

Walk:

Wollemi National Park: T3 to Tootie Cascades via Stairway Ravine

Leader:

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park vehicles on T3 Trail at GR 812 013 and proceed west for a few hundred metres to GR 811 012. Descend into the gully to the north and walk all the way to Tootie Cascades. Swimming opportunities. From here, return via the gully rising south east towards T3 Track. Re-connect with the vehicles. Exploratory. About 6 km. Scrambling and exposure.

Rating:

5M. S333E

Gear Issues:

2 litres of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, first aid kit, tape (leader only). Change of gear for afterwards.

Date walked:

12 April 2024.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Anne Milson, Bill Beck, Bridget Hillebrand, Yidan Saladine, Malcolm Read, 6.

The Weather:

A warm, mostly sunny day with clear sky in the morning and a 50% cloud cover in the afternoon. Very light breezes, felt on exposed tops. Temperature range 16 to 24 degrees C.

Track Notes

Note: time references in the text relate to Grid References in the table at the end of these Track Notes.

Cars were parked at the end of T3 Trail, and after a quick briefing, the adventure was underway at 0923. The party first headed westwards along a moderately falling slope and soon connected with a narrow spur running towards Cascades Peak. We had walked to Tootie Cascades via Cascades Peak on several occasions over the last couple of years. It is an enjoyable journey with spectacular views in the first section, but also a fairly long and, in places, scrubby affair, especially in its second part, and the total time required to get to the cascades is 3.5-4 hours. The main objective today was to see if a shorter, much more direct route was possible via a ravine we had partially travelled on a previous trip.

Having reached the target spur, we stopped at a lookout point as I knew we were next going to descend below the cliff line into the area covered in dense vegetation, so now would be our last opportunity to take in the sweeping panorama of Tootie Creek and Colo River gorges. At 0932.



Tootie Creek and Colo Gorges from the lookout. Parr South is in the middle. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Six minutes later, we were above a narrow slot that would be used for our descent. All around us, the bluffs guarding the top looked very formidable. According to both the map and the on-the-ground observations, this compact spot seems to be the only place available to get down in this vicinity. The first part breaching the cliff line was very steep, but the line of the watercourse could always be identified, and it was easier to follow than the surrounding scrub. Moisture licks appeared in the creek bed after the first 50-60 metres and soon became pools of running water. That was largely due to the downpours that had occurred in the last week or so; we had walked through the bottom part of this ravine previously, and it was almost completely dry.

After a short while, the group attempted to leave the creek bed, to seek greener pastures on a ledge below some wet cliffs, but it only took a few minutes of bashing through Devils Twine and other nasties to realise we had made a mistake and turn back down and rejoin the watercourse, at 1001. Another foray, to the opposite slope, was attempted, only to convince us we should get back into the ravine. This we did, at 1008, and from that moment on, stayed within it for the entire trip to the cascades.

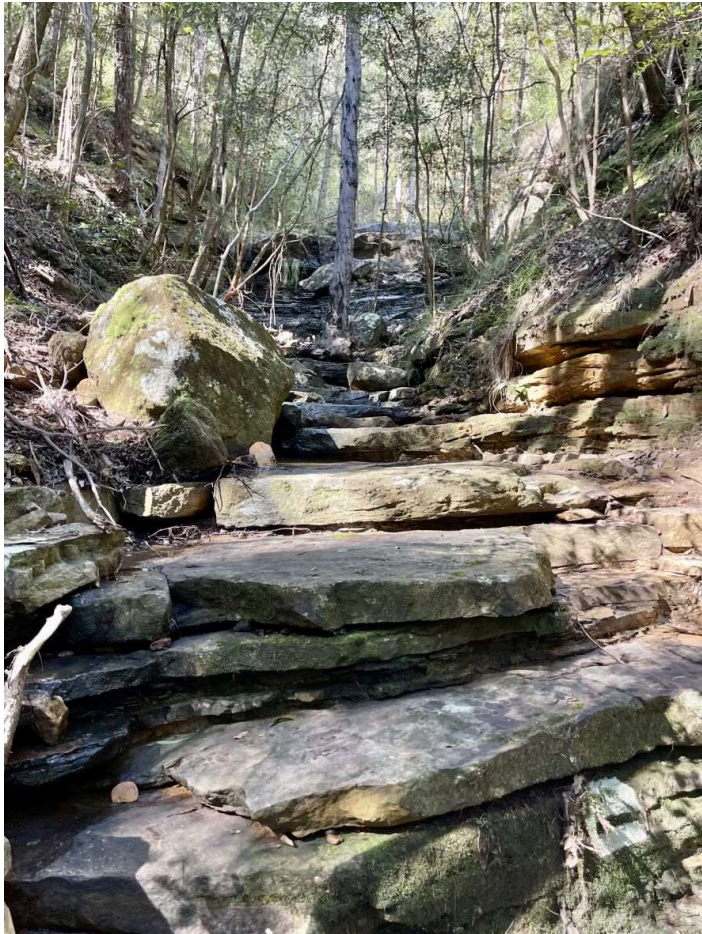
The creek bed was getting more and more enjoyable to tread on as we were coming down. Small boulders we had encountered at the beginning turned into extensive flat stone platforms. There was a lot of running water, and the creek dropped down in big well-measured steps, like a giant stairway. Numerous waterfalls were encountered, but all of them were easy enough to negotiate on one or both sides and, at times, through the middle. The banks of the ravine were forested by medium-size trees, with little or no undergrowth, and provided an easy option to the creek bed when it had too much water.

Between 1037 and 1045, we had a late morning tea on the ravine bank. Thirteen minutes after resuming, a junction with a gully coming from the west was passed. We continued to walk on an incredibly smooth flat light brown creek bed floor as if it was a pavement of a city street. At 1102, a small but beautiful cave was photographed, with conglomerate rock walls looking like a piece of ancient mosaic – orange, white, brown and red. Six minutes later, the party made it to the junction with the tributary we had used to come down on the trip of 04/12/22. I knew now what to expect – more of the same amazing giant stairway. At 1132, the ravine I had been thinking of for making our return trip was passed.

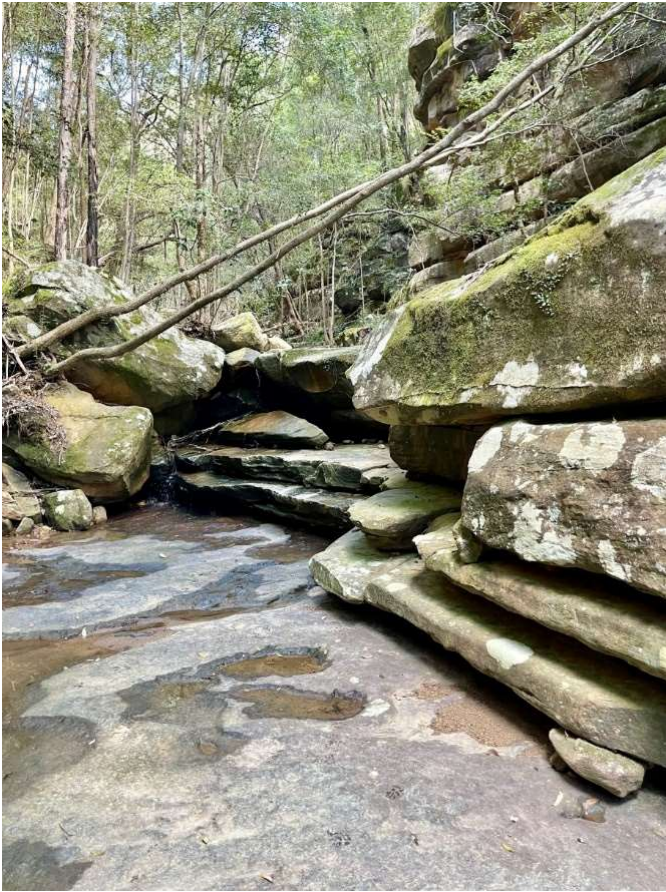


Mosaic cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

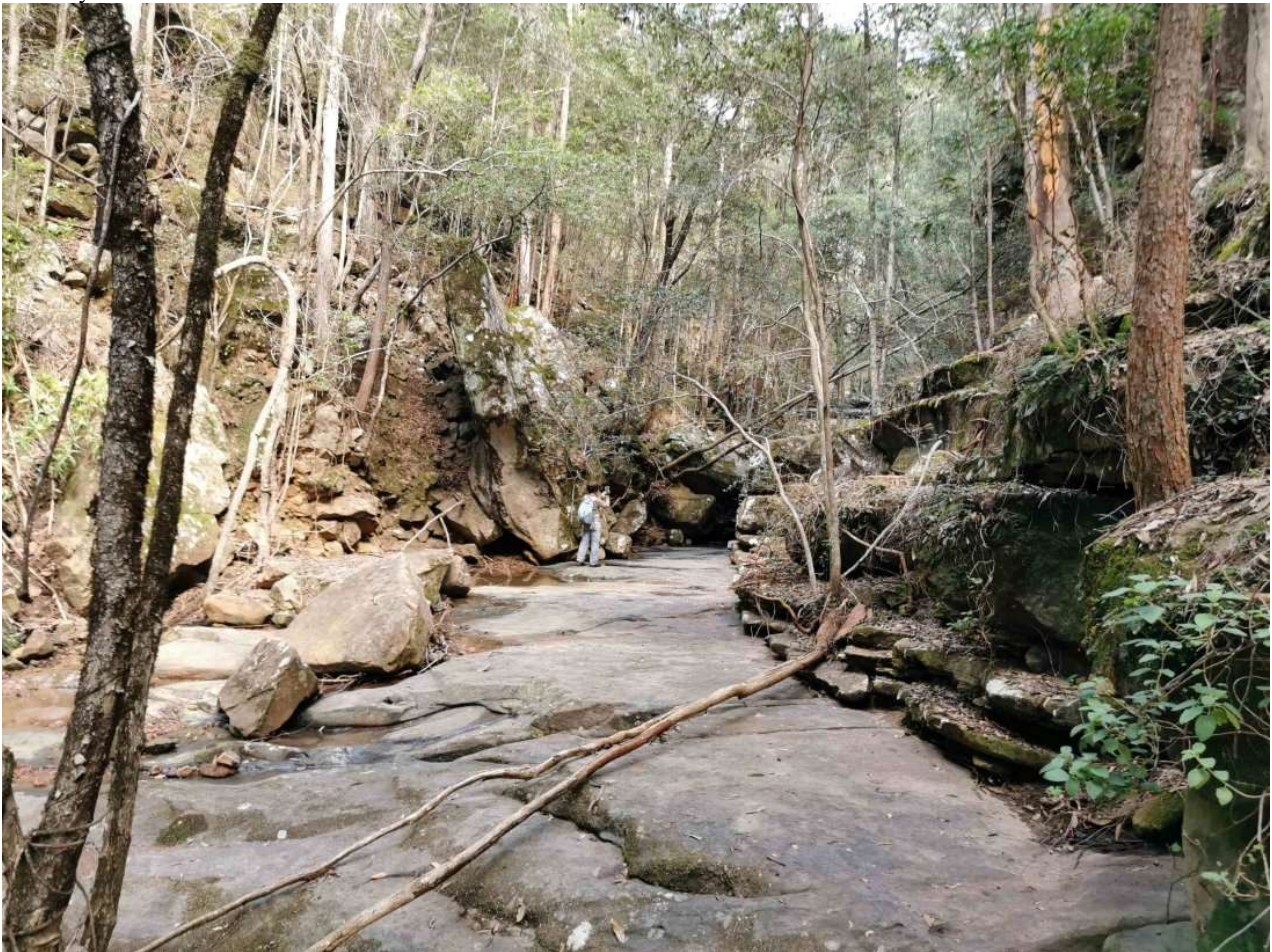
Not long after that we began to hear the roar of rushing waters, making it to Tootie Cascades by 1144, 2 hours 19 minutes since we had left our vehicles. This was a much shorter time compared with other routes, and a very enjoyable journey. I called the amazing watercourse we followed all the way here from near the end of T3 Trail, Stairway Ravine as it is for most of its way, like a giant stairway. A big luxury in the Wollemi!



Stairway Ravine. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Stairway Ravine. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Pavements-like floors in Stairway Ravine. Photo: Bill Beck.



Descending Stairway Ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

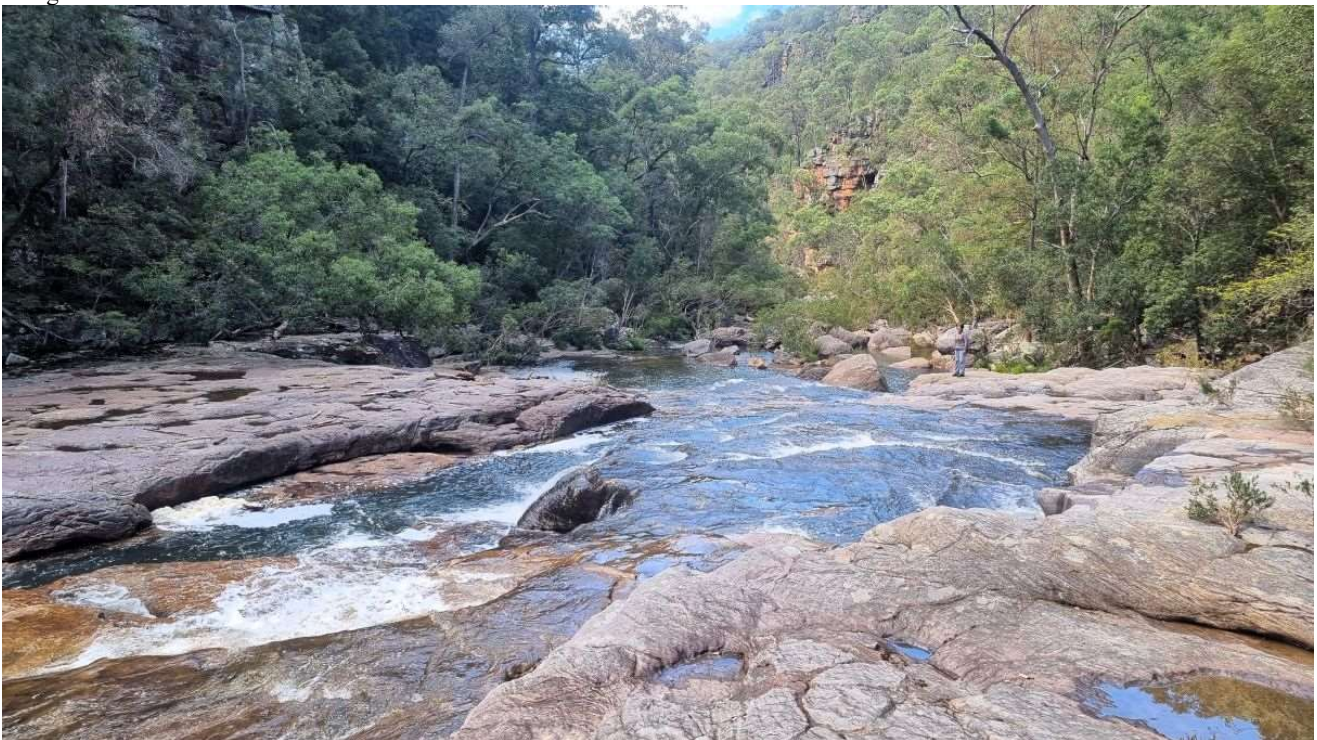
Time for a well-deserved early break for lunch and photography. By going upstream to the largest pool, it was still possible to find a quiet spot for a swim, but the water was very cold, and only a few of us braved the icy temperature.



Tootie Cascades in full flow. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Bridget at Tootie Cascades. Photo: Anne Milson.

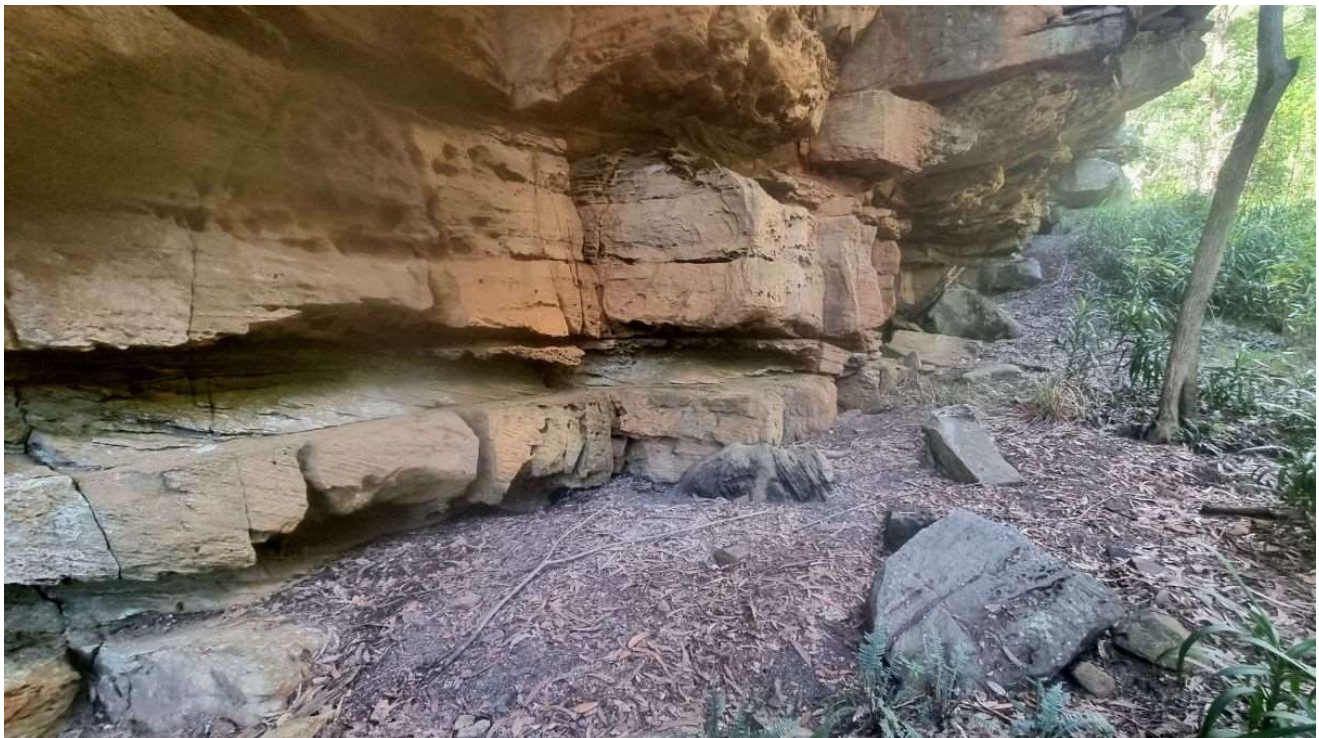


Tootie Cascades. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Water striders, family *Gerridae*. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

At 1230, we began the return journey, first, by following Stairway Ravine up for about 250 metres, and then, at 1239, continuing up a tributary coming from the east. This creek was in many ways similar, but a bit narrower, greener, darker, and in places even prettier. Seven minutes later, I inspected an overhang on the left side, with flat floors and highly eroded walls; it would be a good camping spot for a couple of people. No traces of previous occupation were found.



Camping cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1302, an awkward scramble was necessary to pull yourself up onto the higher platform. It would have been quite easy coming down; today, we set up a tape here for safety. Just past the constriction, we reached a spot where the gully split in two branches and took the one going westwards. At 1308. The enjoyable terrain – platforms and easy to negotiate waterfalls – continued for another 300 m, where the creek seemed to have lost its lustre and became clogged with debris.

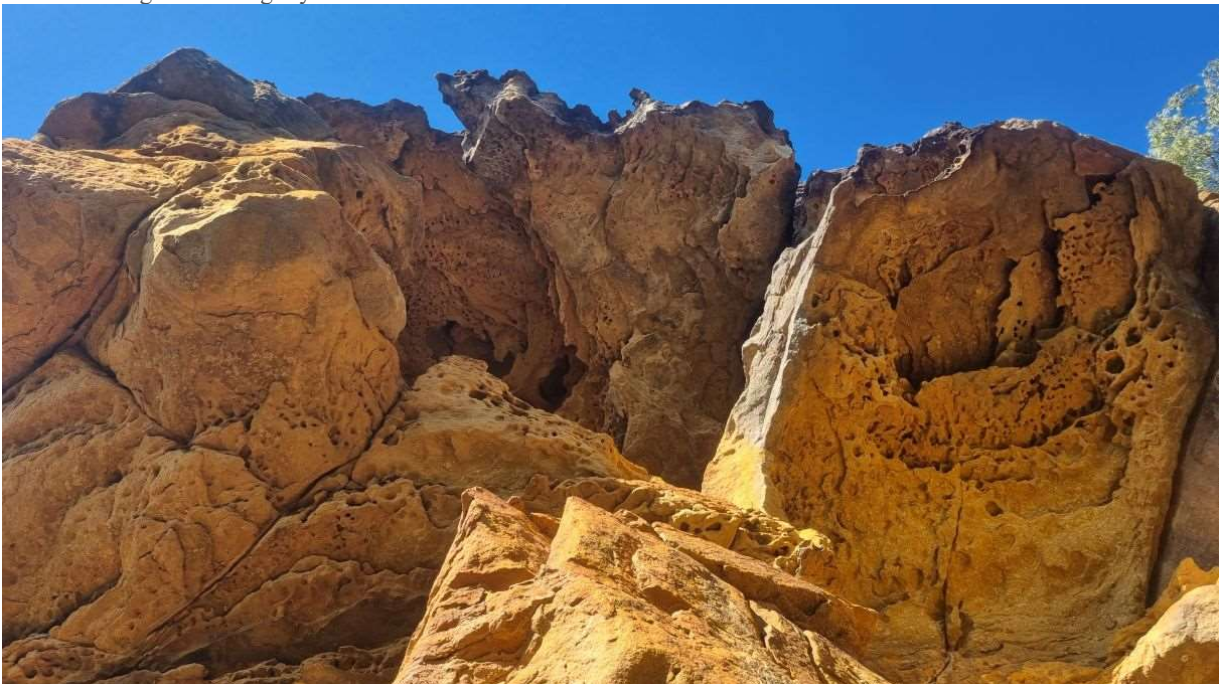


Another easy gully to negotiate. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

At 1338, we left it and began our ascent to the spur on our east, which looked dryer and less scrubby than the one on the western side. A short scramble was necessary almost immediately, to clear a small cliff line. We then continued through medium density understorey. I expected the top of the spur being even easier to walk through, but it was not the case. When we reached it at 1351, we found thick overhead high wall of new growth here. At least the prickly shrubs were not many, and it was just a matter of pushing through, a few steps at a time. It lasted for about 400 m and took us 15 minutes to cross – in my opinion, a small price to pay to the Wollemi gods for the delights of the trip.



Anne climbing out of the gully. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Enormous cliffs above. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By 1406, the group entered a rocky, much steeper slope, reaching the line of high cliffs a four minutes later. A short rest stop was taken here. A traverse in either direction would have probably worked, but I decided to head east, where the map indicated a small gully breaking through the cliffs.

It was a great change of scenery, with the shady confined gullies being replaced by enormous eroded orange and yellow cliffs beautifully lit by the warm afternoon sun. There were also great views of the green gorges below that we had just left behind.

1433 saw the expected break in the cliff line and us entering the target gully, which, although very steep, looked like a doable proposition. It was then a matter of scrambling up it, pausing for a quick drink in one spot, in order to reach the T3 Trail at 1457. We stopped once again at the wonderful lookout just before the end, at 1512, from where we could see most of our route today and the incredible wilderness much further northwards, all the way to Mount Yengo.

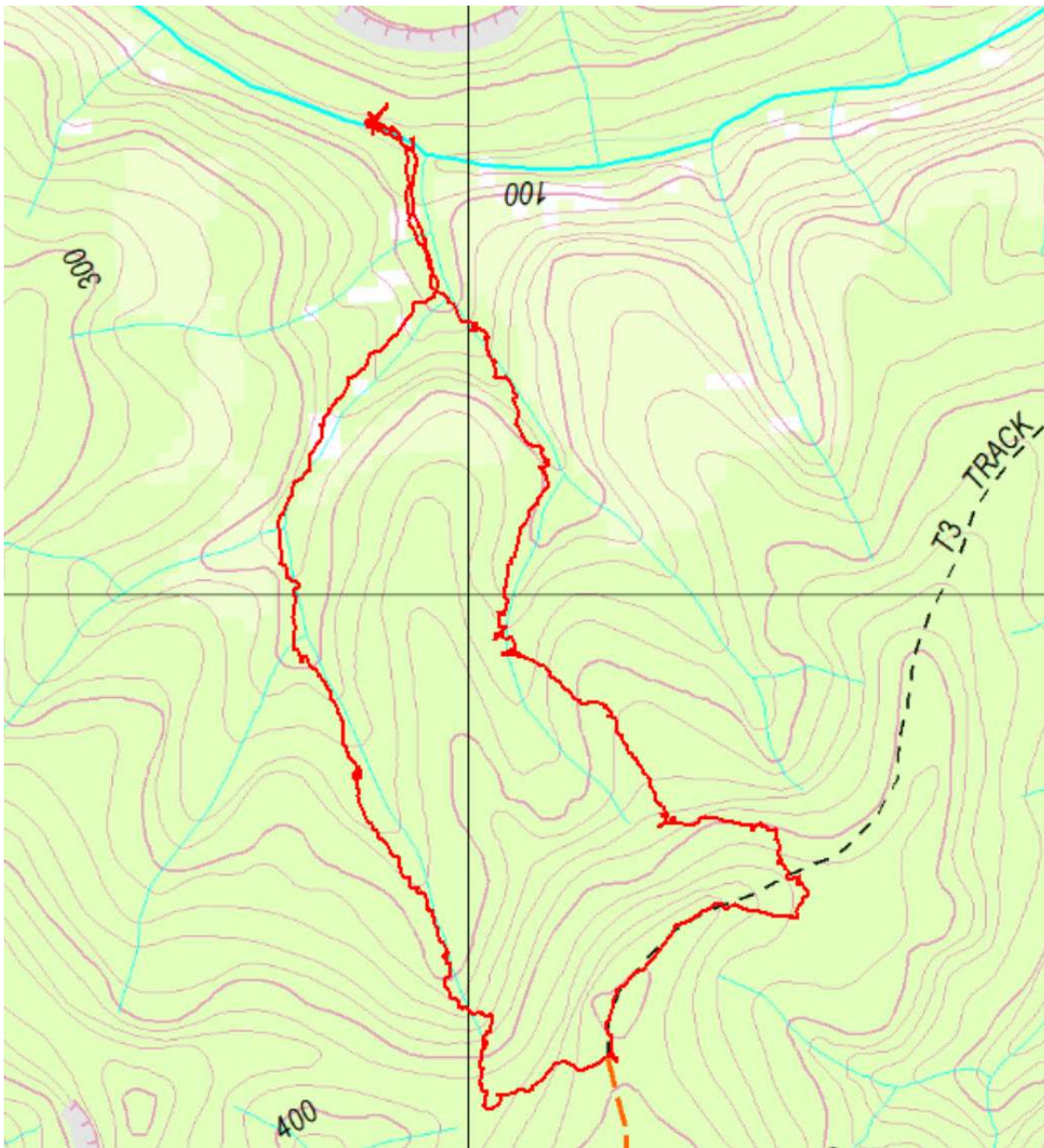


Last view of the day. Cascades Peak is to the left of the centre. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

At 1518, we made it back to the vehicles. I was very happy that we had achieved the main objective of the trip, finding a quick and enjoyable way from the end of T3 Trail to Tootie Cascades. This route can be combined with the fast and easy ridge immediately to the east of the cascades¹ for a great round trip.

Walk statistics: total distance 5.7 km; total ascent 445 m.

¹ See the track notes of the walk on 04/12/22, soon to be part of our *Wollemi National Park: Walks from Bilpin*, Book 1.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0923	Cars parked and started walking	GR 8125 0124	490 m
0932	Lookout	GR 8105 0118	435 m
0938	Descent slot, start of Stairway Ravine	GR 8103 0117	425 m
1001	At the bottom of the ravine	GR 8100 0132	335 m
1008	Ravine becomes pretty	GR 8097 0138	300 m
1037-1045	Morning tea	GR 8082 0171	250 m
1102	Mosaic cave	GR 8072 0202	180 m
1108	Tributary we had used on a previous trip	GR 8070 0210	170 m
1132	Tributary we were planning to use for the return trip	GR 8095 0250	95 m
1144-1230	Tootie Cascades, lunch and swim	GR 8091 0274	85 m
1239	Exit tributary	GR 8095 0250	95 m
1246	Camping cave	GR 8101 0244	120 m
1302	Tape-assisted scramble	GR 8112 0224	180 m

1308	Creek splits, took the western branch	GR 8112 0221	200 m
1338	Exit the creek	GR 8107 0191	250 m
1351	Top of the spur	GR 8121 0183	310 m
1406	End of the dense scrub section	GR 8131 0166	360 m
1410-1415	Underneath the cliffs, drink stop, start sidling	GR 8132 0163	375 m
1433	Gully up	GR 8150 0160	400 m
1457	T3 Trail	GR 8154 0147	440 m
1512	Lookout	GR 8125 0135	500 m
1518	Back at cars	GR 8125 0124	490 m