

## **Walk:**

### **Wollemi National Park: Scenic Spur and Orange Cliffs**

## **Leader**

Yuri Bolotin

## **Maps, etc.**

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

## **Description**

Park at GR 815 007 on T3 Trail. Walk east then north east on a ridge and descend on a knife-edge-like spur towards the Colo River. The last part of the spur will need some work getting around the cliff lines. Walk a short distance upstream and ascend via Giant Steps Gully's tributary to the south. Exploratory. About 6 km. Scrambling and exposure.

## **Rating**

6M. S333E

## **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**

23 January 2026.

## **The Party**

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Paula Kelly, Rob Herbert, Sachith Algama, Ross Jamieson, Patrick Spiers, Yidan Saladine, Brandon Xie, 8.

## **The Weather**

A cool (for this time of the year), mostly cloudy day. Little or no wind. The cloud cover was 100% at the start, but it gradually diminished during the afternoon. Temperature range 14 to 21 degrees C.

## **Background Notes**

This walk was designed as an attempt to add to our collection of passes to the Colo River from T3 and Gaspers Ridge Trails<sup>1</sup>. Despite the 1:25,000 topographic maps showing no cliffs in that area, we now know that there are very many and that it is a very challenging terrain, which often leads to exciting adventures.

## **Track Notes**

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

It was an unprepossessing start to our trip. Having left our vehicles about a kilometre south of the end of T3 Trail, at 0855, we quickly plunged into a dense head-high scrub, consisting mainly of thin after-the-fire saplings bound by copious Devils Twine, *Cassytha pubescens*. I found this initial experience a bit disorienting and had to give a close attention to the navigation duty.

Luckily, after the first couple of hundred metres things began to gradually improve. At 0917, there was a course change from east to north, north east, and five minutes later, the party reached the start of a

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<sup>1</sup> In the last two years, we walked/discovered Goliath Steps, Phantom Gully, Colo Bend Pass, Ivy League Pass, Spider Orchid Gorge, T3 Track – all giving access to the Colo River.

significant north east-trending spur that I was hoping would lead all the way down to our destination. At this point, our rate of descent accelerated dramatically, and distant but alluring glimpses of the Colo gorge started to appear through the dense tree cover. These vistas were quickly becoming more and more expansive.

After getting around a small cliff line, we stopped momentarily on the edge of the steepest section of the descent so far, to take photos of the rest of the spur coming down towards the bottom of the Colo gorge, a small section of the river itself, as well as the Goliath Steps Ravine and its southern tributary, our planned exit route. At 0932. A few specimens of purple-flowered Shiny Daisy Bush, *Olearia tenuifolia*, standing out from the ground cover, were photographed in this vicinity. It took twenty-three minutes to carefully negotiate the next, very steep section. It was not difficult, but slippery leaves were a problem, as well as lots of loose rocks.

The ridge now continued to fall more gradually. It was becoming more narrow and scenic with our every step. Abundant Cycads, *Macrozamia* and Flowering Grass Trees, *Xanthorrhoea* graced the rocky ground. Amongst the trees, Angophoras, Silvertop Ashes and Yellow Boxes stood out.



Flowering Grass Trees, *Xanthorrhoea*. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Between 1008 and 1021, the party stopped for morning tea at a small knoll that commanded expansive views in all directions and, in particular, towards the Colo Gorge. This panorama of the straight several kilometres long stretch of the river as it flowed towards a 180-degree turn around a spur crowned by Mount Townsend to the north would now be with us for most of the journey down.

The spur from here on turned from scenic to spectacular – rocky, narrow (five metres or less in places), and with continuous grand views. A few scrambles were required here and there, all of them very straightforward and enjoyable.

At 1044, we reached a spot from where I decided to, rather than continuing on top of the ridge, to drop down on the western side in order to avoid several cliff lines shown on the Lidar map. Fourteen minutes into that very steep but doable descent, I checked the map and realised we were quickly approaching the tributary of Goliath Steps Ravine, which was to be our exit gully, instead of the Colo River. I did not think the crew would appreciate missing out on a swim, so the course was quickly corrected by climbing about 15 metres and sidling back to the nose of our approach spur, just below the cliff lines we had tried to avoid. At 1113. Looking up the slope, I could not help thinking we could have probably negotiated the small cliff lines above instead of going around them. It would have been a much more scenic way, and shorter as well. Never mind for now, we are only talking about an 80 metre stretch of the ridge that we missed, but I would love to check this out next time.

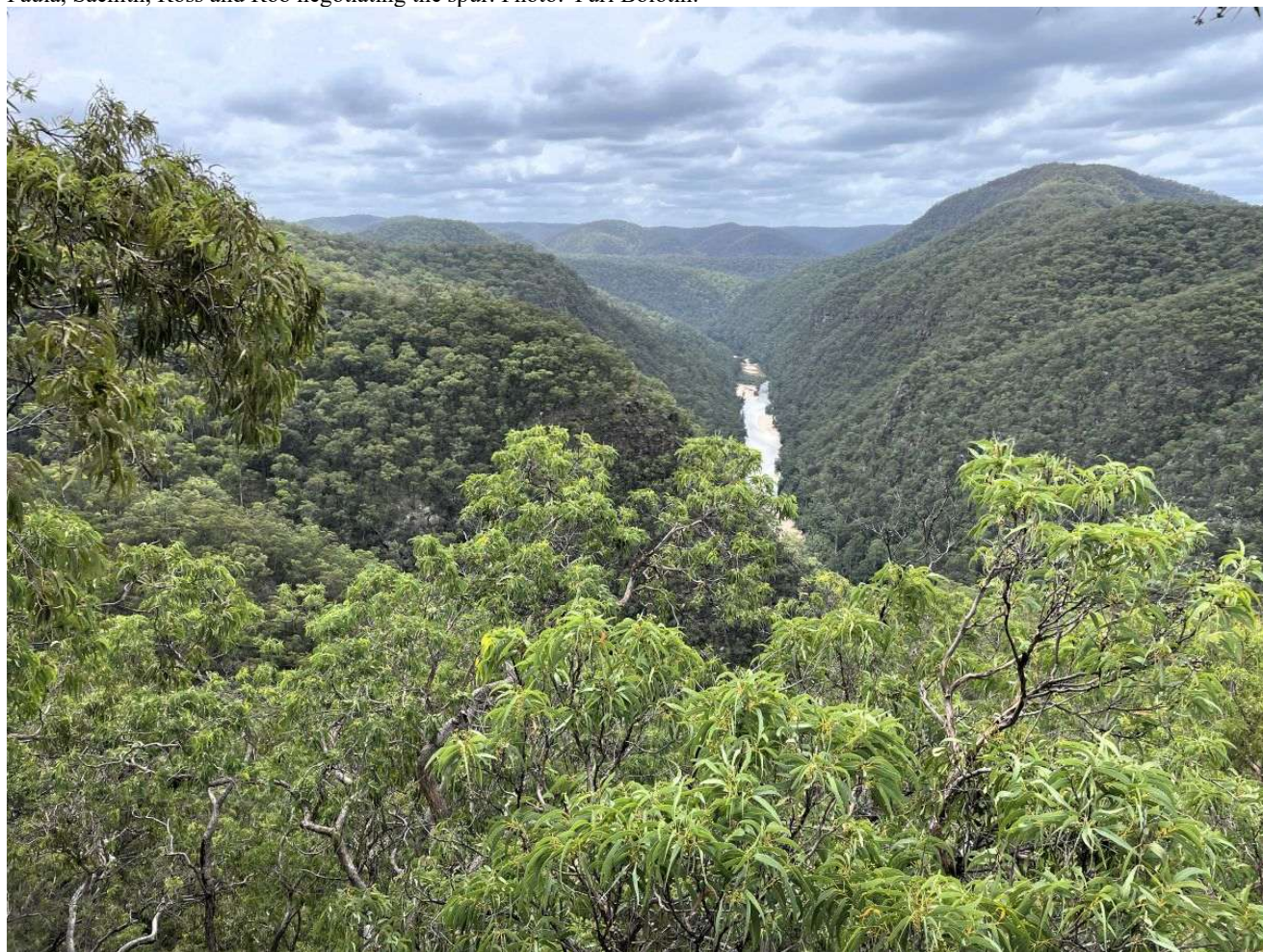


The Colo view from the spur. Photo: Rob Herbert.





Paula, Sachith, Ross and Rob negotiating the spur. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

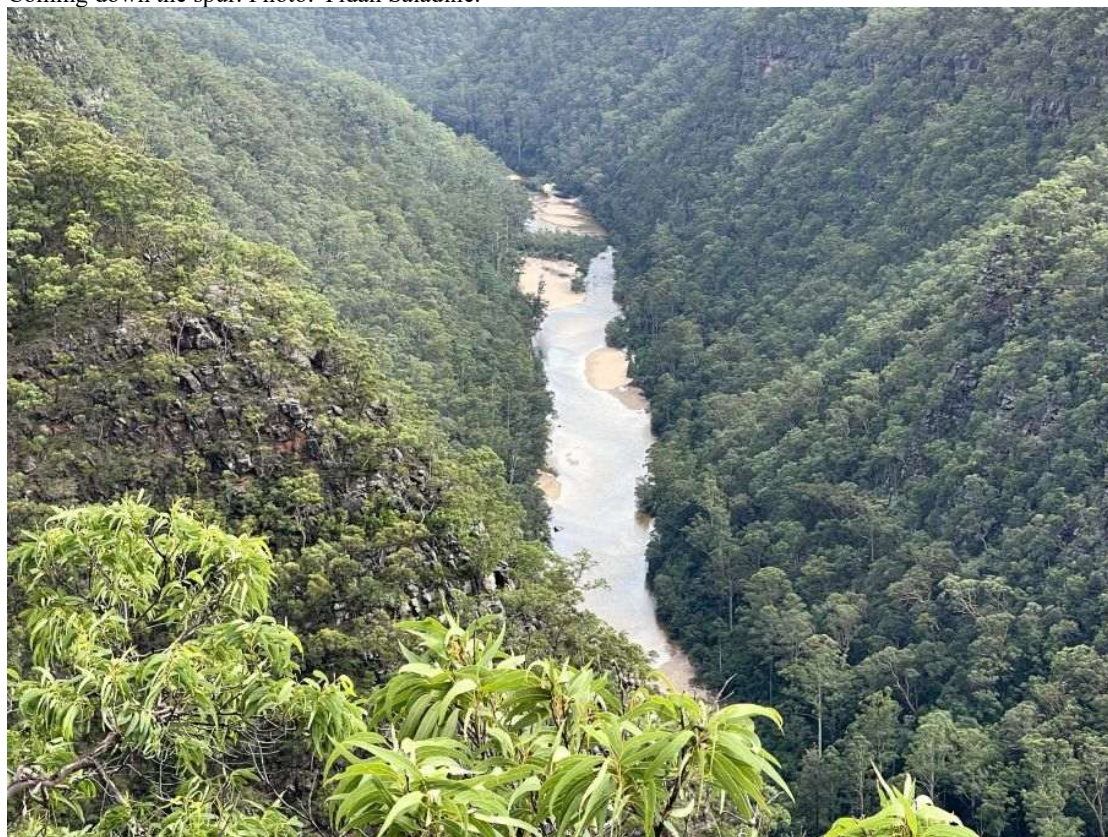


The views are getting better and better. Mount Townsend can be seen on the right-hand side. Photo: Rob Herbert.





Coming down the spur. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



The Colo is getting closer now. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



The last part of the descent was precipitous and had a few small cliff lines, unexpected and mildly frustrating, considering our goal was so near, but it was not difficult. 1135 saw us down on a long stretch of yellow-white sand framing the Colo River, which had a lot more water than when we had seen it three weeks ago, before the recent period of heavy rains.



On the sands of the Colo. Photo: Rob Herbert.

The sun was now trying to come out from behind the clouds, and everyone felt tempted to go for a swim, but before stopping, I wanted to get to our next take-off point at the confluence with Goliath Steps Ravine, which was duly attained by 1154, in time for a very well-deserved lunch, river plunge and rest.





Colo gorge. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Yidan and Brandon in the Colo. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The Colo River formed a beautifully deep pool here, and the water was warm but refreshing enough. What more could one ask for? Well, soon enough, I had to ask the team to pack up, so that we could continue our adventure. At 1229, we headed up the Goliath Steps Ravine.



Heading up towards Goliath Steps Ravine. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



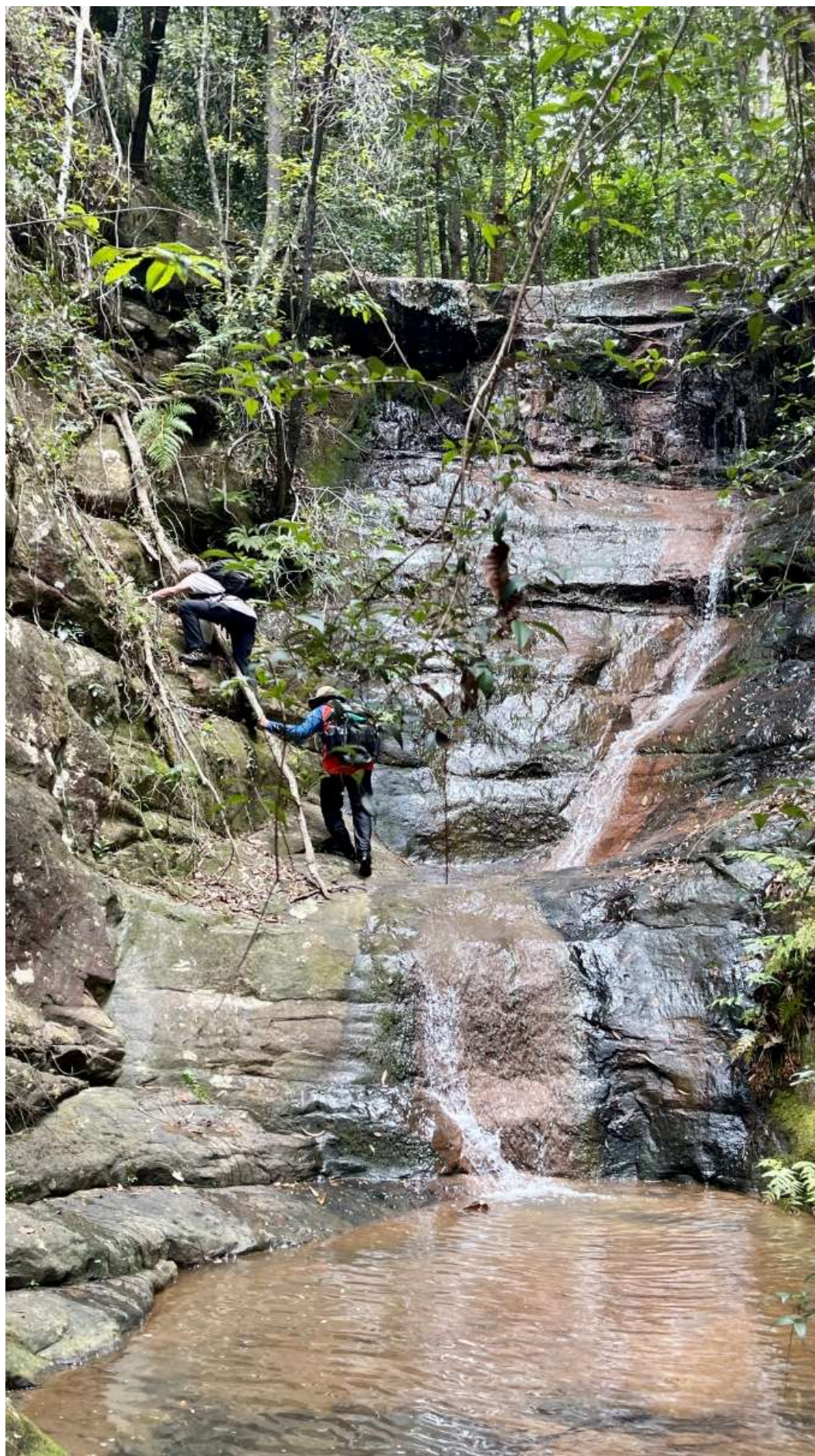
In Goliath Steps Ravine. Photo: Sachith Algama.



The next short part of the course was the only known to me section, so I was not surprised when nine minutes later we arrived at an eight metre waterfall barring our way, not shown even on the Lidar map. I remembered how shocked I had been when we first used this route less than a year ago, having spent several hours making our way down all the way from T3, only to be stopped within less than 100 metres from the Colo River. At that time, I found a tiny short ledge on the southern side that led just downstream of the waterfall; we then had to use the tape to safely descend from there.

Today, that option did not look all that great somehow, and I decided to try to climb straight up on the left side of the waterfall from the bottom, where the rock seemed relatively dry. I asked Sachith to come with me and the rest of the group to wait at the bottom. The scramble was not super hard, except for a tricky bit right at the end, where a handy tree proved to be very helpful. Tape was set there. My 15 metres were a bit short, so Patrick added his thin rope at the bottom for extra safety. Whilst everyone was making their way up, Ross decided to give the opposite (northern) side a go. He ended up completing the climb, but I would not recommend it. The waterfall challenge had certainly added a bit of adrenalin-fuelled variety to the trip.





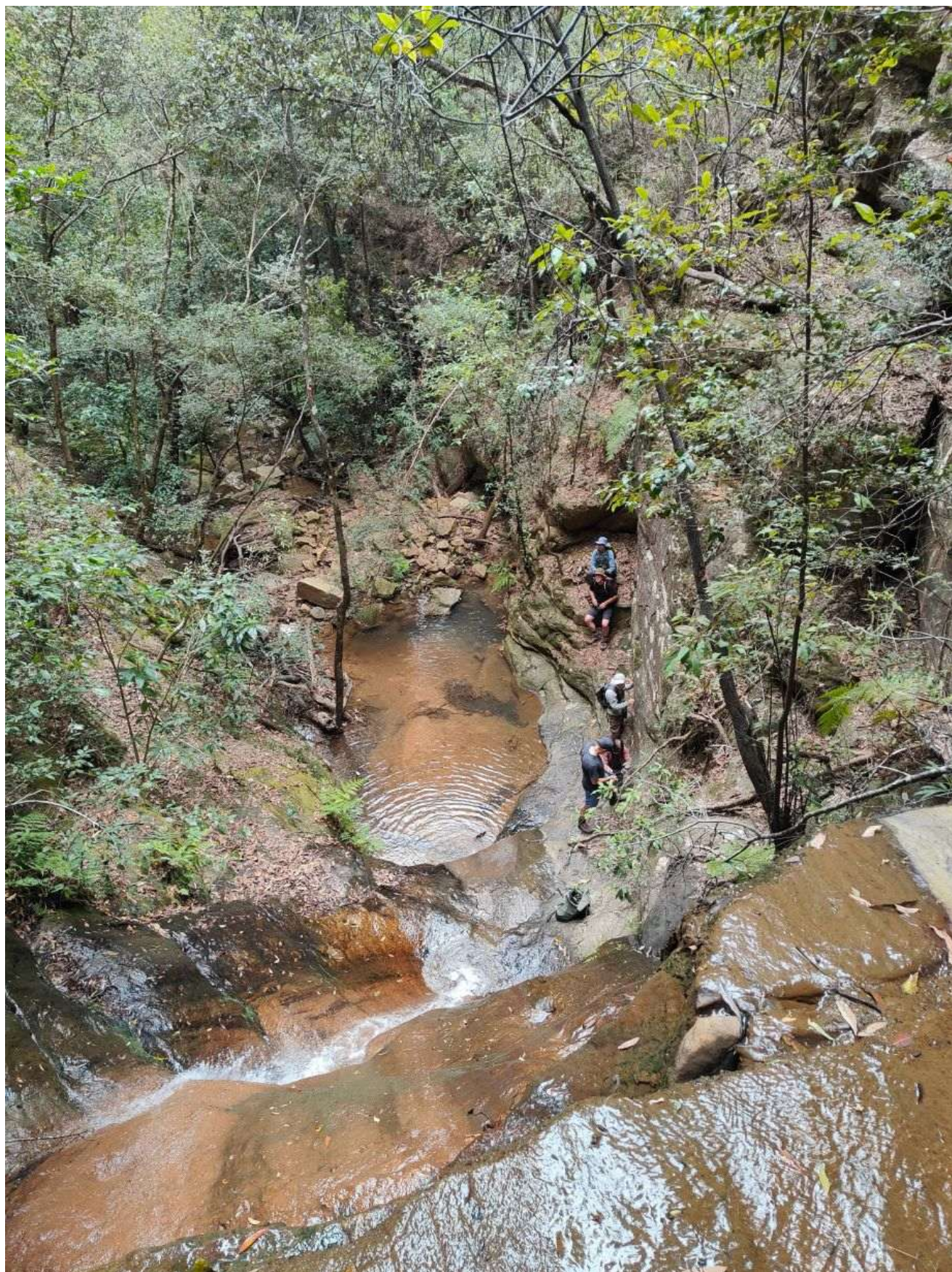
Yuri and Sachith climbing on the side of the waterfall. Photo: Yidan Saladine.





Brandon and Yidan are waiting for Patrick (on the terrace level) to set up his rope. Photo: Rob Herbert.



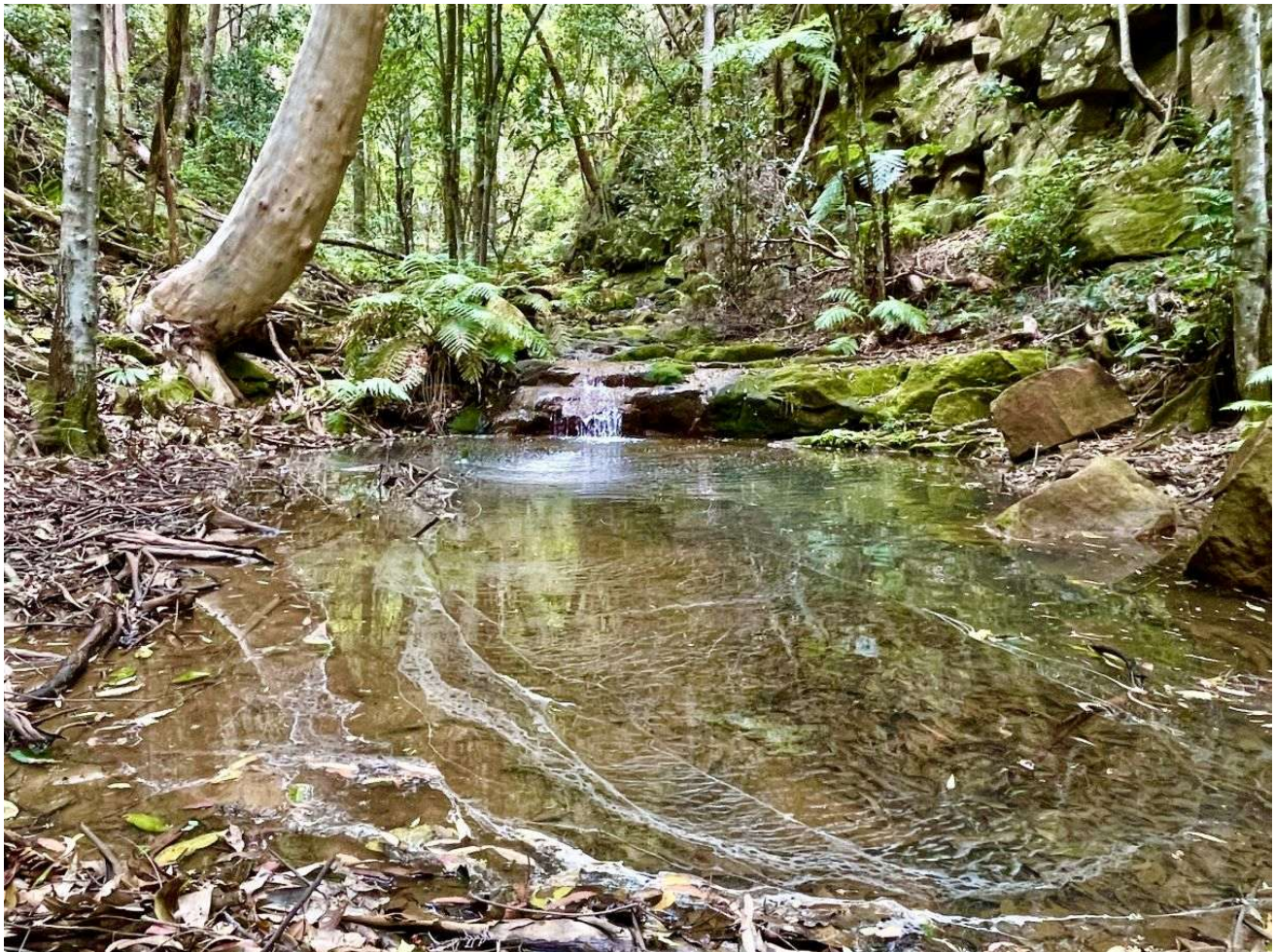


The view of the proceedings from above. Photo: Sachith Algama.

By 1303, we continued our journey up this beautiful rainforest ravine. Just four minutes was all it took to get to the tributary junction that today was hopefully going to be our route up and out. This signified the end of the only non-exploratory part of the trip.



The shady green gully we were now climbing in had a boisterously running brook, with plenty of picturesque cascades. After only 150 m, at 1317, we saw a big waterfall ahead. It is indicated on the detailed map and so was fully expected. The creek plunged here from the height of probably 30 metres or more but through a series of terraces rather than a single drop. It may have been possible to climb it on the left-hand side, but wet and slippery surfaces as well as thick scrub made this proposition very unattractive, to say the least.



Goliath Steps Ravine. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

On the other hand, just in front of where we stopped was a steep but completely dry watercourse that looked very climbable. We went up it for some short distance before I remembered that this could well be our last source of water. Whilst we waited for a few people to go back down and replenish their supplies, Ross drew my attention to a prominent orange-coloured outcrop towering well above our heads.

Having been presented with an attractive-looking overhang, I did not need much convincing, and so it was that at 1326, we left the dry gully and climbed steeply in a southwestern direction towards it. After dealing with a few tricky, but not too tricky, bits, we arrived at a most gorgeous lookout sixteen minutes later. The Eagle-eye view from here was towards the Goliath Steps Ravine and the Colo Gorge, with the bottom of it not in sight, but with Mount Townsend just visible on the northern horizon. Wow! Ten minutes here allowed all team members to catch up and take their photos.





The view of the Goliath Steps Ravine below and the Colo Gorge in the distance, with Mount Townsend left of the middle of the horizon line. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The next section was going straight up the spur, with no obstacles, and we reached our descent spur just near the morning tea spot by 1421. Once again, there were great views of the Colo Gorge from here. That prompted me to name this entire route, beginning at GR 8205 0072, 465 m and ending at the Colo River, GR 8284 0142, 18 m, Scenic Spur.

1442 saw us below the cliffs and at the bottom of a steep section we had gone through this morning. Whilst planning this trip at home, I had indicated an option here, depending on the timing and group energy, to traverse under the cliff line to our west for just under a kilometre, until a gully is reached that would provide a much shorter route back to the cars. I now knew we would have enough daylight, but, all in all, this exercise would undoubtedly take us longer, so I wanted to make sure everyone was OK with doing that.

After a chat, the group decision was for doing this variation, and we began our traverse six minutes later. The first part was a bit tricky as we needed to walk through the head of a wet gully, where a significant rock collapse had recently occurred. That part soon behind us, the party came to the first pretty overhang at 1457, which morphed into a narrow horizontal slot of a cave featuring a tafoni panel on its roof. At 1503, a stop was made to take photos of one metre long beautiful Green Tree Snake, *Dendrelaphis punctulatus*. It was the first time I had seen one! The Snake was on a nearly vertical brown rock surface; it could have been trying to escape our attention that way or had been sleeping in one of the hollows before our arrival.

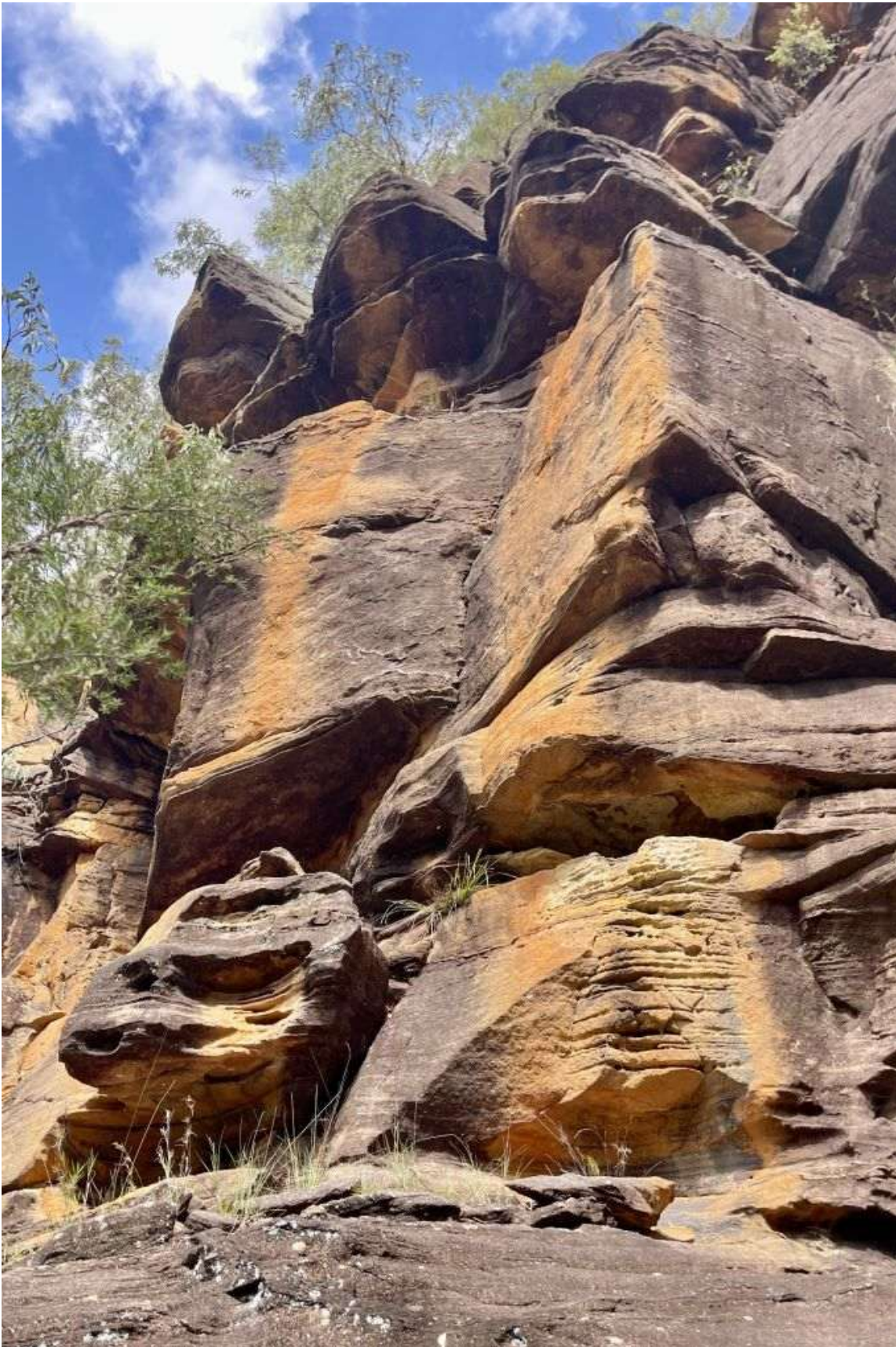




Green Tree Snake, *Dendrelaphis punctulatus*. Photo: Paula Kelly.

As we continued traversing, we passed a few striking but not very eroded rock walls, rather like art installations made by a cubist. By the time a point where the cliffs were becoming north-north west-facing was reached, we gained some elevation and a view towards Mount Townsend. At 1528. This is the most favourable aspect for sandstone erosions to occur, and indeed, as soon as we turned the last corner, we entered an easy continuous ledge bordered by massive orange, black, brown and beige weathered overhangs. The lack of very fine detail we often find elsewhere was amply compensated by the striking geometric shapes and colours, in particular, glowing, radiant orange. There were also many carved pieces, poking out of the cliff faces, resembling giant animal heads. What an exciting addition to an already superb trip! We took our time here, frequently stopping for photos and to climb within some of the overhangs for better angles. The last of the caves was noted at 1601, GR 8185 0105, 350 m, as we entered our exit ravine. I called this remarkable 250 m long section of continuous overhangs Orange Cliffs.



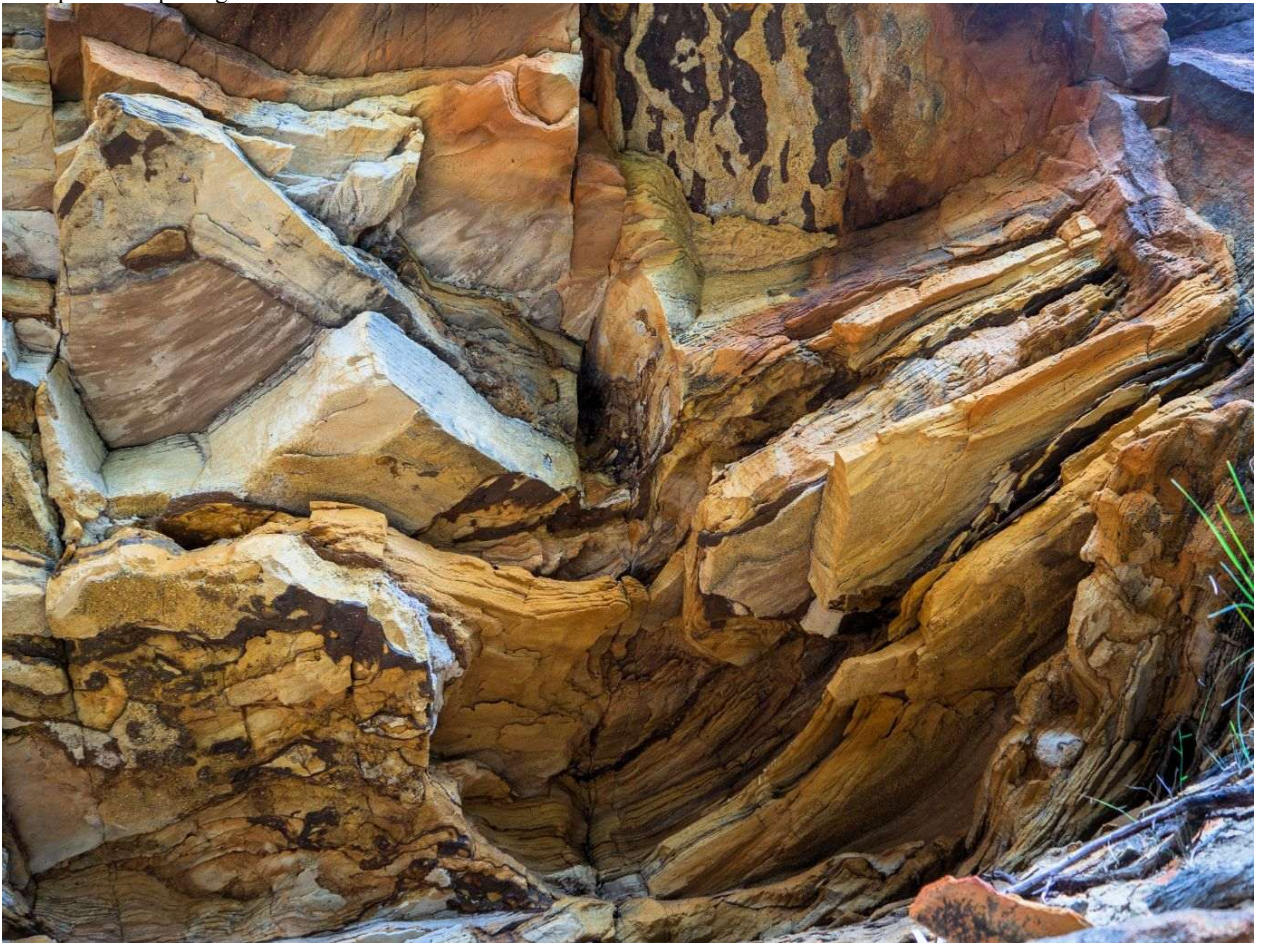


Orange Cliffs. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



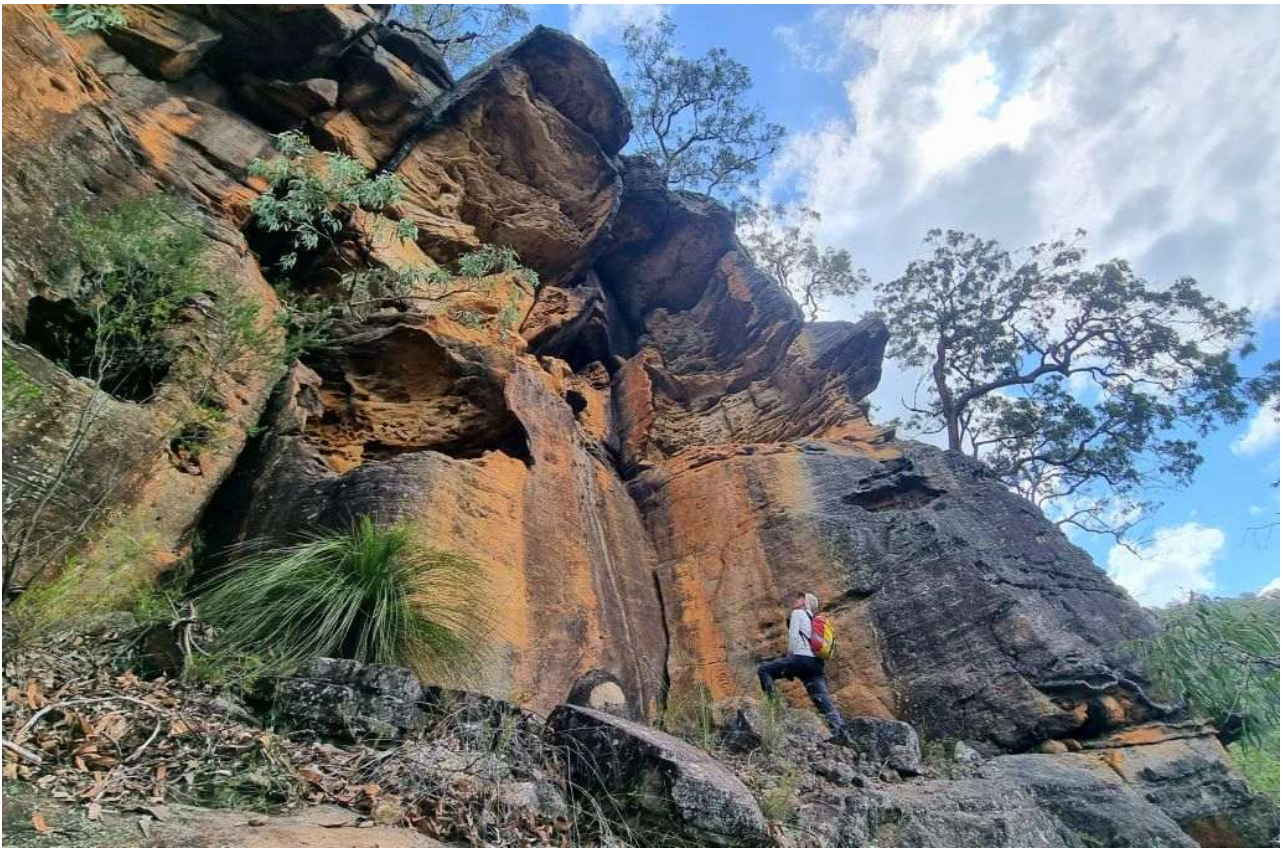


Multiple heads poking out of cliff walls. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Orange Cliffs detail. Photo: Paula Kelly.





Ross at Orange Cliffs. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Patrick under a giant animal head. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.





Orange Cliffs detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

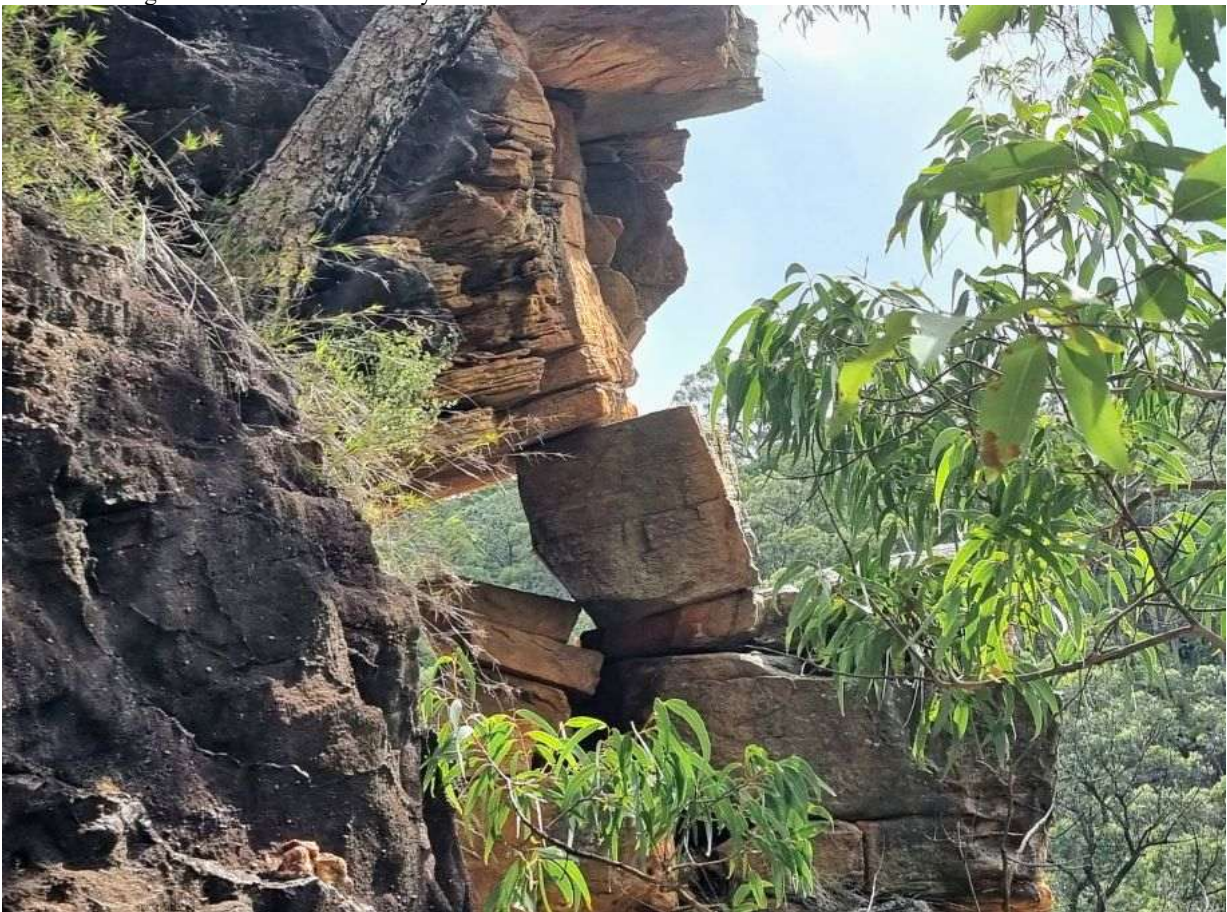


Orange Cliffs. Photo: Paula Kelly.





Yidan at Orange Cliffs. Photo: Paula Kelly.



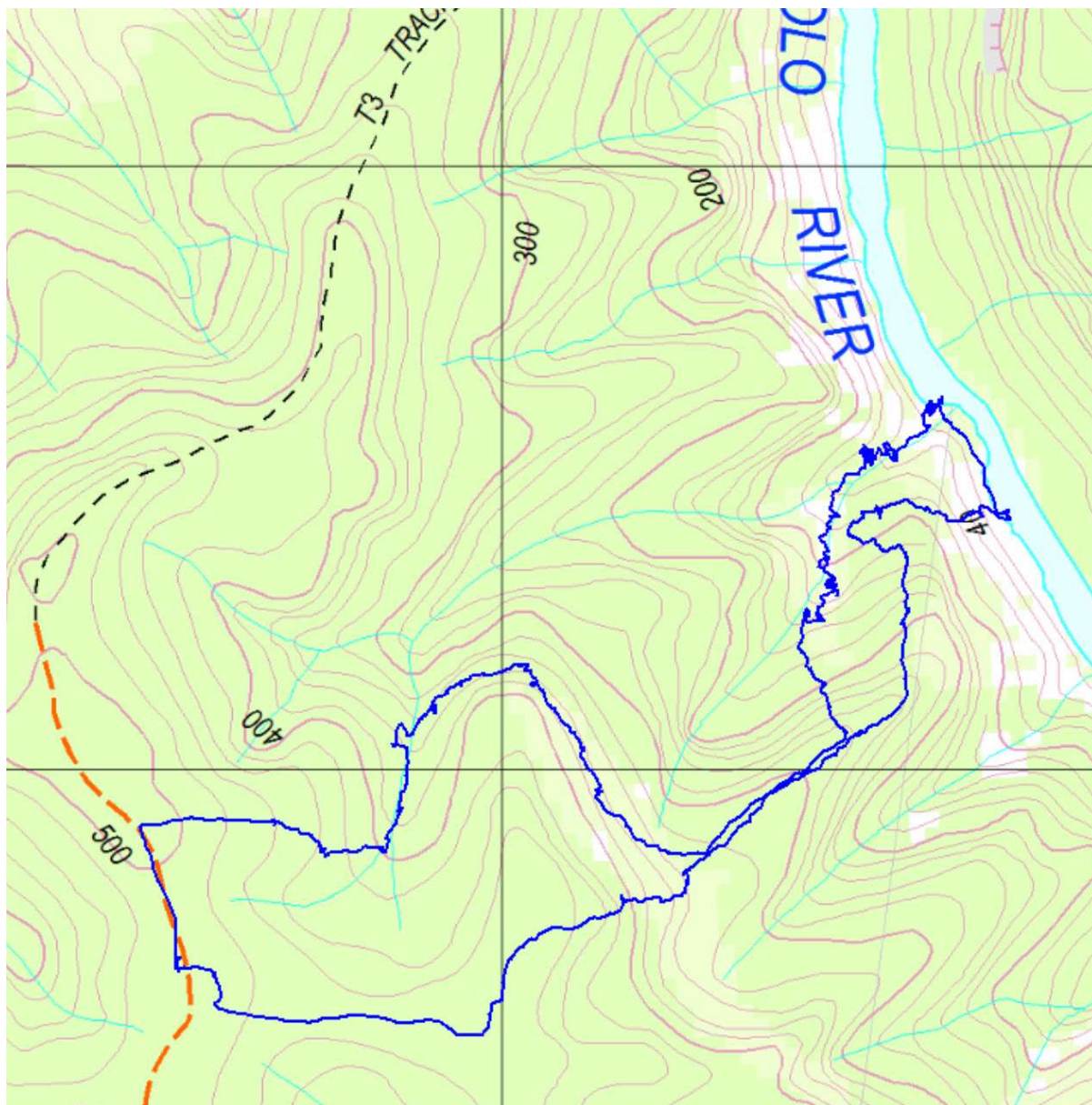
Orange Cliffs detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The gully proved to be a good way of route. We stayed just above it on the left-hand side for a while, before coming down to the rock bed. Small pools of water were noted here, but they would probably soon dry out and cannot be relied on. At 1618, near a tributary junction, I decided to leave the gully and climb westwards up a steep spur.

It was a straightforward but somewhat gruelling climb, being at the end of the day, and, as expected, the last section was very scrubby. We reached T3 Trail at 1658, and the parked cars, seven minutes later.

Trip statistics: total distance 7.2 km; total ascent 640 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

## Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0855	Cars parked and started walking	GR 8146 0067	490 m
0917	Turned to north, north east	GR 8198 0057	470 m
0922	Start of Scenic Spur	GR 8205 0072	465 m
0932	First view at top of the steep section	GR 8220 0078	405 m



0955	Bottom of the steep section	GR 8234 0086	325 m
1008-1021	Lookout and morning tea	GR 8260 0106	280 m
1044	Left the spur to avoid cliffs	GR 8266 0137	120 m
1113	Back in the spur	GR 8267 0145	80 m
1135	Colo River	GR 8284 0142	18 m
1154-1229	Lunch and swim at the bottom of Goliath Steps Ravine	GR 8271 0160	19 m
1238	Waterfall (bottom), tape-assisted ascent	GR 8266 0151	32 m
1303	Waterfall (top)	GR 8261 0150	40 m
1307	Tributary junction	GR 8255 0147	60 m
1317	Waterfall, turned up a dry gully	GR 8254 0135	100 m
1326	Left the gully	GR 8256 0130	115 m
1342-1352	Lookout	GR 8251 0126	135 m
1421	Scenic Spur	GR 8257 0107	275 m
1442-1448	Below the cliffs, decision to traverse	GR 8234 0086	325 m
1457	First pretty overhang	GR 8221 0091	330 m
1503	Green Tree Snake, <i>Dendrelaphis punctulatus</i>	GR 8216 0097	332 m
1528	Start of Orange Cliffs	GR 8204 0117	350 m
1601	End of Orange Cliffs, exit gully	GR 8185 0105	350 m
1618	Leave the gully	GR 8181 0087	400 m
1658	T3 Trail	GR 8140 0091	510 m
1705	Back at cars	GR 8146 0067	490 m