

Blue Mountains National Park

Kinda blue



Not much riding, but a lot to see

The view is exceptional from Mount Portal, and so is the rock climbing.

The Blue Mountains are that smudge of bluish grey you can see off to the west from Sydney when the pollution isn't too bad. They offer spectacular scenery, moderately interesting plants (with some honourable exceptions such as wildflowers and the staggering giant blue gums in the eponymous forest, at least before it burned) and lots of native and introduced wildlife.

Introduced? Lots of it, sadly. "If you want to do the environment a favour," says a mountain-dwelling friend of mine, "run over every fox and cat you see."

These would not be called mountains anywhere else in the world, by the way. They reach the dizzying height of 1100 metres. But they do deserve the other part of their name. They were given their name from the blue haze that hovers over them that is produced by the volatile oil from the eucalyptus forests.

Blue Mountains National Park was created in 1959. It covers 264,848 hectares of dissected sandstone plateau, forested river valleys and deep gorges and would be

one of the few national parks in the world that includes a city. The City of the Blue Mountains runs along the east-west ridge between the Grose and Cox's river gorges along the Great Western Highway and railway. It splits the park into two sections; one to the north and one to the south of

the string of towns that makes up the city. It includes such landmarks as the Three Sisters in Katoomba, the Blue Gum forest (or what's left of it after recent fires) and the staggeringly beautiful scenery of the Grose and Jamieson valleys.

That's the good news.



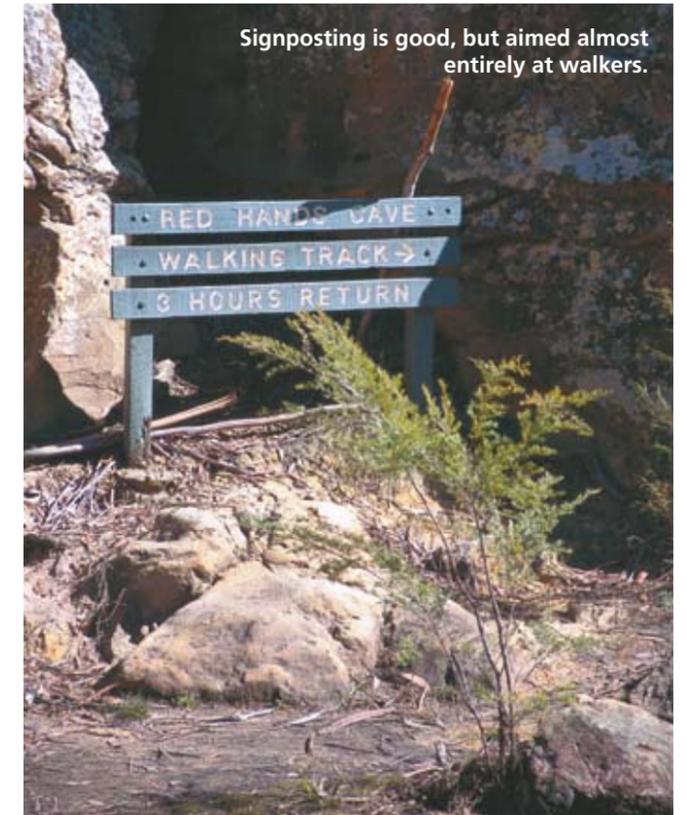
Crossing Glenbrook Creek on a concrete causeway is no great chore.

The bad news is that there is very little access to the park for motorcycles. Unlike some of the surrounding national parks, BM (may we call you BM, BM?) has been reserved mainly for walkers. That's a shame, but there you go...

There is some riding, although it is mainly just a matter of getting to one lookout or another. Never mind, it's good practice for anyone learning to ride on gravel, while still being quite accessible to road bikes. By the way, do not trust the maps available for this park. I must have checked a dozen completely different ones (including the National Parks Service maps) without finding an accurate version with the possible exception of the NRMA's No. 5 Holiday Guide map. The others are either at too large a scale (such as the one in my *Hema Motorcycle Atlas*) or just plain wrong. One that gets close is the CMA Blue Mountains Tourist Map, but it's hard to read. Even the instructions on the National Parks Service website are wrong.

But you can trust us.

The most easily accessible tracks begin at Glenbrook, just down from the railway station behind the tourist information centre. Signposting is good and you will need to pay an admission charge at the entrance. The track crosses Glenbrook Creek and you have the choice of heading for the nearby Portal Lookout or down to Nepean Lookout.



Signposting is good, but aimed almost entirely at walkers.



Many roads in the park are sealed, but even the surface of the gravel tracks is generally very good.

Ad

You come out the same way you went in, as you do on all of these tracks. None of them connects. The surfaces generally are good, but there is a lot of dust and on the way to Portal Lookout there's a remarkably steep hill.

Murphys fire trail, otherwise known as Bedford Road, takes you from Woodford on the highway to Murphys Glen camping ground. Well, not quite. The last bit is walking track only.

From Wentworth Falls you can take the Kings Tableland Road and then Queen Elizabeth Drive to Ingar camping ground. This used to be the other end of Murphys fire trail, but it doesn't connect with the above bit.

You can also continue along the Kings Tableland Road to McMahons Lookout, south from Wentworth Falls along the cliff tops above Kedumba Walls. The road ends at McMahons Lookout, where you can stand some 500 metres above Lake Burragorang, the Warragamba Dam catchment, and take a look at the level the water should be at.

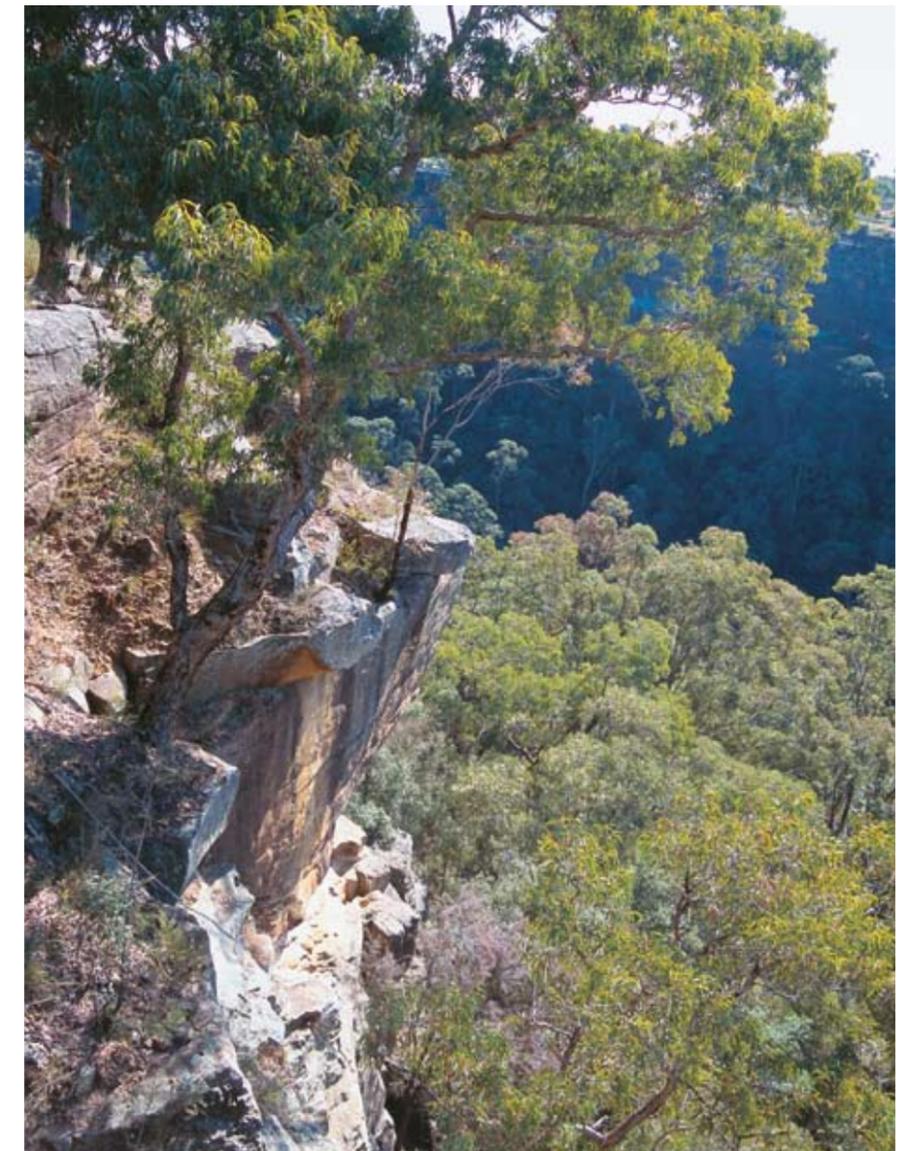
Off Bells Line of Road, to the north, there's the road to Mount Wilson that is worth exploring. The little township may or may not have an operating café, but there are some terrific buildings and natural attractions such as the Cathedral of Ferns to look at. The road goes all the way to Mount Irvine, which has even fewer services than Mount Wilson. I've been told it is just possible on a bike to make your way down the Mount Irvine Road back to Bells Line of Road, but don't count on it.

A long way to the south, and accessible only from the Shooters Hill Road, is the old Oberon-Colong stock route to Yerranderie. This travels along 1000-metre-high ridges on the border between BM and Kanangra Boyd national parks. It crosses a number of (usually low) creeks

before reaching the old silver mining town of Yerranderie. In good weather, the road is navigable by road bike, but you'll need to make your own assessment in the wet. More on Yerranderie at another time; the place deserves its own story.

The best time to visit Blue Mountains National Park is any time; you won't be disappointed. In summer, the mountains are generally cooler than Sydney, and in winter you may find yourself riding in snow – at least in the higher part of the mountains. **RR**

You can see wattle almost anywhere, but the plants in the park seem to be especially bright and prolific.



There is no shortage of scenery in many parts of the park.

Information

National Parks & Wildlife Service,
Govetts Leap Road, Govetts Leap:
(02) 4787 8877
Visitor Information Centre,
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(02) 4739 2950