

DESTINATIONS

Dingo Tops State Forest and Tapin Tops National Park

If you want a weekend away from the NSW Pacific Highway bustle you can drive into the hills that overlook the Manning Valley for a peerless rainforest experience.

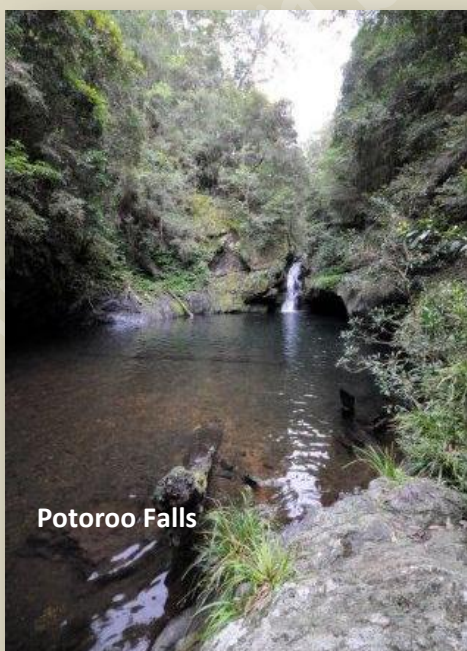
Most of this beautiful drive is on graded dirt roads, so it's not a demanding 4x4 destination, but there are many steep side tracks in the State Forest sections that are worth exploring, if you have topographic GPS map backup. Other reserves in the locality are Cottan-Bimbang and Biriwal-Bulga National Parks.

Magnificent, tall ferny blackbutt, brushbox, tallow wood and blue gum trees dominate the ridge lines and valleys, and rainforest pockets appear around virtually every corner.



View from Blue Knob Lookout

Almost half of Tapin Tops NP is old-growth forest and provides a habitat for threatened species, including the parma wallaby, squirrel glider and sphagnum frog. Wildlife abounds, but is often difficult to see when there's traffic about. On a quiet side track we came across a spotted-tail quoll that was a tad too fast for the camera to catch.



Potoroo Falls

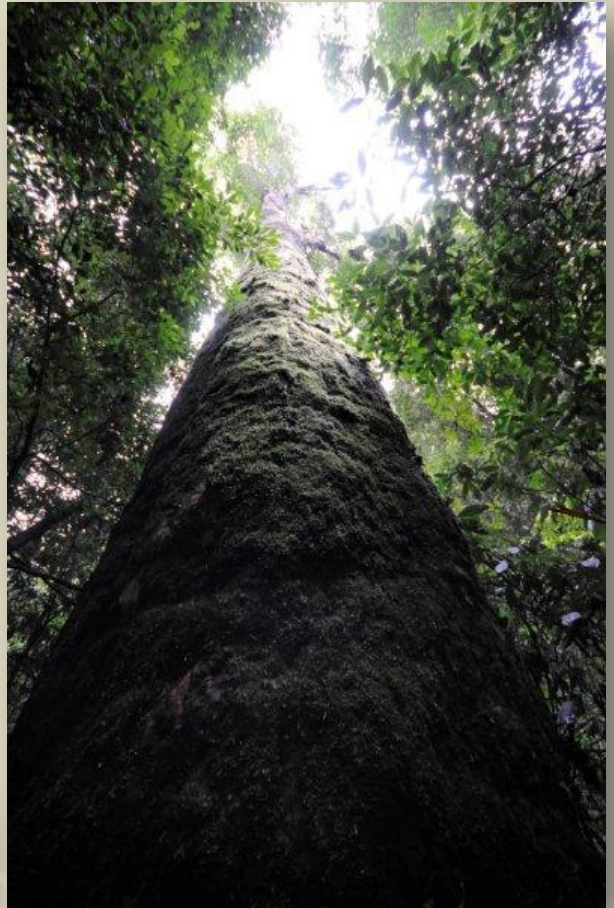
Driving through this beautiful country is punctuated by views of the surrounding mountains and Blue Knob Lookout is a must-visit roadside stop, offering 360-degree panorama of the surrounding hills.

As with most 4x4 touring you need to climb out of your vehicle and walk, to get the best value from a destination. There are two rainforest walks that start from Dingo Tops rest area: a 15-minute short walk, south of the main camping ground; and a 35-minute walk on the northern side.

Potoroo picnic area is located near Little Run Creek on Potoroo Road and the walking track to Potoroo Falls starts just near the wooden-plank ford over the stream.

The track is a simple footpath through rainforest, so it's damp and slippery, with a number of creek crossings that will wet your plimsolls. However, the 600-metre trek is worth it, culminating in a huge swimming hole below Potoroo Falls. You'll also brush by the largest water-gum in NSW, right on the edge of the track.

Our trek began with a drive to the west, up the Oxley Highway, from the timber town of Wauchope. We turned left towards Byabarra, Comboyne and Elands, before taking the short side trip to Ellenborough Falls. This single-torrent drops off the Bulga Plateau on the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range and is billed enthusiastically by the locals as the second-tallest single-drop waterfall in the Southern Hemisphere.



Ellenborough Falls

Spectacular as Ellenborough is this dizzying 160-metre water drop must take its place behind Queensland's Wallaman, NSW's Wollomombi, Victoria's Dandongadale and the NT's Jim Jim Falls, according to Geoscience Australia.

At the top of Ellenborough Falls is a touching plaque, dedicated to a child who fell over the edge.

From Ellenborough our trek led north, for an overnight camp at Maxwells Flat, followed by an early start and a day's drive along Knodingbul Road and Potoroo Road, before a refuel at Wingham and the freeway run back to Sydney.



Maxwells Flat Camp Area

Evident History

The area was traditionally inhabited by the Biripi people and was probably used as a pathway connecting the tablelands with the coastal plains.

The name 'tapin' means dingo in the local Aboriginal Kattang language.



Timber harvesting began in the early 1900s and escalated during and after World War II. Today's Dingo Tops rest area was previously a forestry work camp and features some historic logging relics: a rusting dobbie - a wheeled wedge used for log skidding - a dilapidated steam traction engine and what's left of a horse-drawn grader.

This drive that used to be exclusively through State Forest country, before an 11,000 hectare slab of it was dedicated as Tapin Tops National Park in 2000.

A steep 4x4 track leads to Rowleys Lookout: however it's now a 'strenuous 45-minute walk' from a tiny car park, ruling it out of bounds for many visitors.



It's important to remember as you punt along this excellent road network that we wouldn't have it without the early logging enterprises: NPWS is into closing roads, not building them.



FACT FILE

Where

Knodingbul Road is the main access road, running the full length of the central ridge and connecting Mount George in the south to the Oxley Highway in the north.

From the east, access is via Wauchope, Comboyne and Ellenborough Falls and, from the west, Nowendoc Road.

Time required

Three days

What to do

Easy to very demanding 4x4 driving, camping, bush walking, photography, bird and animal watching and fishing.

Maps

A detailed NSW road map is adequate for straight-through driving, but topographic GPS mapping is necessary for track driving and bush walking.

Camping

Maxwells Flat and Dingo Tops campsites have toilets. Potoroo Falls has a picnic area and toilet.

Permits

There are no permits needed, but there's a camping fee payable at Dingo Tops.

Track closures

Roads and tracks are closed after heavy rain and at times of extreme bush fire risk.

Last fuel

Wauchope, Wingham, Walcha.

Contact

National Parks and Wildlife Service Port Macquarie Area Office:

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Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au



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