

## The Eastern Escarpment of the Lower Blue Mountains

### History

The Eastern Escarpment of the Lower Blue Mountains is steeped in "European" history of NSW. From the exploration and earliest crossings of the mountains to the early roadworks and ultimately to the railway - - the Lapstone Hill area was part of the mountain barrier that had to be overcome in order to open the way to the pastures and agricultural land that was sorely needed by the infant colony in the early days after settlement in 1788. The area we plan to traverse today will highlight the efforts to overcome the barrier - - while we walk you might spare a thought for those hardy souls that ventured and toiled hereabouts in days gone by.

### The Walk

From our morning tea rendezvous in High Street Glenbrook, we take a short walk in a southerly direction through cleared bush to Barnett Street where we turn east, skirting around the locked barrier of Knapsack Park and onto the fire trail heading towards Elizabeth and Marge's Lookouts. At the point where the track divides (approx 700m) we take the track on the right towards Elizabeth L/O where we can enjoy the sweeping vista to the east towards Emu Plains, Penrith and the Cumberland Plain beyond.

We look for the track to the south of the lookout which winds down Knapsack Gully to the base of the Knapsack Viaduct, designed by John Whitton, the "father" of NSW railways, and opened for rail traffic in 1865. Take some time to admire the structure and read the inscription. At that time the bridge was described as being the " - - most imposing, picturesque, finely proportioned and substantial structure of which New South Wales can boast."

We then make our way up the escarpment via path and steps to the lookout at the northern end of the Lapstone Zig-Zag (the top dead-end) where we can catch our breath and again view the plain, particularly to the north-east - - look for the Penrith Regatta Centre in the middle distance.

The Lapstone Zig-Zag was part of the route of the original railway over the Blue Mountains - - from Penrith, through Emu Plains, over the Knapsack Viaduct to the "bottom points" (the site of which we will see later). The line then rose northwards to the top dead-end, then southwards towards Knapsack Street where it generally followed the path of the existing Great Western Highway towards Glenbrook. We walk some 800m along the south-bound track, past the old Lucasville platform, through the original cuttings and looking out for original sandstone steps and culverts along the way, to the end of Knapsack Street and the descriptive information board. We then make our way back north approx 300m and find a track leading east and down to the old quarry and the Great Western Highway.

Following the footpath south, we walk under the GWH beside the Lapstone exit road and towards the water reservoir, the location of the original "bottom points". Our walk will take us on a sweeping curve to the west, to the right of the reservoir, but first we should have a quick look at an indicator of the oldest European "location" on our walk. This is a "Footsteps in Time" marker, some 100m to the left and south of the water tank. The marker identifies one of surveyor William Evans' trig points (November 1813) which followed Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson's trail (May 1813) and is the likely route of Cox's original road (July 1814) over the Blue Mountains.

We walk back to the reservoir and up Tunnel Gully following the second of the eastern escarpment railway routes, which bypassed the Zig-Zag and led towards the eastern portal of the first railway tunnel (1892). The tunnel became necessary because of the need for longer trains and to avoid delays in "switching" the trains back and forth along the Zig-Zag. We make our way up the Tunnel Gully cutting and consider the effort required to open the cutting, largely by way of manpower and horsepower assisted by "primitive" explosives. As we traverse the cutting we can consider where Arthur Streeton might have drawn his sketches and paintings depicting the construction of Lapstone tunnel. "Fires On" (1891) is undoubtedly one of the iconic Australian landscape paintings.

We make our way through the badly overgrown gully and come to the impressive eastern portal of the Lapstone tunnel (1892). The tunnel itself (so we are told) is a well-preserved structure some 660 metres long, but unfortunately not accessible to the public as it is currently used for growing mushrooms! There was a time during WW2 that the tunnel was "secretly" used by the Army for the storage of some pretty nasty gas-producing substances, but that's another story! A short climb beyond the roof of the tunnel in a generally south-westerly direction brings us to a point north of the Lapstone Oval and we follow the fire trail westerly until it intersects with the bed of the "tramway" built to service the construction of the (second) Lapstone tunnel (1913?). We can follow this old railbed south to Explorers Road where we make our way to the Lapstone School Carpark approx 200m to our right and our transport to our vehicles and then to lunch.

***The committee of the Blue Mountains Branch of the National Trust hope that you have enjoyed your walk today - - we'd love you to join us again sometime.***