

Walk:

Blue Mountains National Park: Wollangambe Four

Leader:

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Wollangambe. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park near the locked gate at Boronia Point Trail. Walk down to Wollangambe Three exit at GR 584 925. Swim/float/walk/scramble down the gorge till the exit at GR 597 925. Must be able to swim well. Helmet is 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:

13 February 2025.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Gary Roberts, Nicole Bordes, Alistair Trung, Yidan Saladine, Andrew Dumphy, 6.

The Weather:

The morning was fully overcast, but the sun started to make appearances from about 10 am; at first, for a few minutes only, then longer and longer, resulting in a mostly sunny late afternoon and evening. There was almost no wind. Temperature range 16 to 25 degrees C.

The Colo River height gauge for the area closest to the Wollangambe was at 1.06 metres.

Track Notes

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

This is one of the few Wollangambe canyon days where the initial logistics are simple – a single starting and finishing location, the intersection of Mount Irvine Road and Boronia Point Trail. How is it possible to have a short-ish canyon entry walk and an even shorter exit walk radiating from the same spot and still spend a full day along the river, you may ask. The reason is the extraordinary twists and turns of the gorge in between. It could easily be seen by simply looking at the topographic map, but I was very much looking forward to entering this terrain and experiencing it for real today.

We began our adventure at 0844, by walking on Boronia Point Trail. This old road skirts the lower edge of Mount Wilson basalt cap before continuing on top of a sandstone spur that descends in the direction of the Wollangambe. Not being aware of any easy or even moderately doable ways down from its termination point, I am not sure why this trail was put there; most likely, it would not have been for river access.

At 0903, the company headed off track along a north-trending branch spur. Surprisingly, we found the bush was only slightly wet – I expected a lot more moisture after last night's drizzle and considering the windless

conditions. Within two minutes of leaving the trail, a single star picket fence post was encountered, with a white plastic cap on top. By the faded appearance of the cap, this object of unknown origin is not very recent. A little further, a much more impressive installation was noted – a five metre high burnt tree trunk, with twists and cut-outs worthy of a great sculptor.



A sculptural tree trunk. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

A faint trail, which appeared and disappeared, led us into a shallow saddle (at 0917), from where we ascended to just below the spot height 834 m (at 0922). Here, the party turned west and began a much faster descent towards a tiny saddle (that took us a little time and effort to locate), which was reached fourteen minutes later. The visibility had much improved by then, so we were able to enjoy two lookouts from the open terrace just above the saddle, one towards our route today, Wollangambe Four, and another one, surveying the course of the river that is part of the previous section, Wollangambe Three. Perhaps an even better view may be enjoyed from a high point 250 metres to the west, but I decided against visiting it today, in the interest of time.



Wollangambe gorge view from the lookout. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

Instead, we followed a very steep and scrubby narrow gully down to the river, reached at 1002. Before changing into the canyon gear, I led several members who had not been here before to view and photograph the large pool and the dramatic arch-like formation at the end of the previous section.



A pool and an arch-like formation at the end of Wollangambe Three. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

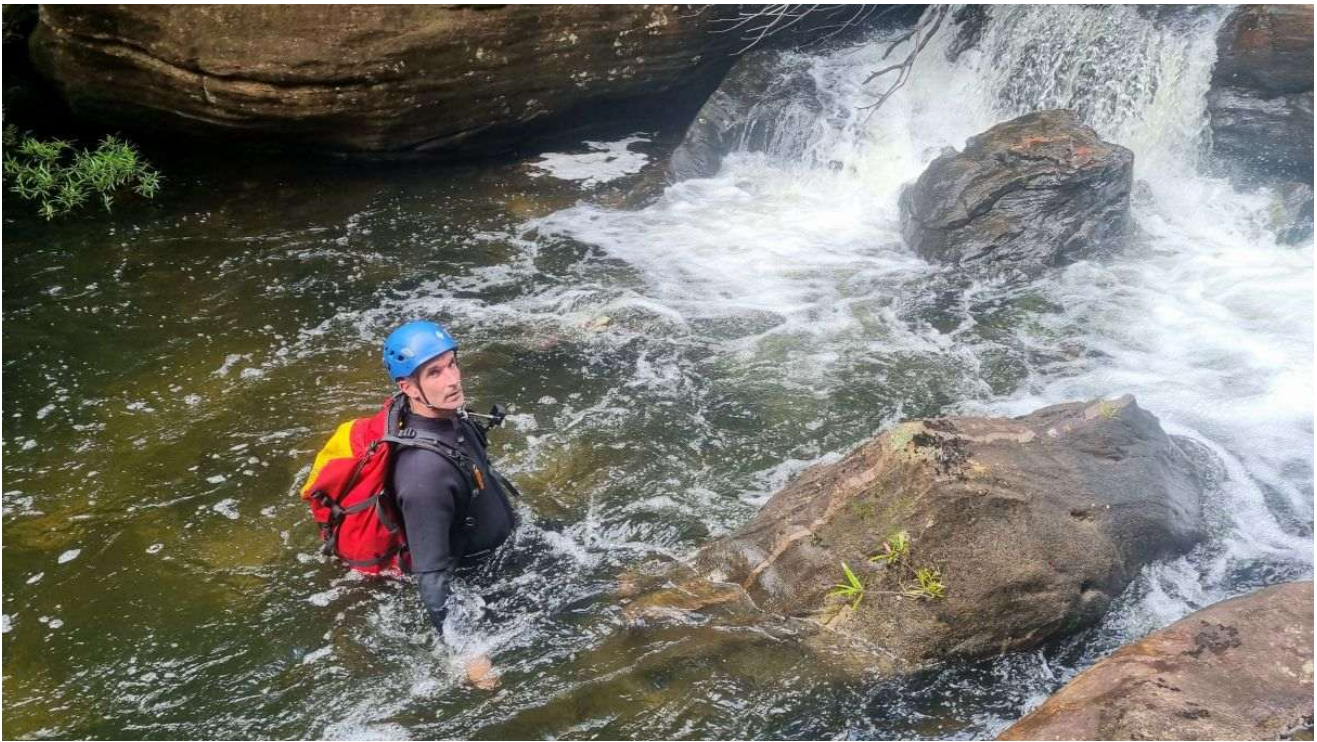
Just as we were getting ready for the next part of the trip, the sun staged a brief tentative appearance. This was surprising, given the forecast for continuous drizzle and overcast conditions. At the cars, I had had a bit of a go at Alistair for applying his suncream, and now I was suspecting I would have to lick my words – but this was a good problem to have.

By 1045, we were at the water's edge, ready to launch into the stream. As always, it felt a bit cool to start with, but soon we got used to it, as the water temperature, in fact, was very comfortable. Our journey began with a few small rapids, and I suspected that we would experience quite a lot more, considering the river level was higher than on most previous trips.

I was proven right almost straight away as we entered a section of cascades that included a two metre waterfall. I had to remind the team that we were not equipped for white-water rafting and therefore they must exercise complete care at all times.



The first set of cascades. Photo: Nicole Bordes.

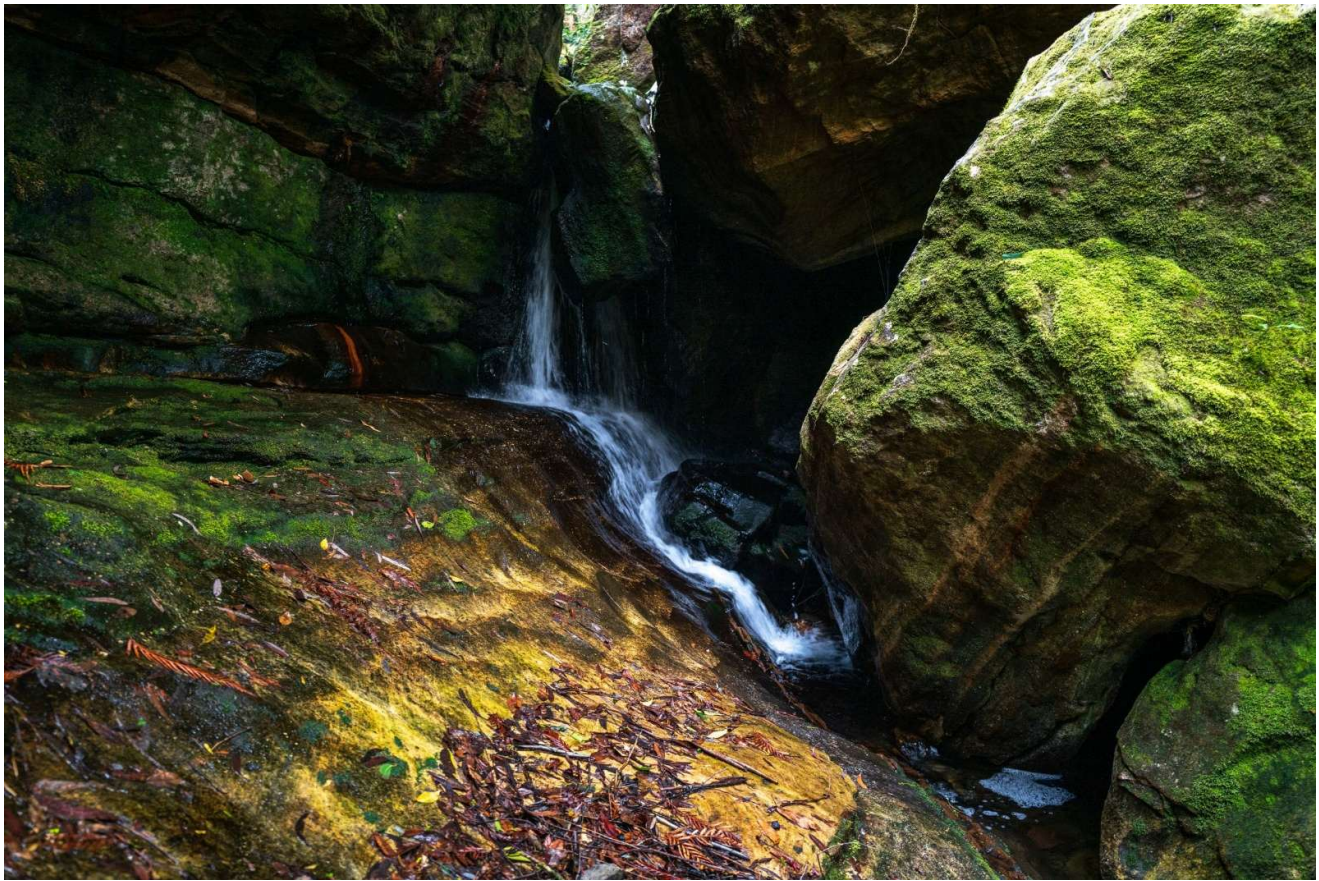


Andrew below the white-water section. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

In total contrast to the previous part, we then entered a beautifully tranquil 100 metre long pool, followed by a 1.5 metre waterfall and a 50 metre long slow current stretch. At 1114. Two hundred metres further downstream, at a 90-degree bend in the river, the company stopped at a junction with a prominent gorge, and I decided to walk up it a short distance to have a look. Soon, we encountered a very pretty waterfall set in between emerald-green mossy boulders. At 1126. I could see that it was possible to climb around it on the right-hand side and keep going, but thought it might take too long and therefore affect this trip. This gorge contains the rarely visited and fairly remote Old Man Canyon in one of the upstream tributaries.



Nicole wading in a long pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Waterfall in the side gorge. Photo: Nicole Bordes.

Shortly after resuming on our course, the party encountered a massive 300 metre long pool. The end of it was reached at 1158. Another extensive stretch of unbroken water soon followed, and then, suddenly, the river went through a series fast, white, noisy rapids. The best way to negotiate them was to carefully wade across just before the start and walk along a stone terrace, where the current was just ankle-deep. At 1215.



A tranquil pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

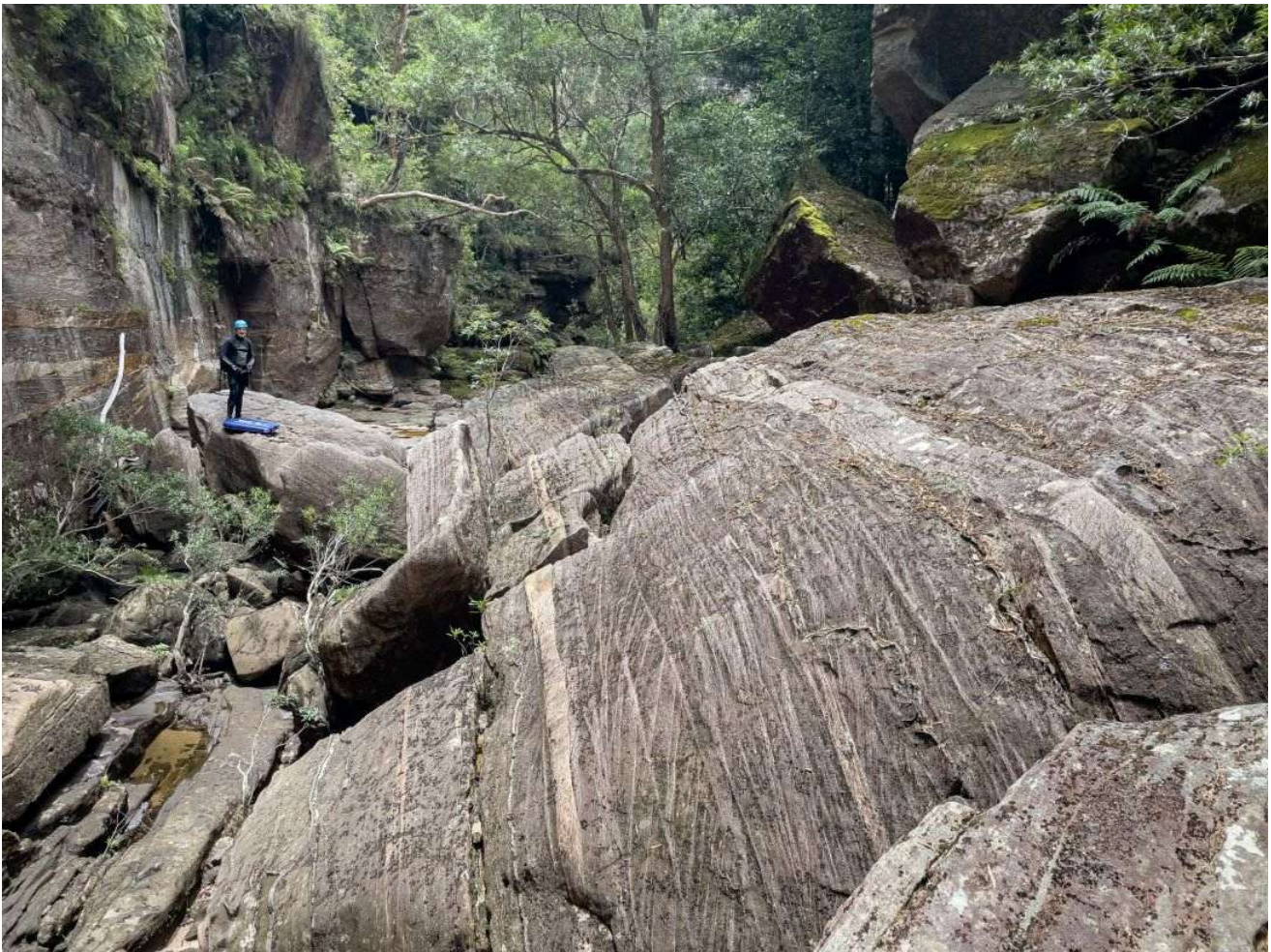


Nicole and Yidan showing rapid rapids action. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Alistair looks happy to be on the safe side of the rapids. Photo: Nicole Bordes.

The Wollangambe Four was certainly full of contrasts as right at the end of the rapids we stopped on top of a rock and surveyed in awe an extensive stone shelf, with the river bed plunging down five metres beneath our feet through a series of massive scattered boulders and then entering a huge tranquil blue-green pool seen in a distance. The surface of the platform was decorated with deep natural carvings, made by water, resembling oversized Aboriginal grinding grooves. Wow! At 1224 (top).



Where has the river gone? It is in between these boulders! Photo: Nicole Bordes.



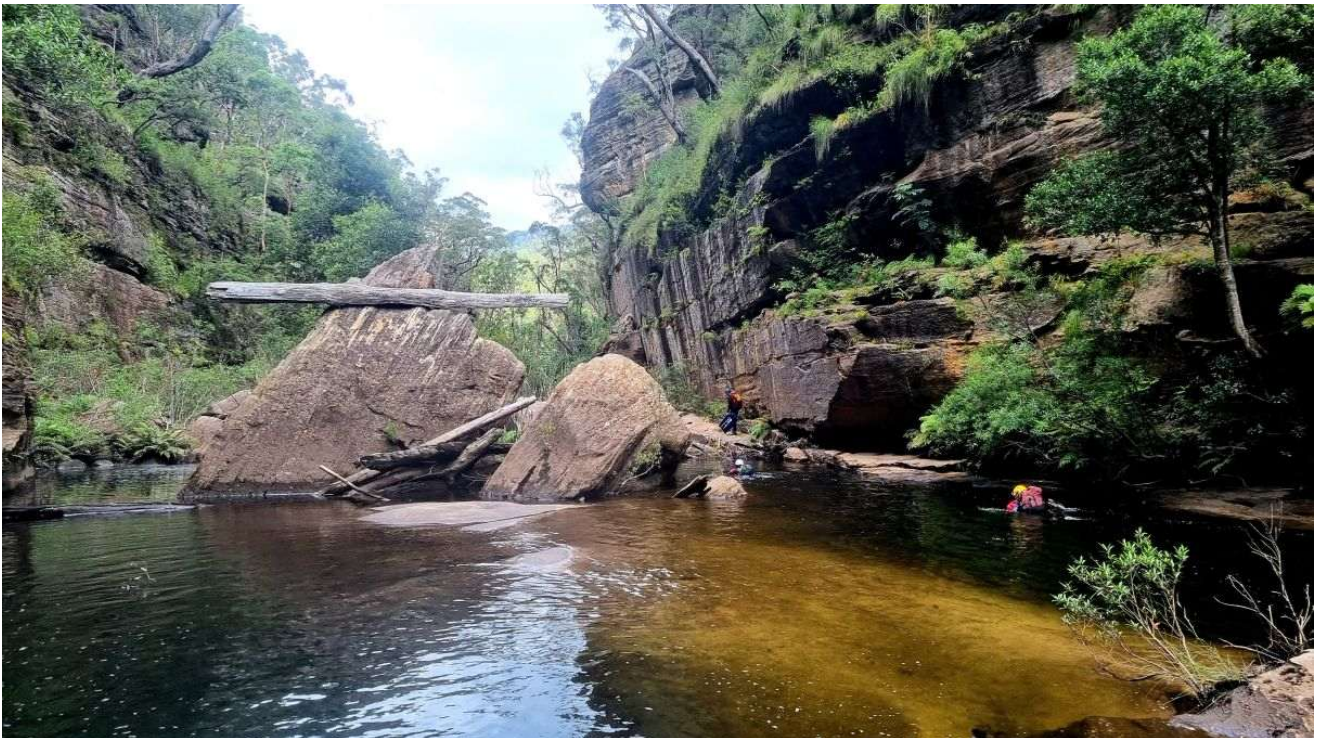
The stone platform with a pool at the end. Photo: Nicole Bordes.



Natural water carvings on the stone surface. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

A little further downstream we negotiated another set of fast rapids. There was a safer way that bypassed most of them on the southern side, but one must get out of the current just before the start. Some of the party missed the right moment, got a bit caught and had to be carefully guided through to safety.

A few quiet stretches followed. The last, the most extensive one, featured a 15 metre long horizontal tree trunk stuck on a boulder in the middle of the gorge, five metres above the water level. An incredible sight! It must have been deposited there by a flood.



This huge tree trunk stuck on a boulder shows the height of the river in flood. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

I had been looking for a suitable lunch spot for a little while now, and, at 1319, we found one that was just right, a very long dry stone shelf, about three metres above the river. We stayed here till 1340. Over the last couple of hours we had been experiencing increasing sunshine, with only about half of the sky now covered by clouds.



Our lunch time spot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Resuming, the party followed what was the straightest part of the course today, where the river flowed south east through a series of small pools and fast narrow rocky channels. I covered a big proportion of this by walking on the right bank, others chose to fight the current. For me, the scrub was dense in places but, overall, quite manageable.

Next on the agenda was something entirely different, a magnificent 500 metre long pool (yes, I measured it on the topographic map afterwards). We took our time to fully enjoy it. From 1415, northern end, till 1445, southern end.



Yidan and Nicole at the end of the 500 metre long pool. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The last section, about one kilometre in distance, mainly consisted of shallow bouldery raceways with some slow deep stretches in between, one of them measured around 200 metres. 1540 saw us at the easy to recognise exit from Wollangambe Four, at a spot known as Sandy Point¹, where the river makes a 180-degree turn around a narrow knife edge-like peninsula that contains the way out.

True to this name, there was a wide sandy beach here that extended on both sides of the jutting promontory. By 1613, the group finished packing and headed very steeply up, making it to the lookout on top of the spur seven minutes later. We next followed this narrow, elevated walkway that provided glimpses into the Wollangambe gorge stretching underneath on both sides till its end, reached by 1634. Only a small amount of elevation had been gained so far, but I knew this was about to change as we stopped for a quick drink and got ready to tackle the steepest section of the climb.

¹ This location is identified as Sandy Point on the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade topographic map (Custom Edition), 1:25,000, December, 2017.



Packing up for the exit. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

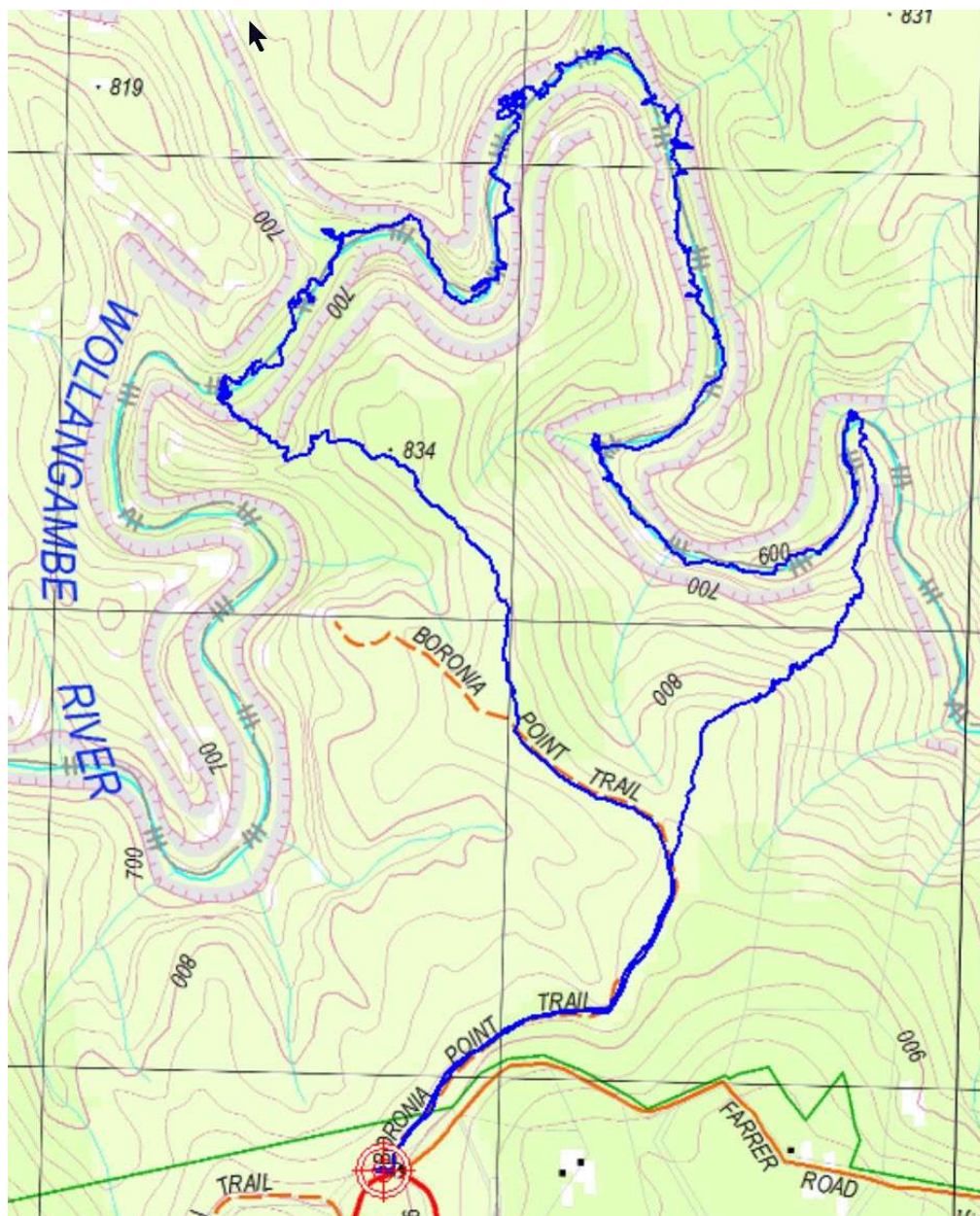


The lookout on top of the spur. Note the river doing a 180-degree bend. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

It was not technical, but the gradient was sharp and the sun by now, quite hot. The top of the first cliff line was attained by 1715, and the top of the second and last, smaller cliff line, ten minutes later. Just before we joined Boronia Point Trail, a one metre long Red-bellied Black Snake, *Pseudechis porphyriacus*, was seen quickly escaping our attention. We reached the made road by 1740 and were back at the vehicles twenty minutes later.

Wollangambe Four certainly did not disappoint, its main distinguishing features being very long serene pools and fast rocky rapids in between. Lilo and a full wetsuit are strongly recommended, but check the water level before your trip and compare them with the one stated at the beginning of these track notes under “Weather”.

Trip statistics: total distance 11 km; total ascent 420 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

| Time | Location | Grid Reference | Elevation |
|-----------|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| 0844 | Cars parked and started walking | GR 5877 9080 | 900 m |
| 0903 | Left Boronia Pont Trail | GR 5903 9178 | 850 m |
| 0905 | Picket fence post | GR 5901 9186 | 851 m |
| 0917 | Saddle | GR 5888 9222 | 810 m |
| 0922 | Near spot height 834 m | GR 5873 9236 | 830 m |
| 0936 | Saddle and lookouts | GR 5852 9235 | 760 m |
| 1002-1045 | Wollangambe Four start | GR 5836 9249 | 635 m |
| 1114 | End of pool | GR 5854 9271 | 630 m |
| 1126 | Waterfall in side gorge | GR 5858 9285 | 632 m |
| 1158 | End of pool | GR 5895 9275 | 625 m |
| 1215 | Rapids | GR 5899 9311 | 623 m |

| | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------|-------------|
| 1224 | Rock platform and boulder field | GR 5901 9314 | 624 m (top) |
| 1319-1340 | Lunch on rock shelf | GR 5934 9306 | 618 m |
| 1415 | 500 metre pool (northern end) | GR 5943 9267 | 610 m |
| 1445 | 500 metre pool (southern end) | GR 5921 9233 | 608 m |
| 1540-1613 | Wollangambe Four end, Sandy Point | GR 5975 9247 | 595 m |
| 1620 | Top of the knife-edge spur and lookout | GR 5977 9243 | 620 m |
| 1634 | End of the spur | GR 5976 9219 | 650 m |
| 1715 | Top of the first cliff line | GR 5959 9188 | 800 m |
| 1725 | Top of the second cliff line | GR 5954 9185 | 825 m |
| 1740 | Boronia Point Trail | GR 5937 9146 | 870 m |
| 1800 | Back at cars | GR 5877 9080 | 900 m |