

Thunderbolts Way, NSW

RATING	Get there before the traffic finds it.
MAP REF	Map 27, C11 – Map 29, J9
START/END	Gloucester, Walcha
DISTANCE	158km
INFORMATION	Gloucester (02) 6558 1408, Walcha (02) 6777 1075



It's mainly a fast, open road but remember that you're a long way from a hospital.

Thundering north

Once upon a time you could scare beginner motorcyclists – and not-so-beginners – with Thunderbolts Way. It was named after a bushranger and seemed to have picked up the roughness to go with it. The stretch just before Nowendoc, coming from Gloucester, was a nightmare of big, pointy, loose rocks which would throw everything short of a full-dress Harley off line unmercifully – again and again.

Things change, and sometimes they even change for the better. Today, Thunderbolts Way is one of the best roads in NSW.

Get it while you can. It is clearly destined to become a major link between Sydney and the north of the State. The road across to Tamworth is progressively being tarred (although Port Stevens Cutting remains as narrow and dangerous as ever) so all it will take will be finishing the upgrading of Bucketts Way from the Pacific Highway. But until the full flow of traffic finds it, it's ours.

"The road is like a giant roller-coaster as it heads north to the Manning Valley ..."

The road is well signposted from **Gloucester**. Just cross the Gloucester River and you're away. The road is like a giant rollercoaster as it heads north to the Manning Valley and then up into the range with some impressive sweeping corners. It's not flat at the top, either, although it is flatter, and there are some great views to the west across the Barnard River and its tributaries.

Nowendoc, off to the left a short way, has a general store and fuel pump but little else. These are the only services on the road. The building itself and the open grassy patch Nowendoc occupies reminds me of the north-western USA; you might be in Utah or Montana here.

The final stretch of road into **Walcha** has been tarred for longer, so it's narrower and the corners are not surveyed quite so generously. It's still fun, though, and of course it leaves you on the wonderful Oxley Highway.

Surface, signposting and everything else is as good as a major highway's along Thunderbolts Way.

