

Walk:**Wollemi National Park: Enchanted Cliffs Traverse****Leader:**

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park one car at GR 859 975 and another one at GR 875 976 on Mountain Lagoon Trail. From the first car, descend towards the cliffs above Gaspers Creek at about GR 859 979 and explore the cliff lines to the north east, revisiting the Onion Skins Cave. The exit point will depend on the interest and available time. About 6 km. Scrambling and exposure. Mainly exploratory.

Rating:

5M. S323E

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:

2 May 2025.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Kiki Le-Thuy Hoang-Tran, Ian Starkey, Scott Marshall, 4.

The Weather:

A cool day with variable weather conditions. Fully overcast most of the morning with a light drizzle at times. Lengthy sunny periods in the afternoon, changing to drizzle and light rain towards the end of the walk. No wind. Temperature range 13 to 18 degrees C.

Track Notes

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

One car was left on Mountain Lagoon Trail a few hundred metres west of the intersection with Comleroy Road, now locked, at 0830, and the other one was driven back west along the trail and parked at the walk take off point. Our adventure began from here at 0846.

Leaving the trail, the group headed north east along a small spur into a head-high scrub. It was mostly not too dense but felt much worse after it had been thoroughly drenched by the overnight rain. We too got soaked quickly, and with the temperature at low 13 degrees C it felt quite chilly, so there was occasional talk about putting on the rain gear. In the end, we did not do it. The absence of wind and walking kept the party reasonably warm.

A hundred metres or so from the road, we came across some star pickets forming an enclosure, probably the remains of an abandoned 'weed' growing operation. Ten minutes into the spur walk, we stopped following it, plunging steeply down towards a gully to our north east. Despite the gradient, the descent would have

been pleasant and easy if it was not for the slimy slippery rocks and wet bush. Nevertheless, the occasional views through the trees of Gaspers Creek gorge, still covered in thick white cloud, were very enjoyable.



First gully descent. Photo: Scott Marshall.

By 0920, the group was at the bottom of the watercourse. Before coming down further, I had a look at a nearby cave but it did not contain anything noteworthy. A few more slippery slides along the boulder-strewn creek bed, and nine minutes later, we reached our target cliff line at a small but very pretty overhang, featuring several tongue-like white and pink rock formations. A good omen for what we might find further ahead! On 29/10/24, I had led a trip that included this area, but on that day, we had stayed within Gaspers Creek below and missed the section of the cliff line we were about to explore.



The first overhang along our way. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Just a few steps from the first find, we paused again to photograph a six metre long highly ornate cave with two window holes pierced through the side wall. A hundred metres further along, the company took shelter from the oncoming drizzle in a ten metre long richly decorated overhang sporting several interesting protruding shapes. The colours here were soft pink, grey, brown and black.

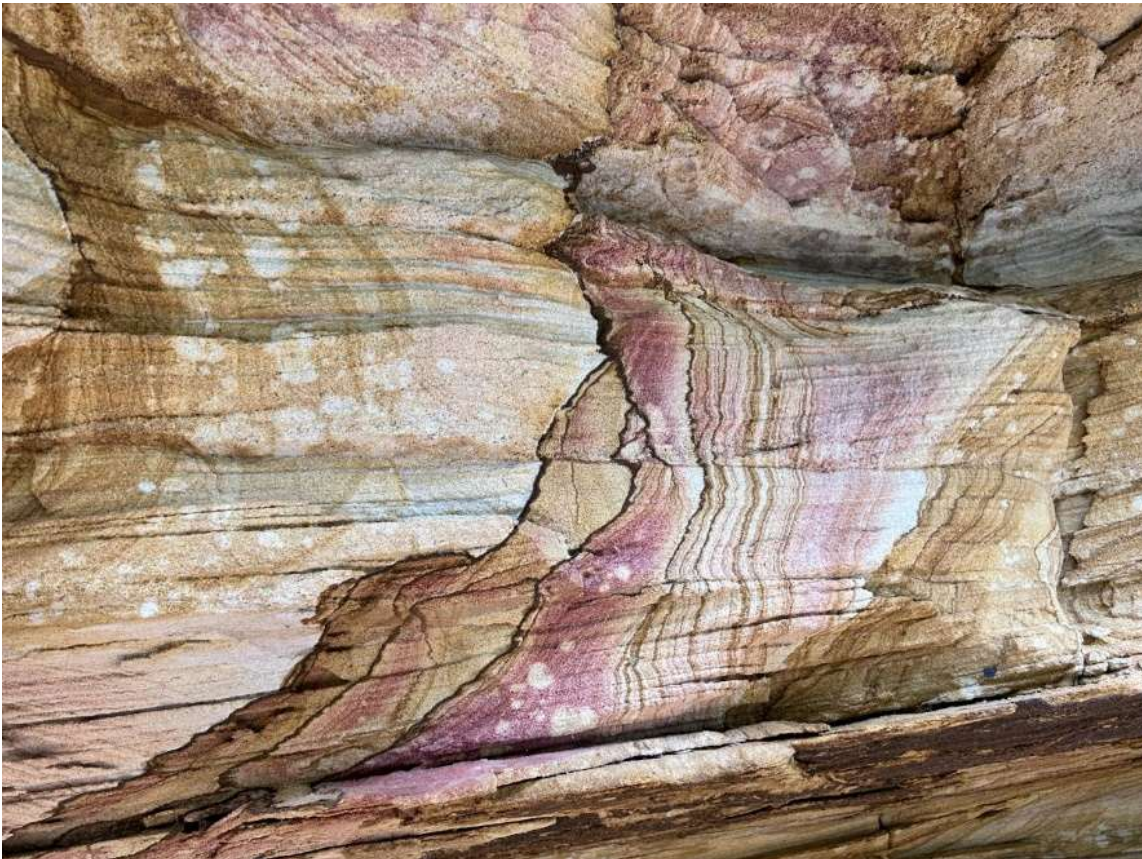


A beautifully decorated overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Shortly after the cliff line turned east, the party inspected a striking eight metre long eroded wall featuring pink and brown veins running across light beige planes of flat sandstone. Scott, our team geologist, was particularly happy to see and record these. At 0949.



Patterned cave wall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



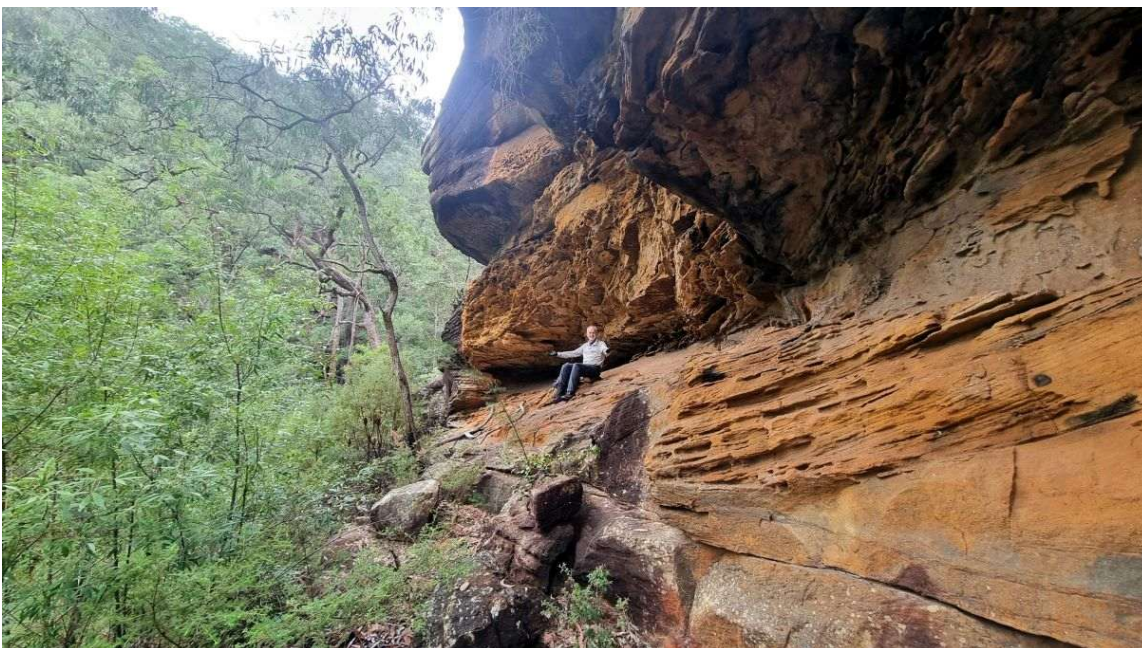
Pink and brown veins in the cave, Photo: Scott Marshall.

Next, we walked along a broad, almost scrub-free ledge. The cliffs above were flat brown and not very weathered but looked spectacular as they rose up fifty or more metres in a number of terraces that accommodated strikingly tall trees. *Banksia spinulosa* shrubs were flowering everywhere, adding splashes of golden yellow to this dramatic landscape.



Cliffs along the ledge traverse. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

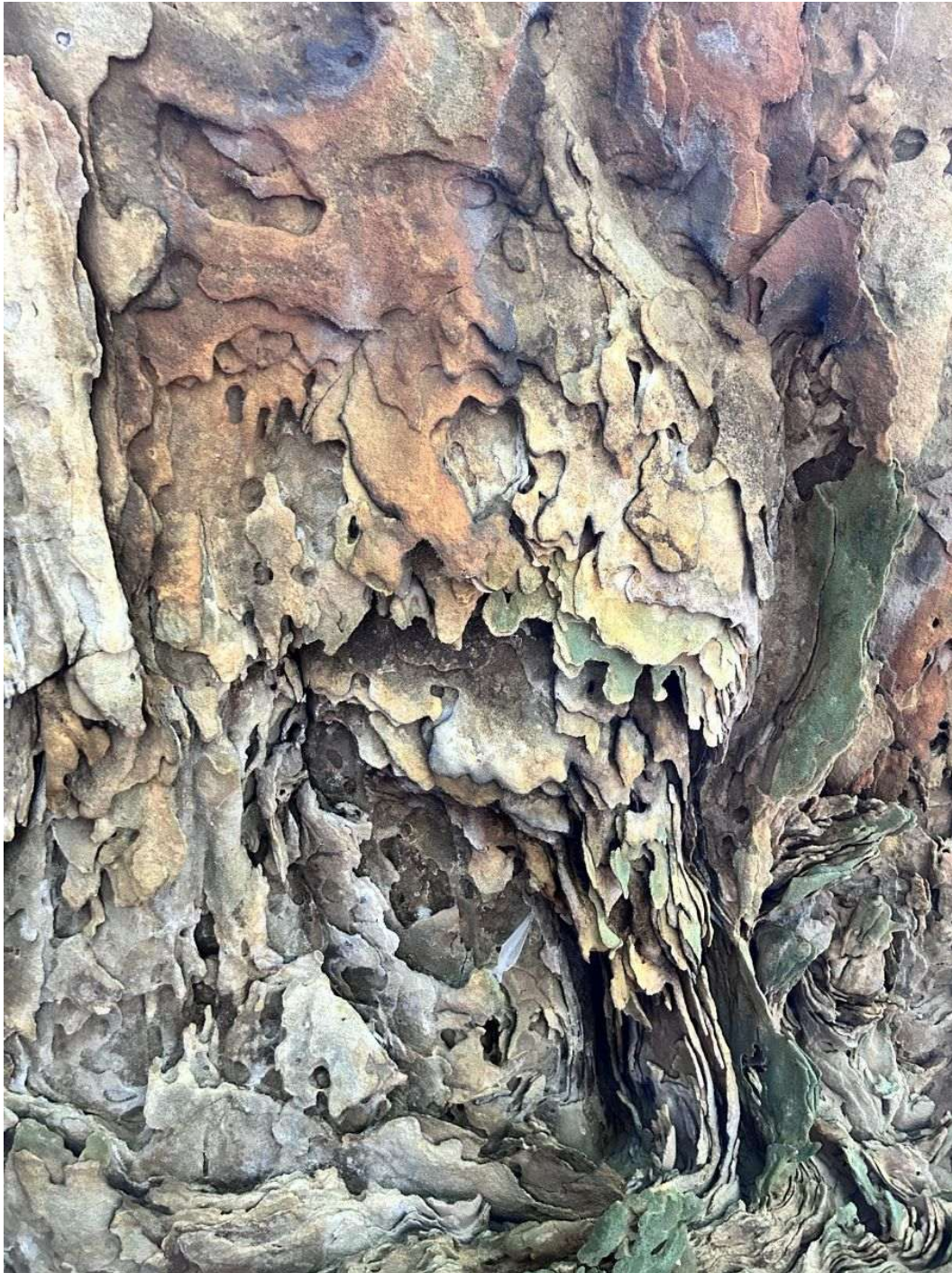
Just before we entered the next gully, there was a 40 metre long ornately decorated overhang of mostly light brown-orange stone with some forms jutting out, resembling fairy tale creature heads. The drizzle stopped by now, but the bush, which had been just beginning to dry out, was wet again. This dry cave was perfect for our morning tea break, from 1012 till 1022.



Ian in the morning tea overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Resuming, we descended into the gully. On the other side, was a plain-looking wall, about 30 metres long. The first 25 metres were indeed flat expanses of orange and brown stone, but in the last five metres they suddenly changed into a most amazing stretch of geological forms. This is how I described our visit to Onion Skins Cave on 29/10/24:

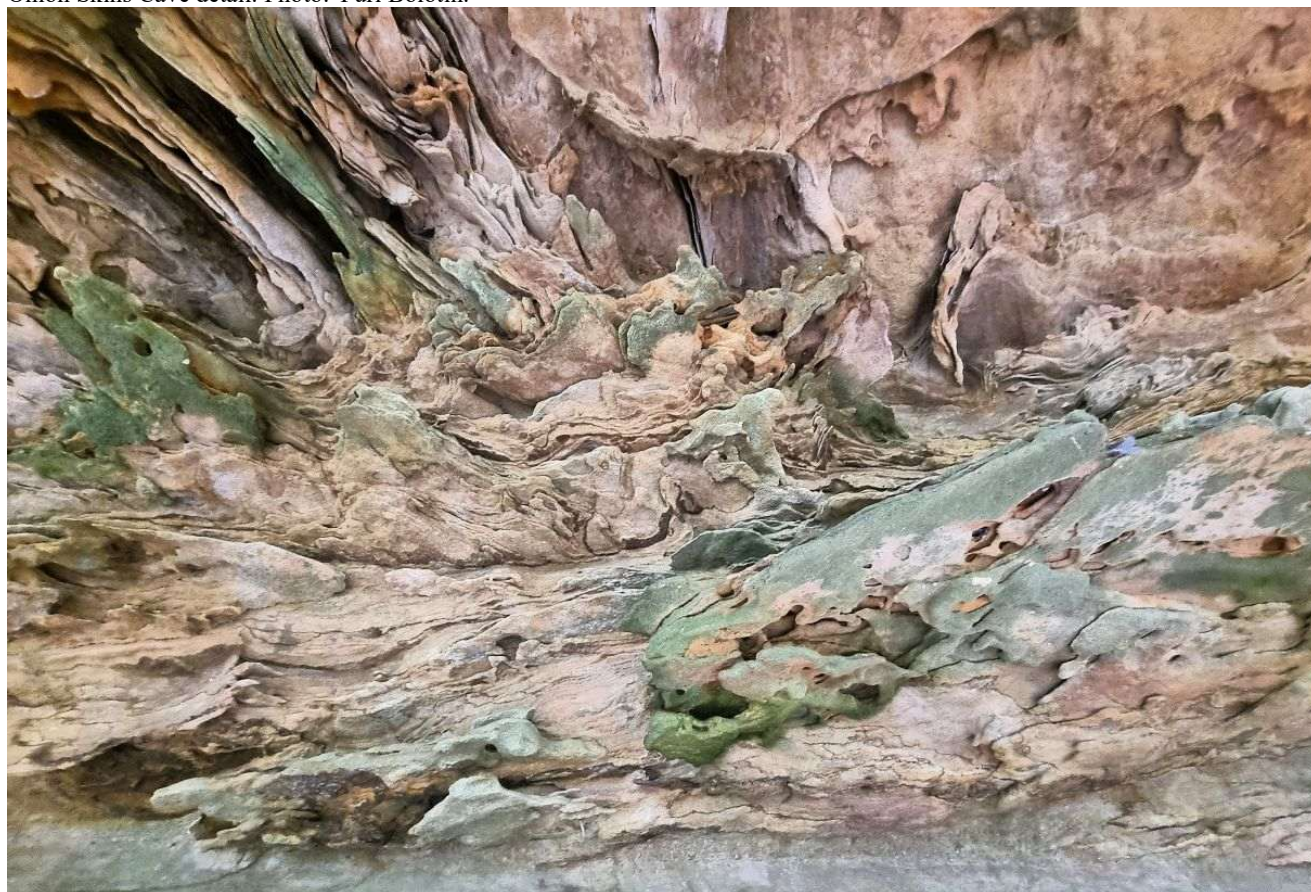
You may be familiar with spheroidal or onion-skin weathering that produces multiple concentric tightly compressed layers or shells of rock. These layers can be only a millimetre or two thick. I have seen some striking examples of spheroidal weathering on relatively flat surfaces, vertical and horizontal, but here we had onion-skin formations on a cave roof that had been twisted, deformed, turned, and eroded into phantasmagorical forms. They also featured an amazing array of pigmentations – grey, yellow, brown, orange, beige, green, purple, black. The result was an incredible riot of shapes and colours that took our breaths away.



Onion Skins Cave detail. Photo: Scott Marshall.



Onion Skins Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Onion Skins Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Our party spent from 1032 till 1040 there, but could easily have stayed for several hours. Moving on, we continued traversing, first above the gully containing the Onion Skins Cave and then above Gaspers Creek. The ledge here was good, the warm sun was coming out from behind the clouds for longer and longer periods, and the views of the gorge below were glorious and continuous.

Coming up about 20 metres, we spotted an old, elaborately constructed cairn. There were plenty of ways down and up from this level, so I am not sure why it was built at that spot. At 1101. The traverse continued to be both pleasant and scenic. We could either marvel at the huge boulders bulging out high above our heads or explore the overhangs closer in. One of them featured a large roof window.



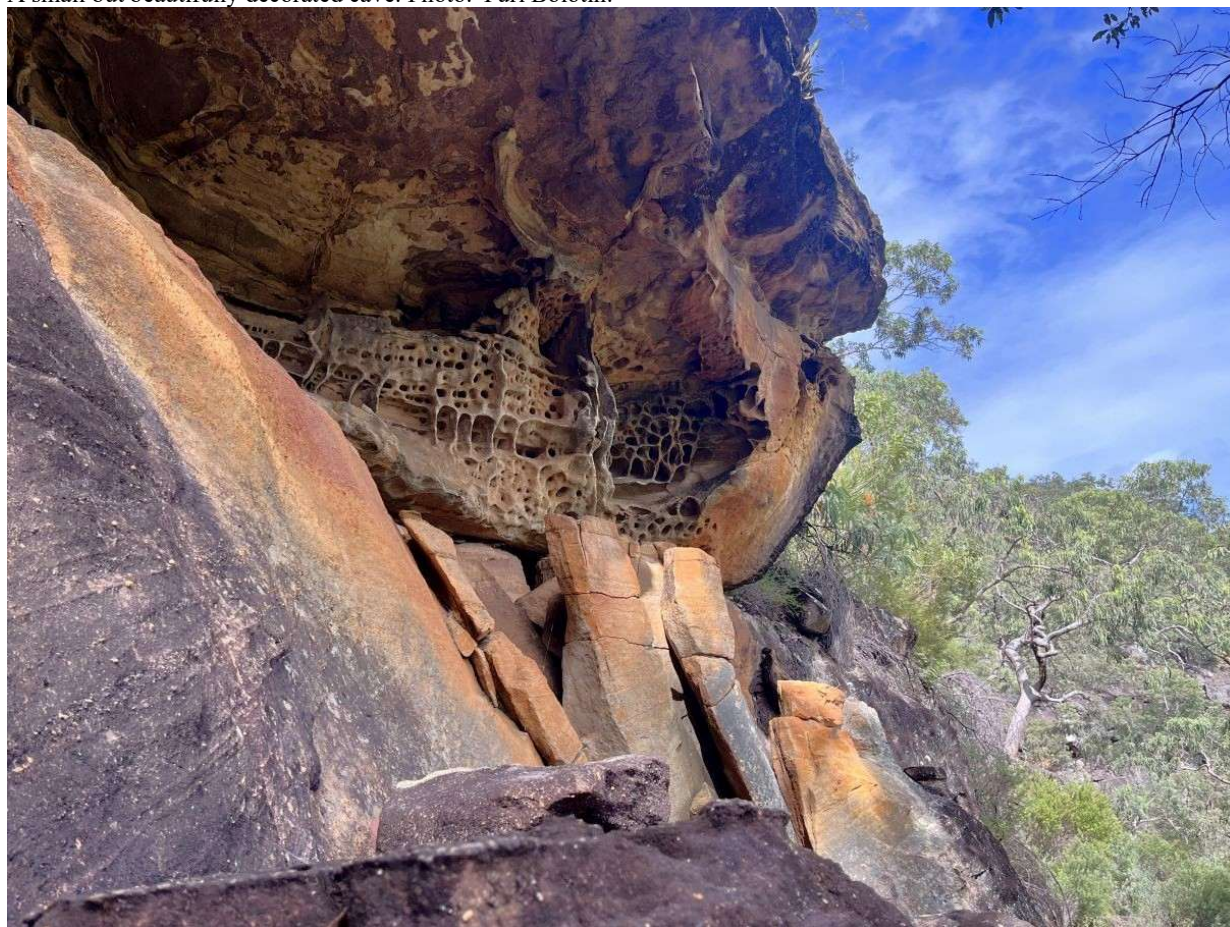
Striking boulders along the traverse. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1126, the party crossed the gully we had used to exit last time, but today we were hoping to get much further into the new terrain. Immediately, there was a choice of taking either the lower or the upper terrace level, and I chose the latter, mainly as I thought we would have a better chance of keeping out of wet scrub there. We stayed on this ledge for the next 600-700 metres, so the only way to find out what we missed below us is to do another trip (it is now on my list).

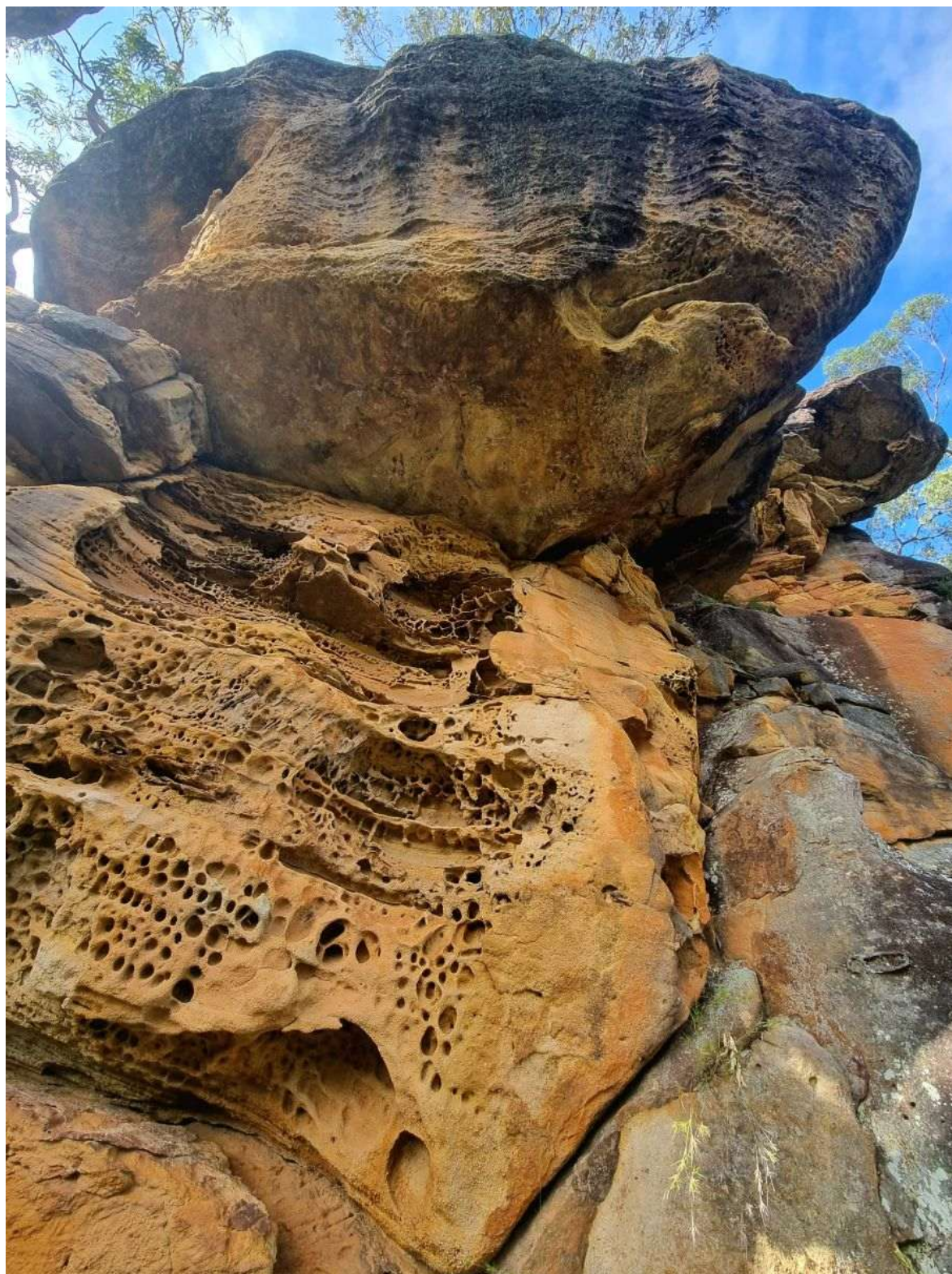
After passing a few small but pretty overhangs, we stopped at a much bigger one, featuring a narrow, five meter long panel of exceptionally fine honeycomb formations. At 1136. Less than a hundred metres further along, there was another area of dramatic rock shapes that looked like a heard of seals climbing up a mountain slope. This was followed by a huge boulder resembling a giant angry Koala, its breast decorated with tafoni erosions.



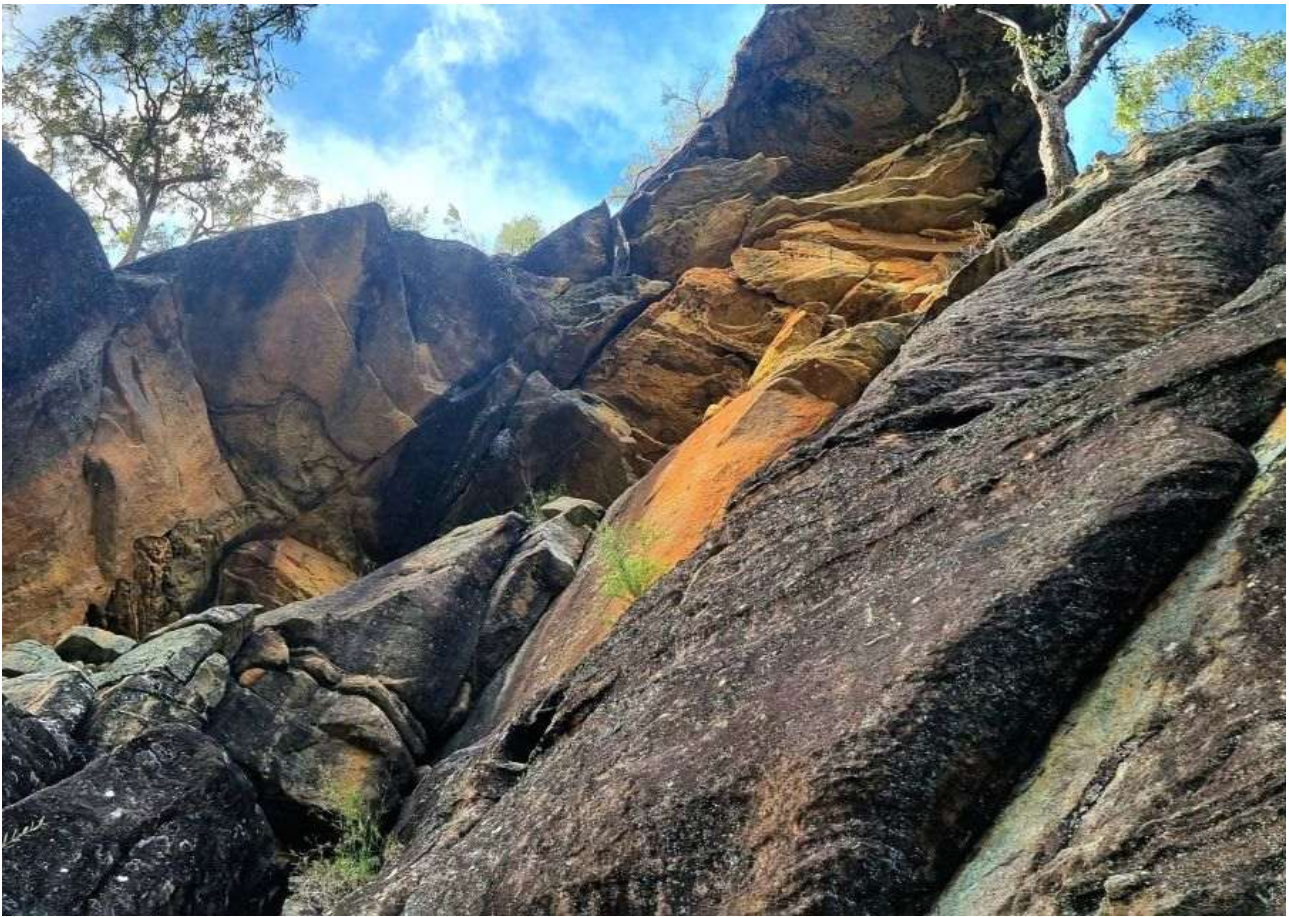
A small but beautifully decorated cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



This overhang features a narrow panel of very fine honeycomb formations. Photo: Ian Starkey.



An angry Koala-shaped wall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



These rocks resemble a herd of seals going up a ramp. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1208, just before crossing a small gully, the party paused to admire a four metre tall totem of three boulders on top of each other. Next, there was a wall of enormous stone columns and mythical creature heads, silently staring at us passing by. It was framed by magnificent *Angophora floribunda*, Rough Barked Apple trees, which dominated most of the landscapes we walked through today.



The wall of heads and amongst Rough Barked Apple trees. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

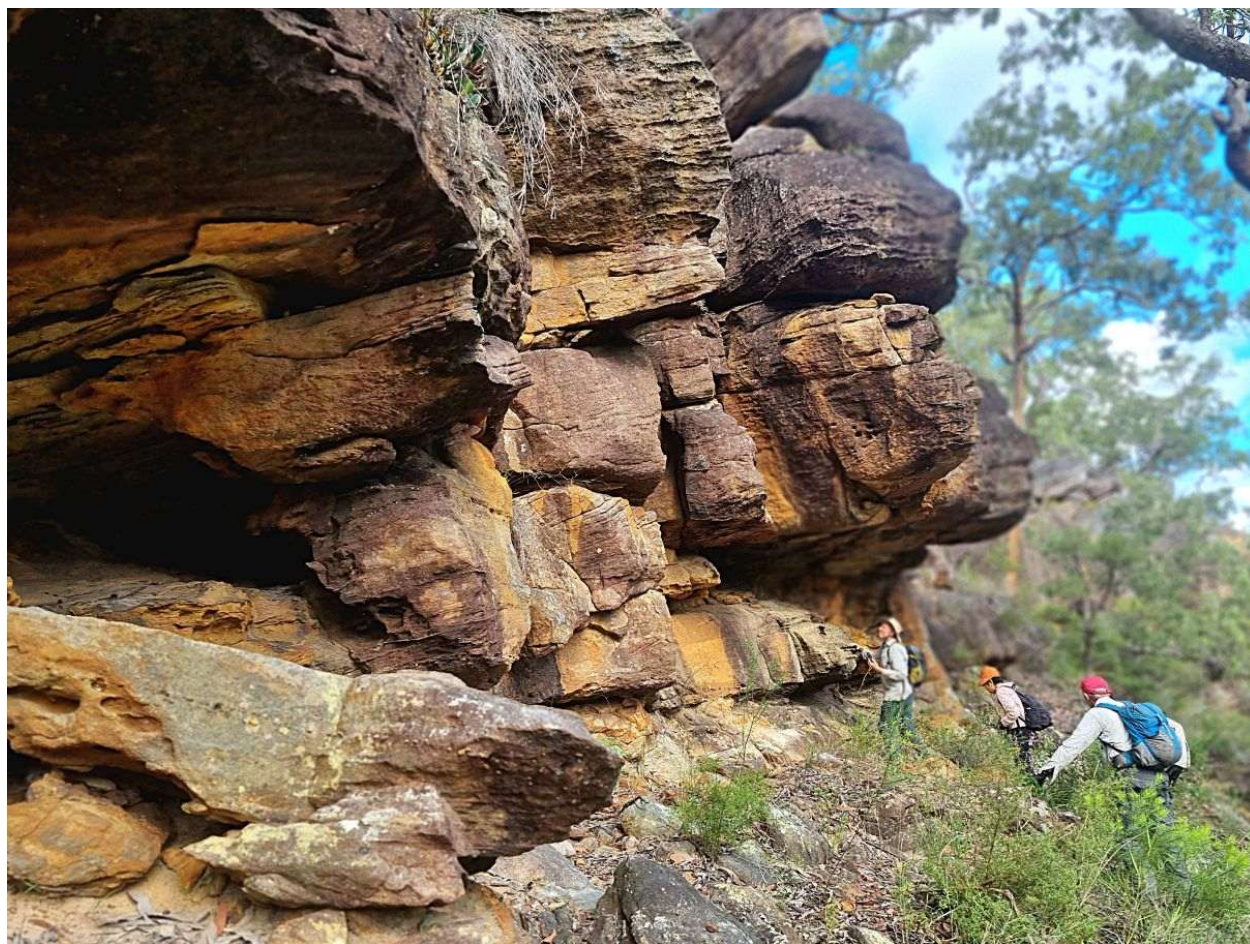


A totem. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



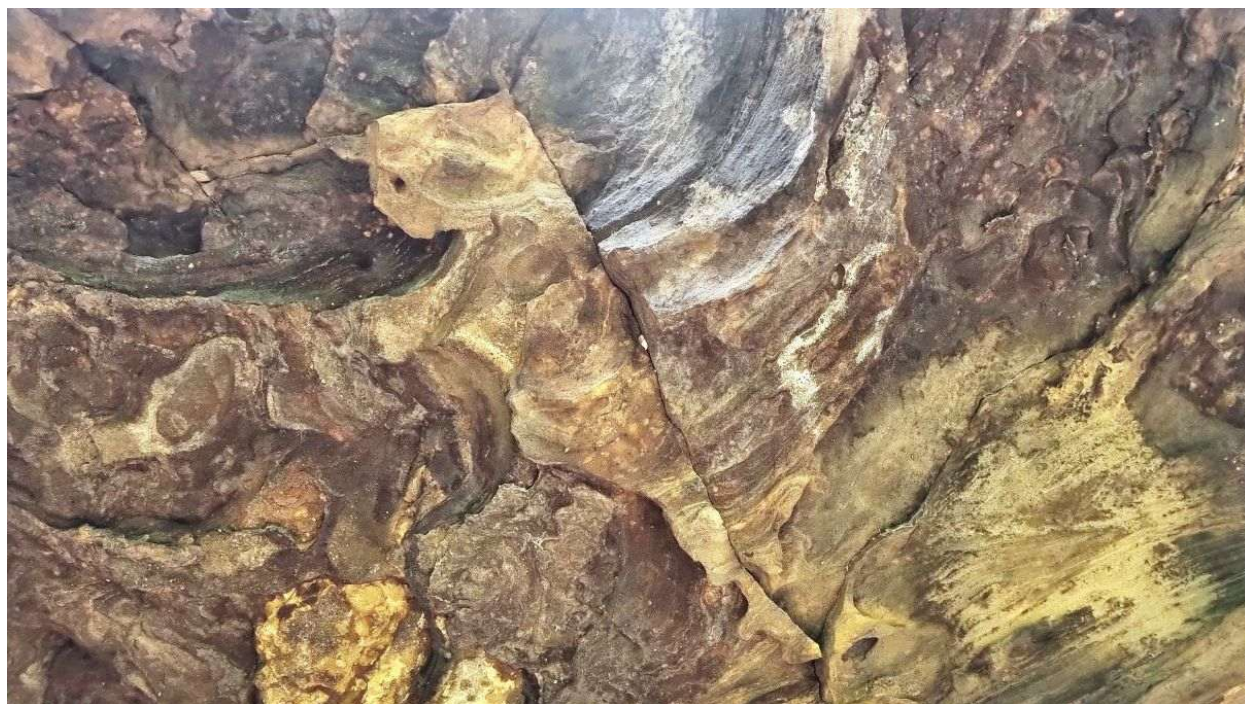
Ian, Kiki and Scott on the ledge traverse. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

After twenty-four more minutes of walking along this easy, dry ledge, with only a few ups and downs, we stopped at a long overhang topped by a row of huge monster shapes jutting out towards us. Fortunately, they did not seem to mind our presence, so we thought, we would take advantage of their benevolent mood and have lunch here.



Monster heads staring at the visitors to this cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1251, our adventure continued as we descended about 30 metres to pick up another good ledge, facing north west and then north. A few out-of-season Native Irises, *Patersonia sp.* were seen in bloom here, probably confused by the ever-changing weather. Seventeen minutes later, we paused to photograph a small but delightful chocolate-coloured cave.



A chocolate-coloured cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Next, the group circled around a point that marked the end of the ridge above. As we entered the east-facing slope, the vegetation became a lot thicker, but it was still dry enough and not that difficult to push through. Further on, the group had difficulty getting off a ledge that suddenly became narrow and slippery. We managed to do it without the tape, by using parts of our bodies to support each other.

At 1354, we scrambled up the slope a bit to inspect a striking two-level cave. We had been initially attracted by the snow-white colour of sandstone inside, contrasting with the brown rock of the outer skin. The lower level had a small interior chamber with wonderful organic shapes on the right-hand side and a white-beige orange wall on the left. The higher level, decorated by Rock Orchids, was not easily accessible, but looked attractive enough for a distant photo.



The party in the two-level cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

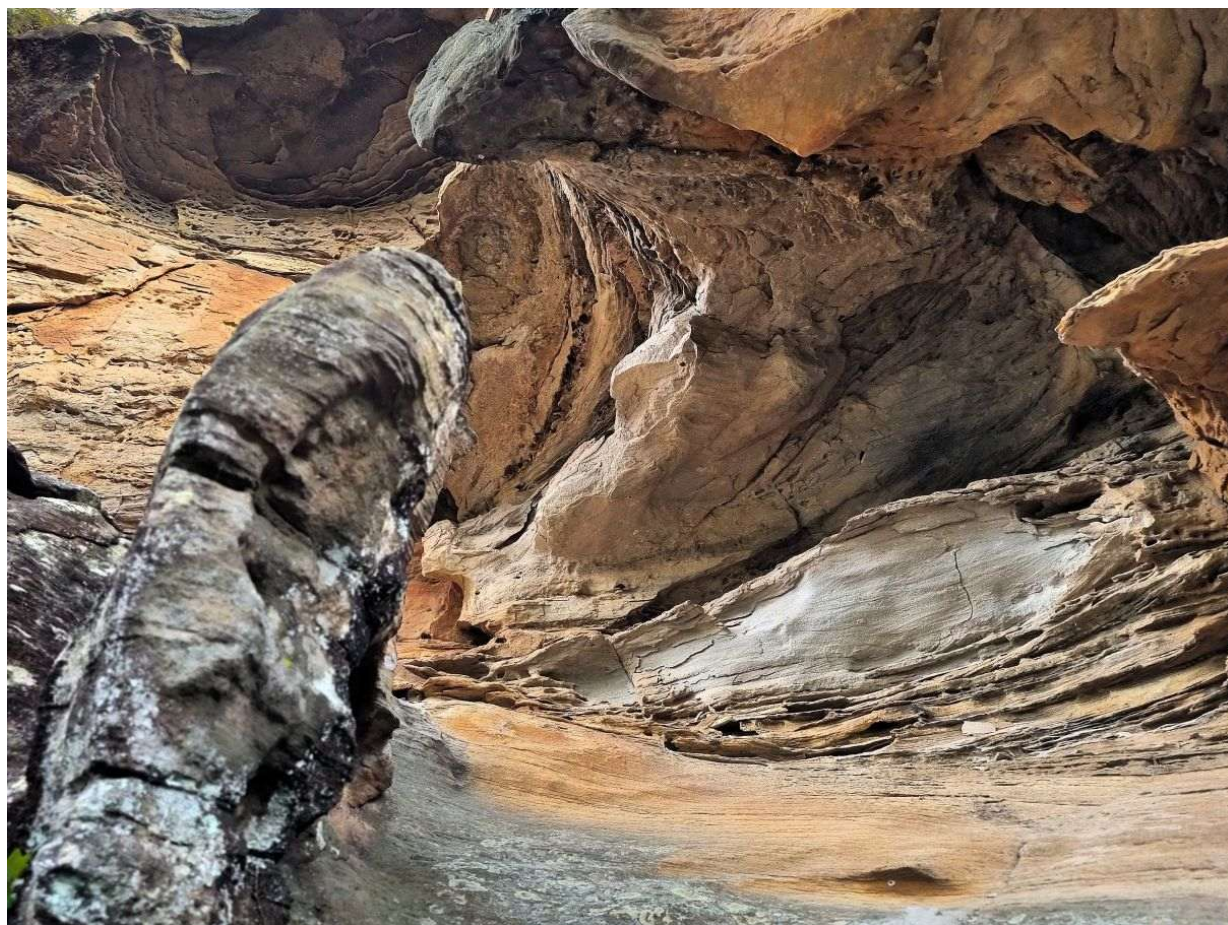


Wonderful formation inside the cave. Photo: Ian Starkey.

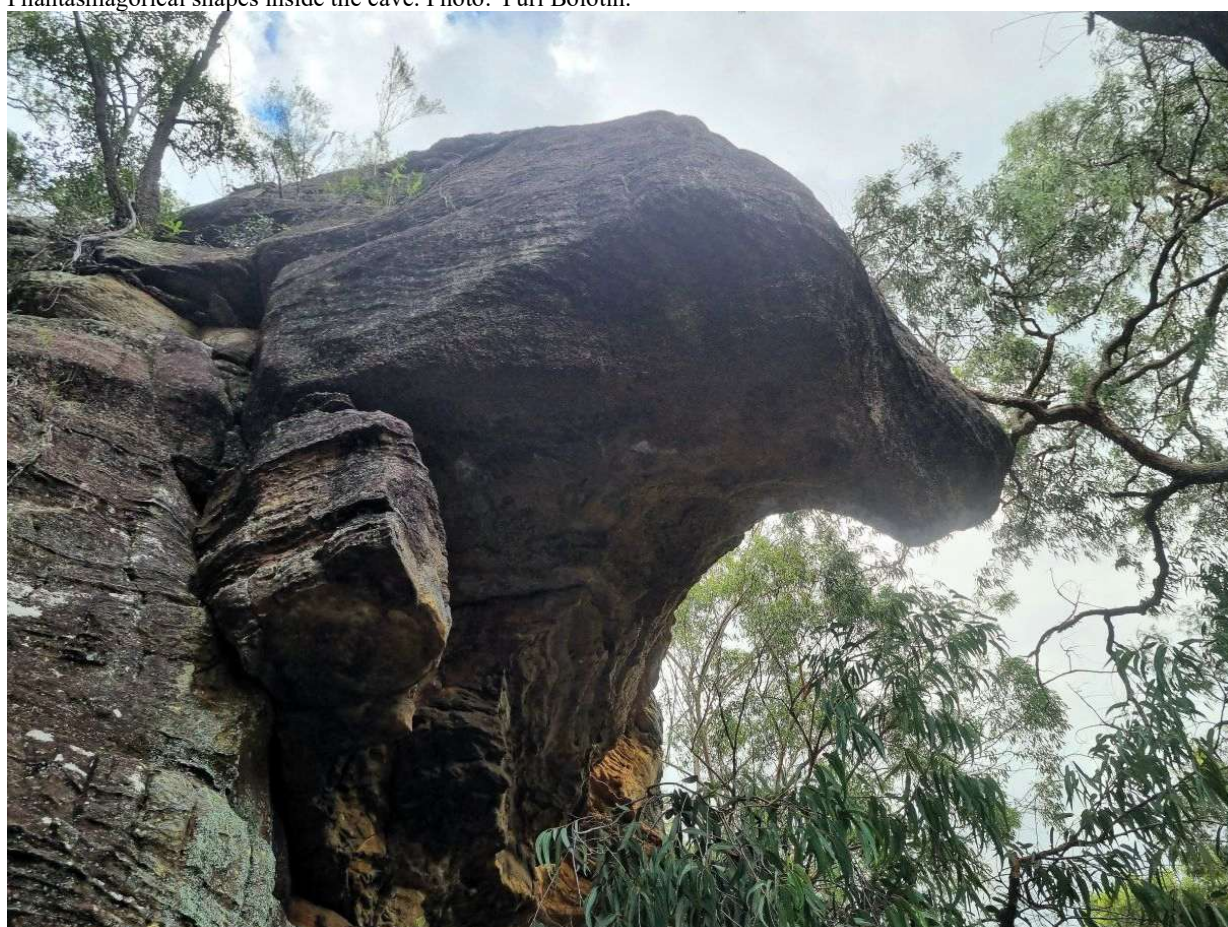
When we proceeded, the terrain forced us to come down sharply to avoid cliffs – I first thought, 20 metres would be enough, but it ended up being twice as far. Our more than fair compensation was a wall of phantasmagorical rock formations, encountered along the way, with a giant serpent head hovering over its northern end, and a seal (or dog) head at its southern end. At 1410.



Giant serpent head at the northern end of the overhang. Photo: Ian Starkey.



Phantasmagorical shapes inside the cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Giant seal head at the southern face of the overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Having crossed another gully, we found ourselves at a small but beautiful wall below a high line of cliffs, at 1417. There seemed to be no way up towards the balcony level, where more caves were visible, so we had to traverse for about 80 metres until a ramp was found at 1422. That brought us to a remarkable string of dry, highly ornate overhangs accessible via a continuous level ledge. They contained sweeping curved formations, intimate chamber-like spaces, multiple holes and windows, jutting out heads – a geological paradise. Scott was in heaven!

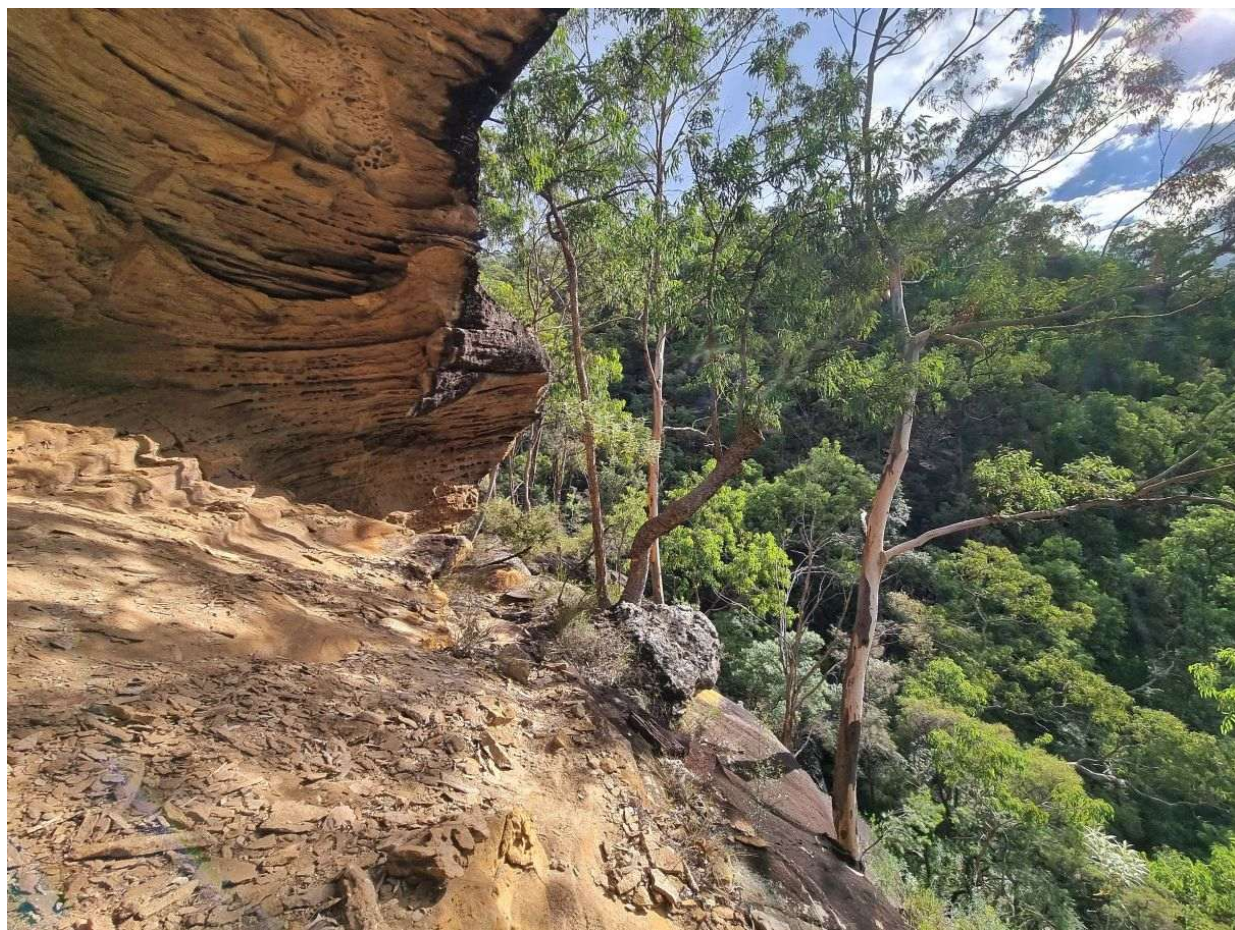
The western extent of it was reached at 1444. From the very end, I could see, by bending low, a short ledge that would have been possible to crawl along. It connected this terrace with the gully below. This ledge was not visible when we had been there, so we could not take advantage of it, but this would be useful for future trips as it avoids the 80 metre traverse.

Walking the other way, we arrived at the eastern boundary of the overhangs at 1452. That means, this constant terrace level is about 200 metres long. Four minutes later, we came to a wide break in the cliffs. I had a feeling (confirmed by looking at the map) that there is much more further on to explore, but for now, we decided it was time to exit the area, especially as it looked like a thunderstorm was brewing to our north.

Based on today's discoveries, I am proposing two new place names. I have called the last 200 metre long balcony level section of remarkable overhangs Gospers Balcony as it is situated above Gospers Creek not far from where it flows into Gospers Lagoon. The magnificent four kilometre long undercliff traverse above Gospers Creek, beginning from the gully at GR 8587 9791, 109 m and terminating at the eastern end of Gospers Balcony, GR 8737 9897, 87 m, is on a mainly continuous ledge and features a great number of caves (including Onion Skins Cave), fairy-tale-like psychedelic formations and Gospers Creek gorge views. I called it Enchanted Cliffs Traverse.



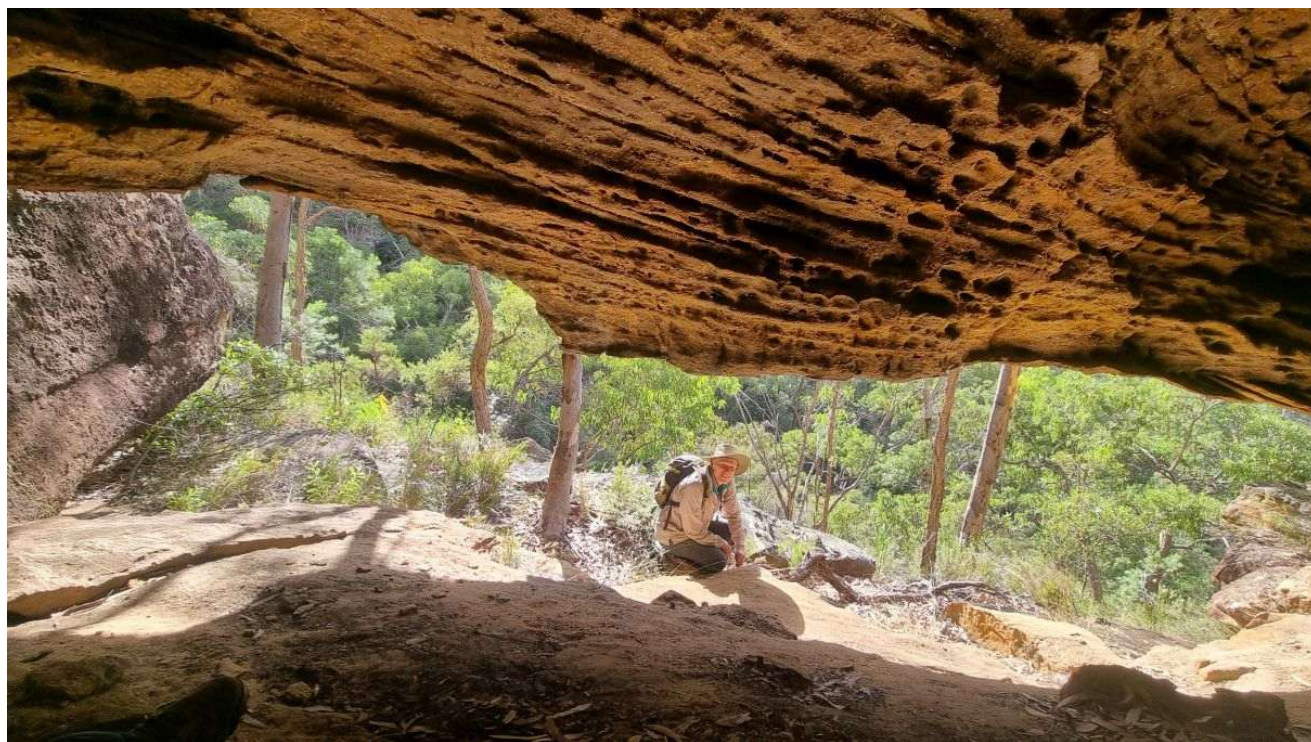
Kiki on Gospers Balcony. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Gospers Balcony. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



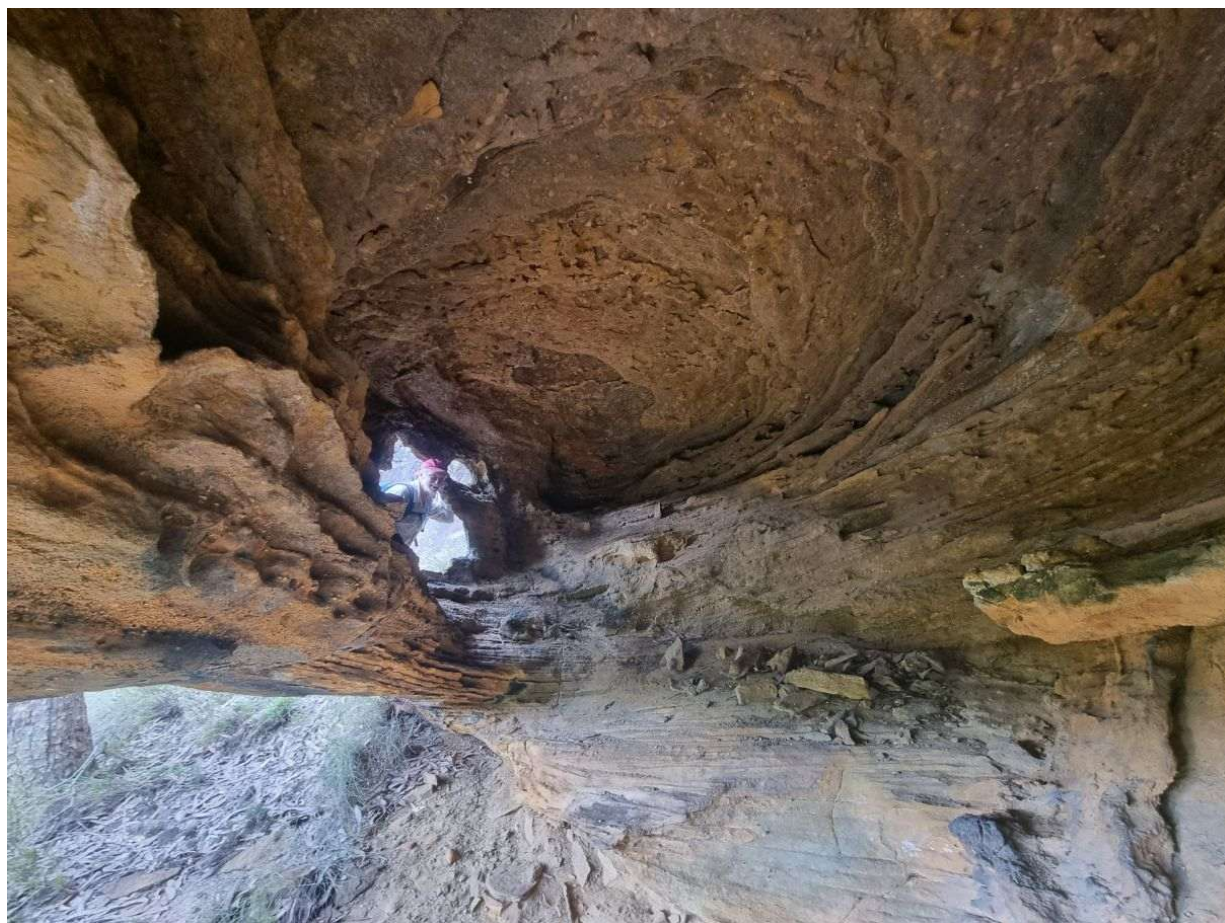
Ian, Yuri and Kiki in a cave on Gospers Balcony. Photo: Scott Marshall.



Scott on Gaspers Balcony. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Ian, Yuri and Kiki on Gaspers Balcony. Photo: Scott Marshall.



Ian on Gaspers Balcony. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Gaspers Balcony detail. Photo: Scott Marshall.

Coming steeply up an easy dry spur covered in waist-high mixture of Bush Pea and Curly Wig, *Caustis flexuosa* bushes, the party briefly stopped at a viewpoint overlooking Gospers Lagoon, at 1500. Twelve minutes later, we reached a flatter gradient and started to follow what looked like a bike track, but after 300 m, it swung sharply to the right and downhill, which was not where we wanted to go.

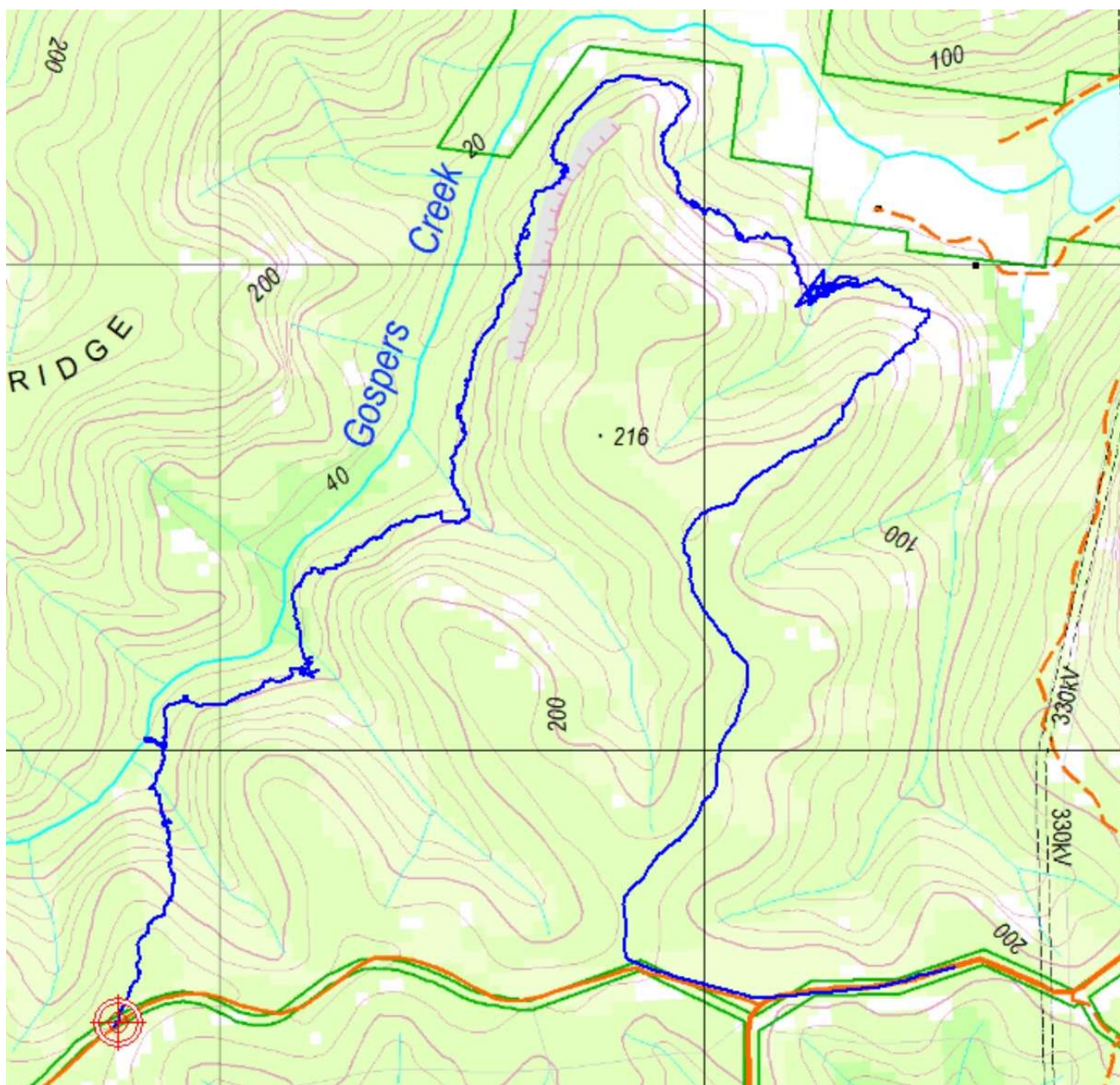


Gospers Lagoon view. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

As we headed off track on the spine of the spur, a drizzle started and quickly developed into a light rain, forcing us to don the wet weather gear. More relics of a weed-growing infrastructure, most likely abandoned, were noted along the way here. At 1529, we joined a well-maintained trail. We knew about this track from a previous expedition and had been looking for it over the last five minutes or so, but could not see it due to thick undergrowth. It is also shown on the Mountain Lagoon topographic map, first edition, but not on the current second edition.

Ten minutes later, we made it to the junction with Mountain Lagoon Trail, about a kilometre west of the second car, which was reached 1547. The shuffle was completed by 1555. We will be back to this area soon for more!

Trip statistics: total distance 8 km; total ascent 300 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0830	Car parked at the expected walk exit	GR 8751 9755	205 m
0846	Another car parked at the start and the walk begins	GR 8579 9744	254 m
0920	Bottom of the gully	GR 8589 9785	117 m
0929	Start of Enchanted Cliffs Traverse	GR 8587 9791	109 m
0949	Overhang with pink and brown veins	GR 8593 9811	98 m
1012-1022	Morning tea in ornate cave	GR 8617 9816	95 m
1032-1040	Onion Skins Cave	GR 8619 9820	78 m
1101	Old cairn	GR 8624 9838	98 m
1126	Gully crossing	GR 8652 9849	85 m
1136	Tafoni wall	GR 8650 9863	101 m
1208	Tottem	GR 8660 9896	87 m

1232-1251	Lunch in an overhang	GR 8672 9920	115 m
1308	Chocolate cave	GR 8687 9939	78 m
1354	Two-level cave	GR 8707 9906	116 m
1410	Overhang	GR 8718 9904	76 m
1417	Ornate wall	GR 8722 9895	73 m
1422	Pass up to the balcony level	GR 8729 9898	79 m
1444	Western extent of Gaspers Balcony	GR 8722 9892	90 m
1452	Eastern extent of Gaspers Balcony and the end of Enchanted Cliffs Traverse	GR 8737 9897	87 m
1456	Exit point up	GR 8742 9894	84 m
1500	Gaspers Lagoon view	GR 8747 9891	103 m
1512	Bike track	GR 8737 9880	171 m
1529	Trail	GR 8697 9836	207 m
1539	Mountain Lagoon Trail	GR 8684 9758	222 m
1547	Second car	GR 8751 9755	205 m
1555	First car and shuffle completed	GR 8579 9744	254 m