

## **Walk:**

### **Wollemi National Park: Middle Creek and Long Ridge West**

## **Leader:**

Yuri Bolotin

## **Maps, etc:**

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

## **Description:**

Private property access has been arranged. Park at GR 790 997 on Long Ridge Trail. Get down to Cabbage Tree Creek at around GR 793 011 via Long Ridge Knife-edge. Walk to Tootie Creek and continue up Middle Creek. Exit at GR 779 013, climb south to a saddle, then descend into Tootie Creek. Walk up to around GR 773 007, sidle counterclockwise to about GR 771 996. Find a way up to the top of Long Ridge West and walk back to the vehicles. About 10 km. Scrambling and exposure. Partly exploratory.

## **Rating:**

6M. M333E

## **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:**

18 December 2024.

## **Important Note:**

Part of this walk is through private property. Access permission must be sought for each visit.

## **The Party:**

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Louise Evans, Chris Dalton, Tracey Williams, Ciaran Quinlan, Barth Wahlen, 6.

## **The Weather:**

A variety of weather patterns within one day. In the morning, we had fog, intermittent rain and drizzle till around 11 am. A mostly cloudy couple of hours followed. The sun started to make consistent appearances by about 2 pm. When we finished the walk, the sky was almost completely clear. Temperature range 14 to 20 degrees C. Overall, very favourable walking conditions for this time of the year.

## **Track Notes**

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

Because of a huge fallen tree along Long Ridge Trail, we parked about 400 m short of the usual spot near the 90-degree bend. Even though I packed a chainsaw, it was agreed that the time saved would not be worth the effort. At 0923, our rain jackets on, we began by scrambling over the tree spread across the road, and 200 metres further on, went off-trail by climbing on top of Long Ridge that was covered here in prolific but not difficult to push through understorey.

Just at that time, the persistent early morning rain diminished into a very light drizzle. However, even with our waterproof gear on, we quickly got drenched from the bottom by the extremely wet undergrowth. Having done the Long Ridge Knife-edge descent several times in the past, I had high hopes that by the time

we arrived there, the fog would lift to allow us to enjoy the wonderful views on that route. Meanwhile, even with the limited visibility, we were able to find visual delights at close range in the vivid greens of the vegetation and the pink-orange-reds of the bark-shedding Angophoras.



Angophora roots in the rain. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 0951, following a short descent, the party arrived at the first lookout near the start of Long Ridge Knife-edge, which is a narrow spur that comes down in a north-easterly direction towards Tootie Creek. A few minutes prior, the rain had intensified, so a mass of white cloud was all we could see from that point. None of my companions had traversed the Long Ridge Knife-edge before, so they had to trust my words and use their imagination.

As we continued our descent, I intentionally slowed down; firstly, because the ground was dangerously slippery, and secondly, as I was expecting the change in the weather predicted for about this part of the morning. Indeed, by the time we reached the next viewpoint, precipitation decreased and the fog became thinner, so it was possible to see some silhouettes of distant hills and valleys to our left.

At 1030, having just negotiated a particularly greasy and therefore challenging section, we emerged at an open platform with a great panorama of Tootie Creek gorge. Viewed through a veil of haze, it was dominated by the unnamed conical hill that separates Tootie Creek from the ravine that contains Middle Creek; to the north west, we could just discern the profile of Mount D'Arcy, and to the north east, of Cascades Peak. We had morning tea here, which lasted nine minutes.



The panorama from Long Ridge Knife-edge. Tootie Creek immediately below, with Middle Creek behind the unnamed conical hill. This afternoon, we would descend from the saddle on the left of it. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Quarter-an-hour later, when we were standing at the last lookout, the rain stopped almost completely, and the visibility became even better, so we could clearly see the landscape around and below us, including our next key destination, the cross-like junction of Tootie, Cabbage Tree and Middle Creeks.



Another view from the descent. Cabbage Tree Creek is below us, Cascades Peak to the right of the centre, and Parr South on the far horizon. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By 1058, we were at the end of the knife-edge, below a huge mushroom-like rock. The plan from here was to leave the main spur and to come down in a northeasterly direction into a tributary of Cabbage Tree Creek.

The descent was through the area of thick undergrowth, which included Macrozamia and a small amount of Lawyer Vine. It was slow, wet but manageable.



Ciaran and Barth underneath a mushroom-like rock at the end of Long Ridge Knife-edge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

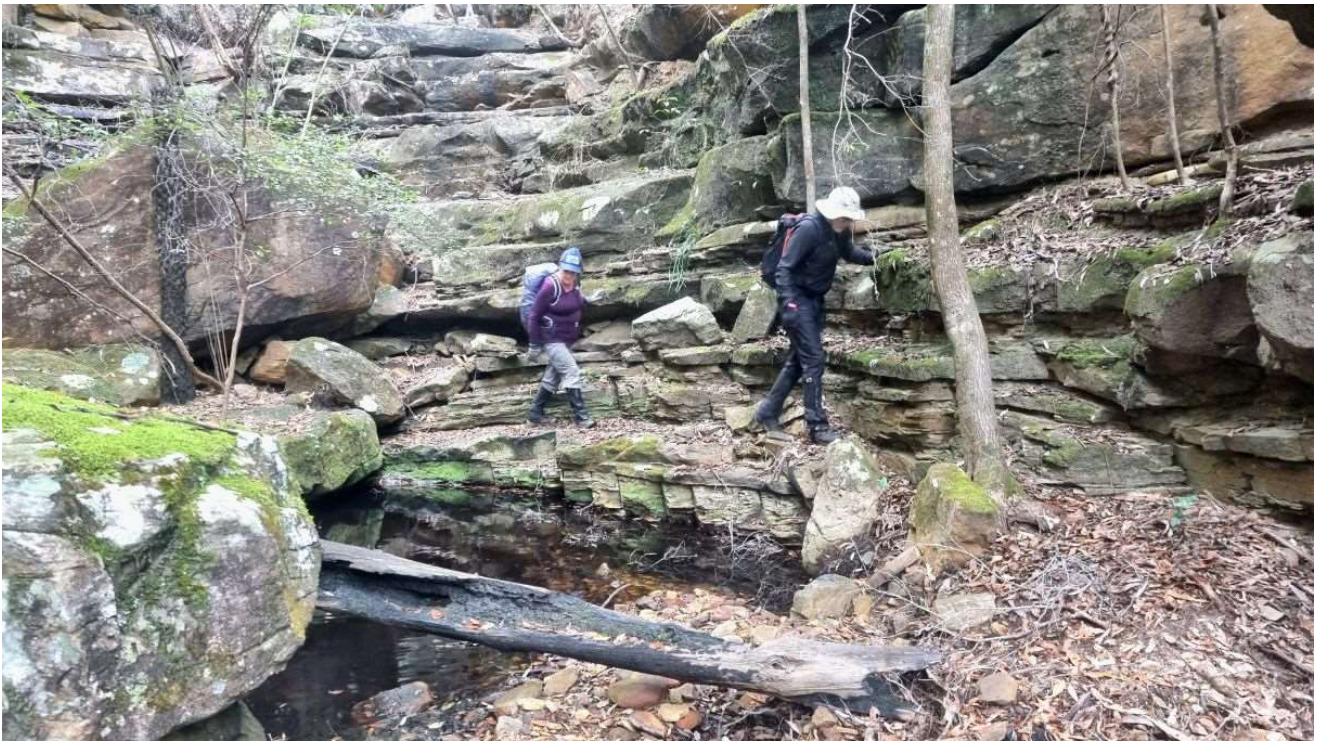
Soon after the bottom of the gully was reached, we came to a big rock platform on the edge of a ten-metre dry waterfall. At 1126. The way down was quickly found on the right-hand side. The creek bed was bouldery, free of debris and a delight to walk on. Less than fifty metres downstream, a big pool of water was recorded. A series of stone terraces led to the junction with Cabbage Tree Creek, at 1146. Here, we inspected a large dark north-facing cave, but it looked too wet for any habitation.



Barth on the edge of the waterfall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

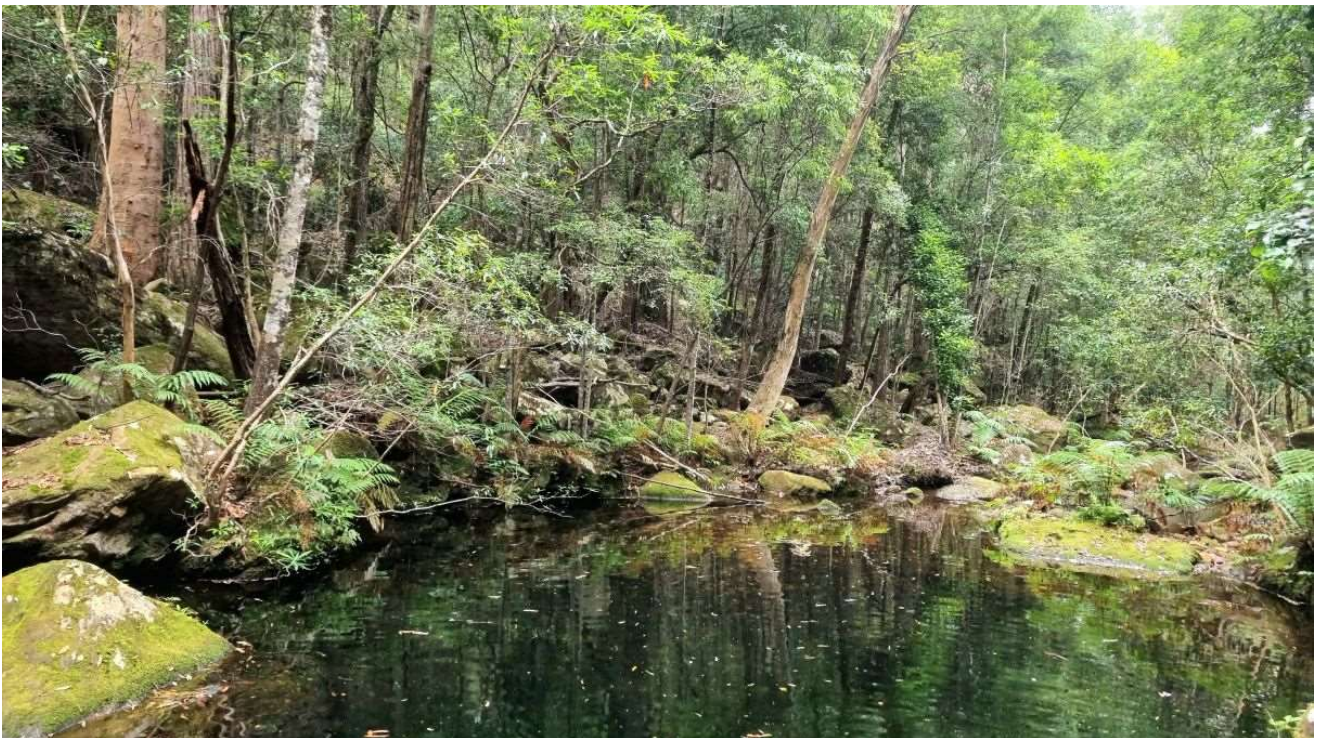


Yuri below the waterfall. Photo: Tracey Williams.



Tracey and Chris in the tributary of Cabbage Tree Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The 500-metre journey down Cabbage Tree Creek was very enjoyable. Unlike the upstream section that we had explored before, the valley here is wide open and dry. There were easy rock block-ups to scramble over and a number of big blue-green pools. The best one, about 20 metres long, with beautiful water reflections, was encountered at 1151. The rain had by then stopped completely, but the sun was still hiding behind thick clouds.



A big pool on Cabbage Tree Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Cabbage Tree Creek boulders and pools. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

A very nice dry deeply weathered overhang with flat floors, suitable for camping, about 20 metres long, was noted next, at 1207. Seven minutes later, the party came to the three-way intersection with Tootie Creek, and, immediately across it, Middle Creek. Whilst it looks remarkable on the topographic map, in real life this area is quite messy due to the abundance of small trees and small scattered boulders; the exact spots where these creeks join are almost impossible to see.



Yuri in a big cave near the junction of Cabbage Tree Creek and Tootie Creek. Photo: Tracey Williams.

On the positive side, Tootie Creek was easy to cross. Our last attempt to do this walk, in March 2022, had been halted by the flood. We were unable to get to the other side and had to change the route, which resulted in discovery of the amazing Surprise Caves.<sup>1</sup>



Ciaran and Tracey at the confluence of Tootie, Cabbage Tree and Middle Creeks. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Today, our journey continued up Middle Creek. It was another fun and enjoyable experience – a darker, deeper ravine, compared with Cabbage Tree Creek, rising at a steeper gradient, and covered mostly in rainforest vegetation, with some very big trees standing out. There was not a great amount of flowing water, so the pools were smaller, but the boulders, much bigger and more interesting to find a way around. A few long dark overhangs were looked at; they were all south-facing and would not be very attractive for human habitation.



Middle Creek action. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

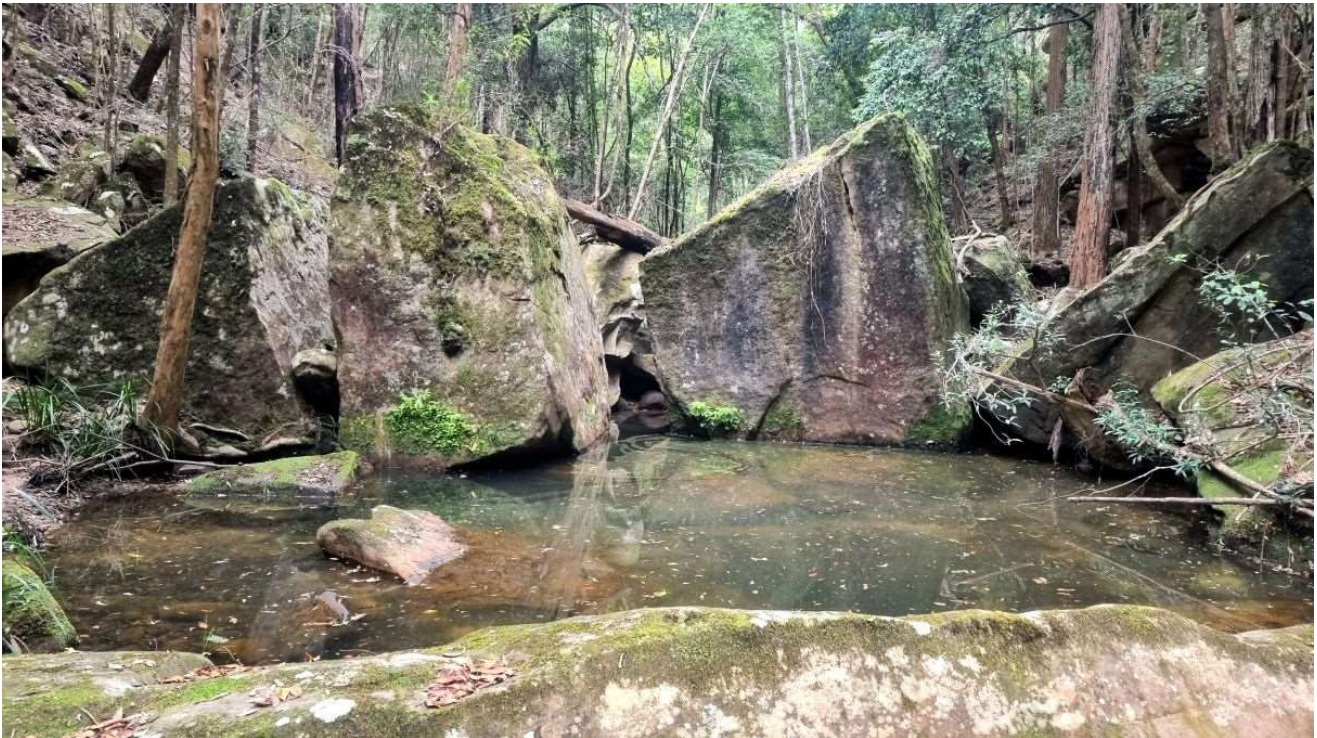
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<sup>1</sup> That story can be found in *Wollemi National Park: Walks from Bilpin, Book 1*, Walk 1.21.





Middle Creek ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



A picturesque pool in Middle Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

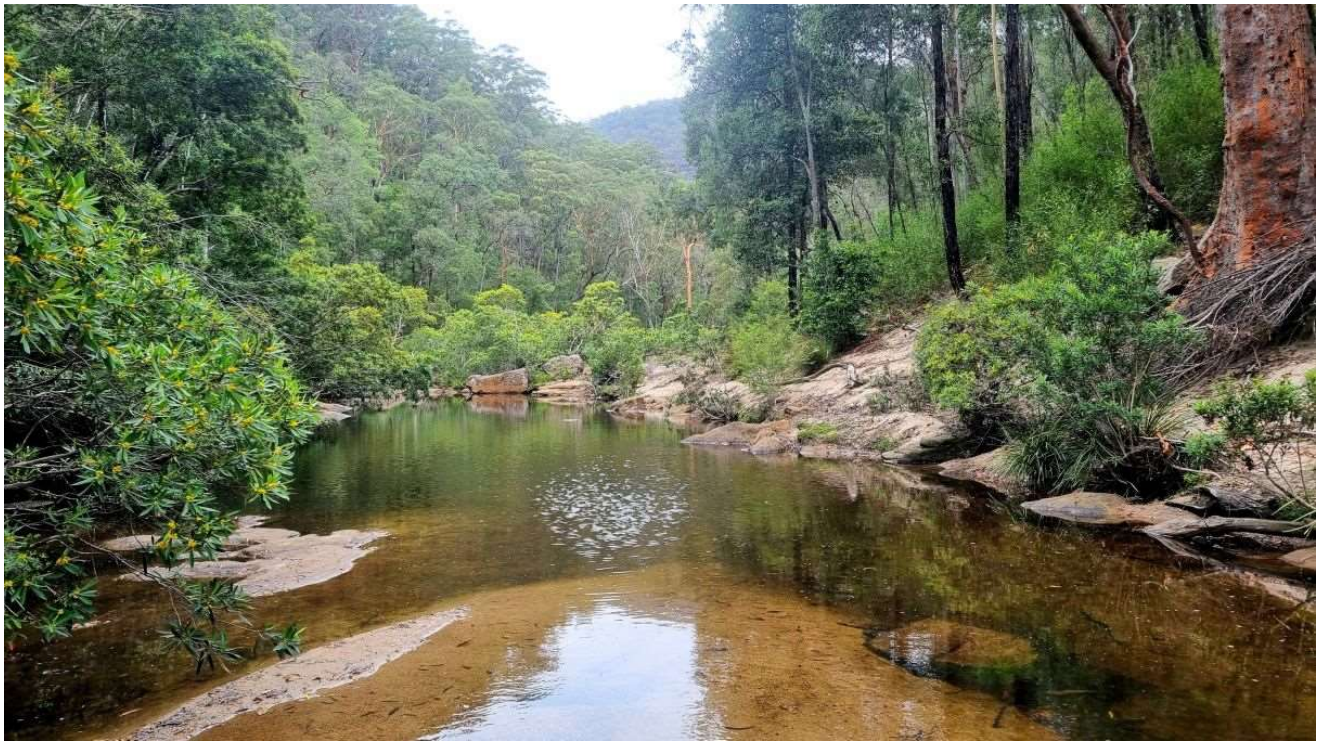


Lunch time in Middle Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From 1305 till 1322, accompanied by loud calls of male Cicadas, the party had lunch on the banks of Middle Creek. Before resuming, we checked and refilled our bottles, as water quality here is superior to Tootie Creek.

Almost straight away, we started to move up a grassy forested slope towards the saddle between Middle Creek and Tootie Creek valleys. The vegetation here was plentiful but manageable, and, by that time, completely dry – which certainly helped. The 60 metre climb to the top took us seventeen minutes. Whilst having a quick stop here, we photographed a ten centimetre orange Praying Mantis.

The much steeper, deeper and scrubbier descent towards Tootie Creek which included negotiating a 10 metre cliff line near the bottom, took thirty-two minutes. Shedding 120 metres of elevation, we made it down by 1411 and felt like another refresher break. A large beautiful pool near the spot where we had crossed to the other side provided an ideal setting.



Tootie Creek pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The party now needed to tackle a 170 metre uphill slog to the bottom of the Long Ridge West cliffs. This was a new route, but a couple of years ago we had ascended only a few hundred metres to the east and found the vegetation almost impossible to penetrate. I therefore expected it to be a real battle, especially as the team felt not all that fresh by this time of the proceedings.

The climb was steep Ok, but the ground was dry and the understorey, negotiable. Based on this trip and many others, I can conclude that the worst of scrubby conditions created by the prolific vegetation growth after the 2019-20 bushfires and the subsequent rains are now generally over, both in the Wollemi and the Gardens of Stone. However, with the hotter summers and wilder temperature, rainfall and wind fluctuations, this more favourable state of the natural environment may be short-lived.

A few short drink stops helped to keep us moving, and by 1455, the company reached the extensive cliff line we were going to traverse for the next part of the trip. I had done a recce trip here three years ago, so it was not too hard to orchestrate our arrival point to be spot on at one of the geological features I noted then – a 2.5 metre high totem standing in a deep niche. It consists of a thin vertical stone blade, capped by an incredible balancing rock that looks like it could crash down any minute but somehow manages to stay on top of the installation.

I speculated how this piece of geological engineering was created. If the top, which weighed hundreds of kilos, had fallen down a few metres from the cave roof onto the narrow pedestal, it was impossible to believe that it would stay on it, tilted at 30-degrees and only attached to the base in a very small area. There was not enough rubble underneath to indicate that the foundation used to be bigger and had eroded from underneath the balancing rock over time. Quite a mystery. I called this feature Small Totem, as I knew there was a much bigger one further ahead.



Small Totem. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The group now commenced traversing under the high cliffs – first, westwards for a short distance, and then southwards. We could see impressive high overhangs above our heads. They were outside an easy reach, and besides, I did not think we had enough energy or time left today for detailed investigations that would take us off the planned course. The ledges here jumped levels frequently and in places became very narrow and tricky, with very big drops below. In one spot, two party members got separated from the rest of the group. The wait and the ‘rescue’ mission (finding them and helping them to come down safely from a treacherous ledge) took an extra 40 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

1545 saw the reunited party underneath an impressive 25 metre long overhang featuring several huge triangular knife-shape blades of rock protruding from its walls. Five minutes later, we came to an outstanding cave. About 20 metres from one end to another, it is triangular in profile, with the floor tilted at 45-degrees meeting the roof, which is raked at 30-degrees, at the rear of the space. It is possible, with some difficulty, to carefully make your way up the inclined slope covered in soft sand and rubble towards the back of the overhang. To sit there, looking out, under an extravagantly carved tilted roof, is a special experience. I called this feature Tilted Cave. Five minutes was all the time we could afford to spend here.

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<sup>2</sup> I have adjusted the trip recordings in these track notes to exclude this additional time, to give the readers a better representation of the time needed to do this walk.



The overhang with knife-blade-like shapes. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



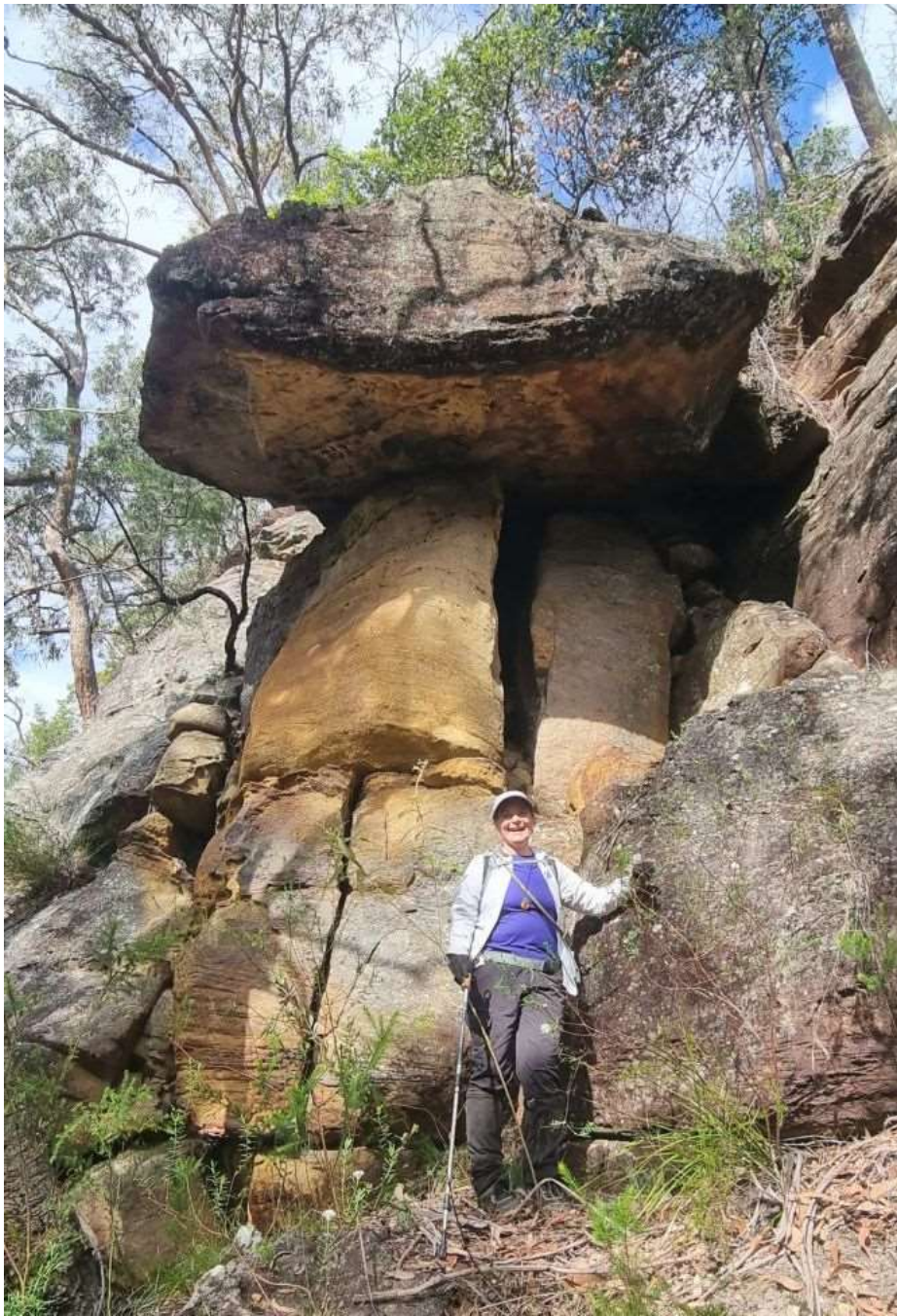
Tracey, Ciaran and Chris in Tilted Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Ciaran, Tracey and Chris in Tilted Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

To continue, it was now necessary to go back on the same ledge for about 100 metres, then use a ramp to come down the next level. During this time, the sun made its first appearance of the day, making the yellow and orange cliffs we walked under sparkle in the afternoon light.

At 1616, we stopped to admire and photograph a much bigger totem structure. This mushroom-shaped nature's creation is over five metres high, with a cap stone measuring two metres across. I called it Big Totem.



Louise under the Big Totem. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The next section of the traverse featured many attractive overhangs, but it is the one we came to at 1640 that bowled me over completely by its whimsical beauty. It is a 15 metre wide cave with raked ceiling, which is decorated along its entire span by a huge, most exquisite tafoni panel in the shape of a flying dragon. It is simply breathtaking in its beauty and must be seen to be believed. Well, it looks good on the photos too. The dragon's giant head and belly contain particularly fine honeycomb patterns, with its long tail having more shallow adornments. A few broken-off honeycomb blocks, dragon's scales, lie on the floor. I called this Tafoni Dragon Cave. Seven minutes here flashed by like a single moment, but we had to keep going.



Tafoni Dragon Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

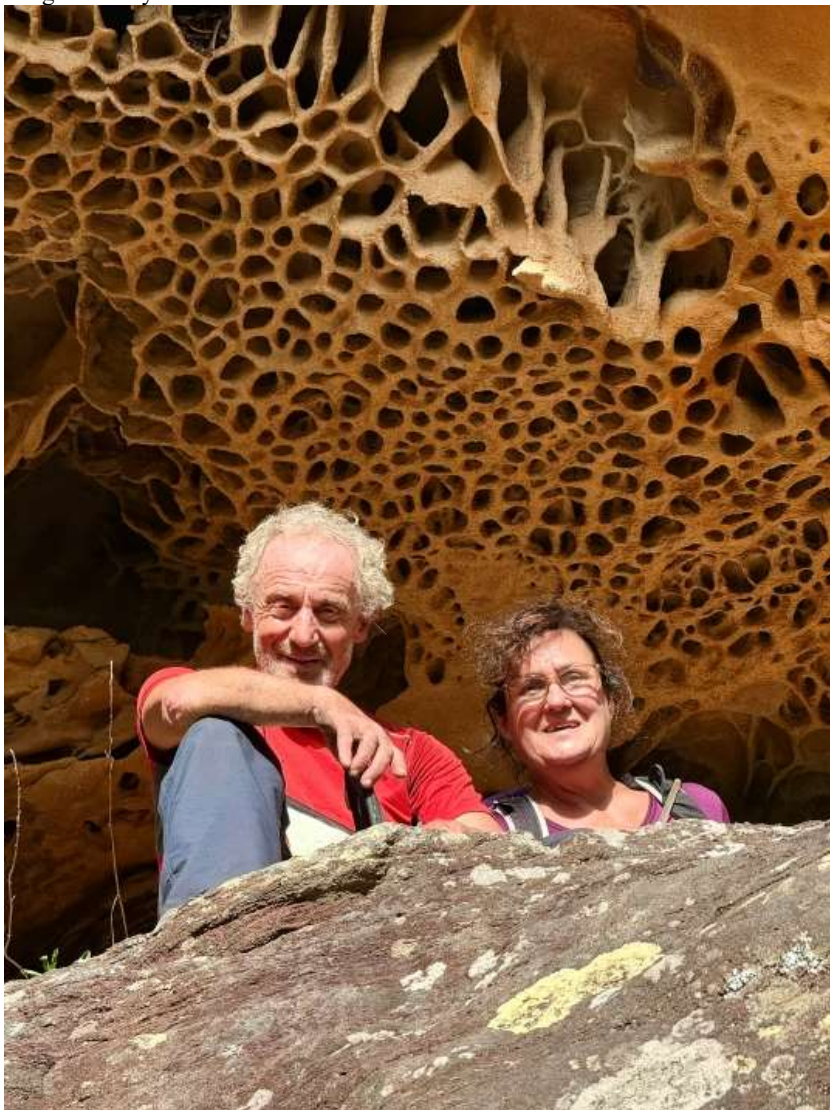


Dragon's head. Photo: Barth Wahlen.





Dragon's belly and tail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yuri and Tracey under the belly of the dragon in Tafone Dragon Cave. Photo: Barth Wahlen.



Sunlit cliffs on Long Ridge West traverse. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

After sidling for another 300 metres or so, at 1658, near a 90-degree bend in the bluffs, the party came to what looked like a ramp leading up through the cliffs, which had been impregnable until now (the topographic map shows unbroken high walls here as well). Having noted this break on my previous trip, I had been hoping to use it as our preferred exit for today's adventure. I now thought, *It better go*, because if it did not, we would have to deal with an extra kilometre or more of traversing below the south-facing cliffs. Due to the dense wet scrub we would most likely find there, this exercise could take an hour or even longer, the time we could not really afford at this stage of the journey.

To my relief, it was all very easy. The ramp quickly led to an open gully, with only a couple of areas of short bluffs, and within seven minutes, we emerged above the main rock wall on a small spur with fantastic views towards Tootie Creek gorge, brilliantly lit by the afternoon sun.

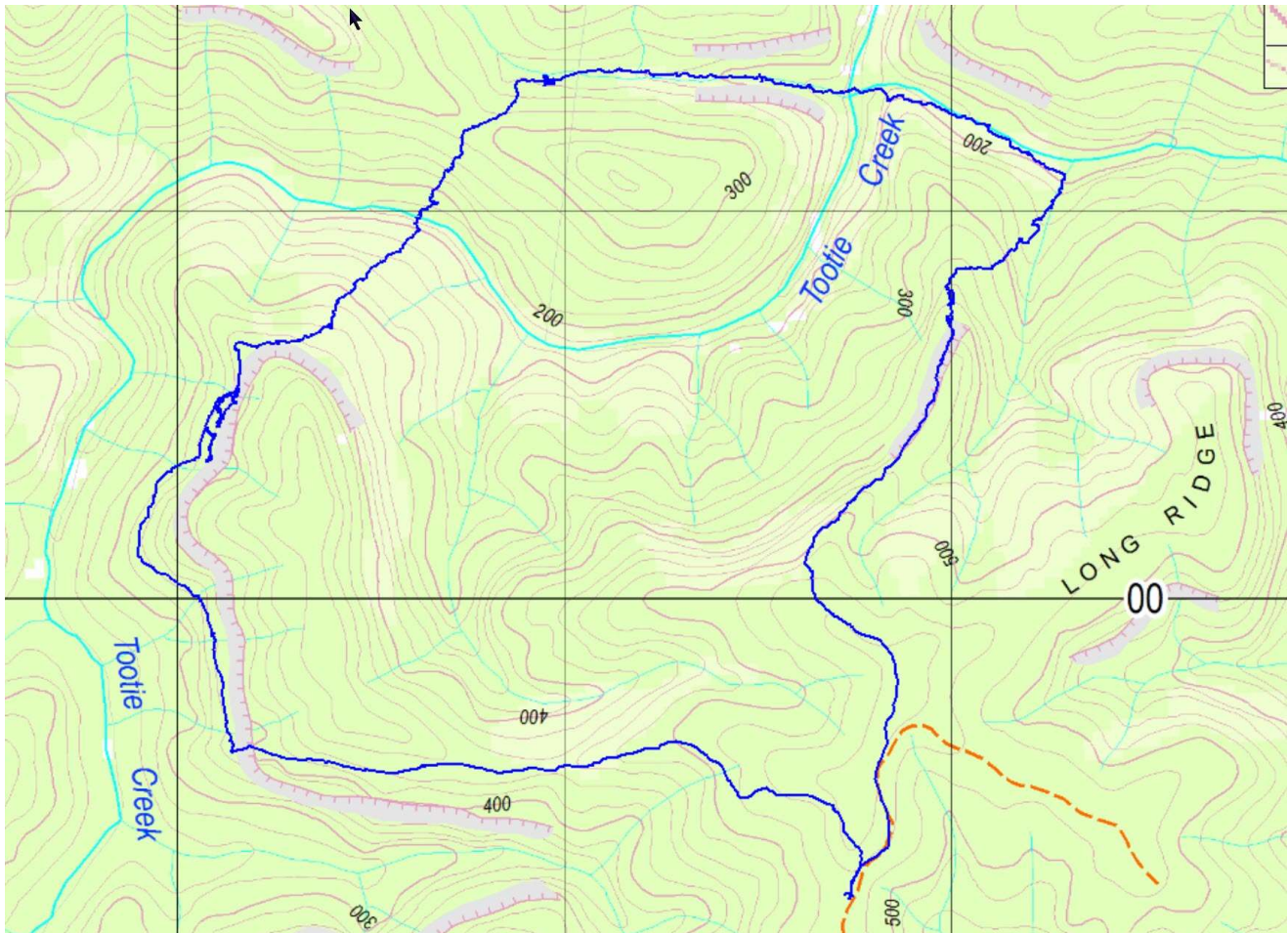


Tootie Creek gorge from Long Ridge West. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We now climbed a bit higher and then sidled below the ridge line for a while. The going was easy, and it saved us a few extra ups and downs compared to climbing on top of the watershed. At 1743, the team made it to the middle of the ridge. From here, there was 100 metres or so more elevation to gain, in a gradual fashion, before making a descent to the Long Ridge Trail and the parked vehicles, reached at 1820.

This was a brilliant day in the Wollemi, with a tremendous variety of landscapes, weather conditions, and experiences.

Trip statistics: total distance 10.1 km; total ascent 660 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

## Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0923	Cars parked on Long Ridge Trail and started walking	GR 7875 9924	530 m
0951	Lookout on Long Ridge Knife-edge	GR 7866 0017	500 m
1030-1039	Lookout and viewpoint	GR 7899 0073	390 m
1058	End of Long Ridge Knife-edge	GR 7900 0081	360 m
1126	Rock platform in the tributary	GR 7923 0095	245 m
1146	Cabbage Tree Creek junction	GR 7930 0109	195 m
1151	Large pool	GR 7920 0116	190 m
1207	Cave	GR 7885 0133	170 m
1214	Junction of Cabbage Tree, Tootie and Middle Creeks	GR 7873 0131	160 m

1305-1322	Lunch in Middle Creek	GR 7796 0134	230 m
1339	Saddle	GR 7777 0122	290 m
1411	Tootie Creek	GR 7763 0100	170 m
1455	Small Totem	GR 7740 0071	340 m
1550-1555	Tilted Cave	GR 7708 0036	355 m
1616	Big Totem	GR 7694 0026	325 m
1640-1647	Tafoni Dragon Cave	GR 7710 9991	360 m
1658	Pass up through the cliffs	GR 7713 9967	370 m
1705	On top of the cliffs, viewpoint	GR 7714 9961	395 m
1743	Top of the ridge	GR 7773 9958	450 m
1820	Back at cars	GR 7875 9924	530 m