

## The Mounts **DISCOVERY TRAIL**

Enjoy a very spectacular and varied high mountain drive by following this Discovery Trail. One of the best places to see mountain rainforests and a botanist's delight! The excellent complete circuit across Bowens Creek can be completed by bicycle. Highlights include the Mount Tomah Botanic Garden, Grose Valley lookouts and walking tracks, Mount Wilson forests, lookouts and gardens.

### Route Description

This discovery trail takes in part of the main Greater Blue Mountains Drive (and the Botanists Way) along Bells Line of Road, almost completing a full circuit. From Berambing go westward along Bells Line of Road to the first optional diversion – 2km down Valley Ridges Road on the left to Waratah Picnic Area.

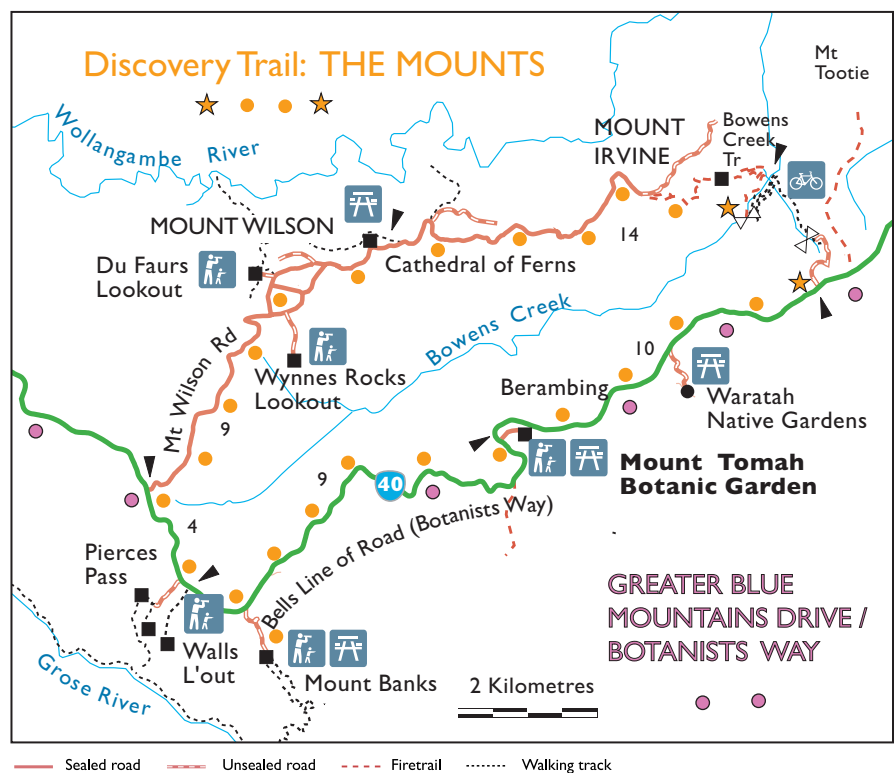
Back on the Bells Line, the road climbs up onto the basalt top of Mount Tomah and the entrance to Mount Tomah Botanic Garden on the left (entry fee). This is a 'must-do' stop to enjoy gardens of mountain and cool climate plants from across the world, informative displays, great views and perhaps a picnic or restaurant meal.

Further along Bells Line of Road glimpses of the stupendous Grose Valley begin to appear on the left. This section of the trail presents you with three different places to stop and take in this extraordinary view from varying perspectives. Make sure to take them all in!

Mount Banks is the first, 9.5km from Mount Tomah. The unsealed road leads through heathland 1.3km to the carpark, picnic area, viewpoint and walks.

### Drive summary

- 48km (one way)
- 1hr to drive (one way)
- Highway, narrow sealed roads, gravel roads, 4WD trail
- Start: Berambing
- Finish: Bowens Creek
- Alerts!: Narrow, winding roads through Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine.



The turnoff to Walls Lookout and Pierces Pass is another 1.5km on along the main route. Pierces Pass picnic area and trackhead is 1km down the unsealed road, while the walk to Walls Lookout starts from the carpark just off the main road.

Leave Bells Line of Road about 2km further west and follow the Mount Wilson Road to the rich basalt cap of Mount Wilson. Beautiful garden estates (sometimes open to the public), tree-lined avenues and lush temperate rainforest on the edge of the scratchy sandstone wilderness make for a novel experience – especially during spring and autumn when the gardens are at their most colourful.

Don't miss the two expansive look-outs – Wynn's Rocks (off Queens Avenue) and Du Fours Rocks (turn off at the bush fire shed). On the way towards the sister summit of Mount Irvine is the Cathedral of Ferns – a lovely picnic area with tall gums and rainforest walks.

The sealed, winding road to Mount Irvine passes through superb wet forests of various types. Just before Mount Irvine (a residential area with no public facilities). An additional 4WD option is to continue straight ahead down the Bowens Creek Track, to the trail's end at a small picnic site on the creek. The road across the creek and up the other side back to Berambing is closed to motor vehicles but lucky cyclists can continue on.

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

One leg of the main Greater Blue Mountains Drive that's packed with its own experiences is The Botanists Way, a themed route that follows the historic Bells Line of Road and Chifley Road between Windsor and Lithgow.

The Botanists Way celebrates the unique botanical heritage of the area and its human stories, from the first Aboriginal inhabitants, through the colonial scientist-explorers to today's magnificent gardens of the basalt tops. It's no fluke that The Botanists Way is one of only two roads across the Blue Mountains. Just like the Great Western Highway through Katoomba, it follows a natural pathway along a watershed that has been trodden by Aboriginal people for travel and trade since time immemorial.

The Mounts Discovery Trail follows The Botanists Way westward from the rural village of Berambing and over Mount Tomah before turning north into the fabulous forests and gardens of Mount Wilson. Along the way it takes in many botanical treasures and any number of great picnic spots and short walks, adding up to a fascinating daytrip.

The first of many attractions you can choose from is Waratah Native Gardens just off Bells Line of Road in Blue Mountains National Park. The tall turpentine and stringybark of the quiet forest glade reflect the richer shale soil that also supports the nearby ridge-top orchards.

The Gorge is a rewarding short walk that descends into the less fertile sandstone that makes up most of the area. A small tributary of the Grose River has cut a sheltered chasm of lush temperate rainforest, with massive turpentine, coachwoods and lianas above a ferny understorey.

Continuing west, Bells Line of Road climbs onto the table-top summit of Mount Tomah. The basalt capping the mountain is just a surviving skerrick of huge lava flows that flooded over the area about 18 million years ago. The grow-anything volcanic soil of 'the mounts' (Tomah, Bell, Banks, Wilson and Irvine) attracted early settlers like bees to a honeypot, and today the larger summits are a mix of small farms and landscaped gardens, peppered with remnant stands of the exuberant wet forests that once covered the lot.

At 1000m above the plains, the mountain is the perfect place to grow a showpiece garden of cool-climate plants. Mount Tomah Botanic Garden was opened on an old nursery in 1987 as an annex of the famous Sydney Botanic Gardens. Now you can see something like 7,000 different species there, from the Blue Mountains, Australia and all over the world.

Themed sections, informative signs and a self-guided audio tour help to tell the fascinating story of the evolution of Australia's unique plants. If you just want to look, the garden walks and stunning views over the surrounding Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area will leave you

exhilarated. For a complete experience just add lovely picnic sites, a restaurant and a gift shop! A major permanent exhibition about the World Heritage Area is to be added soon.

Westward from Mount Tomah the landscape changes character. The orchards and fruit stalls are gone, and unsullied wilderness hugs both sides of the road. The cliff-bound deeps of the Grose Wilderness flash past to the south, while to the north narrow hidden ravines run to the Colo River.

Along here are more places for walkers and view-seekers. The track to the summit of Mount Banks passes through beautiful open heathland – a response to thin soils, fire and wind exposure. The reward for climbers is one of the few basalt tops with its natural forest intact.

Pierces Pass is one of the best jumping-off points for some serious bushwalking – a descent of the Grose Valley to Blue Gum Forest. The legendary glade was rescued from the axe by a coalition of bushwalkers during the 1930s depression, to become a nucleus of not only Blue Mountains National Park but also the whole national park movement. The walk to Blue Gum Forest is best done as an overnight trip, camping beside the forest at Acacia Flat. For the less ambitious, short walks to Walls Lookout and Rigby Hill reveal breathtaking views from the brink into the great gulf of the Grose – but keep back from those unfenced cliff edges!

Turning off Bells Line of Road to Mount Wilson, the road winds through some of the finest scribbly gum woodland in the mountains. A few springs ago, the scribbles were flowering so well that the aroma of fermenting nectar filled the car. As the road meets the slope of 'the mount', the bush abruptly changes to tall forest of eucalypts and rainforest species. On top, the forest shifts into something much more genteel: tree-lined avenues and superbly designed garden estates – many open for inspection in spring and autumn. Beyond the gardens there is a feast of fine natural things to see too.

The lookouts at Wynnes Rocks and Du Fours Rocks are quite different in character but equally impressive. Wynnes Rocks looks over the head of Bowens Creek to the edge of the Grose, while the bizarre rock formations of Du Fours Rocks stand above the Wollangambe River with the tangled ridges of Wollemi National Park fading into the north. It's a wilderness out there – recognised as the biggest in New South Wales. In spring, new growth on the gumtrees adds splashes of red to a colourful foreground.

But if you really want colour, nothing can beat cruising around the gardens in springtime. The richness of the ornamental plantings, sprinkled with the waratahs, wattles and other native wildflowers, can be overwhelming. Then in autumn, the reds and yellows look like someone's gone berserk with the spray-paint. When your eyes need a cool break from all this, the Cathedral of Ferns offers restful strolls through shadowy rainforest. It's also a good place to picnic or to camp the night.

Walkers are spoilt for choice at Mount Wilson. The village stroll between Silva Plana reserve and the Cathedral of Ferns sneaks along public byways between the gardens, while a bunch of other tracks explore the bush, the creeks and surviving rainforest. One of my favourites is the Waterfall Walk, featuring perhaps the only basalt waterfall in the mountains! And don't be put off by 'bad' weather – Mount Wilson in the fog can be pure magic.

The sealed road to Mount Irvine winds through an amazing diversity of wet and dry forests, with quite a few spots where you can stop for a closer look. In spring the flowering shrubs – some of them found only in the Blue Mountains – can be spectacular.

The garden and rural settlement of Mount Irvine has no public facilities but sticky-beaks will want to drive in for a look, while the more adventurous will make the spectacular descent into the gorge of Bowens Creek. This bit is for four-wheel-drives only, or keen mountain-bikers. The bumpy dirt trail – an historic coach road – takes big sweeps across the valley-side as it passes from ridge-top scribbly gums into tall eucalypts and rainforest.

Apart from a basic picnic spot, the beautiful clear-water creek is the main attraction, flowing away deep into the wilderness and eventually, the Colo River. The bridge is a good place to gaze around and contemplate how early European explorers and settlers might have felt, fresh from the green fields of England, wrestling through this strange and unknown land of rock and scrub.

It must have been very lonely, but at least in the case of explorer/botanist George Caley, his 1804 Blue Mountains journey impressed him deeply. After leaving Australia forever Caley wrote from a faraway land: "It's those damned mountains after all my suffering that I am enraptured with... Oh! Botany Bay! I wish I could forget you! But this will never happen as long as your mountains haunt me."

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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