

Jenolan / Kanangra **DISCOVERY TRAIL**

This trail is a 'must-do' variation off the main Greater Blue Mountains Drive into spectacular escarpment country and Jenolan Caves, with a bonus out-and-back drive deep into Kanangra-Boyd National Park. An overnight stay is recommended. Highlights along the way include the scenery and the spectacular destinations of Kanangra Walls and Jenolan Caves.

Route Description

Take the sealed Edith Road southwards out of Oberon, across high country farmland and through the village of Edith.

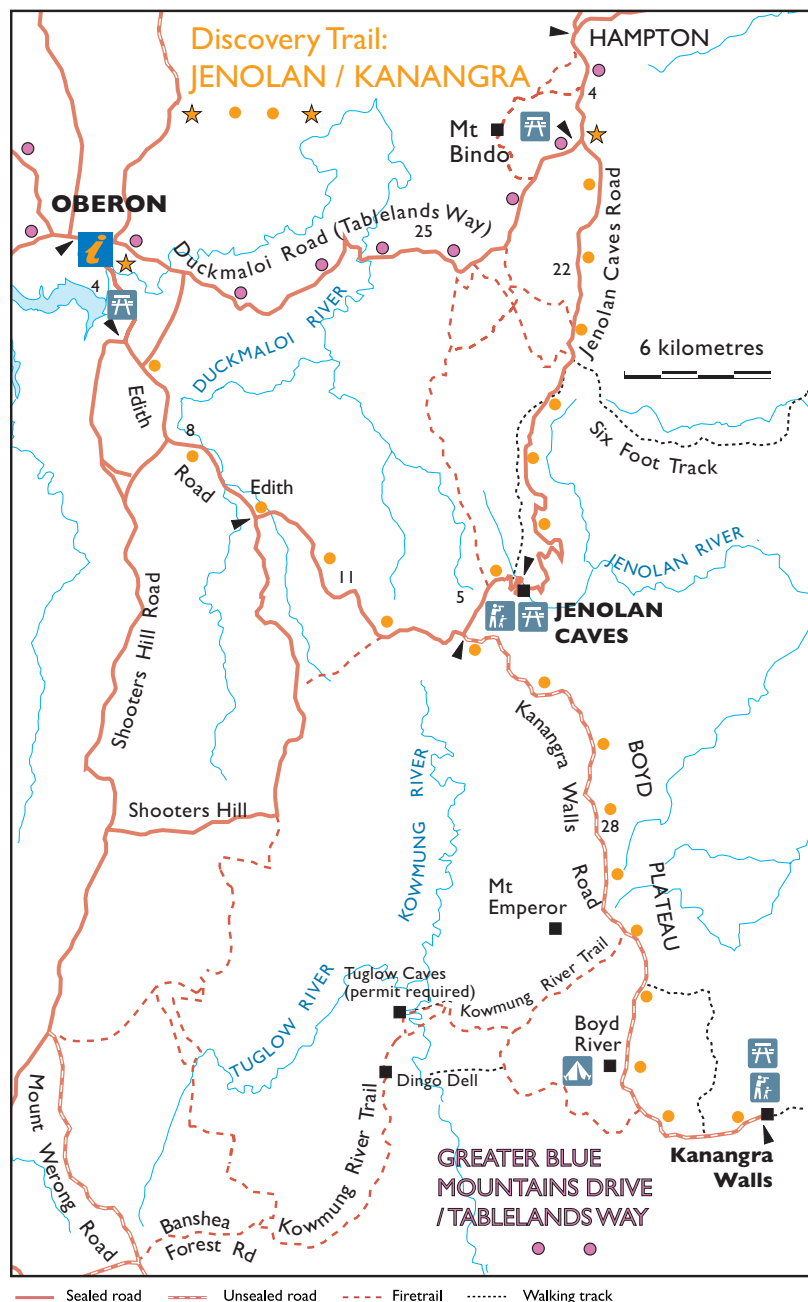
After 23km, the unsealed Kanangra Walls Road turns off to the right into Kanangra-Boyd National Park. It traverses the Boyd Plateau's montane forests of snow gum and mountain gum (with signs of past logging) before emerging into mallee and heath on the plateau edge. Boyd River Camping Area is passed some 10km from the turnoff, then the road end and carpark is reached after 29km. A short, easy walk (wheelchair accessible) leads to the majestic main lookout on the brink of Kanangra Deep. Longer walks go to Kalang Falls and out onto the sandstone plateau of Kanangra Tops for even more breathtaking views. Experienced and well prepared bushwalkers only can range far and wide into the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness.

Returning to the Edith Road, the Discovery Trail descends very steeply (hairpin bends) down the 'two-mile' hill into the valley of Jenolan Caves. Guided and self-guided tours of the caves are available every day. Adventure caving tours are also available.

A network of surface tracks explore the remarkable karst landscape, and Jenolan Caves House provides accommodation, a bistro, café and gift shop.

Drive summary

- 105km (one way), 2.5hr to drive (one way)
- Narrow sealed roads, unsealed roads
- Start: Oberon
- Finish: Junction of Jenolan Caves Road and Duckmaloi Road (on The Greater Blue Mountains Drive), 4km south of Hampton.
- Alerts!: Very steep and winding road into the Jenolan Valley and back out again. Caravans not allowed. These can be left at Oberon. Enquire at the visitor centre. Kangaroos on the Kanangra Walls Road.



Tour fees apply. When leaving the caves, drive through the Grand Arch and follow the winding road up the 'five-mile' hill and

along the plateau to rejoin The Greater Blue Mountains Drive at the Duckmaloi Road junction. Here you can continue north on the main drive.

Jenolan / Kanangra **DISCOVERY TRAIL: an account of things to see and do along**

Long before anyone thought of motor vehicles, let alone the idea of tourist drives, people have been visiting Jenolan Caves. Some say this magical underworld was the first tourist attraction of colonial New South Wales. Tourists have been travelling there for more than 150 years, at first by foot, horseback and horse-drawn coach, then by car and bus.

So it's no surprise that Jenolan Caves is the focal point for one of the most exciting discovery trails that veer out from the Greater Blue Mountains Drive – the epic tour around the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The drive follows major roads between Oberon and Hampton, across the tablelands on the western side of the mountains, but the Jenolan and Kanangra discovery trail is a more enticing option that dives right into the wild places along the edge of the escarpment.

Heading east out of Oberon through the hamlet of Edith, high country grazing land gives way to bush near the crest of the Great Dividing Range. Right on the edge of the tableland's eastern fall, a choice must be made: will you go straight ahead, down the big hill into Jenolan Caves, or will you turn right towards Kanangra Walls first? Those who turn right will have a longer drive, on a gravel road, but will see a completely different side to this unique area. They'll also have the chance to camp overnight and really get to know the place. Accommodation is available at Jenolan Caves and several other establishments nearby for those who want an extended stay.

The Kanangra Walls Road enters Kanangra-Boyd National Park and wanders across the Boyd Plateau, an outlier of the Central Tableland built on a core of granite rock and surrounded on three sides by deep ravines flowing to the Coxs and Kowmung Rivers. The superb mixed forests include mountain gum, peppermints, brown barrel and snow gum – and quite a few cut stumps.

It might be hard to believe now, but back in the 1960s the plateau's native forest was due to be cleared out for a pine plantation. Conservationists, who were campaigning against a limestone quarry near Colong Caves as well, took on a public enquiry to save the Boyd. They won, and the forests were added to the national park – to the great benefit of all the wallabies, possums, kangaroos, birds, bats and gliders that still call the plateau home, as well as travellers out to enjoy the natural wonders.

Boyd River camping area stands in the midst of the forest by a bubbling stream: a quiet sanctuary where city cares can fall away. It's a great base to explore more of the park. Another 10 km leads out of the forest

into the flowered heathland on the edge of the plateau. A five-minute stroll on an easy all-access path to the main lookout is an absolute must. The reward is a view into the wilderness often described as the 'best in the Blue Mountains'.

The sandstone strata of Kanangra Walls and the quartzite pinnacles of Thurat Spires face each other across a narrow gorge. Rattling way down in between is the silver thread of Kanangra Creek, leading the eye away to the north to be lost in the maze of interlocking blue ridges that fill the wilderness towards Katoomba on the far horizon. Reaching out from the sandstone, the Gangerang Range rolls away to the triangular landmark of Mount Cloudmaker. The peak was so aptly named by the great conservationist and enthusiastic Blue Mountains bushwalker Myles Dunphy, while Gangerang goes back much further, to the Gundungurra people whose homeland this is.

It's hard to tire of the peacefulness of this scene, but other walks await the energetic. The Kalang Falls track descends to a nearby cascade and pool, at the top of a much larger series of falls into the gorge that is often tackled by experienced abseilers. But best of all is the easy walk out onto the Kanangra Plateau. Over waist-high heath, it reveals an ever-expanding vista of the wilderness, across the Kowmung valley to the Blue Breaks, and back up into the head of the gorge where Kanangra Falls makes an impressive leap off the plateau.

This is a very fine piece of the Great Escarpment, a remarkable geographical feature that extends right along the east coast of Australia but was only recognised in recent years. The escarpment was shaped, and is still being shaped, by coastal streams carving back up into the tablelands towards the Great Divide. The tablelands themselves were pushed up in one chapter of the long story of Australia's origin.

Or at least that's the scientific view. A Gundungurra creation story is even more intriguing. The great valleys of the Coxs and Wollondilly rivers were gouged out during a titanic struggle between two ancient spirit creatures: an eel-like being called Gurangatch (often interpreted as the rainbow serpent) and Mirragan the native cat, or quoll. The fight passed through 'bin-oo-mir' (Jenolan Caves) and over the divide into the Fish River. Driving back across the Boyd Plateau towards Jenolan Caves, some excitement about this special place is

bound to arise. Anticipation is heightened by the steep descent into the hidden valley, down the hairpin bends, with grey bluffs of limestone appearing out of the depths. Deciding which of the tours to choose, buying your tickets, and then waiting for the guide to lead you into the utter blackness are all part of the experience. Then the lights go up and you're standing in a room-sized natural jewel-box, amazed.

Gundungurra elder Billy Lynch, who died in 1913, said that his people ascribed great healing powers to the waters of Jenolan Caves, and they carried sick folk long distances to bathe there. Most modern visitors find the caves restorative too, perhaps not for the waters but for the incredible beauty and sense of timelessness that pervades the darkness.

New research touts Jenolan Caves as some of the oldest and most complex limestone caves anywhere. The caves have gone through many stages in their making, reaching back for hundreds of millions of years. A little of the mystery goes, but the wonder remains.

For the full karst experience, a package of two or three caves is recommended – you'll see quite different aspects of the underground world, and pick up more of the karst story from the guides. One must-do cave is the self-guided walk-through the awesome Devils Coachhouse, perhaps combined with some of the walking tracks that explore the above-ground karst landscape of arches and delicately carved outcrops. There's even a swag of special activities, like the adventure tours, ghost tours and history tours. And speaking of history, if you're worn out from all this action you can relax with a stroll through the venerable architecture and ambience of Caves House. One visit to Jenolan Caves will never be enough!

It may be with some regret that you drive out through the Grand Arch and up the very winding road (known locally as the 'five-mile' hill), back to the plateau. But as a parting reward the road gives glimpses into the Jenolan River valley and Hell Gate Gorge with the Wild Dog Mountains on the horizon. A stop at Mount Inspiration Lookout is recommended.

The Jenolan and Kanangra discovery trail rejoins the main Greater Blue Mountains Drive just before Hampton. Then it's onwards and northwards, to the next adventure.

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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