

## Newnes Plateau **DISCOVERY TRAIL**

This is a trail rich in both cultural heritage as well as varied scenery as you drive through escarpment country, pine forests and into native eucalypt forests of the Monundilla sector of the World Heritage Area en route to the Glow Worm Tunnel.

This latter section of the trail follows part of the alignment of the old Newnes railway.

### Route Description

From the Zig Zag Railway on Chifley Road (part of the Botanists Way), the Discovery Trail travels down into Lithgow and past the State Mine Heritage Park on the north side of the town. From here you drive up the State Mine Gully Road onto Newnes Plateau where it joins the Glow Worm Tunnel Road.

The Glow Worm Tunnel Road passes through extensive areas of pine plantation with many cross-roads, before entering native eucalypt forest. The road then enters national park (Gardens of Stone on the left, Wollemi on the right) and follows parts of the abandoned Newnes railway alignment past the junction of the Old Coach Road to 'No. 1 Tunnel'.

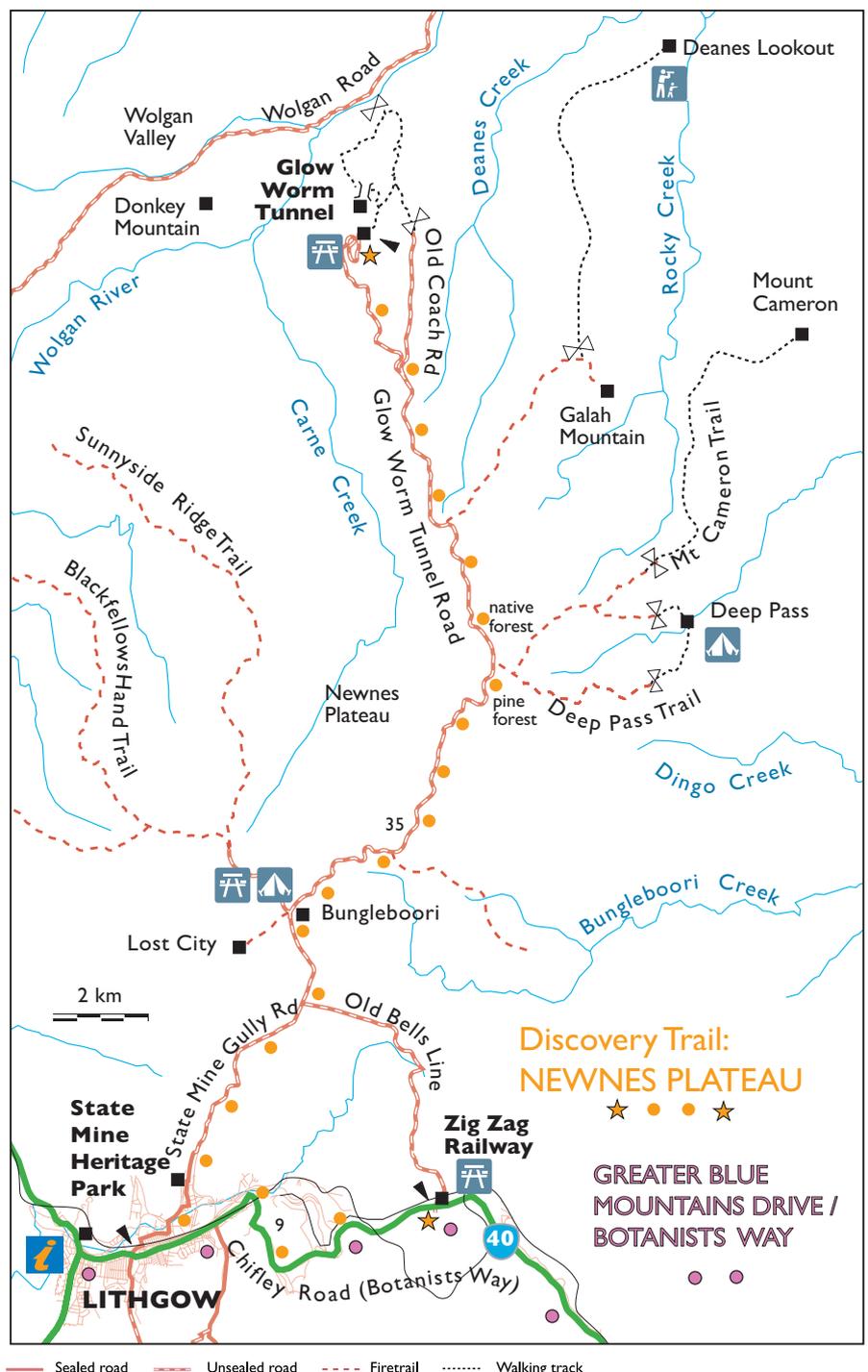
Drive through the tunnel and around a sweeping bend to the road end and carpark. From the carpark you can walk one kilometre along the old railway through a ferny gorge to the Glow Worm Tunnel. Lyrebirds are often seen here.

The 400m 'No. 2 Tunnel' curves to create a dark zone where star-like glow worms (the larvae of a fungus gnat) hang their webs from the dripping walls.

A battery-powered light is needed. An alternative walk to the tunnel is via the Pagoda Track, which starts from the carpark at the Old Coach Road gate. Overnight travellers can camp along the way at Bungleboori in Newnes State Forest.

### Drive summary

- 44km one way, 1hr to drive (one way)
- Narrow unsealed roads
- Start: Zig Zag Railway
- Finish: Glow Worm Tunnel
- Alerts!: Watch out for kangaroos, other wildlife and logging trucks. Slow down on narrow sections and beware of oncoming traffic on bends. Check road conditions after rain.



# Newnes Plateau **DISCOVERY TRAIL: an account of things to see and do along the**

Henry Deane (1847-1924) was something of a renaissance man. Like many educated people of his era, he wasn't stuck in one specialised field but pursued a variety of interests. As a railway engineer Deane was involved in the Transcontinental Railway across the Nullarbor Plain. In the Blue Mountains he designed the unique Newnes railway to the oil shale workings in the Wolgan Valley and helped to plan the modern route of the main western railway to bypass the difficult Great Zig Zag descent of the western escarpment.

But Deane found time to become an accomplished botanist too, combining his railway surveys with plant hunting. He was in contact with such botanical luminaries as Joseph Maiden, William Woolls, Baldwin Spencer and Ferdinand von Mueller. At least four plants are named in his honour, including the Mountain Blue Gum *Eucalyptus deanei*.

The Newnes Plateau discovery trail follows in Henry Deane's engineering and botanical footsteps. You might spot some rare plants, while immersing yourself in the industrial history of the Lithgow region and maybe spying some wildlife. There are 18 discovery trails which are the heart and soul of the Greater Blue Mountains Drive, but if you like a rich mix of natural and cultural heritage, this one's for you. The trail goes into some quite remote country, which is a big part of the attraction, with the amazing Glow Worm Tunnel as the ultimate destination.

The trail starts from the Zig Zag Railway 'top points' station on Chifley Road (part of the The Botanists Way and Greater Blue Mountains Drive). Why not kick off the day with a steam train ride down the Great Zig Zag (1869), reliving the era when mighty 'puffing billies' chugged across Newnes Plateau into the Wolgan Valley? Steam trains run on weekends and Wednesdays and rail motors on other days, with the first trains at 11 am. Then you can follow Chifley Road down the nearby Scenic Hill into the Lithgow Valley, an early Australian industrial centre that remains a focus for coalmining and power generation. The modern city of Lithgow offers plenty of accommodation, dining and historical attractions – several of which are passed on the route onto Newnes Plateau.

First up is Eskbank House with its fascinating domestic exhibitions, then Blast Furnace Park where the gothic ruins of Australia's first steelworks (1907) rise out of the slag. Lake Pillans wetland, where you might see some waterbirds, lies right alongside. Then a collection of interesting coal-mining machinery, buildings and other relics can be explored at the State Mine Heritage Park, marked by the tall framework of the poppet head. The State Mine operated here from 1916 to 1967. The museum is open on weekends and public holidays.

The road winds on up State Mine Gully, where quaint old miners' cottages give way to bushland, and then squeezes up through sandstone bluffs with cavernous grottoes and fallen blocks onto the top of Newnes Plateau. This is the highest sandstone tableland in New South Wales, topping out at nearly 1200 metres altitude. The road through Newnes State Forest passes through a mix of native eucalypt forest, with Blue Mountains ash, black ash, brittle gum and peppermints, rare high altitude shrub swamps and areas of pine plantation. Bungleboori Picnic Area, shaded by mature pines, is a handy rest or camping spot.

The shrub swamps are the home of *Boronia deanei*, a beautiful species discovered by Henry Deane in 1906 while surveying for the Newnes railway. He reported "acres of it, to the exclusion of almost any other plant". Today *Boronia deanei* is much harder to find and is listed as a threatened species. Deane also discovered the iconic Pagoda Daisy (*Leucochrysum graminifolium*), which grows only on rocky outcrops in the Newnes-Capertee Valley area.

Eastern grey kangaroos are a common sight in the forest, especially in wet or foggy weather, so it pays to drive carefully. Not long after passing the entry to Wollemi National Park, the old site of Deanes Siding pops out of the bush. An information sign explains that this was a water stop on the Wolgan Valley railway. The line was constructed in 1907 to haul products out of the Newnes oil shale works, deep in the cliff-bound Wolgan Valley.

A drop of 700 metres to the valley floor was a big challenge for Deane. "It was clear after some study of the problem", he wrote, "that the adoption of 5 chain curves, and 1 in 25 grades (4%), was unavoidable." He also declared that "...if economy had been no object... the difficulty could have been solved by the adoption of spiral tunnels!"

Tunnels and cuttings were one thing, but garden-variety steam locomotives couldn't handle such tight bends and steep grades. Deane was confident that the more specialised Shay locomotives could do it. These American 'hill-climbing' machines were geared and delivered power to all wheels, so gaining more traction on the steel rails.

But the pioneering 32-mile (51.5 km) railway was short-lived. When the ill-fated Newnes works closed in 1937, the rails were pulled up and replaced with an oil pipeline from Glen Davis. Today the road from Deanes Siding to the Glow Worm Tunnel follows some of the old railway alignment, so you get to see the sort of cuttings and bends that were required – and that's just on the easy terrain

of the plateau! The country gets rougher near the edge of the cliffs, with views opening out between pagoda-shaped rock formations crowding the gullies.

Sadly no spiral tunnels are to be seen, but there's a bit of excitement when the road passes under a sandstone ridge through the curving No 1 Tunnel. Once out the other side, you're deep inside the pagoda country with crenulated rocks rising on both sides. In between are ferny grottoes and tall eucalypts.

The drivable part of the railway ends at a carpark from where it's an easy one kilometre walk to the longer No. 2 Tunnel – now known as the Glow Worm Tunnel. Strolling through the quiet, sheltered gorge, perhaps with a lyrebird's call as the only sound, it's hard to imagine the roar and grind of the pumping Shay train as it dragged a load out of the valley. Through this gorge and out into the main valley was the most difficult part of the railway's construction – check out the huge embankments and infills that had to be built. In one bit, they just piled rock into the narrow canyon and laid the rails over the top – today you can hear the creek gurgling way down below. Deane declared that: "The gorge through which a great part of the descent had to be negotiated, was so narrow and the levels were so bound by the necessity of passing through certain spots, that many times the task seemed almost hopeless." But they got it done in just 18 months.

The railway splits away from the creek just before it enters the tunnel – to bypass an even deeper canyon. You need a torch to explore inside, because the tunnel curves for 400 metres through the mountainside. In the dark middle zone you can't see either end. This is the best place to stop, turn off all lights and wait for your eyes to adjust. In a good season, hundreds of tiny lights like stars will slowly appear. Each pinprick of bioluminescence comes from one end of a glow worm – the larva of a fungus gnaw – hanging in its sticky, dew-dropped web, waiting for small insect prey to be attracted and ensnared.

Walking out of the far end of the tunnel is like passing through into another world – one of soft green light. Tree ferns and rainforest fill the gorge, now wider and deeper. If you continue along the railway formation, the gorge falls away and the track emerges into open forest at the base of a huge cliff. You're now in the magnificent Wolgan Valley, and at the end of this discovery trail. Through the trees you can see the cliffs across the other side, and perhaps down to the river on the valley floor.

The **Greater Blue Mountains Drive** has been established by the regions which share the mountains as their own backyard working together to develop the drive in collaboration with the NSW Dept of Environment and Climate Change, Tourism NSW and Tourism Australia. Further development of the drive product has been enhanced by the ongoing involvement of Transurban. The establishment of the drive was proudly supported by the Australian Government and its business program delivery division, AusIndustry in a program proposed and developed by Blue Mountains Tourism Limited. © 2007

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