

## **Lapstone Zig Zag**

**Location:** Start this walk at the end of Knapsack Street in Lapstone where a large signpost indicates the start of the walk.

**Duration:** 2 hours

**Grade:** Easy, although if you take the detour to Elizabeth Lookout it has many steps and requires some fitness

**Features:** lookouts, historical sights

### **Trip Notes:**

We could imagine the railway tracks making their way along this fir covered trail dappled with beams of sun shining through the Casuarina trees. The sign at the start sketched out the various tracks in this area so we didn't take the first path on the right to Quarry Lookout knowing we would come back to it later in the trip. Instead we continued straight ahead entering an impressive cutting in the rock, the first obvious sign of the railway. Now a mass of ferns carpets what once was the railway line and long gnarled tree roots weave themselves onto the vertical rock face amongst the blast lines and weathered rocks. Walking through this tunnel-like pathway, we can't help but wonder at its history and the skilled construction of the railway, which the bush is now reclaiming.

Emerging from a second cutting, a sign points us down a lower path to the Quarry. This is the middle line of the Zig Zag and we will also ignore this path for now and continue straight ahead to Lucasville station (the top point). What remains today are the sturdy station platform and some interesting old steps which once led to the cottage of the Hon. John Lucas, the Minister for Mines in the late 1800s. Going straight ahead takes us to Siding Lookout at the end of this top line. The view is impressive and directly opposite us is Elizabeth Lookout and in between is Knapsack Gully, the deep crevice across which the original stone viaduct still stands. This domineering and magnificent structure is Knapsack Viaduct and the far reaching view from Siding Lookout takes in this picturesque bridge with its seven tall semi circular arches, as well as the second newer brick viaduct. Making a U-turn at this lookout and heading down the pretty path lined with stones, leads to Knapsack Viaduct where there is a number of choices of track. Those wanting a casual stroll may like to take the fork to the right which leads to the top of the viaduct where cyclists and walkers are enjoying the day and exploring the area. For the more energetic, the left fork goes to Mitchells Pass, and the path which goes under the viaduct is the one we took which leads to Elizabeth Lookout.

Here the vegetation grows more dense and the tinkering sounds of bell birds can be heard. The track goes down to Knapsack Creek and swings back round to go under the viaduct again, this time on the other side of the creek. Some impressive views of the viaduct can be had from down here and many fellow bushwalkers stopped to admire this towering wonder. Now a steep climb up many steps takes us up to Elizabeth Lookout. The somewhat gruelling climb was made more interesting by the red belly black snake that was out sunning itself – a beautiful and shy creature which slithered away when it heard us coming.

Elizabeth Lookout had a large picnic shelter which was a good place for a rest and from the lookout we could see all the way to the city of Sydney, with its unmistakable landmark of Centerpoint Tower. After exploring the lookout area, we retraced our steps; this detour to Elizabeth Lookout taking about an hour return trip from the viaduct.

Continuing to retrace our steps back up the path to Siding Lookout and back along the top line got us to the middle line signposted to the Quarry. This track meanders through another cutting and a small detour takes us past the site of the postman's cottage, unfortunately not standing today but evidenced by some large stone blocks nearby. A quaint picnic table here is a peaceful place for a break. The quarry is close by and we can see where rocks have been cut out of this embankment. It's an intriguing place to explore and some walkers were taking the steps from here down to the highway which eventually leads back to the viaduct. However we turned right here towards the quarry wall and followed the path around and up to Quarry Lookout which gives more scenic views over the plains and across to the Sydney. From here it's only a short stroll back to the start to complete the walk.

**History:** Zig zag railways were constructed in the shape of a Z so that trains could negotiate very steep inclines. The two points on the Z (the top and bottom points) were where the train could change direction by reversing up or down the middle track. Lapstone Zig Zag was opened in 1867 and finally provided a way for rail to get over the Blue Mountains. Knapsack Viaduct was part of this railway and also provided some vehicular access over Knapsack Gully. This was considered the greatest feat of railway engineering at the time and was constructed under engineer John Whitton. The Zig Zag operated for 25 years but eventually funds were available to tunnel through the mountain and in 1892 the first Glenbrook Tunnel replaced it. Once another route of easier grade up the mountain was made, the railway line was again changed and a newer brick viaduct was built to join the new line. This was opened in 1913 and is still in use today. Consequently the original Knapsack Viaduct lay dormant until 1926, when it became part of the main highway across the Blue Mountains. In the mid 1990s the route of the Great Western Highway was altered, building over the bottom line of the zigzag and leaving Knapsack Viaduct closed to traffic.

Ref: Bayley William A 1975. *Lapstone Zig Zag Railway, Blue Mountains NSW*. South Coast Times Commercial Printing, Wollongong.