

Blackheath / Megalong **DISCOVERY TRAIL**

This tour of the upper Blue Mountains offers a journey across plateau and valley environments and includes a wide selection of lookouts, picnic sites and walks. Highlights of the drive include a visit to the NPWS Heritage Centre, the Govetts Leap, Pulpit Rock, Evans and Hargraves lookouts, Blackheath Glen and Megalong Valley.

Route Description

The trail explores five routes radiating out like the spokes of a wheel, each an out-and-back drive from the hub of Blackheath. They can be linked in any order but are described here in a clockwise direction.

Pulpit Rock Lookout is just a short drive out of Blackheath on Hat Hill Road then Pulpit Rock Road. The lookout itself is a 10 minute steep walk (with some steps) from the car and a fabulous place to start the day, with the early sun rising onto the Blue Gum Forest deep in the valley.

Next up is Govetts Leap Lookout with its classic view into Govett Gorge and a graceful waterfall. Don't miss the NPWS Heritage Centre with its interpretive display, information and gift shop.

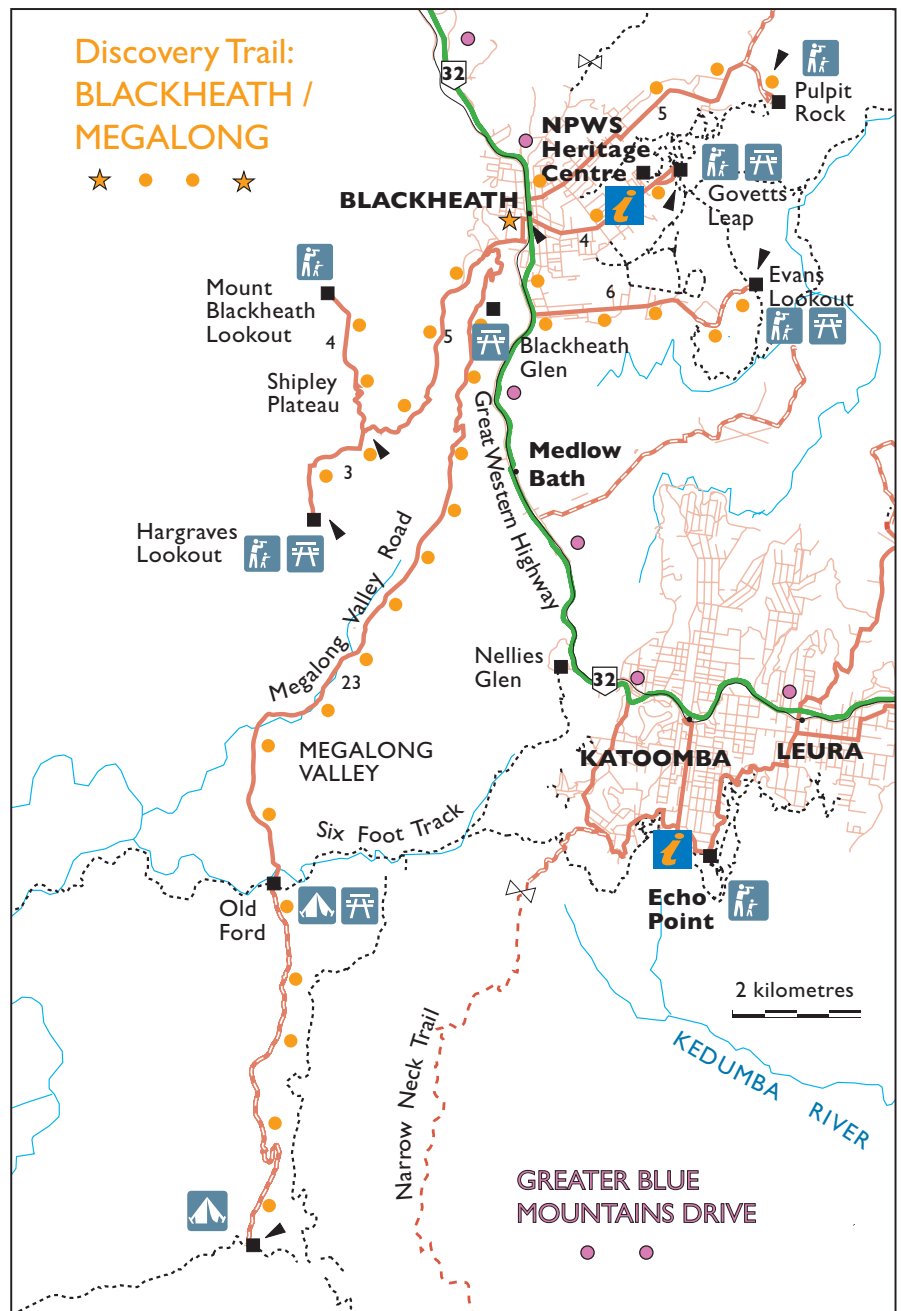
Last of the Grose Valley stops is Evans Lookout, named for the surveyor of the first road over the mountains.

Heading south out of Blackheath, Megalong Valley Road provides a change of pace as it winds down through the rainforest of Blackheath Glen.

Emerging into farmland with a backdrop of cliffs, the drive continues to Old Ford Reserve (camping) on Megalong Creek, across the Six Foot Track, into the valley of Galong Creek and on to a camping area on the edge of the Blue Mountains National Park.

Drive summary

- 92km (from Blackheath return), 2-3hr to drive plus stops
- Narrow sealed roads and unsealed roads
- Start and finish: Blackheath
- Alerts!: Take care of oncoming traffic on narrow sections.



— Sealed road — Unsealed road - - - Firetrail Walking track

The final spoke out of Blackheath heads out onto Shipley Plateau and the grand vistas of Hargraves Lookout and Mount Blackheath Lookout – great places at sunset.

There are numerous opportunities on this trail to stretch the legs along a walking track, including the Grand Canyon near Evans Lookout, the cliff-top tracks from Govetts Leap and rainforest walks in Blackheath Glen.

Blackheath / Megalong **DISCOVERY TRAIL: things to see and do**

The charming mountain village of Blackheath certainly has plenty to offer. Atop a plateau that falls abruptly into deep, cliff-walled valleys on either side, the town is surrounded by lookouts, forests and walking tracks. The Blackheath and Megalong Discovery Trail takes in the best of the lot, foraging out into the bush like the spokes of a wheel from a hub of cafes, shops and galleries. With so much scenery, so many picnic spots and walking tracks to choose from, as well as a ready retreat to the village if it all gets too much, this drive can be confidently tackled in any weather.

The five main 'spokes' of the tour go to Pulpit Rock, Govetts Leap, Evans Lookout, Megalong Valley and Shipley Plateau and can be done in any order, but to keep it simple we'll go clockwise, starting in the north. Many locals reckon Pulpit Rock is the best of many viewpoints on the rim of the spectacular Grose Valley. It may be a little harder to get to, being a ten minute walk from the car, but it sure is right 'out there' on a point of rock hanging above the green depths.

The view stretches way down the main valley past the renowned Blue Gum Forest and Mt Hay and back up to the head of Govett Gorge. Blue Gum Forest became the kernel of Blue Mountains National Park after a struggle to save it in the 1930s, but in an even more visionary move the valley was actually reserved from sale as a 'national spectacle' way back in 1875.

Anyone not too scared of heights should take the stairs down to the lowest lookout, where you can peer straight down onto a dark rainforest canopy. And right beside the track is a rare mallee – one of more than 100 types of eucalypt growing in the Greater Blue Mountains that helped win World Heritage recognition for the region.

Blackheath's picturesque streets lead to Govetts Leap Lookout and then Evans Lookout for some different perspectives on the mighty Grose – or more correctly the Govett Gorge branch of the valley. One can never tire of these scenes, always inspiring, constantly changing with the mountain light. Whether in noonday brightness, with valley cloud at dawn, sunset lighting the cliffs or shadowed by cloud, there's always something new revealed.

An interesting feature of these two lookouts is the intricate and historic stonework used in some of the facilities. Govetts Leap has a picnic area and nearby is the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre run by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Don't go past without checking out the informative exhibition and the comprehensive range of books, maps and other products on the Blue Mountains.

The Grose Valley lookouts are the focus of an extensive network of walking tracks. One

superb walk that ties it all together is the cliff-top track from Pulpit Rock, past Govetts Leap to Evans Lookout. A drop-off at one end and a pickup at the other makes for the perfect half-day outing – and if that's not enough you can add in the slightly more strenuous Grand Canyon track, widely regarded as one of the most impressive and unique walks in the mountains.

You'll need an early start to do all that and finish the rest of the drive. Back through the centre of Blackheath and across the railway line leads to the longest 'spoke' of the day: Megalong Valley. What a contrast from the Grose! Although partly cliff-bound, this is a valley that you can drive into, and that is mostly settled for residences and grazing. Drained by the Coxs River, the valley was settled as early as the 1830s – and not from the mountains or the west as one might think, but up the river from the Burratorang Valley (now flooded by Warragamba Dam).

Megalong Valley Road descends steeply into Blackheath Glen and through one of the most accessible rainforest glades in the mountains. Short walking tracks lead into Coachwood Glen and Mermaids Cave, with huge cliffs towering above. Further down is a small picnic and camping area beside the creek. Then the road breaks out of the tall forest onto the valley floor, where the cliffs stand back in majesty.

Old Ford Reserve on Megalong Creek is another camping and picnic site, with a chance for a dip in the cool water. Just nearby the road crosses the historic Six Foot Track, so named because it was constructed to that width (nearly two metres) as a bridle track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves in 1884. The eight-hour ride remained the main access to the caves until motor vehicles took over early in the 20th Century.

Some fascinating accounts of what we would now regard as that arduous journey survive from those days and enliven the experience for many modern walkers on the three-day trek. The section from the Explorers Tree at Katoomba to the Old Ford is a very enjoyable downhill day-walk, and you can also walk from Old Ford to the Coxs River and back.

If short of time you could turn around here, but driving on to the end of the road on the edge of the wilderness is recommended. The road soon turns to gravel and descends into the sharp valley of Galong Creek. Here much of the historic property 'Green Gully', taken up by the Carlon family in about 1840, has been added to Blue Mountains National Park. Up the top of the far hill is a small camping area.

The campsite looks out over the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness that stretches away to the south. Pioneer bushwalker and conservationist Myles Dunphy, (who in the 1930s first advocated for a great national park running the length of the Blue Mountains) made these mountains his stamping ground and came up with many of the place-names on today's maps: the Wild Dog Mountains, Mount Warrigal, Cloudmaker and many more. Today the campsite is a jumping-off point for bushwalkers heading out to the Wild Dog Mountains, Splendour Rock and the Coxs River. But with no marked tracks in the wilderness only experienced teams should contemplate this rugged country. Much of this part of the national park is also designated as a water catchment Special Area, providing clean runoff for Lake Burratorang, Sydney's main water supply and so is subject to access restrictions.

With nowhere else to go it's time to turn around and drive most of the way back to Blackheath. Along the road are plenty of other attractions, including cabin accommodation, horse-riding and tea rooms.

Then there's one more 'spoke' to our journey: Shipley Plateau, a southern extension of the main Blackheath plateau, with a mix of bush, small farms, galleries, orchards and residences.

The main attractions for travellers are two lookouts, not as famous as their Grose Valley cousins but of equal magnificence. The vista from Hargraves Lookout reaches out over the now-familiar Megalong Valley and south into the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness, past the Wild Dog Mountains to the distant heights of Kanangra Walls and the Krungle Bunglee Range. This is all country where the Gundungurra people roamed. Many Gundungurra names remain in some form on the land, and the people retain strong connections today.

On the opposite end of Shipley Plateau, Mount Blackheath Lookout looks to the north and west to the Great Divide, over the Kanimbla Valley (which is really another part of the Coxs River valley). Because it catches the uplift from westerly winds, this is a popular spot for launching hang-gliders and parasails. In the right weather it can be quite a spectator sport to watch the colourful canopies riding the thermals. And after a long day of sightseeing, Mount Blackheath is the perfect place to relax and watch the sun go down before returning to the comforts of Blackheath.

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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