

## Glenbrook DISCOVERY TRAIL

Explore the sandstone 'Blue Labyrinth' beyond Glenbrook Creek gorge on this Discovery Trail. Highlights include exploring Glenbrook Creek, viewing Darug Aboriginal art at Red Hands Cave and sharing the company of relaxed kangaroos at Euroka Camping and Picnic Area.

### Route Description

From the Glenbrook Visitor Information Centre (ph 1300 653 458) turn left into Ross Street and follow this through the village and down to a T intersection. Turn left into Burfitt Pde. Continue eastward along the railway line, into Bruce Road, across the railway line and to the Glenbrook entrance to Blue Mountains National Park. An entry fee applies, and the gate is locked at 7pm (during daylight saving) or 6pm (all other times), and re-opens at 8.30am.

The sealed road descends steeply to cross Glenbrook Creek. On the way down, a parking stop and short steep walking track to Blue Pool is passed on the right. It has good swimming and is well worth a stopover (perhaps on the way back).

The road (The Oaks Trail) crosses a causeway on the creek (which may be uncrossable after rain) and climbs up the other side of the gorge onto the plateau, past the walking track to Euroka and another parking area.

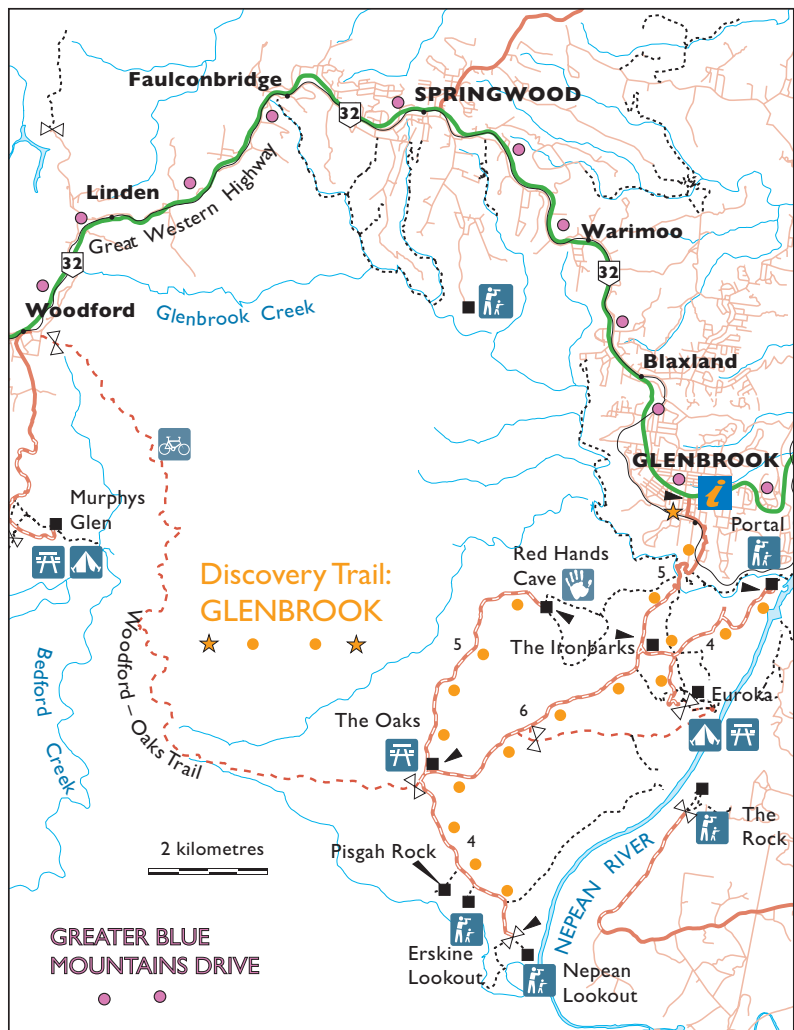
About 1.5km from the creek, turn left into the Euroka Road, then after another 0.6km left again into the unsealed Mount Portal Road.

A steep pinch leads to the carpark for Tunnel View Lookout, where a short walk leads to a dramatic unfenced clifftop lookout above Glenbrook Gorge. Part of the western railway line can be seen across the gorge.

Back at the road, continue on another kilometre or so to Mount Portal Lookout. This fenced viewpoint has wide views across the Nepean River to Penrith and western Sydney.

### Drive summary

- 47km return Glenbrook
- 3hr drive involving narrow sealed and unsealed roads plus stops
- National Park entry fees apply
- Start and finish: Glenbrook
- Alerts!: Narrow, winding roads. Some unfenced cliff-tops



— Sealed road — Unsealed road - - - Firetrail ..... Walking track

Return the same way and turn left into the sealed Euroka Road and descend into Euroka – a magnificent picnic and camping area. Bookings are required for camping (ph 02 4588 5247).

After a pleasant interlude, follow the sealed road back up the hill to The Oaks Trail and turn left onto the unsealed surface. A small picnic area is passed at The Ironbarks, then after some 5km, The Oaks picnic area and a junction. Keep left, then left again, into Nepean Lookout Road. This leads past short walking tracks on the right to Pisgah Rock

and Erskine Lookout, then terminates at a carpark. A short stroll to Nepean Lookout will reward with views over Fairlight Gorge.

Return the same way to The Oaks, and turn left into Red Hands Cave Road. The carpark is some 4.5km from The Oaks. A short downhill track leads to a sandstone overhang, where extensive panels of stencil art are protected by an enclosure. The art is typical of Darug sites elsewhere, and much art throughout the Sydney sandstone region.

Return to Glenbrook via the Red Hands Cave Road and Oaks Trail.

# Glenbrook **DISCOVERY TRAIL: an account of things to see and do along the trail**

Who would have thought such peace and quiet could be found so close to Sydney? I lie back on the grass, just like the sleepy grey kangaroos under a nearby blue gum. They flick their ears at a few insects, while a mother wood duck waddles over the lawn with her fluffy ducklings in tow. The loudest sound is the occasional screech from a white cockatoo.

This place is just a stone's throw from the Nepean River, seven kilometres from Penrith, 15 minutes off the M4 motorway. It's called Euroka, the old Darug Aboriginal name meaning a place of sun and warmth. On this balmy spring day the word seems to fit the saucer-shaped basin in the Blue Mountains foothills like a friendly old jumper.

Sure, on weekends Euroka must be bustling with tents and eskies, happy campers and children playing, but when I was there mid-week it was more suited to quiet contemplation of the magnificent natural surroundings.

The first white settlers learned a few things about Australia pretty quickly. They could soon spot productive ground that sprouted soft grass and tall trees instead of prickly scrub. As a rare patch of rich volcanic soil in a sandstone landscape, Euroka was picked out for sale as early as 1826, and cleared soon after. A century and a half of grazing and farming followed, before it was taken into Blue Mountains National Park.

Today, Euroka is the centrepiece of the Glenbrook section of the national park, part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and a delight for picnickers and campers, kangaroos and birds alike. It's a key place on the Glenbrook Discovery Trail, one of 18 one-day tours linked to the Greater Blue Mountains Drive, a touring route encircling the World Heritage Area. The drive ties together all the great experiences and interesting communities in one ready package, making it easy to plan your own exploration of what can be a bewildering maze of possibilities.

Speaking of mazes, the chunk of wild country surrounding Euroka was called the Labyrinth by trailblazing bushwalkers in the days before accurate maps. Then the great conservationist Myles Dunphy came up with the Blue Labyrinth, and the name stuck.

Bamboozled by the meandering grid of similar creeks and ridgelines, those walkers must have envied the familiarity of the Darug people after millennia of living there. The Darug heritage of occupation sites, rock art, stone arrangements, engravings and grinding grooves is particularly rich, secreted and protected in the blue haze of the labyrinth.

Although tamed somewhat by the addition of fire trails in the 1960s, the Blue Labyrinth is still one of the wildest areas so close to Sydney, and I reckon one of the most beautiful to explore.

Not in the slap-in-the-face way of some places, but more like a quiet friend that gets more familiar, more complex and more interesting as the visits and years go by. For the casual visitor there are many lookouts and walking tracks to reveal the twisted woodlands and tall forests, the weather-beaten cliffs and the creeks winding through narrow gorges.

Some of the fire trails are now well-maintained gravel roads that lead to a bunch of great places, each revealing another side of the labyrinth. The day I set off to follow the Glenbrook Discovery Trail was by no means the first time I'd been there, but still I was filled with a sense of anticipation as the car cruised again through the village of Glenbrook, into the park gate and down between the golden bluffs of Glenbrook Gorge. What new sights would I find this time?

The first thing that struck me was the wildflowers. With good winter rains following years of drought, plants had thrown caution to the wind. Waves of white, yellow, blue, purple and pink flashed through the undergrowth: pea-flowers and persoonias, hop-bush and hakeas, wattles and wax-flowers. Already some shrubs were bent over with the burden of their seed-pods.

After soaking up some restorative ambience from Euroka, I felt like some exercise. I could have followed a track down the creek to the Nepean, but opted for a stroll along the Euroka track on the plateau. It was so good to see water in the little creeks again. Overhead, scribbly gums, angophoras and Bakers apples waved their many-elbowed limbs against a clear blue sky. Wrinkled sandstone outcrops poked out of the undergrowth where pardalotes and cuckoos called.

Such outcrops are a familiar sight in the Sydney region. When they stick up on the edge of a valley they create fine natural lookouts, and the Blue Labyrinth is full of them. I drove to Tunnel View first, which is just a short stroll from the road – and just as well, as the walk helps you get ready for the dizzying drop into Glenbrook Gorge from the abrupt and unfenced cliff edge (don't go too close, and keep children with you). This rustic spot must be popular with train-spotters, because directly across the chasm the main western railway disappears into a tunnel. Away upstream a few of the Blue Mountains' heights are visible.

A bit further along the road, Mount Portal Lookout has quite a different feel. The solidly constructed viewing platform, right on the edge of the escarpment, looks across the Nepean River to the M4 and Penrith beyond.

One of many information panels around the area explains what can be seen.

I double back and follow the gently winding Oaks Road, overhung with trees, to its picnic area – a lovely place shaded by tall Forest Oaks. A couple of multi-coloured enthusiasts whiz by on mountain bikes. The trail from Woodford, further up the mountains, is a very popular day-ride, and on weekend afternoons the cafes in Glenbrook are abuzz with dusty cyclists reliving the fun.

I drive on to the road end, passing by the walking tracks to Machins Crater and Pisgah Rock for another day. From the carpark two more good walks lead to Nepean Lookout and down Jack Evans Track. Nepean Lookout, an informal site a half-kilometre amble from the car, gives dramatic views up and down the Nepean Gorge. A sign explains how the gorge was formed during the uplift of the Blue Mountains.

If you want to follow Jack Evans Track all the way down to the beautiful Erskine Creek it's a half-day walk. But just a short stroll from the carpark, Erskine Lookout lets you see the wide silvered creek flowing through a forest gorge dotted with golden cliffs. By the time I got there the shadows were spreading into the valley and I still had one more place to see, one I was really looking forward to.

The road to Red Hands Cave is similar to others in the area – a slow, relaxing drive through beautiful bushland. From the carpark it's only a five-minute walk to the cave: a long, arching wave of sandstone overlooking a small gully. Behind the wire and perspex barrier the walls of the overhang are decorated with hand stencils, handprints and other motifs, mostly in red ochre. Hand stencils are a common form of indigenous rock art in the Sydney region, and indeed all over the world, but this is said to be one of the finest local examples.

On the floor of the cave are grooves worn from shaping stone axes. A grindstone, raw ochre and a coolamon have been placed there to represent how the cave may have looked when still occupied by the Darug. The whole scene is poignant on so many levels that I perch on a sun-warmed rock, let the calm evening wash over me and contemplate what it may have been like to live here, to hunt and gather and raise a family, to know every nook and cranny of the land.

But the sun is gone from the tree-tops and the gates of the park are locked at 6 pm in spring, so I dare not linger. A swim in one of the cool pools of Glenbrook Creek on the way home is a delight that will just have to wait for next time.

