

Dunns / Capertee **DISCOVERY TRAIL**

A very scenic alternative to the main drive between Capertee and Rylstone, through the grand Capertee Valley. 'Big sky' outback atmosphere with the weathered escarpments of Wollemi National Park and Gardens of Stone National Park winding around the valley. Highlights: Cliff-lined valleys, Glen Davis and the Capertee Gorge, Dunns Swamp camping, swimming and walks.

Route Description

The roadside Pearsons Lookout, on the Castlereagh Highway just south of Capertee village, gives a view over the expansive Capertee Valley that you are about to explore.

Turn off the main drive at Capertee, onto the Glen Davis Road. The sealed road winds through open forest backed by sandstone crags. On the right (to the east), Gardens of Stone National Park sweeps up to the outstanding mesa of Pantoneys Crown.

Emerging from the forest into rolling farmland, the road becomes unsealed and heads towards the massive cliff of Mount Gundungaroo guarding the entrance to Capertee Gorge, where the broad valley narrows down.

Just across the bridge over the Capertee River (which may be dry) and 28km from Capertee, turn right at the T-junction and continue 4km between tall cliffs, across the river again, to the old shale-mining village of Glen Davis.

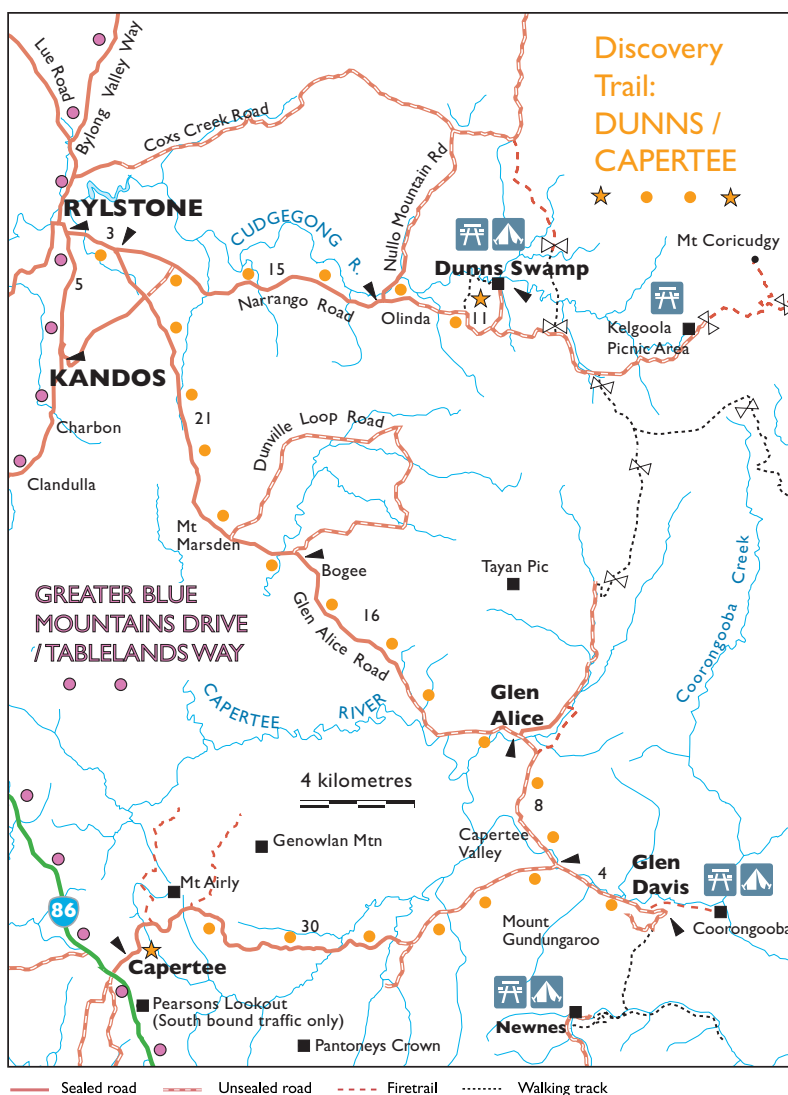
The relics of the early 20th century shale refining works are on private land but tours and accommodation can be arranged at the hotel. (Regular tours are also held Saturdays).

The camping area on the southern side of Glen Davis has all facilities. A picturesque alternative is to turn left into Goora Street just before crossing the river on the way into town and follow the signs along a rough dirt road, down the valley and across the river to Coorongooba in Wollemi National Park.

This is a basic camping and picnic site with no facilities. Beyond, the Capertee River enters the Wollemi Wilderness and joins the Wolgan

Drive summary

- 113km one way, 2.5hr drive (one way)
- Narrow sealed and unsealed roads
- Start: Capertee Finish: Dunns Swamp
- Alerts!: Unsealed roads, kangaroos.



River to form the Colo River. The gorge extends for over 100km – reputedly one of the longest gorge systems in Australia.

Drive back out of town the same way, and at the T-junction near the Capertee River bridge, continue straight ahead on the Glen Alice Road. The unsealed road leads another 8km to the even smaller village of Glen Alice, and then north-west through the rural upper Capertee Valley. The road soon changes to sealed then you pass beneath the towering massif of Mount Marsden and across a gap in the Great Divide, entering the westward-draining Cudgong Valley. Some 35km from Glen Alice, two turnoffs to the right onto the Narrango Road are reached.

Follow Narrango Road (at first sealed, then unsealed) east about 20km to the turnoff into Dunns Swamp on the left.

Dunns Swamp is a quiet waterway created by a weir on the Cudgong River. Fine camping is available (fees apply). A rock art site is part of the rich Wiradjuri heritage of the area, and several walking tracks explore the swamp, forests and rock formations. Boat tours and hire canoes are available during weekends and school holidays in spring and summer. When leaving Dunns Swamp, travel back along Narrango Road to the delightful town of Rylstone, where you can continue north on the main drive.

Dunns / Capertee **DISCOVERY TRAIL: an account of things to see and do along the**

The Greater Blue Mountains Drive connects major arterial routes to encircle the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It's a great way to get from one part of the mountains to another with the minimum of fuss, so you've got more time to poke into all the other interesting places. And sometimes, there's an alternative 'slow' way to get there.

The discovery trail through the Capertee Valley to Dunns Swamp is one of the best 'slow' routes, an alternative to the main drive between Capertee and Mudgee, and one of 18 discovery trails that meander through the backroads and byways of the mountains.

This is a drive to inspire – not just with huge vistas across the cliff-walled valley, but also with the unique places along the way. In little more than 100 kilometres from go to whoa, the route packs in so much scenery that many folks will struggle to finish before dark. Which is OK because there are good places to camp as well as other accommodation options in the Capertee Valley.

Accommodation along the way makes this trail an excellent bike ride, using public transport (Countrylink buses) at each end. The valley is a popular haunt for birdwatchers too. Being on the western fall of the mountains, a mix of eastern and inland species boosts the number you might spy in a day. Best of all, quite a few rare birds call the valley home, including the Regent Honeyeater. This is one of the few breeding grounds for these spectacular black, yellow and white birds that have become critically endangered by the clearing of their woodland habitat.

So pack your binoculars and camera and let's get going! I well remember the first time I was driven through the valley as a teenager: I was gobsmacked by the drama of the scenery. The combination of a wide and gentle valley rimmed by long lines of orange cliffs is unique in the Blue Mountains. I've been back many times since, but never tire of it, whether in the clearing fog of morning, the bright middle of the day or with sunset burning up the cliffs.

Leaving the small village of Capertee and heading along the Glen Davis Road, you're quickly amongst the open forest and woodland that is typical of the drier western side of the sandstone ranges. Then the cliffs of Mount Airly and Genowlan

Mountain bob up above the road, and the isolated butte of Pantoneys Crown – the centrepiece of the well-named Gardens of Stone National Park – stands as a landmark in the navel of the valley.

Closer to Glen Davis the valley becomes more gentle and bush gives way to cleared grazing country. Unobstructed views reveal the towering cliffs of Wollemi National Park looming closer – Mount Gundungaroo, the Sentinel, Mount Iris and other crags. Standing proud on the northern horizon is the conical high point and volcanic remnant of Tayan Pic.

The Capertee River itself is often dry where it runs through Glen Davis – this is rainshadow country, with rainfall of only about 600 mm a year. But over eons the river has driven a remarkable gorge through the layers of sandstone. The wide upper valley narrows down at Glen Davis, and is then squeezed even tighter further downstream in the Wollemi Wilderness. In fact there is 100 kilometres of continuous gorge along the Capertee and Colo rivers, running from Glen Davis almost to the Hawkesbury River.

The village is just a shadow of what it was, with a population of up to 2,500 in the heyday of the mining and refining industry. When the works shut down in 1957 Glen Davis relaxed into a quiet backwater. But the setting has always been spectacular, with massive brown and yellow bluffs, two and three hundred metres high, almost encircling the valley floor.

The ruins of the oil refinery are on private land and not readily viewed, but guided tours are available every Saturday. It's well worth spending the night at the camping area on the edge of town to explore the area more thoroughly - the strenuous walk over the range to the sister mining town of Newnes is just nearby - or staying at one of the local guesthouses or bed-and-breakfasts. And then there's Coorongooaba in Wollemi National Park, a basic campsite by the river at the start of the gorge and a great place to watch the sunrise and sunset colours on the cliffs.

Heading back out of Glen Davis the road continues on towards Glen Alice, another tiny settlement on the northern side of the valley. Along here the surviving trees in the paddocks – mostly forest red gums - give some idea of the original stature of the valley forests. You can also see the occasional remnant of a swamp. The Capertee Valley is Wiradjuri country, and it must have been a rich hunting and gathering ground.

Beyond Glen Alice the road skirts the base of the prominent Mount Marsden before crossing the almost imperceptible Great Divide into the valley of the Cudgegong River – a tributary of the Macquarie and then the Darling. The Cudgegong is a particularly fertile valley, enriched by volcanic sediment washed down from Tayan Pic and the other basalt peaks that rim the top of the watershed.

If you're tempted just to drive on to Rylstone here, you'll be missing one of the jewels of Wollemi and the perfect end-point for this discovery trail. Dunns Swamp might have a rather dull name, but it has a well-earned reputation for fabulous landscape and the range of experiences on offer.

The place was once a swamp on the upper Cudgegong River, but that was before it was dammed to supply water to the cement works at Kandos. Since then nature has softened the small lake with reeds. Colourful pagoda rocks fall straight into the water in places. Campsites are squeezed between the water and the pagodas, and campers can enjoy a range of activities from swimming and canoeing to walking and wildlife spotting, or just lazing around in a wonderful place. A range of walking tracks explore the lake and pagodas, hire canoes and boat cruises are available seasonally, and the plentiful wildlife includes waterbirds and platypus. There's even a Wiradjuri rock art site to see.

Personally, I like nothing better than being in a canoe in the early morning or late afternoon, with the pagodas reflecting in the dark rippling water, paddling quietly along the edge of the reeds, spotting swamphens and coots: simple, inexpensive, but oh so relaxing.

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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