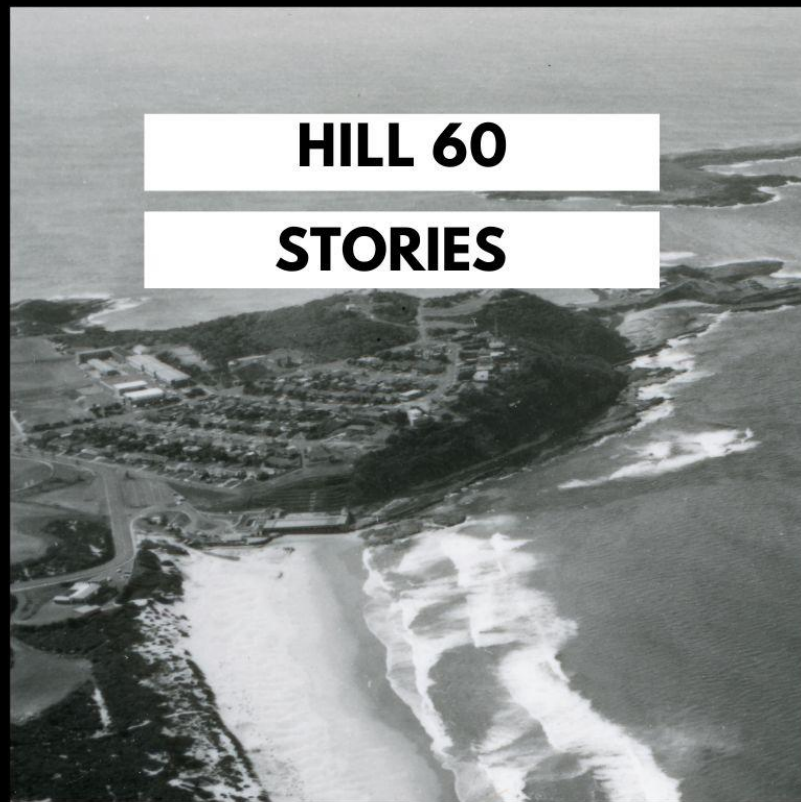




Hill 60 Stories

Hill 60 Stories is a collection of Oral History Interviews on Wollongong City Libraries Illawarra Stories website.

It is a valuable project that captures history told by Aboriginal Traditional Owners, custodians and knowledge holders who share their connection to this place and the experiences of their family members who lived on Hill 60, Port Kembla NSW.



In April 2024 Traditional Owners and custodians were consulted by WCC Community Engagement Aboriginal Services Officer to gauge interest in sharing their stories.

Introductions were made to the Local Studies team who then consulted directly and built meaningful connections with numerous Elders and Aboriginal community members who wanted to be part of sharing the history of their Ancestors in association with Hill 60.

Great care was taken to ensure that each individual could share their story in their way.



New interpretive signage about the history of the area was placed by Wollongong City Council (WCC) in December 2024 at Hill 60, Port Kembla as part of the Ngaraba-aan Trail. The history includes the displacement of the Aboriginal community and the hills war heritage.

Ngaraba-aan Trail

Displacement of the Aboriginal Community



For millennia, Hill 60 was home to the Aboriginal people of the Illawarra. In 1909 Hill 60 was acquired for defence purposes by the Commonwealth Government, however little was done for a substantial period.

Despite living peacefully through World War I, Aboriginal people living at Hill 60 faced pressure to leave in the late 1920s. This push by Council, disguised as environmental concern, aimed to expand the town of Port Kembla.

In 1923 the Port Kembla Golf club built a nine-hole golf course on the lower slopes where the Aboriginal community was camped. The Aboriginal residents were forced to move higher up the hill where they lived there till the early 1940s.

The Aboriginal community supported by advocates resisted eviction, by the Council. With the onset of economic recession in the 1930s Council ceased its efforts to remove the community having larger concerns to address in the town.

With the eruption of World War II in 1939 the Department of Defence commenced preparations to fortify Hill 60 due to threat of Japanese invasion.

Image: Tent homes were set up at the 'Official Camp' (near Coomadicche) near Port Kembla until housing was completed (ca. 1930-1941). From the collections of the Wollongong City Libraries and the Illawarra Historical Society 2020/21.



By 1942 all Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from Hill 60 and to ensure they could not return, their houses were burnt to the ground. Children and adults living on the Hill were put in the back of army trucks and taken to Sandyalah, near Berry, where they were put to work on a farm. Following the war much of the Hill 60 Aboriginal community returned from the South Coast and were moved onto a camp not far from Hill 60. The Camps were a tent city which had formed during the depression where people of many cultures lived together.

The area gradually reverted to an Aboriginal camp which consisted of families who were removed from Hill 60. This Aboriginal camp known as the 'Official Camps' was located on and around the area now known today as Coomadicche Public Reserve.

The Aboriginal settlement at Coomadicche again faced eviction by the NSW Housing Commission by 1957. The Community's land rights campaign led to a one-acre Aboriginal Reserve near Coomadicche Lagoon and six small houses were built however, promises of further housing and land rights never materialised.

Ngaraba-aan Trail Hill 60 stories



Listen to stories about Hill 60 told by Aboriginal Traditional Owners, custodians, and knowledge holders.

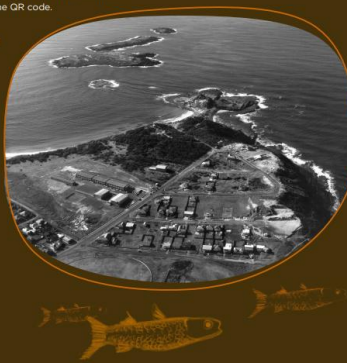
You can access the stories here: www.illawarrastories.com.au/hill-60-stories or by scanning the QR code.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that the website contains images, voices, and names of deceased persons.

The Hill 60 Oral History project is part of Illawarra Stories, an ongoing project of Wollongong City Libraries. Illawarra Stories aims to document the social and cultural history through recordings of interviews facilitated by library staff and volunteers. This project preserves the way people speak through voices, accents, and vocabularies, creating a valuable record for us all. These are real people, with real stories.

If you have a story to share with the community about Hill 60 from the past or present, you can contact our Library Team by calling 4222 7414 or by email: localhistory@wollongong.nsw.gov.au

Image: Red Fort, Port Kembla ca. 1960. From the collections of the Wollongong City Libraries and the Illawarra Historical Society 1999/04.



Ngaraba-aan Trail

Hill 60: A Bastion of War and Heritage



Welcome to Hill 60, a site of strategic military significance during World War II, now a public reserve rich with history. Acquired by the Commonwealth Government in 1909, this hill was fortified in the 1940s to protect Australia's coastal ports from potential Japanese invasion, with extensive contributions from the local coal and steel industries.

In the wake of the SS Millimullum's sinking in 1941, a detailed defence report highlighted Port Kembla's vulnerabilities, leading to the development of comprehensive coastal defences. Hill 60 was equipped with the 'Lower Battery' part of the robust 'Kembla Fortress' network, which also included the Port Kembla Breakwater Battery and the Drummond Battery at Mt. Drummond. These were interconnected by a new Military Road, ensuring safer access through the inland route, and powered by local electrical mains for heightened operational readiness.

During this period, the local Aboriginal Community faced severe displacement pressures to accommodate military constructions, a painful chapter in their ongoing struggle for land rights. Despite these adversities, they remained resilient, marking an indelible part of Hill 60's story.

By 1942, Hill 60 emerged as the command centre for the Kembla Fortress, monitored by the 13th Garrison Battalion. The surrounding

area, stretching from Lake Illawarra to Tom Thumb Lagoon, was patrolled by troops supported by the local fishing community from Fisherman's Beach. Despite its formidable defences the fortress saw no military action and was dismantled post-WWII in 1944.

Today, Hill 60 retains a range of preserved military structures, some of which have been repurposed to serve the community. These include Marine Rescue Port Kembla, run by volunteers, operating from a modified WWII lookout tower. The network of tunnels and connecting rooms servicing the two gun positions on Hill 60 also remain intact beneath this site, as indicated within the interpretive pavement treatment. The tunnels are currently closed to the public.

As you explore, reflect on the layered histories of defence, community resilience, and cultural survival that define Hill 60.

Image top: Hows Battery, Kembla Fortress area, 1944. No.2 gun emplacement and radar.
Image below: Entrances to military tunnels, leading to the practice room and gun positions, 1944.
Image courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.



The Hill 60 Stories page went live on the 19th of December 2024 when the interpretive signage was placed there.

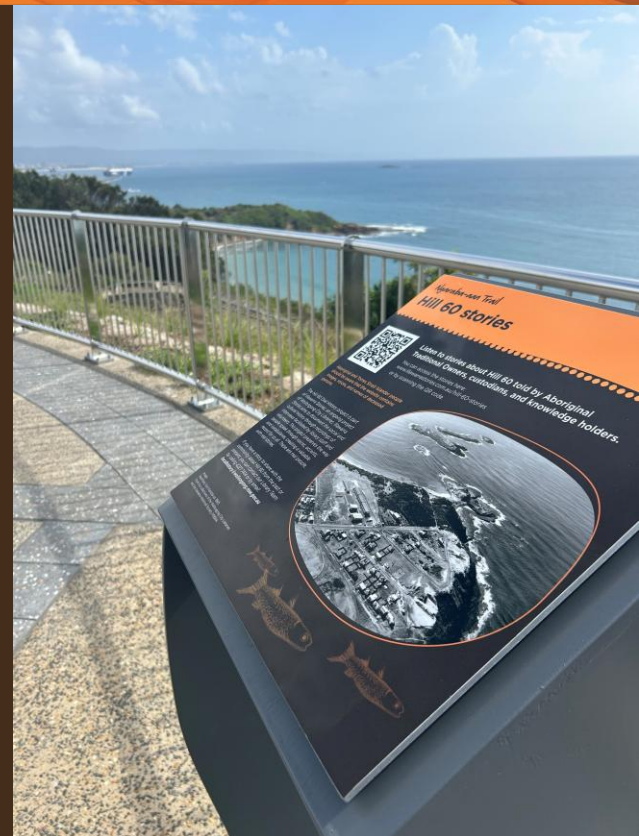
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this website contains images, voices, and names of deceased persons.



Hill 60 Stories

[Read more](#)

A QR code on the Hill 60 Stories sign links to the Illawarra Stories website where our Elders voices can be heard sharing the history of this significant place.





Uncle Steve Russell designed the terrazo that was also placed on Hill 60.

Uncle Steve shares his family's story and the meaning of his design.

Aunty Sheryl Davis Fulcher's connection to Hill 60.



Hear the complete interview at:
Hill 60 Stories – Wollongong City Libraries' Illawarra Stories

In addition to the Hill 60 Stories relating to Ancestors who resided on the hill, the Aboriginal Elders shared their own life experiences and images which can be found on Aboriginal Community Members page on the Illawarra Stories website.



It was an honour to sit with our local Aboriginal Elders and record their knowledge of this significant place.



Hill 60 Stories – Illawarra Stories

Thank You !
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