Tom Roberts was the father of Australian landscape painting.

He captured the amazing light and colour of the Australian bush, the Australian way of life and its people.

Born in England in 1856, Tom migrated to Australia with his widowed mother and family in 1869. He was interested in art from an early age and studied in Australia and overseas. Visiting Tasmania in 1877 he met his first wife Elizabeth (Lillie) Williamson. Tom and Lillie later married in East Kew, Victoria in 1896. They honeymooned in Tasmania before first settling in Sydney, NSW. Their son Caleb was born in 1898. In the years that followed they visited Tasmania several times, and moved mainly between Melbourne, Sydney and England before finally settling in Kallista, Victoria in 1923. Lillie died in Victoria in 1928. Later that year Tom once again travelled to Tasmania and married an old family friend, Miss Jean Boyes at Christ Church, Illawarra. Tom and Jean settled at Kallista, Victoria and visited Tasmania each year.

To many Tom Roberts is certainly considered to be the first artist to capture Australia’s natural light with startling realism. He is the founder of The Heidelberg School in Victoria; Australia’s first significant art movement.

His extensive array of paintings tell the story of the development of Australia as a society and as an idea. They show us sparkling coast and dusty interior, the sophisticated city and the productive countryside, Aboriginals and immigrants, bright-eyed little girls and crusty old squatters, ladies with parasols and men with guns, politicians and bullockies, people making music and people making roads.

Tom was impressed by the Tasmanian landscape paintings of John Glover, and he painted Under Ben Lomond as a tribute to this well-known early colonial artist.

Tom’s Shearing the Rams is arguably our single most widely recognised and best loved painting. It is considered the definitive image of an emerging national identity.

The most important commission of Tom’s career was the Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia by H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall and York (Later H.M. King George V) May 9 1901. Two years in the making, the painting is 15sq meters of pomp and portraiture, featuring over 250 likenesses of Colonial and British dignitaries.

Tom died at Kallista, Victoria in 1931 and his ashes were returned to Tasmania and buried in the Boyes’ family plot.

The ashes of Tom Roberts are buried in the church yard of Christ Church, Illawarra, near Longford, Tasmania.

“He was a great talker, full of fun and whims and wisdom, but he was no egotist ... He would not permit the silent listener. Every moment brought the call for active comradeship, participation in the passing of life and the enjoyment of beauty. He could not have lived without this active interchange of affection and friendship”.

(Sir Frederic William Eggleston, of his friend Tom Roberts)
Follow the Red line from the Visitor Information Booth to Illawarra Christ Church & Tom Roberts grave.

Approx. 7 km

Please shut the gates behind you. Go up the small hill on this dirt track; walk or take vehicle. 0.4km.