

Who was Ben Buckler?



Long stretch of beach at Poll na Crann, Benbecula. Photos courtesy of Undiscovered Scotland, www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk

Ben Buckler is the name of the northern headland of Bondi Bay. There are many conflicting stories about how a headland came to have a male name, but what is undisputed is that the first recorded use of the name was in 1831, when a land grant to Richard Hurd at North Bondi was described as being '...to a point called Ben Buckler'.

The three most common theories about its naming are:

- It was named for a convict Benjamin Buckler or Ben Buckley, who lived locally with the Aboriginal people from 1810. His friend and fellow convict James Ives claimed he was killed near the point now bearing his name when the rock shelf on which he was standing collapsed. He also claims that the headland was formerly known as 'Ben Buckler's leap'.
- A variation on the story has a bushranger called Ben Buckley who, after taking part in many adventures and after obtaining his liberty, lived in a cave in the rocks at the northern end of Bondi Beach and was a known local character.
- Obed West (1807-1891) claimed that it was a corruption of an Indigenous word 'benbuckalong'. Others have claimed that the Indigenous word was originally 'baal-buckalea'.

But is there a Governor Lachlan Macquarie connection? This was first raised in an anonymous letter to the Sydney magazine the *Australian Town and Country Journal* on 25 May 1878. The writer, using the nome de plume, 'Old Colonist' claimed that the name Ben Buckler was a corruption of a name bestowed upon the headland by Macquarie. He went on to argue that Macquarie named it 'Benbecula' in honour of the island of the same name located in the remote Outer Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland. Macquarie was born on one of the Hebridian Islands, Ulva, and would have been familiar with other islands in this group.

The west coast of Benbecula has golden sand beaches, including one long sweep of beach Poll na Crann, with sand dunes behind them, the same coastal environment as Bondi Beach had before its development. Macquarie was born on island of Ulva in the Inner Hebrides, Scotland in 1762 and may have visited Benbecula, although this cannot be confirmed.

Macquarie would have travelled along the South Head Road, (now Old South Head Road) which had been constructed in 1811 and along parts of this Bondi Beach and its northern headland would have been visible. Did it look like Benbecula from a distance?

In 1906 the discussion began again in a local paper *The Bondi Weekly* when a land subdivision on the headland, known as the Queenscliffe Estate, began rumours that Ben Buckler's name was to be changed to Queenscliffe.

On 29 June 1915 Captain J. W. Watson of the Australian Historical Society decreed that 'the name of Ben Buckler is a corruption of Ben-becula, the name given by Macquarie.'

There is no primary evidence for any of the claims for the name Ben Buckler, making the debate about it all the more fascinating.

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