

Walk:**Wollemi National Park: From Upper Tootie Cascades to Tootie Cascades via Russet Caves****Leader:**

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park at GR 812 012 at the end of T3 Trail and walk to Cascade Peak, then descend to Upper Tootie Cascades. Explore the cliff line on the southern side of Tootie Creek for the next kilometre, then continue to Tootie Cascades. Ascend Stairway Ravine and walk back to T3 Trail. Partly exploratory. About 8 km. Scrambling and exposure.

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:

29 December 2025.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Oliver Descoeudres, Ross Jamieson, Avi Sanjoyo, Scott Marshall, Yidan Saladine, Calogero Panvino, John Anderson, 8.

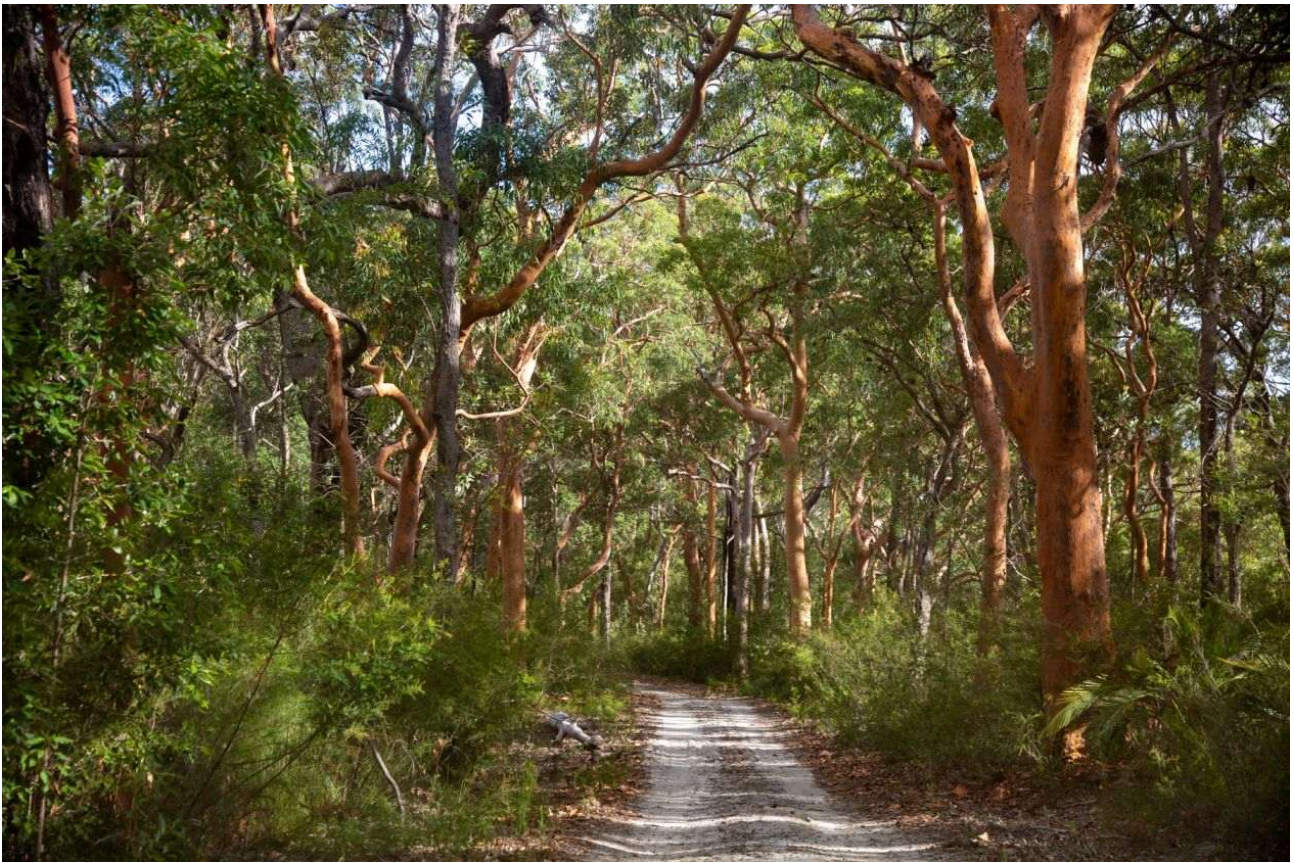
The Weather:

A cool cloudy windless morning followed by a warm mostly sunny day with moderate cool breezes. Temperature range 12 to 25 degrees C. Perfect 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.

The cars were parked at the end of T3 Trail, and after a short briefing, our adventure commenced at 0825. The first exercise was to descend westwards through moderately steep terrain, to the beginning of a long ridge we would need to follow for nearly two kilometres in order to reach Cascades Peak. This task is trickier than the map suggests due to a number of small gullies, knolls and cliff lines that have to be negotiated.



T3 Trail. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

Because of tree cover and sharp angle of the slope, you do not really see the ridge line until you are right on it. Ten minutes after leaving our vehicles, we made it to the target ridge, at a spot immediately above the headwaters of Stairway Ravine where we would be exiting this afternoon, if everything went according to plan. The entire journey to Cascades Peak is very picturesque, but my favourite part is at the very start - the knife-edge narrow elevated walkway of giant rock boulders separated by (mostly) jumpable cracks.

It only took three further minutes to reach the first big view of the day, from a flat platform suspended above the breathtaking wilderness terrain of gullies and mountaintops that seemed to be going on forever. Standing out, were the Tootie Creek gorge, the Colo River gorge and the bulk shape of Parr South. The morning sky was full of feathery shifting clouds casting a veil of intricate shadows on this magical landscape.



Yuri at the knife-edge spur. Tootie Creek is the first major ravine visible, followed by Colo River. Parr South is to the right of the centre. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.



The knife-edge spur. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.



Negotiating the knife-edge spur. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

The next knoll on our way, at over 500 m elevation, is higher than Cascades Peak, but right now, it completely dominated the scenery due to the short distance that separated us from it. After we had gone around a huge boss of rock (some people went over the top of it, which required a little scramble at the start but was the easiest choice at the end), the ridge widened and we commenced a gradual ascent that brought us to the summit of the first mountaintop, at 0908. The views were getting better and better as we progressed, with Island Mountain now visible on the other side of the Colo gorge and the huge blue hump of Mount Yengo standing out on the distant horizon. We were grateful for the continuous cloud cover (now around 80%) that kept us cool whilst we were traversing these tops.

Getting off the high point proved to be a little tricky, as is often the case in Wollemi, as the narrow saddle we were aiming at was completely hidden from view by trees. Once below the first cliff line, I was glad to see the small cave, familiar from the previous trips, that contained several striking animal-like sandstone weatherings. A slot descent took us to a short saddle and a low knoll at the western end of it. This part of the ridge was once again very narrow and had great views northwards of both Tootie Creek and the Colo River.

Coming down towards a deep tiny saddle just before Cascades Peak, the party faced a two-level slot that required, in its second part, taking off our packs, to be able to squeeze down a 30 centimetre wide space. Another cliff line was negotiated next, and then one more, which had two possible routes but the one on the right-hand side was safer than a precipitous-looking rock apron on the left. A beautiful tafoni cave located underneath was our reward. At 0952, we clocked it at the bottom of the saddle.



The view towards Tootie Creek gorge and beyond. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Coming down a two-level slot. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.



The cave above the deep saddle. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

A gradual climb to Cascades Peak ensued. Along the way, there was a flat intermediate section where the cartographers, in their wisdom, indicated a spot height 436 m, but the top was still over 200 m away to the north. Before reaching it, a stop was made at Jaws Rock, a feature I had named on the first trip here. It is a descriptive name given to an overhang that bears a close resemblance to a giant shark head with its maw wide open, its teeth prominently visible at the bottom. At 1009.



Scott at Jaws Cave. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

1016 saw us at the top of Cascades Peak for morning tea. The views from the summit were excellent, especially north west towards the double summit of Mount D'Arcy and adjacent Mount Not-D'Arcy. Three hundred metres below us, Tootie Creek flowed in a wide sweeping arc, changing direction from south-north to west-east.



The view from Cascades Peak. Mount d'Arcy is the double-headed hill to the left of the centre, followed (to the right of it) by Mount Not-D'Arcy. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

At 1031, it was time to saddle up and attend to the matter of getting down to Tootie Creek. The less than 700 metres of horizontal distance and a 300 metres of elevation drop gives you the idea of the steepness of the terrain.

To start with, we descended along a north east trending spur, then took a sharp, almost 270-degrees turn to the west, clearing several rows of bluffs encircling Cascades Peak by 1052. All of the above was not very difficult but care had to be exercised due to very slippery leaves covering the ground.

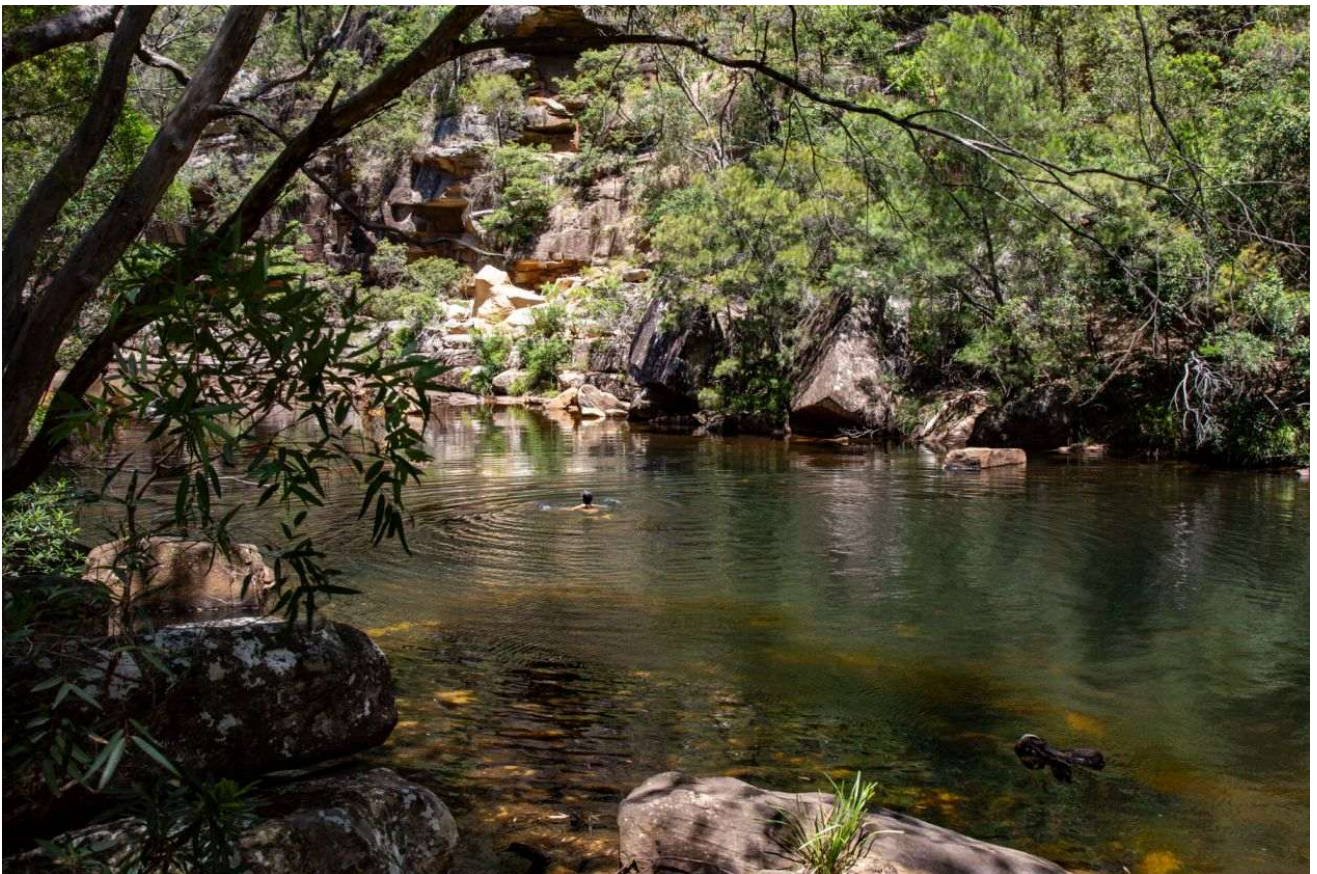
After a short traverse, we located a broad spur descending north west. The incline was gentle and the flora around us so dense that I needed several stops to ensure we were still on the ridge. Another change of direction was required at 1112, when the party headed westwards for a short while on an almost flat sparsely vegetated spur. Next, the rate of descent quickly accelerated, and glimpses of Tootie Creek appeared through the trees far below. We still had more than 200 metres of altitude to shed.

By 1136, we paused above of what appeared to be a series of cliff lines, with the ground dropping sharply towards our destination. From here, the group generally headed north, going through a series of short zigzags to negotiate one obstacle after another. Despite the numerous challenges, we could always find a way forward after a short search.



Calogero descending towards Tootie Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The team made it to the edge of the big deep pool just downstream from Upper Tootie Cascades by 1201. This is an idyllic camping spot, with a flat grassy glade, sandy beach, tree shade, and the large rock platform of the cascades, incised by deep channels, a few steps away. There were no more clouds in the sky, and the air felt warm. It did not take long to convince me we should have a lunch and swim break here, which we proceeded to do.



Swimming in the large pool next to Upper Tootie Cascades. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

Twenty-five minutes were spent swimming, relaxing and having food. I was happy with the progress so far and told the guys that my intention was to have another substantial break and swim at Tootie Cascades later today. That would be subject to what we find along the next part of the route and how long it would take to explore it, which, for me, was the main reason for creating this walk.

In the past 2-3 years, I had several journeys that followed the approximately two kilometre long section along the creek between here and Tootie Cascades, and on every occasion, seeing the towering sunlit cliffs on the southern bank, I wished we had time to explore them, but we were always in a hurry to get somewhere else, and it took until this, purposefully designed trip, to finally start investigating this area. Through all this, I also had to bear in mind the 400 metre climb back to the cars we would face at the end.

Shouldering the packs, we only had to move a hundred metres downstream and climb about twenty-five metres above the creek bed to encounter our first cave. It was a very modest offering, more of a small niche, but it had a finely weathered back wall. Appropriately, Scott, our geologist, was photographed sitting in the chamber, with a hopeful smile on his face, full of anticipation. At 1234. Straight after it, we came to another, much bigger overhang, about 30 metres long by 5 metres wide, decorated with beautiful formations in orange, pink, brown, beige and white. On the far end of it and a little higher, was a spectacular pink-brown-orange honeycomb panel, about 5 metres long, with its own intensely coloured ceiling above. Wow, we were getting somewhere!

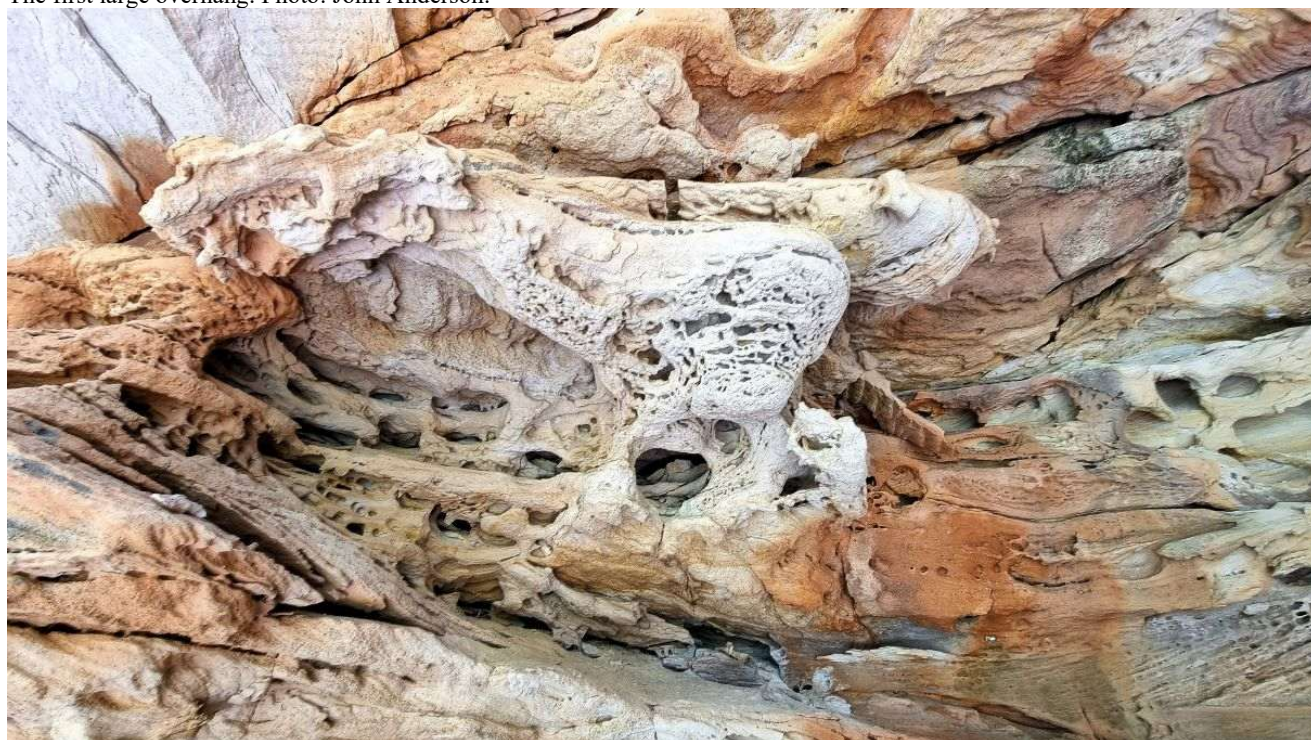
Moving on, the group stopped briefly to photograph an exquisite tafoni chamber, only 3 metres across. A large two-level cave followed. The second level was expansive but less weathered compared to the previous overhangs. Straight after came another multi-layered cave of mainly flat sandstone but the colours were so vivid and ranged from white to pink via golden yellow, brown and orange.



Scott in the first cave. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.



The first large overhang. Photo: John Anderson.



Back wall detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Back wall detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Orange/pink tafoni panel. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Cave detail. Photo: Scott Marshall.



Brightly-coloured overhang. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

As if to compensate for the plain walls of the previous overhang, the next cave, about 10 metre long, had over-abundant intensely coloured formations of many shapes, some resembling animals, flowers and people, with phantasmagorical erosion residuals scattered on its pink floors. The colours, again, were simply dazzling. Another 10 metre long overhang followed, featuring finely-sculpted back wall, with the centrepiece being a panel relief of people-like shapes. Yet one more chamber of similarly striking formations was photographed next. A little further, we found a small alcove of intense pink, red and green. It was easy to miss, as one had to climb a couple of metres and look inside an opening. After another 30 metres or so, we came to an arc-shaped cave, about 50 metres long. The weatherings here were not as fine but the colours – white, pink, bright and dark browns – were amazing.



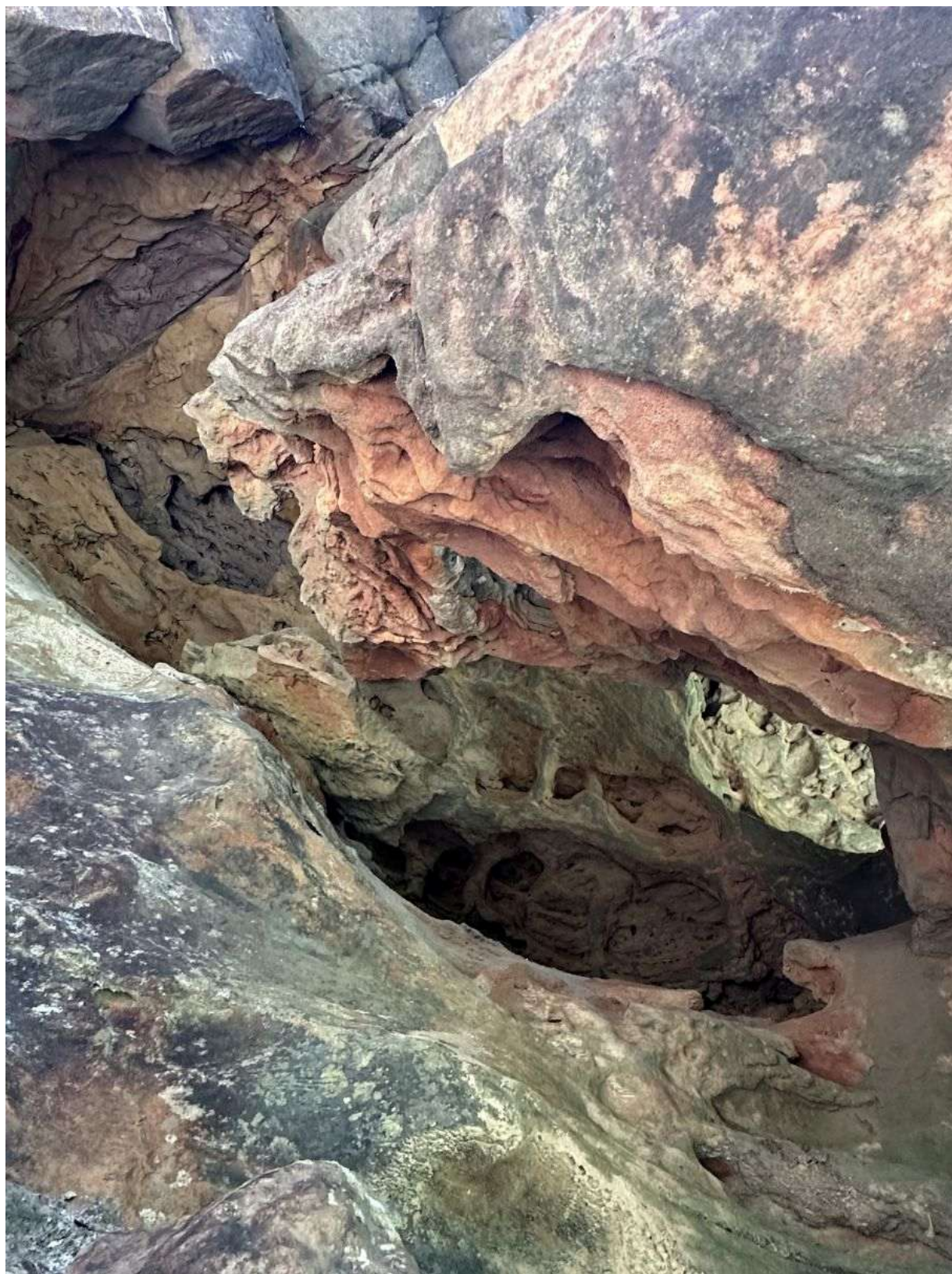
The cave with bright walls and animal-shaped figures. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Cave detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Cave detail. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.



Multi-coloured alcove. Photo: Avi Sanjoyo.



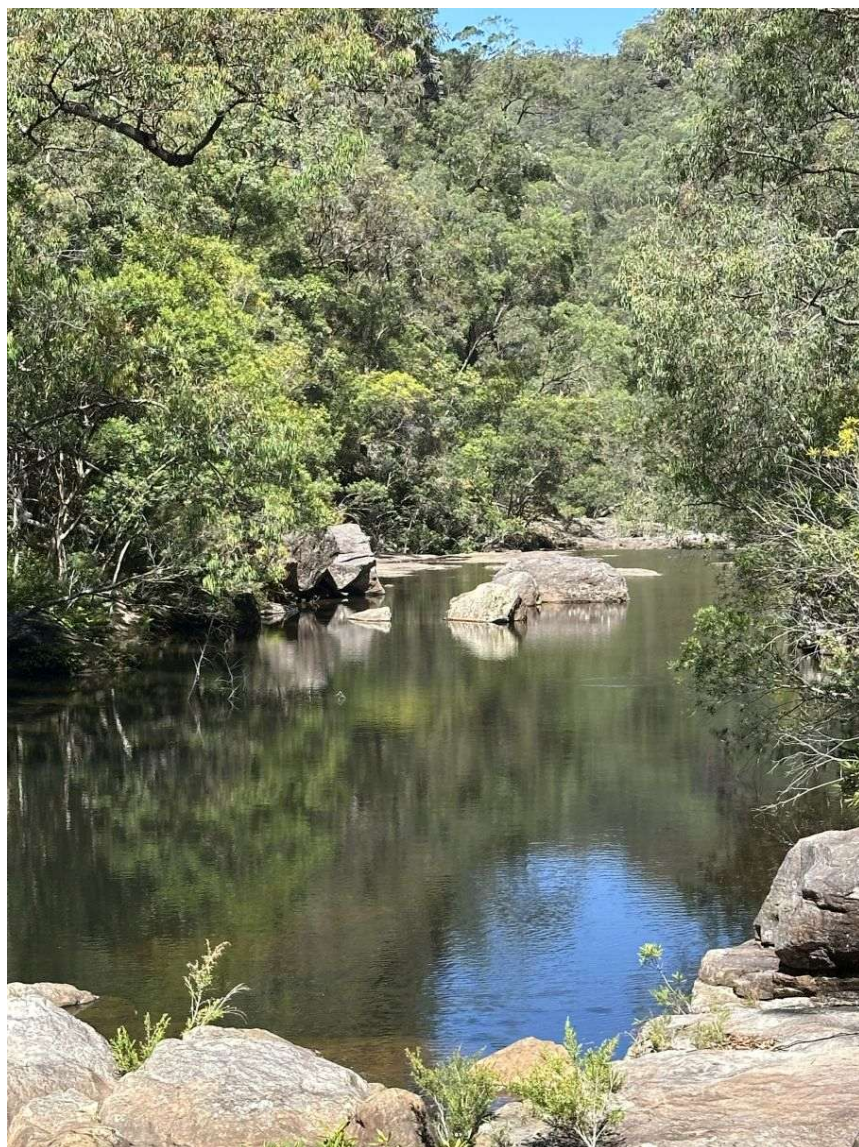
Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1335, the party came to a small tributary gully dissecting the cliffs. The ledge we had been following stopped here, and so did most of the overhangs, at least at the level we could access. The 500 metre long section we explored after lunch took us one full hour as it included lots of ups, downs and photography stops. In the part that followed, as far as I could see, the walls came down to the creek level, with only few caves visible. Most of them seemed inaccessible. Bearing in mind the time of the day, the 1.5 km that separated us from our exit point and the climb out after that, I made a decision to walk along Tootie Creek at the bottom level from now on, which would take the shortest possible time.

Reflecting on what we had just experienced, as we continued by the creek side, I could only remember seeing very few overhangs before with such rich bedazzling colours anywhere else, and most of these extended for much shorter distances. Predominant hues here were deep red-brown-orange. It is not the only colour of sandstone found here, but this is what stays in my mind when I think of this area. I therefore would like to call this entire section featuring many striking consecutive chambers, Russet Caves.

Tootie Creek had a noticeably less flow today compared to a few months ago, but the little cascades and waterfalls were still gurgling with water; the green forest framing both sides featured flowering Water Gums, and the scattered brown boulders were as picturesque as ever. I was glad the day was not too hot as we now had a lot more sun exposure, having lost the protection of overhangs we had followed before, especially as we stayed on the southern bank at all times, hoping to see more caves.

By 1414, the party came to a big 90-degree bend and a 150 metre long pool in the creek. The temptation to go for another swim was strong, but, being not that far from Tootie Cascades, I did not want to have another stop here. As we progressed downstream, the rock platforms became more sustained and our pace accelerated. At 1428, the group passed through a mini-tunnel created by a huge wedge-shaped rock that has fallen from the cliffs above.



Tootie Creek. Photo: Avi Sanjoyo.

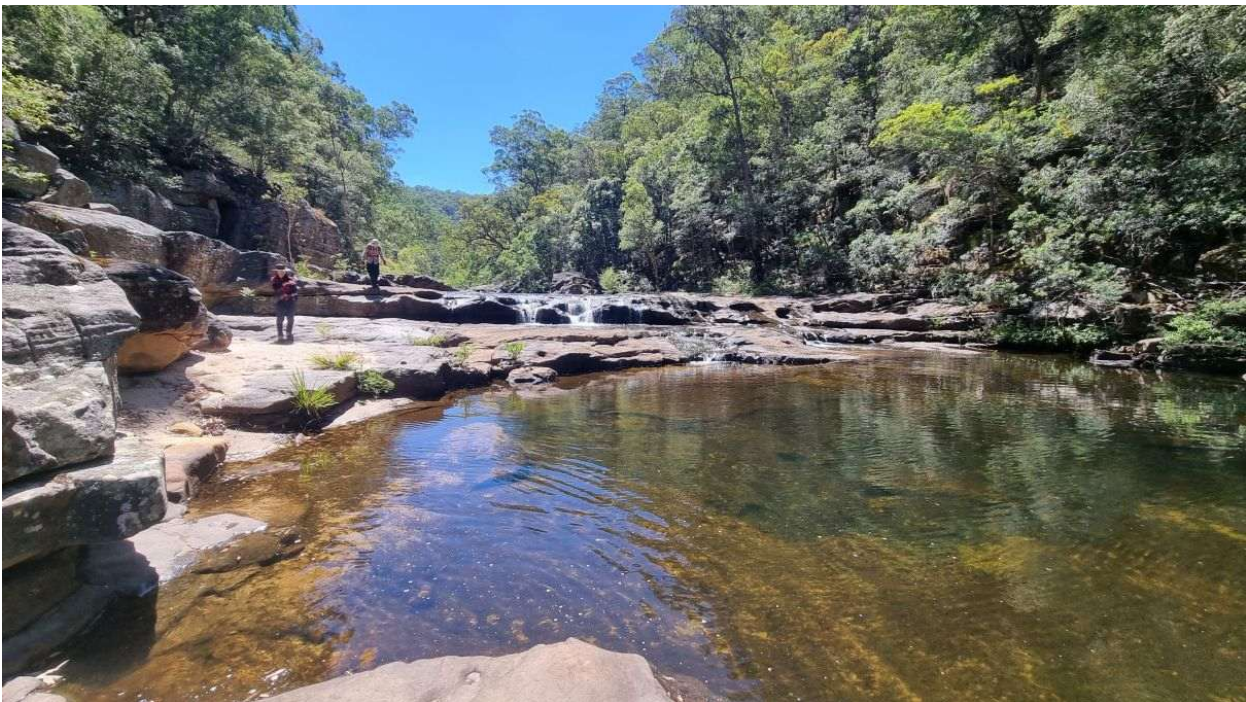


John near the inclined rock tunnel. Photo: Oliver Descoeudres.

Tootie Cascades were reached at 1452. During the last 400 metres, I noticed quite a few caves higher up. These would need a separate trip to investigate. Even with less current coming through, the cascades were beautiful, boasting two pools (upper and lower), the spa section in the middle, and the enormous flat slab of rock that spans the entire area. A good swim was in order. Ross even found a new private spa bath hole I had not noticed before – it may have been created by the redistributed water flows.



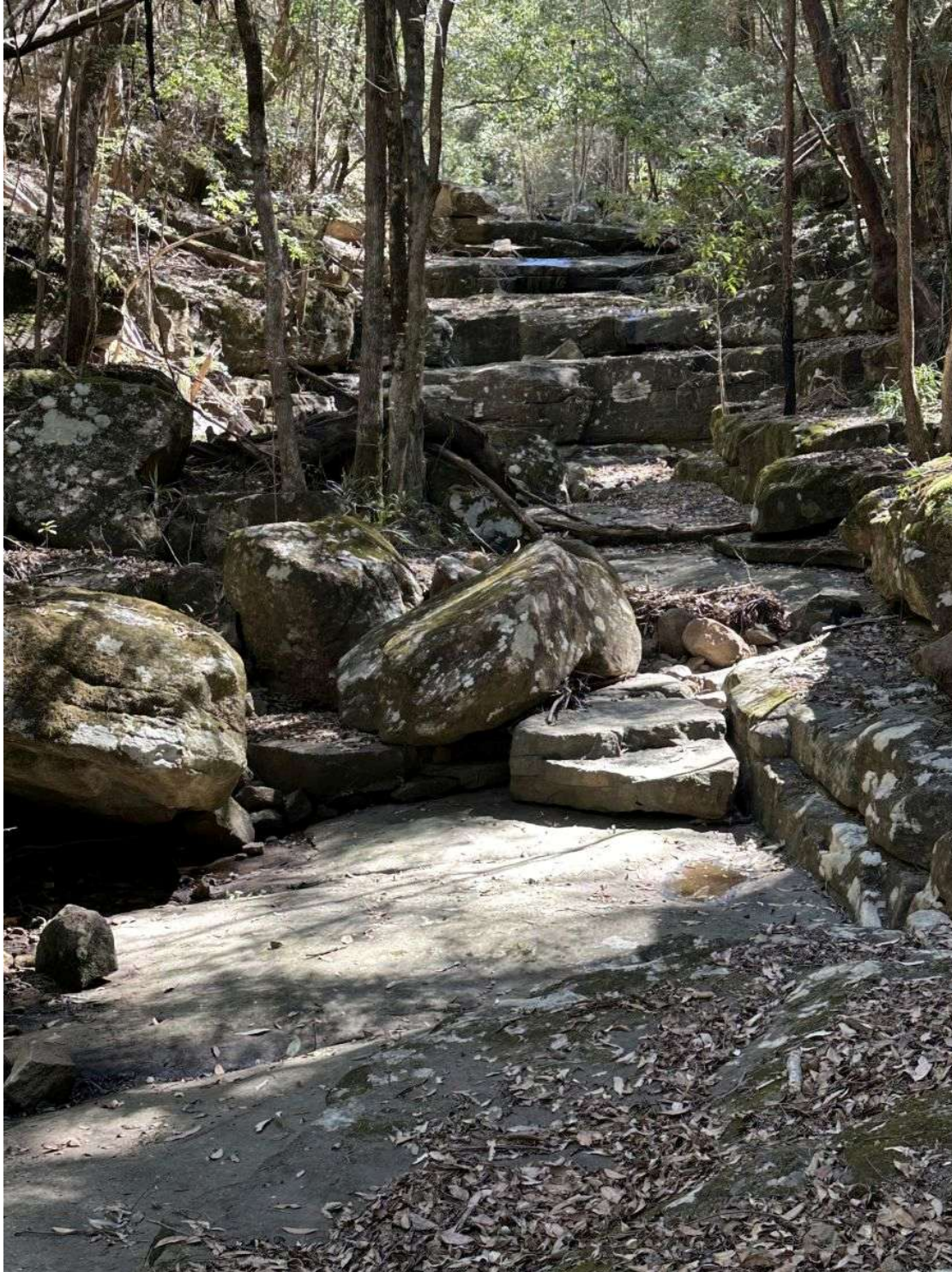
Tootie Cascades. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



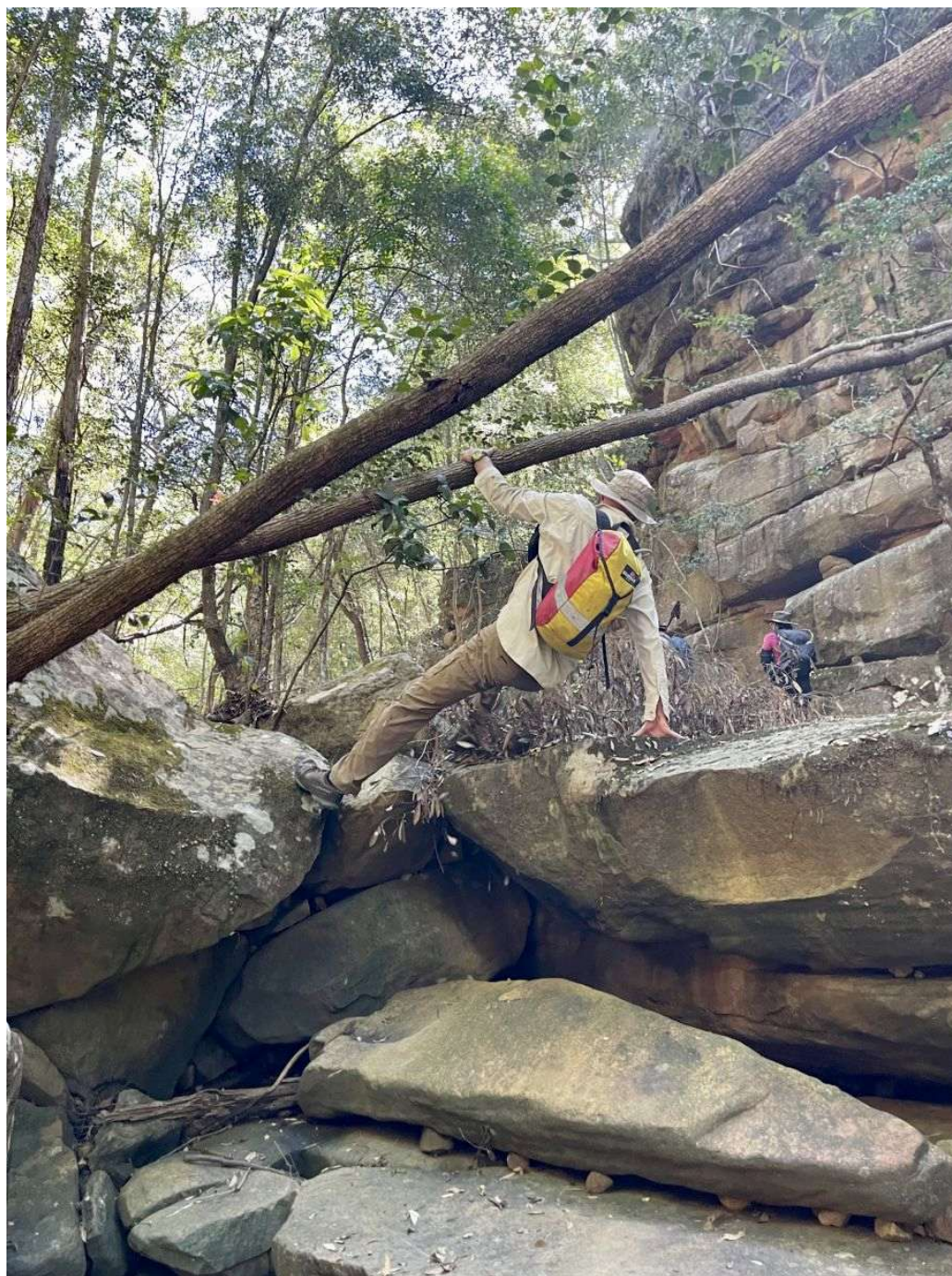
Tootie Cascades. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1515, much refreshed, we started our ascent in Stairway Ravine. This wonderful pass, discovered by us in April 2024, is a picturesque shady gorge with step-like easily negotiable stone terraces and pools of running water. This time, the flow was very small, but it was still there. This is a perfect way up (or down), especially in summer.

Ten minutes after the departure, GR 8095 0251, 95 m, a junction with a major ravine coming from the south east was passed. The pools vanished for a short distance but then appeared once again. At 1548, there was a junction with another tributary, this time it came in from the west, and three minutes after, we stopped to photograph a small cave of colourful mosaic-like conglomerates. After another five minutes of easy climbing, at a Y-junction, we took the left branch. No water was visible from here on.



Stairway Ravine. Photo: Avi Sanjoyo.



Ross demonstrates stairway bridging skills. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Stairway Ravine. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

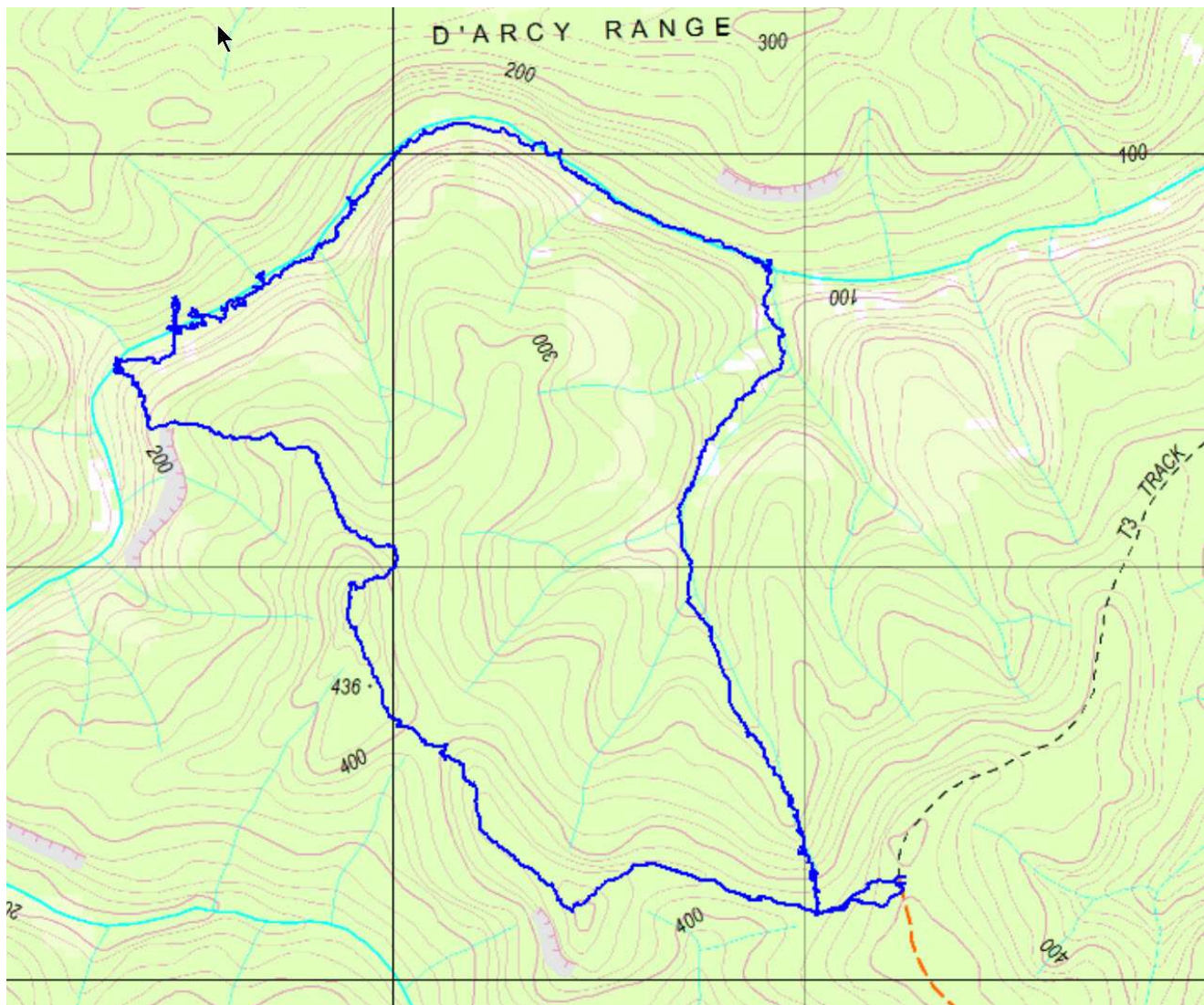


Mosaic cave. Photo: Scott Marshall.

The next 100 metres of elevation were gained easily, but from 1638, the ground became a lot steeper and we encountered a series of dry waterfalls, all of them negotiable with care. Six minutes later, at another Y-split (not indicated on the topographic map), it was important to take the branch to the right. The final section, approximately 200 metres long, was steep and had a fair quantity of Lawyer Vine, but it did not present any technical difficulties.

At 1715, we made it back to the spot on the knife-edge spur we had passed by this morning. From here, it was still 60 metres of gradual/steep ascent up densely forested slopes beautifully lit by the afternoon sun, to reach the vehicles by 1730.

Trip statistics: total distance 10.5 km; total ascent 760 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0825	Cars parked and started walking	GR 8124 0123	490 m
0835	Top of Stairway Ravine	GR 8103 0116	430 m
0838	Lookout	GR 8097 0097	438 m
0908	Top of the knoll	GR 8045 0118	505 m
0952	Saddle	GR 8007 0158	390 m
1009	Jaws Rock	GR 7991 0186	455 m
1016-1031	Cascades Peak, morning tea	GR 7990 0196	465 m
1052	Under the Cascades Peak bluffs	GR 7998 0205	380 m
1112	On spur heading westwards	GR 7980 0230	325 m
1136	Above the steep section	GR 7945 0235	225 m
1201-1226	Upper Tootie Cascades. Lunch and swim	GR 7935 0248	110 m
1234	Start of Russet Caves	GR 7944 0251	135 m
1335	End of Russet Caves	GR 7980 0275	100 m
1414	Long pool	GR 8010 0307	90 m
1428	Tunnel	GR 8038 0298	85 m
1452-1515	Tootie Cascades. Rest and swim.	GR 8090 0275	75 m
1525	Tributary junction	GR 8095 0251	95 m

1548	Tributary junction	GR 8070 0211	170 m
1551	Mosaic cave	GR 8072 0203	180 m
1556	Y-junction	GR 8072 0193	195 m
1638	The start of the steep section	GR 8096 0143	285 m
1644	Y-junction	GR 8098 0139	305 m
1715	Top of Stairway Ravine	GR 8103 0116	430 m
1730	Back at cars	GR 8124 0123	490 m