

New South Wales

When it comes to bushwalking, New South Wales (NSW) can rightly claim to be Australia's state of variety. Dotted around the state's 800,000-or-so square kilometres are several of the country's highest peaks, lush pockets of temperate and subtropical rainforest, volcanic remains, desert ranges, isolated beaches and gorge-scarred tableland. There's empty space aplenty and it's possible to walk through almost all of it.

On a crowded walkers' highlights reel, the cool upper reaches of Kosciuszko National Park probably grab top billing. Here are relatively easy walks in a usually well-watered region, under wide skies and with stunning views. The dense eucalypt forests and shady, plunging canyons of Blue Mountains National Park would probably run a close second. Especially as the 'Blueys' are in an eponymously named World Heritage Area, and said area of world renown is right on the doorstep of Sydney, and Sydney is a jolly fine destination for walkers in its own right. North and south of the NSW capital are easy coastal walks through cliff top heathland of unrivalled beauty. From these ocean ramparts, you can gaze in silence at the tall towers of nearby Sydney with nothing but sea-eagles for company.

Of all the places to walk in NSW, the remarkable Warrumbungle Range might be the best in which to ponder NSW's diversity of terrain and experience. To the west of the 'Bungles stretch the tabletop plains of western NSW. East, a spur of the Liverpool Range bends back towards the Great Dividing Range, which includes the Blue Mountains, Kosciuszko Range and other distinctive walking destinations, such as the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops and the rugged, hidden Budawang. Big state. Big choice. Get started.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Wandering past sandy beaches, beautiful wind-fretted rock formations and soaring cliffs of the Royal National Park on the **Coast Track** (p58)
- Exploring the World Heritage-listed landscapes of the **Blue Mountains** (p62) and **Kanangra-Boyd National Parks** (p80)
- Climbing Australia's highest peaks in **Kosciuszko National Park** (p88)
- Savouring solitude and the extraordinary rock formations of **Monolith Valley** (p101)
- Scaling the ridges surrounding the volcanic spires of the **Warrumbungles** (p110)

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ www.visitnsw.com.au

■ www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

ENVIRONMENT

The Great Dividing Range dominates eastern NSW, running the length of the state and providing a key influence on climate, plant and animal distribution and human settlement. Most of the Great Dividing Range's ancient peaks have been worn down to a series of plateaus or tablelands, including the New England tableland, the Blue Mountains, the Southern Highlands and the Monaro Tablelands, most of which don't rise above 1200m to 1400m. By contrast, in the Snowy Mountains the high peaks top 2000m, culminating in Australia's highest point, Mt Kosciuszko (2228m). Here there's evidence of the last ice age in the moraines and lakes left by retreating glaciers.

East of the range, the coastal strip is (by Australian standards) heavily settled and much changed by human hand. To the west, the better watered and more productive agricultural lands on rolling land near the range give way to vast, empty, arid plains.

The walks in this chapter are concentrated in the ranges and coast, where there's generally a higher proportion of forested country and greater diversity of plant and animal life.

INFORMATION

When to Walk

For the most part NSW offers year-round walking conditions, with a few exceptions. Mid-winter snows generally prevent walking in Kosciuszko National Park, while high temperatures and lack of surface water can sometimes inhibit departures in certain parks (and even close some areas) in mid-summer. Generally, autumn and spring are the most popular seasons for walking.

Maps

If you're planning to do a lot of driving, take along the series of regional road maps by the National Roads & Motorist's Association (NRMA), which shows almost every road and track in the state, although not the topography. The descriptions of road conditions are accurate and up to date. You can order online (www.mynrma.com.au/maps_2.asp) or pick them up at NRMA offices – most will have the maps to their area and probably the whole set. They're free to members, and to the members of motoring organisations in other states.

The **NSW Department of Lands** (☎ 9228 6111; www.lands.nsw.gov.au), referred to as 'Lands', produces topographic maps at three scales – 1:25,000, which cover the coast and ranges; 1:50,000, for the western slopes and central region, and 1:100,000, for the far west. In the past, the state mapmaker has been known as Land & Property Information New South Wales (LPINSW) and Central Mapping Authority (CMA), and many Lands maps continue to be published under one of those imprints.

For maps covering individual walks, see Planning in the introduction to each walk.

BUYING MAPS

Sydney has the best range of maps (p52), available either in dedicated map shops or one of the many outdoor gear shops.

Books

For the most extensive coverage of the state's national parks, use the National Parks Association (NPA) guide in two volumes: *The NPA Guide to National Parks of Northern NSW* and *The NPA Guide to National Parks of Southern NSW*. Several walking books explore the state in fair depth. Tyrone Thomas's *120 Walks in New South Wales* and *70 Walks in Southern New South Wales* and *the ACT* are extremely useful. John and Lyn Daly's *Take a Walk in a National Park* series has four volumes covering NSW walks: *South-Eastern Zone*, *Blue Mountains*, *Sydney to Port Macquarie* and *Port Macquarie to Brisbane*.

Information Sources

Tourism NSW (☎ 13 20 77; www.tourism.nsw.gov.au) is the NSW government's peak tourism body. Almost every major town (and many minor ones) has a tourist office with local information that's not readily available from the larger state organisation; those relevant to individual walks are listed in this chapter.

For information on NSW national parks and bushwalking organisations (all based in Sydney), see Information (p51).

Park Fees & Regulations

National park fees and camping regulations vary across NSW. Just under 50 of the state's 100-plus parks charge vehicle-entry fees, which vary from \$22 per day during the winter in Kosciuszko National

Park (\$16 during the rest of the year) to \$3 per day. If you're going to be a regular park visitor, a Country Park Pass (\$45 for 12 months, allowing unlimited entry to all parks except metropolitan Sydney and Kosciuszko), Multi-Park Pass (\$65; entry to all parks except Kosciuszko) or All-Parks Pass (\$145; all parks including Kosciuszko) is probably the best deal. The **National Parks Annual Pass Centre** (☎ 9585 6068, 1300 361 967; fax 9585 6831; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) has all the details and you can purchase permits online.

Some parks have restrictions on camp sites and campfires, and some charge fees for camping, usually only at popular sites with vehicle access and facilities, but oc-

asionally for the use of bush camp sites. Any relevant fees are listed in the Planning section for each park or area within this chapter.

Guided Walks

National Parks Association (NPA) (☎ 9299 0000; www.npansw.org.au) Conducts one or more overnight bushwalks per week, led by a member, on a bring-your-own gear and pay-your-own costs basis. The NPA's volunteer guides are often vastly experienced walkers with a detailed knowledge of the areas in which they lead walks.

Parktrek (☎ 03-9486 7070; www.parktrek.com) Has a program of all-inclusive walking tours from various bases in several states. Among its NSW offerings is a five-day Kosciuszko National Park trip, consisting of day walks

from a base, which usually runs late January. Pick-up is from Canberra, if required. Cost is from \$132 to \$165 per day.

River Deep Mountain High (☎ 4782 6109; www.bluemountainguides.com.au; info@bluemountainguides.com.au) Runs two- and three-day Blue Mountains overnight walks from Katoomba into the Blue Gum Forest and along routes such as the Six Foot Track. Costs range from \$375 for a two-day carry-own-gear trek to \$660 for a fully supported three-day walk.

Tread Lightly EcoTours (☎ 4788 1229, 0414 976 752; www.treadlightly.com.au) Does short, half- and full-day walks in the Blue Mountains.

Wildframe Ecotours (☎ 0500 505 056) Leads more tourist-oriented day walks in the mountains, picking up from city hotels. Cost is \$82 per person and overnight walks can be arranged on application.

GATEWAY Sydney

☎ 02 / pop 4 million

Conveniently, Australia's most populous city is the nearest centre to several of NSW's walking hot spots. There are excellent local, state, national and international transport connections and plenty of things to distract you during down time between walks.

INFORMATION

Information on Sydney and its vibrant suburbs is available at the **Sydney visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 067 676, 9240 8788; www.tourism.nsw.gov.au) The Rocks (nr Argyle & Playfair Sts) Darling Harbour (33 Wheat Rd), open daily. The website includes a large database of hostels and hotels.

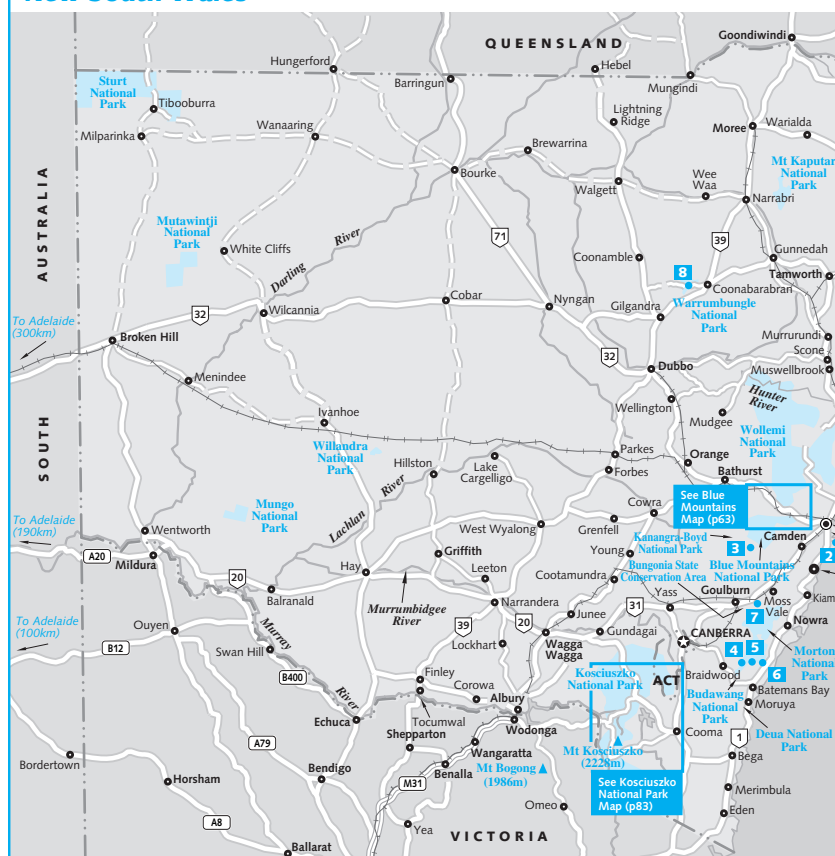
The NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) is the prime source of information about walking in the Sydney region and throughout NSW. Its **head office** (☎ 9585 6444; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au; 43 Bridge St, Hurstville) is rather inconveniently located, about 15 minutes' walk from Hurstville station. The information centre there is open weekdays and carries a comprehensive range of parks information and maps. Its website (www.npws.nsw.gov.au) is also a mine of information, with contact numbers for each park, details of activity programs and news of bushfires and park closures. For information on specific parks, it's usually better to call the ranger or district office (contact details are listed in the Information section for each park).

The **National Parks Association** (☎ 9299 0000; www.npansw.org.au; level 9, 91 York St) is one of the state's leading community conservation organisations, and has a very active walks program open to non-members.

The Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW represents more than 60 clubs across the state and operates a volunteer wilderness search and rescue service. Although it cannot normally be contacted for inquiries (its office bearers are volunteers), it produces an informative magazine, *The Bushwalker*, and also maintains an excellent website (www.bushwalking.org.au), which includes a list of clubs, addresses of shops, information about current environmental issues and a list of national parks closed by bushfires.

The Sydney Morning Herald and *The Australian* daily newspapers carry detailed weather reports and forecasts.

New South Wales



Lonely Planet has two guides to Sydney: *Sydney* and *Best of Sydney*. The Lonely Planet *Sydney City Map* is a great help for getting around central Sydney and nearby suburbs.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

In the city, branches of the main outdoor gear shops cluster on Kent St, behind the Town Hall. The icon is **Paddy Pallin** (☎ 9264 2685; www.paddypallin.com.au) at No 507. Other worthwhile outdoor gear shops in Kent St are **Mountain Designs** (☎ 9267 3822; www.mountaindesigns.com) at No 499, and **Snowgum** (☎ 9261 0187; www.snowgum.com.au) at No 481. **Larry Adler Ski & Outdoor** (☎ 9264 2500; www.larryadler.com) at No 497, offers gear hire – a basic two-person tent rents for \$30 and a sleeping bag \$40 for one night (each \$5 more per extra night). A credit-card imprint is required as security.

These shops also stock walking maps, but the best range can be found at **Map World** (☎/fax 9261 3601; 371 Pitt St, Sydney) and **Sydney Map Shop** (☎ 9236 7720; Maps_Sydney@lands.nsw.gov.au; 1 Prince Albert Rd).

SLEEPING & EATING

The accommodation choice in Sydney is huge and prices competitive, with good options in every price range. Contact the **Sydney visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 067 676, 9240 8788; www.tourism.nsw.gov.au) for an extensive list of accommodation options.

It's a complex trek to the tent sites nearest to the city at **Lane Cove River Tourist Park** (☎ 9888 9133; www.lanecoverivertouristpark.com.au; Plassey Rd, North Ryde; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$30/\$36, cabins from \$121). To get there, take bus route 545 from Chatswood train station to Plassey Rd. The park is a few hundred metres north towards Lane Cove National Park. Access will improve from 2008 when Delhi Rd station opens on the new Epping-Chatswood train line.

Sydney Central YHA (☎ 9281 9111; www.yha.com.au/hostels; cnr Pitt St & Rawson Pl; dm members/non-members \$35/39) is the nearest hostel to Central Station. Just to the southeast is **Railway Square YHA** (☎ 9281 9666; 8 Lee St; dm members/non-members \$35/39).

Wake Up! Sydney Central (☎ 9288 7888; www.yha.com.au/hostels; 509 Pitt St; dm \$24, d without/with ensuite \$88/98) is central and has the Fed Up bistro in-house (mains \$8 to \$12).

Y On the Park Hotel (☎ 9264 2451; www.yhotel.com.au; 5 Wentworth Ave; dm/s/d \$33/88/98, deluxe r with/without kitchenette \$130/136) is close to the Oxford St buzz overlooking Hyde Park. Tariffs include breakfast.

Central Railway Motel (☎ 9319 7800; 240 Chalmers St; d \$114), just south of Central station, has clean and neat rooms.

Medina Apartments (☎ 1300 633 462; www.medinaapartments.com.au; cnr Kent & Bathurst Sts; studio \$180, 1-/2-bed r \$240/316) are at the Medina Grand Sydney.

Star City Apartments (☎ 1800 700 700; www.starcity.com.au; 80 Pyrmont St; 1-/2-/3-bed apt \$520/620/730) are right near the casino – get your yah yahs out after a lengthy stint in the bush.

Aarons Hotel (☎ 1800 101 100; www.aaronshotel.com.au 37 Ultimo Rd; s/d \$110/\$150) is a convenient 3½-star establishment central to theatres, entertainment venues, restaurants and markets.

Woolbrokers Hotel (☎ 9552 4773; http://members.ozemail.com.au/~woolbrokers; 22 Allen St Pyrmont; d \$89) is on the corner of Pyrmont St near the Convention light rail stop and monorail station – slightly downmarket but close to Darling Harbour.

With great local produce, innovative chefs, inexpensive prices and BYO (Bring Your Own) alcohol licensing laws, Sydney is a fine place to eat out. Choices are nearly unlimited around Pitt and Goulburn Sts in Haymarket, and Chinatown's Dixon St.

Musashi (☎ 9280 0377; 447 Pitt St, cnr Campbell St; lunch \$15-22, mains \$19-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) has reliable Japanese cuisine including sushi and sashimi.

Encasa (☎ 9211 4257; 423 Pitt St; mains \$19-\$26; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) offers a mix of international flavours, including tapas, pizza and pasta.

Diethnes (☎ 9267 8956; 336 Pitt St; mains \$15-\$26; ☎ lunch & dinner) is the place for traditional Greek food amid the skyscrapers. Sydney's biggest concentration of Greek restaurants is further out in the suburbs, so this is one to savour.

There's no shortage of Chinese food in this part of town, and **Seabay** (☎ 9267 4855; 372 Pitt St; mains \$8-\$12; ☎ lunch & dinner) is cheap and cheerful, with dumplings a speciality.

BBQ King (☎ 9267 2586; 18 Goulburn St; mains from \$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a Sydney institution, stays open late (2am) and specialises in flamed flesh with a Chinese flavour.

Macchiato (☎ 9262 9525; 338 Pitt St; mains \$16-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) offers mostly Italian cuisine

as the name would suggest – filling pastas, lasagnes and wood-fired pizzas.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Sydney's **Kingsford Smith Airport** (☎ 9667 9111; www.sydneyairport.com.au) is 10km south of the city centre. Flights arrive from the usual international points and from all over Australia. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) all have frequent flights to other Australian capital cities and major airports. Regional carriers, such as **Qantaslink** (☎ 13 13 13) – comprising Airlink, Eastern Australia Airlines and Sunstate Airlines – and **Regional Express** (Rex; ☎ 13 17 13; www.regionalexpress.com.au) fly mainly within NSW.

The Sydney domestic and international terminals are 4km apart. A convenient free shuttle service operates between the terminals for transit ticket holders. **CityRail** (☎ 13 05 00; www.cityrail.info) run trains between the domestic and international terminals, connecting to the rest of the Sydney metropolitan network and to country services at Central Station. These are regular commuter services, so can get crowded and are not luggage-friendly.

Bus

Sydney Coach Terminal (☎ 9281 9366; Eddy Ave), outside Central Station, is a base for **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au). **Premier** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premiers.com.au) and **Firefly Express** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.firefly-express.com.au) have offices around the corner on Pitt St.

Car & Motorcycle

Major car-rental companies have offices at the airport and around the city: **Avis** (☎ 13 63 33; www.avis.com), **Budget** (☎ 1300 794 344; www.budget.com.au), **Europcar** (☎ 1300 131 390; www.deltaeuropcar.com.au), **Hertz** (☎ 13 30 39; www.hertz.com.au) and **Thrifty** (☎ 1300 367 227; www.thrifty.com.au).

The major roads leading out of Sydney are either motorways, on which a toll is charged, or freeways. Routes to know include the M4 from Strathfield to the Blue Mountains, the F3 to Newcastle (en route to Bouddi, Brisbane Water and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Parks), the F6 from Waterfall (Royal National Park) towards

TOLL CITY

Planning on using a rental car to get to various walks near Sydney? Consider this: a whopping share of recent Sydney transport infrastructure projects have been given to private enterprise, which has enterprisingly engineered deals that amount to the proverbial licence to print money. How bad can it be? Well, suppose you're a resident of Sydney's eastern suburbs faced with a busy day (Christmas?) visiting relatives. Leave the city via the Cross City Tunnel (\$3.56) and pick up the M4 (\$2.20) to get to Aunty Joan's at Penrith for lunch. Bail out midafternoon and pick up the Westlink M7 (\$5.88) and M2 (\$3.80) to get back to tea at Uncle Ted's place in Chatswood. Duck back home after dark through the Harbour Tunnel (\$3). If you're driving an economical four-cylinder car, you've just spent more on tolls than you did on petrol.

Wollongong and the Budawangs, and the M5 towards Goulburn (Bungonia Gorge), Canberra and Kosciuszko National Park.

Train

All interstate and principal regional train services operate from Central Station, on Eddy Ave between George and Elizabeth Sts. For bookings and recorded information on arrival and departure times call **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) or try a **Countrylink Travel Centre** (☎ 13 28 29).

SYDNEY REGION

Amid the towering buildings of central Sydney it's difficult to believe that within 100km are several national parks and some of the state's largest wilderness areas. The parks protect a staggering variety of habitats – ranging from coastal heath to subalpine eucalypt woodland – and include unspoilt beaches, World Heritage-listed mountain vistas and rare plants and animals. It says much for the community's commitment to national parks that some of these have survived intact for as long as 120 years, in defiance of Sydney's relentless urban sprawl. Two outstanding and popular walks in parks flanking Sydney to the north and south are

WARNING

During summer, walkers must be alert to the ever-present threat of bushfires in Sydney's national parks. During the Bushfire Danger Period (usually 1 October to 31 March) it's always wise to contact the relevant park information centre to check on fire danger rating before setting out. If there isn't a park fire ban in place, you may be allowed to light a cooking or heating fire – although it's always advisable to use a fuel stove. Days of Total Fire Ban (p25) are widely publicised in the news media. Fire danger ratings are listed in the weather pages of the daily newspapers. You can also check the Total Fire Ban and Current Fire Danger map on the **NSW Rural Fire Service** (www.bushfire.nsw.gov.au) website, or contact the local park information centre.

Also ensure you're familiar with the advice on what to do if caught near a fire (p387).

described in this section – just a glimpse of the city's wealth of walking opportunities.

PLANNING
When to Walk

Sydney's climate is pleasant for walking during all but the hottest and most humid days of summer. Late winter through spring

(wildflower season in the city's nearby national parks) is the most pleasant time to be out. September is the month with lowest average rainfall; blooming wildflowers and daily temperature averages of 10°C to 20°C add to September's charm for walkers. Flies are a distraction throughout summer; late summer is often uncomfortably humid and has the year's highest average rainfall. Check weather forecasts for thunderstorm activity from late spring through summer.

Maps

For general planning, there's not much difference between the many regional tourist maps on the market, although it's fair comment that the NSW government's Lands Department's tourist maps are probably less frequently revised than some of their commercial counterparts'. The LPINSW 1:25,000 series maps covering the region have mostly been recently updated.

For maps covering individual walks, see Planning in the introduction to each walk.

Books

The range of Sydney walking guides is undergoing a growth spurt. They now number in the dozens; some of the most recent are low-budget efforts that cover relatively small areas. The most comprehensive and detailed remains *Bushwalks in the Sydney*

HARBOUR WALKABOUT

More than anything, even real estate prices, Sydney Harbour defines the NSW capital and its inhabitants. It's the fluid space that makes the Opera House sails fly and reflects the famous Bridge's grandeur. Melbourne can keep its trams; Sydneysiders get to scoot home on ferries.

A new walk that loops around the western part of the harbour gives a fascinating perspective of this Sydney icon. The Harbour Circle Walk was mapped by volunteers who were determined to keep the harbour foreshores accessible for all to enjoy. Over a period of some years they explored the foreshore parks, long-forgotten rights-of-way and little-used footpaths that run within rock-skipping distance of the water. They dug into the history of various suburbs and colourful individuals, and finally they pulled all their knowledge together in a map and set of historical walking notes.

The walk has a main 'circle' of 26km and 13 scenic loops that add another 40km. It's possible to complete the main circle in one solid day but much more interesting to break it into sections and walk a bit at a time, travelling to harbourside starting points by (what else?) ferry. From the Harbour Bridge the main circle winds along the north shore of the harbour to Hunters Hill, then meanders south to Balmain and finally crosses the Anzac Bridge on the way back to Pyrmont, Darling Harbour and Observatory Hill. The more difficult north section is 12km and the south 14km; they each take about five hours to walk. You can download the walk map and the historical notes (one set for the main circle, another for the side-trip 'loops') from the **NSW Department of Planning** (www.planning.nsw.gov.au/harbour/walking.asp) website.

GREAT NORTH WALK

Opened in 1988 to celebrate the bicentenary of European settlement in Australia, the 250km Great North Walk (GNW) links the cities of Sydney and Newcastle via natural corridors – narrow strips of bushland and beaches in places – that extend virtually to the centre of both cities.

From Circular Quay, the route crosses Sydney Harbour by ferry to Valentia St wharf. It briefly parallels part of the new Harbour Circle and Loop walks (opposite) before going through Lane Cove National Park, along Berowra Creek and through Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park to Broken Bay. Walkers then take a ferry to Brisbane Water National Park. Beyond there, the GNW traverses state forest and private land northwards to Congewoi Valley, then heads east along the Myall Range, past Lake Macquarie and on to the coast and Newcastle. The route is a combination of fire trails, walking tracks and some specially built sections of walking track, and is well signposted and track marked. Simple camp sites have been provided at suitable intervals, and the GNW passes through some small towns with shops and accommodation. About 75km of linking tracks provide access to transport connections and, at the northern end, Hunter Valley wineries around Pokolbin.

The recommended time for the full distance is 14 days, although transport access means this can be split into shorter journeys, mainly in the south where the route regularly crosses the Sydney–Gosford railway line.

The walk is maintained by the **Department of Lands** (☎ 9228 6111, 9236 7720; www.lands.nsw.gov.au), which publishes a set of six colour brochures, each with a topographic map showing the route of the GNW and all the necessary practical information. It's available from the Department, local tourist offices, map shops and outdoor gear suppliers.

Region, Volumes 1 and 2, edited by S Lord and G Daniel and published by the National Parks Association of NSW. They describe 166 walks, all within about 120km of central Sydney. The contributors are all active bushwalkers; the maps are almost good enough to use on the walks. *Sydney and Blue Mountains Bushwalks* by Neil Paton describes 140 walks from two hours' to several days' duration, most in national parks.

generally keep close to the rugged cliff-lined coast, passing through most of the park's different vegetation types, from tall, cool forest in sheltered gullies to dense, low heath on exposed headlands.

It is described here as a return walk from Putty Beach, near Killcare, a small settlement on the shore of Brisbane Water. The moderate part of the grading is earned by the several steep ups and downs, and also by the occasional roughness of the track – although track work is improving several of the most eroded sections. You'll probably notice discrepancies in the distances given between places on signposts along the walk, although by no more than 1km; we've tried to reconcile these in this description.

A couple of worthwhile side trips to cliff-edge vantage points would add close to 2km and up to an hour.

ENVIRONMENT

Bouddi's distinctive suite of plants includes eucalypt-like angophoras, the intriguing scribbly gum and the burrawang, a type of cycad – an ancient group of palm-like plants that was once widespread but is now restricted to about 250 species, all in tropical and subtropical habitats. The burrawangs are especially noticeable from the track near Maitland Bay and Little Beach.

BOUDDI COAST

Duration	5 hours
Distance	13.5km
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Putty Beach
Nearest Town	Sydney (p51)
Transport	private
Summary	A varied walk along Bouddi's unspoiled coast, featuring heath, woodland, beaches, cliffs and panoramic views across Broken Bay to Sydney's northern beaches and the city skyline.

The Bouddi Coast walk (one of the finest of its kind in NSW) links Putty Beach (towards the western end of the park) with Little Beach, on the northeast boundary. Boardwalks, walking tracks and fire trails

PLANNING

Maps & Books

The LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic map *Broken Bay* covers the walk described here. *Bushwalks in the Sydney Region* and *Take a Walk in a National Park Sydney to Port Macquarie* (p49) both include descriptions of six walks in Bouddi.

Information Sources

The park information centre beside the Maitland Bay car park, on the Scenic Rd about 2.5km east of the Putty Beach turn-off, is open only at weekends. A better alternative is **NPWS Central Coast** (☎ general inquiries 4320 4200, ☎ camping inquiries 4320 4203; central.coast@environment.nsw.gov.au; 207 Albany St North) in Gosford.

Permits & Regulations

Sites at bushland camping areas at either end of this walk – Putty and Little Beaches – require permits, which are available from the NPWS Central Coast Office (see Information Sources earlier). The fee per two people is \$16; at Putty Beach there's an additional charge of \$7 per day to park your car. Bring \$1 and \$2 coins for the ticket machines. No wood fires are allowed at these camps, but there are (free) gas barbecues; to be on the safe side you should bring a fuel or gas stove for cooking. Camping is

not permitted elsewhere in the park. During times of extreme fire danger the park is closed to public access.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

See Sydney (p51).

Putty Beach camping area & Killcare

For something a bit more natural before setting out, indulge in a spot of car camping at the national park site at Putty Beach (at the start of the walk); it's essential to obtain a permit first (see left).

The nearest food shops are on Araluen Dr in tiny Killcare – follow the Killcare road for 400m from the junction of Putty Beach Dr and the Scenic Rd. Killcare Cellars is a convenience store open daily with some supplies. The Old Killcare Store opposite has a small delicatessen and offers takeaway or eat-in sandwiches, burgers and quiches.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Drive north of Sydney on the Sydney–Newcastle Fwy. Leave the freeway at the Kariong and Woy Woy exit, then turn off the Pacific Hwy 1.5km southeast of the freeway along Woy Woy Rd. About 10.5km further south, at a right bend near the shore of Woy Woy Inlet, Woy Woy Rd becomes Rawson Rd, which in turn (at the intersection of Edward St) becomes Allfield Rd. Veer right off

MARIE BYLES & BOUDDI

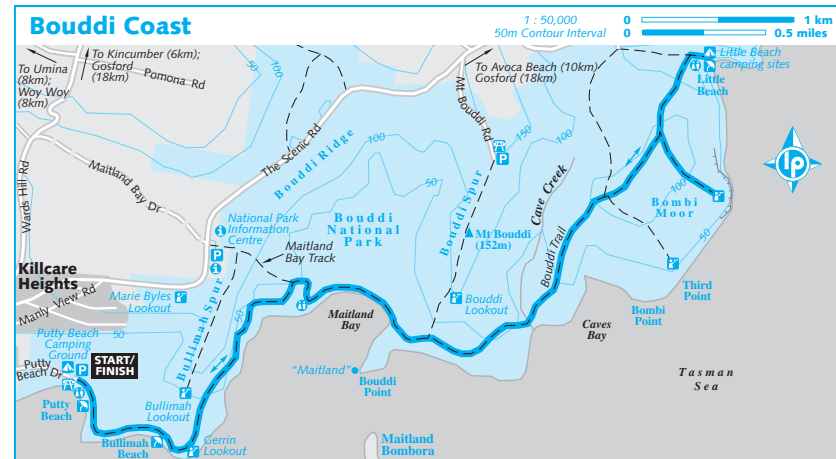
The dense scrub and rugged terrain of the Bouddi area deterred European settlers and ensured that this coast remained more or less in its natural state well into the 20th century.

In 1922 a remarkable young woman, Marie Byles (1900–79), ventured onto Bouddi Peninsula and was captivated by its natural beauty. Soon after, she became the first female solicitor in NSW and began her lifelong campaign for equal rights for women. Mountaineering and bushwalking were enduring passions and she was naturally drawn to the concept of national parks to preserve natural areas.

In the early 1930s Byles and a group of fellow bushwalkers campaigned for the creation of a national park at Bouddi, and in 1935 the state government set aside 263 hectares for public recreation and named the area Bouddi National Park. Its administration was in the hands of trustees, one of whom was Byles; it's almost certain that she was responsible for having the trustees' meetings on a park beach.

As Bouddi State Park, the reserve was taken over by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service in 1967, and in 1975 it regained national park status; the area of the park is now 1189 hectares. The park's marine extension of 287 hectares, between Gerrin and Bombi Points, was the first area of the sea bed to be given special protection in NSW.

Marie Byles was also an intrepid traveller throughout Southeast Asia and a founder member of the Buddhist Society of NSW. A lookout on the Scenic Rd that overlooks Bouddi is named in her honour.



Allfield Rd onto Blackwall Rd and continue for about 1.7km to a roundabout; here go left, cross over the Rip Bridge and follow Empire Bay Dr for almost 6km, and then drive south via Wards Hill Rd, which climbs very steeply up and over to the Scenic Rd. Turn right here, and then take the second road on the left, signposted to Putty Beach. This partly sealed, part-gravel road ends at the beach car park, 1.1km from the Scenic Rd.

Although private transport is the most practical option for this walk, it's possible to get to Bouddi National Park by train and bus. A good train service runs to the Central Coast, and **Busways** (☎ 4368 2277; www.busways.com.au) runs infrequent services (none on Sundays) to Killcare from Woy Woy (\$4.20) and Gosford (\$5.80). The one-way train fare to either station is \$8.

THE WALK

From the car park, go east along Putty Beach to the steps at the eastern end of the sand. Climb to an open expanse of fretted and crumbling sandstone, which leads to a long boardwalk above a fine shoreline rock platform. Soon you come to a junction where a short track leads down to small **Bullimah Beach**, which is safe only for paddling (treacherous rocks lurk just below the surface). Back on the main track, shady steps take you up to **Gerrin Lookout** and fine views of Maitland Bay, the offshore rocks known as Maitland Bombora and the tall city buildings of the southern skyline. Continue

through eucalyptus woodland, interspersed with some splendid burrawangs, to a track junction; turn right to go down to **Maitland Bay** (about 1¼ hours from Putty Beach).

There's a pit toilet near the track at the western end of the beach, which is safe enough for swimming on a calm day. Go along to the eastern end and up the steep steps to a shallow gap on the spur leading towards Bouddi Point. There are good views of the coastal cliffs a short distance to the right; at low tide you might be able to make out the remaining fragment of the coastal paddle steamer *Maitland*, which foundered here in 1898 with the loss of about 27 lives, on the western side of Bouddi Point.

Continue along the main track up to a junction (the Mt Bouddi turn-off) and turn right towards Little Beach, with spectacular views of the Hawkesbury River estuary. The cliff-edge track, eroded in places, crosses a couple of gullies, separated by she-oak and banksia thickets, then descends to cross Cave Creek (about 45 minutes from Maitland Bay).

After this the way is up, via the many steps overlooking Caves Bay, to a small clearing. Turn left along a sandy 4WD track and continue climbing. Bear right at a fork and you soon come to the turn-off to Third Point on the right. There are good views of the cliffs from near the end of this track, but the next one to **Bombi Moor**, another 500m along the main track, is even more rewarding. The 1.5km return walk along a

fire trail passes through heathland rich with wildflowers in spring; it ends right on the cliff edge, from where there are magnificent views southwards of Sydney's northern beaches and the city skyscrapers.

Back on the main track, continue steadily down through varied eucalyptus woodland to a T-junction and turn right to reach **Little Beach**, a small rocky cove (about 45 minutes from Cave Creek). There are toilets and barbecues here but no fresh water.

The return to Putty Beach is simply a matter of retracing your steps.

THE COAST TRACK

Duration	2 days
Distance	26km
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Bundeena
Finish	Otford
Nearest Town	Sydney (p51)
Transport	train, ferry

Summary This path crosses varied terrain along the cliffs and beaches in Royal National Park. Coastal views from atop eroded sandstone ramparts, heathland alive with birds, beautiful stretches of sand and shady palm forest combine to ensure a memorable walk.

Declared in 1879, Royal National Park is Australia's oldest (and the world's second-oldest) national park, and also a long-time haunt of Sydney bushwalkers. Within its 15,080 hectares is a wide-ranging network of walking tracks; the Coast Track is reputedly NSW's busiest walk. The route traverses traditional lands of the Dharawal Aboriginal people and there are several important Dharawal sites along the route or nearby, including rock engravings at Jibbon Point, near Bundeena, and a huge midden at North Era. Severe fires in 1994 (which flattened 90% of the park's vegetation) and 2001 (60% destroyed) have left little trace today but did prompt the realignment of (and improvements to) sections of the track.

ENVIRONMENT

Royal National Park covers a sloping sandstone plateau that rises from sea level in the park's north to about 300m in the south. Various sandstone features – cliffs

and caves – and dune systems created by changing sea levels and erosion dominate the landscape. Several plant communities feature. The most prominent is the coastal heath of banksias, boronias, tea-trees and hakeas that dominates the northern part of the Coast Track. Various types of eucalyptus woodland and pockets of remnant rainforest, such as the Palm Jungle, feature on the track's southern part. A healthy variety of frog, reptile and mammal species inhabit the park, and during winter whales are frequent visitors along its 19km coastline. Birds are the animals most visitors will see; more than 270 bird species have been recorded here. In the heath, various types of honeyeater, and wattlebirds, fairywrens and thornbills add colour. It's also fairly common to see yellow-tailed black-cockatoos travelling in sizable flocks – an awesome, and noisy, sight.

PLANNING

National Parks authorities advise Coast Track walkers to carry in all water. There are several creeks (usually running) along the way and creek water in the toilet/shower facilities at Wattamolla, but any water you collect must be boiled or treated before drinking. Many people walk the Coast Track in low-cut shoes, but boots are advisable – the track is stony and uneven in places.

Maps

The LPINSW 1:35,000 *Royal National Park Tourist Map* covers the park in one sheet, accurately shows tracks and facilities, and is more than adequate for Coast Track walkers. The LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps *Port Hacking* and *Otford* show greater topographic detail.

Information Sources

The **Royal National Park visitor information centre** (☎ 9542 0648; Farnell Ave, Audley Heights; ☹ daily) is signposted from the Princes Hwy between Loftus and Engadine.

Permits & Regulations

All walkers staying at either the North Era or Providential Point sites must have a **bush camping permit** (per 2 people \$6). The numbers of people using each site are strictly limited and you must book ahead; the visitor information centre takes bookings and accepts

payments. Sites may be closed at times of high fire danger or to allow vegetation to recover. Wood fires are prohibited, so bring a portable stove for cooking. It's \$9 per day to bring a car into the park.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

CityRail trains run every 30 minutes from Central to Cronulla (\$4.40 single, 47 minutes). The **Bundeena ferry** (☎ 9523 2990) leaves Cronulla hourly from 8.30am (\$4.50, 20 to 25 minutes). The last ferry departs Cronulla at 6.30pm from November to March, and 5.30pm April to October. The ferry wharf is off Tonkin St, just west of Cronulla CityRail station and well signposted.

From the Bundeena ferry wharf, walk straight up Brighton St, past the shops and continue south. About 20m from the end of Brighton St, go left onto the pathway through to Rymill Place. Follow, then go right into Bournemouth St, left into Reef St, right into Beachcomber Ave and continue past the locked gate. The Coast Track starts on the left about 200m beyond the gate.

THE WALK

Day 1: Bundeena to North Era

6–7 hours, 17km, 150m ascent, 140m descent

From the start the track rolls for about 700m down to low cliffs and the ocean. There it turns sharply right (south), and there's a real sense of leaving Sydney behind. The first wide views of the coastline appear and the track ahead beckons, snaking through cliff-side heath.

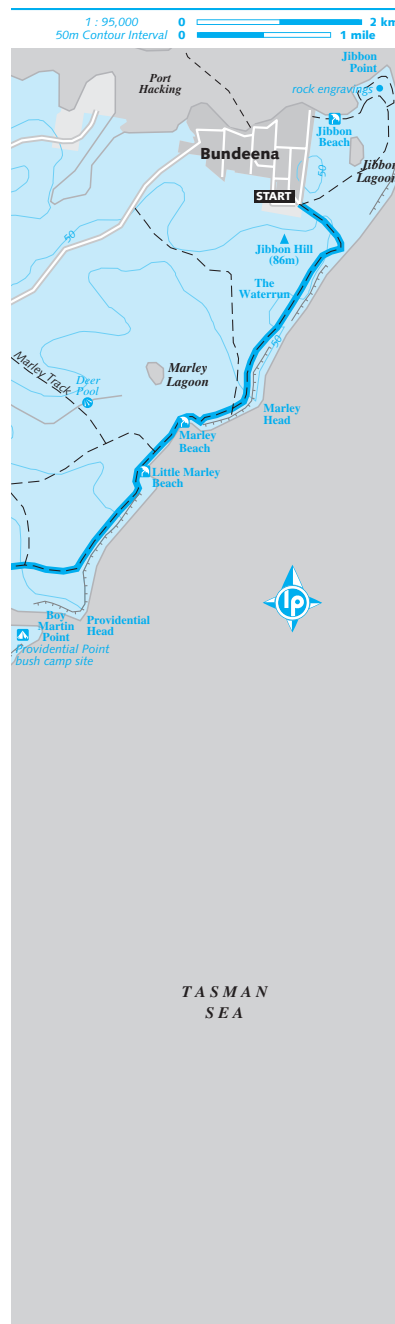
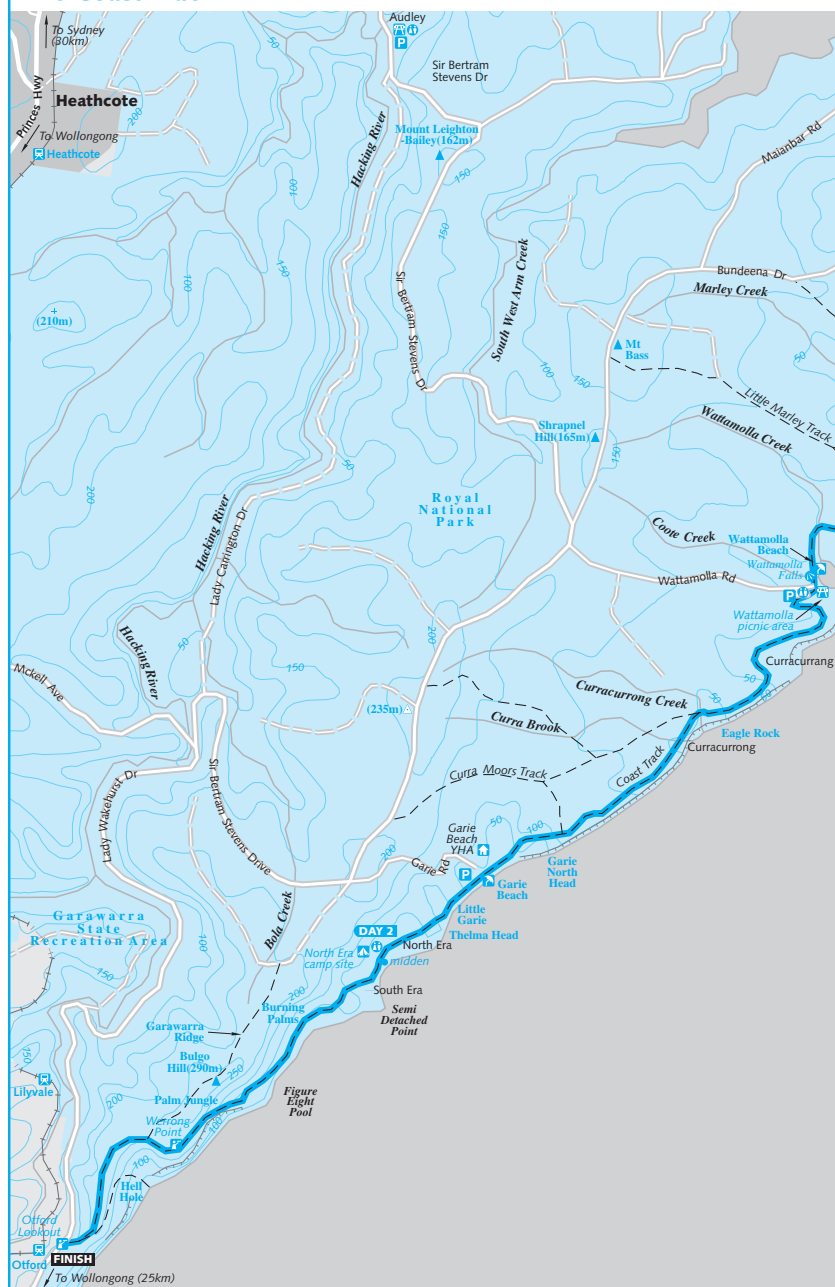
The track stays close to the eroded cliff top for about 15 minutes then cuts inland and drops steeply down to a watercourse draining **The Waterrun**, an area of wet heathland. After rising back to cliff height, continue for 2km through the heath to Marley Head, crossing cliff top dunes that were deposited when sea levels started rising about 10,000 years ago. There's a profusion of eroded old tracks near Marley Head, but the track is well marked and it's no problem picking the way down to **Marley Beach**, with its striking backdrop of wind-scoured dunes. Cross the lagoon outlet at the northern end then continue towards the sign at the southern end of the beach. Marley is too frequently visited to be a genuine 'wild' beach, but it has that flavour, especially on a winter's day.

About 250m south of Marley take the left-hand fork and follow it to **Little Marley Beach**. It's reasonably safe to swim here, although like Marley it's unpatrolled. South of Little Marley the track hugs a stretch of majestic cliffs about 35m above the ocean, crossing sandstone shelves sculpted into weird shapes and dazzling yellow, red and orange hues. About 20 minutes past Little Marley and amid heath, the route jags sharply inland and runs straight for about 800m to a T-junction. Go left; soon after, the first sight of **Wattamolla** picnic area appears. It will likely be packed on any weekend there's not a hurricane forecast – winter or summer.

The track crosses Wattamolla Creek and its artificial swimming hole about 500m before lovely **Wattamolla Falls** and the picnic grounds. Continue across the main picnic area past the kiosk (open in summer) and main information sign to the parking bays. (To reach Providential Point bush camp site, take a left turn just past the toilets and walk east for about 200m.) Continue up to the fourth parking bay and walk along it to the fire trail gate. Turn left at the gate and continue. Go right at the water tank about 300m up the track and follow right at the 'Curracurrang' sign about 50m further along. The track winds around as it descends to the cliff line, which it follows to Curracurrang Gully and a creek crossing. Beyond the steel-grid section south of the creek, various track braids lead to the new steel bridge over a tributary stream. About 25m past the bridge the track goes right and loops up and behind a knoll dominated by low eucalypts. Another section of raised steel-grid track leads to a nice rolling downhill to **Curracurrang**, where a cliff waterfall and nearby **Eagle Rock** – a cliff formation that appears as its name suggests – provide an excuse to rest.

The track climbs away and slightly inland then crosses heath for about 2km. At Garie North Head the first views of **Garie Beach** appear and loom larger throughout the steep, zigzagging descent to the sand. Once at Garie, the walk enters its distinctly different second part. The low heath, sandstone and relatively flat going mostly disappear and are replaced by shale soils, pockets of coastal (littoral) rainforest and a series of climbs over headlands. Go south along

The Coast Track



Garie; just uphill from the car park near the surf club is the small and basic (no electricity or phone) **Garie YHA** (bookings ☎ 9261 1111; bed \$14), a good overnight alternative if you're walking with a group (you can book the hostel for \$140). Traverse the rock platform in front of Little Garie Point then, at Little Garie, go to the right of the first shack and follow the markers through the other shacks to the stairs. Follow up and over the ridge. The **North Era camp site** is about 300m downhill, set in a wide, grassed area behind the football-pitch-sized midden.

Day 2: North Era to Otford

3–4 hours, 9km, 530m ascent, 450m descent

Spend some time checking out the huge midden before shouldering packs to continue south. Walk to the east of the midden then go up and over the rise to South Era. There, skirt around the front of the dune and pick up the track again just beyond the lagoon. The climb among the shacks is sandy and tiring at first, then breaks into the clear on a firm track with fine views of the ocean. Burgh Ridge rises to the right, and further west lies the 70m cliffs of **Garawarra Ridge**. After about 10 minutes, the track winds down through more shacks and cabbage tree palms to **Burning Palms**, the last chance on the walk for a swim. The track descends to within a few metres of the beach then climbs away, passing behind the beach through coastal rainforest.

For about 15 minutes after passing the old ranger shack the going is open and the views wide, then the track plunges into the **Palm Jungle** and palms, figs and lianas provide a dense canopy. For about 30 to 45 minutes there's a steady uphill – with a couple of steeper sections – towards the top of which the rainforest starts to open and other plant species hold sway, including striking gymea lilies and various types of taller eucalypt. Just before the walk's highest point, near **Werrong Point**, two lookouts about 50m apart provide spectacular views south. After another 10–15 minutes, the track meets the fire-trail-sized Cliff Track. Go right, and follow for about 800m, where the walking track continues. About 1km remains – an easy rise followed by an initially steep descent – before the track's end at the **Otford Lookout**. To reach Otford Station, go left and follow Lady Wakehurst Dr for

150m to Fanshawe Rd. Go right, and follow the signs for 400m to the station.

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The Blue Mountains have some truly fantastic scenery, excellent bushwalks and all the gorges, gum trees and cliffs you could ask for. For more than a century, the area has been a popular getaway for people seeking to escape the summer heat of Sydney. Despite the intensive tourist development, much of the area is so precipitous that it's still only open to bushwalkers.

The foothills begin 65km west of Sydney and rise to 1100m; the mountains are really a gently rising (east to west) sandstone plateau dissected by spectacular gorges formed over millennia by erosion. The blue haze that gave the mountains their name is a result of the fine mist of volatile oil given off by eucalyptus trees – which is also why eucalyptus forests can explode into firestorms. Blue Mountains National Park offers bushwalkers enough opportunities to fill a month's solid walking. The walks described lead to shady eucalyptus forest, Aboriginal rock art, remote rivers, renowned caves and spectacular sandstone ramparts.

In 2000, the Greater Blue Mountains was inscribed on the World Heritage list. It covers more than 10,000 sq km of wild, mostly forested landscape that begins just 60km inland from the Sydney CBD. Worldwide, few natural World Heritage Areas are as close to major population centres as the Greater Blue Mountains is to Sydney.

HISTORY

Established in 1959, Blue Mountains National Park now protects 2678 sq km of forested sandstone ridges and deep, rugged valleys. The vision for the park came from one of the most famous figures in Australian bushwalking, Myles Dunphy (1891–1985). An important tool in the campaign for the park was the NSW Lands Department's 1932 'Special Walking Clubs Issue' Blue Mountains map – inspired, and largely drawn, by Dunphy. Myles's son Milo (1929–1996) took to bushwalking and conservation with the same zeal as his dad. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s,

Milo played a pivotal role in doubling the area of land in NSW dedicated to national parks. The Dunphys' vision for a Greater Blue Mountains reserve was fully realised with the area's World Heritage listing.

ENVIRONMENT

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area consists of seven national parks – Blue Mountains, Wollemi, Yengo, Nattai, Kanangra-Boyd, Gardens of Stone and Thirlmere Lakes – and the Jenolan Caves karst (limestone) landscape.

This area supports a significant proportion of the world's eucalypt species, and reveals the eucalypts' superb environmental adaptation. Australia's Department of Environment and Heritage describes the area as 'a natural laboratory for studying the evolution of the eucalypts. The largest area of high diversity of eucalypts on the continent is located in southeast Australia. The Greater Blue Mountains Area includes much of this eucalypt diversity.'

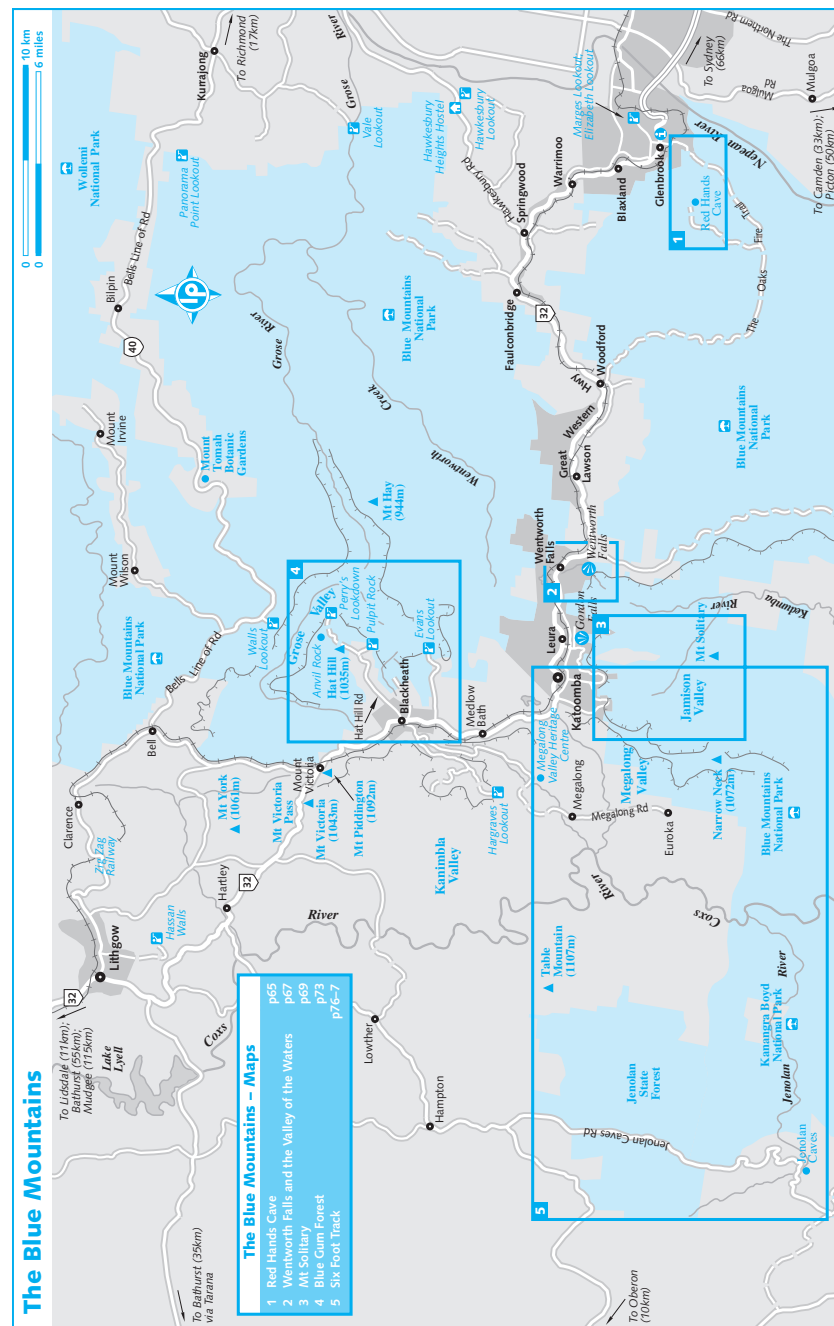
The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area also contains ancient relict plants such as the famous Wollemi pine, one of the world's rarest plant species; many threatened or rare marsupials, including the spotted-tailed quoll, the koala, the yellow-bellied glider and the long-nosed potoroo; and rare reptiles including the green-and-golden bell frog and the Blue Mountains water skink.

PLANNING When to Walk

With none of the summer haze or problems with water scarcity and bushfires, winter can be the best time for bushwalks – days are often clear and down in the valleys it can be comparatively warm. But beware of sudden changes in weather and come prepared for freezing conditions; snow is possible between June and August. Autumn's mists and drizzle can make bushwalking less attractive, but the mountains in a thick mist are an atmospheric place. Summer days can be hot (in the high 20s).

Books

The NP's *Bushwalks in the Sydney Region* has detailed notes on nearly 60 walks in the Blue Mountains and nearby national parks. Neil Paton's *Sydney and Blue Mountains*



Bushwalks contains scores of walks in the area – mainly day walks, but several stretching over longer periods. *Blue Mountains Best Bushwalks*, by Veechi Stuart, is also a fine source of day walk ideas. John and Lyn Daly's *Take a Walk in Blue Mountains National Park* contains 40 walks.

National Park Explorer, Around Sydney by Alan Fairley is a readable guide to the Blue Mountains and other Sydney national parks; it includes information on geology, flora and fauna as well as suggested walks.

Information Sources

The excellent **NPWS Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (☎ 4787 8877; bluemountains.heritagecentre@environment.nsw.gov.au; Govetts Leap Rd) is near Blackheath, about 3km east of the highway. It has all the information, maps and books you could need for walking in the area, plus a small selection of snacks and drinks.

There are **Blue Mountains visitor information centres** (☎ 1300 653 408; www.australiablue-mountains.com.au) at Glenbrook, on the Great Western Hwy, and at Echo Point in Katoomba.

ACCESS TOWN & FACILITIES

Katoomba

☎ 02 / pop 17,900

The best all-round base is Katoomba, although there are accommodation options throughout the Blue Mountains. There's a free Blue Mountains **accommodation booking service** (☎ 4782 2857; info@bmbbookings.com.au; 157 Lurline St), also open daily.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

There's a full range of walking gear at **Mountain Designs** (☎ 4782 5999; 190 Katoomba St) and **Paddy Pallin** (☎ 4782 4466; 166B Katoomba St).

SLEEPING & EATING

Katoomba Falls Caravan Park (☎ 4782 1835; Falls Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$24/31, cabins \$74-85) is close to walks and views, right across the road from the Mt Solitary walk starting point.

Katoomba (Blue Mountain) YHA Hostel (☎ 4782 1416; 207 Katoomba St; dm member/non-member \$24/28, d \$79) is comfortable, welcoming and just a hop from the main shops.

VIP Flying Fox Backpackers (☎ 4782 4226; www.vipbackpackers.com; 190 Bathurst Rd; dm \$22, d & tw \$60) receives consistently good reviews from travellers.

Central Backpackers (☎ 4782 9630; 144 Bathurst Rd; www.centralblue.com.au; dm \$22, d without/with ensuite \$65/75), close to the station and shops, is well appointed.

No 14 (☎ 4782 7104; 14 Lovel St; d & tw \$59) is a peaceful and homely guesthouse run by ex-travellers.

Cecil Guesthouse (☎ 4782 1411; 108 Katoomba St; s/d from \$55/85) has the style of the grand guesthouses, but with a lower tariff than many – and it includes breakfast.

Katoomba St has many, many good places to eat. The pleasant, reasonably priced **Savoy** (☎ 4782 5050; 26-28 Katoomba St; ☑ lunch & dinner) has an interesting menu of focaccia, pasta and Asian-inspired variety. Also part of the old Art-Deco Savoy Theatre is quirky **Avalon** (☎ 4782 5532; 18 Katoomba St; ☑ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner daily), one of the town's best restaurants with plenty of tempting meals.

The eternally popular **Blues Cafe** (☎ 4782 2347; 57 Katoomba St; ☑ lunch) serves mostly vegetarian and vegan food, while the moderately priced **Arjuna Indian** (☎ 4782 4662; 16 Valley Rd; ☑ dinner), is up the railway end of town, near Bathurst Rd. There's a **Coles supermarket** (cnr Parke & Waratah Sts) that's open seven days.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

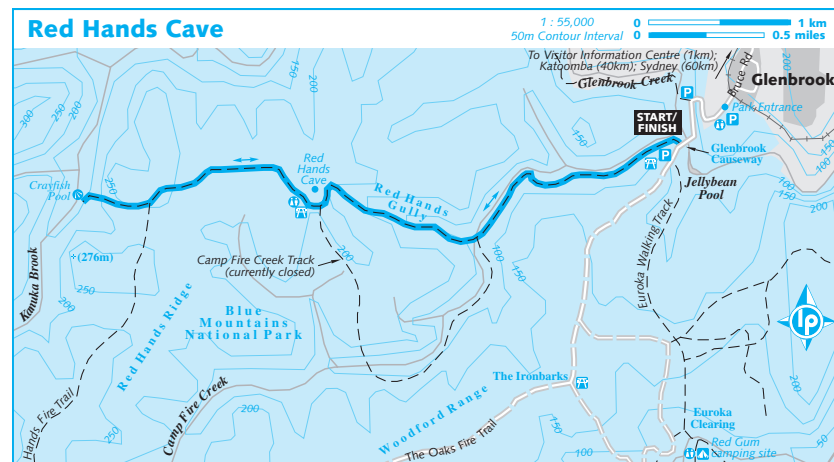
Katoomba, 109km from Sydney's city centre, is almost a satellite suburb. CityRail trains run more or less hourly from Central (\$11.40 one way, two hours). By car, exit the city via Parramatta Rd and detour onto the Western Motorway tollway (\$2.20), known as the M4, at Strathfield. The motorway becomes the Great Western Hwy west of Penrith.

RED HANDS CAVE

Duration	4–4½ hours
Distance	11km
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Glenbrook Causeway
Nearest Towns	Katoomba (left), Sydney (p51)
Transport	Train

Summary A pleasant amble to an Aboriginal rock-art site, with the opportunity for an invigorating swim in a secluded creek pool.

This walk has two highlights: Red Hands Cave, a noted Aboriginal rock-art site; and secluded Crayfish Pool on Kanuka Brook,



a beautiful place for a swim on a warm day. The rock shelter, 'discovered' in 1913, is decorated with numerous stencils and solid images of hands, created with coloured clays (ochre) by the Daruk (also spelt Dharug) Aboriginal people. The walk to the cave follows the well-used track beside Red Hands Gully, with some easy rock hopping to navigate. The walk down to the pool and back follows Red Hands Fire Trail and a steep track; it's rocky in places but generally easy to follow.

It used to be possible to complete a circuit walk from Glenbrook Causeway via Red Hands Cave, but bushfire damage has closed the lower part of the circuit, the Camp Fire Creek track.

PLANNING

Spring is the best time for Lower Blue Mountains walks. The water in Kanuka Brook may be safe to drink, but it's better to bring as much as you need for the day.

Maps & Books

The walks described in this section are covered by the LPINSW 1:25,000 *Penrith* map, which depicts all of the walking tracks except the final drop down to Kanuka Brook. The NPWS guide *Blue Mountains National Park Walking Track & Visitor Guide: Glenbrook & the Eastern Blue Mountains* has brief track notes along with information about picnic areas, lookouts and places of interest.

Permits & Regulations

The park entry fee is \$7, payable at the entrance station 1.5km from Glenbrook (it's free to walk in). The park gates open at 8.30am and close at 7pm daily during summer (6pm in winter).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

CityRail train services run at least hourly to Glenbrook from Sydney Central (\$8, 1¼ hours) and Katoomba (\$5.20, 45 mins). Exit the station to a footpath that parallels Burfitt Parade and Bruce Rd to the national park entrance. Walk down and across the causeway; the start of the Red Hands Track is a short distance to the right (about 1.8km from the station).

Glenbrook is 65km from Sydney via the Western Motorway and the Great Western Hwy. In Glenbrook, the turn-off from the Great Western Hwy to Blue Mountains National Park is clearly signposted. Follow Ross St to a T-junction and turn left along Burfitt Parade, which becomes Bruce Rd and leads to the park entrance.

THE WALK

From the junction of Red Hands Gully and Glenbrook Creek, Red Hands Track, which is rocky and sandy in places, follows the gully upstream to a junction (about 40 minutes from the start). Bear right and climb through mixed forest, including bloodwoods, she-oaks and turpentine (a tall tree with dark green, glossy leaves), to **Red**

Hands Cave (another 25 minutes). The cave is glassed in to protect the hand-stencils; detailed interpretive signs explain its history and how the hands were created.

A broad track leads to the Red Hands Cave car park (there are toilets nearby). To continue to **Crayfish Pool**, turn right along the Red Hands Fire Trail. Follow this generally west for 1.3km (15 minutes); the start of the track down to the pool leads westwards between two stringybark trees and opposite a small informal car park. This excellent track makes a tortuous descent, exploiting gaps and defiles in the craggy spur. The final steep section involves a slightly awkward move down boulders using footholds in a narrow slot. Walk upstream for five minutes: go up and over a large boulder, and then down through more boulders near a sheer wall on the left to deep Crayfish Pool, with its sandy beach and waterfall (30 minutes from the fire trail).

Return to Glenbrook Causeway via the outward route.

WENTWORTH FALLS & THE VALLEY OF THE WATERS

Duration	5½–7 hours
Distance	7km
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls
Nearest Town	Katoomba (p64)
Transport	train, bus

Summary A classic Blue Mountains day walk, combining an edge-of-forever feel from cliff-top panoramas, numerous pools and waterfalls and a challenging side trip into the secluded, sylvan Valley of the Waters.

Adding to the pleasure of walking at Wentworth Falls is the convenience of its location (a day trip from Sydney is easily accomplished) and the wide range of trail variations on offer. The most popular route is the clockwise circuit from Conservation Hut following the Overcliff and Undercliff Tracks to Wentworth Falls and then back along the National Pass. This covers 5km and usually takes three to four hours. It's a spectacular route, coupling amazing views with refreshing waterfalls. It can get busy – especially at weekends – but that's balanced

by the fact that National Pass track work (there's an ongoing upgrade program) is undertaken on weekdays, and closes the track for most of the day.

The route described here goes anti-clockwise on that circuit and adds on a couple of challenging side trips to extend the walk to a full day (seven hours maximum), with several options for picnics and swims in secluded pools along the way. Although most of the route is very clear, the trail down to Vera Falls is more tricky; hence the easy–moderate grading. The reward of making the trip to Vera Falls – especially if you walk during on a weekday – is that apart from wildlife you're likely to have the Valley of the Waters all to yourself. The route can be tackled in either direction; it's best to go to Vera Falls first, though, so as not to be faced with the 450m vertical slog back up to the Conservation Hut at the end of the day.

HISTORY

There have been walking tracks at Wentworth Falls since the 1830s; Charles Darwin was a visitor in 1837 and a walk here is named after him. So popular did the area become that the National Pass – a remarkable route cut into the side of the cliff over 100m above the valley floor – was started in the 1890s and finished by 1908. Wentworth Pass, which runs below the National Pass, was completed between 1901 and 1902, and was extended to join with Vera Falls in 1913. Slacks Stairs, down to the base of Wentworth Falls, were added in 1932.

PLANNING

Maps

The Lands 1:25,000 topographic map *Katoomba* covers the Wentworth Falls area and shows all tracks.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The **Blue Mountains Bus Company** (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) runs regular services from outside the Carrington Hotel on Katoomba St, Katoomba, to Fletcher St, Wentworth Falls (routes 685 and 690; \$4.70, 15 minutes); get off where the road turns into Valley Rd and walk less than 100m to the Conservation Hut.

Cityrail trains run regularly from Katoomba to Wentworth Falls station (\$2.80,

10 minutes), from where the Conservation Hut is about 20 minutes' walk. Turn left after crossing the bridge out of the station and pass the short parade of shops to reach the Great Western Hwy. Cross and walk to the right to Falls Rd (there's a short cut through Wilson Park). Keep heading down Falls Rd to Fletcher St then turn right; the Conservation Hut is at the end of this road.

If driving you can park either at the Wentworth Falls Picnic Area, within 30 minutes' walk of the falls, or at the Conservation Hut – the Short Cut Track links the two.

THE WALK

From Conservation Hut take the right-hand track due west, heading downhill towards the Valley of the Waters. It'll take less than 10 minutes to reach **Queen Victoria Lookout** – the first of many view points along the walk – and views of Valley of the Waters way below. Sandwiched between sheer ruddy cliffs, a creek winds its way through the dense temperate rainforest of coachwood, sassafras and lilly pilli. A

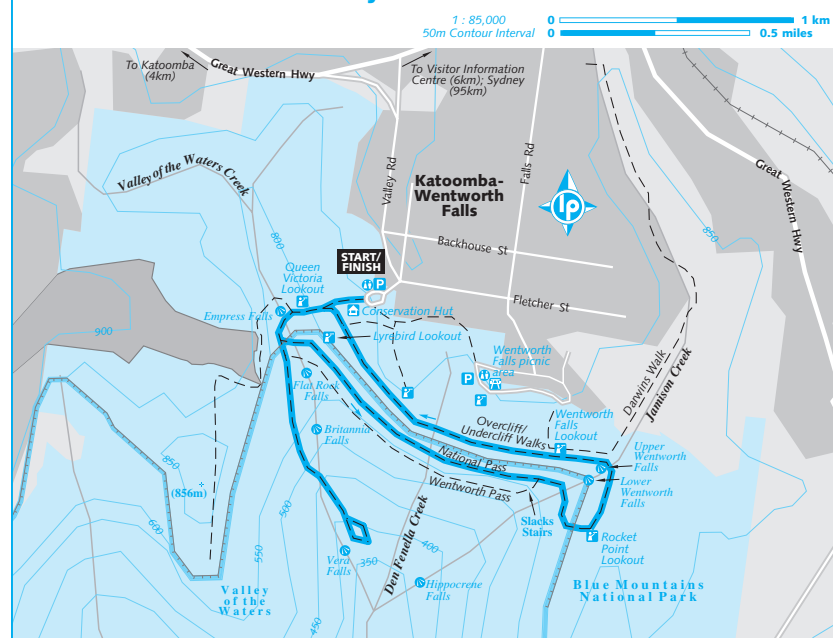
minute later, the **Empress Lookout** provides a balcony view above the Empress Falls.

Two flights of steep metal stairs take you down into the valley towards the base of the falls. At the next junction take the left-hand National Pass route, following the stone steps down to the crossing at the base of **Empress Falls**, where the atmosphere is damp, lush and dark; in wet weather you'll need to watch your footing. The route shadows the creek as it twists and drops in tiny cataracts over the rocks.

Just after the point where you cross the creek again, the track to Vera Falls veers off to the right. This is a narrower, less well-defined track, with some junctions where you need to take care that you're going the right way. A return journey to the top of the falls takes around two hours. Initially, there's a steep zigzag down to **Flat Rock Falls**. Negotiate your way across rocks in the creek to the west side (true right). The route then heads steeply downhill.

After 15 minutes, you'll reach the junction for the Wentworth Pass track, which crosses the creek again at Red Rock Falls

Wentworth Falls & the Valley of the Waters



and runs through the forest along the base of the cliffs towards the Lower Wentworth Falls. Our route sticks to the west bank of the creek. You'll need to be careful here; there are two turn-offs to the right that you should ignore. The second is clearly marked as the Roberts Pass track – don't take this but look for the tree marked with a red arrow and continue to head downstream. Here the trees twist into fantastic shapes to reach the light above, and stealthy creepers wait to trip up walkers.

The track crosses the creek one last time – there are pools to soak in, if you're getting warm – and then continues for around 15 minutes sharply downhill to the top of Vera Falls. There are actually two tracks, both ends of a loop to the falls – you can take either. There's a lovely vista of the valley and cliffs from **Vera Falls** and some more pools that are perfect for bathing in. You're likely to see flocks of white cockatoos and need to keep alert for snakes. To return the way you came to the National Pass junction takes around one hour.

From this junction, the views along the next couple of kilometres of the **National Pass** are some of the most remarkable of the whole walk – indeed, of the entire Blue Mountains. The track is cut into the sandstone cliffs, with multicoloured rock faces soaring above and the vast expanse of the Jamison Valley spread out below towards the distant Kanangra-Boyd wilderness. Runoff from the cliff tops provides the occasional cool shower.

After 30 to 45 minutes you'll arrive at the turn-off on the right to **Slacks Stairs** and the Wentworth Pass. These nine flights of steep metal stairs (named after an early trustee of the park), and the rocks you have to scramble over at the bottom, make this a diversion for the fit and confident bushwalker only. The reward at the base, though, of a sandy beach before the 48m drop of the **Lower Wentworth Falls** makes the effort of getting there well worthwhile. It's one of the best spots on the walk for a swim or picnic lunch.

Returning to the National Pass, it's a short walk to the glittering 110m **Wentworth Falls**. You'll have to hopscotch across the ledge of the falls to rejoin the track. It's a very stiff but relatively short climb of around 15 minutes to the top of the falls,

where you can also make a five-minute side trip to **Rocket Point**, another photographic vantage point.

From the falls follow the Overcliff and Undercliff Tracks back to Conservation Hut – around one hour's walk. The track's name becomes obvious as soon as you have to squat to negotiate the undercliff: a Lilliputian world of ferns, flowering heaths and stunted eucalypts clinging to the rocks.

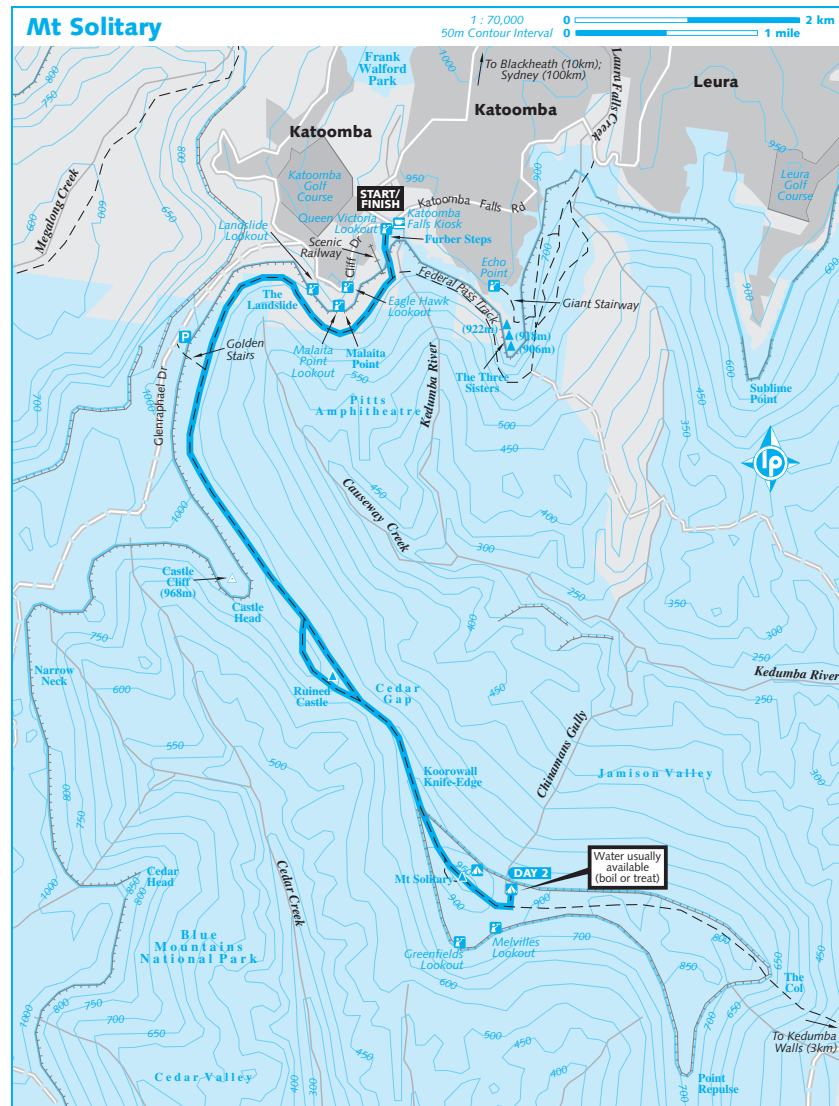
There are several more view points, none far from the main track and all worthwhile side trips. Along the more exposed overcliff section of the track you're likely to scatter mountain dragons and skinks basking in the afternoon sun. **Lyrebird Lookout** provides a final panorama of the valley before the last 10-minute steady climb back to **Conservation Hut** (☎ 4757 3827; 🍳 breakfast & lunch). It's a fine place to stop for breakfast, lunch or an afternoon tea of fresh scones, especially out on the deck with views over the valley.

MT SOLITARY

Duration	2 days
Distance	22km
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Katoomba Falls Kiosk
Nearest Town	Katoomba (p64)
Transport	bus

Summary Natural beauty and human history combine in this accessible out-and-back from the Blue Mountains' principal township. Stunning views and a sense of isolation are the reward for Mt Solitary campers.

Peer south over the Jamison Valley from Katoomba's most visited lookout, Echo Point, and a single visual reference point commands attention: Mt Solitary. Jutting above rippling, thickly forested valleys, the plateau-topped peak has delicious, middle-of-nowhere allure, making a walk to it all but irresistible. The walk is a manageable mix of descents, climbs and flat-tracking; plenty of easy-to-follow trail (but the odd navigational twist) and – of course, given the location – bucketloads of visual inspiration. It begins in Katoomba, takes in remnants of the area's coal-mining past, crosses rockfall rubble and passes through both temperate rainforest and open eucalypt country. High-



lights are the view from Ruined Castle (a favourite of many Blue Mountains walkers) and the peace of a night at Mt Solitary.

Solid uphill – including some scrambling – also make this an excellent training walk for more difficult challenges in the Blue Mountains and Kanangra-Boyd National Parks.

PLANNING

NPWS recommends you carry in all water, although there's usually water in Chinamans Gully on Mt Solitary, which you should boil before drinking. The Lands/LPINSW 1:25,000 *Katoomba* and *Jamison* maps cover the Jamison Valley area and show tracks in good detail.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The **Blue Mountains Bus Company** (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) runs regular services from Katoomba station past Katoomba Falls Kiosk (routes 686 and 696; \$2.60, 15 minutes).

From Katoomba station it's about a 2km walk – mostly downhill – to the kiosk. Head straight down Katoomba St for about 1.3km then veer right into Katoomba Falls Rd. The kiosk is on the left, opposite Katoomba Park.

THE WALK

Day 1: Katoomba Falls Kiosk to Mt Solitary via Ruined Castle

4–5 hours, 11km, 390m ascent, 510m descent

Start at the stairs to the right (west) of the kiosk. Descend to the first junction (of three tracks) and go right, following the Katoomba Falls Track. Follow to the Round Walk junction and go left, following signs to the Furber Steps; these wind past several lookouts (from the **Queen Victoria lookout** there are great views of Mt Solitary and the tourist-magnet sandstone pillars, **Three Sisters**) and sidetracks, under sandstone shelves and through damp forest to the Federal Pass Track. Turn right here and continue to the bottom station of the **Scenic Railway**, built in the late-19th century to transport miners into (and shale and coal out of) the valley, but now established as one of Katoomba's main tourist draws. The precinct surrounding the railway (privately owned) has a network of boardwalks through the forest and a good many interpretive signs that provide glimpses of the past, especially of mining, which began here in 1878. It's worth wandering around for a while.

Stay to the right where the track forks just south of the Scenic Railway, and continue beneath soaring **Malaita Point** to the **Landslide**. This huge and rather scary rubble field was created by a series of rockfalls (probably triggered by earlier coal mining) during 1931. The first part of the track across it is indistinct in parts; steel poles and a few arrows show the way across the rocky and eroded gullies. The second part is easier to follow and shows vigorous signs of revegetation: blooming heath plants with small eucalypts and cedar wattle rising above.

Through rainforest west of the Landslide the track is wide and mostly flat. From here

to the Ruined Castle turn-off it follows the course of the old horse-drawn mining tramway. The track passes a junction with the Golden Stairs (which descend steeply from a car park above on Narrow Neck) and walkers enjoy several changes in surrounding forest. In the cool rainforest tracts coachwood and sassafras shade the track; there's every chance you'll see a lyrebird, or at least their scratchings in forest litter. Blue gums and other eucalypt species stretch skywards in other parts. There are a number of well-used camp sites on either side of the track, some of which date back to mining days.

About 3km past the Golden Stairs, take the right turn at the sign to the **Ruined Castle**. After an abrupt climb the track turns southeast and follows the ridge. The crags for which Ruined Castle is named are about 500m from the turn-off below. Drop packs and scramble to the top of the southernmost crag to drink in the lush views (on a clear day anyway): all around the Jamison Valley, down precipitous Cedar Valley and as far as Lake Burragorang, the dwindling source of Sydney's fresh water supply. To the southeast, the route up Mt Solitary looks steep and intimidating.

After shouldering packs continue southeast on the track, which drops steeply back down to another junction. Go right to continue to Mt Solitary. Initially the going is down, to Cedar Gap, and then increasingly up, with the track often rocky and uneven. The way up Solitary follows a narrow ridge charmingly named the **Koorowall Knife-Edge** (sometimes spelt 'Koorowall'). The solid scrambling starts about 1.5km beyond the eastern Ruined Castle junction. It's not well marked; you need to stick to the ridge as much as possible by following the worn rocks (easier than it sounds) and looking for arrows. There's a critical left-turn arrow at a point where the track appears to go straight and dip down below the western cliff-line. The arrow is worn and near your feet, and points left and uphill – taking this turn will get you to the summit faster (if you miss the arrow you'll still get to the summit, via a scramble up a steep, tree-lined gully).

The **Mt Solitary summit** (c 960m) is a shady and soft casuarina grove with several tent sites. Views back to Katoomba from here are wonderful, but there's no water nearby. Continue east on the track, level at first

and then descending, for about 1km to **Chinamans Gully**. There are some large camping caves at the point first reached, but it's better to turn left and follow the creek north for about 250m. The camp sites here are close to the most reliable water on the mountain. Just north at the cliff edge are wonderful views.

Day 2: Mt Solitary to Katoomba Falls Kiosk

4–5 hours, 11km, 460m ascent, 330m descent

The easy way home is to mostly retrace your outward journey, except you should go straight ahead at the Ruined Castle junctions – this cuts only a little distance, but a good deal of climbing, from the return. It's worth considering some variations to the return route. Climbing the **Golden Stairs** will carve about 3km off the journey. The hitch is you'll need a mobile phone to call **Katoomba-Leura Radio Cabs** (☎ 4782 1311) to come and fetch you; the fare back to Katoomba station is about \$17. Another option is to catch the Scenic Railway back to the cliff top (which avoids the climb up Furber Steps). Trains leave every 10 minutes, the fare is \$8 (last train 4.55pm). If you're feeling especially energetic you could continue along the Federal Pass Track, below Echo Point and the Three Sisters, then veer onto the Dardanelles Pass Track and finally climb back to Echo Point on the Giant Stairway. The last option will make the return a tiring but exhilarating 14km-plus journey.

BLUE GUM FOREST

Duration	2 days
Distance	19km
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Neates Glen car park
Finish	Evans Lookout
Nearest Towns	Katoomba (p64), Blackheath (p72)
Transport	train, bus

Summary A series of beautiful secluded worlds are revealed on this circuit walk through the Upper Grose Valley, starting with the dramatic Grand Canyon and culminating in the serene Blue Gum Forest.

The panorama at the end of Govetts Leap Rd, overlooking the yawning expanse of the

Grose Valley, is one of the most breathtaking in the Blue Mountains – a sea of greenery stretching to the horizon, constrained by sheer cliffs of rippling sandstone. This walk takes you into the depths of the Grose to the atmospheric Blue Gum Forest. Although the route is generally easy to follow and reasonably well signed, we've graded it moderate because of the difficulty of climbing into and out of the Grose Valley, especially if you're carrying a heavy overnight pack. The effort is rewarded by the beauty of the valley and the many excellent vantage points that overlook it.

HISTORY

Govetts Leap ('leap' is a Gaelic word for waterfall) takes its name from surveyor William Govett, who came across the cascades dropping 170m into the Grose Valley in June 1831. From the end of the 19th century the area began to be managed and developed for sightseeing and walkers, with the local railway master, Tomas Rodriguez, achieving the seemingly impossible task of building a track (that bears his name) down the cliff face into the valley in 1899. The route along the Grand Canyon was opened in 1907.

It was the fight to save the Blue Gum Forest that helped to secure national park status for the Grose Valley and other parts of the Blue Mountains region. In 1932 a group from the Sydney Bushwalkers Club discovered that the forest was about to be cut down. The club members managed to raise the cash to buy out the lease for the land and thus preserve the Blue Gum Forest for the enjoyment of future generations of walkers. Their campaign also raised public awareness about protecting the natural environment.

Bushfires in 1994 damaged large areas of the Grose Valley, but the Blue Gum Forest escaped intact, and much of the rest of the bush has now regenerated.

PLANNING

The Lands/LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps *Katoomba* and *Mount Wilson* cover the Grose Valley area. Water is available along the route, but you'll need to boil it before drinking. The numerous 'unofficial' campsites you see in the Grose Valley should be used only in emergencies. The

official sites are Acacia Flat and Burra Korain Flat (near the confluence of the Grose River and Victoria Falls Creek). Both are fuel-stove-only sites – no fires.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Katoomba (p64).

Blackheath

☎ 02 / pop 4200

Blackheath, 10km west of Katoomba on the Great Western Hwy, has several quintessential but pricey Blue Mountains B&Bs, a couple of grocery stores and plenty of cafés. For budget accommodation, Katoomba is a better option.

There are tent sites at **Blackheath Caravan Park** (☎ 4787 8101; blkheath@tpg.com.au; Prince Edward St; sites for 2 \$22-26), just off Govetts Leap Rd. The historic **Gardners Inn** (☎ 4787 8347; 255 Great Western Hwy; s \$32-45, d \$59-80) is opposite the train station; room tariffs include continental breakfast.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CityRail trains run regularly from Katoomba (\$3, 15 minutes). The Blue Mountains Bus Company (☎ 4751 1077; www.mountainlink.com.au) runs services from outside Katoomba's Carrington Hotel to Blackheath (route 698; \$6, 25 minutes) – regularly on weekdays and less frequently on weekends.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

It's around a 4km walk (or a short taxi ride) from the Blackheath train station on the Great Western Hwy to the Neates Glen car park. A taxi from Katoomba to Neates Glen car park will cost around \$20. If you're driving and plan to leave your car overnight, the NPWS recommends you use the Grand Canyon Loop car park (which has toilets and water), further down Evans Lookout Rd, rather than the Neates Glen car park. Walking tracks link the Loop car park with both the start of the walk at Neates Glen and the finish point at Evans Lookout. Don't forget to lock your car and don't leave any valuables in it.

The Blue Mountains Bus Company route 698 service stops at St Andrews Rd, about halfway up Evans Lookout Rd (and at the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre on Govetts Leap Rd, if you're considering an alternative finish point).

THE WALK

Day 1: Neates Glen to Acacia Flat

6–7 hours, 8km, 690m descent

From Neates Glen car park, a clear, moderately steep track winds its way down into a narrow gully, a shrouded, dripping world of mosses and ferns, many towering like verdant parasols. Take care, since it can be slippery here. To reach the bottom of the canyon takes around half an hour; have a rest and soak up the otherworldly atmosphere of this rocky enclosure before continuing through a short tunnel and along the track shadowing Greaves Creek, way below. Amazing views of the **Grand Canyon**, in places 30m deep and a few metres wide, open up from this point and the route makes some thrilling passes under waterfalls and cliff overhangs before dropping to the creek. This is a truly magical spot, with the reflected light from the water dappling the umber cliffs and lush vegetation. With time spent dallying, you'll probably be about two hours in the canyon.

The track hopscoches across the creek several times before reaching a junction. A track up to Evans Lookout lies across the creek to the left; our route follows the sign to Rodriguez Pass and Beauchamp Falls. In around half an hour – half of it on the creek's right bank, half on its left – you'll come to **Beauchamp Falls**. There are several spots from which to admire the falls, but take care since this is the trickiest part of the track to follow, with the route across boulders being far from clear. Keep an eye out for steps in the rocks to know you're heading in the right direction. Eventually, this steep route will bring you to a broad plateau in the cascades, a good spot for lunch and to bathe in one of the pools. Cross the creek at this point and go left, the opposite direction from the white arrow on the rock, which points to a dead end further up.

After an hour's walking you'll have reached the valley floor and will be following the Rodriguez Pass to **Junction Rock**, at the confluence of Govetts Leap Brook and Govetts Creek. This is another fine spot for a cooling dip and you're likely to encounter many cat-sized eastern water dragons guarding the rocks. Day walkers often peel off here, and take **Rodriguez Pass** uphill from here to Govetts Leap Lookout – the last section a tough haul up metal ladders.

The track to **Acacia Flat** (around one hour's walk) continues across Govetts Creek and along the stream's left bank, initially passing through an unofficial camp site. The going can get a bit jungly, and at one point you'll wade through a sea of knee-high ferns. It's generally flat, but there's one short climb just after the old Fortress Creek Flat camp site (closed for regeneration – no camping). At the crest of the hill, take the track to the right heading back down to the creek; Acacia Flat is less than a half-hour's walk from here.

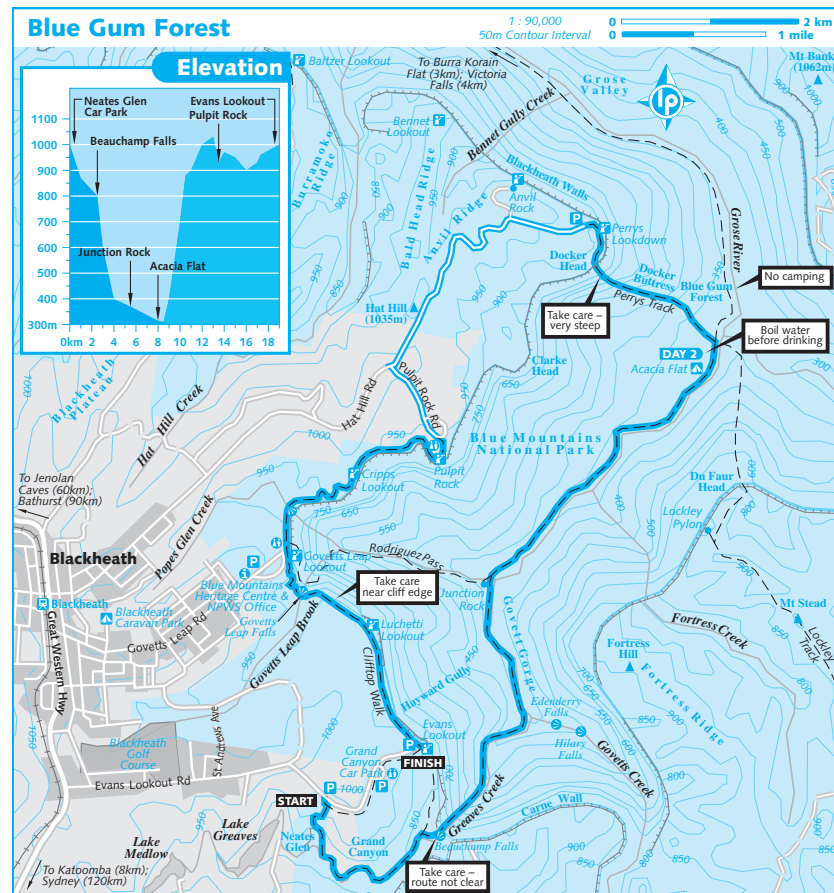
The extensive camp site has a toilet and several paths leading down to the creek where you can get water (that must be boiled). After downing your pack, take time

to enjoy the calm, cool atmosphere of the nearby Blue Gum Forest.

Day 2: Acacia Flat to Evans Lookout

6–7 hours, 11km, 680m ascent

In warm weather, an early start to climb the **Docker Buttress** – one of the steepest ways out of the Grose Valley – is recommended. From Blue Gum Forest, take the left-hand route up the hill, which starts climbing sharply almost immediately. (The track straight ahead eventually leads to Victoria Falls, 12km northwest – an alternative way out of the valley, if you've arranged transport to meet you at Victoria Falls Rd.) There are a few short flat sections between the uphill slopes, which get steeper and steeper until



you're virtually rock climbing. Depending on your level of fitness, the 2km route, which rises 600m from the valley floor, takes between 1½ and three hours.

Docker Head is the first view point you'll reach on the cliff edge, but **Perrys Lookdown**, a bit further on, is the better vantage point. From the nearby car park (no water available), follow Hat Hill Rd for around 4km, an unshaded track enlivened by glimpses across the expanse of the valley and the flashing blue-and-red plumage of crimson rosellas. After around 45 minutes take the left-hand turning down Pulpit Rock Rd to the lookout, 10 minutes away. There are toilets and shelter here, but no water, so make sure you've brought plenty with you from the valley.

Pulpit Rock provides a magnificent view of the Grose Valley and an opportunity to study the layer-cake effect of the different types of vegetation, from the open forest of black ash and peppermint gums on the cliff tops via patches of swamp and woodland to the coachwood and sassafras in the valley below. On the northeast horizon is 944m Mt Hay, while southwest there's a view of **Govetts Leap Falls**, a slender ribbon of white water looking like a length of billowing muslin, hence the alternative name of Bridal Veil Falls.

Returning from the lookout point, take the left turn along Pulpit Rock Track, a route that meanders pretty much on the level around the cliff top towards Horseshoe Falls, a name that's self-evident once you see the concave recess the water has carved into the rock.

The track drops shortly before the falls to Popes Glen Creek, then climbs again towards **Govetts Leap Lookout**. On the way up you'll pass the turn-off for the Popes Glen Track, leading to Blackheath via woodlands and swamp, in around one hour.

If you haven't paused for lunch already, Govetts Leap Lookout is a good spot to do so before tackling the final one- to 1½-hour leg to Evans Lookout; if you've had enough (and don't have a car to retrieve), the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre is a 500m walk up Govetts Leap Rd.

The route drops down to and crosses Govetts Leap Brook (there's a short track to the right here along the brook, called the Braeside Walk) and then climbs again to

the cliff edge, affording eye-catching vistas of the Grose Valley most of the way. The track then shadows the Griffith Taylor Wall of rock, shooting down some 600m to the valley floor, and crosses a minor depression at Hayward Gully, before rising to the car park at Evans Lookout, which has toilets, water and a barbecue area. The actual lookout is a brief walk from here, but worth making the effort for one last look across Govetts Gorge towards the imposing bluff of Fortress Hill.

SIX FOOT TRACK

Duration	3 days
Distance	42km
Difficulty	moderate-demanding
Start	Explorers Tree, Great Western Hwy
Finish	Jenolan Caves
Nearest Towns	Katoomba (p64), Jenolan (p76)
Transport	bus

Summary Traversing the full range of Blue Mountains landscapes, from lush rainforest glens to open woodland, this heritage track follows the original route taken by late 19th-century travellers from Katoomba to the spectacular Jenolan Caves.

The appeal of the Six Foot Track (claimed to be the second-most popular overnight bushwalk in Australia, after Tasmania's Overland Track) derives from a combination of historical associations and gorgeous, constantly changing scenery. It's far from the most ambitious walk you can take in the Blue Mountains, although its difficulty shouldn't be underestimated. It's certainly among one of the prettiest trails, particularly in spring when wildflowers bloom in profusion.

Starting from the Explorers Tree just outside Katoomba, the track drops down through the rainforest of Nellies Glen, crosses the rolling meadows of the Megalong Valley and fords Coxs River. It then climbs over both the Mini Mini Saddle and Black Range to reach the Gothic splendour of Jenolan Caves, as awe-inspiring a climax today as it was a century ago.

Although it's possible to cover the route in less time (the record is an incredible

three hours, 12 minutes, set during the annual marathon run), the best way to fully appreciate the landscape is to take three days, camping at Coxs River and on the Black Range. If you're a fast, strong walker and have arranged transport back from Jenolan (or an overnight stay there), a two-day itinerary is possible, camping at Alum Creek, roughly halfway along.

We have rated this walk as moderate-demanding, more in line with the Six Foot Track Heritage Trust's 'hard' grading. While the route is clear and well signposted, its length and two sustained climbs on Day 2 make it a challenge, especially with a heavy pack. On weekends and during holidays you're sure to encounter several walking parties along the way; plan a midweek trip for a quieter experience. The track can be walked in either direction, but it's easier to go from Katoomba to Jenolan, to avoid finishing with the climb up Nellies Glen.

HISTORY

The lure of Jenolan Caves as a tourism hot spot prompted the government to survey a route across the Megalong Valley in 1884. The first recorded trip along the whole track was by the NSW governor, Lord Carrington, and his wife in 1887. Although built as a bridle trail, the route quickly became popular with walkers. The Six Foot Track gained its present name in 1937 – by which time the 6ft-wide bridle trail was already close to impassable. The rise of motor transport caused the track to decline

even more after WWII, reaching a nadir in the 1960s when an ill-conceived and later abandoned scheme to build a road down Nellies Glen scarred the landscape almost irreparably.

However, 100 years after it was first blazed, the track was remarked and reopened by the Department of Lands. Although fire trails now cover large sections of the original route, the route retains much of the fascination of its earlier years. The track is now managed by the Six Foot Track Heritage Trust, a non-profit, community-based organisation. The trust is administered through the Lands office in Orange.

PLANNING

The Lands/LIC 1:25,000 topographical maps *Katoomba*, *Hampton* and *Jenolan* cover the route in the most detail. The Lands map/information sheet *Six Foot Track* should be considered essential – it shows all the important detail, including gradients, and its sales help to fund track maintenance. It's available at good map shops (p49) and in Blue Mountains visitor information centres (p64). The lack of reliable water sources are one of the main difficulties of walking the track. There are rainwater tanks at the Coxs River and Black Range camp sites. Boil any water taken from watercourses.

Guided Walks

The Six Foot Track Heritage Trust licences guiding companies to conduct walks along the track and can refer interested parties to

LIMESTONE LANDSCAPES

Dramatic and often hidden realms, limestone landscapes are marked by steep-walled gorges, sinkholes and extensive cave systems with underground rivers – in short, a speleologist's dream. On the surface, limestone country can be hard to pick. It's often characterised by barren, rocky ground in otherwise fertile country. As well as the Six Foot Track walk, which ends at Jenolan Caves, two other walks in this chapter traverse limestone country: Cooleman Plain (See Gorges, Plains & Caves, p94) and Bungonia & the Shoalhaven River (p107).

Limestone landscapes occur in areas where there are dense, well-jointed pockets of limestone near the surface, fed by rainfall and circulating groundwater. In a process called carbonation, the limestone reacts with the acid from rainwater as it seeps through the soil, then dissolves and is carried away. The water flows through existing joints in the limestone and enlarges them to form passages, caves and other features.

Caves are extremely varied, ranging from vertical shafts or narrow passages to soaring Gothic caverns decorated with stalactites (limestone pendants that hang from a cave ceiling, formed by deposits of calcite in dripping water) and stalagmites (cave-floor pinnacles formed as water drips from stalactites). Gorges generally form when a series of caverns collapse.

these licensed operators. The trust is currently administered through an office in the **Department of Lands** (☎ 6391 4321) in Orange, west of Bathurst, but administration will eventually pass back to the community and this phone number will change.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Katoomba (p64).

Jenolan

☎ 02

At track's end, there are several sleeping options at Jenolan Caves, which is administered by the **Jenolan Caves Trust** (☎ 6359 3911; www.jenolancaves.org.au). The **Jenolan Caves Resort** (☎ 6359 3322) includes up-market Jenolan

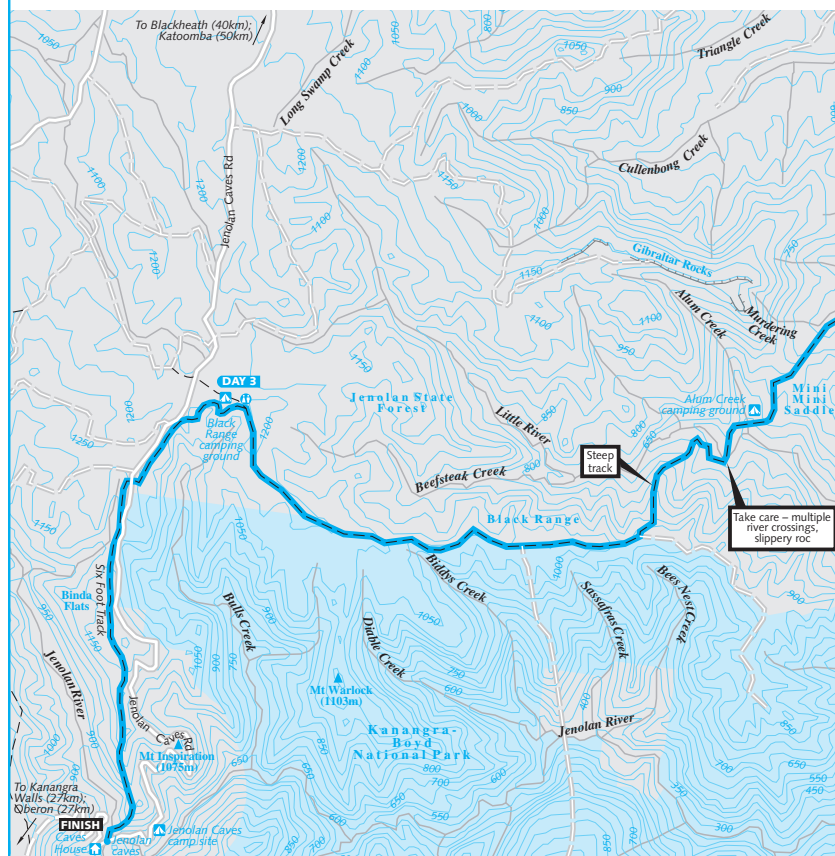
Caves House, with shared-facility rooms from \$65, and bunk beds at a backpacker lodge, the Gatehouse, from \$25. Room rates increase on weekends and public holidays.

Meals are available in Caves House at Trails Bistro and at Chisholm's Restaurant (mains \$23).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Jenolan is 72km from Katoomba. If you can't arrange a pick-up from Jenolan, Katoomba-based **Fantastic Aussie Tours** (☎ 1300 300 915) runs a daily transfer service to/from the caves for \$35, departing from the caves at 3.45pm. If you plan to come out on a Sunday check ahead with them – low passenger numbers sometimes lead to cancellation.

Six Foot Track



Blue Mountains Trolley Tours (☎ 1800 801 577; www.trolleytours.com.au; \$35), also in Katoomba, has a Jenolan service that departs the caves around 3pm to 3.30pm each day.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The start of the Six Foot Track, at the Explorers Tree, is 2km west of Katoomba, just off the Great Western Hwy; a taxi to here costs about \$7 to \$8.

THE WALK

Day 1: Katoomba to Coxs River

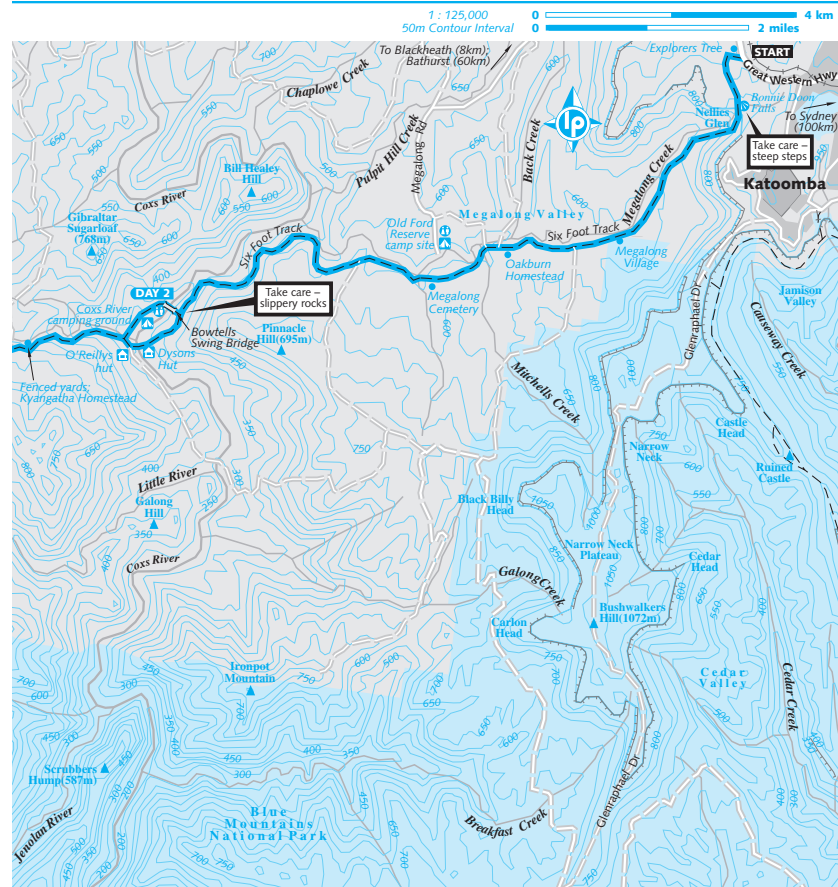
6–7 hours, 15.5km, 750m descent

From the Explorers Tree head down the track to the start of the route into Nellies Glen. After 10 minutes, the track turns sharply

right and descends into the glen along a series of uneven steps. To reach the bottom takes around 45 minutes, by which time your knees are likely to be rather wobbly.

The old track snaked in a more leisurely fashion through this beautiful enclave of warm temperate rainforest. Through the trees you'll hear, if not clearly see, Bonnie Doon Falls. The glen is named after a 19th-century mine operator's daughter – looking ahead you can see **Narrow Neck Plateau**, a knobby finger of rock soaring out of the Megalong Valley, under which the coal and shale mines were once located.

At the bottom of the glen, the vegetation abruptly changes to drier woodland dominated by scribbly gum and smooth-barked



apple, which is neither smooth-barked nor an apple tree. The narrow route widens into an access road, which you follow as it shadows Narrow Neck on the left-hand side. Where you pass a paddock is the site of the long-abandoned **Megalong Village**, an early 20th-century community for workers at the nearby shale mine.

Ahead there are several locked gates to go through, all with stiles over them. Just after the **Oakburn homestead**, which was the early Megalong Post Office, the track continues through woods en route to the **Megalong Cemetery**, just across Megalong Valley Rd. At the entrance to the overgrown cemetery, a cairn lists those known to be buried here; only two marked graves remain, one fenced in by ornate ironwork.

Descending the track as it follows Megalong Creek, watch out for sharp-edged bits of pale stone on the ground. This is chert, brought by Aboriginal people to this area for use as cutting tools. The track undulates gently across open meadows, which is very English in feel until you look back towards the towering sandstone cliffs and take in the gum trees. One particularly fine old river gum marks the spot where you'll cross a small creek before climbing a hill that affords a beautiful panorama of the valley.

Approaching the Coxs River valley, the track drops back into woodland, punctuated by huge lichen-splashed granite boulders. Look out for one particularly large one known as Toad Rock, and for an enchanting glen of giant split boulders. This is one of the prettiest sections of the walk, sticking to the track's original route and dimensions. Below, the Coxs River can be heard and eventually the track will reach its side.

As long as the river isn't in full flood, there's a choice of crossings. The most thrilling is by the 90m-long **Bowtells Swing Bridge**. Only one person at a time is allowed to cross this metal suspension bridge, which is 30m above the rocky river bed. The best way to negotiate the bridge, if you take fright, is to look straight ahead and sing/whistle a tune.

If the water is low, it's usually possible to cross by the rocks below the bridge, or follow the track down the true left bank of the river for 1km to a narrow, shallow section at the confluence with Murdering Creek. Take care when crossing the river bed as the granite rocks are very slippery.

The official Coxs River camping ground (with toilets) is around 15 minutes' walk from the bridge.

Day 2: Coxs River to Black Range

7½–8½ hours, 20.5km, 900m ascent

This is the toughest, longest day of the walk so an early start and a steady pace are recommended. Also make sure you have sufficient water, especially as there are no sources at all once you start the long climb up and along the Black Range.

As a warm-up for the day ahead there's a one-hour climb of around 300 vertical metres along the fire trail beside Murdering Creek. At the top, the land opens up beside the fenced yards of the old **Kyangatha homestead**. A pear tree stands in the paddock and you're likely to encounter several ponies and horses, plus some cattle further along.

Enjoy the view before climbing another 200m over undulating fields across the Mini Mini Saddle. At the top, a forest of smooth-barked apple begins again as you drop down sharply towards **Alum Creek**, an official camp site, with no facilities and no guarantee of water in the creek either. Here you may want to remove your boots as the route crosses the river three times, but take care not to slip in the water. This is a good spot for lunch before the sustained steep climb up the Black Range. You may also be fortunate enough to spot grey kangaroos here.

At a steady trudge, it takes between 1½ and 2½ hours to reach the 1000m-high ridge of the Black Range. About halfway up, there's a track heading downhill to the right that you should ignore. The best view back is just before the summit, beside a cluster of spiky-headed grass trees. From here, with good eyesight – or binoculars – you'll be able to see the Hydro Majestic Hotel at Medlow Bath. A sign marks the start of the Kanangra-Boyd National Park on the left side of the track, while to the right is Jenolan State Forest.

The track twists for a leisurely 10.5km along the ridge towards the official camping ground. On the way, you'll pass several striking termite mounds. It's also high enough here for subalpine snow gums. After a couple of hours you should reach the junction with another fire trail, where the forest has been cleared; turn left and walk for 500m to the next left turn-off to

the Black Range camp site, which has a toilet and shelter.

Day 3: Black Range to Jenolan Caves

4–4½ hours, 9km, 350m descent

The Black Range camping ground is on a marked deviation from the original Six Foot Track, which for a large part of this day's walk has long since been covered by Jenolan Rd. From the camp to the road via the deviation is 3km, around a one-hour walk through shaded woods of brown barrel eucalyptus and radiata pine (spreading from a nearby plantation). There's one short steep section to negotiate before reaching Jenolan Rd. Cross this and follow the adjacent track for another hour to Binda Flats.

The cleared grassy area of **Binda Flats** was once used to grow vegetables to feed residents at Jenolan Caves. Now, particularly in the late afternoon, it's possible to see grey kangaroos and wallabies grazing here. The route continues behind the cabins and down towards the caves in a more or less straight line for 4km. At times it's rocky, steep and rather narrow, but affords lovely views of the plunging wooded valley near the limestone caves.

You'll eventually arrive at a gap in the rock that acts as a window on a blue-tinged lake not far below, its luminous colour caused by the dissolved limestone. From here you can either reach Caves House, the end of the walk, by the direct right-hand route, or along the left-hand trail that goes via the looming cavern known as the Devil's Coachhouse.

Since this is really only a half-day walk, you'll have plenty of time to enjoy exploring **Jenolan Caves**. Regular tours are run through nine show caves, and if you've still got some energy, there are several short walks in the vicinity. For details of cave tours contact the **Jenolan Caves Trust** (☎ 6359 3911; www.jenolan.caves.org.au).

KANANGRA-BOYD NATIONAL PARK

Kanangra-Boyd National Park and its eponymous wilderness have rich associations with NSW bushwalking and conservation, and have long been popular destinations for

independent walkers and adventure-seekers. Although not as widely known as Blue Mountains National Park, its neighbour to the east and south, Kanangra-Boyd arguably outstrips 'the Blueys' for scenery and isolation. Those undertaking walks in the Blue Mountains enjoy the sense of being on the fringe of civilization; a Kanangra-Boyd walk feels like a journey into the wild. The entire park is one of seven included in the 10,000 sq km Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, declared in 2000.

ENVIRONMENT

The 68,000-hectare park contains some of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area's most remarkable landscapes and scenery – no mean boast. In a region dominated by grand sandstone cliffs and valleys, vast Kanangra Gorge (overlooked by Thurat Spires, Kanangra Walls and with Mt Cloudmaker in the distance) is the visual champion for pure majesty.

With so much of it a declared wilderness, the park and its habitats are an important reserve for rare plant communities and animals. It covers an extensive plateau deeply eroded by a network of creeks and rivers. Its highest point is 1334m Mt Emperor, about 10km northwest of Kanangra Walls, and it plunges to less than 200m in some creek and river gorges. Remnant rainforest is found on the plateau escarpments and there is extensive subalpine habitat of snow gums, swamps and bogs. The park protects the headwaters of the Kowmung, Kanangra and Jenolan Rivers, which are major contributors to Sydney's fresh water supply. In 2005, the Kowmung was given special protection as a NSW 'Wild River', which will ensure it remains free of threat from mining or forestry.

PLANNING When to Walk

Conditions in Kanangra-Boyd closely resemble those in the Blue Mountains. Summer days can be warm, hazy and marred by bushfire danger and water scarcity, which makes autumn through spring the best time for walking. Mid-winter days are clear and cool; snowfalls can occur between June and August. Throughout the cool months, the valleys are often warmer than the high, exposed plateaus.

Information Sources

The **Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (☎ 4787 8877; bluemountains.heritagecentre@environment.nsw.gov.au; Govetts Leap Rd), near Blackheath, has all the requisite maps, guides and information to Kanangra-Boyd. The park is administered from the **NPWS Oberon office** (☎ 6336 1972; 38 Ross St).

Permits & Regulations

The park entry fee (really, more like a parking fee) is \$7. Bring \$1 and \$2 coins for the ticket machines.

ACCESS TOWN

See Katoomba (p64).

KANANGRA WALLS TO THE KOWMUNG RIVER

Duration	2 days
Distance	24km
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Kanangra Walls car park
Nearest Towns	Katoomba (p64), Oberon (p19ht)
Transport	private

Summary A challenging jaunt from one of NSW's most spectacular natural features – the plunging wilds of Kanangra Deep – to one of the state's iconic wilderness rivers.

Kanangra-Boyd National Park's best known attractions (Kanangra Walls, Kanangra Deep and Thurat Spires) derive a major benefit from being an extra few hours' drive from Sydney. Compared with similar natural monuments in the Blue Mountains, Kanangra-Boyd's highlights don't suffer from overcrowding; it's touch too far for the average day visitor. This effect is amplified in the case of the park's walks. On all but the most popular of holidays, as soon as one ventures away from the tracks near Kanangra Walls it begins to feel like very isolated country. A peaceful night near the banks of the Kowmung River is all one needs to understand why conservationists spent so much energy protecting this region.

PLANNING

Away from the Kanangra Walls area, any of the tracks in Kanangra-Boyd National Park aren't well marked, so maps and com-

pass are essential. Morong Creek at Boyd River camping ground is the nearest water supply to the track head (boil before use). Water availability between the Kanangra Walls car park and the Kowmung will depend on weather conditions. It's safest to carry all you'll need for the journey. NPWS recommends that walkers boil water taken from the Kowmung. The walk is covered by two LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps, *Kanangra* and *Yerranderie*. Both accurately show tracks and pads. The NPA's *Bushwalks in the Sydney Region* has notes on several walks in Kanangra-Boyd National Park.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Katoomba (p64).

Oberon

☎ 02 / population 2200

Quiet Oberon sits at 1113m, making it the Blue Mountains region's highest town and the one closest to Kanangra-Boyd National Park. The **Oberon visitor information centre** (☎ 6336 0666; www.oberonaustralia.com; cnr Ross St & Edith Rd) is open daily.

SLEEPING & EATING

Jenolan Caravan Park (☎ 6336 0344; www.jenolan caravanpark.com.au; 7 Cunynghame St; unpowered sites for 2 \$14-18, powered \$22-26, cabins \$72-94) is a short walk from the Oberon shopping strip.

Big Trout Motor Inn (☎ 6336 2100; www.bluemts.com.au/bigtrout; Oberon St; s/d \$89/99) is on the eastern end of the main street with 33 plain but comfy rooms. It has a Chinese restaurant (closed Monday).

Highlands Motor Inn (☎ 6336 1866; www.highlandsmotorinn.com.au; cnr Dart & Fleming Sts; s/d \$89/99) has classic motel rooms a touch closer to the town shops.

There's two bakeries and several cafés on the main street, plus an IGA supermarket that opens 9am to 5pm weekdays (shorter hours on weekends). The **Royal Hotel bistro** (☎ 6336 1011; mains from \$17; ☎ lunch & dinner daily) offers reliable meals. **Oberon RSL** (☎ 6336 1607; cnr Oberon & Dudley Sts; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) has a restaurant that also serves takeaways.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A coach service runs between Mt Victoria and Oberon on Tuesday mornings and Friday and Sunday evenings. The one-way fare is \$6.60; book through **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32;

www.countrylink.info). CityRail trains run regularly to Mt Victoria from Sydney Central (one way \$13, 2¼ hours) and Katoomba (\$3.60, 20 minutes).

Boyd River camping ground

The nearest sites to Kanangra Walls are at Boyd River camping ground, 7km southwest of the walk starting point. The site has pit/composting toilets and wood barbecues (bring your own wood). Sites are free.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Take the Great Western Hwy west from Katoomba and to Hartley. Go left onto Jenolan Caves Rd and follow for 45km to Jenolan Caves. Go through the arch and climb steeply for 7km to the Kanangra Walls turn-off (left). From Oberon, take the Edith Rd towards Jenolan Caves. The Kanangra Walls turn is about 23km out of town. Boyd River camping ground is 21km south of the turn and Walls car park another 7km.

Misty Mountains 4WD Tours (☎ 4757 2278; info@4wdtours.net.au) will do shuttles for walkers from the Katoomba area to/from Kanangra Walls for \$400 (one way for \$250). The vehicle fits up to six walkers.

THE WALK

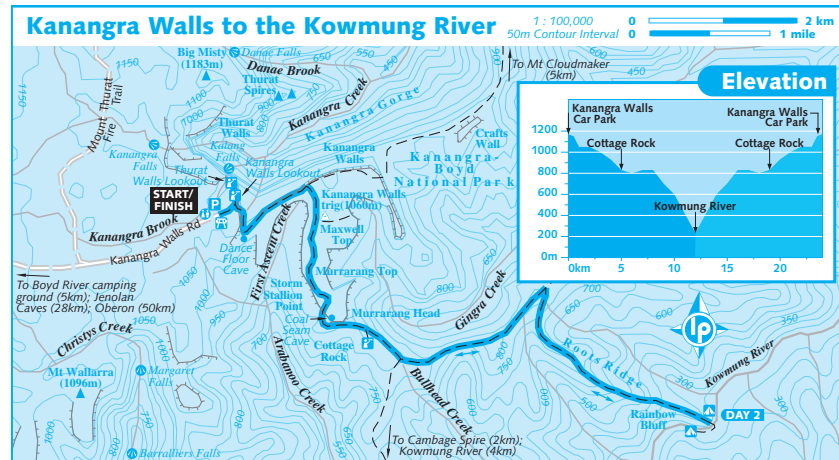
Day 1: Kanangra Walls car park to Kowmung River

4–5 hours, 12.2km, 840m descent

Go east from Kanangra Walls car park, past the locked gate and continue along the

track. About 300m along is the first of two junctions (about 50m apart) for the plateau walk leading to **Kanangra Walls**. Before taking the turn, go on 150m to Echo Head and Kanangra Walls lookout for an inspiring view of the soaring cliffs and plunging gorge that define the area. Return to the first track junction and set off (left) downhill, past some sedimentary cliffs and, just before the track rises, the turn to **Dance Floor Cave** (70m to 80m off to the right), named because it once contained – what else – a dance floor where local workers kicked up their heels. After a climb up some steps the track continues, following the Walls northeast; here and there are small tracks leading off to the cliff edge. About 1.2km past Dance Floor Cave the track reaches a wide, upward-sloping rock platform; here take the narrow track off to the right that's obscured by heath. (To the left, there are brilliant views of Kanangra Gorge, Thurat Walls and Thurat Spires. If there's been rain, Kanangra Falls and Kalang Falls will be flowing, adding to the spectacle.)

After running flat and passing the turn to the Kanangra Walls trig, the track starts to fall away. It's heavily eroded in places and overgrown with heath. After about 45 minutes it opens up into scrubby eucalypt forest, before a steep, short drop down the cliff line of Murrarang Top near Storm Stallion Point. Continue left (east) at the base of the descent, passing the camping-friendly **Coal Seam Cave**. There's often a container here,



Kanangra Walls to the Kowmung River

collecting fresh water seeping from Murrarang Head through the overhang. Beyond Coal Seam Cave are a couple of hard-to-spot track junctions. The first, to the right about 300m to 350m along, leads to **Cottage Rock**, from which there are views of wild Arabanoo Creek and Canyon (allow 30 minutes for the side trip). Past here the track undulates (mostly descending) along the spine of the Gingra Range, mostly through open eucalypt country and with wonderful filtered views north and south. About 4km past Coal Seam Cave a marked tree (hard to spot) and tent site marks the turn-off down Roots Ridge and the Kowmung.

Go across the little clearing and veer right. From here the track is more a well-worn pad, easy to follow as it sticks closely to the ridge while dropping 600 vertical metres in a little over 3.5km. The first glimpses of the Kowmung come about 1km from the camp sites; there's a particularly fine view upriver from **Rainbow Bluff**, about 700m to 800m from the end of the day.

There are tent sites among the beautiful casuarinas on both sides of the river, some of the better ones on the eastern (opposite) bank and just upstream from the bottom of the track. The river and its surrounds are an enchanting place, and well worth a two-night stay to allow time to explore.

Day 2: Kowmung River to Kanangra Walls car park

5–6 hours, 12km, 840m ascent

This is a straightforward return on the outward route, to the extent that 800m-plus vertical ascents are straightforward. Take your time, have frequent breaks and savour the peace and quiet.

KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

In southeast NSW, about 150km inland from the coast, is an area of high peaks, deep valleys, plateaus and plains collectively known as the Snowy Mountains, or 'Snowies'. Within this area Australia's highest summits are found, including Mt Kosciuszko (2228m), the highest peak on the continent – and the only direct evidence on the Australian mainland of glaciation

dating from the last ice age. Fortunately, this region is protected within Kosciuszko National Park, a huge reserve about 150km long and between 20km and 50km wide, encompassing an area of 690,000 hectares. The park contains a rich variety of flora and fauna, and all of NSW's ski resorts; it's also the backbone of the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme, arguably Australia's greatest engineering feat.

Kosciuszko National Park is ideal for bushwalking. The gently rounded summits of the Main Range, including Mt Kosciuszko and Mt Twynam, are easily climbed without the need for long, arduous walks, although there is certainly enough space within the park to keep a walker busy for weeks.

The most popular area for walking is the Main Range between Thredbo and Charlotte Pass, containing Australia's highest peaks (p88). But other areas are definitely worth a visit, too. The southern region of the park has some wild and rarely visited localities, including the Chimneys (p92), while in the north are lower-altitude frost plains, limestone caves and gorges of the Coleman Plain area. The three walks described here give a good introduction to these very different areas.

It's actually possible to complete a marathon walk through the mountains of Victoria, NSW and the ACT, and thus achieve a full traverse of the Australian Alps, though admittedly few walkers actually walk this route in one journey. The path, known as the Australian Alps Walking Track (p157), enters Kosciuszko National Park south of Dead Horse Gap, meanders over high peaks of the Snowy Mountains, and exits the park at the ACT border.

HISTORY

The earliest evidence of an Aboriginal presence in the region dates from at least 5000 years ago, when various tribes travelled to the mountains in summer to feast on the protein- and fat-rich Bogong moths.

The timing of the first visit to Australia's highest peaks by white settlers is a little unsure. While it's probable that stockmen from pastoral properties in the Monaro region ventured into the high country in the 1820s and '30s, it was not until 1840 that Paul Edmund Strzelecki climbed to the Main Range by way of Hannells Spur and

summitted the highest peak, which he named Mt Kosciuszko. Following 'discovery', the mountains were gradually settled by local stockmen who brought their livestock to graze on the plains during summer.

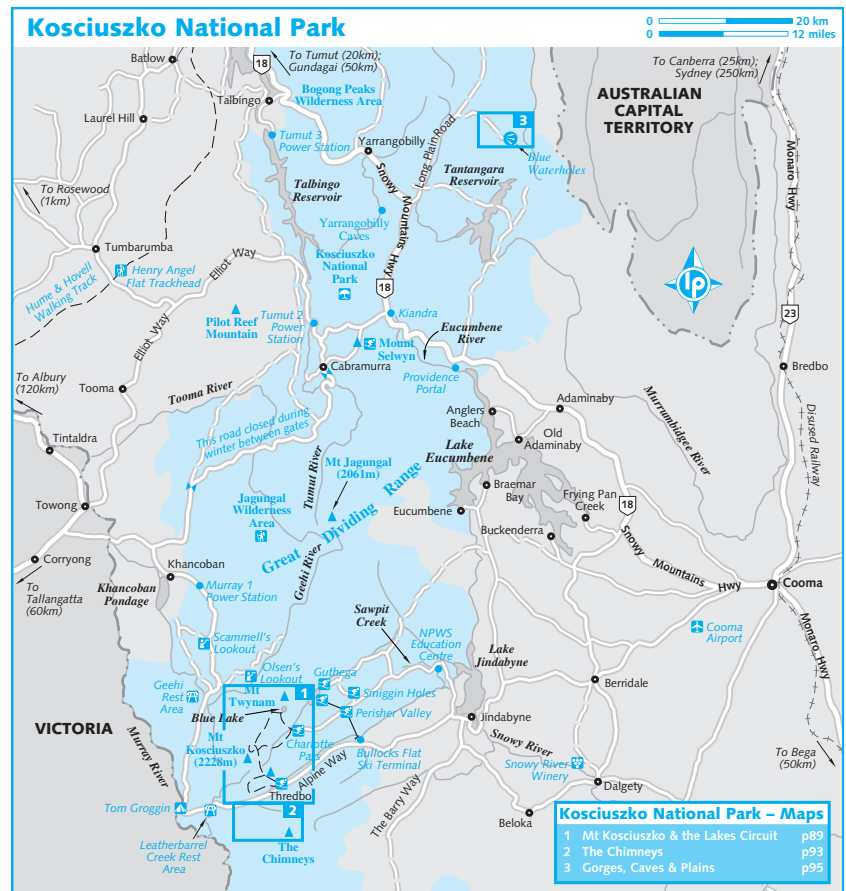
In 1859 word of gold discoveries in the Kiandra area spread and inspired a gold rush, and by 1860 Kiandra boasted a population of more than 15,000. As with many such booms, however, gold deposits were rapidly depleted and within a matter of years the town had only a few hundred residents. By about 1905 the area was virtually deserted.

From the 1920s, skiers and bushwalkers gradually discovered this impressive area. Hotel Kosciuszko was built near Perisher

Valley in 1909, but the ski resorts as we now know them did not develop until after WWII. Work started in 1949 on the massive Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme, and was finally completed in 1972. This huge scheme diverts water in tunnels through the mountains and produces electricity at many power stations on the steeper west side of the ranges. Much of the track network across the park was cut during this construction period.

ENVIRONMENT

It is not surprising in an area with terrain as mountainous and varied as Kosciuszko National Park that there is such a diverse range of flora and fauna. The park is home



CAPITAL WALKS IN THE ACT

Australia's national capital and its surrounding territory is one of the best places in the country to live if you're a dedicated walker. The vast spaces of Kosciuszko National Park (p82) extend so far north that they skirt the ACT's western border, while the rugged wilderness of the Budawangs (p97) and dramatic limestone landscape of Bungonia Gorge (p105) are closer to Canberra than any other city. But really, one needn't even leave the well-ordered confines of the ACT to find a score of decent walks.

The main walking lure for Canberrans is **Namadgi National Park** (www.environment.act.gov.au/bushparksandreserves/namadgi.html), the 1060-sq-km bushland haven that adjoins Kosciuszko and is the northernmost of several Australian Alps national parks, a chain of which extend northwards from the high country east of Melbourne. Namadgi is renowned for grasslands (and the large kangaroo population it supports), eucalypt forest and some tall peaks – several over 1800m. Popular Namadgi walks include the 16km return track from the **Naas Valley to Horse Gully Hut**, which starts just off the Boboyan Rd in the park's south. It's easy going and there's a good chance of seeing plenty of kangaroos. The area – like a lot of bushland around the ACT – was damaged in the disastrous 2003 fires, but it's recovering at a startling pace. Further north off the Boboyan Rd, the **Yankee Hat Walking Trail** is a mere stroll at 6km; it leads through more grasslands to some striking Aboriginal rock art on a granite boulder. For more information contact the **Namadgi visitor information centre** (☎ 6207 2900; namadginationalpark@act.gov.au; Naas Rd, Tharwa).

Closer to central Canberra, **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** (www.environment.act.gov.au/bushparksandreserves/parksandreserves/tidbinbilla) bills itself as the ACT's best place to see wildlife in a natural setting – which is a pretty fair assessment. In addition to several easy tourist walks, the reserve has a handful of more challenging day walks (ranging from 5km to nearly 20km) that provide access to some of the better views and taller peaks. Views from the **Gibraltar Trail** and **Camel Back Trail** are probably the most impressive. The **Tidbinbilla visitor information centre** (☎ 6205 1233), near the reserve entrance off Paddys River Rd, can assist with information on longer walks and more remote tracks.

The **Environment ACT** (www.environment.act.gov.au) website is an excellent starting point for more information on these and other ACT parks and reserves.

to about 200 species of birds, 30 species of reptiles, 30 species of mammals and 200 species of insects.

The lower and mid-mountain slopes are dominated by tall and slender mountain ash, mountain gum and alpine ash. This forest is home to eastern grey kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, ringtail and brushtail possums, native bush rats and marsupial mice. Higher up, in the region just below the snow line, the forest is predominantly snow gum, which is often buckled and weathered into weird shapes by heavy snow and strong wind. In some areas, the forest is coated in a thick understorey of tussock grass and shrubs, purple hoveas, royal grevilleas, yellow kunzeas and pink grass trigger plants, all of which flower delightfully in spring and summer.

Above 1800m is the alpine zone, where the climate is generally too cold and severe for any tree growth at all. Heaths, grasses, herbs and snowpatch vegetation dominate

here, as well as the rare feldmark, a low, ground-hugging migratory plant that grows on the most exposed (and often damaged) sites. Sphagnum bogs develop on wet sites, absorbing water and releasing it slowly throughout the year.

Birds species that frequent the alpine region include gang-gang and yellow-tailed black cockatoos, wedge-tailed eagles, pied currawongs, colourful flame robins and, in alpine ash forest, elusive lyrebirds. However, it's the common raven that you may see the most. In some areas, with luck, you may even spy an emu or two!

Lizards and skinks are common reptiles, but there are also some species which you do not want to see, such as black, brown and tiger snakes. Other undesirables which now, unfortunately, inhabit the park include feral animals, such as pigs, brumbies (wild horses), rabbits, hares, foxes and even cats. Some of these you're likely to spot, even if only as road-kill.

CLIMATE

As you'd expect of a mountainous region, there is a wide range of weather phenomena influencing the park's climate.

Temperature drops at a rate of about 1°C for every 150m of altitude gained, making the mountain tops over 10°C cooler than the lowlands. Average daily maximums at about 2000m range from 15°C in summer to 0°C in winter, but strong variations are common. Summer can still get quite hot at times and temperatures in autumn and spring can be anything from comfortably mild to cold, and frosts are common during these times. Winter is cold everywhere in the park.

Precipitation is heavy all year, but in summer is usually more erratic; torrential thunderstorms are common in the mountains during summer. Snowfalls are frequent in winter and snow covers most of the terrain above 1400m during this time. In the most elevated areas and on the western slopes of the ranges, rainfall can exceed 2000mm a year, tapering to less than 1000mm in the far northeastern sector of the park.

PLANNING

It's essential that you're well prepared with the right gear for a walk in the mountains, as weather conditions can be severe at times, even in summer. For further information on what to bring, see the boxed text p39.

When to Walk

Winter is really the only season when walking is out of the question, either because of the deep snow that covers the walking areas described here, or because of seasonal road closures that affect access. In most areas of the park you can walk any time between October and April, although in the highest areas, such as the Main Range, large areas are under snow until mid-November. The most popular bushwalking months are January to March, when weather is warm and generally stable, frosts are least likely and wildflowers are at their best.

Maps & Books

There are many good general maps of the park, most of which are available at the larger visitor information centres (p85), some local newsagents and bookshops. CMA's *Snowy-Kosciuszko – The Snowy Mountains* at 1:250,000 and the *Australian*

Alps Tourist Map by Ausmap at 1:500,000 provide a good overview of the park and feature some town maps as well.

Both *Snowy Mountain Walks* by the Geehi Bushwalking Club and *Bushwalking in Kosciuszko National Park* by Charles Warner (primarily a guide for experienced walkers) are handy walking guides to the region. *Australian Alps – Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks* by Deirdre Slattery has some track notes, but also contains loads of other information on the environment, flora and fauna, history and the development of the Snowy Mountains region. For historical background on the Snowy Mountains have a look at *Huts of the High Country* by Klaus Hueneker and *Kosciuszko – The Mountain in History* by Alan EJ Andrews.

Information Sources

The best source of park information (including accommodation, transport, maps and books) is at the major Snowy Region visitor information centre at Jindabyne (p86). Other towns surrounding Kosciuszko National Park also provide information on the park. To the east, the **Cooma visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 636 525, 6450 1742; www.visitcooma.com.au; 119 Sharp St; ☹ closed Sun), in Cooma, has a large selection of maps and brochures, and a helpful inquiries desk. In Tumut, close to the northern end of the park, you'll find the **Tumut Region visitor information centre** (☎ 6947 7025; www.tumut.nsw.gov.au/trvc/trvc.html; 5 Adelong Rd) in the Old Butter Factory.

If approaching the park from Victoria, the **Khancoban Information Centre** (☎ 6076 9373; Scott St; ☹ 9am-noon & 1-4pm) sells a range of maps, books and park visitor permits. When the office is closed, you can purchase permits at the nearby **Khancoban Roadhouse** (☎ 6076 9400).

On the Internet, the **Australian Alps National Parks** (www.australianalps.deh.gov.au) website is an excellent source of general background information on the High Country.

Permits & Regulations

There are no camping fees but a fee is required for every car entering the park. The permit costs \$16 a day in summer or \$190 for an annual pass (which also gives you unlimited entry to every national park in NSW). Permits can be obtained at the visitor information centres (p85) or at the

toll booth on the Alpine Way just east of Thredbo. There are also some restrictions applying to bushwalkers (and skiers). No camping is permitted within the water catchments of the five glacial lakes on the Main Range and no campfires are permitted above the tree line.

Guided Walks

If you're not confident in tackling a walk on your own, there are a number of guided walks – from short day strolls to longer two-day walks – on offer from Thredbo. Contact Thredbo Sports (opposite) for details.

GETTING AROUND

There's little in the way of public transport within Kosciuszko National Park, except between the centres of Jindabyne and Thredbo. There are, however, several private transport companies that operate to locations within the park. The **Adaminaby Bus Service** (☎ 6454 2620) specialises in bushwalker transport and can provide a charter service to most areas. The Jindabyne-based **Snowy Mountains Taxi Services** (☎ 6457 2444) and John at **Jindabyne Motors** (☎ 6456 7340) also can be worth contacting for your local transport needs.

On the Victorian side of the park, if you require transport from either Corryong or Khancoban, try contacting **Bob Wilkinson** (☎ 6076 1418). He operates taxis and minibuses into the park from his base in Corryong, and will even provide coffee and sandwiches!

ACCESS TOWNS

Jindabyne

☎ 02 / pop 4400

As the main access town for snow skiing in New South Wales, Jindabyne is a busy, bustling place in winter. In summer, when 'Jindy' takes on a more relaxed pose, it becomes a good jump-off point for walks in the Kosciuszko National Park, particularly the southern sector. The town hugs the southern shore of Lake Jindabyne, a large water storage created as part of the huge Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme, and makes a good base for water sports.

INFORMATION

The **Snowy Region visitor information centre** (☎ 6450 5600; www.snowymountains.com.au; Kosciuszko

Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), beside the main road in town, provides plenty of information on Kosciuszko National Park, offers a transport booking service and hires out EPIRBs for a flat fee of \$10 (with a refundable \$20 deposit). The centre houses numerous displays and the handy Sublime Café n Bar (opposite).

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

At **Nuggets Crossing Shopping Centre** (Kosciuszko Rd) you'll find a chemist, banks and a large number of food and retail shops, including **Wilderness Sports** (☎ 6456 2966), which sells a wide range of outdoor gear. Camping equipment can also be purchased at **Paddy Pallin** (☎ 6456 2922; www.paddypallin.com.au; cnr Kosciuszko Rd & Alpine Way) a few kilometres west of town at the Thredbo turn-off. Behind the Nuggets Crossing complex is a **post office** (Gippsland St), while there's also a smaller collection of retail shops at the **Town Centre Plaza** (off Kosciuszko Rd) 300m east of Nuggets.

SLEEPING & EATING

Just west of town, at the Thredbo turn-off, is the **Snowline Holiday Park** (☎ 1800 248 148, 6456 2099; www.snowline.com.au; Kosciuszko Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 from \$22/26, dm/cabin from \$15/50) while right in town is **Jindabyne Holiday Park** (☎ 6456 2249; www.jindabyneholidaypark.com.au; Kosciuszko Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 from \$21/25, cabins from \$60). Both parks have shady positions and front the waters of Lake Jindabyne.

Hostel-style accommodation can be found at the handy **Snowy Mountains Backpackers** (☎ 1800 333 468; www.snowybackpackers.com.au; 7-8 Gippsland St; dm/d from \$20/50; ☑) close to the Nuggets Crossing shops.

Other establishments in the centre of town include the good-value **Jindy Inn** (☎ 6456 1957; www.jindyinn.com; 18 Clyde St; s/d from \$35/55) and the **Lake Jindabyne Hotel/Motel** (☎ 1800 646 818, 6456 2203; lakejindabyne@bigpond.com; Kosciuszko Rd; s/d with breakfast \$70/80; ☑) on the shore of the lake and offering a spa, hotel pool and sauna.

Further accommodation options can be gleaned from **Snowy Mountains Reservation Centre** (☎ 1800 020 622), **Kosciuszko Accommodation Centre** (☎ 1800 026 354) and **Alpine Resorts & Travel Centre** (☎ 1800 802 315).

Note that accommodation prices rise more steeply than the ski lifts in winter.

While many restaurants close during summer, there are still a few cafés and takeaway outlets open all year at the

Nuggets Crossing and Town Centre shopping areas, including two supermarkets.

Adjoining the visitor information centre is **Sublime Café n Bar** (☎ 6457 1130; Kosciuszko Rd; mains \$14; ☎ breakfast & lunch), a modern eatery catering for hungry information gatherers. Pastries and other goodies can be bought at the **Sundance Bakehouse & Tea Rooms** (Nuggets Crossing; pies \$5, pastries \$2.50; ☎ breakfast & lunch).

Café Susu (☎ 6456 1503; 7-8 Gippsland St; meals \$8-15; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sun), good for a quick coffee or something more hearty, is a popular venue for both backpackers drifting through from the hostel next door and the more affluent. It is closed on Saturdays.

For a good carbo-load before or after a bushwalk, try **Il Lago** (☎ 6456 1171; 19 Nuggets Crossing; mains \$22-27; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat), an Italian-style eatery serving pasta and pizza.

For wholesome pub-grub at a good price, head down to the **Lake Jindabyne Hotel/Motel** (☎ 1800 646 818; Kosciuszko Rd; mains \$8-14; ☎ lunch & dinner), which is particularly popular on Tuesday and Thursday, when discounted schnitzels (\$6) are on offer.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See the Snowy Region visitor information centre (opposite) for transport bookings.

Transborder Alpine Express (☎ 6241 0033; www.transborder.com.au) runs Alpine Express buses between Canberra and Jindabyne (adult/child \$45/22.50, three hours), via Cooma. **Summit Coaches** (☎ 1800 608 008, 6297 2588; www.summitcoaches.com.au) operates services on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday to/from Canberra (adult/child \$43/19, 2¼ hours).

If you're driving, Jindabyne is about 468km from Sydney by way of Goulburn, Canberra and Cooma. From Cooma, follow the Snowy Mountains Hwy, then the Kosciuszko Rd west for 65km to Jindabyne.

There are two routes – both long trips – from Melbourne to Jindabyne: the first (560km) is via Wodonga, Corryong, Khancoban and Thredbo; and the second (535km) is through Gippsland and the towns of Traralgon, Bairnsdale, Bruthen and Buchan. Much of Barry Way between Buchan and Jindabyne is unsealed.

Thredbo

☎ 02 / pop 2900

The pretty ski village of Thredbo (1370m) has the most alpine charm of all Australia's

ski resorts, and makes a convenient base for walks in the Mt Kosciuszko area. In winter it's a frenzied place offering great skiing with long runs, while in summer Thredbo is a less-hectic centre for outdoor pursuits with walks, cycling, bobsledding and other sports on offer.

The **Thredbo Information Centre** (☎ 1300 020 589; www.thredbo.com.au; Friday Dr; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), on the main street through town, provides helpful information on activities and can organise accommodation bookings.

Near the Thredbo Alpine Hotel is the Village Square where you'll find useful services, including a chemist, newsagent, supermarket, ATM and outdoor shop. Across the footbridge, near the base of the chairlifts, is **Thredbo Sports** (☎ 6459 4119; Valley Terminal; ☎ 8am-5pm), which sells outdoor equipment and lift tickets for the Crackenback chairlift, and also organises guided walks.

SLEEPING & EATING

Thredbo has various levels of accommodation even in the quieter summer period, with many establishments offering breakfast and dinner. To make an inquiry or booking, contact **Thredbo Accommodation Services** (☎ 1800 801 982) or the Thredbo Information Centre.

Thredbo YHA (☎ 6457 6376; thredbo@yhansw.org.au; 8 Jack Adams Pathway; dm/d from \$24/\$56; ☑) offers budget accommodation and includes a good kitchen and balcony.

For more up-market accommodation try **Kasees Apartments** (☎ 6457 6370; www.kasees.com.au; 4 Banjo Dr; d from \$100). There are self-contained units with mountain views and a sauna. Also of good value is **Candlelight Lodge** (☎ 1800 020 900; www.candlelightlodge.com.au; Banjo Dr; s/d \$75/110), providing B&B accommodation, with the bonus of a licensed restaurant and bar on the premises.

Like nearby Jindabyne, many eateries are closed during summer, but lots are still open to cater for hungry outdoor enthusiasts. For self-caterers, there's a supermarket at the eastern end of the Village Square.

Altitude 1380 (☎ 6457 6190; Village Square; mains from \$10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) is a good place for a morning coffee and cake before hitting the hills.

In the Thredbo Alpine Hotel complex, between Friday Dr and the Village Square, you'll find the popular **Pub Bar &**

Bistro (☎ 6459 4200; mains \$10-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner) with typical hotel meals. Opposite the pub is **Cascades Café & Bar** (☎ 6459 4200; mains \$25-30; 🍴 breakfast & dinner) with sunny window tables overlooking a large deck and ski slopes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Transborder Alpine Express (☎ 6241 0033; www.transborder.com.au) operates buses between Canberra and Thredbo (adult/child \$64/32, 3½ hours), via Jindabyne. **Summit Coaches** (☎ 1800 608 008, 6297 2588; www.summitcoaches.com.au) runs services on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday to/from Canberra (adult/child \$60/29, 2¾ hours).

If you just want to travel between Jindabyne and Thredbo, and you don't want to wait for a bus, contact one of the shuttle services listed under Getting Around (p86).

Transport inquiries and bookings can be made through the Thredbo Information Centre (p87) or the Snowy Region visitor information centre (p86).

Thredbo is an easy 33km drive west of Jindabyne on the Alpine Way. You can leave your vehicle in one of the designated overnight car parks east of the chairlift terminal.

MT KOSCIUSZKO & THE LAKES CIRCUIT

Duration	3 days
Distance	38km
Standard	easy-moderate
Start/Finish	Thredbo (p87)
Transport	bus, shuttle service

Summary A relatively easy stroll across Australia's highest mountains with uninterrupted views all the way. You'll encounter rocky peaks, broad plains, striking granite tors and mainland Australia's only glacial lakes.

The mountainous region from the peaks of the Rams Head Range to the Rolling Ground (including Australia's tallest peak, Mt Kosciuszko) is affectionately known as the Main Range. Within this area you'll find Australia's largest tract of truly alpine country. Mostly above the limit of tree growth, it incorporates Australia's highest peaks and five glacial lakes, including Blue Lake, possibly Kosciuszko National Park's most precious jewel. While snow gums can survive

in a few isolated localities, the vegetation is predominantly snow grass, herb fields, shrubs and sphagnum bogs. Numerous granite outcrops, some forming spectacular and gravity-defying tors, are scattered across the exposed mountaintops and plains, providing fantastic vantage points.

In the past, grazing (particularly by sheep) had such a severe effect on the ground cover protecting the fragile soil that whole mountain slopes were literally washed away. In the 1950s grazing was banned from the highest areas and erosion control programs were instigated. Evidence of drainage works can be seen in many areas of the Main Range, particularly around Carruthers Peak and Mt Twynam, where discreet retaining walls have been erected to slow runoff and encourage plant regrowth.

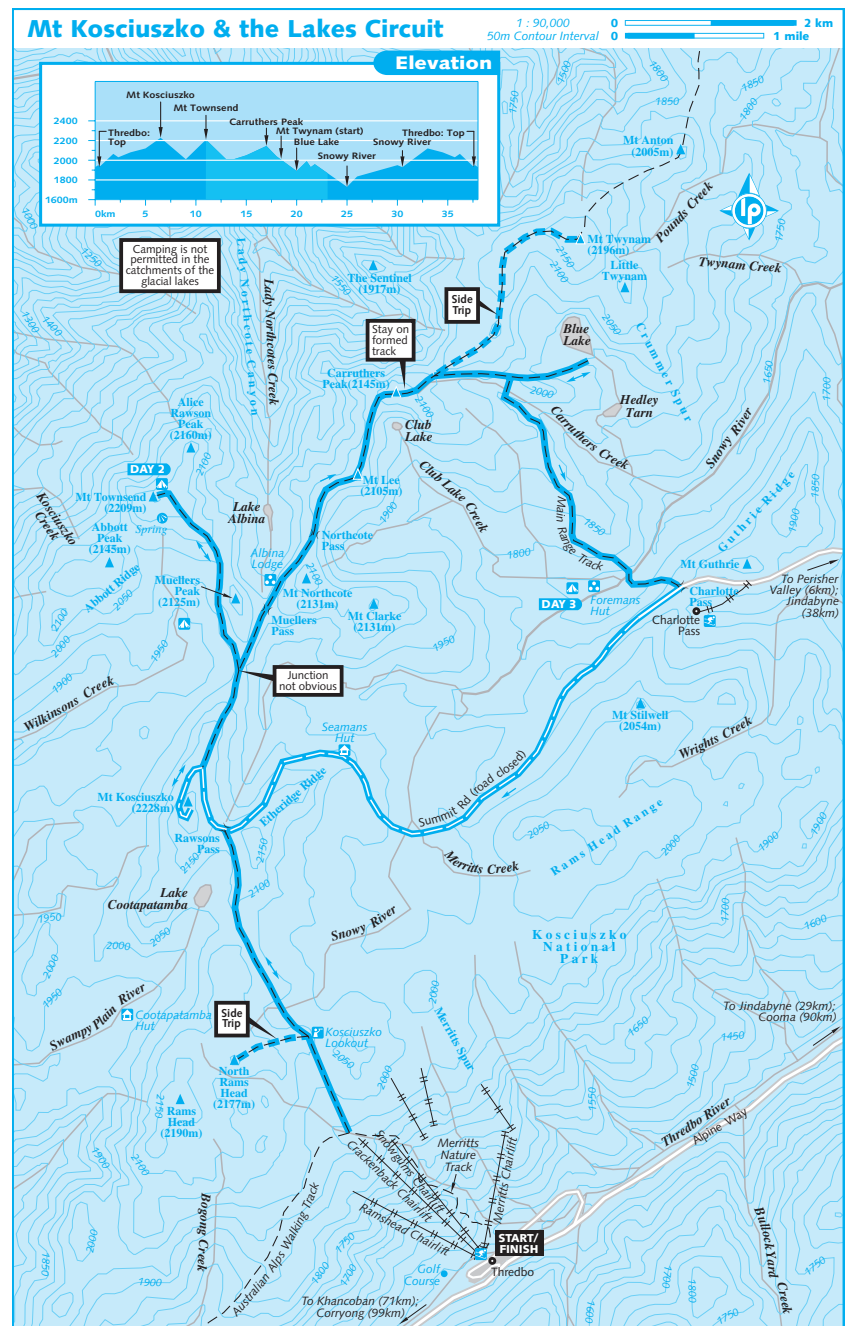
The large number of walkers heading to Mt Kosciuszko only adds to the erosion problem; so heavily trampled and damaged was the popular route from Thredbo that there is now a 6km paved path and raised metal walkway from the top of the Crackenback chairlift. Other sections of walking track on the Main Range have also been paved, camping has been banned within the watersheds of the glacial lakes to protect water quality and maintenance works are ongoing.

But don't let these environmental problems deter you. The exceptional views and ascents of Australia's three highest peaks are all major drawcards of this walk. And even the hordes of day walkers heading to Mt Kosciuszko from Thredbo in the height of summer won't bother you...there's plenty of room for everyone on the summit, and you'll be leaving them behind as you progress beyond Mt Kosciuszko in any case.

As a bonus, two short side-trips have been thrown in. They explore the boulder-strewn outcrop of North Rams Head and Mt Twynam, Australia's third-highest peak. Three days allows plenty of time to take in the sights of the walk, including the side trips.

PLANNING

It must be emphasised that this is a very exposed walk, so you must have a strong weather-proof tent, wet-weather gear, good sleeping bag, warm clothes and a fuel stove for cooking.



Maps

There are two excellent topographic maps covering the whole walk. The Department of Lands' 1:25,000 *Perisher Valley* map (one of a new series of maps) and SutMap's 1:40,000 *Mount Kosciuszko, Perisher & Thredbo* map are both good choices, and there's not much between them. They cover about the same area, but the SutMap sheet is smaller due to the difference in scale, which makes it a little easier to use.

Permits & Regulations

While no permits are required for this walk, there are some restrictions that apply to bushwalking on the Main Range. No camping is permitted within the water catchments of the five glacial lakes and all campsites should be hidden from roads and tracks. No campfires are permitted above the tree line.

As well, following the extensive 2003 bushfires, there are some areas where walking is prohibited. Check with the visitor information centres in Jindabyne (p86) or Thredbo (p88), before setting out, to see which areas are affected by closure.

THE WALK

Day 1: Thredbo to Mt Townsend

3 hours, 11km, 535m ascent, 255m descent

The walk starts at the top of the Crackenback chairlift, which whisks walkers up the mountainside from behind Thredbo Sports in the Valley Terminal. The fare is \$22 (\$11 for children) and you'll need to keep your

ticket for the return ride. If Crackenback is closed for maintenance, the adjacent Snowgums chairlift will run. The ride takes 10 minutes (or 20 minutes on the slower Snowgums lift) and it operates between 9am and 4.30pm daily. If you'd prefer not to pay for a ride on the chairlift you could walk up the Merritts Nature Track, which starts a little east of the Valley Terminal and joins the main route at the top station of the chairlift. Allow 1.5 hours for the climb.

The paved track begins right at the top of the Crackenback lift and heads north, soon crossing a creek, which is a good place to collect water. The path and metal walkway, raised above the snow grass, provides easy walking. From here on nearly the entire walk is above the tree line and, when temperatures climb and the sun beats down, you'll be praying for an alpine zephyr.

Aesthetically, the walkway is not particularly attractive. However, built to protect the plant life alongside the track that had been so heavily trampled, it serves its purpose well.

The track climbs to **Kosciuszko Lookout** – where you have your first glimpse of Kossy's rounded dome and where the side trip to North Rams Head departs – then reaches **Cootapatamba Lookout** in a saddle nearly 4km (one hour) from the chairlift. Lake Cootapatamba, Australia's highest glacial lake, sits below you to the west, often backed by a lingering snow-patch until well into summer.

You'll soon reach the old car park at Rawsons Pass. **Mt Kosciuszko** (2228m) is

only a short climb away to the west, but due to revegetation works you must follow the Summit Rd – which almost circles the mountain – for 1.5km to the top. As you'd expect, the views here are extensive, and encompass the highest peaks in the land. You may have to share the views with others, but hey, where else can you stand atop a hill and claim you are higher than anyone else in the country?

Head back down the Summit Rd for 750m to a signpost indicating a foot track that bears north. Follow this track as it gradually descends to a saddle south of Muellers Peak (8.5km and two hours from the start). Below you to the west of the saddle is the Wilkinson's Creek valley, which provides some camp sites. (In bad weather, or very dry conditions, this is a better camping option for the first night as the site is more protected than the Mt Townsend Plateau and water is plentiful.) The route to Mt Townsend leaves the main track at this saddle and heads northwest (not obvious for about the first 50m), skirting the western flank of Muellers Peak. It crosses a boulder field, then climbs gradually to a small plateau east of Mt Townsend. In fine weather this area makes a pleasant camp site – there are often small streams draining the plateau – and you can find shelter from the prevailing winds by choosing a site protected by boulders. A short rock scramble from the plateau leads to the summit of **Mt Townsend** (2209m), providing more dramatic views than those from Mt Kosciuszko. Of all the summits on this walk, Mt Townsend – Australia's second-highest mountain – is the pick of the bunch, yielding uninterrupted views across the Alps, especially to the northwest where the lowlands can be seen over a mile below.

SIDE TRIP: NORTH RAMS HEAD

1 hour, 2km return, 100m ascent

A highly worthwhile side trip, particularly in fine weather, is the short stroll to North Rams Head, a rocky prominence left behind as the glaciers retreated and melted away. In midsummer, the plains surrounding the mountain are carpeted in swathes of wildflowers, including billy buttons and snow daisies.

From Kosciuszko Lookout, bear west and climb the rocky slope. There is no track,

but please spread out if you're in a large group to help minimise damage to fragile alpine plants and soils. Within 10 minutes you'll reach a plateau where you can see the peak dominating your westerly view. The ascent of **North Rams Head** (2177m) requires some easy rock scrambling, but a birds-eye panorama unfolds as you reach the top. In an area where bizarre boulder formations abound, the sculpture-like tor just below and to the east of North Rams Head is a classic. Can you see the face?

Day 2: Mt Townsend to Snowy River

4 hours, 14km, 170m ascent, 640m descent

Retrace your steps to the saddle south of Muellers Peak, then follow the main track generally north to Muellers Pass. Alternatively, you could walk over the summit of **Muellers Peak** (2125m) – there is no track and the route requires some boulder hopping – then drop down steeply east over grassy slopes to Muellers Pass.

At the pass you'll see Lake Albina to the north, the headwaters of Lady Northcotes Canyon. As you continue along the track the ruins of Albina Lodge lie just below you. The hut was originally constructed for use by skiers, but the environmental problems it caused led to it being dismantled. The track skirts the western fall of Mt Northcote (2131m), joins the main divide again at Northcote Pass and continues just to the west of Mt Lee (2105m). Along this section information boards highlight areas of feldmark, which grow on damaged points along the exposed crest. All along this high spine of the Main Range you'll enjoy near endless views over the headwaters of the Snowy River and beyond to the dry plains of the Monaro region.

From the saddle beyond Mt Lee you get your first good look at the small, shallow Club Lake. The track then climbs north, zigzagging steeply to the summit of **Carruthers Peak** (2145m), two hours from camp. There are great views from here, particularly southwest to Mt Townsend and northeast to the distant Mt Jagungal (2061m) over the pyramid-like Sentinel (1917m) and Watsons Crags (2022m).

As the track descends from the summit you will notice the preventive measures (stone walls and drains) taken against soil erosion and vegetation loss on the eastern

WRAGGE'S OBSERVATORY

Something always close to a walker's heart is the weather. It's interesting, then, to ponder that many years ago Australia's highest building was a weather observatory on the summit of Mt Kosciuszko.

When Clement Wragge, a government meteorologist, began recording weather data here, little did he know what he was letting himself in for. Initially a collection of tents, 'Wragge's Observatory' suffered from buffeting by incessant winds. One tent and much of the measuring equipment it housed ended up 1600m below in the Geehi Gorge during one violent storm. Out of necessity, the observatory became a permanent structure in May 1898, when a wooden hut, with chimney access as one of the allowances for deep snow, was built. Horrendous tempests were common; on occasions the air was so electrically charged that sparks could be seen flying off any metal object waved in the air, while at other times winds were so strong that Wragge's staff had to be secured by rope when venturing outside to check the instruments. It's no surprise that the meteorologist earned the nickname 'Inclement Wragge'. By 1900 Australia's highest building was closed and abandoned, and was finally destroyed by lightning in 1914.

Regrettably, there are no remains...any that were left have either been pilfered or blown into oblivion by cumulative storms over the past 100 years.

slopes of Carruthers Peak (2145m). Soon you reach a **saddle** where the main route swings east, while an old, faint 4WD track climbs northeast for the side trip to Mt Twynam (below). The saddle is covered with fragile feldmark and walkers are encouraged not to stray off the track.

Follow the main route east for 1km as it gently descends to a paved area in a shallow saddle. Leave your rucksacks here and follow the track for 1km to Blue Lake, which is tucked in at the base of cliffs on Mt Twynam's southern slopes.

In a country where the effects of glaciation are few and far between, **Blue Lake** is not to be missed. Of the five glacial lakes, Blue Lake is not only the finest but also the deepest, coldest and most dramatic. In winter, the crags on the north side are hidden beneath a thick layer of ice and frozen waterfalls, and provide one of the few training grounds in Australia for budding ice climbers. Even on a hot summer's day, the dark waters look cold and forbidding.

Gather your packs and follow the heavily used path down to cross Carruthers Creek. The track climbs a little to the crest of a spur – where you can catch the occasional glimpse of **Hedley Tarn** to the east, the last of the five lakes – then descends for about 2.5km to the valley. Here there are two large watercourses to cross; Club Lake Creek and the Snowy River. Both can be waded or crossed on stepping stones unless the water levels are high, in which case it's best to walk upstream to find a suitable crossing, or wait. A camp site exists between the two rivers a short distance upstream, near a lonely chimney stack, the last vestige of Foremans Hut. Make sure you camp at least 100m away from either watercourse.

SIDE TRIP: MT TWYNAM

1½ hours, 5km return, 150m ascent

The walk to Mt Twynam yields yet more wonderful vistas, including close-up views of the Sentinel (1917m) and Watsons Crags (2022m). If nothing else, you can bag the third highest peak in the country.

From the saddle east of Carruthers peak, follow the faint 4WD track up the slope to the northeast. The track remains close to the crest of the ridge until you reach the highest point near **Mt Twynam**. The summit (2196m), littered with small boulders, is

200m south from here across open grassland. Needless to say, the grandstand scene is unrestricted in all directions.

Day 3: Snowy River to Thredbo

3½–4 hours, 13km, 450m ascent, 260m descent

After you've negotiated the river crossing, take the path steeply east to rejoin the Summit Rd at Charlotte Pass. Summit Rd provides easy walking as it skirts the slopes of Mt Stilwell (2054m) and the Rams Head Range, with the broad plains of the upper Snowy River area dominating the scene. Just over 4km from Charlotte Pass the trail crosses a bridge over Merritts Creek; soon after you cross the Snowy River before climbing to **Seamans Hut**. This solid stone hut was built in 1929 in memory of Laurie Seaman and Evan Hayes, who perished on the slopes of Mt Kosciuszko in the winter of 1928.

Summit Rd continues on for 1.7km to Rawsons Pass, 2¼ hours from the Snowy River, from where you retrace your steps of the first day to the top of the Thredbo chairlifts.

THE CHIMNEYS

Duration	5–6 hours
Distance	17km
Standard	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Dead Horse Gap
Nearest Town	Thredbo (p87)
Transport	shuttle service

Summary A generally easy walk across the attractive Boggy Plain culminates with a scramble to the rocky summit of the Chimneys. Some route finding is required, but there are great views into vast wild areas.

While most of the popular walks in Kosciuszko National Park lie in the area between Thredbo and the ghost town of Kiandra, some particularly interesting country can be found south of the Alpine Way in the southern section of the park. The Chimneys are a high, rocky outcrop providing an elevated post from which to view the surrounding mountains and plains. Dominating the Chimneys Ridge a few kilometres south of Thredbo, the peaks provide an unusual view of the Rams Head and Mt Kosciuszko area to the north. Other than Cascade Trail, the only tracks in the

area are those formed by wildlife, including emus and brumbies. Although most of this route is off formed trails, the open Boggy Plain (also known as the 'Big Boggy') provides easy walking, and the upper reaches of the Thredbo River provide reliable guidance in a trackless landscape.

Starting near Dead Horse Gap the walk follows the north bank of the Thredbo River, then climbs gradually to the base of the Chimneys, though the last section is a little scrubby. The final ascent is a rock scramble – not too difficult – to the twin rocky prominences of the Chimneys. You could easily fill two days in this wild and scenic region.

PLANNING

Maps

Look no further than the Department of Lands' 1:25,000 *Chimneys Ridge* map.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk begins a few hundred metres east of Dead Horse Gap, where the Alpine Way crosses the Thredbo River. This point is also 4km west of Thredbo and 37km west of Jindabyne.

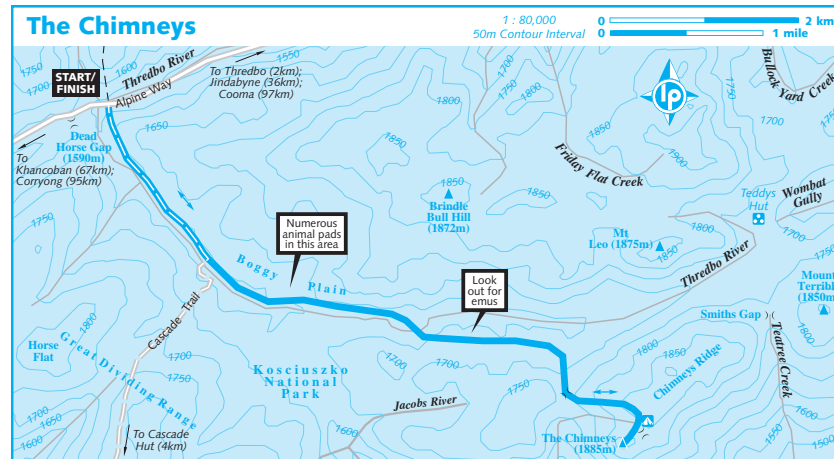
For information on transport to and from the trailhead, contact one of the shuttle services listed under Getting Around (p86) in the introduction to Kosciuszko National Park. Alternatively, you could walk from Thredbo to Dead Horse Gap, adding an additional 8km to the total length of the walk.

WARNING

Though the walk is rated easy–moderate, sound navigational skills are essential as much of the walking is off-track and, with the lack of prominent features, finding your way can be difficult in poor weather. You must carry a compass and a good topographic map, and, above all, be able to use them.

THE WALK

Cascade Trail climbs southeast away from the Alpine Way above the Thredbo River. After 2km Cascade Trail fords the river – there's also a footbridge – but the route to follow doesn't, and instead follows the north (true right) bank generally east. A brumby pad begins here and heads upstream into pretty **Boggy Plain**, providing views across the grasslands of the Thredbo River valley. About 2.5km from the ford the river veers briefly to the south; cross the river on some rocks where it begins to turn back eastwards and walk a little way uphill to locate some more brumby pads. Follow these east across the plain – or walk cross-country if you don't find them – but after about 1km from the river crossing you will need to bear southeast and ascend away from the river. There are faint pads in places, but it may be more convenient to make your own way. There are often emus grazing in the upper reaches of Boggy Plain and you



will no doubt have noticed the huge piles of brumby droppings along the route.

You will soon be able to see the rocky outcrop of the Chimneys in the distance through a gap in the Chimneys Ridge; walk towards this prominent saddle. As you get closer to the saddle and gain height you'll need to cross a small stream and climb south up a little valley; the best route is about 50m east of the stream on an animal pad. Once on the saddle climb east – there is no pad – and ascend the Chimneys Ridge. There is some scrub at first but it's not unduly thick and the best route seems to be slightly on the north side of the ridge. Avoid the temptation to head directly for the Chimneys as the scrub is thicker on the south side and there are some boulders that hinder walking.

At a point directly north of the Chimneys, walk south onto a snow plain 200m west of a saddle. There are some camp sites in the trees at the base of the Chimneys and water can usually be found in the gully west of the snow plain. A rock scramble through stunted, gnarled snow gums is required to reach the top of these inviting little peaks; there is no marked route, so pick the best way you can. The highest point of the **Chimneys** (1885m) is marked by a cairn and dilapidated trigonometric point. There are excellent views of the Main Range to the north and the Jacobs River valley far below you to the south. The dry, yellow Monaro region can be seen on the eastern horizon.

Return to the start via the outward route, but take your time to soak up the pleasantness as you amble back.

GORGES, CAVES & PLAINS

Duration	5–6 hours
Distance	18km
Standard	easy
Start/Finish	Coolman Mountain Camping Area
Nearest Town	Adaminaby (opposite)
Transport	shuttle service

Summary This circuit walk passes through dramatically varied terrain, including a pretty gorge, limestone caves, a waterhole and a curious sinkhole, and also includes a visit to an historic rural homestead.

Blue Waterholes and Coolman Plain, tucked into the far northeastern sector of Kosciuszko National Park, are unusual and captivating for a number of reasons. The area around Blue Waterholes consists predominantly of tree-covered hills and broad grassy plains – the largest known as Coolman Plain – providing delightful walking. At times, the area seems so benign that you'd hardly believe you were in the Kosciuszko National Park at all!

What is also surprising is the lack of running water above Blue Waterholes, a result of the plain's underlying limestone geology. Limestone is readily dissolved by carbon dioxide and water, as found in rainwater. The result is that streams draining the surrounding hills seep underground on reaching the plains, surfacing again at a few locations, most prominently at the Blue Waterholes where Cave Creek bubbles out from underground. The area is also riddled with caves and sinkholes, and the picturesque Clarke Gorge and the restored Coolamine Homestead are further attractions. If you've a keen eye you may see kangaroos, brumbies and even feral pigs in the area.

Unlike the southern areas of the park, which were torched by disastrous bushfires in 2003, the Coolman region has fortunately remained unscathed.

The Blue Waterholes Fire Trail, a popular 4WD route, continues beyond the start of the walk to the camping areas at Blue Waterholes. The trail is quite passable to 2WD vehicles in dry conditions, but you may have difficulty negotiating the track after heavy rain.

PLANNING

Note that this walk cannot be accessed in winter and spring (between June and October) as the Long Plain Rd is closed to all traffic during this time. Remember, too, that if you wish to have a peep inside any of the caves, you need to bring a torch.

Maps

You need two maps for this walk. The CMA 1:25,000 *Peppercorn* and *Rules Point* maps show excellent detail and have a useful 10m contour interval. The foot tracks into Clarke Gorge and along Cave Creek aren't shown, but there's enough detail on the maps for easy navigation.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Adaminaby

☎ 02 / pop 460

Popular as a base for fishing in the nearby streams and Lake Eucumbene, Adaminaby also makes a handy base for walks in the central and northern areas of Kosciuszko National Park. It's only a small town – and there's little to do – but it has good amenities for bushwalkers. Limited information about the region can be obtained from within the **Bake House** (Denison St), just off the highway.

SLEEPING & EATING

At the western end of Adaminaby, though not far from Denison St, is the **Alpine Tourist Park** (☎ 6454 2438; www.alpinetouristpark.com.au; cnr Lett St & Snowy Mountains Hwy; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$18/20, cabins from \$42).

Tanderra Lodge (☎ 6454 2470; www.tanderra.com; 21 Denison St; s & d from \$65) is in the main street right near the shops. Also on the main drag, offering both food and accommodation, is the **Snow Goose Hotel/Motel** (☎ 6454 2202; cnr Denison & Baker Sts; hotel s/d \$40/60, motel s/d \$55/65). The Snow Goose offers hearty lunch and dinner meals. Denison Street also has a number of takeaway outlets and a small supermarket.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Adaminaby is on the Snowy Mountains Hwy, 51km from Cooma or 80km from Jindabyne (via Berridale). **Adaminaby Bus Service** (☎ 6454 2620) can shuttle walkers between Jindabyne and Adaminaby.

Coolman Mountain Camping Area

While a long way from any of the nearest towns, this is a good camping ground equipped with toilets and tables, and plenty of space for cars.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

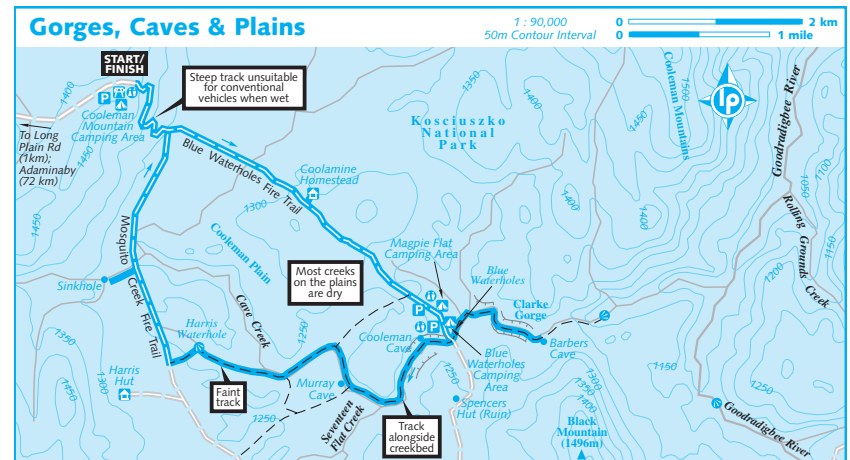
From Adaminaby, drive west for 55km along the Snowy Mountains Hwy to the Long Plain Rd turn-off to the right (on a sweeping bend, about 20km north of Kiandra). Take this dirt road north for 17km to the Blue Waterholes Fire Trail turn-off to the east; 2.5km along this side-trail brings you to the camping area.

Adaminaby Bus Service (☎ 6454 2620) is the best bet for a ride to the start of the walk, but you should call a few days in advance of your transport need. For other shuttle services see Getting Around (p86).

THE WALK

The route heads east and within 15 minutes reaches the open meadows of Coolman Plain.

A further 2km leads to **Coolamine Homestead** (see the boxed text p96), just off the trail to your left. Wandering among the old cattle yards and machinery, and reading the old newspapers which adorn the walls of the main building, is like stepping back to yesteryear. You may feel that you are in a time warp, if even just for a moment. Information boards in the area give further insight into the history of this mountain outpost.



COOLAMINE HOMESTEAD

The isolated mountain property of Coolamine Homestead dates from 1839 when a Canberra pioneer, Sir Terence Murray, stumbled upon the lush grasslands of Cooleman Plain and wasted no time in staking his claim. He built a slab hut and named the property Coolalamine Station, although it was soon known by its present name, Coolamine.

Over time a collection of buildings were added using building practices of the time, including horse hair for roof insulation and newspaper as lining for the internal walls. As the station prospered the homestead was extended and in 1889 even a cheese hut – a structure made out of grass thatch and clay to store cheeses while they matured – was built. By 1907 the main house (the one that you see today) was erected. Over time, further rooms were added to accommodate more employees; one particular room was used as a Sunday post office when mail was being delivered from Berridale, west of Jindabyne.

During the first half of the 1900s occupation of Coolamine declined and the buildings were gradually abandoned. The homestead deteriorated over the years to a state of virtual ruin, and by the late 1960s only four buildings remained. After 1975, when the land was finally passed from freehold to Kosciuszko National Park, the Kosciuszko Huts Association saw the historical value and importance of the homestead and began restoration works in 1977. The result of their handiwork, persistence and vision can clearly be seen today.

The trail crosses a low hill then descends steadily to the Blue Waterholes camping area, where it's common to see kangaroos grazing. At the end of the track, the cool and enticing waters of **Blue Waterholes** rise from beneath the plains like an oasis beneath the limestone crags. If it's hot, a refreshing dip may be in order.

At Blue Waterholes, which form the major headwater of Cave Creek, a trail heads downstream on the left bank. This soon crosses a broad stream, then immediately crosses over Cave Creek itself on stepping stones before continuing downstream on the right bank. It is worth following this track downstream for about 1km from the Blue Waterholes (or more if you wish) to gain access into the scenic **Clarke Gorge**. Here, the creek has carved a spectacular route through the rock, creating a narrow canyon hemmed in by 30m cliffs. It is possible to venture much further downstream, eventually reaching some waterfalls and cascades about 2.5km from the Blue Waterholes.

Return to Blue Waterholes, fill your drink bottles and locate Blue Waterholes Fire Trail where it crosses the dry creek bed just above the waterhole. Follow the trail for a few hundred metres before leaving it to follow a walking track up the Cave Creek valley, or walk up the bed of the creek itself. In summer, the rusty golden hues of the mountain grasses contrast vividly with

the barren crags of the gorge beside the dry Cave Creek.

Along this section, the route follows part of the marked 'Nicole Gorge & Murray Cave Walk', and the track is easy to follow. Heading upstream, you soon pass Cooleman Cave (worth a cursory look) and, about 1.5km further on, **Murray Cave**, one of the most impressive of all the caves in the Cooleman Plain area. The entrance to Murray Cave is a narrow slot, but once inside the cave opens into a large chamber, which is refreshingly cool in summer. To the left as you enter, the cave continues for a further 200m, although it is often quite wet and not recommended without protective equipment, such as a hard-hat.

The **Nicole Gorge** walk climbs steeply up above the cave to the left of the entrance, but the better route is to follow another track which continues up the Cave Creek valley.

Not far beyond Murray Cave the valley broadens, and the track turns away from the creek bed and heads north to join the Blue Waterholes Fire Trail. Do not follow this track; instead, stay in the valley, cross Cave Creek to the north (true left) bank about 1km past Murray Cave – there is usually water running here – and locate a faint foot track heading west. This stays north of the creek for 750m then crosses the creek again before heading gently up a side valley to **Harris Waterhole**. This waterhole is an

anomaly on these plains, being one of the few places where you'll find surface water.

Climb up the grassy slope southwest from the waterhole and you'll locate a obscure 4WD track. This soon meets another faint 4WD track, the Mosquito Creek Fire Trail, which you follow north. It descends into a shallow valley and climbs a low spur before dropping to another shallow valley, 1.5km from Harris Waterhole. Leave the track here – there are no signs to point the way – and walk southwest up this valley for 300m to an interesting phenomenon. Here, two small creeks flow down the hillside only to plummet underground into a limestone sinkhole. Peering into the sinkhole, you may feel as if you're being sucked towards the centre of the Earth.

Return to the faint track and continue north to rejoin the Blue Waterholes Fire Trail 1km east of Cooleman Mountain Camping Area. It's a 25-minute climb back up the trail to the end of the walk.

THE BUDAWANGS

The Budawangs form a complex maze of deep valleys and heavily forested canyons, presided over by towering cliffs and flat-topped sandstone peaks: this is some of the most spectacular bushwalking country in NSW. The walks described here lie mostly within the borders of the 162,000-hectare Morton National Park. The wild, densely timbered escarpment of Budawang National Park continues south of here, with Yadboro Creek forming the boundary between the two regions.

Despite the encroachment of farmers, prospectors and loggers into the valleys, and continuing conflict between conservationists and logging interests, the Budawangs still have a primordial, rugged feel, and give us an inkling of what untouched Australian wilderness might have been like before European settlement.

HISTORY

Visits by walkers to the Budawangs in the early years of the 20th century led to significant conservation efforts. In 1934 Australia's first wilderness area – the 3100-hectare Tallowa Primitive Reserve – was gazetted, primarily as a result of the work of Myles

Dunphy (see p62). Mark Morton, a local member of the NSW parliament at the time, provided significant support and vision, and the national park today bears his name.

ENVIRONMENT

The Budawangs' high rainfall and significant altitude variation support a rich and varied flora and fauna. Rainforest thrives in the valleys and canyons where moist sheltered conditions prevail (trees present include the highly prized red cedar, used in making furniture, and brown beech). Coachwood forest exists further south towards Yadboro Creek, while eucalyptus forest, on the dry slopes, and mallee species eke out an existence on high rocky plateaus and exposed sandstone platforms. Heath and some alpine species dominate the higher altitude areas and windswept mountain tops.

Wildlife includes the usual Australian species (kangaroos, wallabies, koalas and dingos), with platypuses and native water

WARNINGS

Topographic maps and a compass are mandatory for walks in this area. Since the NPWS made the decision to let this area regenerate back into wilderness, some areas have become increasingly overgrown, and route-finding can be tricky. To further complicate matters, the high ridges and plateaus attract fog and low cloud that may obscure all visible landmarks. Be especially mindful of this when walking in the Monolith Valley area. Allow plenty of daylight hours for slower-than-usual travel and always set out with sufficient food, water and gear for an unplanned bivouac.

Due to the difficult nature of the terrain and the lack of surface water in summer, when streams and creeks often dry up, there is little protection for Budawangs walkers caught out in a bushfire. Prevention is better than cure, so keep a look out for signs of trouble, such as smoke, and plan on changing your route early to avoid being swallowed by a fire front. It's best to avoid the region in very hot, dry weather, especially if a northerly or westerly wind is blowing. Check with one of the district NPWS offices (p98) for current fire-risk status before entering the park in danger periods.

rats common. Black-cockatoos are often seen, and the superb lyrebird can frequently be heard mimicking the calls of other birds as it scratches around the leaf litter on the forest floor.

PLANNING

Budawangs walks feature prolonged sections of track overgrown with dense scrub. Gaiters and long trousers are recommended. If you have inexperienced walkers in the party, a 10m length of 9mm rope will assist in scaling the route to the summit of The Castle.

While water tanks and creeks exist in many of the camping and picnic areas, they may be dry in summer, so it's best to carry sufficient water to the start of your walk. Check with NPWS on the availability of surface water before setting out.

When to Walk

Spring and autumn are the best times for Budawangs walks. The short daylight hours of midwinter add unnecessary veneers of haste and concern to walks in the Monolith Valley area. Cool periods in summer can be good if recent rains leave plenty of surface water and dampen the bushfire risk.

Maps & Books

Produced by the Budawang Committee (Coast and Mountain Walkers Club), the 1:50,000 *The Northern Budawang Range and the Upper Clyde River Valley Sketch Map* is essential for Budawangs walks. It includes some historical notes and handy walk summaries and much detail – such as locations of camping caves – that is not shown on the CMA 1:25,000 topographic maps *Corang* and *Milton*, which cover the area but are sadly out of date.

Pigeon House and Beyond produced by the Budawang Committee is the definitive reference to the history, geography, wildlife and bushwalks in this area. It's available throughout Australia from outdoor gear suppliers and bookshops, and includes extensive walk notes. Ron Doughton's *Bushwalking in the Budawangs*, despite its sometimes obtuse language, is the most extensive work on the area and is useful for planning. John and Lyn Daly's *Take a Walk in a New South Wales National Park South-Eastern Zone* has notes on Monolith Valley, Pigeon House, The Castle and other tracks in the area.

Information Sources

The **NPWS** (☎ 4423 2170; 55 Graham St) has a district office in Nowra, a subdistrict park office in **Ulladulla** (☎ 4454 9500); and a visitor information centre at **Fitzroy Falls** (☎ 4887 7270), on the park's northern boundary. The Ulladulla office is responsible for the areas covered by these walks, but you'll have more luck making contact with Fitzroy Falls or Nowra.

Permits & Regulations

NPWS asks walkers to fill in a journey intention form and return it to the office in **Ulladulla** (fax 4455 1850) before setting off on overnight trips (not necessary for the Pigeon House walk).

Bush camping is permitted everywhere except Monolith Valley, where overuse has damaged this fragile area.

ACCESS TOWN Ulladulla

☎ 02 / pop 9500

Ulladulla, a holiday town on the NSW south coast, about 225km from Sydney, is the only sizable settlement relatively close to the park that provides accommodation and walk supplies. **Ulladulla visitor information centre** (☎ 4455 1269; shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au) is in the Civic Centre opposite the harbour.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Boots Great Outdoors (☎ 4455 2526; 9/44 Deering St), is one block west of the Princes Hwy and has a full range of gear and fuel.

SLEEPING & EATING

Ulladulla Headland Tourist Park (☎ 1300 733 021; ulladullapark@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au; South St; unpaved sites for 2 \$20-30, powered \$30-40, cabins \$60-225) is close to town and within earshot of the surf; it's quiet outside of school holidays.

Travellers Rest Backpackers (☎ 4454 0500; 63 Princes Hwy; www.southcoasttravellersrest.com; dm \$25, d & tw \$50) is a small, friendly, homely place with just five rooms.

There are several motels in Ulladulla, although vacancies can be scarce in summer and school holiday periods. **Motel Harbour Royal** (☎ 4455 5444; 29 Burrill St; d \$120-140) has a good off-highway location, while **Colonial Palms** (☎ 4455 1777; 13 Princes Hwy; d \$135) and **Mollymook Seascape** (☎ 4455 5777; d \$135) are opposite one another north of town.

Various restaurants, cafés and small eateries line Ulladulla's main street (the Princes Hwy). Down at the harbour, **Fisherman's Wharf Seafood** (☎ 4455 3906; Wason St; ☎ daytime) is the place to buy fresh fish, and it serves fish and chips during the day. Across the road, **Tory's Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 4455 0888; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a licensed restaurant with good views and fresh food.

The **Marlin Hotel Bistro** (Princes Hwy; mains around \$20; ☎ lunch & dinner daily), serves pub fare, or for self-caterers the **Coles supermarket** (Boree St), one street west of the main drag, is open late daily.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

If driving from Sydney, take the Princes Hwy straight down the south coast – the highway runs directly through Ulladulla (225km from Sydney). **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 133 410) has a twice-daily south coast service from Central Station, Sydney, to Ulladulla (one way \$31).

HEART OF THE BUDAWANGS

Duration	4 days
Distance	52km
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Wog Wog picnic area
Nearest Towns	Ulladulla (opposite)
Transport	private

Summary An extremely varied walk among some of Australia's most spectacular sandstone escarpment country. Monolith Valley, The Castle and Mt Owen are highlights, but there is much else to see besides.

This is breathtaking country. The views across the heavily forested valleys and ridges are dramatic, and the walker's gaze constantly alights on something new. The craggy rock walls of the lower sandstone plateaus are capped by dark, brooding sandstone peaks, such as The Castle. Monolith Valley is a highlight, dissected as it is by a maze of clefts and canyons scoured into its rocky battlements.

Tackling this walk in four days (it's possible to complete in three) allows more time to enjoy the Wog Wog to Burrumbet section, including Corang Peak and Corang Arch, and more energy for the demanding Monolith Valley/The Castle/Mt Owen circuit.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Ulladulla (opposite).

Wog Wog picnic area

NPWS allows camping at the Wog Wog picnic area, the starting point of this walk. There's a pit toilet at the site but no other facilities. No tank water is available. Wog Wog Creek is about 300m downhill from the picnic area; boil water before drinking.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

From Ulladulla you can circle north or south to reach the Wog Wog area. Heading north, take the Princes Hwy 54km to Tomerong then go left on Turpentine Rd. Continue for about 56km (most of it on the gravel Braidwood–Nowra road) to Nerriga. Continue south for 17km, then turn left onto the Mongarlowe Rd. Wog Wog picnic area is 5km on, after a creek ford. From the south, take the Princes Hwy for 50km and turn west on to the Kings Hwy just north of Batemans Bay. Follow for 43km, up Clyde Mountain, then go right and follow for 7km to Mongarlowe. Continue towards Charley's Forest and Nerriga; Wog Wog picnic area is 21km past Mongarlowe.

Travellers Rest Backpackers (☎ 4454 0500; www.southcoasttravellersrest.com) provides a shuttle to the Budawangs for guests. Discuss your requirements when booking a bed.

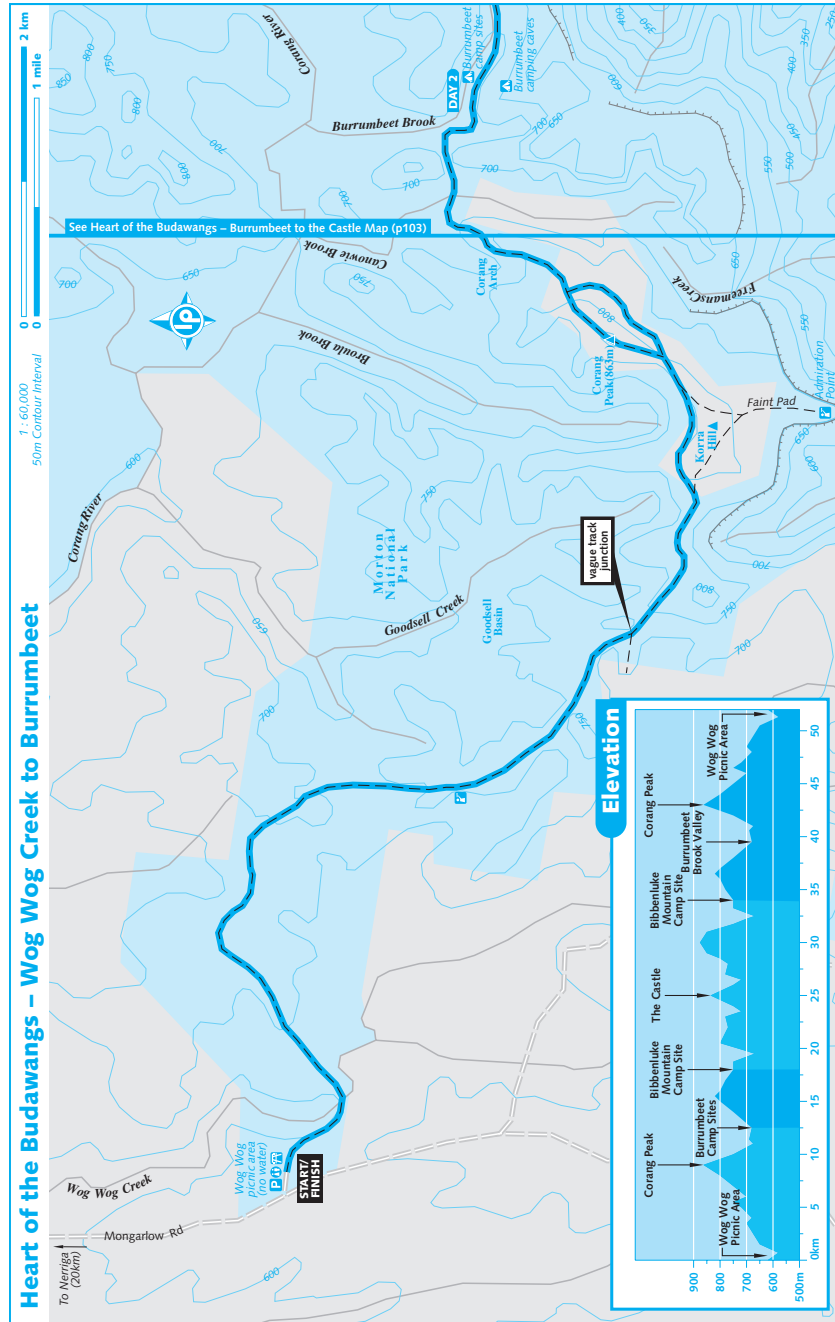
South Coast Nature Tours (☎ 4454 0072; www.southcoastnaturetours.com.au) will collect walkers from accommodation in the Ulladulla area to Wog Wog picnic area for \$200 per person return. The owner offers discounts to larger parties, brings after-walk refreshments and he'll supply maps and compass for the walk if they're required.

THE WALK

Day 1: Wog Wog picnic area to Burrumbet Brook valley

4–4½ hours, 12.5km, 350m ascent, 270m descent

The walk starts from the area just behind the national park information board. Take the walking track to Wog Wog Creek, a short distance down the hill. Head upstream and along the track, crossing Wog Wog Creek and continuing up the hill for about half an hour. The track is wide and well marked; about 2km past the creek it crosses an old fence line. In the next few hundred metres the track passes two sandstone formations



(the first to the right, the second on the left). Continue along the top of the next rise and descend to cross a saddle, before climbing again, heading in a southerly direction. Continue to follow the track through a gully, then climb again to a gap between large conglomerate outcrops.

The track continues southeast, crossing an exposed rocky area for a few hundred metres, then passes a barely discernible track junction about 6.5km from the start; the track veers left here. Continue, traversing the northern side of Korra Hill, part of the way on boardwalks, and reaching another track junction at the flat saddle. From here, an indistinct track can be taken south along the ridge to **Admiration Point** (1.8km return), which has excellent views across the Yabborie River to Currockbilly Mountain and east to the ramparts of The Castle and Mt Owen.

Just past the Admiration Point junction, take the left fork to the summit of **Corang Peak** (a 70m altitude gain to the 863m summit), from where great views of all the surrounding peaks and heavily forested valleys unfold (about three hours from the Wog Wog picnic area). Continue off the summit of Corang Peak to the northeast, passing **Corang Arch** about 15 to 20 minutes further along. This remnant of a collapsed sandstone overhang lies about 50m to the left of the main track; you need to be near the cliff edge to see it. From here the route descends indistinctly down a sloping conglomerate ramp, turns east and drops down steps to Canowie Brook. Continue across the Canowie Brook swamp, over the rise, and follow the track right (south) and down to cross a tributary of Burrumbeet Brook. A few hundred metres east near the brook there are good camp sites, while numerous small tracks lead off (to the right) to camping caves just south of the main track.

Day 2: Burrumbeet Brook valley to Bibbenluke Mountain camp site

2–2½ hours, 5.5km, 90m ascent, 80m descent

This is a short day so there's plenty of time to dawdle over breakfast. Continue up the Burrumbeet Brook valley northeast. About halfway up the climb to the head of the valley there's a right turn to **Yurunga Lookout**, which is worth the detour on a clear day for its views into the plunging deep below

Bibbenluke Mountain. The track climbs steadily for another 400m then follows a scenic ridge crest (with some fairly solid scrub-bashing) to the west and north of Bibbenluke Mountain. The track descends gently through more heath on boardwalks to a couple of creek crossings. There are some camp sites either side of the track 50m to 60m past the second creek, but it's better to continue for a few hundred metres and take the left (north) turn to the sites near the upper reaches of the Corang River. You can pass the afternoon with a jaunt up **Mt Tarn** (887m) – the pad is vague in places, but quite manageable – or drinking in the view of Mt Cole (877m), Mt Owen (876m) and Donjon Mountain that unfolds east of the Bibbenluke Mountain saddle.

Day 3: Bibbenluke Mountain camp site to Monolith Valley & The Castle return

8½ hours, 16km, 620m ascent, 590m descent

This section is strenuous and involves significant height gains and descents, so an early start is necessary to ensure you won't be finishing in the dark (be especially mindful of this on short winter days). Return south from camp and go left when you reach the main track. Follow this to the next junction and turn right (the left branch goes to Mt Tarn), fairly soon after entering light forest. The track meanders over fallen trees for about 500m to 600m to a creek crossing, climbs a little and then veers east and down to the saddle. From here it's all uphill to the cliffs of Mt Cole.

Upon reaching the cliffs, go left and continue around Mt Cole's base to the north, following the rubble-strewn track and passing three camping caves before surmounting the saddle between Mt Cole and Donjon Mountain. Signs here indicate that you're entering the protected region surrounding Monolith Valley. Within this area, camping and fires are not permitted.

From here the track continues east, then veers south at the saddle between Mt Cole and Seven Gods Pinnacle. Continue down the small ravine along the course of the creek into the narrowest part of **Monolith Valley**. As the canyon widens, an arch of rock appears on the right, and is worth exploring. The canyon is all moss, ferns and shade, a magical and unexpectedly soft world after the heath-bashing that's come

before. Continue on the track to the small wooden bridge. The trip from Bibbenluke Mountain camp site to here should take two hours. You'll need another three to four hours to reach and climb The Castle and return to this point.

To climb The Castle, cross the bridge and head up and east, following a creek-side track around and into the saddle between Mt Mooryan and Mt Nibelung, where several track braids lead through the tall grass. The track drops into a narrow defile down to the right, but it's best to avoid this by following cairns along the rock shelves to the left, then dropping to the base of the gully via a fixed chain. The track continues southeast and east, and descends beside a creek to the sign indicating the end of the protected area. Cross the creek and continue south, skirting the base of the cliffs of **Mt Nibelung** and finally dropping southeast into The Castle saddle. There's evidence of old camp sites here (camping's banned; a left turn leads to Cooyoyo Creek camp site, a steep 20- to 30-minute walk downhill).

Go straight ahead to reach The Castle, following the now less-distinct pad as it climbs slightly before heading along the eastern base of the cliffs past some camping caves and, up to the right, 'the tunnel', which can be ignored. (This constricted slot, marked by scratched arrows, provides access to the western side of The Castle, where there are great views of Mt Owen and the **Oaky Creek valley**; keep an eye on the time if you decide to take a look.)

About 100m past the tunnel the track rises to the start of the climb up the 'tail' of **The Castle**. From this point you'll need to patiently follow arrows scratched on the rock and wear marks, sometimes stopping to carefully review the options – there are quite a few false leads and wrong turns can get nasty. For the most part the climb is quite manageable for experienced walkers. There's an exposed section very low down that might be unnerving, otherwise the hardest sections are towards the top. Once you're on the ridge of the tail, the track undulates between outcrops and boulders, finally passing east of a prominent tower then continuing along a ledge for about 40m to the last major obstacle, a chimney. Here you may want to use the rope (mentioned in Planning p98) to assist less

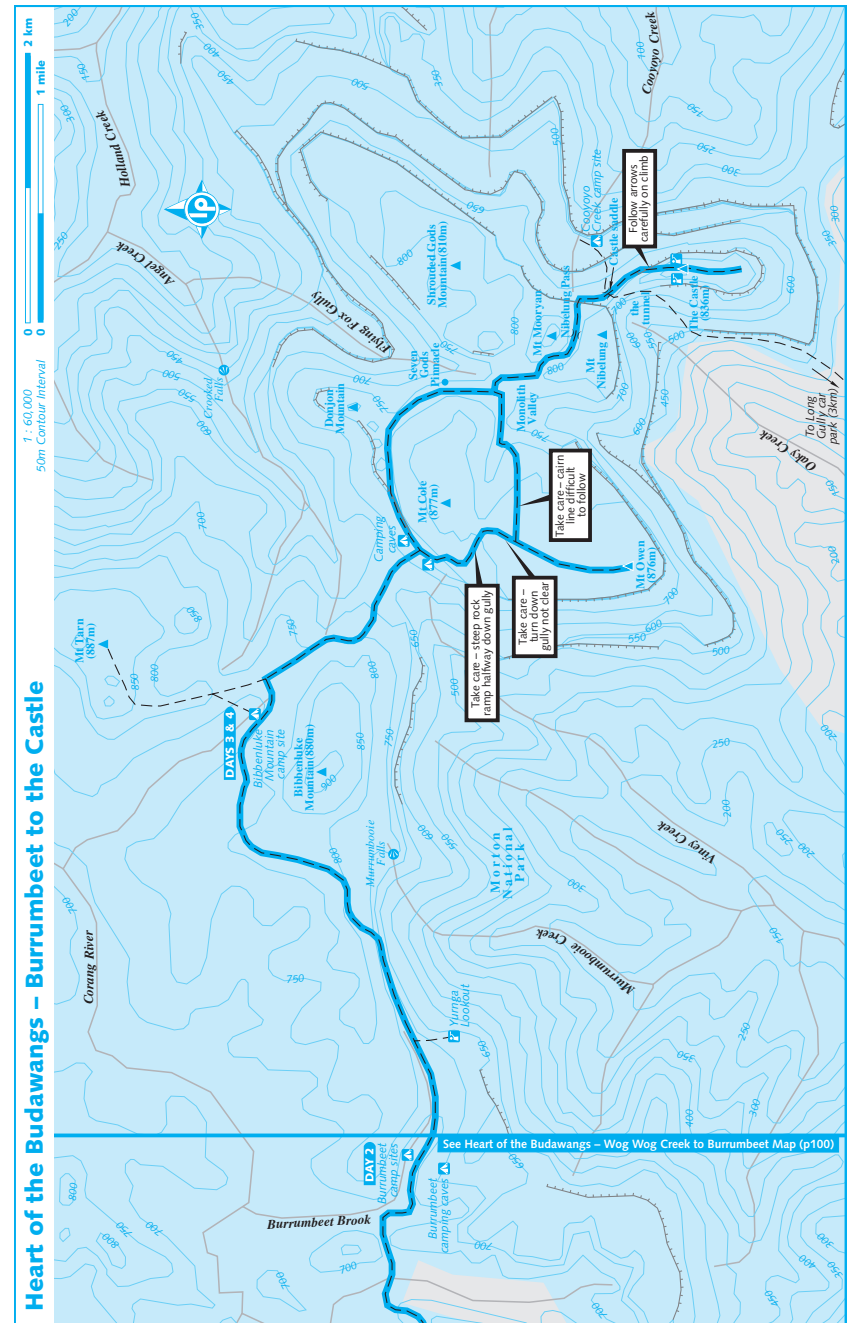
confident members of your group (there is sometimes a length of rope hanging here, left by previous parties). Above, traverse out and round the bulge to the right, before bridging the final two short chimneys. This brings you out on the summit plateau, where the views are spectacular, particularly to the south and southeast. There's a logbook in a container about 15 minutes' bus trip south from the top of the climb (again, check timing before committing to an extra half-hour up here).

Return to Monolith Valley on the outward route and cross back over the small bridge. Go left for 20m to 30m then climb the steep, rocky track through a small slot and down into a boulder-strewn valley. Follow the vague line of cairns across the boulders of this for about 150m then go south and up a very steep track along a series of ledges. The final part of the ascent follows a gully up the eastern side of Mt Owen plateau, after which a line of cairns marks the path west for about 700m to 800m, to large cairns directly south of the saddle between Mt Owen and Mt Cole.

From here, a strenuous return detour (about 2.8km, up to 1½ hours) leads to the southern end of **Mt Owen plateau**; you should only attempt it if you have sufficient time (you'll need one to 1½ hours to get back to camp from the large cairns). Follow the vague but cairned route southwest. There are magnificent views across to The Castle from the south point. Follow the same route back to the large cairns.

The track is vague past the large cairns. You need to head north to the rim of the plateau (following cairns, and occasionally being distracted by false turns) and drop down a narrow gully (with a small rock shelter at its top) into the saddle between Mt Owen and Mt Cole. Follow the cairns (again, they're vague) westwards down the gully. The going is steep and scrubby; you need to be particularly careful when descending the tricky rock slab on the gully's left side. Not far beyond it you'll pass the protected area signpost.

From the mouth of the gully, head to the right along the base of the cliffs, past two camping caves, to the junction with the track used earlier in the day. Return to Bibbenluke Mountain camp site, following the same route used on the outward journey.



Day 4: Bibbenluke Mountain camp site to Wog Wog picnic area

6–7 hours, 18km, 350m ascent, 440m descent

Return to Wog Wog along the walk-in route. Expect to be tired from the previous day's exertions, so allow time for a slower pace and for rests. Unless you're keen for another look at the view from Corang Peak, take the lower track around its eastern flank. It's mostly level going on boardwalks.

PIGEON HOUSE MOUNTAIN

Duration	3 hours
Distance	5.9km
Standard	moderate
Start/Finish	Pigeon House Mountain car park
Nearest Town	Ulladulla (p98)
Transport	private
Summary	A short but exhilarating walk via a series of ladders to the summit of Pigeon House Mountain, with sweeping views of the ocean and coastal plains.

This day walk provides magnificent 360-degree views of The Castle, Byangee Mountain and the rugged escarpments to the north and south of the park. The ocean is also visible, giving an interesting contrast between the dissected valleys of the Clyde River and its tributaries, and the distant coastal plains, from Mt Dromedary in the south to Point Perpendicular in the north. A series of metal ladders needs to be negotiated near the summit. These are very safe but quite exposed and the metal rungs may be slippery after rain. While the walk is short, it is fairly steep and quite hot and dry in summer – remember to take plenty of water. A water tank is available at the car park but is rained and may be dry in summer.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

From Ulladulla, go south (past Burill Lake) for 8km to Wheelbarrow Rd; go right and continue for 6km to a left turn at Woodburn Rd, then go right (after 3.2km) up Clyde Ridge Rd. Follow for 7km then go right into Yadboro Forest Rd. Veer left 4.3km ahead to reach the Pigeon House picnic area at the start of the walk.

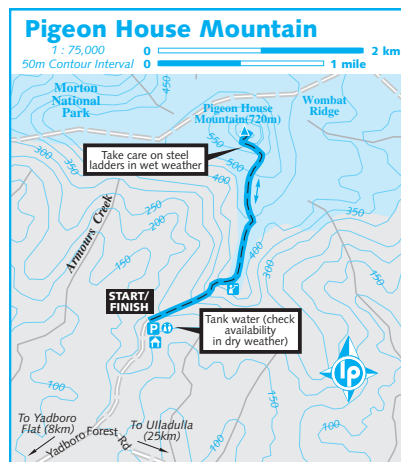
South Coast Nature Tours (☎ 4454 0072; www.southcoastnaturetours.com.au) will collect you and

your party from accommodation in the Ulladulla/Milton area and provide a shuttle to Pigeon House for \$60 per person return. The owner offers discounts to larger parties and brings after-walk refreshments.

THE WALK

From the picnic area and car park, head straight up the hill on the obvious track past the interpretive NPWS sign. Continue for 800m until a small band of low cliffs and rocky outcrops is reached. Follow the track and eroded steps round to the left, up to the top of the bluffs, and across the national park boundary proper (the car park is actually in state forest). A small **lookout** here on the right, slightly off the track, gives great views to the south and tree-filtered glimpses of Pigeon House, which was named by James Cook in 1770 as he sailed up the east coast of Australia. The Murrumarang Aboriginal people knew it as Dithol or Did-Dell, meaning 'woman's breast', and it was a women's Dreaming area.

The track flattens out here on a lightly forested plateau, and the walking is easy and pleasant for 1km. Then the track steepens and keeps climbing right up to the rocky base of **Pigeon House Mountain** (720m). Take the track round to the left from here, up the metal steps, as it snakes round to the eastern and southern sides of the mountain below the cliff. On the southern side, more metal steps lead to the base of four metal ladders, which provide a route up some chimneys to



HUME & HOVELL WALKING TRACK

The Hume & Hovell Walking Track covers 440km between Yass and Albury on the route taken by Hamilton Hume and William Hovell on their expedition to Port Phillip in 1824–25.

Hume, one of the first children born in the new colony, played a part in the 'discovery' of the Goulburn Plains and Lake George. Hovell was an English sea captain who settled in the colony in 1813, but spent most of his time seeking adventure on the Southern Ocean. The two set off from Hume's property near Lake George in October 1824 to strike a land route between the settled districts of NSW and the poorly known country on the continent's southern coast, 1000km away. After an eventful journey they reached the Yarra Ranges and gazed over the site of present-day Melbourne before high-tailing it back to Sydney via a more direct route (now followed by the Hume Fwy).

First proposed in 1925 on the centenary of the journey, the Hume & Hovell Walking Track was researched during the 1970s. About 300km of track had been marked and prepared by 1988 (with the aid of funding for that year's Australian Bicentennial), with a further 150km completed over the next decade. The track covers the NSW portion of Hume and Hovell's outward journey. It's fully signposted and can be taken in sections of various sizes – day walks, weekend walks or a total walk of about 24 days.

The track starts at Cooma Cottage on the outskirts of Yass and finishes at the Hovell Tree on the banks of the Murray River in Albury. Skirting the Australian Alps, much of the track is along forestry roads or through farmland. Camp sites, pit toilets and other facilities are provided along the way. The route has three track heads about 100km apart – James Fitzpatrick at Wee Jasper, Thomas Boyd on the Goobarragandra River (23km from Tumut) and Henry Angel on Burra Creek, near Tumberumba. The route includes 17 bush camp sites, a great deal of improved track and three major bridges over rivers.

For more information call the **Department of Lands** (☎ 6937 2700). The Department's *Hume & Hovell Walking Track Brochure* kit has an index map, six sectional maps and information on walking distances, safety hints, facilities, transport and historical information. It's \$22 and available from the Department and various tourist offices, map shops and outdoor gear suppliers.



the summit massif on the top. The ladders are reasonably exposed but solid and safe.

The views are fantastic from the top, although it's necessary to walk around to get the best vantage points. Byangee Mountain, The Castle and the craggy cliffs of the central Budawangs are all revealed in sharp relief from the summit. Return to the start along the same route.

BUNGONIA STATE CONSERVATION AREA

Bungonia Gorge and the Shoalhaven River valley area is a rugged and beautiful place. The towering cliff faces of the 300m-deep

Bungonia Gorge make this the deepest limestone gorge in Australia. The area provides some of the most difficult long rock climbs in the country. It is also a major caving area, and speleology clubs flock here to explore the maze of caverns and tunnels, most of which can only be entered using fixed ropes and caving ladders.

The two-day walk described here starts in the Bungonia State Conservation Area, which at 4007 hectares is the largest of its kind in NSW. The reserve protects an area of the Southern Tablelands running from Bungonia Gorge to the south and up the steep west bank of the Shoalhaven River, where it borders nearby Morton National Park. The reserve has been protected since 1872; however, a reminder of the ugly march

of progress – a gaping limestone quarry that produces ingredients used for making concrete, among other things – is visible from the start of the described route.

ENVIRONMENT

The low-nutrient limestone soils here leads to scrubby, stunted vegetation on the upper slopes and plateaus, with stringybark, yellow box, grey box and broad-leaved peppermint trees common. Many huge grass trees grow in the area. Along the lower reaches of the gorge, water exiting the caves system supports the growth of rainforest trees, including red cedars, giant stinging trees and sandpaper figs. At camp sites along the Shoalhaven River and the borders of Bungonia Creek, casuarinas or she-oaks provide a pretty canopy and ground cover of soft, pine-like leaves. Casuarinas make great windbreaks, and it's quite calming to lie back after a hard day's walking and listen to the gentle swish of breezes rustling through their foliage.

WARNINGS

Falling Debris

The gorge is very narrow and high, and debris falling from above – including rocks and tree branches – can be a significant hazard along the boulder-choked bed of Bungonia Creek. This can be especially risky during storms and strong winds, when it may not be entirely obvious that stuff is getting blown around up top until it starts raining down on you. There is really nowhere to run if you're caught, so keep an eye out for windy weather before heading into the gorge.

Water Levels in the Gorge

Bungonia Creek can rise very quickly and without warning, and the gorge is a dicey place to be when the creek is up – the boulder choke at the eastern end of the gorge is particularly difficult to negotiate in such conditions. Check the weather forecast ahead of your visit and heed predictions for summer thunderstorms or heavy winter rains: the sort of events that drop rain on the catchment area upstream. Current conditions are available from the **Bungonia State Conservation Area visitor information centre** (☎ 4844 4277, infoline 4844 4341; Lookdown Rd, Bungonia). NPWS closes the gorge for safety reasons when the water level is up.

Quarry Blasting

A 700m-long restricted area is indicated by signs along the banks of Bungonia Creek, on the Red Track route used for the out-and-back into the Gorge on Day 1. This zone, on the north side of Bungonia Creek just beyond the boulder-choked eastern end of Bungonia Gorge, lies below a limestone quarry perched on the ridge high above. It is occasionally affected by rock falls triggered by blasting at the quarry.

Blasting occurs around 3pm on weekdays. Listen for several warning sirens preceding the blast. A continuous siren sounds from one minute before blasting until all is clear. A full explanation is given on the signs at each end of the affected area, so read these carefully. Remain outside the no-go area when blasting is taking place.

Bungonia's gorge is an ancient coral reef, which was crushed and compressed to form limestone about 400 million years ago. This limestone belt is one of the largest in NSW, and was once overlaid with less resistant shale. Water carved a swathe through this shale, exposing the three tilted limestone deposits and creating the deep, narrow canyon. The limestone deposits also provide a rich source of raw material for the quarry on the northern side of the gorge, visible from the Bungonia State Recreation Area. The quarry is due to be relocated north and out of sight of the lookouts by the year 2010.

PLANNING

It's best to boil or treat water as the Shoalhaven River and Bungonia Creek are fed in part by runoff from farmland.

When to Walk

If visiting in midsummer, NPWS recommends you plan to walk out of the gorge late in the day to avoid the worst of the heat.

Maps

The CMA 1:25,000 *Caoura* map fully covers the area in the walk description but tracks aren't accurately marked. A useful NPWS visitor's leaflet, *Bungonia State Conservation Area*, is available from the visitor information centre. The leaflet indicates the location of all major tracks down to the junction of Bungonia Creek and the Shoalhaven River.

Useful books include *Fitzroy Falls and Beyond* published by the Budawang Committee, volume 2 of the NPA's *Bushwalks in the Sydney Region* (which has notes on Bungonia Gorge) and John & Lyn Daly's *Take a Walk in a New South Wales National Park South-Eastern Zone*, which includes notes on all the tracks in the area.

Information Sources

The **Bungonia State Conservation Area visitor information centre** (☎ 4844 4277, ☎ infoline 4844 4341; Lookdown Rd) is right near the park gate.

Park Fees & Regulations

Walkers should register their intended route and times of departure and return at the visitor information centre on entering the park. A book (with 24-hour access) is provided for this purpose. All camp sites along the Shoalhaven River and lower Bungonia Creek are fuel-stove only – no fires.

A car-entry fee of \$7 per day is payable on entering the conservation area. Bring \$1 and \$2 coins for the ticket machines.

The park is closed twice a year for feral animal control. At this time, high-powered rifles are used within the confines of the gorge. Check with the visitor information centre for dates.

BUNGONIA GORGE

Duration	2 days
Distance	22km
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	David Reid car park
Nearest Town	Goulburn (right)
Transport	private

Summary A fascinating walk through spectacular limestone gorge country, with some pretty camp sites along the banks of the Shoalhaven River. There are numerous opportunities for swimming in the heat of summer, in Bungonia Creek and the Shoalhaven River.

The variety of geographical features encountered here, along with the rugged nature of the limestone gorge country, make this an engrossing ramble. It involves a good deal of clambering over boulders, plus ascents and descents of steep gullies and ridges, so this walk receives a moderate-demanding rating, in spite of its relatively short length. It's possible to extend the walk significantly by adding in more of the country bordering the Shoalhaven River, both north and south of its junction with Bungonia Creek. However, the route as described presents a nice balance of the area's most interesting features.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Goulburn

☎ 02 / pop 20,900

Goulburn is the nearest sizable town to the walk, making it the best place to stock up on supplies.

The **Goulburn visitor information centre** (☎ 4823 4492; www.igoulburn.com; 201 Sloane St), opposite Belmore Park, has regional information. There is no regular bus to Bungonia but the visitor information centre can supply phone numbers for local buses (for group charter) or taxis.

EATING & SLEEPING

Unless you pick a weekend when there's a special event on in town, you won't have too much trouble getting a bed in Goulburn.

Governor's Hill Carapark (☎ 4821 7373; 77-83 Sydney Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$23/29, on-site vans/cabins from \$70/84) is on the old highway near the town's northern fringe.

Sloane St (running parallel to the railway line) has a number of pubs offering basic accommodation, including the **Coolavin** (☎ 4821 2498; 188 Sloane St; s/d \$30/60) and the **Carlton** (☎ 4821 3820; 285 Sloane St; r \$50-60). The **Exchange Hotel** (☎ 4821 1566; 9 Bradley St; s/d \$35/55) also offers a self-serve breakfast.

All the eating places are spread along the main drag (Auburn St), including some good old country bakeries and cafés, with the **Paragon** (174 Auburn St; ☎ lunch & dinner daily) probably the pick of the bunch.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Goulburn is 201km from Sydney, 659km from Melbourne and 89km from Canberra. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 1499), **Murrays**

(☎ 13 22 51) and **Fearnes** (☎ 1800 029 918) stop in Goulburn. Trains between Sydney and Melbourne also stop here daily. The one-way fare from Canberra is \$9 and from Sydney \$23; call **Countrylink** (☎ 13 22 32) for information and reservations.

Bungonia State Conservation Area

There is a convenient and well-equipped camping ground just behind the visitor information centre, near the park entrance gate. Hot showers, toilet facilities and a community kitchen are provided. Tent sites for two people are \$10. It's recommended that walking parties stay at this camping ground on the night prior to the walk.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Driving from Sydney on the Hume Hwy, look for the signposted turn-off to Bungonia Gorge on the left, about 2km south of the Marulan exit (soon after passing the BP petrol stations). You take the same exit if coming from Goulburn (it's also possible to reach Bungonia from Goulburn on minor roads – follow the signs from Sloane St, next to the railway line).

From the Hume Hwy, follow the signs through the small township of Bungonia, turning left where indicated; the park gate is another 8km along a good sealed road. The gorge area and the trailhead are a little further along this road after the gate (the route to David Reid car park is well signposted).

THE WALK

Day 1: David Reid car park to Shoalhaven River Camp Site

5–6 hours, 12km, 420m descent

Although it's possible to enter Bungonia Gorge from the west, it's a much better experience to walk the gorge without a full pack, so our route does an out-and-back into the gorge from the east, before continuing on a circuit walk down to the Shoalhaven River.

Water is available from a tank near the car park, and it's advisable to stock up here if you're unsure of water availability in the gorge, particularly in summer. Leave the car here and pick up the start of the Red Track, heading east. All the walks in the recreation area are colour coded and well marked, with appropriately coloured arrows and squares appearing on geographical features and signposts along the trails. After 700m the track divides: follow the Red Track markers to the left and northeast.

The track drops past the top of a gully and through a saddle before descending sharply to a **lookout point** with views straight into the gorge. From here the track descends steeply on a ridge for about 500m to Bungonia Creek. Cross to the north bank, where the first of the quarry blasting signs stands. Turn left (west) and proceed (assuming that the hour and absence of sirens indicate that it's safe to do so) up the creek towards the gorge for about 700m, where another sign marks the end of the blasting-danger area.

BUNGONIA CAVES

Bungonia is an area containing predominantly vertical caves, created by water and dissolved acid from the atmosphere carving through the limestone bedrock to form deep underground ravines. Because of their vertical nature, descent into the chambers requires ropes and caving ladders, making exploration possible only by experienced cavers. The limestone belt here is about 4km long, 670m wide and 300m deep. Over 170 caves are recorded within the conservation area, and the region contains some of the deepest caverns on mainland Australia, including Blowfly Cave (152m), Odysseus Cave (142m) and Fossil Cave (131m).

The first cave was recorded in Bungonia around 1824; in 1872, a reserve titled Water Reserve No 27 was set up both to protect the caves and provide an area for public recreation. This was very likely the first reserve established for the purpose of public recreation in Australia, and perhaps the world. In 1892 the Skull Cave was discovered, and so named because it contained the skull of an Aboriginal child.

As limestone is very porous, water tends to permeate it quickly, draining through the soil and leaving little surface moisture. This is the reason for the rugged, stunted appearance of most of the vegetation in the Bungonia area.

The going gets tougher a short distance from here so this is a good place to stash packs. Continue, lightweight, into the gorge.

The gorge's eastern end is choked with large boulders, which take a lot of patient over-and-under negotiating; in times of high water in the creek it may be necessary to wade across sections here. Once you're past the boulder choke the going is easier. Towering above you, on either side of this deep, narrow defile, are limestone cliffs hundreds of metres high. The gorge is so constricted, however, that it feels as if you can touch both walls with outstretched hands. Follow the gorge up along the course of Bungonia Creek – the boulders gradually decrease in size. There is a risk of rock fall from the high walls here, so proceed with caution (see the boxed text p106). The logical turnaround point is the western end of the gorge. Follow your outward route back to the packs.

When you return to the point where the Red Track reaches the creek, keep following the vague track that continues downstream. You'll pass several deep-green waterholes and rocky sections of creek bed, crossing and recrossing the stream where necessary, before reaching a tight left-hand bend in the creek, about 2km from the quarry sign. Follow the creek left, passing a large flat camping area and another deep-green waterhole. This is a beautiful, shady swimming spot in summer.

Cross the creek to the south bank at the end of the pool and, a few hundred metres

downstream, the confluence of Bungonia Creek and the **Shoalhaven River** is reached. Cross Bungonia Creek to the north and continue up the west bank of the Shoalhaven River, following the well-worn but unmarked track. Numerous camp sites are along here. Continue up to the crossing of Barbers Creek, and then follow the cairned track up and northeast over the low hill to a large flat area looking across to the saddle of **Rainbow Ridge**, just before a big horseshoe bend in the Shoalhaven River. A quick excursion down to the rapids of the Shoalhaven River (a 30-minute return trip) is well worthwhile.

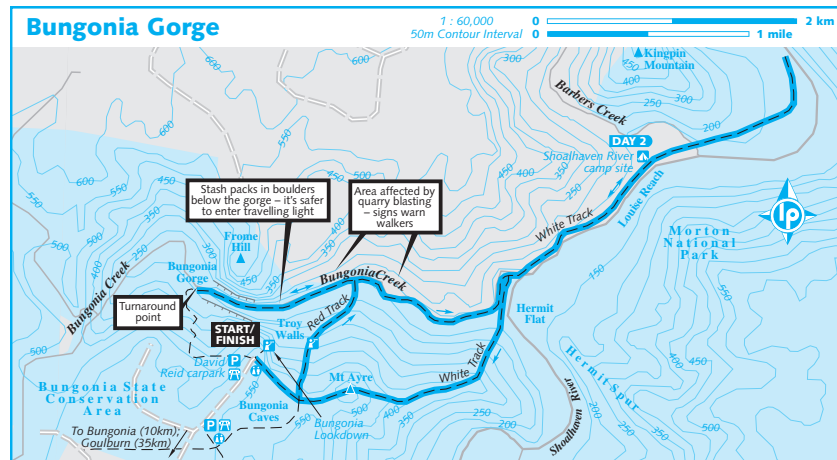
It's possible to camp here, but there's a nicer camp site underneath shady casuarinas about 2km back along the outward route, near **Louise Reach** on the Shoalhaven River (about 500m southwest of Barbers Creek).

There are some excellent alternative camp sites around the junction of Bungonia Creek and the Shoalhaven River. Be sure to camp well above river level to ensure you stay dry if water levels rise overnight after rain.

Day 2: Shoalhaven River Camp Site to David Reid car park

4–5 hours, 10km

Leaving the casuarinas, continue southwest along the Shoalhaven River, following the outward route back to the Bungonia Creek/Shoalhaven River confluence. From here, pick up the **White Track**, which is indicated by



a signpost on the south bank of Bungonia Creek, slightly up the hill. This track continues gently up and across a flat plateau for 500m, before climbing suddenly at a much greater angle. This track is steep! However, going up is easier than going down. Watch out for the slippery, loose shale that lies underfoot, as the path is so steep that falling is easy. On a hot day make sure you have plenty of water for the climb.

The track climbs steadily, with great views back across the Shoalhaven River valley from the previous day's walk. About 4.5km from Bungonia Creek you pass **Mt Ayre** – a good spot for a final look back at the Shoalhaven. Keep an eye out to the left (south) as you descend the western side of Mt Ayre for some brick chimney stacks way down on the Shoalhaven River banks – all that remains of the Tolwong copper smelter, which operated in the early years of the 20th century. The Red Track junction is just ahead. Don't forget to sign out of the activity register when you exit the park.

WARRUMBUNGE NATIONAL PARK

The volcanic spires that define the skyline of the 21,000-hectare Warrumbungle National Park rise abruptly from the surrounding flat plains of western NSW like clusters of jagged, rocky teeth. These cliffs, domes and crags are visible for many kilometres before the approaching traveller reaches the park boundary. About 490km northwest of Sydney, this is an ancient landscape of imposing rocky buttresses, deep wooded valleys and primordial beauty, and is justifiably one of the state's most popular national parks, receiving up to 80,000 visitors per year.

The walk takes in some of the area's best features, including spectacular circuits of the Grand High Tops, Dows High Tops and the more remote Mt Exmouth, at 1206m the highest point in the park.

Before 1939, the Warrumbungle Range was known only to a core of hardy bushwalkers, climbers and local landowners. It came to national prominence when the renowned adventurer and photographer Frank Hurley made the Grand High Tops area the subject of an illustrated magazine

article, turning the Breadknife into a widely recognised Australian icon.

HISTORY

Aboriginal people of the Wailwan and Gamilaroi (or Kamilaroi) language groups are the traditional custodians of this area. Signs of Aboriginal camp sites and fragments of stone implements, including quartz flakes used to fashion axes and cutting tools, are found all over the park. Explorer John Oxley was the first European into the region in 1818; settlers followed from about the late 1830s and quickly displaced the Aboriginal people.

Calls for the preservation of the Warrumbungles were first heard in 1936 and 3360 hectares were set aside as a national park in 1953. Further additions since have increased the park to its present-day size. The Warrumbungles' first ranger, Carl Dow, is credited with establishing the network of walking trails – cut by hand in difficult terrain.

ENVIRONMENT

About 17 million years ago, erupting volcanoes produced a thick layer of debris and molten lava on top of the area's sandstone base. Eons of erosion later removed the surrounding softer clays, exposing the harder volcanic plugs and dikes that form the jagged peaks and rugged buttresses seen today. Some of the park's well-known features, including the Breadknife, Beloungery Spire and Crater Bluff, are the remnant cores of volcanoes long since eroded away.

The Warrumbungles form a boundary between the dry Western Plains and the more humid regions of coastal NSW. As a result, it is a meeting place for moist coastal species and plants of the dry inland regions. Remnant rainforest plants such as Port Jackson fig trees and maidenhair ferns exist side by side with hardy white cypress, prehistoric macrozamia, red gums – much loved by koalas – and striking white gums.

Due to the wide variety of habitats formed by the park's diverse geography, many different types of animal inhabit the area. Over 90 bird species have been recorded in the park, and goannas, eastern brown snakes, koalas, gliders, grey kangaroos, emus, wallaroos, and red-necked and swamp wallabies exist in large numbers. Sunset at the

various grassy picnic and camping areas is usually the best time to view wildlife.

PLANNING When to Walk

Walking is possible at any time of year, with autumn and spring providing the most pleasant conditions. In summer, temperatures in the high 30s and 40s are common, although nights can be cool. School holidays and long weekends can be very crowded. The quietest times to visit are in summer, winter and midweek, when it's quite likely you will have the trails to yourself.

What to Bring

A fuel stove is essential, as wood fires are banned on walking trails (there are fireplaces in the camping grounds.) At least 4L of water per person per day should be carried in the heat of summer – take adequate supplies with you from the valley. Creeks marked on topographic maps rarely flow, and aside from a small rainwater tank next to Balor Hut (which is often empty), there is no tap water on the higher walking trails. It's wise to boil or treat any tap water taken from within the park to make it safe to drink.

Maps & Books

The LPINSW 1:40,000 *Warrumbungle National Park Tourist Map* covers the entire park in good detail (including contour information). The park is also covered by four CMA 1:50,000 topographic maps: *Tenandra*, *Tooraweenah*, *Bugaldie* and *Coonabarabran*.

The NPWS guidebook *Warrumbungle National Park* by Peter Fox is an excellent resource and is small enough to take on the walk with you. It includes a useful *Walks Guide* booklet with some sketch maps, track notes and descriptions of major features in the park.

Information Sources

The park's **visitor information centre** (☎ 6825 4364) is inside its boundaries, about 300m off the John Renshaw Parkway (signposted on the right when driving from Coonabarabran). It stocks information booklets, topographic maps, gifts and snacks, and staff can organise hut bookings and accept payment for park use, hut and camping fees. Some information is also available at the Coonabarabran visitor information centre (p112).

ROCKIN' UP THE BUNGLES

The volcanic spires and imposing bluffs of the Warrumbungles offer some of the most atmospheric and challenging long rock climbs Australia has to offer. The area has been a mecca for climbers for many years, and enjoys a deserved reputation as a serious and scary place to touch rock. The history of climbing in the 'Bungles (as it's known to climbers) is a fascinating tale in itself, and starts in the early 1930s. A wild (some would say completely crazy) bunch of hardcore bushwalkers started pursuing rock climbing as an activity in itself at about this time, and formed a club known as the Blue Mountaineers. Their weekends were filled with horror ascents of iconic rock formations in the Blue Mountains, including the Three Sisters at Katoomba. With virtually no equipment, very poor quality ropes and incredible bravado, they achieved feats that would leave modern rock climbers, with their camming devices and strong harnesses, quaking in their grippy rubber boots. Two of the main crazies were the legendary Eric (Dr) Dark and Dot Butler, known as the 'Barefoot Bushwalker' – a name earned from the many wilderness walks she completed without shoes.

In 1932 Eric Dark and Osmar White made the first ascent of Beloungery Spire after drinkers at the local pub proclaimed the ascent 'impossible'. In 1936 a party of three including Eric Dark and Dot Butler made the first ascent of Crater Bluff, an incredible achievement considering the technical nature of the climb, and the wildly exposed route they took. Take a moment to have a good look at Crater Bluff from the Grand High Tops track and you'll understand. Dot Butler, of course, completed the first ascent barefoot.

Today, the 'Bungles have lost none of their seriousness and awe-inspiring grandeur. As the rock routes are very long (up to 500m), climbing should only be attempted by very experienced parties who are familiar with long, multipitch climbs. Climbers must register at the visitor information centre before heading out; climbing is banned on the Breadknife and Chalkers Mountain.

Permits & Regulations

Park entry costs \$7 per vehicle per day. Tent sites for two people are \$10 at Camps Blackman and Wambelong, and \$6 at Camp Pincham. Bush camping along trails is free. All fees should be paid at the visitor information centre, where you can also book overnight stays at Balor Hut (\$4 per person per night). After hut fees are paid you'll be handed a key that must be returned upon completion of your walk.

If you're planning to go rock climbing in the park you must register at the visitor information centre.

Guided Walks

The national park's Discovery Program arranges Aboriginal cultural heritage walks that can be specially tailored to suit specific interests, such as traditional lifestyles or bush tucker. These are not overnight walks and, at \$55 per hour, are a better deal for groups than individuals. The visitor information centre can provide more information and make bookings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The park lies 35km west of Coonabarabran and 490km northwest of Sydney. Driving from Sydney, it takes six hours to reach the park via Mudgee and about seven hours via Dubbo (via the Oxley and Newell Hwys). It's also possible to enter the park from the west, from the Castlereagh Hwy via Gulargambone and Coonamble. **Countrylink** (☎ 132 232) runs a daily train/bus service to Coonabarabran Monday to Friday; the one-way adult fare is \$51.

WARRUMBUNGLES GRAND HIGH TOPS

Duration	3 days
Distance	34km
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Pincham car park
Nearest Town	Coonabarabran (right)
Transport	private

Summary Explore one of Australia's most spectacular volcanic landscapes on challenging and well-marked trails. While extremely steep in places, the walk affords wide views across the park's rocky features, and beyond to empty spaces of western NSW.

This wonderful walk takes in all of the major sights and formations visible in the national park's central region. This includes the Grand High Tops, a walk across Dows High Tops with fantastic views of Bluff Mountain's massive west face, and a visit to Mt Exmouth, the park's highest peak. The walk could be done in two days; completing it in three allows for a more relaxed pace over the steep terrain, and time for the numerous possible detours.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Coonabarabran

☎ 02 / pop 3000

Coonabarabran is 35km east of the park entrance and the logical place to stock up on any last-minute requirements. If driving from Sydney, it may be wise to stop in Mudgee or Dubbo for a major resupply of food and stove fuel as you will probably hit Coonabarabran late in the evening when the shops are shut.

The **Coonabarabran visitor information centre** (☎ 6842 1441; www.coonabarabran.com), on the Newell Hwy (John St), has some park information and walking books.

Petrol and kerosene are available from the service stations in town. Bring Shellite with you to be on the safe side; methylated spirits for stoves is available from the supermarkets.

EATING & SLEEPING

Several pubs in town have accommodation and cheap pub meals, and the road into the town centre is lined with motels.

The **Imperial Hotel** (☎ 6842 1023; d/B&B \$35/51), opposite the town clock tower on the main street, is basic but convenient.

Acacia Motor Lodge (☎ 6842 1922; 10 John St; r \$110) is slightly more up-market.

Wagon Wheels (☎ 6842 1860; Newell Hwy; d/cabin \$70/50) is cheap and cheerful.

The **Warrumbungle Holiday Camp** (☎ 6842 3400; dm/cabin \$14/50) is 12km from Coonabarabran on the national park road.

The **Jolli Cauli Cafe** (John St; ☎ lunch), opposite the Royal Hotel, is a pleasant café with a good selection of light food, cakes and coffee, and also provides Internet access for email. For self-caterers, the IGA and BiLo supermarkets, centrally located in Dalgarno St near the intersection with John St, are open daily.

Warrumbungle National Park

Camping areas closest to the walk are at **Camp Pincham** (sites for 2 \$6), south of the John Renshaw Parkway, and **Camps Wambelong** and **Blackman** (sites for 2 \$10), which are west and east of Canyon Picnic Area. Camp Blackman also has hot showers. The visitor information centre can assist with bookings and payments.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Drive into the park on the John Renshaw Parkway and follow signs to the visitor information centre. After organising camping fees, continue to the trailhead at Pincham car park. Leave your vehicle here. (All access roads within the park are sealed, making wet-weather access easy.)

THE WALK

Day 1: Pincham to Balor Hut via Bress Peak

4–5 hours, 10km, 760m ascent, 460m descent

From Pincham car park, follow the well-defined and clearly signposted walking track through Camp Pincham and continue south for about 3km over several wooden bridges to the Bress Peak track junction on the right (do not take the right-hand turn along West Spirey Creek to Ogma Saddle, or the left-hand turn to Goulds Circuit passed on the way).

Drop packs at the track junction and take the steep side trip up to **Bress Peak**, a 1.1km return walk via **Bridget Peak**. The track is amazingly steep with loose footing in sections, and walkers often pass it by, but the view from the summit across to the Grand High Tops from an unusual angle is well worth the effort. If climbing up in warmer weather, take plenty of water.

Returning to your packs, continue south along the track towards the Grand High Tops for 500m to a junction with the end of the Goulds Circuit track on the left. Drop packs again and complete the circuit (about 3.5km of steep ups and downs) as it heads back north over the rocky outcrops of **Macha Tor** and **Febar Tor**. When you meet the Grand High Tops track once again, follow it back up to the packs. Although this involves some doubling back, the views in all directions are worth the effort.

From the intersection of Goulds Circuit and Grand High Tops tracks, continue

south towards the High Tops. The track begins to climb up towards the base of the **Breadknife**, and a bizarre section of paved track, looking like a back-yard barbecue area, continues steeply up for several hundred metres (this is known affectionately by track workers as the 'Yellow Brick Rd'). Just below the towering wall of the Breadknife is a track junction; turn right to reach Balor Hut. From the Pincham car park to here, the route described covers just over 10km.

Balor Hut was built in 1967 by ranger Colin Dow to house track workers. Coonabarabran Bushwalking Club maintains the hut, and it can sleep six people in reasonable comfort. It's often used as a base by climbers in the park. Beware the resident hut rat! He or she is a particularly voracious eater and the little wire hooks dangling from the roof are for hanging food out of harm's way. Bookings for the hut are essential.

ALTERNATIVE CAMP SITES

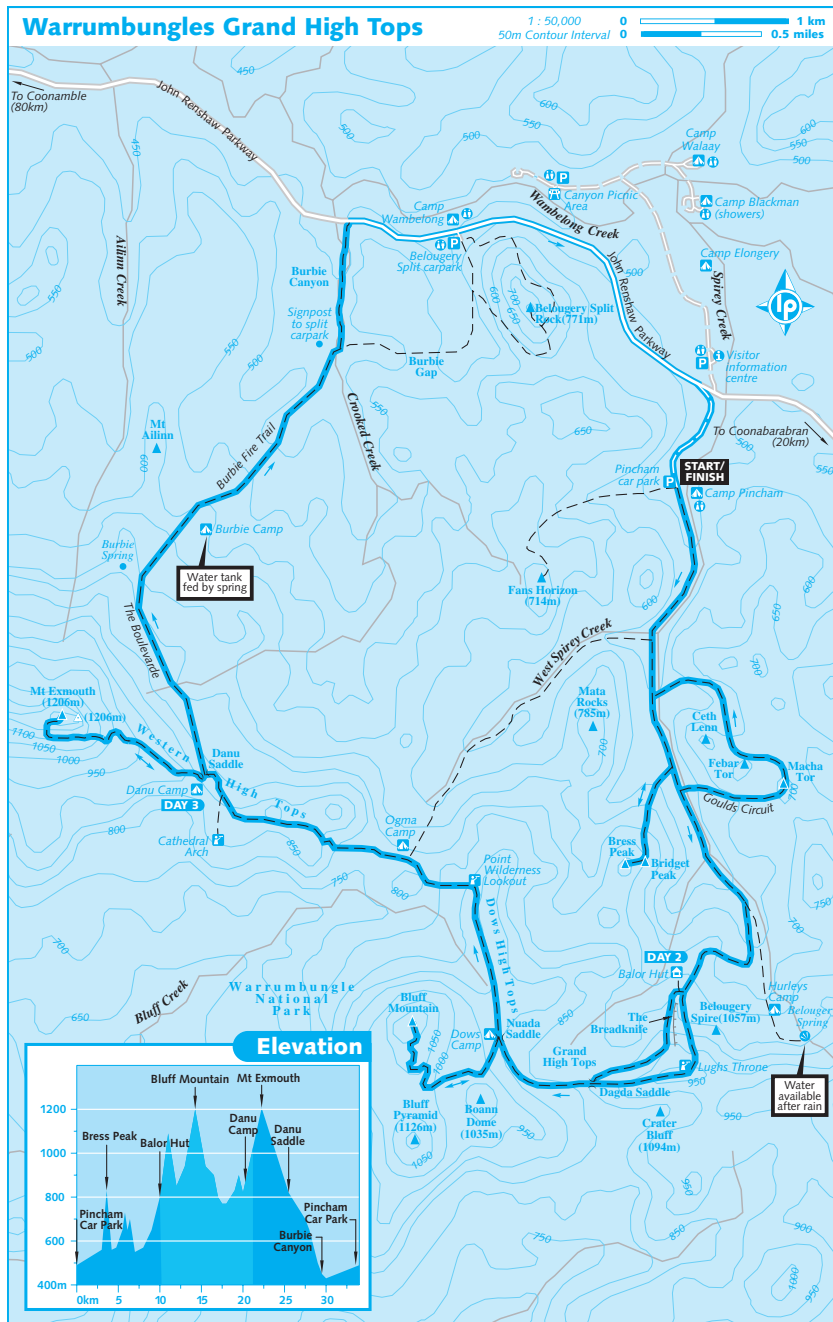
If you set out a bit later and do all the detours recommended, you'll probably want to stay in Balor Hut. If, however, you're feeling fit and have plenty of daylight, continue to the camp sites at **Nuada Saddle** (2.4km on, at the Bluff Mountain turn-off) or **Ogma Saddle** (4.6km on, at the junction of the Western High Tops and West Spirey Creek tracks).

Day 2: Balor Hut to Danu Saddle

7–8 hours, 15.5km, 930m ascent, 930m descent

Leaving Balor Hut you have two options. You can return to the track junction, continuing along the Grand High Tops track on the eastern side of the Breadknife. The track heads south then turns right (west) at Lughs Wall before passing **Lughs Throne lookout** – from which there are fine views of soaring **Crater Bluff** (1094m) – and continuing to Dagda Saddle. Alternatively, continue southwest down the track behind the hut and along the western side of the Breadknife. The tracks join at Dagda Saddle after about 600m. Doing a complete circuit of both tracks is worthwhile for the views if you have good weather.

From Dagda Saddle, continue west along the Grand High Tops track to Nuada Saddle (1.2km). Dump your packs at the track junction and take the 2.6km return detour to **Bluff Mountain**. This trip is not to be missed;



the 360-degree views from the 1200m summit are breathtaking. Further views are to be had by following an indistinct track north a few hundred metres from the summit cairn. Take warm clothes in winter as the summit may be cold and windy. Returning to the packs, head to Ogma Saddle via the Dows High Tops track. The saddle is reached after about 1.5km. The tracks from here to below **Danu Saddle** are not as well defined and maintained as those in the rest of the park.

From Ogma Saddle, continue along the Western High Tops track to Danu Saddle; (do not take the right-hand turn from Ogma, which heads northwest back to Camp Pincham). On the way to Danu Saddle a long section of loose scree and boulders is crossed, as well as a track to Cathedral Arch – a worthwhile side trip giving good views of Bluff Mountain.

At Danu Saddle, several tracks meet. Drop your packs here and take the signposted walk to **Mt Exmouth** (1206m), the park's highest point, about two hours return. The track passes over rocky scree slopes on the north side of the peak, before doubling back to meet the summit and spectacular views across the park and over to the plains in the west. Return to the camp site at Danu Saddle (total distance just over 5km).

Day 3: Danu Saddle to Pincham car park via Burbie Canyon

2½–3 hours, 8.5km, 100m ascent, 400m descent

Pick up the old 4WD track from Danu Saddle and head north for 2.4km to Burbie Camp, where spring water may be available from a tank. Head northeast along the sandy 4WD track to the signposted walking track to **Burbie Canyon**. Walk through the pleasant narrow canyon, where kangaroos

and emus are commonly seen, to the sealed road just west of Camp Wambelong. Turn right and head on to Pincham car park (about 4km further).

BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK

Home to some of NSW's highest and wildest country, Barrington Tops National Park is the centrepiece of a complex of parks, reserves and state forests that cover more than 1000 sq km between the upper Hunter Valley and the mid north coast. The Barrington Tops Plateau, part of which this walk explores, is a 100-sq-km area entirely above 1400m elevation. Walkers are attracted to the plateau's peaceful snow gum woodland, intriguing subalpine swamps and its seemingly endless views: the Barrington country rises dramatically from surrounding farmland and its highest peak, Brumlow Top, crowns the park at 1586m. Predictably, given this altitude, the plateau is subject to rapidly changing weather. Damp, misty days, high rainfall, heavy frost and snowfalls are all part of the package.

The park is in the southernmost component of the 3665 sq km Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA) World Heritage Area, declared in 1986 and extended in 1994.

ENVIRONMENT

The Barrington Plateau is a remnant of the vast lava sheet created in the millions of years after the break-up of the southern supercontinent Gondwana. It's one of only a few examples of these lava flows remaining;

BARRINGTON BADDIES

Barrington Plateau walkers can't help but notice the overbearing presence of Scotch broom, a heavily seeding weed that's spread by park visitors both desirable (outdoor-loving humans) and undesirable (feral pigs). Broom is regularly seen in dense thickets, which provides shelter to pigs. Park authorities are doing their best to control both: the pigs through trapping and other measures; the broom through trackside spraying and various biological controls. The casual observer would judge that the broom is winning the battle.

The discovery of the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, scourge of conservation managers in several Australian states, has prompted the closure of a large portion of the plateau, including two of the area's better walking tracks – the Watergauge Trail and Brumlow Creek Track. It's expected that the *Phytophthora* exclusion zone will be in place for some time.

the others – including the Dorrigo Plateau (p119) – form the main parts of the CERRA World Heritage Area. This is the highest region of NSW outside of Kosciuszko National Park, and much closer to the coast.

The steep eastern escarpment of the Barrington country forces moist easterlies to drop more than 1500mm rain each year in this area, which in combination with rich volcanic (basalt) soils provides excellent conditions for the subtropical, warm temperate and cool temperate rainforest found in damp areas throughout the park. Tall eucalyptus forests fill in the gaps at all altitudes, with subalpine grasslands and swamps a feature of the high plateau.

PLANNING

Many – not all – of the plateau's walks are on 4WD tracks and, especially on weekends and during summer and Easter school holidays, you can expect to see a few cars. Plateau tracks are closed to 4WDs from 1 June through 30 September and, while midwinter is the coolest time for walking, with heavy frosts and snowfalls fairly commonplace, the absence of cars is a bonus. If walking through the cold months you must bring a full suite of winter clothing and shelter. Even in summer, cool changes can bring very low temperatures to the park.

When to Walk

While walking in the Barrington presents no real difficulties, inexperienced walkers should be careful to check the weather forecast before setting out, especially during midwinter.

Maps

The CMA 1:25,000 topographic maps *Moonan Brook* and *Barrington Tops* cover the area of the walk. Both are somewhat out of date, particularly the Barrington sheet. The LPINSW/NPWS 1:100,000 *Barrington Tops National Park Tourist Map* is useful for planning. The NPWS free visitor guide *Barrington Tops National Park and adjacent reserves* has an overview map and information; NPWS's *Barrington Tops National Park Guidebook* (\$10) provides greater depth in all aspects. John and Lyn Daly's *Take a Walk in a New South Wales National Park Sydney to Port Macquarie* includes notes on several walks in the area.

Information Sources

The **NPWS Gloucester office** (☎ 6538 5300; 59 Church St) is open during business hours and has a small selection of guides and brochures. Rangers will usually have a good idea of track conditions in the Tops.

BARRINGTON TOPS PLATEAU EXPLORER

Duration	3 days
Distance	39km
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Barrington Tops Forest Rd near Polblue Swamp
Nearest Town	Gloucester (below)
Transport	private

Summary Easy tracks lead walkers past snow grass plains, subalpine forests, sphagnum swamps and stunning views.

Easy walking and blissful peace and quiet await walkers traversing the Barrington Tops Plateau. Tracks are wide and well marked, and there are several flat and comfortable camping areas with lots of space for larger-than-usual groups. Crisp mornings, swirling mountain mists and a subalpine landscape combine to provide a very different NSW north-coast walking experience.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES Gloucester

☎ 02 / pop 2650

Gloucester lies just east of the Bucketts, a range of rocky hills that are said to derive their name from the Aboriginal word 'buc-cans', meaning 'big rocks'. This is a fertile valley and Gloucester has long been a centre for beef, dairying and logging. The **Gloucester visitor information centre** (☎ 6558 1408; 27 Denison St) is open seven days.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Basecamp Warehouse (☎ 6558 1444; 36 Church St), in Gloucester has a very limited range of gear. If you're driving up from Sydney, **Raymond Terrace Camping World** (☎ 4983 1910; Pacific Hwy), about 100km south of Gloucester, has a full range of fuels and gear.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gloucester Holiday Park (☎ 6558 1720; www.gloucestertourism.com.au; Denison St; unpowered/powering sites

for 2 \$8/19, bunkroom \$15, cabins \$40–64), has loads of choices and is an easy walk from the town centre.

The **Roundabout Inn** (☎ 6558 1816; Church St; s/d \$50–60) has small and tidy rooms and a brasserie on location.

Bucketts Way Motel (☎ 6558 2588; www.bucketts.com.au; 19–21 Church St; d \$81) at the north end of the main street has larger comfortable rooms and a restaurant (mains \$20 to \$30).

The eating choices in town are limited, with the Broadaxe bistro in the **Avon Valley Inn** (☎ 6558 1016; 82 Church St; ☎ dinner Tue–Sun) and the **United Chinese Restaurant** (☎ 6658 2222; 32 Denison St; ☎ dinner Tue–Sun) towards the top of the list.

Foodworks (☎ 6558 1405; nr Church & King Sts) is the better of the town's two supermarkets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Gloucester is about 330km from Sydney. Go north on the freeway and, at its northern end, continue on the Pacific Hwy, following signs to Hexham and Raymond Terrace. Turn right onto Bucketts Way about 20km north of Raymond Terrace and follow for 80km to Gloucester.

Countrylink (☎ 132 232) runs three rail services daily through Gloucester; the one-way fare is \$28.

Polblue Camping Ground

These are the nearest sites to the start of the walk, just 2km west on the Barrington Tops Forest Rd. Polblue walk has toilets and fireplaces; an easy circuit walk around Polblue Swamp begins at the camping area. There are no fees.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

From Gloucester, go north on Thunderbolts Way to Barrington. Just west of the Barrington River, continue straight ahead on the Scone Rd when Thunderbolts Way goes right to Walcha. Continue for 59km on Scone Rd/Barrington Tops Forest Rd (just over 40km on gravel) to the Barrington Trail turn-off, to the left. Park down near the sign and picnic table.

Barrington Outdoor Adventure Centre (☎ 6558 2093; www.boac.com.au) will collect walkers from Gloucester station and provide a shuttle to the Polblue area for \$250 return. The vehicle fits up to 10 walkers. If you arrive late, you can camp at Adventure Centre, about 1km

north of Gloucester; sites for two people are \$20, with access to showers, toilets and kitchen facilities.

THE WALK

Day 1: Barrington Tops Forest Rd to Junction Pools Camp Site

3–4 hours, 13km, 185m ascent, 260m descent

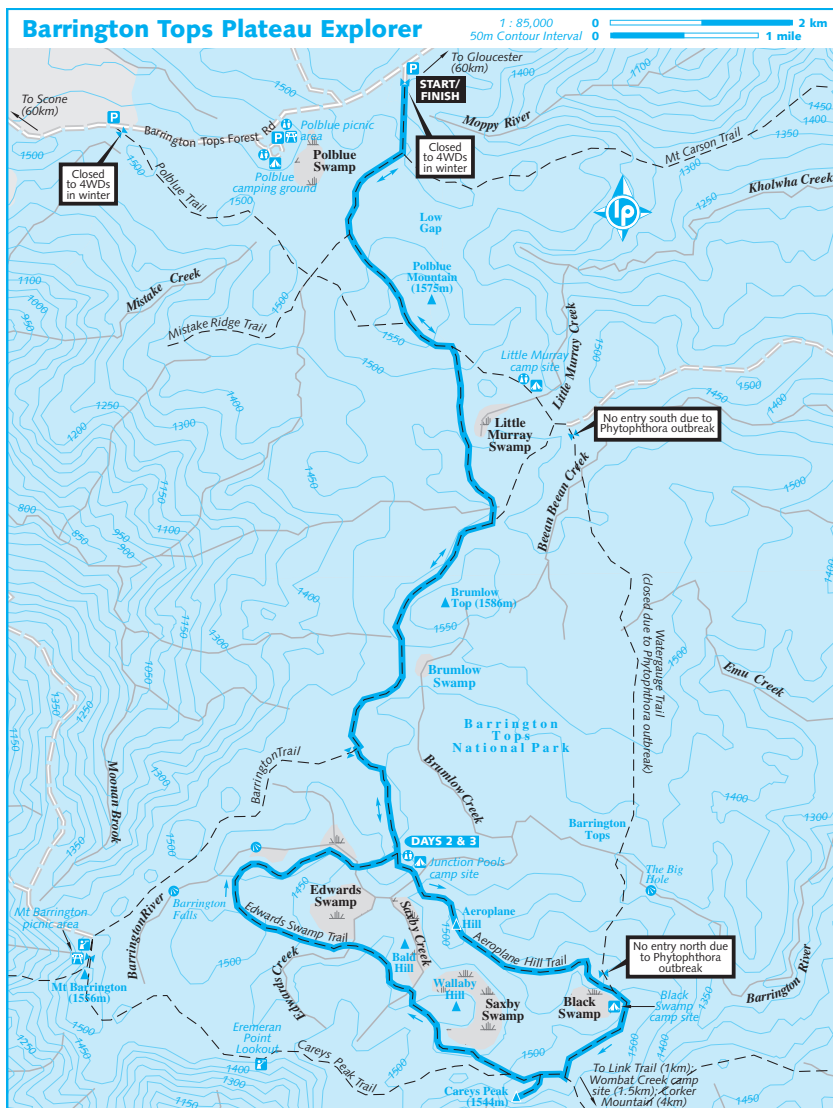
Go past the gate (locked June–September) and continue downhill on the Barrington Trail. It's wide and easy going in pleasant, shady forest. If any 4WDs do come along (on this day or any other) you'll hear them many minutes in advance. Pass the turn-offs to Mt Carson and Mistake Ridge and, at about 3.6km, the Polblue Trail (another route to the Barrington Tops Forest Rd). By now you'll have grown accustomed to the mix of woodland and subalpine grasses, and have seen the first large groves of Scotch broom. There's every chance of seeing brumbies, or at least dodging the remains of their digestive processes.

After a steady climb alongside Polblue Mountain the track descends to a junction. About 800m ahead is Little Murray camp site – quite popular with the 4WD set – while to the right, the Barrington Trail continues towards Junction Pools and Mt Barrington. The track descends for a time before commencing another climb, this time around the western flank of Brumlow Top (1586m). Along the way you'll pass a junction with the walking track that links with Little Murray camp site. There's a long descent and some very pleasant winding through eucalypt forest before the left turn to **Junction Pools camp site** is reached. The last section of the walk passes the first good views of the plateau's open swamplands, birthplace of the Barrington River. Junction Pools camp site is 2km from the turn, set above the river with wonderful views of Edwards Swamp.

Day 2: Junction Pools Camp Site to Careys Peak & Edwards Swamp Return

3½–4½ hours, 13.3km, 255m ascent, 255m descent

This is an easy day, weather depending, to allow plenty of time to explore the Barrington Plateau and (again, weather permitting) some outstanding views. There's also quite a lot to see around Junction Pools and the upper Barrington River, so you'll probably find yourself dawdling through



the early part of the day. When you set out, head downhill from the camp site towards the main pool to the south, and about halfway down veer left and rock-hop across the Barrington River (with care if the water is up) to join the Aeroplaner Hill trail. The wide track rises steeply at first then smoothly, continuing upwards through

peaceful eucalypt forest, usually ringing with bird calls, for about 800m to the summit of **Aeroplaner Hill**.

The track descends steadily, passing through some dense stands of dead Scotch broom, then undulates, before eventually giving way to the sedges and sphagnum of **Black Swamp**. On a misty day this is a very

atmospheric place, with clouds swirling around surrounding peaks and through the trees lining the swamp. Continue to the junction with the Big Hole trail and go right (just to the left is a gate marking the border of the Phytophthora exclusion zone). The Black Swamp camp site is a short distance along the even wider trail – it's side-by-side walking all the way. About 1.6km along there's a big junction, with the Corker Trail, Link Trail (to Gloucester Tops) and Wombat Creek camp site all straight ahead. Our route is uphill to the right, signposted to Careys Peak. Just 500m on go left at the junction to reach **Careys Peak Hut** (a former walkers' shelter that's now collapsing) and, another 300m on, **Careys Peak** (1544m). If the weather's clear, you'll get one of the best views imaginable, down the steep escarpment and all the way to the ocean. It's a view you can spend a lot of time enjoying.

Return past Careys Peak Hut to the Barrington Trail junction and go left to continue. The track drops away steeply for 300m to the well-disguised junction with the Edwards Swamp trail (there's a cairn on the right and a sign, tucked in the bushes, on the left). Go right, and follow the single-track path down through a snowgrass clearing to another junction about 300m along. (The vague track to the left here leads back to the Careys Peak Trail. If you've plenty of time and are feeling up for an extended walk, you can do an out-and-back from here to either **Ermeran Lookout** – about 6km return – or **Mt Barrington** – about 12km return. Neither has views as good as those from Careys Peak, but the walk does pass through some pleasant forest). Continue from the junction on the Edwards Swamp trail.

The 6km back to Junction Pools provide the best look at the plateau's renowned sub-alpine swamps. The trail passes first **Saxby Swamp** and then **Edwards Swamp**, winding along beside the swamps, climbing forested hills and crossing several small watercourses on the way to the Barrington River upstream of Junction Pools. This was seasonal grazing country in the past and the remains of fence lines and gates attest to the human presence.

Once across the Barrington River, follow the signs to the right and continue along to the Junction Pools track. It's a short walk downhill back to camp from here.

Day 3: Junction Pools Camp Site to Barrington Tops Forest Rd

3–4 hours, 13km, 260m ascent, 185m descent
Return to Barrington Tops Forest Rd via the Day 1 route. For a variation, veer right at the walking track to Little Murray camp site, passed on the way in, which follows the old alignment of the Barrington Trail. This will add just a few hundred metres and less than half an hour to the journey.

DORRIGO NATIONAL PARK

Dorrigo National Park, which protects almost 12,000 hectares of rainforest and tall, moist eucalypt forest, is 600km north of Sydney. Straddling the Great Escarpment on the eastern edge of the Dorrigo Plateau and overlooking the lush Bellinger River valley, the park was added to the World Heritage list in 1986, as part of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia. The region's high rainfall ensures that its main creeks continue to flow throughout the year, with myriad waterfalls cascading through glades of rainforest trees with buttressed trunks and thick hanging vines.

ENVIRONMENT

The park protects a number of different rainforest types. On rich red volcanic soils, a dense subtropical rainforest canopy of strangler figs, black booyongs, yellow carabeans, giant stinging trees and a host of other species blocks out most of the light, leaving the forest floor relatively open. Hanging gardens of climbers, lianas and epiphytic ferns and orchids use the large trees for support to reach the life-giving light in the upper canopy.

On the poorer soils, a simpler but no less beautiful warm temperate rainforest is dominated by coachwood, crabapple, sassafras, soft corkwood and Dorrigo plum. It's this rainforest type that's seen on the Rosewood Creek Circuit. In the highest and coolest northeastern parts of the park a cool temperate rainforest occurs, with Antarctic beech growing in association with coachwood and hoop pine.

Over 120 species of bird have been recorded in the park. Avid bird-watchers

come from afar to spot paradise riflebird, regent bowerbird, noisy pitta and green catbird. Brush turkeys and lace monitors cruise around the picnic areas with little fear of visitors. In the late afternoon red-necked pademelons come out to graze the lawn at the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre (below). Later in the evening ringtail and brushtail possums and grey-headed flying-fox feed in the rainforest canopy. Less often seen are sugar gliders, echidnas, potoroos and quolls. In late spring fire-flies and glow-worms make for a magical evening experience while in late summer and early autumn it's possible to see luminescent rainforest fungi.

PLANNING

When to Walk

Any time of the year is suitable for walking in Dorrigo National Park. The region's highest rainfall period is January–March, so summer days are often warm and humid. Due to the altitude, winters can be a little cold in the early morning and at dusk, but the days are usually clear and sunny; the driest months are July–September. It's wise to carry a light waterproof jacket at all times. Insect repellent is useful in the warmer months when mosquitoes and leeches can be a hassle.

Maps & Books

The Rosewood Creek Circuit is covered by the CMA 1:25,000 *Brooklana* map, but it's not really necessary. Maps for the tracks around the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and the Never Never Picnic Area are available at the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre (see below). Tyrone Thomas's *50 Walks: Coffs Harbour and Gold Coast Hinterland* and John and Lyn Daly's *Take A Walk in a National Park Port Macquarie to Brisbane* include route descriptions of day walks in the park.

Information Sources

The **Dorrigo Rainforest Centre** (☎ 6657 2309; Dome Rd), which doubles as the NPWS Dorrigo Plateau area office, has excellent displays about the natural and cultural heritage of the rainforest. Staff can advise you of track conditions, weather reports and answer questions about the rainforest. The Centre sells various books and souvenirs and includes a café.

Permits & Regulations

Stay on the tracks to avoid erosion and damage to the ground vegetation. Dorrigo National Park has no camp sites (although bush camping is allowed in the more remote parts of the park).

Guided Walks

During school holiday periods NPWS rangers conduct short guided walks, including informational jaunts such as spotlight tours and bird-watching from the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre. **Hinterland Tours** (☎ 6655 2957; www.hinterlandtour.com.au), a local tour company with Ecotourism Australia accreditation, conducts guided day walks in the park and extended walking tours in more remote national parks in the region.

ROSEWOOD CREEK CIRCUIT

Duration	4 hours
Distance	7.5km
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Never Never Picnic Area
Nearest Town	Coffs Harbour (below)
Transport	private
Summary	A relatively easy circuit walk through the Never Never section of the World Heritage-listed Dorrigo National Park, through warm temperate rainforest and moist eucalypt forest.

The walk follows a well-maintained circuit through the subtropical rainforest. The forest here is dominated by coachwood trees. It's a relatively easy walk, but a steep section near the pretty Cedar and Coachwood Falls gives it a moderate grading.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

Coffs Harbour

☎ 02 / pop 60,000

Coffs Harbour is the biggest town between Newcastle and the Gold Coast, and the nearest access point to Dorrigo National Park with good transport connections – it has excellent bus and train links and an airport with several flights daily from Brisbane and Sydney. Coffs has a good range of shops, supermarkets and plenty of accommodation. The **Coffs Harbour visitor information centre** (☎ 1300 369 070, 6652 1522; www.coffscost.com.au; cnr Grafton & Mclean Sts) is near the town centre.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Coffs Harbour Camping World (☎ 6651 9088; 73 Grafton St) is central and stocks a wide range of camping fuels and other necessities.

SLEEPING & EATING

The visitor information centre can assist with accommodation inquiries and bookings. Coffs is a big holiday centre and, outside school holiday periods, finding a site or a bed is not a problem.

Park Beach Holiday Park (☎ 6648 4888; www.parkbeachholidaypark.com.au; Ocean Pde; unpowered/powered sites for 2 \$32/40, cabins \$94-190) is close to the ocean and has plenty of sites.

Coffs Harbour YHA (☎ 6652 6462; coffsharbour@yhansw.org.au; 51 Collingwood St; dm/d from \$25/60) has sparkling clean rooms plus bike and surf-board hire.

Aussitel Backpackers Hostel (☎ 6651 1871; www.aussitel.com; 312 Harbour Dr; dm/d \$22/55) offers free canoes and an Internet café.

Ocean Palms Motel (☎ 6652 1264; www.oceanpalmsmotel.com.au; cnr Park Beach Rd & Ocean Pde; s/d from \$65/69) has a pool and a charming South Seas feel.

The Jetty on Harbour Dr is Coffs' best destination for alfresco evening meals; the city centre is fine during the day for coffee and lunch.

Foreshores Café (☎ 6652 3127; 394 Harbour Dr; mains \$6-20; ☎ breakfast & lunch) does huge breakfasts (including snazzy French toast) on its terrace.

Maria's Italian Restaurant (☎ 6651 3000; 368 Harbour Dr; mains \$9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) is an old-fashioned Italian place with a family-friendly menu featuring pizza and spaghetti bolognese.

Fisherman's Co-op (☎ 6652 2811; 69 Marina Dr; ☎ daytime) at the nearby marina, sells fresh fish right off the boats. Home-made gelato is available and there's a nice picnic area.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Coffs Harbour Airport is just south of town. **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) and **QantasLink** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) operate flights between Coffs and several state capital cities. **Sunshine Express** (☎ 13 13 13; www.sunshineexpress.com.au) flies to Brisbane.

Buses leave from a shelter adjacent to the information centre. **Greyhound Australia** (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) runs several services a day to Sydney, Brisbane and

points beyond. **Premier Motor Service** (☎ 13 34 10; www.premierms.com.au) has similar runs. Local operator **Kean's** (☎ 1800 625 587) runs to Bellingen, Dorrigo and inland cities such as Tamworth and Armidale.

Countrylink (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) goes north to Casino (where the train used to branch off to Byron Bay) and Brisbane (\$75, 5½ hours), and south to Sydney (\$84, nine hours).

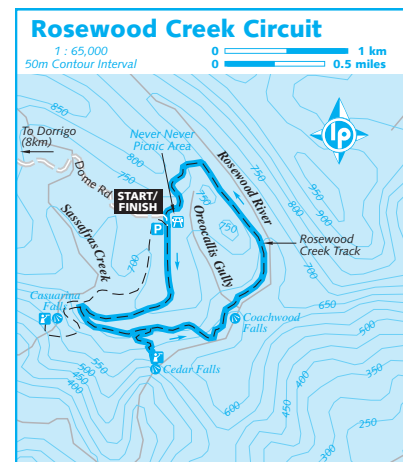
Hostel shuttles meet all long-distance buses and trains. Major car-rental companies are at the airport, or try the 24-hour **Coffs District Taxi Network** (☎ 13 10 08, 6658 5922).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Turn off the Pacific Hwy onto Waterfall Way south of Coffs Harbour, just north of Urunga. Drive through Bellingen and continue west along Waterfall Way, climbing the Great Escarpment and onto the Dorrigo Plateau. About 2km before Dorrigo township turn right onto Dome Rd and follow the signs to Dorrigo Rainforest Centre – there, check the track conditions. Continue along Dome Rd to the Never Never Picnic Area. The walk starts from the picnic area.

THE WALK

The Rosewood Creek Track starts at the southern end of the picnic area, just past a shelter. The track initially follows an old logging road through tall, moist eucalypt forest. Although this area was logged up to the early 1970s there are plenty of magnificent



old-growth eucalypt trees above the regenerating forest. After 1km, at the T-junction, go left and continue for about 800m to the intersection with the side track to **Cedar Falls**. Follow this side track as it descends steeply in a series of switchbacks to a point with a good view of the falls. Continue downwards, past an interesting type of dry rainforest growing on scree. It's possible to have a dip at the base of the falls but take care as the rocks can be slippery.

Retrace your steps back to the main Rosewood Creek Track. Turn right and continue along for another 1km to **Coachwood Falls**. You are now in warm temperate rainforest dominated by coachwood. A deep pool above the falls offers another chance for a swim. Again, take care if approaching the top of the falls.

Continue along the track as it climbs away from Rosewood Creek. After about 2.5km of pleasant walking through warm temperate rainforest, the track returns to the Never Never Picnic Area.

MORE WALKS

BLUE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK Grose River

The Blue Gum Forest walk (p71) can be extended for another three to four days (about 65km) through this moderate to demanding bush-bash, which follows the Grose River downstream from Blue Gum. It's a challenging but richly rewarding journey through the Grose Wilderness to the Nepean River, finishing near Richmond. There's no track, but navigation is easy because you follow the river. Once in the Grose Valley, the walk beside the river to Richmond is more or less on the flat – actually, slightly downhill. Take the LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps *Mount Wilson* and *Kurrajong*.

Katoomba to Kanangra Walls

This scenic four-day (45km) trek starts at the Narrow Neck Plateau and crosses the Wild Dog Mountains to end at spectacular Kanangra Walls (p80) in Kanangra-Boyd National Park. Advanced bushwalking and navigational skills are necessary. The distance and climbing involved make this a tough route. The ascent from Coxs River

to Gangerang Plateau and Mt Cloudmaker is around 700 vertical metres. Take the LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps *Katoomba*, *Jenolan* and *Kanangra*.

Katoomba to Mittagong

This four- to six-day (120km) walk for experienced bushwalkers starts at Narrow Neck and continues to the Coxs River. It's a long and not always terribly interesting haul on Scotts Main Range Rd (a fire trail) to the historic silver-mining town of Yerranderie, and then continues via the Wollondilly and Nattai Rivers to Mittagong. You'll need a swag of maps and a lot of advice: Volume 2 of the NPA's *Bushwalks in the Sydney Region* is a fine starting point. Ask the NPWS (☎ 4787 8877; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) about track conditions and surface-water availability before starting.

The Three Peaks

This classic three- or four-day (80km) circuit starts at Katoomba, travels via Narrow Neck and the Wild Dog Mountains to Coxs River, then skirts the Krungle Bungle Range and traverses Mt Guouogang (1291m), Mt Paralyser (1155m) and Mt Cloudmaker (1164m) to finish at Kanangra Walls. It's difficult and you'll need to be fit and have complete confidence in your bushwalking and navigational skills. Take the LPINSW 1:25,000 topographic maps *Katoomba*, *Jenolan* and *Kanangra*.

KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK Mt Jagungal Circuit

A popular and scenic southern route to Mt Jagungal, over five to six days, starts at Guthega Power Station – about 37km from Jindabyne along the Kosciuszko and Island Bend Rds). The route heads north up the Mungyang River valley and heads past Schlink Pass and Valentines Hut to climb the prominent summit of Mt Jagungal (2061m). The return route crosses the heads of the Geehi and Valentine Rivers to Mawsons Hut, then traverses the Kerries – some of the most picturesque walking in the Australian Alps – before climbing Gungartan (2061m). Use the Department of Lands 1:25,000 *Geehi Dam* and *Jagungal* maps. Jindabyne is a handy base for this walk, where bushwalker shuttle services can be organised (see Getting Around, p86).

Cascade Hut

This 20km out-and-back walk (five to six hours) passes through a diverse range of scenic mountain country, from open plains to forested glades, highlighted by a visit to an old mountain hut. The walk begins at a point 300m east of Dead Horse Gap on the Alpine Way. Cascade Trail climbs through the lower reaches of Boggy Plain to reach the crest of the Great Dividing Range 4km from the start. The trail then dips into the western end of a long snow plain, from where Cascade Hut can be found 1km up the valley. The best map is the Department of Lands' 1:25,000 *Chimney Ridge*. Thredbo, 4km east of the starting point, is the nearest town. A shuttle can be organised to get you to the trailhead (see Getting Around, p86).

THE BUDAWANGS The Castle via Kalianna Ridge

It's possible to climb The Castle (p99) in a tough day walk from Kalianna Ridge. Access is via the Yadboro Rd. Continue west from the Pigeon House turn-off (p104) and go right onto the Long Gully Rd past Yadboro Flat. Start and finish at the Long Gully car park, and carry sufficient water and plenty of food. The 10km to 11km return walk takes about 10 hours and includes nearly 800m of climbing – expect to come back pretty tired.

Take either the Budawang Committee 1:50,000 *The Northern Budawang Range and the Upper Clyde River Valley Sketch Map* or CMA 1:25,000 topographic map *Corang* – preferably both. For more information contact the NPWS **Nowra office** (☎ 4423 2170) or **Ulladulla office** (☎ 4454 9500).

DEUA NATIONAL PARK Big Hole and Marble Arch walk

Deua is 1220 sq km of rugged NSW south coast escarpment and tablelands. About a third of the park is included in two large wilderness areas. The northwestern section of the park is a karst (limestone) landscape with 400-million-year-old caves, and walkers can see the Big Hole and Marble Arch without venturing underground.

The walk starts at Berlang camp site and goes first to Big Hole. From Big Hole, follow the track below the viewing platform downhill. From the base of the hill the walk is undulating and easy until the sharp

descent into the Marble Arch. There are bands of marble in the canyon walls, which are beautifully decorated with ferns in shadier parts. The return walk is 13km and takes about five to six hours. Berlang camp site is 35km south of Braidwood, on Krawarree Rd. For more information contact the NPWS **Narooma office** (☎ 4476 2888; cnr Field St & Princes Hwy).

MUTAWINTJI NATIONAL PARK Homestead Gorge Trail

People visit Mutawintji, in far western NSW near Broken Hill, and come away changed. The park covers much of the Byngango Range and the lands around Mt Wright Creek. Custodians of these lands are the Malyankapa and Pandjicali Aboriginal people. The park was returned to its traditional owners in 1998. The land, waterways and resident plants and animals are associated with Dreaming stories and a cultural heritage that survives to the present day. Mutawintji visitors usually go with Aboriginal guides to see rock art and other sites. The park office in **Broken Hill** (☎ 08-8080 3200) has more details. The Homestead Gorge Trail is one of several walks in the parks. It covers 8km and usually takes about three hours, passing the cliffs of Homestead Creek before entering the Homestead Gorge.

LORD HOWE ISLAND Mt Gower

Inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1982 for its remarkable plants, birds, marine life and exceptional natural beauty, Lord Howe Island is a remnant volcano off the NSW coast and unquestionably a unique destination. Once you've paid for the flight to the island and your accommodation (see www.lordhoweisland.info), tackle the eight-hour return trek up 875m Mt Gower. There's no other walk like it in Australia and few in the world. You'll see magnificent rainforest, take in dizzying views – the mountain rises literally straight out of the ocean – and can top it off (if visiting during cooler months) by calling out to get providence petrels to land at your feet. You must walk with a guide. It'll be a trifling charge compared to what you'll have already spent. And whatever you spend, it'll be worth it.

OXLEY WILD RIVERS NATIONAL PARK Long Point to Wollomombi

Oxley Wild Rivers covers a spectacular wilderness area on the fringe of the New England Plateau. This is an unmarked route, which most walkers take two to three days to cover in the north of the park. It begins on the park's Michaeliana Walk at Long Point then descends to the Chandler River and follows the gorge upstream. You leave the river and follow the steep Chandler Track back up to the Wollomombi visitor area – a 33km trip. Private vehicle drop-off and pick-up needs to be arranged. Contact the NPWS **Armidale office** (☎ 6776 0000) for information on topographic maps and basic track notes.

Along Kunderang Brook

This tough, five-day walk follows the Bicentennial National Trail from Cedar Creek in Werrikimbe National Park to Georges Junction on the Armidale–Kempsey road. Most of the 75km route is unmarked; it follows Kunderang Brook as it descends to the Macleay River beyond Kunderang East Homestead in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. This is beautiful and isolated country. The walk includes several watercourse crossings, and steep climbs and descents. Private vehicle drop-off and pick-up needs to be arranged. The CMA 1:25,000 topographic maps *Kemps Pinnacle*, *Green Gully*, *Kunderang*, *Big Hill* and *Carrai* cover the route. Basic track notes are available from NPWS **Armidale office** (☎ 6776 0000).

ROYAL NATIONAL PARK Waterfall to Heathcote

This station-to-station walk takes in a high sandstone plateau and a creek with fine swimming pools. From Waterfall head down the Uloola Track (a fire trail), which descends to Blue Pools and Uloola Falls. Continue to Heathcote via Uloola Turrets (sandstone boulders) then Karloo Pool. From here follow the Karloo Track up to Heathcote, turning left near the fire station and right at the next two junctions to the train station. Allow four to five hours for this 11km walk. The 1:35,000 *Royal National Park Tourist Map* accurately shows the tracks.

WOLLEMI NATIONAL PARK Wolgan Valley & Glow Worm Tunnel

For experienced independent walkers, the Wollemi is the place for genuine adventure. NSW's largest wilderness area, it's a spectacular patchwork of winding rivers, gorges and undisturbed forest. Less adventurous walkers can get a taste of Wollemi on a 10km loop from the Wolgan Valley to the Glow Worm Tunnel. You'll need private transport. Drive to Lithgow, head for Mudgee, then take the turn off for Newnes and travel on for just over 27km. The walk follows the old railway corridor from Wolgan Valley colliery to the Glow Worm Tunnel (you'll need a torch and, yes, there are plenty of glow-worms) then returns via the Pagoda Track and Old Coach Rd. The CMA 1:25,000 topographic map *Ben Bullen* covers the area.