

Guidebook 9 - Aberdeen to Jenolan Caves

Places of historic or cultural interest

The Hunter Valley

Aberdeen is in the heart of the Hunter Valley famous for its wines, its thoroughbred studs, coal mines and for its agriculture. Nearby Scone proclaims itself the horse capital of Australia, and there are any studs and horse related facilities in the area. Between Aberdeen and Castle Rock the Trail passes over coal seams soon to be mined by huge open cut mines similar to others further south. The Trail also passes a number of wineries on the western edge of the wine belt. The Hunter Valley has been an established wine growing area for over 100 years and grows some of our best white and red wine grapes.

Widden Valley

Once home of the Kamilaroi tribe, the Widden Valley casts its spell over all who venture in. Meaning “stay here, go no further”, Widden is enclosed on all sides by majestic towering sandstone cliffs that keep watch over its fertile plains.

Since 1867 it has been the home of thoroughbred horses and today, Widden Stud is famous throughout Australia for the quality of its stock. It's Australia's oldest thoroughbred stud and after seven generations is still owned by the Thompson family.

Above all else it is the sense of history that overwhelms the visitor to the Widden Valley and over the next couple of days the Trail takes you through some of our dramatic past.

The Myrtle Trail

The Myrtle Trail has been a bridle track since 1836 when Noel Tindale's great-great-grandfather, John Tindale, picked his way down from Nullo Mountain along the track used by the Aborigines. John Tindale, a convict, was pardoned in 1816 for his work on the road over the Blue Mountains and was granted land at Penrith, west of Sydney. In 1836 he sold the Penrith land and his arrival in the Widden Valley marked the beginning of ownership by five generations of Tindales. The family sprang to national prominence in 1881 when their prize stallion, The Duke of Athol, was stolen from Bylong (allegedly) by Harry Redford and his gang. Redford was immortalised by Rolf Boldrewood in his classic novel 'Robbery Under Arms' as the character Captain Starlight. Redford went to prison for the theft, but the horse was never recovered. The Myrtle Trail wasn't developed for vehicles until 1958 after bushfires decimated the surrounding bush.

Sandy Camp Hut

The Sandy Camp hut was constructed in 1937 by Valdemar Glew to support spring and summer grazing on Nullo Mountain. The hut is located on the stock routes between the Widden, Bylong, Emu and Rylstone valleys. The surrounds were once cleared and freehold land. The hut has been restored recently by NPWS using traditional construction techniques.

The Livery Stable

The Livery Stable is a large cave beside the track; an Aboriginal site containing ochre paintings. Harry Redford's men camped in the cave and one of them drew a charcoal picture of The Duke of Athol next to the Aboriginal art. Over the years, much of the art had been vandalised with graffiti. The NPWS in consultation with a local historian, an archaeologist and Aboriginal people carefully recorded all the markings before removing graffiti using specially developed mild detergents and hand-held fibreglass brushes, so as to protect this Aboriginal and European historic resource. The rugged country around the Livery Stable was also the territory of 'The Lady Bushranger', Jessie Hickman who had property on the Emu Creek.

Glen Alice

The Capertee Valley was first explored in 1822. Settlement quickly followed with the Innes family taking up residence in Glen Alice in 1825 with Campbells taking Umbiella in 1831. In the early 1900s a small shop operated from Brookside, supplying residents with supplies brought from Rylstone. The return journey took up to three weeks. Today Glen Alice is a hall, a church, a school and a few houses. The church hides its slab walls with tin sheets pressed to look like stone. The graves in the cemetery have headstones dating back to the mid-1800s.

Glen Davis

In 1937 a new company called the National Oil Pty Ltd was formed for the purposes of mining the shale oil at Glen Davis. Some of the idle plant from nearby Newnes Commonwealth Oil Corporation was moved to Glen Davis and a pipeline was constructed along the abandoned rail line to Newnes and over the hill to Glen Davis. It commenced operation in 1940, producing petroleum products out of the oil rich shale. The supply and quality of shale mined was never enough to maintain economic production. Nevertheless, during the Second World War, the petroleum production was significant as it did not have to get past the blockade of submarines and other enemy ships. Glen Davis operations closed down after the War because of an inability to compete with imported oil prices and high mining and production costs. Today only skeletons of buildings remain as much of the construction was sold to recover costs.

Pantoney's Crown

Pantoney's Crown is the distinctive butte or flat-topped mountain, you pass on the Trail between Glen Davis and Baal Bone Gap. In the past it has been referred to by several names including Tower Mountain, Crown Mountain, The Crown, Blackman's Crown and Pantoney's Crown. However, Pantoney's Crown is now the official name.

The name Pantoney probably originated from one of the early settlers of the Capertee Valley. In 1816, William Pantoney Junior was issued with government cattle and became one of the first settlers in the Bathurst area. By 1823, he had also established a sheep grazing property at Capertee. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CsFW0rSFp8>

Wallerawang-Lake Wallace

Barton Park was one of the earliest rural estates west of the Blue Mountains and covered the land now occupied by Wallerawang, the Delta Electricity Power Station and Lake Wallace. The original sandstone homestead belonging to the Barton family was flooded by the formation of Lake Wallace in the late sixties. Prior to flooding, the Barton family cemetery was moved to its current location across the lake from the Sailing Club. Much of the sandstone from the original buildings were also recovered and some was used for the foundations of the Sailing

Club now overlooking the Lake. St Johns Church was built for the Barton Family in 1883 and it remains in the Main Street of Wallerawang

Wallerawang today is a scenic residential village overlooking the Lake. The area continues to operate coal mines which feed Delta Electricity's power stations at Wallerawang and nearby Portland.

Rydal

The village of Rydal was founded in 1832 and surveyed and named as a village in 1843. It was called by its original name Solitary Creek until the railway erected the station sign in the 1860s. The village serviced the construction of the road and railway west from Sydney and at one stage in the mid-1800s there were eight inns, five blacksmiths, two bakers, two butchers, two bookmakers, three commission agents, one auctioneer, one saddler, one carrier, one wheelwright and one Cobb and Co agency in the village. The railway follows this original location, but the road has since moved and Rydal today is a small and peaceful retreat.

Cox's Road

Between Rydal and Hampton, the Trail crosses the original route taken by Governor Macquarie when he visited Bathurst in 1815. The route was located and constructed by convicts under the guidance of W. Cox in 1814 and is known today as Cox's Road. Although very little remains of this original road, it is quite significant in the history of the development of the area west of the Blue Mountains. It crosses the Hampton Road near Cut Hill Rd.

The Six-Foot Track

Access to the Jenolan Caves, discovered in 1838, was particularly difficult. Even after the construction of the western railway around 1870, visitors who travelled over the Blue Mountains to Tarana railway station had to complete the journey by horse and buggy over a rough and sometimes impassable coach road. The trip from Sydney often took up to 24 hours.

Acting on the advice of Mr Peter Fitzpatrick of Burragorang and the Premier of New South Wales, the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Alexander Stuart, ordered that a search be undertaken to find a horse track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves.

A Government survey party was duly appointed consisting of Mr W.M. Cooper, Surveyor of Public Parks, Mr Mayes of the Department of Mines, Mr Freeman of the Department of Lands, Mr Donald McKay Barnet, a journalist and two other men. They were to be joined at Katoomba by Mr Peter Fitzpatrick who was to act as guide.

The group left Sydney on 24th March, 1884 and descended the Katoomba cliffs by a rough zig zag path into the Megalong Valley and blazed a route to the Megalong Creek which became Mr Cooper's base camp.

On Peter Fitzpatrick's suggestion, the survey party blazed a fresh route from the Megalong Creek camp up Nellies Glen to the Explorers Tree on Pulpit Hill. This was the most difficult section of the survey and took four days to complete.

The party then marked a route to Cox's River and a second base camp was established at Little River. From there a route was found that crossed the Black Range.

The party finally reached Jenolan Caves on 3rd April, 1884, with trees blazed and mile pegs set. The total distance was 26 miles (or 42km). It had taken 11 days to mark the 42km bridle track and Parliament consequently granted 2,500 pounds for its construction. The

Six Foot Track, as it became known, was maintained for many years by two men using a wheelbarrow, pick and shovel.

Travellers could now ride from Katoomba to the Caves in less than 8 hours. The new track

became very popular and was described in the 1894 issue of the Blue Mountains Railway Tourist Guide as “steep in places, but the romantic beauty of the surroundings amply compensates for the roughness of the ground”.

It is interesting that, for a period commencing in about 1896, the Royal Mail was delivered daily except Sunday, by packhorse from Katoomba via Nellies Glen, Chaplow Creek and Mount Sandy to a Post Office at Cullen Ben Bong near Hampton. This was known as the Pony Mail.

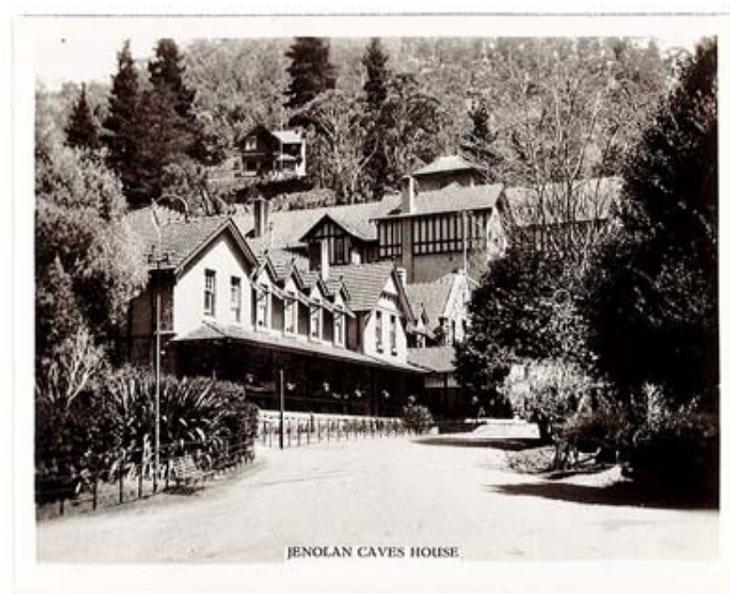
By the end of World War II, the number of people using the Six-Foot Track had declined and maintenance had ceased earlier in the century. Motor vehicles had become more popular and the roads had been improved so that it was possible to drive from Mt Victoria to the Caves via Hampton.

Jenolan Caves

Jenolan is derived from “Genowlan”, an Aboriginal place-name meaning high mountain.

As early as 1823, Europeans had settled at Bullock Flats and the name of this locality was changed to Oberon on the 4th July, 1863.

District property owners, James and Charles Whalan, were given the credit for bringing about the re-capture of escaped convict James McKeon. It is generally accepted that this



event took place in 1838 in the area now known as McKeon’s Valley to the west of Jenolan Caves and that James and Charles Whalan discovered the caves in the same year. The caves became known as Fish River Caves or Binda Caves and were not officially named the Jenolan Caves until 1884.

The Arch, Nettle and Elder Caves were discovered in the 1840s and soon became a popular haven for visitors because of the beauties and curiosities they offered. Initially access to the caves was through McKeon’s Valley with visitors staying overnight at the Whalan property.

During the 1850s the Binda cattle station, situated some 13km north of the caves, became the stopover point for visitors who travelled from Mt Victoria following the route of an old cart track. It is assumed that this cart track was later generally followed by the present road through Hampton. This route was taken in July 1861 by John Lucas, M.L.A., when he visited the caves. It was necessary to negotiate the final steep descent from Mt George to the caves on horseback or foot. It seems that the final section of the Six-Foot Track, when constructed in 1884, followed the same route descending from Mt George. This access to the caves became very popular, especially after the railway was extended to Mt Victoria in 1868.

The caves, which had been found in the 1840s, began to suffer from vandalism. In 1856, after Mr Jeremiah Wilson explored and penetrated deep into the Elder Cave, visitation increased as did vandalism.

In January, 1860, Jeremiah Wilson was in a group that discovered and explored a new cave which was, in 1878, to be named Lucas Cave after John Lucas. In later years, Wilson was to discover the Imperial Cave, the Left Imperial Cave and the Mammoth Cave.

Efforts were made to accommodate visitors, and a dancing platform was erected under the Grand Archway in 1869. The zig zag road down the hill on the Oberon side of the Caves, which was surveyed by Henry Cambridge in 1878, was completed in 1879 providing travellers with direct access to the area for the first time.

In 2000, the Jenolan Caves and parts of the Blue Mountains National Park were declared a World heritage Area in recognition of their special features and significance.