

Walk 1.13

PHILOSOPHERS WALK

At the Philosophers Cave. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

Walk 1.13

Philosophers Walk

The weather

Overcast all day, threatening rain from time to time. Forty-eight hours previously Newnes was drenched with 157 millimetres of rain. Underfoot was soggy and slippery. Non-perennial waterfalls abounded everywhere. Temperature range 17–23 degrees C.

Background notes

The Philosophers Walk makes use of two tracks constructed by rock climbers to access the strenuous climbs offered by Old Baldy. The take-off point at GR 437 263 is one such track. The other is the cairn marker at the back of the old Manager's House tennis court at GR 434 262. The meandering track, including the climb to the viewing

point, is about two kilometres in length. The rest of the walk makes use of the existing road network.

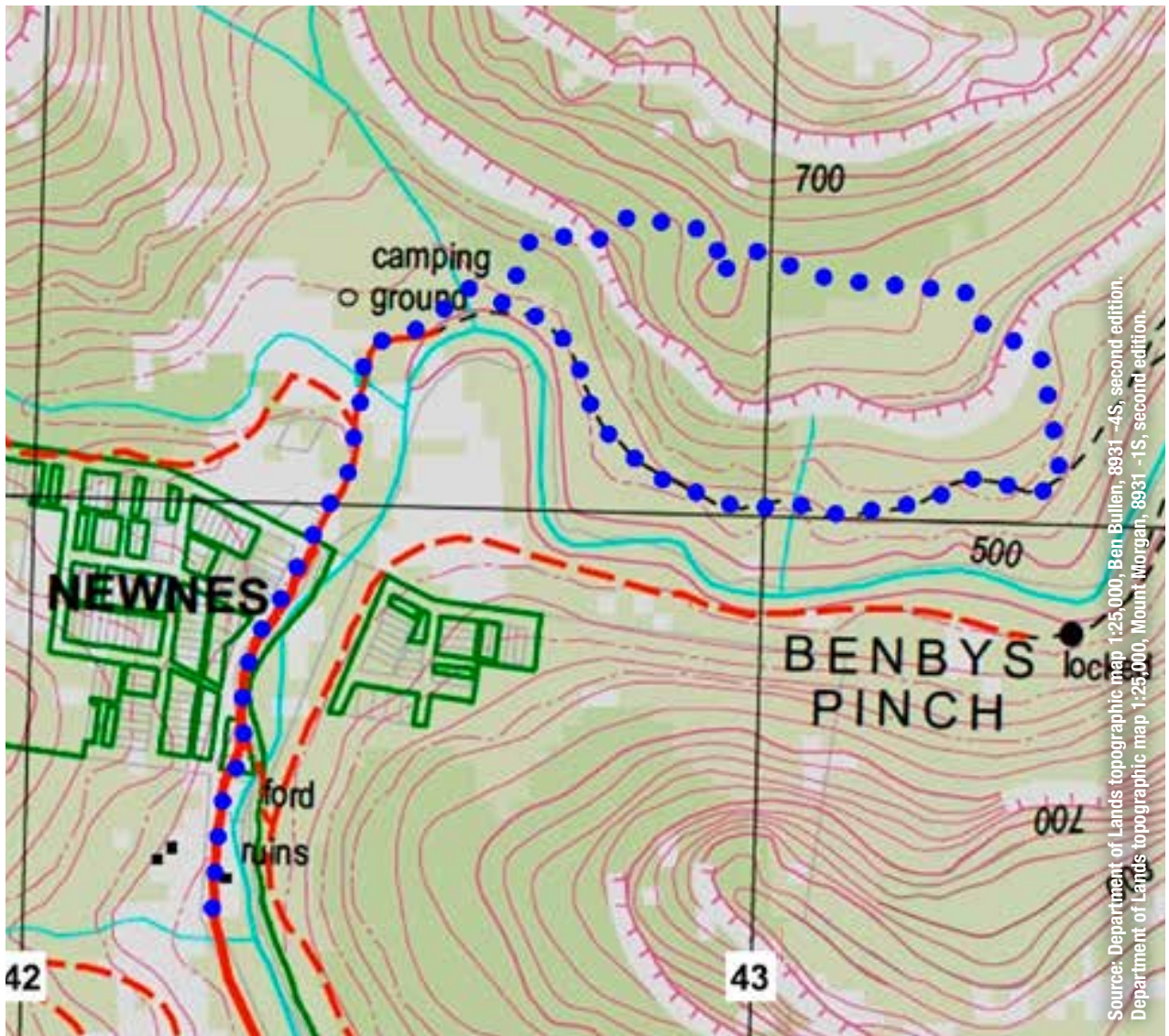
Please also refer to the notes accompanying Walk 1.12.

Philosophers Walk (1.5 hours round walk, medium), as described in the brochure available from Thomas Ebersoll, Newnes Holiday Cabins:

This walk leads you along the bottom of the cliffs of 'Old Baldy', through a garden of massive rocks which have fallen off the cliff many thousands of years ago. Now they lie around the landscape covered in mosses and orchids, sculptures from a long-gone time.

From the Hotel, walk to the Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground and proceed across to the southernmost end where you cross Cathedral Canyon Gully on treated pine log steps. Continue on this track for about one hundred metres where you come to a small cairn on your left.

Maps etc.	Department of Lands topographic map 1:25,000, Ben Bullen, 8931 -4S, second edition. Department of Lands topographic map 1:25,000, Mount Morgan, 8931 -1S, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.
Walk description and route	A short circular walk that explores the talus slopes beneath Old Baldy. On a well-marked track, the walk includes a high point for pretty views over the Wolgan Valley.
Gear issues	First aid kit, one litre of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head- and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass.
Comments	This is one of the short walks that are offered to guests staying at the Newnes Holiday Cabins, operated by Thomas Ebersoll. Date walked: 24 March 2017.



Erosion pieces below the hillock on the Philosophers Walk. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX



John Fox takes a picture of the profile of the unnamed hillock. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

This is the start of the Philosopher's Walk. The path winds up a steep slope. You reach some big rocks with a cave and the 'Philosopher's Stone'. Continue on the path up the slope and you come to a saddle with another cairn. From here you can climb an isolated hill which provides for another grand view back to the Hotel, over Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground and across to Mystery Mountain.

From the saddle the track gently winds down through a garden of big rocks and another cave. You come to the 'Upturned Giant's Table' and just passed that the track comes down steeply to another cairn. From this junction with an old industrial site track the left hand goes up into Petrie's

Gully and right hand goes back through the former Tennis Court of the Manager's Residence where you find the decaying carcasses of two old Ford 'Zephyr' cars left by a former resident. Further down you get to a memorial to a bushwalker who wanted to be remembered at "his favourite place". The ruins of the Manager's Residence show you what a splendid place this must have been including the landscaped gardens around it. If you walk here in August/September the jonquils in the former gardens flower with their rich, wonderful perfume.

Just beyond the Manager's Residence you find the road (turn right) which gets you back to the Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground.



View down the Wolgan Valley towards the junction of Carne Creek and Barton Creek from the top of the unnamed hillock. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

Track notes

The last nine kilometre drive into Newnes on the day was very slow, taking 20 minutes over a nightmare of potholes and a lot of surface water. The previous day the area had been drenched with 157 millimetres of rain. On arrival we were greeted by Thomas Ebersoll, who showed us the latest improvements he had completed on the old hotel building. The new back verandah is stunning, and the new manager's residential quarters within the building are close to fit-out. A section of the old rusting galvanised roof has now been replaced. Thomas has a full program of works ahead, so he elected not to join the walk party.

At 0931, we set out on a walk completed by hundreds of visitors every year, but not documented. The first section is along the Wolgan Road, which due to the lack of any



In the grounds of the former Fell's House. The cliff face of Old Baldy forms an impressive backdrop.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS



Relics from the Wolgan Valley Railway days on show for visitors to enjoy the past. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

name change actually extends to the fork where the Petries Gully Track heads north east and the Pipeline Track heads east. The road is no longer trafficable due to the washout at Cathedral Canyon Gully, the non-perennial waterway on the eastern edge of Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground. Originally this road led to the impressive, Yucca-flanked, gated entrance of the Manager's House and associated curtilage lands at GR 433 260.

After walking less than 50 metres from the hotel along the Wolgan Road, there is a static display on the left-hand side of old railway rolling stock bearing the names of the Commonwealth Oil Corporation and, from a later era, of the former Newnes Industrial Complex, of John Fell and Co. A section of the rail line used for the railway track between Newnes and Newnes Junction on the Western

Line is also on display. Directly opposite and now almost captured by erosion from the Wolgan River are the sandstone foundations of the former Newnes Cooperative, and adjoining these, the foundations of the Newnes butcher's shop. Immediately north of these foundations is a collection of rusting machinery transported in by John Fell from the Eveleigh Railway workshops in Sydney. Fell had grand ideas of using this machinery to build Shay locomotives, but like so much else at Newnes this proved to be just a dream.

Another 100 metres further down the road, there is a rough ford crossing of the Wolgan River that today provides access for campers and walkers to the Wolgan River Trail. The ford is unconstructed and is not recommended during high water or wet weather.

Moving on, there are several small

fenced and gated plots of land on the left-hand side. These plots have legal title, and the current owners often come and camp on their own land.

The next item of interest encountered is the Newnes Flat Picnic Area (NPWS designation). This area is indiscriminately used for camping, and presumably by day visitors as well. It is equipped with fixed barbeque places. There is no formal identification of the Wollemi National Park boundary at GR 425 259, and because of the relaxed nature of the area, it is unnecessary. What is defined on the topographic map is the 'designated built-up area' of Newnes. At 0958, we crossed a flowing Little Capertee Creek, using improvised stepping stones to keep our feet dry (a very unusual problem).

The creek crossing defines the western boundary of Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground. Whilst there were a few campers in residence, they were easily outnumbered by dozens of tame Kangaroos, the unpaid lawnmowers of the area.

By 1002, we had crossed the camping ground and also the scoured-out section of Cathedral Canyon Gully, using the improvised cut treated pine-log stairs. Since the decision to abandon the Newnes Industrial Complex and transfer the retorting equipment to Glen Davis, plus the sale of remaining major items of value and pillaging of bricks and other items, the road has had no maintenance. After successive floods, particularly the big ones that caused the



The Giants Upturned Table, an unmistakable sight on the Philosophers Walk. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

loss of the Billiard Hall in 1985 and undermined the old Newnes Hotel in August 1986, there has been no reason to maintain the road.

On the eastern side of Cathedral Canyon Gully, and immediately on the left, there are several small overgrown piles of bricks and a set of three brick steps, at 1005. This evidence is all that remains of a house that was occupied by Ronny Burke's parents. He was born in that house.

We moved on another 50 metres and, at 1009, reached a cairn of stones marking the start of the Philosophers Walk. The track is defined by placed



The track up to the top of the unnamed hillock on the Philosophers Walk. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

logs and stones, and easily identified by compressed leaves. The way forward is a steady, often zigzagging climb through large broken boulders encrusted with mosses and lichens.

At 1014, we came to a large tilted boulder that forms a protected dry area, and within this there is the Philosophers Stone. This is a flat rock suitable for sitting on and becoming contemplative, if that takes your fancy.

After photos, we scrambled up the next section and found a place surrounded by large boulders to have morning tea, at 1024.

From this location, we could see the saddle mentioned in the notes, and also the small hillock from where the views of the Wolgan Valley are extensive. By 1034, we had reached the crest of the saddle where a cairn marks the start of a short track to the top of the hillock. The hillock is compact, and given its location less than 25% of the way up to the top of Old Baldy, the view is quite remarkable.

At the top, there is a convenient rock where you can sit and take in the view. Panning from the east, the cliffs are those of Island Mountain⁶⁹, which terminates at its western end as Mystery Mountain. Then there is a view of the Wolgan Valley looking upstream. Nestled on the valley floor is the Newnes Hotel, and just visible are the rooftops of some of the holiday cabins. Above these and further west is a cliff profile that conceals Dave's Pass.⁷⁰ Closer, and visually below the observer, is the green sward of the Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground.

⁶⁹ Island Mountain is not so much a mountain as an elevated area bounded on three sides – west, north and east – by a huge loop of the Wolgan River. The southern side is Deanes Creek. This proscribed area is about 24 sq km. (Ref: *SMH*, 10 January 1906, p. 7, Proposed Tramway Route, records engineering difficulties in crossing Constance Gorge and Island Mountain; Other References: Tramway from Wolgan to Clarence. Survey Plan M12435. Surveyed by John Haydon Cardew, Licensed Surveyor, 13 December 1905. Mount Morgan topographic map). See Keats, Michael, and Fox, Brian Kenneth, *The Gardens of Stone National Park and beyond, Book 2*, Walks 2.13 & 2.25, for detailed track notes.

⁷⁰ Daves Pass is a natural pass linking the top of the cliff line to Newnes, 700 m west of the old Newnes Hotel. Described and named by Michael Keats on a Bush Club walk, 9 April 2008: *Dave (David) Dash found one that looked possible. It resolved into one of the most beautiful canyon descents I have experienced anywhere. It was richly endowed with Tree Ferns and Epiphytes.* Ben Bullen topographic map: top is GR 414 255, bottom is GR 416 254. See Keats, Michael and Fox, Brian Kenneth, *The Gardens of Stone National Park and beyond, Book 2*, Walk 2.9 for detailed track notes.



Michael Keats ponders a philosophical question in the Philosophers Cave. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

Beyond the camping ground the lower reaches of Little Capertee Creek stretch into the distance (at 1041).

After descending the hillock, we reconnected with the track and continued walking east. Walking here in the open forest is very pleasant. Along the way, is an upturned rock with one surface almost as flat as a billiard table. This is the rock known as the Upturned Giant's Table. Fortuitously, the surface is orientated in such a way that no moss, lichens or epiphytes grow on it. The analogy of a tabletop is perfect (at 1058).

About 20 metres on, the track descends rapidly to a cairn of rocks that marks the junction of the Philosophers Walk Track with an old

road. If you follow this road to the left you enter the wonderful green world of Petries Gully. To the right, the road leads to the back entrance of the Manager's House via the tennis court and the exotic plant garden that used to surround the house.

The former tennis court area is clearly defined. Unfortunately, it is also the resting place of two vandalised Ford Zephyr cars. Car parts are scattered about and, as rubbish attracts other rubbish, the area comes as a rude shock after the pristine earlier part of the track (at 1106).

Entering a more pleasant section of the former house grounds, it is quite amazing to note how many exotic trees, shrubs and bulbs have survived



Brian Fox at a section of the Philosophers Walk.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS



Brickwork identifying the site of the Fell's House and the surrounding verandah.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

since the house was demolished.⁷¹ I did a quick audit of the plant species I could identify. In no order, I observed Elm, Cypress Pines, Oleanders, Malus species, Crepe Myrtles, Yuccas, Aloes, and Privet. In spring, there are drifts of Jonquils. Walking through the grounds, we came across a well-built vehicle servicing pit and numerous brick garden borders, an ornamental pond, and pipe work that once would have served to deliver water to a garden fountain.

Making our way through the garden, we ultimately arrived at the junction of the Manager's House driveway with the Wolgan Road, at 1110. Possibly

there were ornamental gates here at one time. The driveway edging is still in place, as are the Yucca plants still on duty as sentinels to a once grand and much-loved home.

On the Wolgan Road, we noted the effort expended to ensure that the road to the Manager's House was always drivable. Still visible, there are frequent culverts made using 15 inch diameter glazed terracotta pipes (identified at GR 433 261, GR 430 260, and GR 428 261). All along the high side of the road is a well-crafted catchment drain built so that water flowing off the steep slopes is carried away well before

⁷¹ Later in the day, we caught up with Glen Day, who currently lives in a small cottage in Little Capertee Creek. He used to occupy the Manager's House and was moved out when the building was demolished and the building materials recycled. Day was vague about when this happened, but it was probably in the 1970s.



Explanatory sign showing the original site of the Newnes Hotel. Foundation walls can be still seen.

PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

it could destroy the road surface. These measures account for why this section of the Wolgan Road is still in drivable condition almost a century since the last road maintenance crew was on the job.

There is another set of ruins of a substantial building at approximately GR 431 260. The most impressive relic of the building is an imposing set of brick steps that would have made for a grand entry.⁷² Built brick terraces march up the hill behind.⁷³ (Any thoughts on the use /occupant of this building would

be appreciated). About 100 metres further along from the steps, there is currently a well-decorated bower from a very busy Bower Bird. The blue item collection is truly amazing, and even included a blue shoelace.

Slightly off to the south of the Wolgan Road, there is a stand of exotic trees, possibly Aspens, a sure sign of intensive and prolonged early European occupation. On a previous visit, a whole collection of domestic items was discovered within a fenced area on an elevated river flat.

⁷² A study of a picture on page 27 of Taylor, G J, *Newnes – History of a Blue Mountains Oil-Shale Town* shows this as a company residence of Dr Petrie, Assistant Manager, Newnes Oil Works. Verification is still required.

⁷³ Thomas Ebersoll thinks that the house may have had a secondary use as a home for Stan Grimshaw, one of the patrol men who were engaged to ride the length of the Pipeline from Newnes to Glen Davis on a daily basis to report on its condition or any suspicious activity.



Fenced plots of land along the alignment of the Wolgan Road. These plots, originally bought through auction by residents of Newnes in the early 20th century, are Torrens Title, and the current owners, usually descendants, often come and camp on their property. The plots are too small to permit permanent buildings.

PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

The area is roughly trapezium-shaped, with fence posts at close intervals. Old plaited wire cable had been repurposed to act as the main connector between the posts;

chicken wire mesh extended down to and possibly into the ground. The enclosed space is about 50 x 40 x 70 x 30 metres (maybe a vegetable garden).

Within the enclosed space are several solid brick foundation structures that may have supported machinery, but there is no evidence of mountings of any kind. A large 400 gallon square water tank is located nearby. No evidence could be found that it was connected by a pump to the Wolgan River (at 1140).

At 1143, we reconnected with the take-off point for the Philosophers Walk. At 1200, we sat down on the old Newnes Hotel verandah and engaged Thomas in conversation, and then had a cup of tea followed by lunch.



Kangaroos graze on Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground. The Newnes Arch is hidden by the forest on the cliffs above

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

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Total distance walked 5.2 km.

Total ascents 136 m.

Table of times, locations and grid references – Walk 1.13. Philosophers Walk.
No GPS file exists for this walk; only 3 digit GRs are available.

TIME	LOCATION	GRID REFERENCE
0925	Newnes Hotel verandah	422 254
0931	Old foundations of the Miners' Cooperative	423 255
0935	COC and J Fell and Co. rolling stock + railway line	423 255
0938	Old foundations of the hotel and butchers shop	423 256
0944	Ford across the Wolgan River	423 257
0949	Fenced lots of private land	423 259
0955	Newnes Flat Picnic Area	424 260
0958	Cross Little Capertee Creek	424 262
0959	Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground + kangaroos	424 263
1002	Cross Cathedral Canyon Gully	425 263
1005	Foundations of the former Bourke residence	426 263
1009	Cairn marking the start of the Philosophers Walk	427 263
1010	Large boulders covered in moss and lichen	427 263
1014	Philosophers Cave and Philosophers Stone	428 264
1024	Morning tea	428 264
1039	Track head for route up hillock for view	429 264
1041	On top of hillock with great views, 6 minutes	429 265
1054	Walking in open forest	431 263
1058	Upturned Giant's Table	432 263
1102	Cairn and junction with a road to Petries Gully	434 262
1106	Wandering in the grounds of the Manager's House	434 262
1110	Drive /entrance to the Manager's House	433 260
1121	Terracotta pipe culvert	433 261
1125	In front of the entrance stairs to John Petrie's residence	431 260
1128	Bower Bird bower	431 260
1134	Terracotta pipe culvert	430 260
1139	Terracotta pipe culvert	428 261
1140	Fenced area and water tank	427 260
1143	Cairn marking the start of the Philosophers Walk	427 263
1200	Newnes Hotel verandah	422 254