

A Beautiful Warning

Warnings are part and parcel of this challenging yet stunning day walk.

Do warnings reassure you or discourage you from attempting a walk? Given the name of this mountain, it seems completely appropriate that this day walk is littered with warnings. Captain Cook named Mount Warning, hoping its 1156m high finger-like point would help future sailors avoid nearby rocky reefs. The four to five hour return walk to the summit takes you up the final 700m over a total of 8.8km of track.

The warnings start on the journey to the mountain, but as I am in a car I ignore signs that the narrow approach road is unsuitable for caravans. As I start the walk, it is harder to ignore warning screams from my legs, thanks to the first quarter of the walk being more stairmaster than path.

Fortunately, feelings of pain are drowned out by my other senses. For this is Gondwana rainforest country and the slopes of this ancient volcano are rich with ferns, moss and bird calls. For those fit enough to take the walk in their stride, there is much beauty to enjoy.

Helicopter landing points punctuate each quarter of the walk, serving as stark reminders that many do not take the walk in their stride. The halfway point sign advises you to turn back if it is later than 1pm in wintertime. As the heavily forested climb is on the eastern side, darkness falls quickly and definitively. It is just after this point that the first sea views can be glimpsed, encouraging you onwards.

Summit Views.

BELOW: The author at the summit of Mount Warning.



The final ascent is a rocky scramble aided by a metal chain, hence a warning not to climb in a thunderstorm. This section is longer and steeper than I had been led to believe but provides a great physical challenge.

The sense of achievement is palpable, with walkers celebrating new arrivals to the summit. The views are magnificent – stretching from the Gold Coast to Byron Bay – and there is space on top to allow you to stay for a while.

If you are up for a greater challenge, the summit is the first place in Australia to see sunrise. Hopefully no warnings are needed to ensure night-time walkers set off with a good supply of torch batteries. I find myself disconcerted by signs warning that local Indigenous Elders prefer people not to climb to the summit. Having already started my ascent, I choose to continue.

If you do likewise, be warned that the Indigenous name for this mountain is Wollumbin, meaning Cloud Catcher. I walk on a sunny winter's day, probably like the one experienced by Captain Cook. But if the mountain is in Cloud Catcher mode, I would heed the warnings and postpone your walk for another day.

NEED TO KNOW

The road to Mount Warning heads west from ½ way between Murwillumbah and Uki.

The shorter Lyrebird track is closed due to storm damage with no plans for a reopening date.

<http://destinationtweed.com.au/welcome/wollumbin-mt-warning/>

Walk notes

MOUNT WARNING, NSW

Time/distance: 5hr/8.8km return | Grade: moderate-challenging

