

## **Walk:**

### **Blue Mountains National Park: Wollangambe Three**

## **Leader:**

Yuri Bolotin

## **Maps, etc:**

Wollangambe, Mount Wilson. GPS setting WGS84.

## **Description:**

Park some cars at the locked gate at Boronia Point Trail and the rest at Cathedral of Ferns campground. Walk down to Wollangambe Two exit/Wollangambe Three entry. Swim/float/walk/scramble down the gorge till the exit at GR 584 925. Must be able to swim well. Helmets are mandatory. Bring dry bags. Wetsuit and flotation device are strongly recommended. About 10 km.

## **Rating:**

5M. M323E

## **Gear Issues:**

See above for special gear. 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:**

Date originally walked – 8 January 2018. Date re-walked (for these track notes) - 6 February 2025.

## **The Party:**

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Andrew Dumphy, Hai Chi, Nicole Bordes, Zaid Mohsen, Nicole Mealing, 6.

## **The Weather:**

A warm, humid and mostly sunny day with no wind and variable cloud cover, from 10% to 70%.

Temperature range 16 to 28 degrees C.

The Colo River height gauge for the area closest to the Wollangambe was at 0.81 metres.

## **Track Notes**

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

We left a couple of cars at the start of Boronia Point Trail and drove the rest to the Cathedral Reserve. Only about 1.5 kilometres separates these two points, and the road from one to another goes almost in a straight line. The canyon entry and exits along the Wollangambe were directly north, nearly aligned with the parked vehicles, however the distance we would need to travel in the gorge would be double, at least 3 kilometres, due to the wild twists and turns of the river.

We began at 0800 on the dot by taking a new Wollangambe access trail that bypasses the private property by skirting its western boundary. Crossing Mount Irvine Road, I noticed there would be a temptation to follow a wide trail leading uphill. Instead, in order to stay within the national park, a narrow track going down on the left-hand side must be taken. Andrew led the team here as he had been through it a couple of times already this summer coming up from Wollangambe Two, whereas for me, it was a new experience.

I must report that the trail now is well-defined and quite pleasant to follow as it goes below the ridge line through mostly moist, green terrain, full of Ferns, typical of the basalt country. Along the way, it joins the

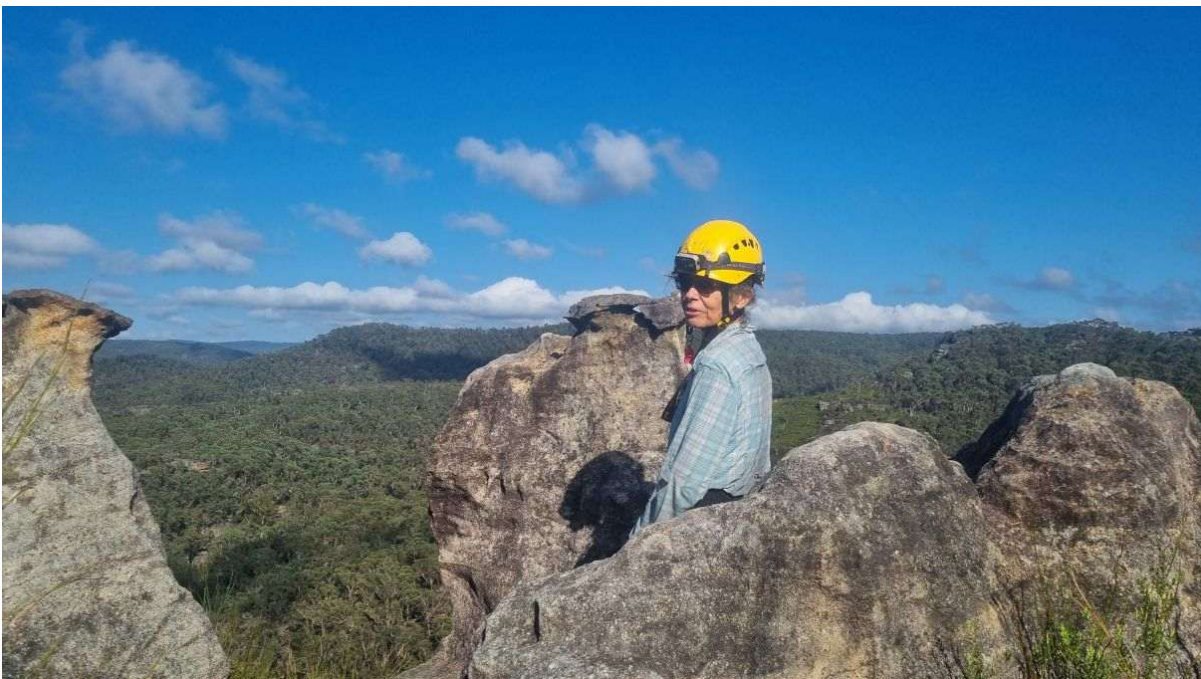
Northern Trail but only for less than 100 metres, and we had to be careful to veer off it on the left-hand side and follow the narrow path downhill. The only issue today was that we did get wet all over, much before we reached the canyon, due to the moisture from overnight rain covering the bush.



Andrew on the access trail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 0834, we came up to the top of the ridge and rejoined the original track just outside of the unmarked private property boundary. I thought the entire exercise was very neat, and the distance was only slightly more compared with what it used to be. I am grateful to the NPWS, the canyons and the property owner who had negotiated and constructed this new access.

0854 saw us at the first great lookout surveying the entire Wollangambe catchment to the west, and a little further, there was, arguably, an even better spot, endowed with interesting rock formations resembling animal shapes or pieces of furniture, depending on one's point of view. At 0904.



Nicole on a 'chair' at the second lookout. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Twenty four minutes later, the group descended to the river through a familiar to most of us narrow slot, which is the exit from Wollangambe Two. The gorge here was still enveloped by a dark shadow, and the river looked rather murky and uninviting, with hardly any visible current. A rather uninspiring start, I thought, but having done it seven years ago, I knew it would get much better soon.



Zaid at the canyon entry. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

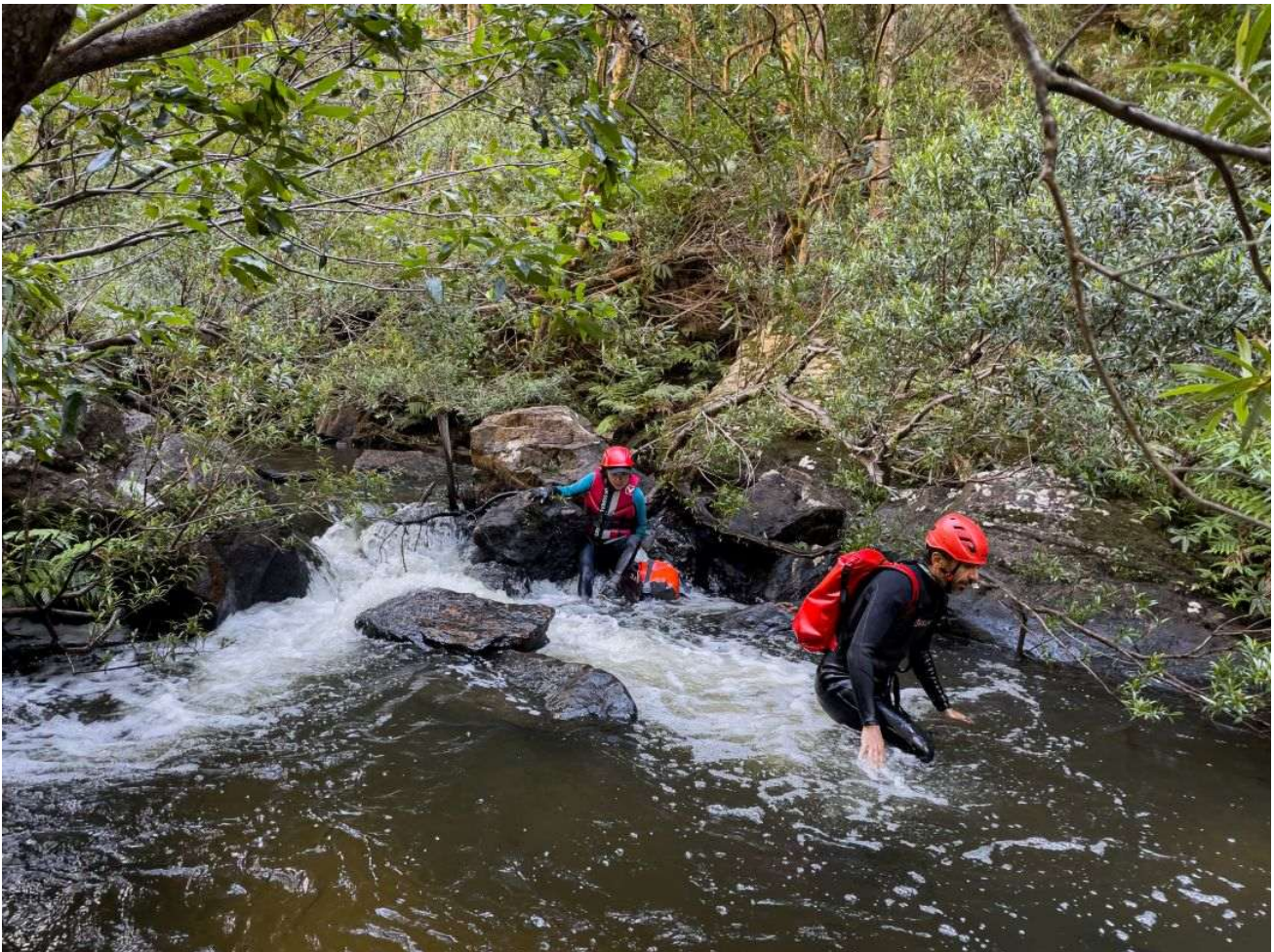
Wetsuits on and floatation devices ready (they proved to be very handy today), we swam off at 0955 and almost immediately entered a wonderful 80 metre long pool. The high walls of the gorge were only about 20 metres apart and soon a slight twist in the river course revealed huge, eroded sandstone cliffs bathed in the warm morning sun. The expected improvement in the scenery happened within minutes of our departure.



Swimming towards the sunny cliffs at the end of the pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

After a short stony transition, the river turned south and we launched our craft into the next large body of water, more than 150 metres long and featuring a few island-like rocks in the middle. The end of it was at 1017.

During the next 300 metres, we mainly waded along the rocky river bed through a chain of short pools. At 1043, at a bend to the east, the group stopped to admire and photograph a spectacular constriction caused by a huge boulder that has come down and blocked most of the space between the canyon walls, leaving only about 5-6 metres for the river (and even less for us) to pass through. The effect was amplified by the nature's masterful lighting – most of the area was in deep shade, whereas the cliffs at the far end of the opening stood out in the bright sunlight. After pushing our way through the narrow slot, we stepped out into a gloriously warm sun. What a change after the gloomy start of the canyon!



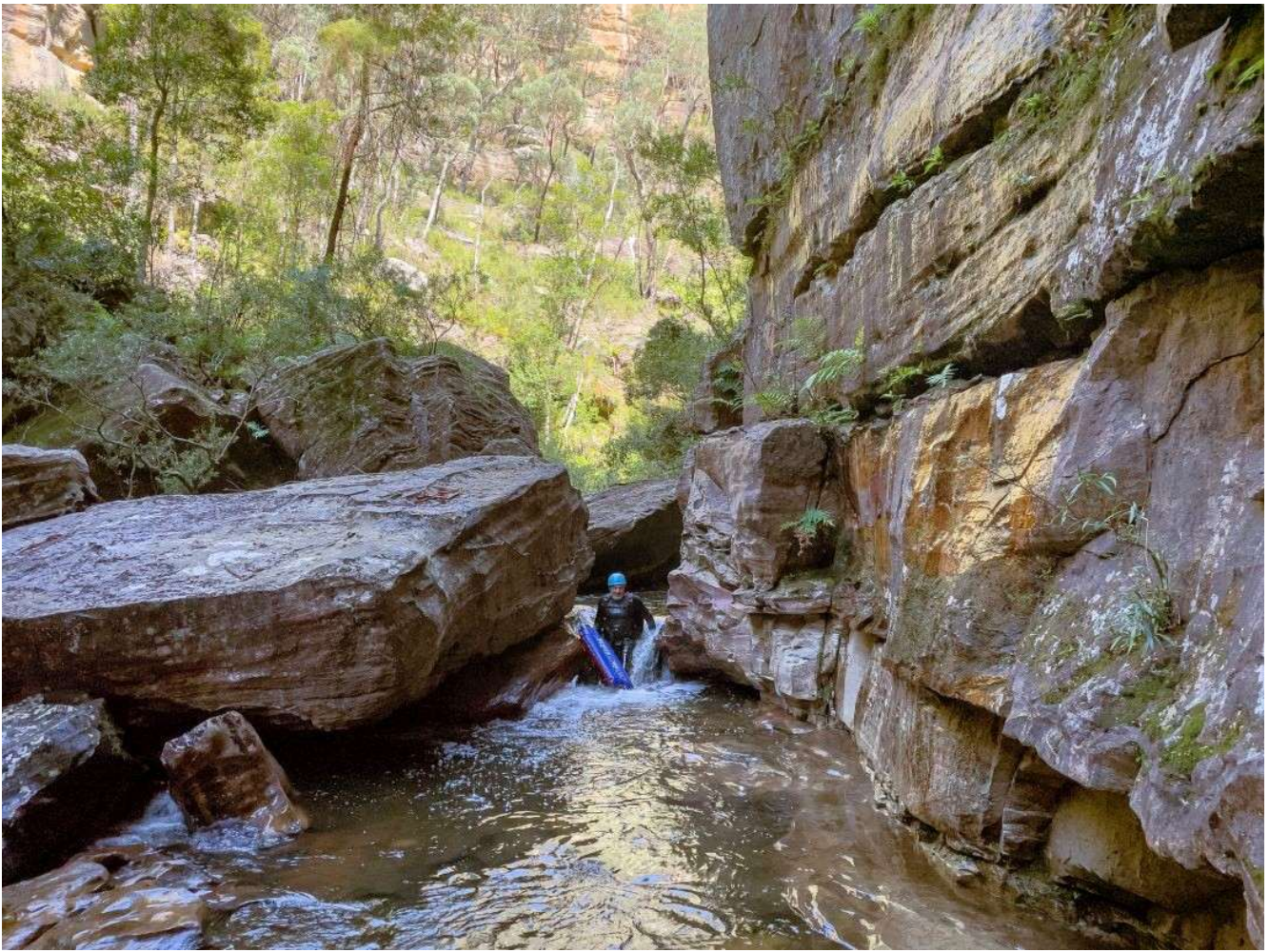
Hai Chi and Zaid negotiating shallow pools. Photo: Nicole Bordes.



Going through the constriction. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

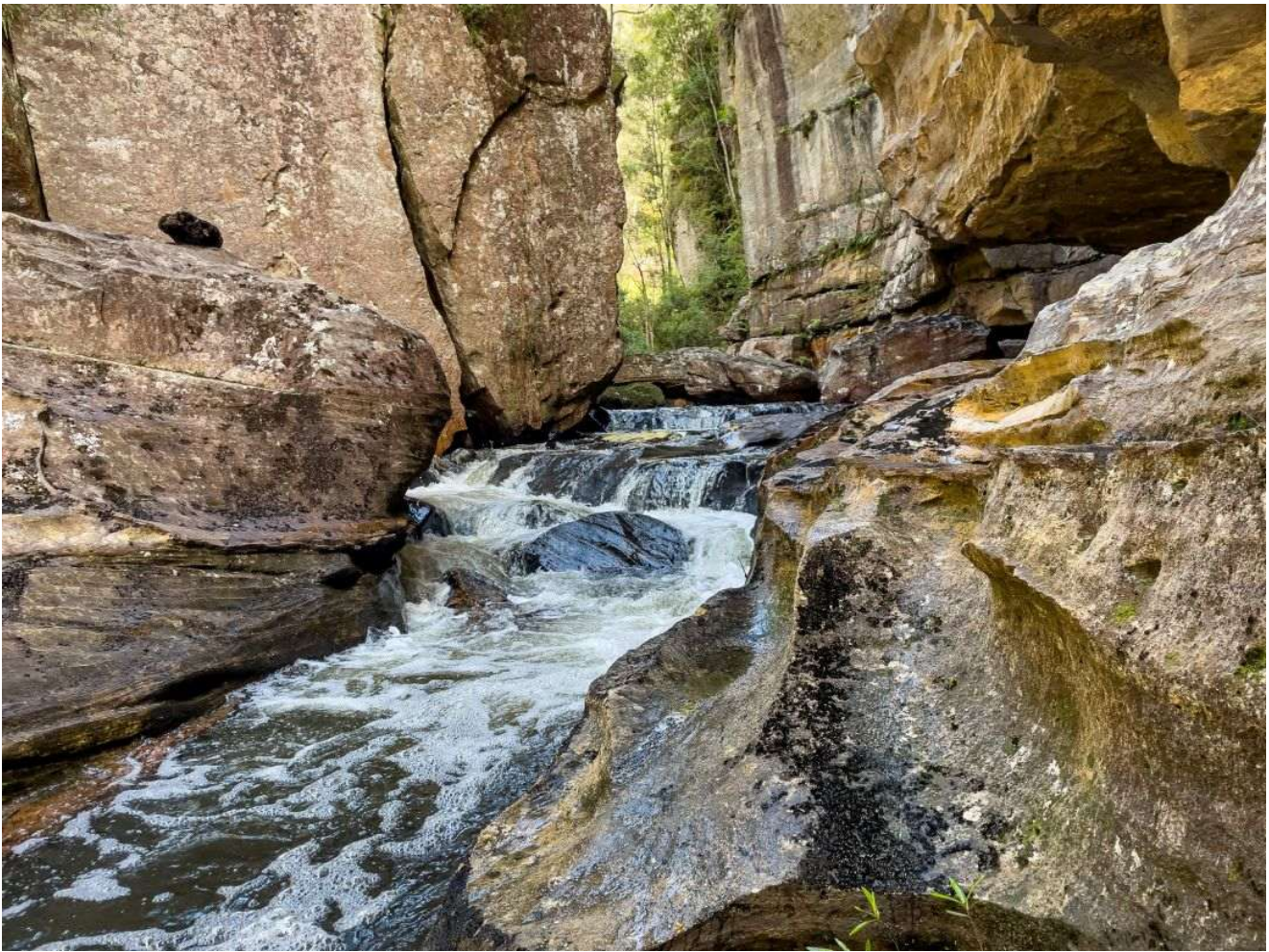


At the constriction. Photo: Yuri Bolotin (08/01/18 trip).



Yuri at the end of the constriction. Photo: Nicole Bordes.

Straight after that, the party negotiated a picturesque series of cascades in another tight section, before plunging into the next 150 metre long stretch of water, which terminated at 1116. Thirteen minutes later, I recorded the end of the next beautiful pool, 80 metres long and framed by tall sinuously carved canyon formations. Here, we also noted a huge animal-shaped guardian rock on the river side.



Cascades in a constriction. Photo: Nicole Bordes.

The next deep section, 100 metres long, where the river flowed north to south, featured particularly eye-catching reflections on the canyon walls. We stopped here for a minute or two to admire this shimmering play of light and shadow. It is amazing to observe how you alter it by simply coming into the space and affecting the way the light is dispersed and projected.

At 1157, I noticed what I thought was a spring coming out of a rock wall on the southern side, but twenty metres further we saw a boisterously flowing brook coming from the same direction. A great place to replenish our water supplies. Today so far, we had seen a few trickling waterfalls on the sides of the gorge, but nothing of the size of this one. Checking the map at home, I saw that this gully originates just west of Caleys Haycock<sup>1</sup> near Cathedral of Ferns.

Only eleven minutes later, we noted another ravine with plentiful running water, also coming from the area of Hayleys Haycock. After a series of intermittent pools that stretched for some 400 metres, the party stopped for lunch in a dry, sunny but not particularly picturesque spot. From 1237 till 1300.

As it often happens, within 50 metres after resuming we stumbled onto a very picturesque field of big boulders scattered in the river bed – a better place to spend time resting and something to keep in mind for the next trip. These long pools kept coming after lunch too! The next one stretched for at least 80 metres and

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<sup>1</sup> According to historian Peter Rickwood, the origin of this rather curious name is as follows, *The name Caleys Haycock was gazetted as item 964 on 24th July 1970 and is after George Caley, explorer and botanist, who reached and ascended Mount Banks in 1804, from which site (on November 4th 1804) he sketched the outlines of the hills and labelled this one The Haycock. This name was lost in the literature for many years and when a track was constructed around the hill in 1868, the feature became locally known as Arkinstall Hill after the person who cut the track. More recently, some local residents have called it Rubbish Tip Hill after the purpose to which they put the track. Ref: Newsletter of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine Historical Society, No.12, July 2005.*

was quickly followed by an extensive section where the Wollangambe went through a series of fast-flowing narrow channels – a bit of a water slalom course – very exciting!



A water slalom course. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The 150 metre long placid pool, framed by very high vertical walls, located at the end of this section, at 1336, could not have been more in contrast to the previous part. Floating along the next continuous body of water, we came within a couple of metres of a couple of water birds. The male, black with a thin long beak, was too busy fishing and did not pay much attention to our presence. Being low, almost at the water level, we observed these birds at an angle close to the level of their own vision, something not commonly possible. Going through my Bird Guide<sup>2</sup>, I think this was a couple of Little Black Cormorants, who can be found in “inland aquatic habitats”.

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<sup>2</sup> K. Simpson and N. Day, *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2004.





Wading through another spectacular pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By 1403, the company entered an extensive boulder field, enlivened by the river making its way through it in a series of gurgling cascades. Here, I photographed some eye-catching rock forms, a result of water-induced erosion and polishing action occurring over a long period of time. A lot more ephemeral, but just as striking, was a long, gorgeously sinuous line of the boundary of the water edge along the sand bank we admired next.



Nicole at the cascades. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



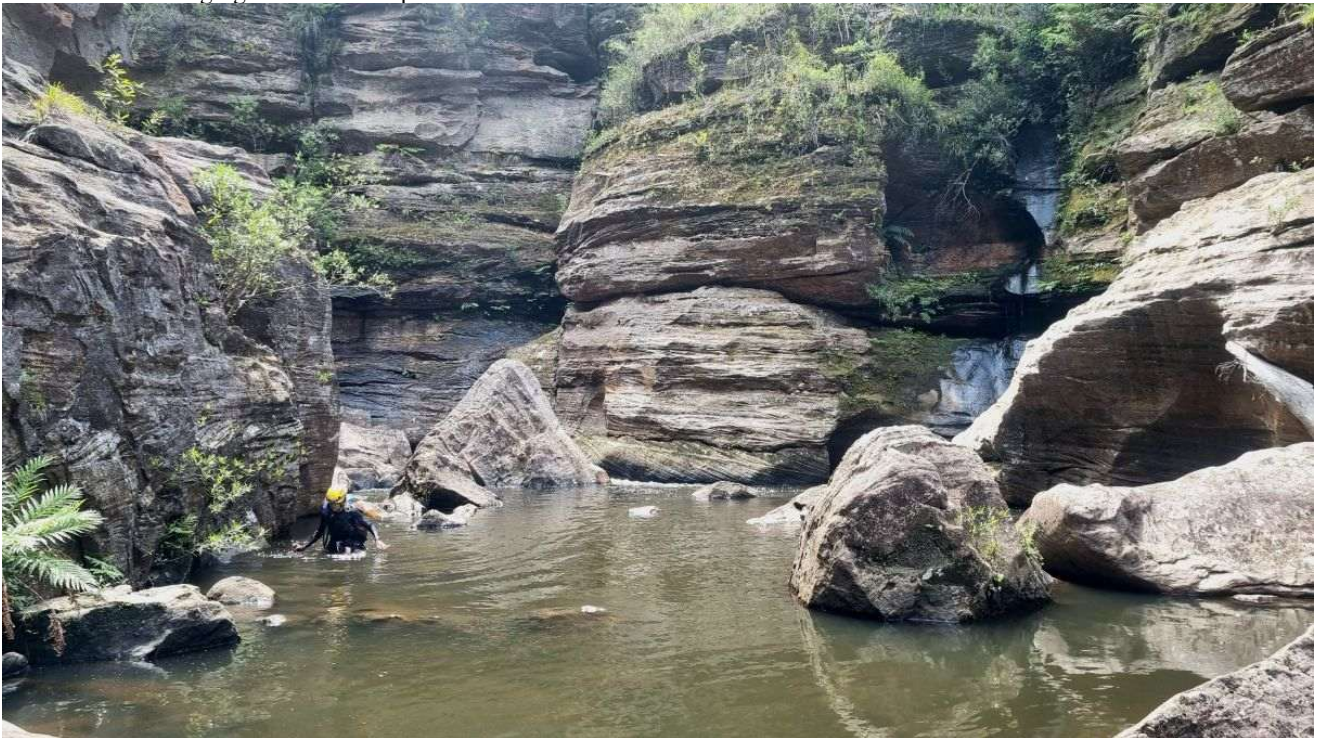
The sinuous curve of the river bank. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By now, we were quite close to the exit, but the river still had a few surprises waiting for us. At the next sharp bend (this one was to the south east), we came to one of the most spectacular parts of today's adventure. Standing on top of a rock in the middle of the river bed, we saw that the Wollangambe suddenly plunging five metres running through a narrow gorge scattered with huge, mostly pyramid-shaped boulders. It was an intimidating sight, as there did not seem to be any easy way to proceed from here, certainly without taking out a tape.

However, I had been here seven years ago and knew what to do next. After a close examination, I found what I was looking for - a small hole, just enough for a person without the backpack to squeeze through. I took off my load and left it on top, then wormed my way into a tight dark cavern that had powerful streams of water running through it, and almost straight away, saw a light at the end – it went, and it was easy! Emerging into the space underneath my companions, I yelled out the good news and asked them to throw my backpack down to me. Soon, everyone else followed suit. It did take about 10 minutes to complete the exercise. From 1417 till 1427.



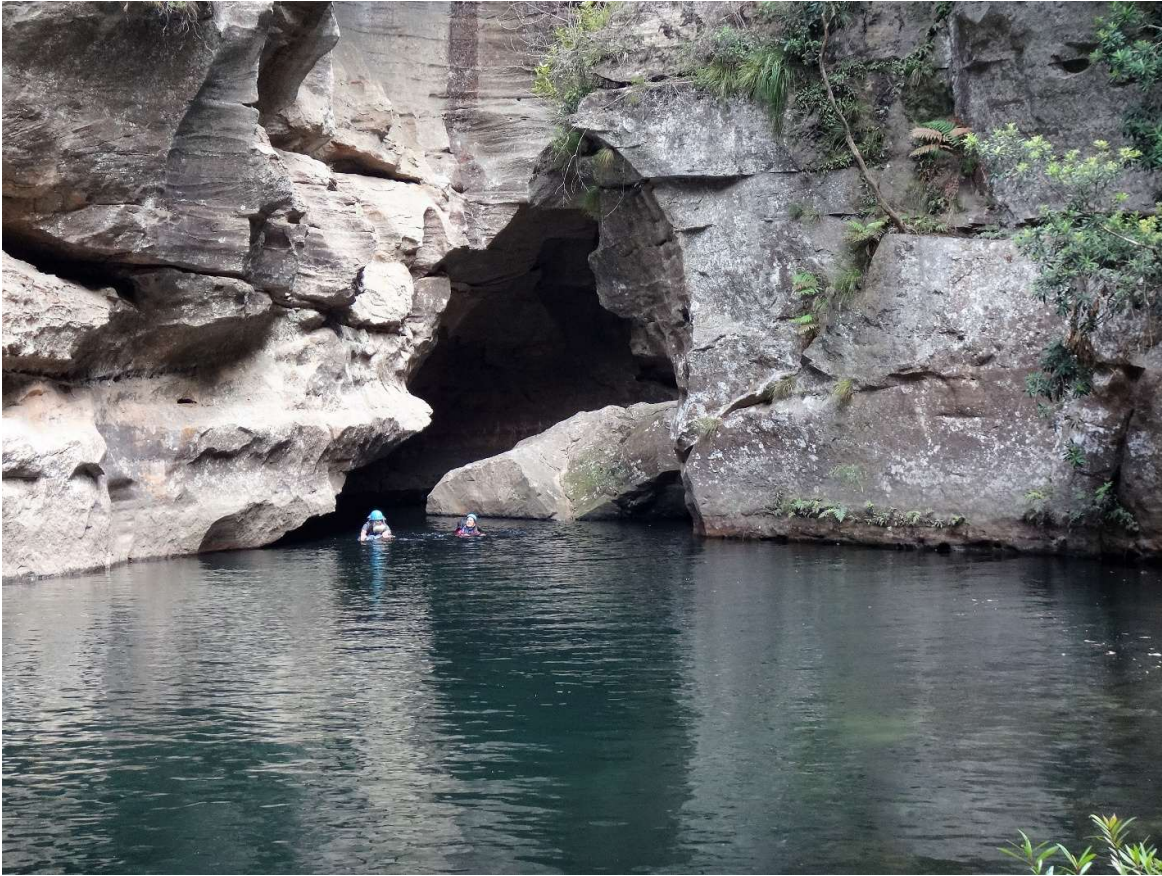
Yuri in the boulder gorge below the drop. Photo: Nicole Bordes.



Nicole making her way around the huge rocks. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

This adrenalin-pumping section was immediately followed by a long pool that included a dark tunnel in the middle. Coming out of it, you continue to the end of this unbroken stretch of water, and then you look back,

and due to the river twisting and the narrowness of the gorge, you get a full impression that what you had just gone through was a full giant arch. What a way to finish the canyon, as, indeed, the exit was via a small gully just past this last amazing feature!



The arch at the end of the canyon. Photo: Yuri Bolotin (08/01/18 trip).

By 1445, our journey through Wollangambe Three was over, and half an hour later, we were ready to start the climb out. The initial part of the pass was so steep and narrow and so crammed between enormous cliffs that it did not seem it could possibly work, but, having been here before, I knew that not only it would go but it would also not require the use of tape or even contain any significant scrambles.

Seven years ago, this felt like a virgin country, but now there was a faint trail leading up, which helped with the thick scrub. What did not help, was the full afternoon sun coming out at full blast, accompanied by the humid, heavy, windless air. As we quickly gained altitude, good views appeared to our north, and by 1538, the group reached a small saddle with expansive panoramas (from two different spots) both north towards the next section of the river (Wollangambe Four) and south, looking at the part we had just done and all the way to Caley's Haycock and the rest of Mount Wilson.

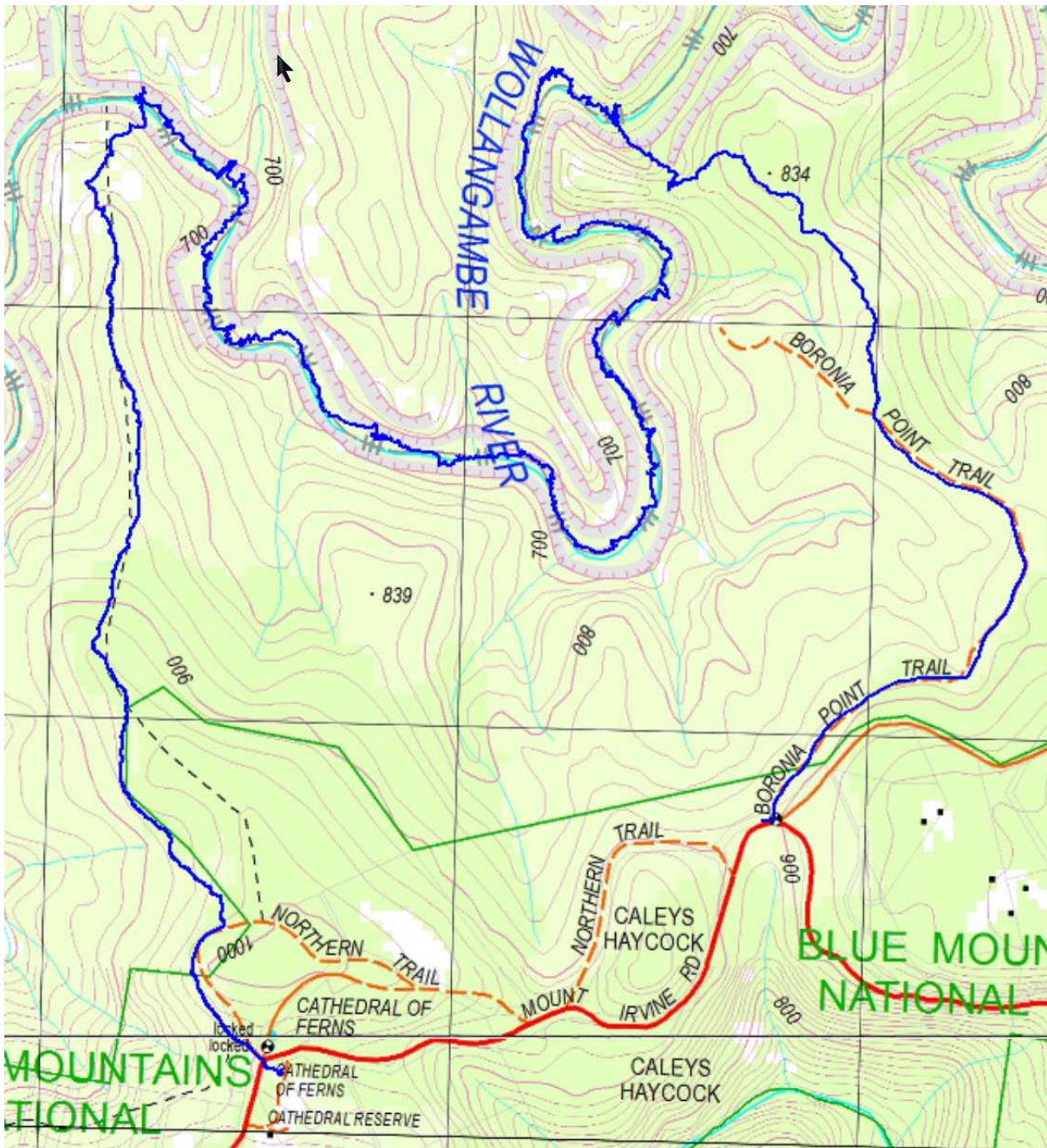


Looking south from the saddle. Wollangambe Three below, Hayleys Haycock in the middle, and Mount Wilson on the right of the horizon Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From here on, the rate of ascent became more measured as we made our way towards spot height 834 m. By 1554, the party began skirting around the high point, dropped down into a shallow saddle and then ascended on the opposite side, all the time following the top of the ridge. That led us to Boronia Point Trail by 1617, and from here, to the vehicles, which were reached twenty minutes later. The car shuffle was completed by 1655.

This had been a wonderful part of the Wollangambe, and I was glad I took both the lilo and the full light wetsuit. I had swum it last time and found the trip today much more relaxing.

Trip statistics: total distance 12 km; total ascent 300 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded by Andrew Dumphy and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

### Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0745	Cars left at Boronia Point Trail	GR 5877 9079	900 m
0800	Cars parked at Cathedral Reserve and started walking	GR 5760 9016	960 m
0834	Top of the ridge, the original track	GR 5719 9105	930 m
0854	Lookout	GR 5716 9186	840 m
0904	Lookout	GR 5713 9205	835 m
0928-0955	At Wollangambe Three entry	GR 5720 9251	690 m
1017	End of the first long pool	GR 5741 9222	688 m
1043	Constriction	GR 5743 9195	686 m
1116	End of a long pool	GR 5780 9171	680 m
1129	End of a long pool	GR 5800 9167	678 m

1157	A gully with fresh water	GR 5829 9146	675 m
1208	Another gully with fresh water	GR 5842 9148	673 m
1237-1300	Lunch	GR 5837 9188	665 m
1336	End of a long pool	GR 5843 9222	656 m
1403	Boulder field	GR 5813 9239	653 m
1417-1427	Drop in the river	GR 5817 9290	645 m (top)
1445-1515	Wollangambe Three exit	GR 5835 9251	635 m
1538	Saddle and lookouts	GR 5850 9234	760 m
1554	Near spot height 834 m	GR 5871 9235	830 m
1617	Boronia Point Trail	GR 5900 9179	850 m
1637	Back at cars on Boronia Point Trail	GR 5877 9079	900 m
1655	Shuffle completed	GR 5760 9016	960 m