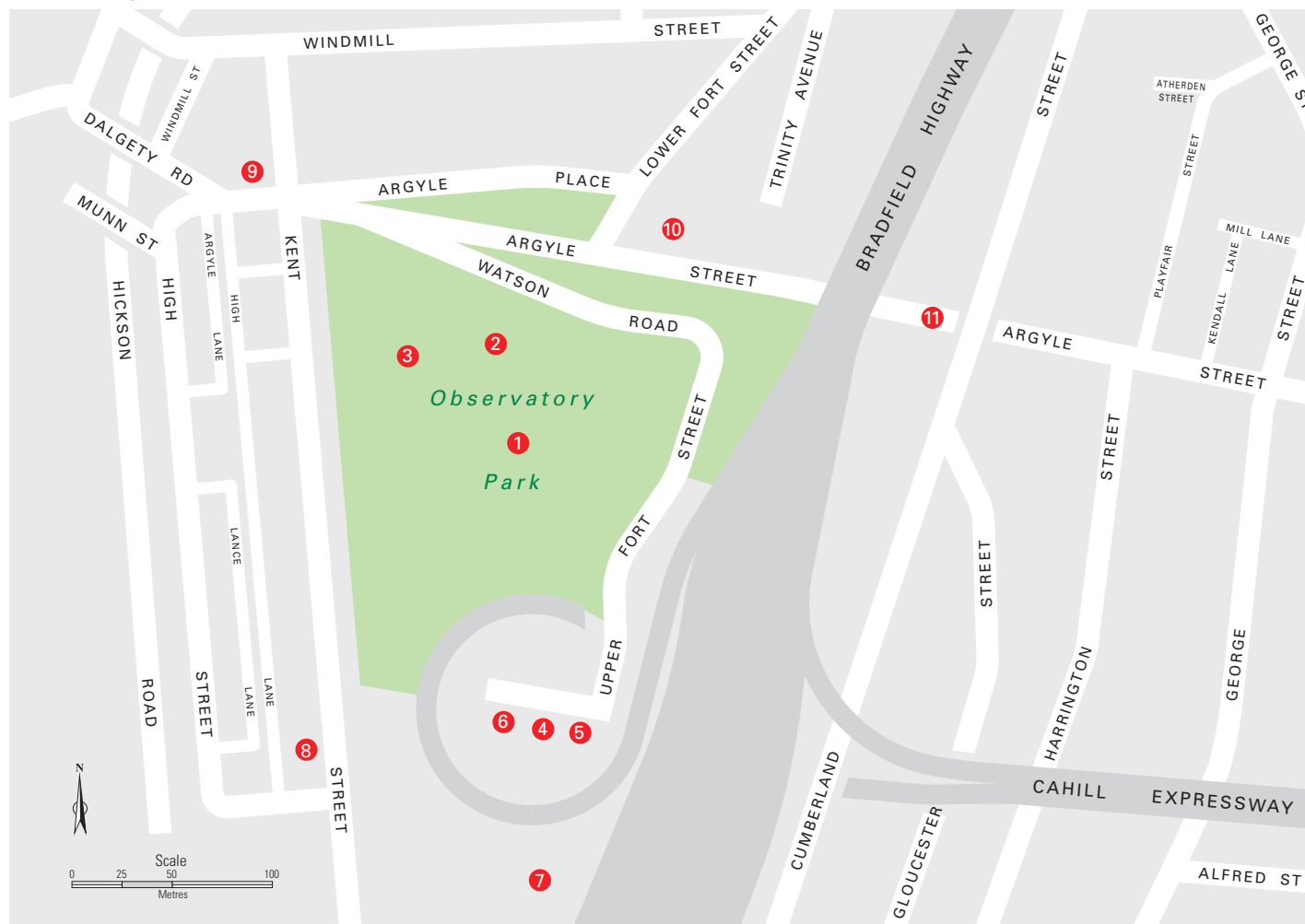
There are many more connections in the surrounding area, stretching across the Sydney Harbour Bridge to North Sydney.

So join Powerhouse Museum curator Dr Nick Lomb on this self-guided walking tour as he reveals some of the lesser known sites and stories at one of Sydney's most popular destinations.

Powerhouse Museum presents

ASTRONOMICAL SYDNEY

Self-guided walking tour with a scientific theme



1. Sydney Observatory

Our walk begins at Australia's oldest observatory, still in operation today. The sandstone building dates from 1857–59 and dominates the surrounding hill. The domed side of the building is the observatory while the other was the residence of the government astronomer. The time ball used to provide the time to ships in Sydney Harbour and still drops daily at 1.00 pm.



2. War Memorial, Observatory Park

This stone monument relates to the Boer War (1899–1902). It commemorates the 327 officers, 6000 other ranks and 14 nurses 'who responded to the Empire's Call' from NSW together with 5877 horses. An artillery gun at the rear of the monument was manufactured by the German armaments firm Krupp and was most likely captured from the Boers.

3. Bust of Hans Christian Andersen, Observatory Park

A rather surprising recent addition to the Observatory Hill landscape is a bust of the Danish author and poet, Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75). Andersen was best known for his fairy tales such as *The little mermaid* and *The ugly duckling*. On 7 March 2005 Prince Frederik and Princess Mary of Denmark unveiled the bust, which is a replica of one from 1865 by HW Bissen.



4. Messenger's Cottage, Observatory Hill

At the instigation of Rev William Scott, the first Government Astronomer, the Messenger's Quarters were built at some distance from the Sydney Observatory building. This distance enabled the builder Alexander Dawson to build the cottage from brick instead of stone at the relatively low cost of £203.



5. Meteorological Lawn, Observatory Hill

When the NSW Office of the Bureau of Meteorology left Sydney Observatory and moved into the Messenger's Cottage in 1917 they also moved their instruments to this adjacent lawn. The bureau still takes readings of temperature and relative humidity in the white Stevenson Screen and measures rainfall with a 'tipping bucket' rain gauge. The Sydney weather readings reported by the media are sourced from here.

6. Meteorological Building, Observatory Hill

Bureau of Meteorology staff experienced cramped conditions in the Messenger's Cottage after 1917. To alleviate these a new two-storey building was built on Observatory Hill with the top floor providing accommodation for the regional director and his family. The NSW state office of the bureau worked in the building until 1963.



7. National Trust Headquarters, near Agar steps on Observatory Hill

Part of this building was originally the Military Hospital designed by Lieutenant John Watts and built in 1815. In 1849 Colonial Architect Mortimer Lewis converted the hospital into Fort Street Model School that, as the name implied, was meant to serve as an educational model for the colony. In 1916 the boys' high school transferred to Taverners Hill where almost 60 years later it was joined by the girls' school. Today the building is the NSW headquarters of the National Trust.



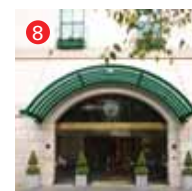
8. Observatory Hotel, 89–113 Kent Street

Designed by well-known Sydney architect Philip Cox and built in 1993, this five-star hotel was named for its proximity to Sydney Observatory. The hotel has a strong astronomical theme with its main restaurant named after the Italian astronomer Galileo, a Globe Bar with a large historic globe and a two-metre heated pool that is illuminated by fibre-optic star patterns on the ceiling above.



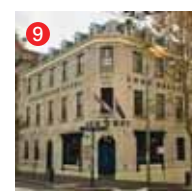
9. Lord Nelson Hotel, 19 Kent St, corner Kent & Argyle Streets

The Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel claims to be Sydney's oldest hotel with a liquor licence dating from 1 May 1841. William Wells, the first licensee, was originally a plasterer, but for the previous three years he had been operating a hotel under a succession of names on the opposite corner. After selling that hotel, he started the Lord Nelson in his own home that he had built in 1836 out of local sandstone.



10. The Garrison Church, corner Argyle and Lower Fort Streets

The foundation stone of the Church of the Holy Trinity was laid on 23 June 1840. Four years later the building was sufficiently completed for services to begin and the church became the official garrison church of the colony with soldiers regularly attending morning prayers. It was, however, a temporary structure that was only completed, using plans by the architect Edmund Blackett, in 1878.



11. The Argyle Cut, Argyle Street

In 1843 the Government decided to cut through the sandstone ridge of Observatory Hill as it blocked easy access from The Rocks to Millers Point. The work was begun by convicts using primitive tools, but finished by the Sydney Municipal Council with explosives and council labour in 1867–68. During the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge the cut was widened and the Bradfield Highway built overhead.



Remix this map

Use our map as a starting point to customise your very own pocket-sized folding map of Observatory Hill and surrounds. Create a walking tour that includes great stops for young kids to explore and a nice spot to sit and eat a picnic and take in the view. The choice is yours. We're continually updating the locations on offer too.

maps.powerhousemuseum.com



Share your stories

We want to read your memories and stories and see your photographs of Observatory Hill too, whether you have recollections of past decades, live in the vicinity today, or are just passing through. Add your images and share experiences on our website.

powerhousemuseum.com/sharedstories



More about Sydney Observatory

When it comes to stories about Observatory Hill, this walking tour is just the tip of the iceberg. As we walk the city's streets, what stories lurk beneath the footpath, behind the sandstone walls, in the faded lettering on a building? If you want to know more about the Observatory and the people who lived and worked there, and the stories of the past, then visit our website.

sydneyobservatory.com.au



The Powerhouse Museum, part of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, also incorporating Sydney Observatory, the Powerhouse Discovery Centre and NSW Migration Heritage Centre, is a NSW government cultural institution.

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