

## **The Glow Worm Tunnel and Old Coach Road on the Newnes Plateau**

**Due to recent and overnight heavy rain the venue for this walk was changed on the morning to the Zig Zag Walking Track. This preamble was prepared earlier in the week.**

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2008

The low afternoon sun cast ghostly shadows of the pagoda formations across the roughly formed coach road. The horses' hooves chinked against the ironstone fragments scattered on the track as the steel rimmed wheels of the coach ground the grooves in the sandstone ever deeper. As the coach bumped and swayed across the plateau the driver and his passengers were surprised at the rapid progress being made on the construction of the new railway line which ran beside the coach road for long distances. The driver's admiration for the workmen on the railway was tempered by the thought that the completion of the line would severely curtail his trade in conveying passengers and supplies to the expanding mining community in the Wolgan Valley.

Along the railway alignment work was continuing apace. Deep inside the sandstone cliffs the two gangs of day labourers, who had commenced work at opposite ends of the long curving number two tunnel, had broken through to meet each other. The sandstone they had cut through was so dense and stable the tunnels did not require any lining. Outside of the tunnel, in order to form cuttings where the line hugged the cliff face as it descended into the valley, men had to be suspended on ropes from the cliff tops as they used jumper bars to drill holes for explosive charges and levered out loose rocks.

Soon the sound of the powerful Shay locomotives would be reverberating off these cliffs and plumes of smoke would billow skywards as products won from the mines were hauled out of the valley.

Should we have been passengers on that coach a mere one hundred years ago this is part of the scene we would have experienced. The Old Coach Road, built to provide a more direct route to the Wolgan Valley mines than the 1897 road via Lidsdale and the Wolgan Gap was, in 1907, about to be made redundant to some extent by the railway. The Newnes township, oil shale mines and processing plants were about to boom, albeit for a relatively short time.

Today the remnants of that human endeavour are being absorbed back into the bushland as Mother Nature reclaims her territory, adding her delicate beautifying touch to mask the evidence of man's occupation. As the Roman poet Horace noted in 20 BC: "Though you drive away nature with a pitchfork, she always returns."

Once again we gathered at the Clarence railway station, xx? walkers keen to explore the area around the Glow Worm Tunnel; an area which contains significant examples of the work of nature and of man.