

New England



If Tamworth is the heart of New England, then Armidale is the brains. Tamworth holds the boot-scooting label and is home to the Country Music Festival, where all people (that way inclined or not) party all week long. When you have swung those tassels till they have almost fallen off, boot scoot over to more conservative Armidale. A cosmopolitan energy focuses on the town centre and there is a string of national parks to the east, with unforgettably deep gorges and waterfalls.

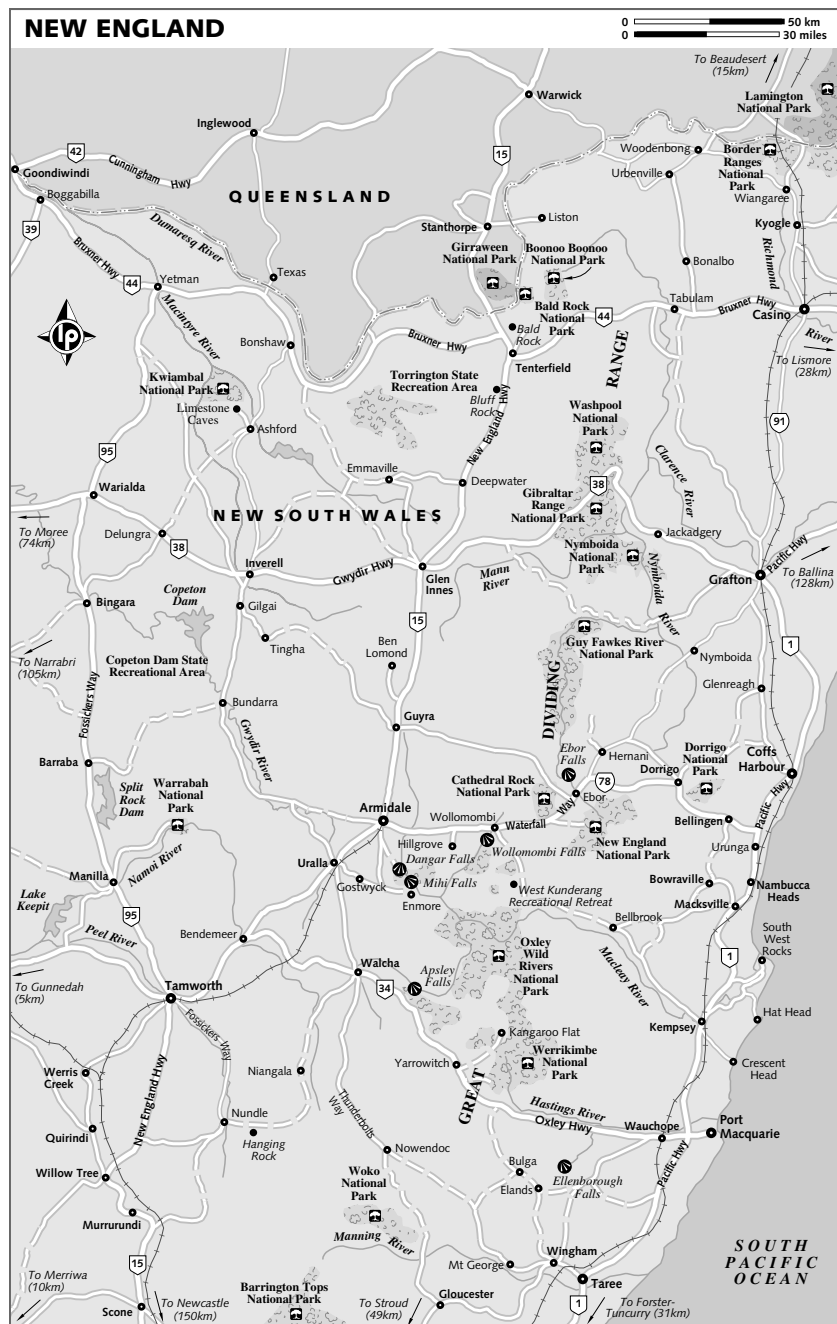
But dotted around these two regional centres is a mottling of small country towns, which are usually located on a river or straddling a couple of highways. Focused on a broad main street they typically feature wide awnings reaching for oversized gutters and a couple of two-storey iron-laced hotels.

Whether you are travelling the Fossickers Way or not, get out the shovel and dig a little deeper as each town carries its own signature gem. Whether it be horse riding or an emerging arts scene, the towns in between are the essence of the New England Tableland.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the largely undiscovered **Kwiambal National Park** (p229)
- Fly high in **Manilla** (p227), away from it all
- Line dance at the Tamworth **Country Music Festival** (p215)
- Cruise in a chopper over the gorges of the **Waterfall Way** (p221)
- Crack the whip at **Leconfield Jackaroo & Jillaroo School** (p215)
- Listen to bird chitchat in **Washpool National Park** at Granite Lookout (p224)
- Fossick for minerals along the **Fossickers Way** (p226)
- Drink and laugh at Inverell's **Graman Pub** (p229)





TAMWORTH

☎ 02 / pop 37, 120

Jackie Cole, Keith Urban, Slim Dusty... 'Pub with no Beer'. That's enough to get anyone's attention (that is if you're still reading). Fair enough, country music may not be your cup of tea, but this fantastically friendly city has a vibrant nightlife, and emerging foodie scene, as well as the rather large golden guitar. So dust off your boots and oil up the chaps, we are going to the country music capital of Australia...yeehaa!

Information

To get into the string of things, drop into to the guitar-shaped **visitors centre** (☎ 6767 5300; www.visittamworth.com.au; cnr Peel & Murray Sts) and check out the **Walk a Country Mile museum** (adult/child \$6/2). Then scoot on down to Peel St (the main street, where you'll find ATMs) to get your bearings before you get the show on the road.

Hospital (☎ 6767 7700; Dean St) When the boot scooting gets too much.

Library (☎ 6767 5457; 466 Peel St) For free internet access.

Post Office (☎ 6755 5988; 406 Peel St)

Sights

COUNTRY MUSIC

Tassel phobes should skip the **Australian Country Music Foundation** (☎ 6766 9696; 93 Brisbane St; adult/child \$6/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat); it's not much of a display really. Ditch the curator and it should take as little as five minutes to see in its entirety, though it all depends on your level of interest of course.

The **Big Golden Guitar Tourist Centre** (☎ 6765 2688; New England Hwy; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a café and souvenir shop where you can stock up on 'golden guitar' jewellery, stationery, clothing and snow domes. And when you have finished stocking up check out the Wax Museum (adult/child \$8/4). It must be alright being a country music star, just look at the smiles plastered across their chops.

By appointment only, **Lindsay Butler Studios** (☎ 6762 1104; ☎ 10am-5pm) will open its doors to visitors.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

And you thought this town was just guitars and mullets. **Oxley Marsupial Park** (Endeavour Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm) has overly friendly cockatoos and other native animals at this council-run park

at the end of Endeavour Dr, the northern continuation of Brisbane St.

Grab a bottle of wine, the one you love (anyone will do), and follow Jacaranda-lined White St to the very top where you'll reach **Oxley Scenic Lookout** (Scenic Rd). This is the best seat in the house as the sun goes down over Tamworth and the surrounding Liverpool Ranges.

Containing three million bucks worth of bikes, **Motorcycle Museum** (☎ 6766 7000; New England Hwy; adult/child \$7/5; ☎ 9am-5pm) memorabilia has been collected by none other than the owner of the Quality Powerhouse Hotel next door. Three cheers for capitalism. There's not much floor space left, not even for the humble Norton 500.

The **Calala Cottage** (☎ 6765 7492; 142 Denison St; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 2-4pm Tue-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) is where you may get a hand-held tour but gee it's informative. The slab hut, coach house and blacksmiths were all built just before the manor in 1875. Coffee freaks will love the old wrought-iron coffee-grinder.

The course at **Leconfield Jackaroo & Jillaroo School** (☎ 6769 4328; 'Bimboola' at Kootingal; 5-day course \$490), covering mustering, milking, shearing, shoeing, and lamb slaughtering, will transform you into a budding horseman/woman in no time.

Festivals & Events

Held at the end of January, New England's biggest annual party, the **Country Music Festival** lasts 10 days. There are over 800 acts, of which 75% are free. Or if you missed the big one in summer, get along to **Hats off to Country Music** during the June Queen's-birthday long weekend.

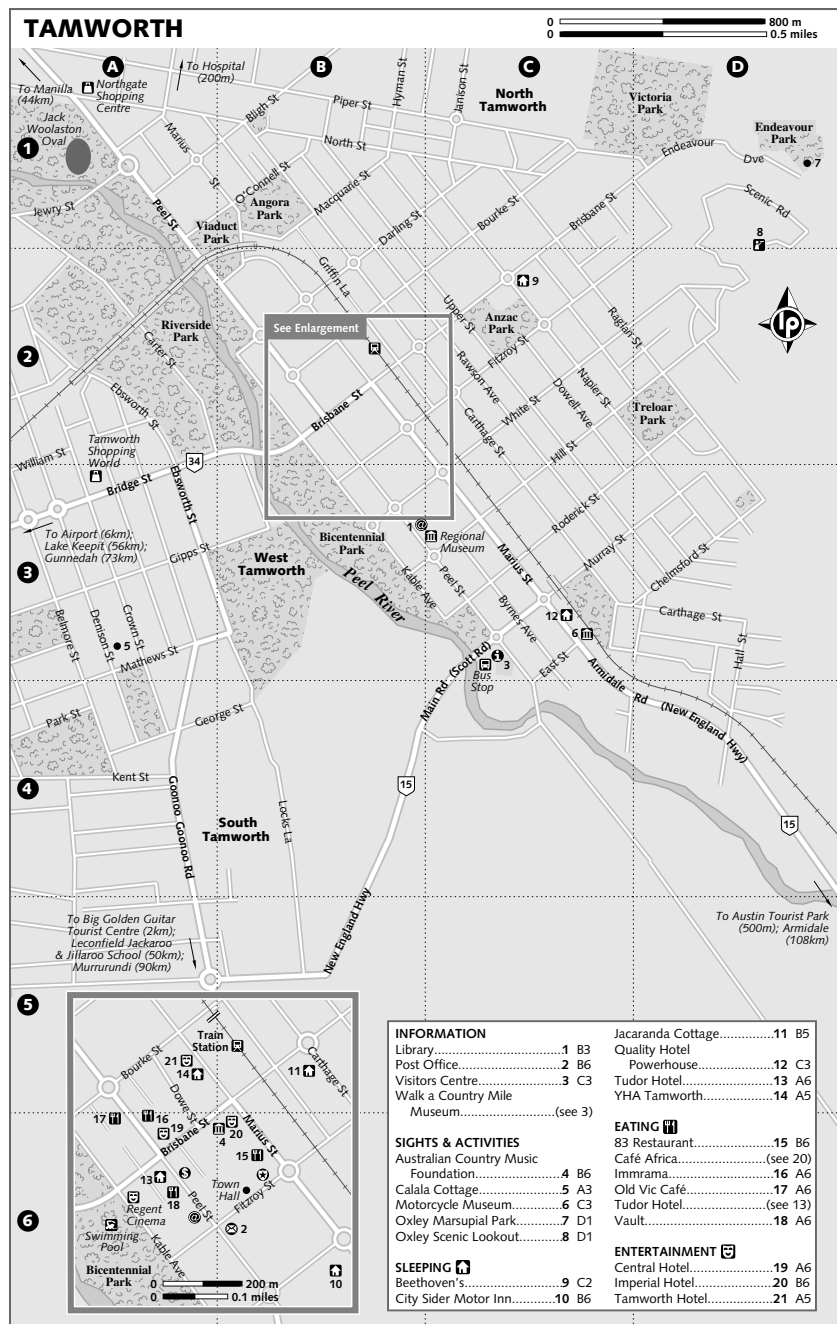
Sleeping

Most of the accommodation in town is booked out months in advance for the Country Music Festival in January, so get in early and contact the visitors centre for an information pack.

BUDGET

YHA Tamworth (☎ 6761 2600; 169 Marius St; dm/d \$23/48; ☎) A clinical little white building slotted snugly into the city. Closed 12.30pm to 4pm.

Tudor Hotel (☎ 6766 9564; 327 Peel St; s/d \$35/45) The pick of the pubs in terms of accommodation. The French Riviera feel is enhanced after many alcoholic beverages and the lift,



at that stage in the night, is a lot safer than the stairs.

Austin Tourist Park (☎ 1800-826 967, 6766 2380; www.austintouristpark.com.au; 581 Armidale Rd; unpowered/powered sites \$21/25, cabins \$52-87; (P) (♿) (♿)) Warning – sleep-walkers should stay away from this park. There is a river and it is quite a steep drop-off.

MIDRANGE

The New England Hwy is midrange heaven and during off-peak times there are plenty of bargains.

City Sider Motor Inn (☎ 6766 4777; 237 Marius St; d/ste \$89/120; (P) (♿) (♿)) Squat rooms in a 'Mediterranean kinda' inspired-complex. Lookout for this one if you are coming in from Armidale; it's gaudy and yellow.

Jacaranda Cottage (☎ 6766 4281; 105 Carthage St; r incl breakfast \$90-135; (P)) Built in the 1930s this B&B is in a very peaceful street (forgetting the fire station next door of course). There are two rooms in the house but the more private option is the self-contained loft out back.

Beethoven's (☎ 6766 2735; 66 Napier St; r \$120 Mon-Thu, \$140 Fri-Sun; (P)) A lovingly restored building with four rooms including bathrooms and a magnificent open fire in the guest lounge. Conveniently located across the road from the bowling club.

TOP END

Quality Hotel Powerhouse (☎ 6766 7000; www.qualityhotelpowerhouse.com.au; New England Hwy; r \$170-210; (P) (♿) (♿)) Prices at the old powerhouse do drop depending on the time of year/week you stay. For example, you may score a cheap room on a Friday night in nonpeak periods.

Eating

There is a meal in Tamworth to suit every tastebud. You can have Chinese, Indian, Thai, Mexican, Italian and even African. And if you are more about quantity than quality, head to **83 Restaurant** (☎ 6766 2383; 199 Marius St; (♿) lunch & dinner) for all-you-can-eat.

Immrama (☎ 6761 3504; 306 Peel St; mains \$5-10; (♿) breakfast & lunch) Finally a place where people can go to rejuvenate and relax, receive reiki (\$30), or get a clairvoyant reading (\$45). Meditation and natural-healing sessions happen on Monday night.

Old Vic Café (☎ 6766 3435; 261 Peel St; mains \$10-18; (♿) breakfast & lunch, closed Sun) An earthy coun-

try feel in terms of cheesecloth and Betty Crocker rather than tassels and bow legs. Get anything from a sandwich to a rump steak.

Tudor Hotel (☎ 6766 2930; 327 Peel St; mains \$9-24; (♿) lunch & dinner) Elegantly decorated with romantic '80s music oozing from the restaurant. Garlic prawns and avocado taste good whether you are downstairs or up as it is the same menu on both levels.

Vault (☎ 6766 6975; 429 Peel St; mains \$9-26; (♿) breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Residing in an old heritage bank, it cooks up basic meals with a gourmet twist.

Café Africa (☎ 6766 9995; cnr Brisbane & Marius Sts; mains \$13-35; (♿) lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Herbivores stay away, you will be confused by the Kalahari Bushman Skewers, and distraught by the Game of the Day. But carnivores are you ready for the Massal Challenge? Eat two Massai 1kg rumps and get the third one free.

Entertainment

Imperial Hotel (☎ 6766 2613; www.imperialhotel.com.au; cnr Brisbane & Marius Sts) This is where the young folk tend to hang out. It goes off Thursday nights but you can catch local live acts most weekends in Studio 181.

Central Hotel (☎ 6766 2160; cnr Brisbane & Peel Sts) It has an older crowd and bands or a DJ on weekends. A bit more of a laid-back affair. You will make friends here whether you like it or not.

Tamworth Hotel (☎ 6766 2923; 147 Marius St) This place says country club and so do the slightly conservative crowd that drink here. There is a brassiere but no loud bands, just the faint sizzle of steaks and subtle hint of pretension wafting throughout the hotel.

Getting There & Away

QantasLink (☎ 13 13 13) has four to five daily flights to and from Sydney.

If you decide to bus it, **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) has daily services along the New England Hwy to Armidale (adult/child \$40/35) and through to Sydney (adult/child \$90/75). And **Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) runs to Armidale, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, and south to Scone.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) trains go to Scone and Sydney daily. Buses travel to Manilla (adult/child \$7/4) and Inverell (adult/child \$46/26) daily.

Getting Around

Tamworth Coaches (☎ 6762 3999) operates extensively throughout town; stops are visible and obvious. **Tamworth Taxis** (☎ 6766 1111) can be waved down around town. And there are plenty of hire-car companies to choose from including **Avis** (☎ 6765 2000), **Budget** (☎ 6765 5910), **Hertz** (☎ 6762 5545), **Tamworth Hire Cars** (☎ 6766 1909) and **Thrifty** (☎ 6765 3699).

OXLEY WILD RIVERS NATIONAL PARK

There will always be one old duck eager to tell you how they saw a brush-tailed rock wallaby. But the truth is sightings are rare, even in World Heritage-listed Oxley, the main refuge for the endangered species. However, large colonies of them do hang out at **Dangar Gorge**. So keep your eye out because if you don't see one someone back up at the car park will have.

But for the most part this park is known for its rivers, gorges and waterfalls. **Wollomombi Falls**, 40km east of Armidale, is the highest in Australia with a drop of 220m. The spectacular **Apsley Falls** are 18km east of Walcha at the southern end of the park.

Lots of water makes for lots of water sports and canoeing and kayaking are popular in the park. Mountain-biking and horse riding are allowed on the fire trails as long as they are not within designated 'wilderness' areas. You can 4WD on **Race Course Trail** on the border of Oxley Wild Rivers and **Werrikimbe National Park**. The National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) run the 'Discovery' programme here during school holidays (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

The park can be accessed via Walcha, Dorrigo and Armidale along the Waterfall Way. **Youdales Hut** is a little primitive but is also a popular camping destination accessed by 4WD only via Walcha and Kangaroo Flats Rd. Call **Walcha NPWS** (☎ 6777 4700) for bookings.

URALLA

☎ 02 / pop 2300

The name Uralla is said to be Aboriginal for 'ceremonial meeting place'. But the town is probably more well known as the home of legendary bushranger Captain Thunderbolt (see the boxed text, below). Although born in Windsor and married in Stroud, Thunderbolt was killed just south of town.

Foodworks in the main street, Bridge St, has an ATM. The **post office** is on Hill St and the **CTC** has internet access in the old Courthouse on the corner of Hill and Maitland Sts. Visit Paul at the **visitors centre** (☎ 6778 4496; www.uralla.com; 104 Bridge St) who will happily point you in the right direction for fossicking around town.

An old flour mill, the **McCrossin's Mill Museum** (☎ 6778 3022; cnr Bridge & Salisbury Sts; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 12pm-5pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) is where you can view Captain Thunderbolt's muzzle loader and revolver and learn about the evolution of the cricket bat.

Sleeping & Eating

Coachwood and Cedar Hotel/Motel (☎ 6778 4110; www.toppuburalla.com.au; Bridge St; s/d motel \$55/70, s/d hotel \$35/70) Stay the night in a cheaper pub room or in the mini motel out the back. With enormous, bold bathrooms and funky coloured paintwork, these rooms are the trendier option in town if not all of New England!

Uralla Caravan Park (☎ 6778 4763; www.urallacara.vanpark.com.au; 17 Queen St; sites unpowered/powerd \$15/18, cabins \$60) Forget about the on-site vans as they are tiny and you forgot to pack linen anyway. The cabins are a better option but Fido must stay outside. Linen is available for hire (\$5).

Stoker's Restaurant (☎ 6778 3777; 37 Bridge St; mains \$19-24; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Built in the 1820s they serve up an odd selection of mains (apparently) reflecting the position of the town

and a need to appeal to all tastes. So keep this in mind when noticing a menu of Italian and Indian dishes and Guinness pie.

Top Pub (☎ 6778 4110; Bridge St; mains \$17-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Known as the Top Pub because it is at the top of the main street, this drinking hole is popular with students from Armidale. The 'Funk Lush Room' outside is a great place to chow down on anything from Thai curry, pizza and steak, to kangaroo fillet.

Getting There & Away

Keans (☎ 6545 1945) buses travel to Coffs Harbour and down the coast to Port Macquarie. They head south to Tamworth and Scone. And **Greyhound** (☎ 13 1499) travels back up the New England Hwy, as far as Tenterfield (adult/child \$60/50) and south to Tamworth (adult/child \$40/32) and Sydney (adult/child \$100/85). An **Edwards** (☎ 6772 3116) bus does five trips a day to Armidale on weekdays only.

AROUND URALLA

An unusual hexagonal-shaped woolshed, a vine-covered chapel and 199 elm trees turn this unique destination, **Gostyck**, into a little piece of England. Go there in the thick of autumn when it is covered in an array of orange tones, and on the first Sunday of the month for a peak inside. Gostyck is just 10 minutes' drive east of Uralla; admission is free, and as it's on public land you can visit it at any time.

ARMIDALE

☎ 02 / pop 25,000

It is a university town but even the hundreds of virile students don't seem to soften the pensive mood here. SAD (seasonal affective disorder) or not, the town's history and culture shine through. You can mope in museums, mill around the market or be joyless in a joy-flight over the local gorge country and waterfalls.

Go there in autumn and hear the fallen leaves crinkle under foot when the cooler breeze paints the town orange hues. With its historic streetscapes, excellent eating options, and World Heritage-listed national parks, there will always be something to do to lift the mood.

Information

The New England Hwy turns into manic Marsh St. Thankfully Beardsy St is the main street and is closed off to traffic.

AMAC Digital Products (☎ 6771 1287; 209 Beardsy St) For internet access.

Armidale Outdoors (☎ 6772 7744; 152 Rusden St) For all your camping accessories. Stocks a handful of maps.

Library (Faulkner St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Has free internet.

National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS; ☎ 6738 9100; 145 Miller St)

Visitors centre (☎ 1800 627 736, 6772 4655; www.armidaletourism.com.au; 83 Marsh St) Located behind the Mobil service station.

Sights

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

The key to finding your way around the university is to locate **Boooloombah** (☎ 6773 3909; University campus, Queen Elizabeth Dr). Not an easy feat in itself, unless you head up Queen Elizabeth St and turn right on Elm Ave, following the elms to the very end. From there you can do a self-drive tour of the university grounds or park and walk (visitors' parking for two hours only; it's better get a parking permit).

A **walking tour** brochure can be picked up from the **visitors centre** in town, and gives a brief description of some of the key university buildings, such as the **Museum of Antiquities** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) where you can learn about Australia's history from back when *Homo erectus* first arrived, 40,000 years ago.

MUSEUMS

With staff who are both knowledgeable and upbeat, **New England Regional Art Museum** (☎ 6772 5255; Kentucky St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) is the *crème de la crème* gallery of the region. Stop for a coffee at NERAM Café on the way out.

We have all come to equate Aboriginal art with dot paintings. Come to the **Aboriginal Cultural Centre & Keeping Place** (☎ 6771 3606; 128 Kentucky St; art exhibit \$2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) to broaden the mind and let the kids make their own priceless piece with the help of the resident artist.

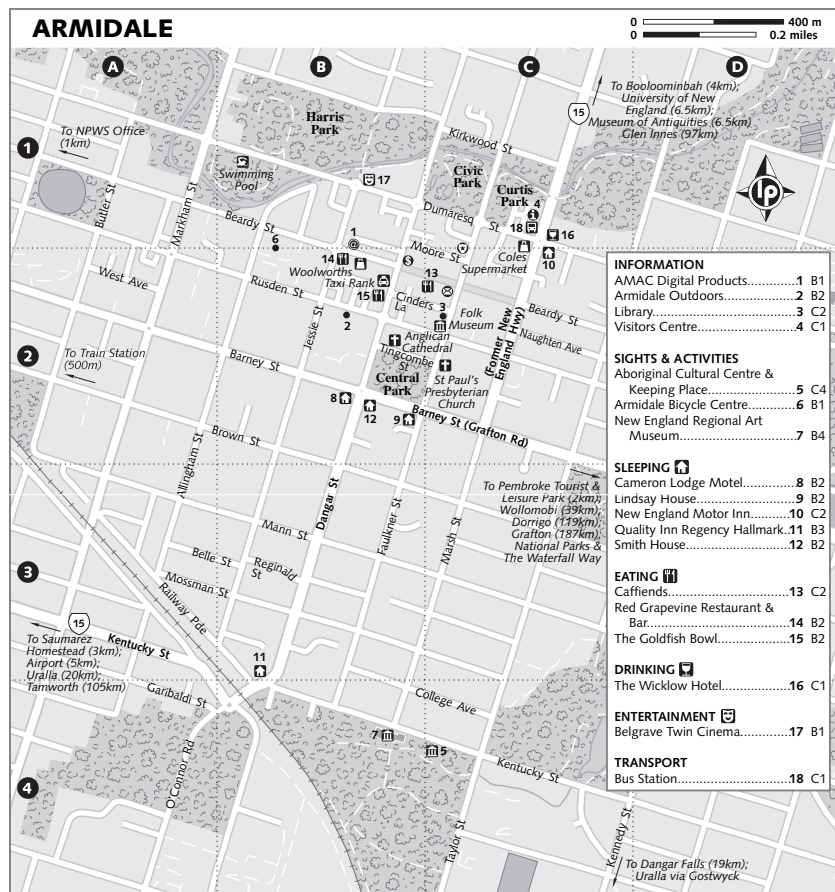
Activities

There is a free, yes you heard right free, **Heritage Tour** of Armidale that departs from the visitors centre at 10am daily. They also have details of heritage walks around town.

Better still, get on a bike from **Armidale Bicycle Centre** (☎ 6772 3718; 244 Beardsy St; per hr \$5.50); you'll cover more ground that way.

THUNDERBOLT

Born to an Irish convict in 1835, dead by 36. A typical timeline for your average Aussie bushranger. Supported by the poorer locals, their legends still ignite a 'them-and-us' sense only capable in a population grown from a convict state. This one inspired the public imagination even further by escaping the inescapable Cockatoo Island Gaol in Sydney Harbour, not once but twice. Swimming to shore in Balmain, he survived the next six years by intercepting and robbing the wealthy aristocrats as they travelled past his bush hideouts throughout the Hunter and New England. Stop at his many lookouts, inspect his hideout north of Tenterfield (5km south of Uralla), the scene of his shooting, and mourn his passing over a beer at the Bottom Pub (see Top Pub, opposite) before checking out his grave on the edge of Uralla Cemetery (John St).



Catch a close view of the gorgeous gorges with **Fleet Helicopters** (☎ 6772 2348; www.fleethelicopters.com.au; Armidale Airport). A 30-minute flight over Dangar and Gara costs \$180 per person, but catch a glimpse of all six in one hour for \$330.

Festivals & Events

Armidale is at its picturesque best in March for the **Autumn Festival**, which includes a street parade and plenty of live music. The National Sheep Dog Trials are held at the **Wool Expo** and on the last Sunday of each month there is a **market** on Beady St.

Sleeping

Watch out as premiums may rise and hotels will book-out quickly during graduation.

BUDGET

Smith House (☎ 6772 0652; www.smithhouse.com.au; 100 Barney St; incl breakfast s/d \$40/50; P) Smith has provided everything you will need including heating, TV, fridge, microwave and even internet connection.

Cameron Lodge Motor Inn (☎ 6772 2351; cnr Dangar & Barney Sts; s/d \$65/72; P) Value for money conveniently located just one block from Beady St. Although the faux-fur bedspreads really do ooze Miami Vice, or is it more '80s porn?

New England Motor Inn (☎ 6771 1011; www.newenglandmotorinn.com.au; 100 Dumaresq St; s/d \$85/95; P) This very pink motel is across the road from the Wicklow and has comfortable rooms that are very popular so you may need to book ahead.

Pembroke Tourist & Leisure Park (☎ 6772 6470; 39 Waterfall Way; unpowered/powerd sites \$19/24; dm \$24; cabins from \$56; P) Very friendly, very leafy.

MIDRANGE

Quality Inn Regency Hallmark (☎ 6772 9800; 208 Dangar St; r \$105-130, spa ste \$175; P) A touch pricey and a little luxurious, this is one of several options in town. A confused French restaurant features overpriced French cuisine and Asian dishes, so head into town for a better feed.

TOP END

Lindsay House (☎ 6771 4554; www.lindsayhouse.com.au; 128 Faulkner St; incl breakfast deluxe/exec d \$165/220; P) Antique-filled rooms house lavish four-poster beds. The front rooms overlook the immaculate gardens and Central Park, and are the perfect place to sit and just chill from the chill on a cold winter's day.

Eating

Goldfish Bowl (☎ 6771 3271; Dangar St; mains \$6-9; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Are Aussies really ready for proper espresso, and although everyone wants to be Italian, do we really need to hover over our coffee? So will you please sit down and watch the *baristas* make the best coffee in town.

Caffiends (☎ 6772 0277; Beady St Mall; mains \$9-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Basic through to gourmet sandwiches, salads, pizzas, laksa, nachos and even steak! A real mixed bag to suit every taste bud but not every wallet, bring cash only.

Red Grapevine Restaurant & Bar (☎ 6772 2822; 1st fl, 113 Jessie St; mains \$19-26; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) It arrives hot, it's hearty, rich and filling. Chorizo, tomato and cannellini bean, it is the way soup was always meant to be. This restaurant is not trying to be anything other than a fantastic Italian dining experience. BYO bottled wine only.

Drinking & Entertainment

A curfew is strictly enforced in Armidale, so pick your establishment prior to 12.30am and settle in.

Wicklow Hotel (☎ 6772 2421; cnr Marsh & Dumaresq Sts) There is a selection of 20 local and imported beers on tap, so dump the young folk in the Kids Club where they can watch *Sponge Bob Squarepants* while the adults do all the socialising.

Belgrave Twin Cinema (☎ 6771 3388; www.belgravecinema.com.au; 137 Dumaresq St) It shows mainstream and occasional art-house films.

Getting There & Away

The airport is 5km southeast of town. **Qantas-Link** (☎ 13 13 13) has four flights a day to Sydney during the week and three on weekends.

Greyhound (☎ 13 14 99) runs twice daily north past Glen Innes (adult/child \$44/36) and south to Tamworth (adult/child \$40/32). One daily service departs Armidale for Sydney (adult/child \$100/82). **Keans** (☎ 6545 1945) runs east to Coffs Harbour (adult/child \$37/20) or as far south as Scone (adult/child \$37/21).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) goes daily to Tamworth (adult/child \$20/10), Broadmeadow-Newcastle (adult/child \$75/35) and Sydney (adult/child \$95/50).

Getting Around

Edwards (☎ 6772 3116) run a local bus service about town. They ferry students to and from the university as well as heading down to Uralla. Or hire a car from **Avis** (☎ 6772 6216), **Budget** (☎ 6772 5872) or **Hertz** (☎ 6772 0620), who all have vehicles at the airport. **Realistic** (☎ 6772 8078) or **Thrifty** (☎ 6772 4551) are in town. For taxi services call **Armidale Radio Taxis** (☎ 6771 1455).

AROUND ARMIDALE Saumarez Homestead

A magnificent National Trust-owned house 3km from Armidale Airport, this **homestead** (☎ 02-6772 3616; Saumarez Rd; tours adult/child \$8/6; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) represents two eras in Australian history. The bottom floor was constructed in 1888 and the second added in 1906. Closed from mid-June until 1st September.

The Waterfall Way

The best thing about the national parks in this area is that they can each be visited in turn (waterfalls included) on a trip from Coffs Harbour or Grafton to Armidale. They are part of what is appropriately known as the **Waterfall Way** and are conveniently close to Armidale.

Forget the water, more surprising are the vast open cavities in the ground. Trees cling to the edge and the voids are so unexpected you would think whole herds of cattle could simply fall in. **Ebor Falls** is unique in that the

water runs down three separate steps formed by ancient lava flows. Whereas the highly vertical **Wollomombi**, **Apsley** and **Dangar** all flow over volcanic rock sporting spectacularly hexagonal columns reaching up to the head of the falls.

NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL PARK

This national park is home to cool temperate rainforest and the very rare Antarctic beech. It is just one of only four core refuge areas in the world for the 80-million-year-old tree.

There are multiple walks to choose from, or if you are feeling a little less than energetic drive to the top to **Point Lookout**. It is so high up here your echo won't even come back and you are bound to have a Leonardo DiCaprio 'I'm the king of the world' moment.

The park is 85km east of Armidale on the Waterfall Way near the township of Ebor. Caravans cannot be towed into the park but there is a serene little camping ground by a stream just before the park. **Thungutti Rest Area** has three cabins that can be hired out through Dorrigo NPWS (☎ 6657 2309).

Within the national park lies **Yaraandoo** (☎ 6775 8401; janniene@email.com; r \$55-135, Wollomombi), which generally targets larger groups but does have a lodge, cottage and cabins available, and a huge range of activities on offer from fly-fishing to skirmish and everything in between.

GUY FAWKES RIVER NATIONAL PARK

This is one of the more controversial parks in the state, where old-growth forest was continually removed until a group of protestors chained themselves to the actual trees. The logging of old growth (in what is now national park) has ceased but take care dodging logging trucks (yes, the pests are still hanging about).

You won't realise how high you have climbed until you stop at the **Misty Creek Lookout**. Just a short walk over a small incline and the extent (or height) of your bumpy trip will be revealed as you peer down into **Guy Fawkes River Gorge** and to the river 630m below. The park has the usual diverse collection of walks but also a 30km-long overnight wilderness walk, **Guy Fawkes River Walk**.

Chaelundi Falls (site per adult/child \$3/2), may not actually be falling (depending on recent rain) but the short walk is worth it for the endless views through the valley and there are more

good chances of spotting the world's only egg-laying amphibious mammal as it definitely does look like platypus country here. The camping grounds are at least an hour's drive off the Gwydir Hwy. But if you only want to stop for a bit of a walk, the **Mt Hyand Track** is just 18km into the park.

Access (not always easy) is from Hernani, 15km northeast of Ebor, and its 30km to the **Chaelundi Rest Area**, with camp sites and water. The Dorrigo NPWS (☎ 6657 2309) office has all necessary information.

CATHEDRAL ROCK NATIONAL PARK

This park engulfs the **Snowy Range**, the highest point in the New England Tablelands, and therefore can get quite chilly. Gone is the lush greenness seen at Guy Fawkes National Park. This is granite country with huge boulders that precariously balance (like sumo wrestlers attempting the Kama Sutra).

The camping grounds at **Native Dog Creek** (adults/child \$3/2) are smallish, fairly private and accessible by car and caravan. Turn off the Waterfall Way and head towards the Guyra. But if you prefer listening to the crickets at night, rather than the cars careering past, stay at **Barokee Picnic and Camping Area** (8km off Waterfall Way). There are several walking tracks and the **Cathedral Rock Circuit** leaves from the rest area and leads you to the top of Cathedral Rock itself.

The park is near Ebor, off the Ebor-Guyra Rd. It is 60km west of Dorrigo off the Waterfall Way and 74km east of Armidale. Contact the Dorrigo NPWS (☎ 6657 2309) office for more details.

GLEN INNES

☎ 02 / pop 6250

Glen Innes is as Scottish as a plastic-backed tartan picnic rug. But that is the gimmick and the locals are sticking with it. Frustrated by the lack of pagan activity back in the Stone and Bronze Ages, the town went about erecting their own standing stones.

The town itself is beautiful in its own right, the fairy lights strung up through the main street enhance the mystical air which is only emphasised more by the presence of the rare blue sapphire. The prettiness of the area coupled with heaps of heritage-listed buildings makes for a nice destination to visit. So leave your kilts and haggis at home and come in search of the rare blue sapphire instead.

Orientation & Information

The town is at the intersection of the New England Hwy and Gwydir Hwy with historic Grey St running parallel to the former. The **visitors centre** (☎ 6730 2400; www.gleninnesourism.com; 152 Church St) is on the New England Hwy. There's an ATM at the Commonwealth Bank on the main street.

Computer Future (☎ 6732 5100; 266 Grey St) \$5 per hour internet access or head down Grey St for free access at the library.

NPWS (☎ 6732 5133; 68 Church St)

Stocks Service Station (☎ 6732 1948; 271 Grey St) Sells fishing gear, bait and camping equipment.

Sights & Activities

Overlooking the town from the Centennial Parklands are the **Australian Standing Stones**, a national monument to the Celtic people who helped pioneer Australia. But stifle giggles by continuing up the hill for a bird's-eye view of town at **Walters Lookout**.

The town has a generous portion of iron-laced pubs built in the late 1800s. But find your way to the old railway station at the **Railway Refreshment Rooms** (☎ 6732 1070; Lambert St, mains \$10-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) where the trains may have stopped running, but the beer never has.

Do not underestimate the capacity to interest at **Land of the Beardies History House** (☎ 6732 1035; cnr Ferguson St & West Ave; adult/child \$6/1; ☎ 10am-noon Mon-Fri & 1-4pm daily). It is quite surprising how much has been jammed into the old hospital, although the highlight for some will be the free morning/afternoon tea (10am and 3pm).

Combining two of the area's interests is **Pub Crawls on Horseback** (☎ 6732 1599; www.pubcrawlonhorseback.com.au; Bullock Mountain Homestead; horse riding per hr from \$30, weekend ride \$375). You will come to a fork in the road at which point you should take a right (a left if you're a fan of 'Free Willy'). Depending on your skill level you will be riding Martini, Budweiser or maybe Baileys. The meals are forgettable so don't go expecting gourmet, but do expect a fantastic time on horseback.

Festivals & Events

Minerama (☎ 6730 2400; www.minerama.gleninnes.biz) or possibly Hawkerama is held on the second weekend of March and attracts hundreds of mineral enthusiasts to the area. The **Celtic Festival** (www.theaustraliancelticfestival.com) is held at the end of April each year when you can

watch grown men in medieval dress poke each other with big sticks in the jousting competition. But the **Beardies Festival** (www.beardiesfestival.com) is where you will see the beard-growing competition, a popular event open to both men and women.

Sleeping

Prices go up and digs book out quickly during the Celtic Festival, but generally you won't find any very dear upmarket choices in town.

Red Lion Tavern (☎ 6733 3271; New England Hwy, Glencoe; s/d \$65/75; mains \$10-27) The old pub burnt down in 1968 and they say the locals frantically saved what they could. No furniture of course, just the liquor. The new pub is built from recycled bits of a court house and church. The meals are tasty, rooms are cosy, and the publican's wife is just lovely. Food is served all day.

New England Motor Lodge (☎ 1800-619 159, 6732 2922; nemlgleninnes@bigpond.com; 160 Church St; s/d from \$69/79, spa ste \$151; ☎ ☎) Fantastic rooms (and restaurant) but what distinguishes this place is the very '80s rock waterfall by the pool. It accommodates discrete spa-frolicking and is in desperate need of a facelift.

Silent Grove Farmstay (☎ 6733 2117; www.silentgrovefarmstay-bandb.com.au; Silent Grove, Ben Lamond; r incl breakfast \$85) Dorothy's your typical hard-working all-Aussie no-nonsense lady. Staying here is just like stopping over at Grans. The kids will love the baby animals, walks on the farm and fishing for yabbies.

Craigieburn Tourist Park (☎ 6732 1283; www.gleninnes.com/craigieburn; New England Hwy; unpowered/power sites \$16/20, cabins \$48, with bathroom \$60-67) The pick of the caravan parks, with on-site fossicking for sapphires with Take a Wee-Breke (☎ 0417-272 440). Just don't underestimate the hobbitesque shower heads.

Eating

Head down the main street to IGA for groceries if you are not venturing out tonight.

Crofters Cottage (☎ 6732 5668; Centennial Parklands; mains \$3-14; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun) At the top of the hill, this place offers light meals such as quiche and salad, as well as vegemite sandwiches for the really broke (\$2.50). There is a guy in a kilt but the most Scottish thing about the place would be the IRN-BRU in the fridge.

Tasting Room (☎ 6732 6500; 296 Grey St; mains \$7-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sat) What this café is

lacking in pretension it makes up for with a delicious array of gourmet sandwiches and light meals, including appealing vegetarian options such as eggplant fettuccine and sweet potato soup.

Crystal Room Restaurant (☎ 6732 4292; Glen Innes & District Services Club; cnr Lang & Grey Sts; mains \$15-21; ☺ lunch & dinner) Have we really regressed to an age when our (seared) meat is served on a heated rock which the chef expects you to cook yourself at your table? Wilma and Fred would be flabbergasted.

Ramona's (☎ 6732 2922; 160 Church St; mains \$24-29; ☺ dinner). Fabulous cuisine focused on organic and local produce. Try chicken breast, pork loin, boneless lamb steak or kangaroo fillet. Yes sure, the carpet screams 'picnic', but it may in some freaky subconscious way help the appeal of the place.

Getting There & Away

Greyhound (☎ 13 1499) runs down the New England Hwy to Armidale (adult/child \$45/36) and Tamworth (adult/child \$55/45). And there is a bus that leaves daily for Sydney (adult/child \$105/85) picking up at the Caltex on Church St. **Black & White** (☎ 6732 3687; www.blackandwhitebus.com) runs to Inverell twice a day. And **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) has buses down to Armidale (adult/child \$18/8) out to Grafton (adult/child \$18/15) and the coast, and up to Tenterfield (adult/child \$10/8).

GIBRALTAR RANGE & WASHPOOL NATIONAL PARKS

There is an unmanned **NPWS visitors centre** at the turnoff to **Mulligans Hut**. Better stop to sign the visitors book and 'take the piss' (in true Aussie style) in the comments column, like all those before you.

The best place in all of New England would have to be **Granite Lookout**. If you are lucky enough it won't be completely fogged-in and you will find yourself alone listening to the birds' chitchat echoing up the valley. If you have to choose between the two, visit **Washpool**, although the rockier **Gibraltar Range** has more accessible roads and is known for its bushwalks and mountain-bike tracks.

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) buses between Glen Innes and Grafton stop at the Gibraltar Range visitors centre and at the entrance to Washpool. The **NPWS** Grafton (☎ 6641 1500); Glen Innes (☎ 6732 5133) offices have more information on camping and walks.

TENTERFIELD

☎ 02 / pop 3300

Forget Sir Henry Parkes and his vision of 'one people, one destiny', that began Australia's road to federation, the real star of Tenterfield is Peter Allen – of 'When my baby smiles at me I go to Rio de Janeiro' fame. Wherever he went it is always remembered in Tenterfield that his roots are firmly here.

But you can also have fun hankering around historic buildings, get into the gourmet cuisine, and immerse yourself in the wilderness at Boonoo Boonoo and Bald Rock National Parks.

Information

The New England Hwy turns into Rouse St and is dissected by High and Manners Sts. See Bidy at the **visitors centre** (☎ 6736 1082; www.tenterfield.com; 157 Rouse St) for help finding the only ATM in town.

Library (☎ 6736 1454; Manners St)

Post Office (☎ 6736 1295; cnr Rouse & Manners Sts)

Sights & Activities

Built in 1888 from riches acquired through tin mining, **Stannum House** (☎ 6736 3780; 114-116 Rouse St) was intended to be the House of Parliament back when Tenterfield was hoped to be the capital of NSW.

The squat little shop, **Tenterfield Saddler**, immortalised in Peter Allen's song about his father, was Peter's grandfather's business.

The famous Henry Parkes speech that shaped the nation took place at **School of Arts** (☎ 6736 3592; cnr Manners & Rouse Sts; adult/child \$5/2; ☺ 10am-4pm). It now houses a library and a small museum with exhibits relating to the politician's career.

Refrain from mentioning you're a geologist or endure a specimen-by-specimen tour of the entire exhibit at **Emmaville Mining Museum** (☎ 6734 7025; 86 Moore St; ☺ 10am-4pm Fri-Tue). Interesting for those into rocks, those who aren't can entertain themselves at the historical and 'handsome' **Emmaville Hotel**.

The king of 4WD parks is **Rover Park** (☎ 6737 6862; www.roverpark.com; Rover Park Rd; sites \$30, on-site vans \$55, bunkhouse \$60); it's best you don't drive a hatchback in if you have some pride. There are over 300km of 4WD tracks to traverse and, if you don't have your own vehicle, hire one for the day for \$45 plus fuel. You can go horse riding, mountain-biking, fossicking or fishing. The park is 35km east of Tenterfield on Casino Rd.

There is plenty of work fruit picking on farms near town from October through to May. Pick stone fruit, cherries, tomatoes and grapes. Phone Barbara at **Tenterfield Lodge & Caravan Park** (☎ 6736 1477) for further information.

Festivals & Events

If you are going to one event in Tenterfield this year, make sure it's the **Oracles of the Bush**. Where state-wide competitors prepare by preening their prose and perfecting their pronunciations. **Gemfest** (☎ 6734 7210) is Emmaville's day to shimmer and shine. Held at the start of September, it's the one day of the year where you can go onto local properties fossicking.

Sleeping

Peter Allen Motor Inn (☎ 6736 2499; 177 Rouse St; s/d \$70/86; ☺) No relation to the Boy from Oz himself except perhaps for the flamboyantly coloured bathroom tiles.

Wangrah Wilderness Lodge (☎ 6737 3665; www.wangrah.com.au; Bluff River Rd; on-site vans \$60, cottages \$132-150) Don't be put off by the 'Private Property' sign, as you follow 12.6km of dusty meandering road and river. At the end of the road is a haven for those who want to relax and unwind. But there is also tennis, bushwalking, 4WD adventures, mountain-biking, fishing and kayaking.

Tenterfield Lodge and Caravan Park (☎ 6736 1477; tenterfieldlodge@ozemail.com.au; 2 Manners St; unpowered/powered sites \$15/19, dm \$25, on-site vans s/d \$35/40, cabins \$45-65; ☺) A great place to base yourself while fruit picking in the area (\$110 a week) but even better if you have canines. There is a dog-friendly cabin where Buster can bunk in with the rest of the family.

Eating

You really need to have basic bases in some parts of regional NSW, then build from that, easing in the gourmet slowly, no sudden moves. Foodworks is on Rouse St.

Destination Field Good (☎ 6736 5777; 399-401 Rouse St; mains \$3-13; ☺ 10am-5pm, closed Tue) The sweet gardens and decking out back are perfect for basking in spring sunshine. The mostly organic menu contains gluten- and wheat-free choices and generous servings of cake.

Kurrajong Downs Vineyard (☎ 6736 4590; Casino Rd; mains \$14-27; ☺ lunch Thu-Mon, dinner Fri & Sat by appointment) Overlooking the vineyard and rolling

yellow hills you can enjoy basic meals with a gourmet edge. The rib fillet on the bone is grown 2km down the road... and boy do those cows look happy.

Saddler Cafe & Wine Bar (☎ 6736 4400; cnr Rouse & Manners Sts; mains \$22-24; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) Specialising in local produce and local wines, the oven-roasted duck with red cabbage potatoes and wine sauce is a delish choice. Who would have thought cabbage could taste so damn good!

Getting There & Away

Buses leave town from the Community Centre on Manners St. **Greyhound** (☎ 13 14 99) runs a service down the New England Hwy stopping at Tamworth (adult/child \$63/52) and Sydney (adult/child \$105/86). **Kirklands** (☎ 6626 1499) runs from Tenterfield across to Lismore (adult/child \$30/15).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) has bus services travelling south along the New England Hwy to Glen Innes (adult/child \$16/8) and to Armidale (adult/child \$35/18), where you can change for Sydney (adult/child \$62/52).

BOONOO BOONOO NATIONAL PARK

Just 20km from Tenterfield, **Boonoo Boonoo** (bun-na-b'noo) is home to the endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby and the glossy black cockatoo. A day pass for one vehicle costs \$7 and it's an extra \$5/3 per adult/child to camp the night. Just to the south of the **Boonoo Boonoo Falls Lookout** turnoff are the **Black Swamp Falls** but don't attempt this road without a 4WD and map. The puddles change in magnitude depending on the season but the consistency of the signage does not.

BALD ROCK NATIONAL PARK

You still can't pronounce Boonoo Boonoo so carry on a further 10km to Bald Rock National Park. Several walks begin in the car park at the camping ground (adult/child \$5/3). There is Carrolls Creek Walk (18km), Border Walk (14km), and **Bald Rock Climb** (3km) which is of course the reason you are here. There is the summit direct steep-grade option for the lunatics out there and the Bungoonaa Walk for the less obsessive among us – though you'll still need to be interested enough to walk for three hours to view the southern hemisphere's largest granite monolith. Stop off to check out **Thunderbolts Hideout** on the way back to Tenterfield. Park entry is \$7 per vehicle.

THE FOSSICKERS WAY

Starting at Nundle this road takes you through the New England slopes as far north as Warialda, then east over the northwest slopes to Glenn Innes. It passes through the Tertiary basalts of the central volcanic province. Hurlled from volcanoes they bear various valuable minerals and contain crystals of corundum otherwise known as sapphire. Forget about fuel prices, you could actually make money on this trip.

NUNDLE

☎ 02 / pop 240

Lush grape vines shade the veranda in spring and summer but the leafless vines in winter give way to snow-capped mountain views. Oh... you are actually sitting on the back veranda of the Peel Inn. And unfortunately the mountains only have snow three or four days a year. But you can be guaranteed that the Peel River will still be flowing and trout still biting.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 6769 3158; 96 Jenkins St) is part of Café Nundle, where you can get information about the **Go For Gold Festival** in Easter; where all the locals dress up as Chinamen (and women) to celebrate the early mining heritage.

Hanging Rock, 10km to the east, offers superb views and picnic opportunities; you can camp for free by the **Sheba Dams**, which were built during the gold rushes. But if you are planning to retire, forget the camping and grab a pan from Café Nundle, as there is gold waiting to be uncovered at **Swamp Creek Reserve**.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation gets booked out over Christmas and the Easter long weekend and during

the Tamworth Country Music Festival at the end of January.

Peel Inn (☎ 6769 3377; www.peelinn.com.au; r \$35-70, s/d incl breakfast \$50/65) When was the last time you walked into a pub through saloon doors? Get good value unintentionally retro pub rooms (think Austin Powers), and a restaurant serving steak and seafood meals (\$10 to \$26).

Jenkins St Guest House (☎ 6769 3239; 85 Jenkins St; r \$130-170) Share honey-glazed lamb shanks with your honey. Or prawn chilli linguine with the love of your life. Lunch is served daily and dinner from Thursday to Sunday. Meals range from \$20 to \$26.

Fossickers Tourist Park (☎ 6769 3355; www.fossickersatnundle.com.au; Jenkins St; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/20, on-site vans \$45, cabins \$55-80; ☎) Adjacent to the Peel River and opposite the visitors centre. Ask for the cabin with river views.

There is a school bus that heads to Tamworth on school days at 7.15am, however, all roads around here lead somewhere, so it's probably best if you come by car.

MANILLA

☎ 02 / pop 2110

The town is just a tippie of its former glory but the three remaining pubs still stand gregariously proud on the main street. Manilla boasts some of the best conditions in the world for paragliding and the talk of this place becoming a hub for the extreme sport is not all just hot air. Extreme sports aside Manilla is also fisherman fantasy world with the Namoi River and Lake Keepit quite close by.

Orientation & Information

There is a SPAR for groceries and ATM located on the main street. The post office is opposite the Post Office Hotel of course.

FOSSICKING THE FOSSICKERS WAY

'Left ta right, side ta side, then turn it ova, just like Mum's flippin a cake', Ross explains, his beady eyes awash with hope as they search through the wash of pebble looking for just a hint of blue. This is the home of the **blue sapphire** and only one of a few places on earth where they are found. Learn to fossick with an expert like Ross or hire gear from town and head to **Boolabinda**, **Kookabookra** or **Dwyers** Fossicking Reserves. Or partake in group fossicking come March when hundreds converge on Glen Innes for **Minerama**. And remember, size doesn't matter, apparently it's all to do with the quality of the crystal. But if sapphires don't light your fire, what about agate, emerald, topaz, garnet, or gold, all waiting to be unearthed along The Fossickers Way. **Take a Wee-Brek** (☎ 0417-272 440; www.fossickingtours.gleninnes.com; Grey St; per bucket \$10-15; ☎ 9am-5pm in summer, ☎ 9.30am-3pm in winter).

VIEW FROM ABOVE

Receiving sporting medals from the prime minister alongside Steve Waugh and Kieran Perkins was a less-celebrated man who has certainly gone the distance. Meet Godfrey Wenness, the man who bought his own mountain and proceeded to fly the very first hill-launched Open-Distance Hang Gliding World Record from it. Not content with the solo record, his girlfriend Suzi joined him up in the clouds for a tandem flight of 223km that netted the world record and saw them land near the Queensland border.

Manilla has become world-famous in the flying community for long-distance flights and Godfrey's mountain is known in flying circles as God's takeoff point.

They are big on fish here so grab your bait, licence and some greasy take-away from **North Manilla Store** (☎ 6785 1900) just north of the bridge before heading to **Lake Keepit** (☎ 6769 7605) or north to Warrabah National Park for the big bites.

The man wanted to fly so he bought a mountain. **Godfrey's Manilla Paragliding** (☎ 6785 6545; www.flymanilla.com; tandem flights \$120) will take you to the top of Mt Borah so you can paraglide back down again. Complete a nine-day course (\$1320 including accommodation), just turn left on Charles St north of the river.

Bulging brown tree-freckled hills, it's hard to imagine **Warrabah National Park** ever being green. You will pass oodles of ostriches on your 35km trip northeast of Manilla. The beautiful brook along the side of the road is the Namoi River and you can bushwalk, canoe, fish (murray cod and catfish), swim or camp on its banks (adult/child \$3/2).

Sleeping & Eating

Manilla River Gums Caravan Park (☎ 6785 1166; therivergums@bigpond.com; 86 Strafford St; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/18 on-site vans \$20-45, cabins \$55; ☎) Just \$10 a night for a bed in the 'crash pad'. You can hire canoes for \$5, and ask Joe where he can get you a great deal on pushbikes.

Chinese Restaurant (☎ 6785 1566; 25 Court St; mains \$9-17; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) If you are counting calories you might as well starve, as one of the only other options is the local Chinese restaurant. Found where all small-town Chinese restaurants reside, inside of the local RSL Club.

Getting There & Away

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) coaches depart Manilla for Inverell (adult/child \$35/18) daily. Get to Manilla from Tamworth (adult/child \$7/4) or Sydney (adult/child \$81/41).

BARRABA

☎ 02 / pop 2140

Settled in the 1830s, Barraba was put on the map during the gold-fever days of the late 1800s. But the old wide streets and elegant awnings cannot hide an artsy underbelly centred on music. You may need to do a little digging to find it, but that's OK because the shovel's in the back next to the pick and pan – this place is great for fossicking.

Everything you need is on Queen St. The **library** (☎ Tue-Fri) has internet access if you happen to be in town when it's actually open. The **visitors centre** (☎ 6782 1255; www.barraba.org; 116 Queen St) is also on the main street and has a leaflet detailing a **Heritage Walk** that trundles past the oldest buildings throughout town.

The **Festival of Barraba** is held on the first weekend in November and is a celebration of 'music, trees and gardens'.

But if it's rocks that you are into and you're feeling a bit fossicky, head to the visitors centre and pick up a pamphlet and purchase a gold pan. Travel 3km out of town and turn right onto Woodsreef Rd, 14km more and you will come to Ironbark Goldfield and **Woodsreef Reserve**.

Andy at **Andy's Backpackers** (☎ 6782 1916; www.andysbackpackers.com.au; 98 Queen St; dm \$20, meals by donation) has 'spasmodic' work available in return for free board. He can organise bushwalking, horse riding and fossicking tours.

Otherwise stay at **Barraba Caravan Park** (☎ 6782 1818; www.barraba.org; Bridge St; sites unpowered/powerd \$16/18, cabins \$30-55).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) departs Barraba from Barraba Food & Fuel for Tamworth (adult/child \$16/8) daily.

BINGARA

☎ 02 / pop 1300

This is a small town straddling the Gwydir River. There is not much here if you are not horsey, but it is a nice place to stop over on your way to Tamworth or Copeton Dam.

The post office and IGA are on the main street, but the only ATM will force you into the pub. The **visitors centre** (☎ 6724 0066; www.bingara.nsw.gov.au; Roxy Theatre, 74 Maitland St) is situated in the **Roxy** which is a Greek-influenced,

refurbished Art Deco cinema. It is still utilised today for films, concerts and theatrical pursuits in general.

There are 3000 acres to ride on but most people want to swim with the horses at **Gwydir River Trail Rides** (☎ 6724 1562; gwyydirrides@northnet.com.au; 17 Keera St; 2½-hr trail ride \$55, canoe hire \$30). For fair-dinkum Aussieness complete the five-day Jackaroo/Jillaroo Adventure. You will come back able to ride a horse, crack a whip and brand cattle among other things. All meals and accommodation included (\$350). Or you can giddy up with horse riding lessons for \$20 an hour.

The **Fossickers Way Motel** (☎ 6724 1373; www.bingaramotel.com.au; Finch St; r \$60; ♿) has a tidy appearance and a very quiet setting on the edge of parkland, just across the road from the Gwydir River.

Cheap accommodation can be found at the **Sportsman's Hotel** (☎ 6724 1139; 31 Maitland St) and if you have finished horse riding and feel famished, get anything from sandwiches and melts to steak and burgers (mains \$10 to \$16).

CountryLink (☎ 13 22 32) coaches depart Bingara for Inverell (adult/child \$18/9), Tamworth (adult/child \$26/13) and Sydney (adult/child \$100/50). All bookings can be made at the local newsagents.

INVERELL

☎ 02 / pop 11,000

What this place lacks in character it does not make up for in any other way. It is, however, a regional centre refreshingly not driven by the tourist dollar. The three reasons to go are all located outside of town. The very surprising Kwiambal National Park, the very empty Copeton Dam (just 23% capacity at the time of writing) and the very beery and cheery Graman Pub (see opposite).

Information

Pick up a map of the area's fossicking sites at the **visitors centre** (☎ 6728 8161; www.inverell-online.com.au; Campbell St) as there are plenty of gems that can be visited by car.

Post office (☎ 6722 5241; 97 Otho St)

Sights & Activities

The **Inverell Pioneer Village** (☎ 6722 1717; Tingha Rd; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a place where you step back in time and discover the people who helped shape Oz.

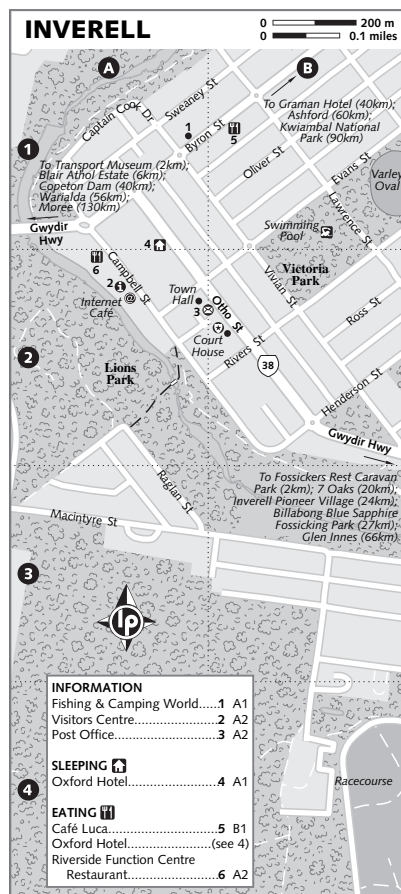
An ideal outing for car enthusiasts is the **Transport Museum** (☎ 6721 2270; Taylor Ave, Bannock-

burn Rd; adult/child \$6.60/4.40; ☎ 10am-4pm), which features some rare and exotic mobiles that can only be viewed here in Inverell.

One of the more popular fossicking reserves around town is **Billabong Blue Sapphire Fossicking Park** (☎ 6728 8161; Woodstock Rd; adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun). However, prospecting individuals may want to check out **7 Oaks** (☎ 6725 1582; Rickey's Lane) as well. **Fishing & Camping World** (☎ 6722 3620; 112 Byron St) can sort out your fossicking and fishing needs.

Festivals & Events

There is dancing in the streets at the **Sapphire City Festival** when locals put on a parade in October. But if you are feeling fishy the **Great Inland Fishing Festival** is held at Copeton Dam



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in December. It is a catch-and-release comp where you score points depending on what you have hooked.

Sleeping

Warning... expect price hikes during festival and peak times.

Oxford Hotel (☎ 6722 1101; 61 Otho St; s/d \$25/35) Very cosy bargain rooms mean you will soon forget about the one-inch gap above the doorway.

Blair Athol Estate (☎ 6722 4288; www.babs.com.au/blairathol; Warialda Rd; s/d incl breakfast from \$100/120) Built on an extinct volcano, the stunning grounds are peppered with a bizarre to almost disturbing mix of flora from Himalayan cedars to boabs. The initial owners are buried in the front yard.

Fossickers Rest Caravan Park (☎ 6722 2261; www.fossickersrest.com.au; Lake Inverell Dr; unpowered/powerd sites \$14/18, cabins \$45-55) Located in a beautiful shady setting 3km east of Inverell.

Eating

Café Luca (☎ 0267-210 160; 103 Byron St; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Located within a hardware store, the café offers a range of original melts as well as the Steamer, flavour-infused milk.

Oxford Hotel (☎ 6722 1101; 61 Otho St; mains \$5-16; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun) Frighteningly, it's the pick in town in terms of value, thanks to large servings of steak and seafood.

Riverside Function Centre Restaurant (☎ 6721 1244; Campbell St; mains \$22-28; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) In a town lacking choice, this restaurant is the most upmarket option. The key here is flavour and they actually use herbs, homemade sauces and dressings, distinguishing it from all other eating options in town.

Getting There & Away

Black & White (☎ 6732 3687) departs Inverell for Glen Innes weekdays only. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32) departs Sydney for Inverell daily (change over at Tamworth). And runs south to Tamworth (adult/child \$28/35), connecting through to Scone (adult/child \$40/35) and Sydney (adult/child \$62/52).

If you would prefer to fly **Big Sky Express** (☎ 1800 008 759) depart daily from Sydney to Inverell, via Gunnedah.

AROUND INVERELL

Copeton Dam (☎ 6723 6269; Gumflat Rd; per car \$8, boat hire per hr \$20, bike hire \$14) There are a number of activities from water skiing and sailing to golf, although the kangaroos don't appear to take their game too seriously. Be careful of these fellows on the road, they're big buggers and remember to stop at Gum Flat Worm and Yabbie Supplies for all your live bait needs.

Green Valley Farm (☎ 6723 3370; Tingha; admission \$5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun & school holidays) Head south of Inverell to the small township of Tingha and Green Valley Farm. There is 18-hole mini golf (\$2), water slides (\$6), a museum, a zoo and topiary grotesqueries, such as an 'eight-legged kitten' and 'Siamese pigs'.

Graman Pub (☎ 6725 6482; Yetman Rd, Graman; ☎ lunch & dinner) Craig is the publican and what you see is what you get, which is always lots of laughs. You will meet brilliant characters and have a wonderful time, this may just be one of the best pubs you will visit in NSW.

KWIAMBAL NATIONAL PARK

Pronounced Kigh-am-bal (the 'w' is silent), the park is located on the junction of the Macintyre and Severn Rivers. Largely undiscovered (admission free), it is an important conservation area for the tumbledown gum and Caley's ironbark.

When you pull up in the car park of the **Macintyre Falls Lookout at Lemon Tree Flat Camping Area**, you immediately notice the hypnotic humming in the trees and the rush of water. Find time to complete a (1km-long) walk as there are several to choose from that either take you over the rocks, down to the plunge pool or along the beach.

The park is also known for the **Ashford Limestone Caves**. You can feel the cold seep into your bones as you approach the entrance. This place is creepy (particularly if you forget to bring a torch) and is home to the very rare Large Bent-wing and Eastern Horseshoe bats.

Head 90km north of Inverell toward Ashford and follow the signs. The road may be hard to negotiate after rain so contact the **NPWS** (Glen Innes office; ☎ 6732 5133) or **Inverell visitors centre** (☎ 6728 8161) before you go to check its condition.

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