

Walk:

Wollemi National Park: Emerald Brook and Three Falls Creek

Leader:

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park at the locked gate on North Wheeny Trail and walk on the trail for about a kilometre before descending into the headwaters of Emerald Brook at around GR 760 926. Follow this ravine all the way down to Wheeny Creek. Turn upstream and walk to a tributary at GR 771 911. Climb that tributary (several waterfalls are expected) for as long as our interest takes us, probably to around GR 758 915. Exit on the ridge to the west and walk back to the cars. About 11 km. Wet feet and more. Scrambling and exposure. Mostly exploratory.

Rating:

5M. 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:

30 December 2024.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Carlos Jimenez, Bernard Lo, Diah Hendarwan, Scott Marshall, Gary Green, Betty Vuong, 7

The Weather:

A cool cloudy morning followed by a warm sunny afternoon. Occasional cool breezes throughout the day. Temperature range 18 to 29 degrees C.

Existing Names in the Area

Emerald Brook is a beautifully green rainforest gorge with running water along most of its length of some 2.4 km. Named by Yuri Bolotin on 24 December 2024. Topographic map Mountain Lagoon. Source, GR 758 928; junction with Wheeny Creek, GR 7780 9158.

Track Notes

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

After a quick drive from Grumpy Baker, the usual Bilpin meeting spot, we parked at the locked gate on North Wheeny Trail, and the walk got underway at 0810. It was a chilly morning for this time of the year, at 18 degrees C, and it probably felt colder because of the fully overcast sky. On the trip last week, when we had discovered Emerald Brook, the group exited before the end of it, something I regretted in hindsight, so today I was determined to explore this ravine from the very source.

After just 12 minutes of trail walking, the party headed into the bush, down a much sharper grade, through densely forested but very manageable terrain. Very soon, at 0826, we crossed a hardly visible overgrown old timber trail, which seemed to be heading on to the spur to the south of our position. By 0841, coming down steeply, the company entered a beautiful rainforest glade, noting the first sizeable pool of water in the creek. Bright green Ferns stood out here on the deep light brown leaf litter covering the ground. A hundred meters or so further, the brook was in full flow, having just received a tributary from the south.

As we descended further, the valley opened up, but the flora at the bottom closed in, becoming very dense and difficult to penetrate. Copious amounts of Lawyer Vine binding it all together were not helping either. After about half a kilometre of that, and having consulted the map, I thought we should climb out on the southern bank and see what it was like on a higher ground. At 0926. It was indeed a lot better, dryer and more open, and soon we came to a low line of cliffs running 10-15 metres above and parallel to the creek. This way was almost scrub-free and even had a few low but pretty overhangs to look at.



Headwaters of Emerald Brook. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



Scott in the ferny part of the creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Following this low cliff line made our progress a lot faster. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

In no time, the group advanced to the area above the ten metre waterfall in the creek that we had discovered on the previous walk. By 0947, we had descended on the southern side to just below it and stopped for morning tea.

Ten minutes later, our adventure resumed. The magic of the Emerald Brook gorge started immediately and was getting better and better as the party progressed downstream. In a softly diffused light, enveloped by sweet sounds of birds and steady low hum of Cicadas, we traversed viridescent rainforest glens, picked our way amongst Moss and Lichen-encrusted boulders, with the clear gurgling stream being our constant trip companion. The 1.7 kilometre journey down must be taken slowly, as every step presents a visual delight, but it is in the second part, when you are enveloped by the emerald-green – from the tree canopy above your

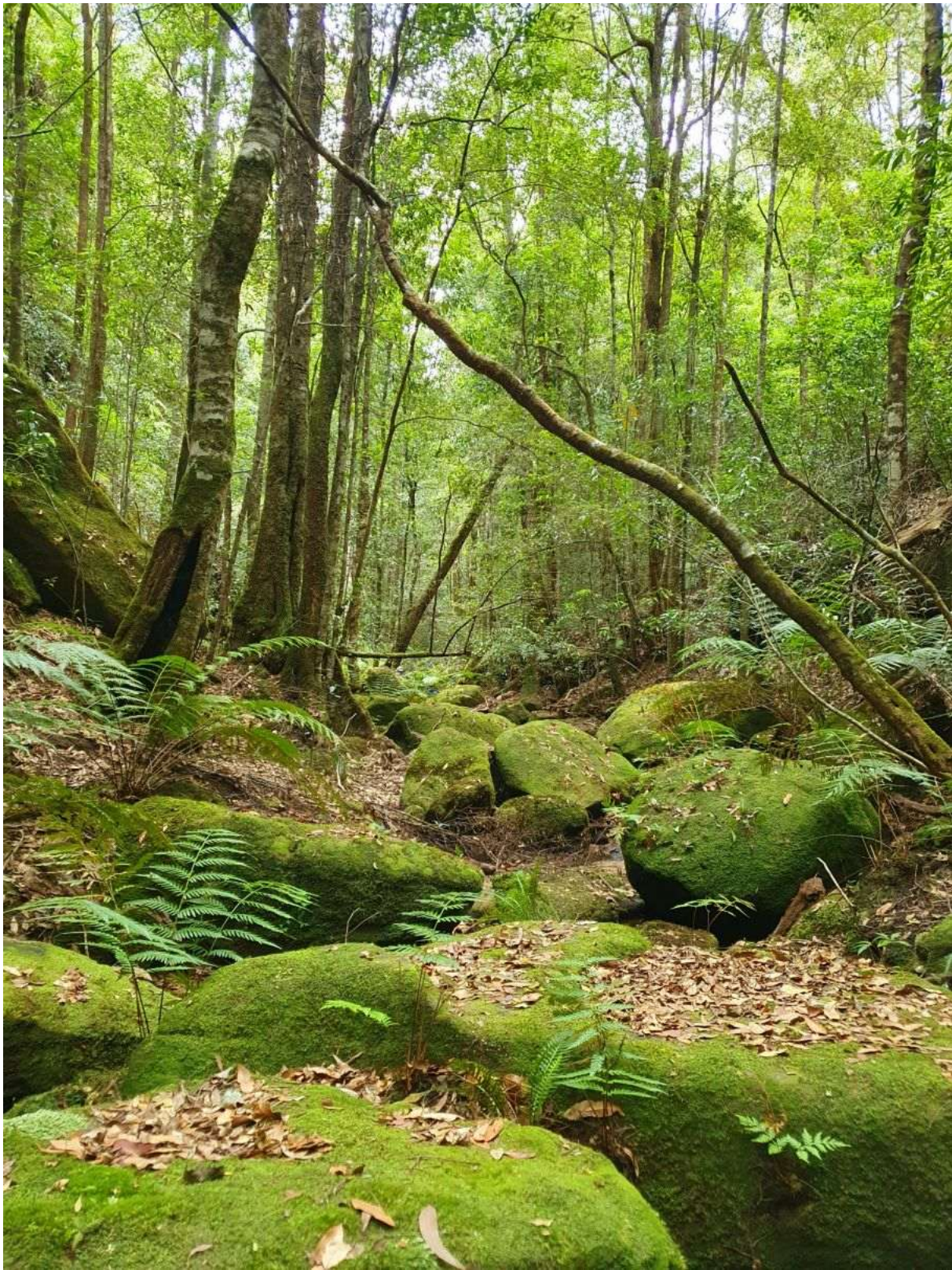
head to the forest surrounding you to the rocks and grasses you are stepping on - that the brook truly lives up to its name.



Emerald Brook. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



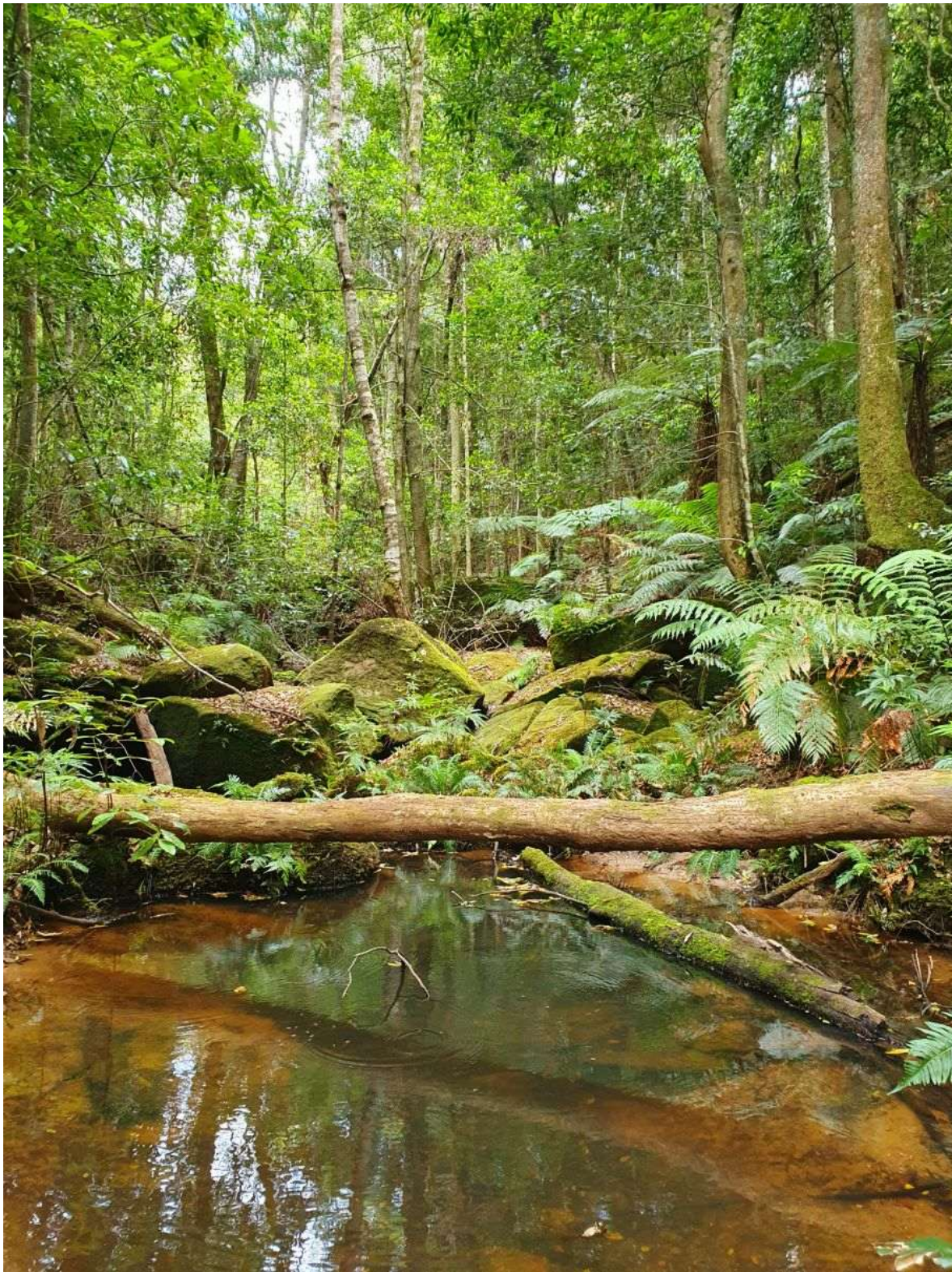
Yuri in Emerald Brook. Photo: Bernard Lo.



Emerald Brook. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



Diah, Betty and Carlos in Emerald Brook. Photo: Bernard Lo.



Emerald Brook. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



The party in Emerald Brook. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.

At 1103, not far from the end, we passed through an extensive overhang on the western side, which had a few tafoni panels. Another half a kilometre or so of the ravine, and then, at 1120, as the sun began making regular appearances from behind the rapidly dissipating cloud cover, the group made it to the junction, at a spot where Wheeny Creek flows through a wide deep pool, which began, according to the last trip, 50 metres downstream.

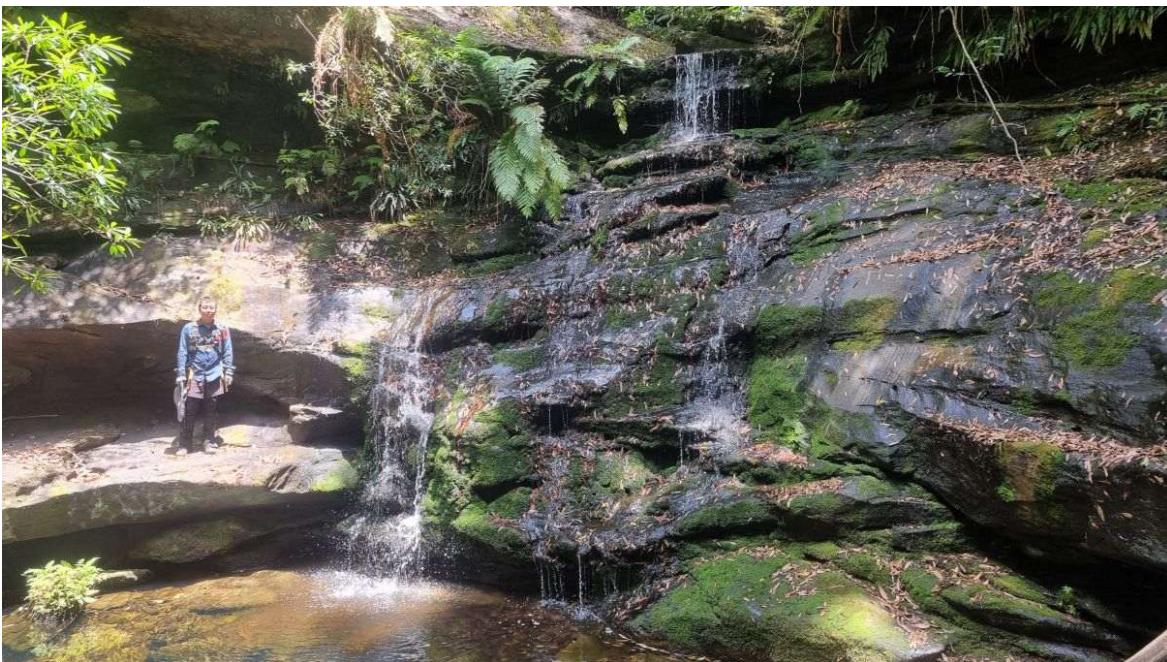
We now proceeded along a broad grassy terrace above the creek, and the pool went on for another 200 metres, till, at 1132, a particularly flat and pleasant area, suitable for camping, was reached. The pool stopped there (which makes it around 400 metres long), but the easy, pleasant walking conditions continued, so we stayed on the same northern bank for the entire journey through this part of Wheeny Creek. Somewhere along the way, a giant Bracket Fungus, about 50 centimetres across, one of the biggest I have seen, was photographed lying on the forest floor.



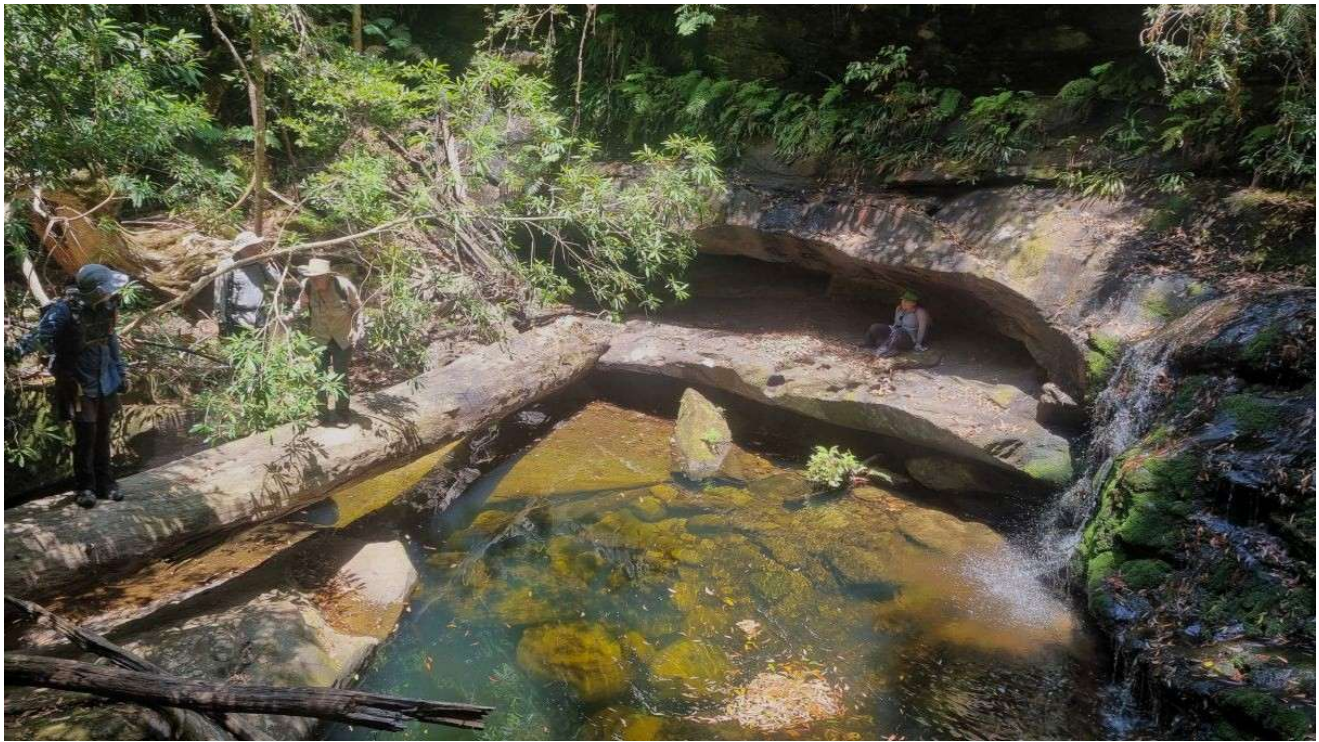
A giant Bracket Fungus. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Towards the end, we noted a bouldery section in the creek, which lasted for about 200 metres to the confluence with our target exit gully, where we arrived at 1155, in time for an early lunch. The planned swim did not happen due to the rocky conditions in Wheeny Creek. I felt very pleased to record a good stream of flowing water in the tributary gully (as had been expected, judging by its long catchment), but it was only enough to dip your toes in.

The lunch ended at 1220, when the company proceeded up a pleasant rainforest-clad gorge of the branch creek. In the Wollemi, you could spend time metres from something special and never see it, so I was not at all surprised when three minutes after resuming we came to a beautiful ten metre waterfall with a very big deep sparkling pool at the bottom, perfect for swimming. It was so good, and the sun was now shining so bright and warm, that I said to the team, *I am happy to stop here if you wish to test the water*, but somehow, we were already mentally on our journey upstream and no one wanted to get wet. Nevertheless, we lingered here for seven minutes, taking photos and enjoying the magic ambience of this spot.



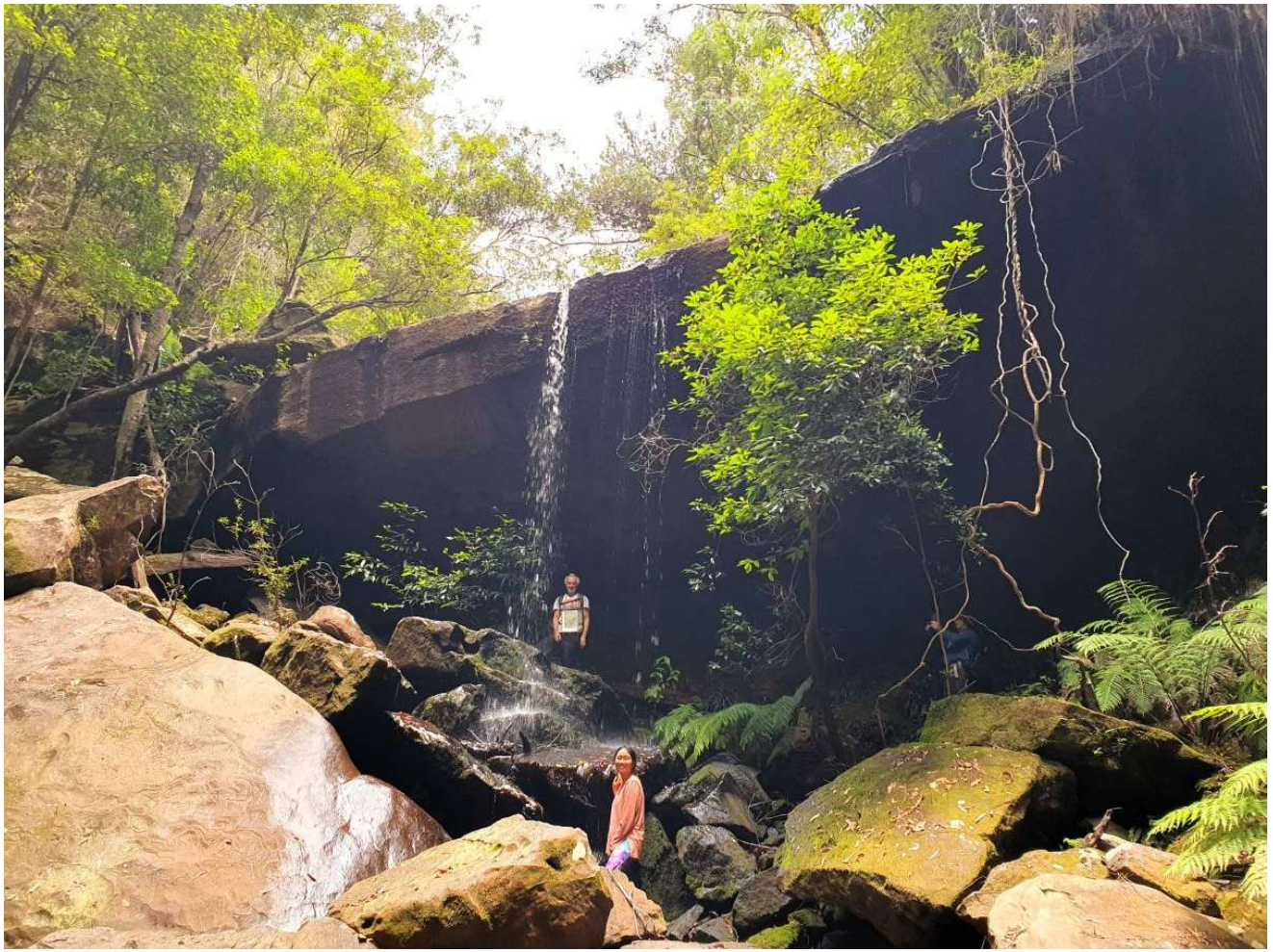
Bernard at the first waterfall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



The group at the first waterfall and pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The way forward from here was found by retracing our steps slightly and climbing a steep ramp that went above the gully almost back to Wheeny Creek, where a break in the cliffs enabled us to scramble to a higher ledge and then walk back until we passed the waterfall. We then descended into the gorge upstream of the obstacle. At 1249.

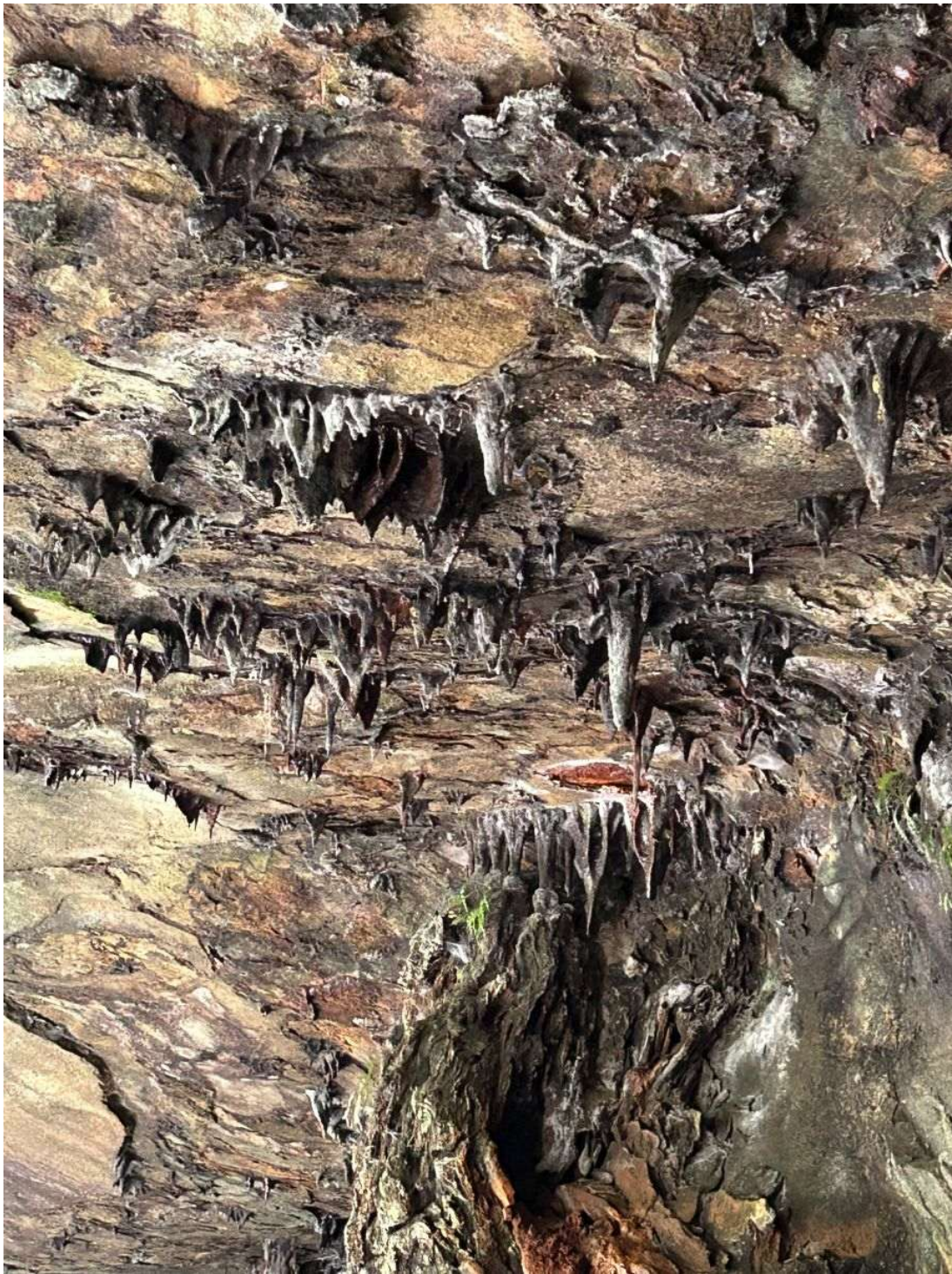
Clambering up steeply over big boulders littering the creek bed, we came to the second waterfall only four minutes later. This one, also about 10 metres high, had one main single drop, with smaller channels on both sides. It fell from a wide horizontal rock apron of dark brown stone, which below the drop line had cavity space where one could pass behind the flowing current. There was no pool due to the steep slope and boulders underneath. Just as impressive, if not more so, was a huge wet dark overhang on the right-hand side. It was about 40 metres long, 5 metres high and featured a ceiling decorated by stalactites and a kaleidoscopic back wall of oranges, blacks, whites, reds and greys, dotted in places by vividly green Ferns. A true Nature's artwork. Ten minutes quickly flew by at this beautiful location.



Yuri and Betty at the second waterfall. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



The second waterfall. Photo: Betty Vuong.

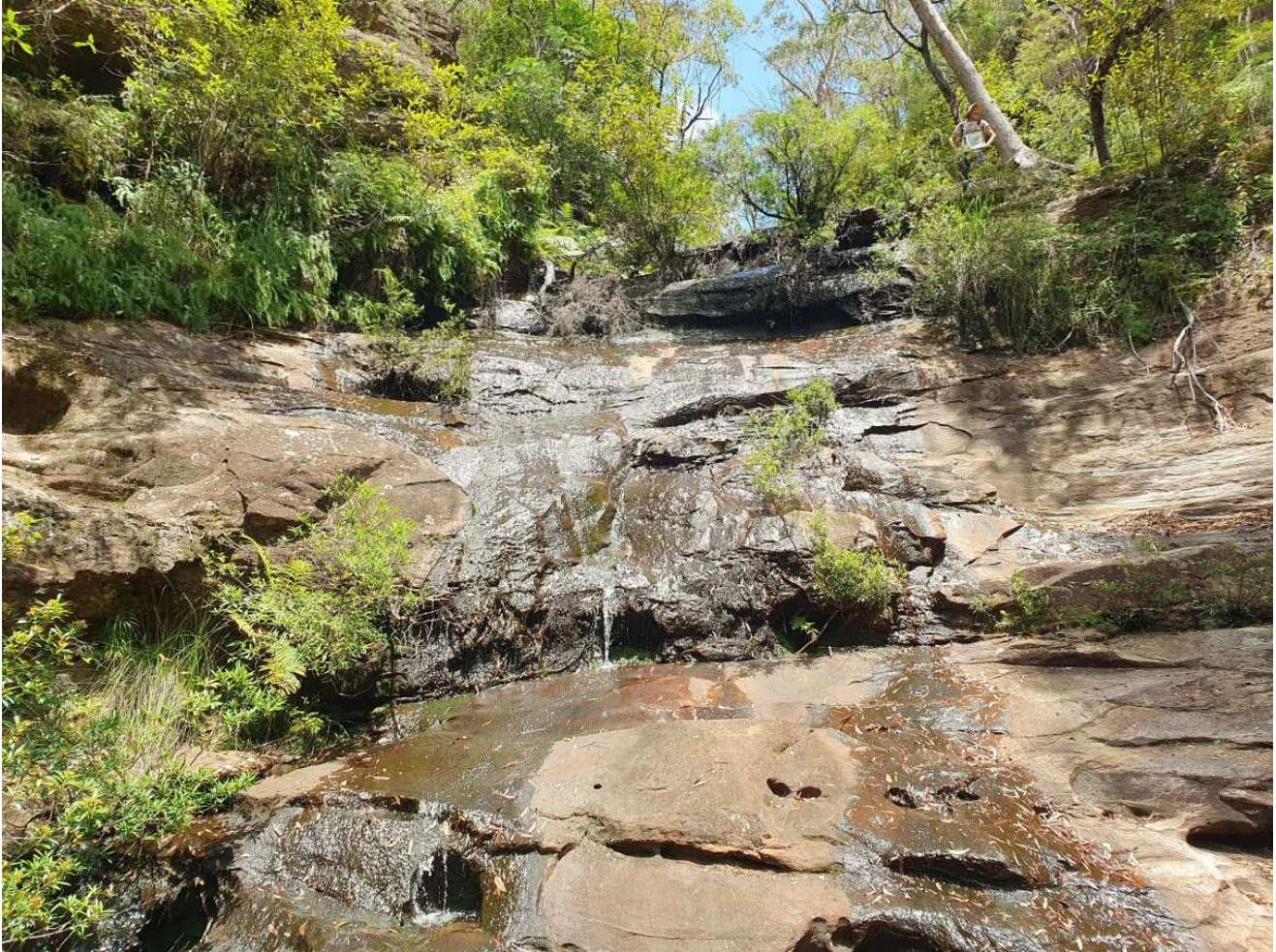


Stalactites in the cave. Photo: Scott Marshall.

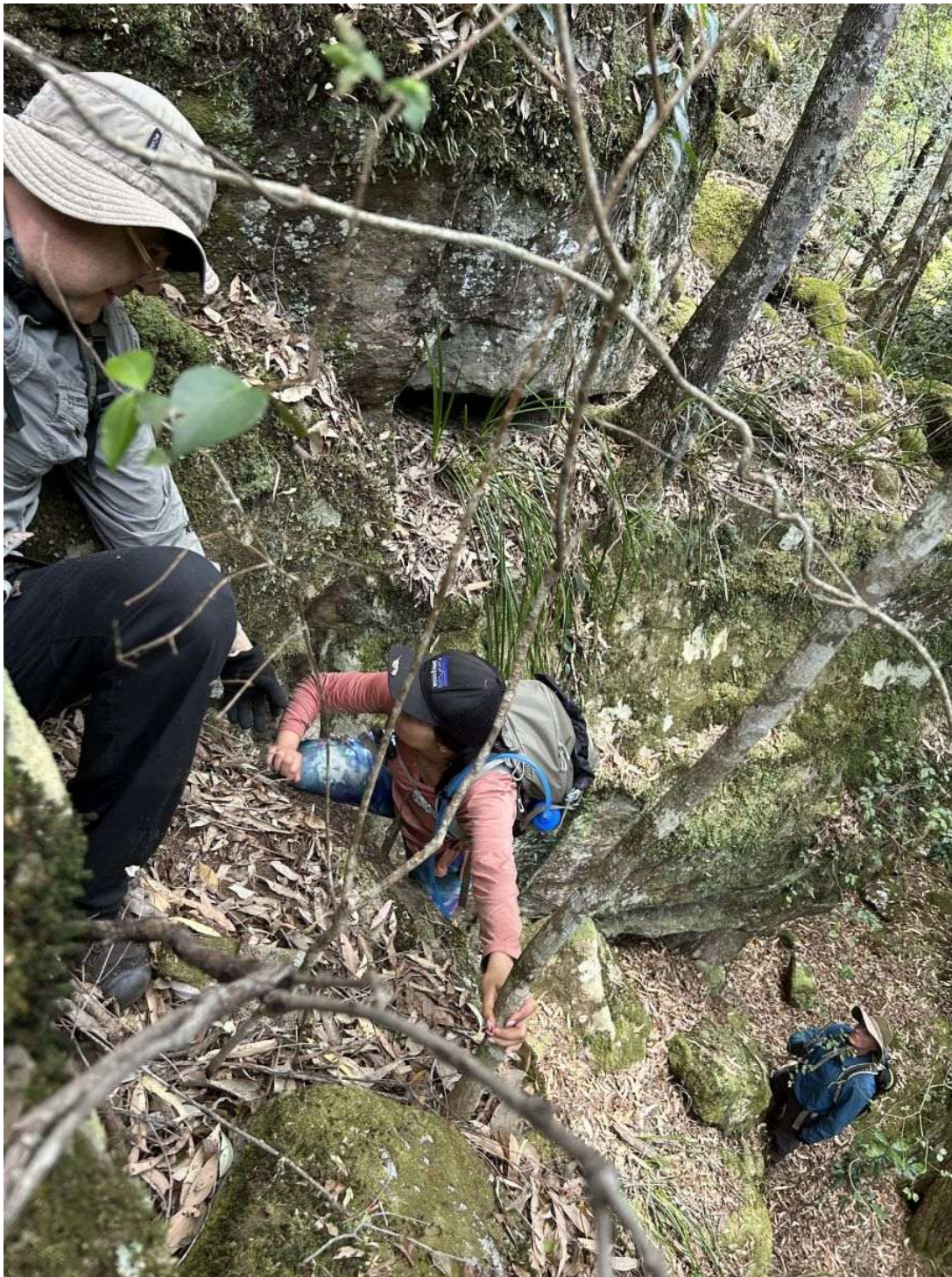
However, as my thoughts returned to the next step of our adventure, I realised that negotiating our way up from here would be tricky, if not impossible. We were at the bottom of a stone bowl, encircled by high cliffs barring our progress upstream. The only possibility was a ramp beginning from the dark space behind the waterfall that led towards the rock wall on the eastern side where I could see some sunlight that might indicate a gap.

As I approached that spot, I saw that there was indeed a ledge leading in the right direction, but after a few metres, it came to a short (a couple of steps) but very narrow and awkward part, which demanded full concentration. Having gone through it, I was happy to step out into a large open space enclosed by high cliffs above the second waterfall. However, in front of me, was another, third ten-metre waterfall! Bernard soon appeared from the direction of the ledge, but no one else was visible.

Before we called everyone on, I wanted to make sure the party could get up and around this new obstacle. There was indeed a very steep slot concealed in dense scrub on the right-hand side that quickly led me to the top. I stayed there and asked Bernard, who remained below me, to call the others. He soon came back with a message that a few people did not like the narrow ledge, so they and the rest of the group climbed higher to another ledge that seemed better. The trouble was that from my commanding position on top of the waterfall I could see that the way they were following would terminate at a huge drop. Luckily, just at that time, I saw Scott, who was leading the second group, emerging from behind the bushes across the void from me. We could hear one another, and I was able to guide him down from the treacherous ledge onto the rock apron below the waterfall. The rest of the company soon followed. All this took considerable time, and we finally regrouped above the third fall at 1330.



The third waterfall. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



Carlos, Betty and Gary negotiating the slot leading above the third waterfall. Photo: Scott Marshall.



The view down from the top of the third waterfall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The gorge here appeared a lot more open. All rainforest was gone. The vegetation on both sides looked quite all right, but the stony, almost flat, gently sloping creek bed provided the best way forward. Only five minutes passed before we came to another waterfall, but this one, at around 2.5 metres high, was only a baby compared with the other three. Notwithstanding, if it was not for a single narrow slot on the right-hand side, we would have had substantial difficulty advancing from here.

Just past this obstacle, on the left bank, was a very pretty dry overhang of mostly yellow rock; some of it had crashed down and was scattered in big chunks on the cave floor. Twenty metres further at the same level, we came to a real gem, a wall of exquisite Liesegang Ring panels. Scott, our geologist, was in paradise! At 1342.



Dry overhang above the creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Scott at the Liesegang Rings wall. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



Liesegang Rings wall detail. Photo: Scott Marshall.

The next part of the journey upstream was very scenic. We either walked on the flat rock shelf dotted with numerous pools, along the gently running stream, or just above it, on the banks covered in low green soft grasses and Ferns. All very easy and pleasant. A couple of small waterfalls, 2-3 metre high, were effortlessly climbed via stepped terraces within the creek bed. Wet feet did not matter at this time of the year.



A small waterfall in the creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1413, we inspected an exceptional overhang on the right-hand side – about 25 metres long 4 metres wide and 5 metres high, dry, and with flat floors. It contained some striking rock weatherings but no signs of previous occupation were found. With its proximity to permanent running water, it would have been almost certainly used as a shelter.



A possible shelter. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The creek upstream from the cave was a continuous delight – open rock shelves, cascades, waterfalls and pools, many pools. In between stone terraces, it was easy walking along the grassy banks covered in short soft Ferns and flowers. A few overhangs were briefly looked at; more were visible a little way up on either side of the gully, but I felt they would have to be left for another day.



Walking up the creek. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



A flowering Conestick, *Petrophile pulchella*. Photo: Diah Hendarwan.



A pool and small cascades in the creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Finally, after over a kilometre of glorious walking since the last big waterfall, the creek swung north, rock platforms vanished, and both sides became covered in thick scrub. This may have been a temporary situation – I do not know since the decision was made at this point to begin our exit towards the ridge on the left-hand side. At 1515. We replenished our water here and said goodbye to this wonderful tributary of Wheeny Creek. Because of the remarkable sequence of three ten metre waterfalls we had to negotiate in its lower part, I called it Three Falls Creek.

The climb out was very straightforward, and the vegetation on our way, only moderately dense. By 1531, we made it to the top of a small spur, and twelve minutes later, we reached the main watershed. The sun was very warm now, and this slowed us down, but I enjoyed this part of the trip through open meadows covered in short knee-high green grasses, colourful flowers and sparsely positioned mature trees. The yellow-grey-white Scribbly Gums and the orange-red Angophoras were shedding their bark and looked especially striking.



Meadows on top of the ridge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

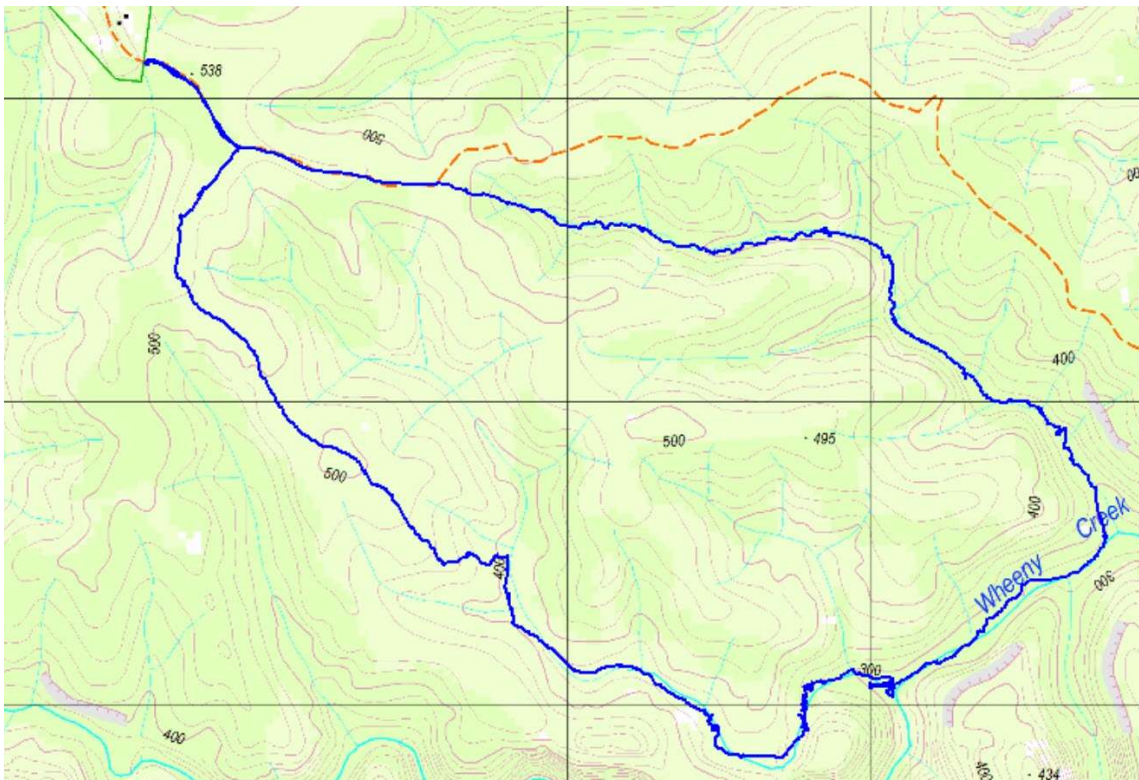


Scribbly Gums shedding bark. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1618, we came to North Wheeny Trail, and six minutes later, the parked cars.

I felt delighted with the day, having explored another section of Wheeny Creek and two of its very different, beautiful and interesting tributaries.

Trip statistics: total distance 11 km; total ascent 353 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0810	Cars parked and started walking	GR 7460 9315	535 m
0822	Left the trail	GR 7556 9272	510 m
0826	Old timber trail	GR 7565 9271	503 m
0841	Entered Emerald Brook	GR 7589 9264	450 m
0926	Climbed out of the creek bed	GR 7654 9251	395 m
0947-0957	Morning tea below the waterfall	GR 7686 9256	380 m
1103	Overhang	GR 7765 9187	328 m
1120	Wheeny Creek junction	GR 7778 9156	276 m
1132	A good camping area	GR 7757 9142	278 m
1155-1220	Three Falls Creek junction and lunch	GR 7706 9105	285 m
1223-1230	The first waterfall and a big pool	GR 7700 9107	290 m
1249	In the creek above the first waterfall	GR 7681 9107	315 m
1253-1303	The second waterfall and a big cave	GR 7679 9106	325 m
1330	The third waterfall	GR 7678 9090	345 m
1335	Another waterfall	GR 7679 9096	350 m
1342	Liesegang Rings in a cave	GR 7677 9093	353 m
1413	Overhang	GR 7649 9093	370 m
1515	Exited the Three Falls Creek	GR 7581 9150	390 m
1531	On a spur	GR 7559 9147	450 m
1543	Main ridge	GR 7533 9178	500 m
1618	North Wheeny Trail	GR 7491 9284	530 m
1624	Back at cars	GR 7460 9315	535 m