

A STEP BACK IN **TIME**

The Wolgan Valley is a return to the days when pioneers hacked a living straight out of the Aussie bush

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The walk around the mining ruins was well sign posted with plenty of information

The Blue Mountains area west of Sydney is truly a natural wonder. From the remarkable "Three Sisters" rock formation at Katoomba through to the underground experience of the Jenalong Caves, there are plenty of things to see and do. And if you want to escape the big smoke for a few peaceful days camping, then you'll find that here as well. One of the best places to get away from it all is at Newnes. Just 47km and less than an hour's drive north of Lithgow, it lies at the furthest reach of the Wolgan Valley at the site of an abandoned oil shale mining operation.

Lithgow is the best place for supplies if you need anything on the way out to the campground; it is a major town with fuel,

supermarkets, restaurants, medical care, camping equipment and motor vehicle repairers and spare parts. Access to Newnes is via Lidsdale from the Castlereagh Highway. As you head towards Mudgee, turn right and follow the Wolgan Road past the Angus Place Colliery, down through the Wolgan Pass and all the way to the end until you hit the camping grounds and the mining ruins.

The oil shale mining operations were started in 1906 and operated on and off until finally closing in 1932 due to operational costs. All that now remains of a once thriving township is the old hotel, (now a general store and information centre) as well as the ruins of the mining plant itself which has been signposted to create an interesting walking tour. The ruins are reached by crossing the Wolgan River at the shallow ford near the hotel either by foot or 4WD, and following the road around to the left along what was once the route of the old railway line.

The railway line itself has an interesting history and forms part of a longer walk to the top of the escarpment through to what is now known as the 'Glow Worm Tunnel'. This walk is approximately 22km return but can be easily shortened by driving 7km back down the Wolgan Road to the weir crossing and hiking in from there. The tunnel was originally built as part of the railway to transport building materials and goods into Newnes and to take the mined shale out. As such it continued all the way to the Bells Line of Road where it joined up with the main



There are heaps of fantastic 4WD tracks close by, such as the Baal Bone Gap track

NEWNES IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF AUSTRALIA'S EARLY SHALE MINING ENDEAVOURS AND RAILROAD ENGINEERING FEATS



WHERE:

Newnes is located on the western side of the Blue Mountains and Wollemi National Park in NSW. The easiest access is via Lithgow and is approximately 34km north of Lidsdale along the Wolgan Road. The more interesting way in is via Newnes Forest Road behind the Zig Zag Railway until it meets up with Blackfellows Hand Track.

CAMPING:

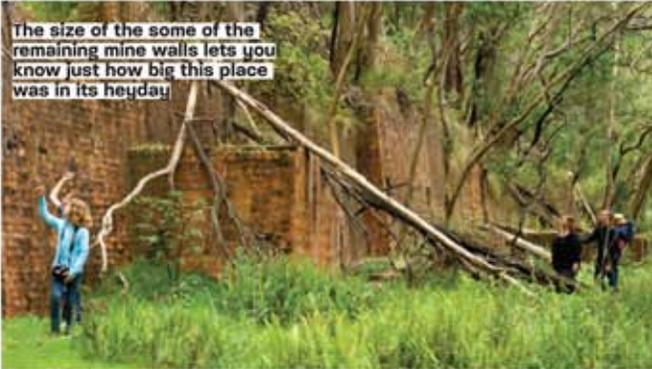
Newnes Flat Camping Ground is located on the western side of the Wolgan River. There is a pit toilet and established fire places and plenty of room for large groups. For a more peaceful campsite, cross to the eastern side of the Wolgan River (shallow, sandy crossing) and turn left to find a few smaller, more secluded campsites. Camping is free at both of these sites. There is paid camping at the private campground opposite the old Newnes Hotel.

WHAT TO TAKE:

You will need to be completely self sufficient for this trip. The old Newnes Hotel operates as a general store on weekends but only has a few basic supplies. Bring your own firewood or purchase from the general store. Water is available from the river but must be boiled first.

There were some great spots in the river perfect for the kids to splash around in

The size of some of the remaining mine walls lets you know just how big this place was in its heyday



Sydney railway line between Zig Zag and Bell.

The track leading around the mining ruins is well formed and the tour begins at the top of the hill before slowly winding its way down through the remnant of the plant, with plenty of engraved plaques along the way explaining the purpose of the many buildings, chimneys and ovens. It is quite amazing to stand in front of these ruins and imagine the many people that use to live and work here less than a hundred years ago. There are still quite a few structures standing, albeit at different stages of collapse and care should be taken, particularly where grass may have overgrown former underground tunnels and mines.

After the tour and before you cross back over the river, take some time to check your camping options on this side of the Wolgan as it is usually quieter,



owing to the need of a 4WD for the water crossing. There is one large area, perfect for groups as well as three or four smaller areas that will suit people camping by themselves.

The main camping area is on the western side of the river where the Wolgan Road finishes at an open grassy area with magnificent views of the escarpment on all sides and plenty of room for both large groups and those that want to tuck themselves away into a bush corner and enjoy the peace



The walking trail to the Shale Mine Ruins is quite short, although we did spend a few hours exploring here

and solitude. We were fortunate enough to be travelling mid-week and found the campground deserted upon arrival, so we were able to set up right in the middle and make the most of the sunshine both early in the morning and late into the evening.

Facilities are basic with two drop toilets on site and firewood able to be purchased from the general store but there is no drinking water unless you are willing to draw it from the river and boil it first. We saw quite a few small kangaroos that call this area home as well as a couple of wombats that came out every afternoon to forage for food. The kids enjoyed following the wombats around for a while as they don't often get to see one up this close, and the wombats didn't seem to mind either as long as the kids kept their distance. They were called back when dinner was just about ready and we were pleased to see that the weather had favoured us with a clear night for stargazing as we relaxed around the fire.



There were plenty of good puddles to play in on the way to the Lost City

The next day saw us up late for a leisurely breakfast before heading off to explore Blackfellows Hand Trail and begin the search for the so-called 'Lost City' somewhere in the middle of the Newnes State Forest.

Blackfellows Hand Trail is signposted not too far from the top of the Wolgan Pass, and a left turn off the bitumen will have you heading uphill on a rough dirt track that very quickly takes you into some of the most beautiful



The clouds cleared away at night and gave us a great view to the heavens

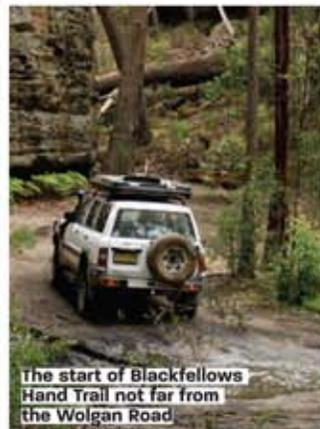
bushland in the area. Lush green ferns and rocky pagodas line each side of the track and we found ourselves pulling over close to a large cave like overhang so we could explore the area on foot.

A walking track leads from the overhang through the fern forest for a few hundred metres before ending in a sort of small amphitheatre, where we found ourselves surrounded by rock walls on three sides with a small trickle of water dropping down onto the end of the path before disappearing under the rocks and presumably into an underground creek. We turned around and retraced our steps back to the 4WDs and were soon driving towards the top of the ridge around a short winding section that then straightened out into a long uphill climb with several erosion mounds along the way.

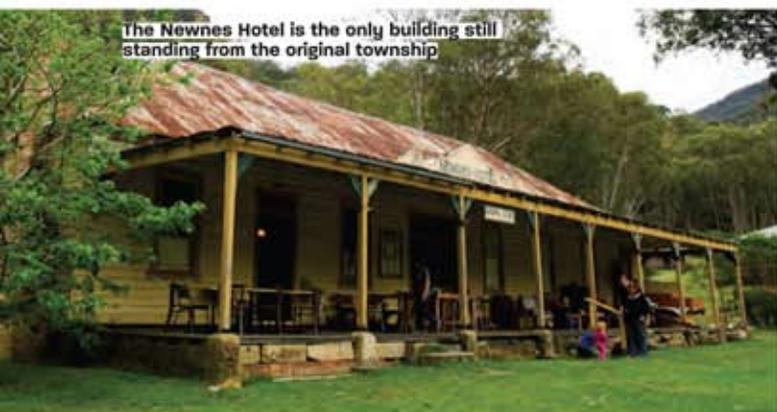
Not far up and the surroundings had changes back to typical dry bushland scrub and we enjoyed the next half hour

of easy driving until we hit the intersection with the Glow Worm Tunnel Road at Bungleboori Picnic Grounds. This used to be a nice quiet place to camp, but unfortunately it has turned into a bit of a mess with quite a bit of rubbish strewn about the place and nowhere really appealing enough to want to set up camp for the night.

It's handy to do a bit of research if heading to the Lost City as it is not signposted. The start of the track is almost opposite the picnic area intersection, only a few metres back up Blackfellows Hand Trail, so keep an eye out for a track leading off to the left. We'd had some rain in the preceding days so there were quite a few long muddy pools across the track, which we stopped and checked before driving through but nothing we came across was over the hub caps so we able to progress quite quickly. Be sure to take the left-hand track at the



The start of Blackfellows Hand Trail not far from the Wolgan Road



The Newnes Hotel is the only building still standing from the original township

SUPPLIES AND FACILITIES:

The nearest major town is Lithgow, approximately 50km or just over an hour's drive away. Lithgow has everything you will need including supermarkets, camping supplies, motor vehicle repairers and spare parts, hospital and pharmacies.

TRIP STANDARD:

Trips are rated A through to E, with A meaning only suited to vehicles with an extreme level of off-road modification and E meaning perfectly suited for all types of 4WD vehicles. This trip would be rated E, with access to the main campground very easy going. If crossing the Wolgan River or visiting the Glow Worm tunnel the rating would be D; and if attempting the Baal Bone Gap track then a C rating would apply with high clearance and lower tyre pressures recommended.

MAPS AND GUIDES:

NSW Topographical Maps 1:25000
Lithgow 8931-3S
Cullen Bullen 8931-3N
Ben Bullen 8931-4S

GPS COORDINATES:

33° 10' 23"S, 150° 14' 22"E

FUEL:

at Lithgow
ULP: \$1.51/L
Diesel: \$1.58/L

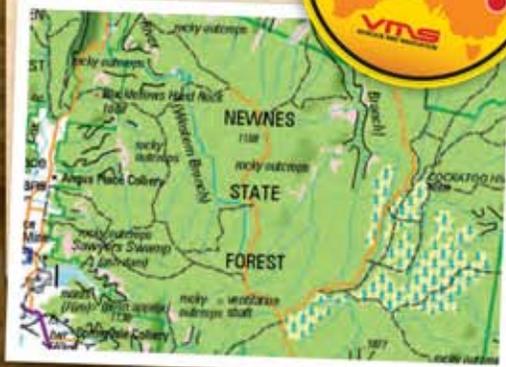
BUDGET ATTRACTIONS:

Camping, 4WD touring, Glow Worm Tunnel walk, Newnes Mining Ruins walk, The Lost City

CONTACTS:

Newnes Hotel
Open Saturday and Sundays only
Phone: (02) 6355 1247

NPWS Blackheath
(02) 4787 8877
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks/parkCamping.aspx?id=N0051



Crossing the shallow
Wolgan River at Newnes



The drive to the Lost City passed through a picturesque gully of ferns

The walk through the forest of ferns was amazing



first Y-Junction and continue on to the end, disregarding any other tracks branching off to either side. The road ends at a large turning bay where you can park and walk the last fifty metres down to the amazing rocky pagados overlooking the canyons and river below. The name 'Lost City' is derived from these pagados whose appearance is strikingly similar to a city landscape when viewed from a distance.

We spent some time here, marvelling at the scenery, climbing the pagados and taking plenty of photos, before eventually climbing back into the 4WD for the trip back to camp. Originally we had planned to also drive out

to the Glow Worm Tunnel as well, but our late start, extra time spent here and also the fact that we had all been there before, made the decision to head back to camp and have a drink around the fire a popular one. For those with young kids, the Glow Worm Tunnel is a great attraction, just head back to Bungleboori Picnic Area and take the Glow Worm Tunnel Road all the way to the end. Be sure to pack a couple of torches as it is completely dark inside and usually a little wet as well as there is a small creek (actually just a trickle of water) that flows permanently through the tunnel.

Just before the campsite we stopped to have a look around the

old Newnes Hotel. Now set up as a (basic) general store as well as a tourist information centre, the owner Thomas was only too keen to bend our ear with some of the history of the township and shale mining efforts. We were soon all hunched over a large laminated map that he pulled out as he began explaining just how big the original settlement was and where everything was located. Our quick chat had soon turned into half an hour, so we thanked Thomas for sharing the town's story and within a few minutes were building up the fire back at camp and getting dinner underway as we prepared for another relaxing evening.

The next morning was to be our last, and we opted to pack up early before exploring some of the walking tracks down around

the river. The creek has a few nice little waterholes around, plus a couple of short shallow rapid sections that would be great to sit in when the sun was at its hottest. As the weather wasn't quite warm enough for a swim, we noted these spots for the next time and after completing a bit of a loop up to the escarpment and back, hopped into the 4WD for the trip back home.

Newnes certainly has everything you could want for a relaxing bush weekend; great scenery, a beautiful river, plenty of 4WDing, bushwalks; and for those that like to revisit Australia's past, a fantastic walking tour of its early shale mining endeavours and railroad engineering feats. We all enjoyed it and will certainly be back to explore this area again. ▲

Lost city is an incredible sight and is well worth the drive



The kids slept really well in the roof top tent