



Grand

IN NAME AND

nature

The Elysian Rock Lookout, offering views of Jamison Valley. Photos Briar Jensen

Experience the best of the Blue Mountains' trails and towns along the Grand Cliff Top Walk

STORY BRIAR JENSEN

Hearing a rustle in the undergrowth, we pause to investigate.

It's a male lyrebird on a branch, barred tail feathers dangling. Undeterred by our presence it bursts into song, trilling through a repertoire of mimicry, like a DJ through a compilation of tracks.

It's another pinch-me moment on the Grand Cliff Top Walk (GCTW).

Like a forest version of Italy's Cinque Terre trail, the GCTW in New South Wales' Blue Mountains National Park is

a two-day, self-guided, village-to-village walk that's accessible by public transport.

It links the villages of Wentworth Falls, Leura and Katoomba, meaning you can enjoy a delicious restaurant meal and comfy bed at the end of each day's walk.

Launched in March 2024, following a four-year project between NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service and Blue Mountains City Council, that involved more than 4,000 helicopter lifts of sandstone blocks and equipment, it seamlessly connects refurbished historic tracks with new sections into a continuous 19km trail.

It's easy to follow, thanks to stylish yellow-tailed black cockatoo way-markers, like the Camino de Santiago's scallop shell symbol.

Designed by Gundungurra artist Kelsie King, the black cockatoo, known as wumbarrung, holds special significance for her people.

The Grade 3 track is walkable year-round, whatever the weather. Cool off in natural swimming holes in summer, witness thundering waterfalls in wet weather, and expect ethereal fog to swirl through at anytime.

DAY 1: 11KM

WENTWORTH FALLS IS the smallest of the three villages, named after William Wentworth, who with Gregory Blaxland and William Lawson, were the first Europeans to cross the Blue Mountains in 1813. Exiting the train station with a girlfriend, we grab a coffee and takeaway lunch from Fed Blue Mountains cafe.



Some of the treats on offer at Fed cafe.

The walk starts across the Great Western Highway in Wilson Park.

The first section of track follows Darwins Walk, named after naturalist Charles Darwin who explored here when visiting the mountains in 1836 during his voyage on HMS Beagle.

It leads from suburbia into the national park as it follows Jamison Creek, flanked by bottlebrush, banksia and boronia.

The creek tumbles over cascades at Weeping Rock then plummets over a precipice, becoming Wentworth Falls.

We're at the top of the escarpment, no climbing involved, and the views are epic.

Sheer-faced sandstone cliffs drop sharply into the Jamison Valley.

A carpet of dense forest below extends to the horizon, part of the one-million-hectare Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

The track follows the edge of the plateau, with the valley on our left, undulating over and under the clifftops, popping out periodically onto rocky outcrops to look out over waterfalls, cliffs and canyons.



An under-cliff section of the walk.

We walk beneath rock overhangs, climb up and down sandstone steps built 150 years ago, and traverse hanging swamps, heath, woodland and rainforest.

There are optional side tracks, like the descent at Den Fenella into a ferny fairyland, and up to the Conservation Hut cafe for coffee and cake.

Today's track ends at Gordon Falls. We've missed the bus, so walk into Leura. First stop is Blue Mountains Sauna for a reviving session of infusion saunas and ice baths, then on to our Edwardian B&B, Varenna by Mountain Whispers.

After freshening up we head to dinner at Korean BBQ restaurant Jiggle.

DAY 2: 8KM

WE HAVE BREAKFAST at Sparrows cafe, collect our pre-ordered lunch boxes from The Bunker, and rejoin the track.

Metal stairs lead down to Gordon Falls Lookout over the valley to Mount Solitary, the first in a series of panoramic pitstops.

Elysian Rock's twin precipitous promontories are connected by Buttenshaw Bridge, while nearby Tarpeian Rock is a geologist's dream of rippled ironstone, like accordion pleats.

My favourite is Bridal Veil View Lookout where we get a cockatoo-eye's perspective of the waterfall opposite, fanning out as it falls.



The Three Sisters.

Following our lyrebird encounter we catch sight of Katoomba's famous Three Sisters. According to Aboriginal legend, the weathered sandstone outcrops are believed to be three sisters who were turned to stone for protection during a battle.

We join tourists at Echo Point for a coffee, then carry on.

Now it's the Kedumba Valley and Narrow Neck Plateau on our left. Stepping stones keep our feet dry at Katoomba Cascades and before long we've reached Scenic World, the end of the GCTP.

We're too late for a drink at Scenic World's Terrace Bar and the bus into Katoomba, so we catch a taxi to our historic guesthouse, 14 Lovel Street.



Unique Blue Mountains accommodation, 14 Lovel Street.

Swapping hiking shoes for heels we celebrate our walk with cocktails at The Gin Parlour, dinner at the Old City Bank Bar & Brasserie, and finish with bubbles at Champagne Charlie's in the Carrington Hotel. Hiking and hospitality – it's what the Blue Mountains do best. ■



The tranquil Pool of Siloam, near Gordon Falls Reserve.

TRAIL INFORMATION

- **Location:** Blue Mountains National Park
- **Getting there:** Two-hour drive from Sydney; Trains travel between Sydney and the three mountain villages.
- **Starts:** Wentworth Falls
- **Ends:** Katoomba
- **Walk distance:** 19km
- **Before you go:** Check for alerts and closures with the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) to ensure the walk is open.