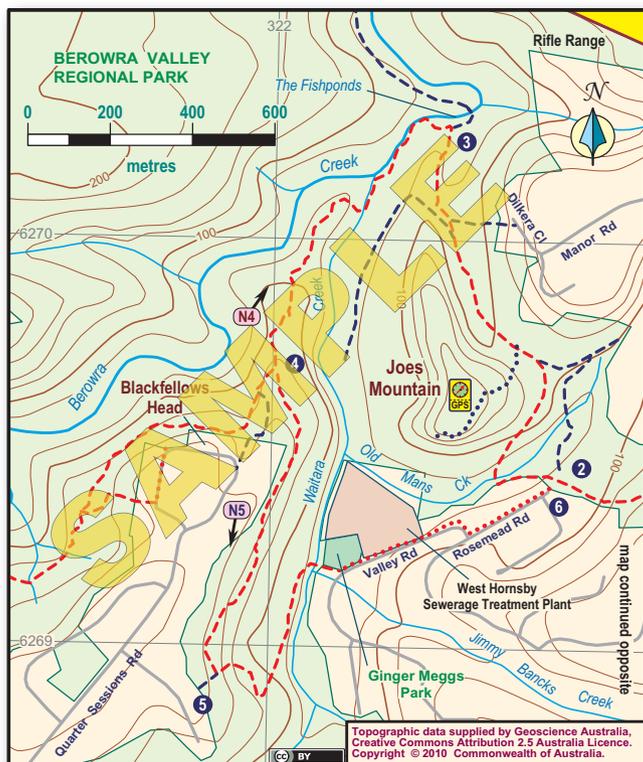


## N5 Blue Gum Walk



**Distance:** 7km (2km urban)

**Climb:** 200m

**Difficulty:** Medium

**Time:** 3 hours



**Start and finish station:** Hornsby

**Line:** North Shore

**Central** 34 km; 52 min

**Frequency:** W<sub>D</sub> 10 min W<sub>E</sub> 15 min

**Features:** Rare forests, Waitara Creek

**Hazards:** Minor creek crossings.

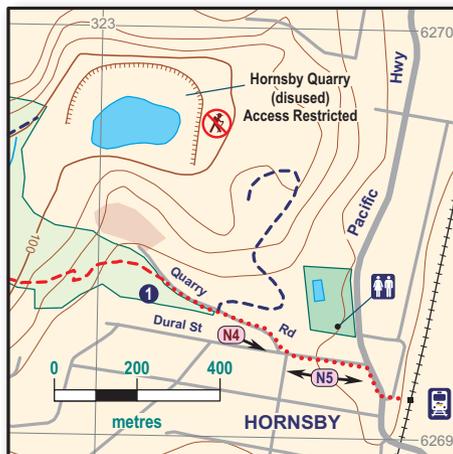
**Summary:** This excellent walk contrasts dry sandstone environments with one of the few remaining substantial Sydney blue gum forests, growing in an unusually fertile valley.



**Note:** fast, comfortable Intercity trains run every half hour between Sydney Terminal (Central) and Newcastle or the Central Coast, stopping at Hornsby. Travel time is under 40 minutes.

From Hornsby station cross the highway at the lights and take the next left onto Dural Street. Follow the GNW signs, down Quarry Road and into bushland before reaching the dead end. On your right the bush is heavily infested with weeds: beyond is the disused quarry, proposed site for future residential development. The quarry was the site of a diatreme, or volcanic plug.

**1 0.7km** The typical sandstone forest on the plateau was burnt a couple of years ago. Descend into Old Mans Valley via a long set of formed steps, laid down during the Great Depression.



Spare a thought for the return journey, where you'll need to climb these same 220 steps.

At the bottom **2 (1.3km)** cross Rosemead Rd Reserve, past a sign listing

distances to 8 locations along the GNW (it's 220km to Newcastle).

Use the stepping stones to cross Old Mans Creek and ascend toward the saddle separating Joes Mountain from the urban plateau. You will immediately notice a change in the appearance of the bush. As the Hornsby diatreme weathers it produces fertile soils in the valleys. The nearby slopes support an extensive fern understory with tall Sydney blue gums and blackbutts. A faint track leads left to unauthorised campsites on the ridge.

The track narrows as you pass a fire trail winding around Joes Mountain. A side track on the right lets walkers on the GNW bypass the nearby rifle range. Continue descending to the Fishponds **3 (2.5km)**, a waterhole on Berowra Creek (swimming is no longer considered safe here). Turn left and follow the creek upstream. The busy sound you soon hear is Waitara Creek.

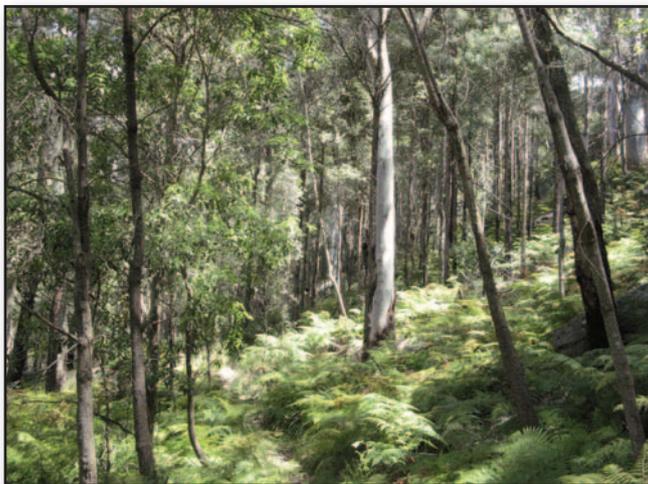
Casuarinas and grasstrees thrive on its bank, along with boulders that you'll need to clamber over. The crossing itself shows how running water inexorably erodes the soft sandstone: step over the little pools and the narrow channel carved by the stream.



Climb past overhangs, into the familiar Hawkesbury sandstone open forest, dominated by old man banksias, red gums and casuarinas. Patersonia (native iris species) are particularly prolific in this environment, and exists in patches rather than the single plants found elsewhere.

- 4 3.5km** The track climbs along a spur, 50m above the creek, that separates Waitara and Berowra creeks. The track veers slightly right and then approaches a junction. To the right is the Elouera Track (Walk N4 comes back this way), while the Blue Gum Walk continues straight ahead. Just off the track to the left is a rocky spot overlooking the Waitara Creek valley, with Joes Mountain behind, a good place to stop for a snack.

Back on the track, the richer volcanic soils immediately change the character of the vegetation. Specimens of *E. saligna*, after which the track is named, are plentiful, as are casuarinas and the especially prolific ferns, notably bracken. Try to ignore the sounds



from the treatment plant down in the valley, and enjoy the cool, moist conditions. The track wanders for a glorious 800m until it swings left and downhill, meeting a fire trail.

- 5 4.3km** Turn left, continue downhill to another intersection, where the walk continues right (these junctions are marked). Weeds start to appear on the right, and by the time you reach the ford lantana and privet have taken over. You emerge from bushland at Ginger Meggs Park (Jimmy Bancks, who created the comic strip, lived nearby). Walk past the Sydney Water treatment plant and along to the park at the end of Rosemead Avenue.
- 6 5.7km** Now gird your loins (or whatever works for you) to prepare for the 220 steps back up to the plateau. There are toilets in Hornsby Park on the Pacific Highway, and plenty of cafes to pick up refreshments before the homeward journey.



## N6 Lyrebird Gully

**Map:** Overleaf.

**Distance:** 11km

**Climb:** 250m

**Difficulty:** Medium-Hard

**Time:** 4 to 5hr



**CityRail**

**Start at:** Mount Kuring-gai **Finish at:** Berowra **Line:** Northern

**Central** 45km; 50min **Frequency:** **W<sub>D</sub>** 20min **W<sub>E</sub>** 30min

**Features:** Riparian and estuary environments, views, Aboriginal engravings and middens.

**Hazards:** Creek crossings, rough track, steep climb

**Summary:** Popular section of the Great North Walk (GNW) accessed by a rough but easily navigated creekside track.

*Note:* Newcastle intercity trains stop at Berowra, providing a faster return journey if you arrive at the right time.

- 1** 600m north of Mount Kuring-gai station, squeezed between the Pacific Highway and the rail line is a remarkable Aboriginal engraving site. Although a to-and-fro detour, it's a fitting way to preface the descent from the busy transport corridor along the ridge into the peaceful natural valley. You'll need to take care walking along the bike lane on the highway. Past a slight rise the road curves left, and you can see a sandstone ledge off to the right. Near the far end there's a minor path and a sign marking the site. Clamber onto the ledge, where mudoes (large engraved footprints) lead to a 3m long engraving of the culture hero *Baiaime*, accompanied by two wives. As always, avoid treading on the precious images. Is the curved object the figure is holding a boomerang or the crescent moon?



- 2 1.6km** Return to the station, cross over the footbridge (*do not attempt to cross the busy road directly*), turn right and enter the Berowra Valley Regional Park at the GNW marker. Carefully negotiate the steep descent on the sealed maintenance road, it's slippery after rain. Several kinds of banksia, wattles, and smaller shrubs displaying masses of spring colour line the road. Sweet pittosporum berries abound in summer.

The track proper starts at a GNW distance sign. Cross a drain, and shortly after that pass a register for groups making multi-day trips. The track continues along the hillside with Lyrebird Gully on the right.