

Walk

Wollemi National Park: Yellow Orchids Wall and Stalactite Cavern

Leader

Yuri Bolotin

Maps

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Walk Description and Route

Park on Hanlons Rd N, Bilpin, walk north above Front Creek and try to locate a historical feature called Powells Pipe, described by J. Carne in 1908. Next, descend towards Tootie Creek and traverse above and/or at the bottom of the gorge to the west, till about GR 693 926. Find a way up and walk back to the vehicles. About 6 km. Scrambling and exposure. Partly exploratory.

Rating

5M. S323E

Gear Recommendations

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

25 April 2026.

The Party

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Scott Marshall, Yidan Saladine, Avi Sanjoyo, Katrina Hemingway, Eoife Huo, Tracey Williams, 7.

The Weather

A beautiful autumn day. Mostly sunny with variable cloud cover and no/very gentle wind. Temperature range 16 to 22 degrees C. Ideal walking conditions.

Background Notes

This walk was created after I had been alerted about the existence of a geological feature, Powells Pipe, described by the prominent geologist Joseph Carne in 1908. To my amazement, Carne's sketch map showed it within a kilometre from my house, in an area that I had visited several times, but, of course, the Wollemi terrain is so complex, you could be 30 metres away from something amazing and not see it. Our geologist friend Scott Marshall was very keen to accompany me, and I added other places to visit to the route, making it a full but easy (I thought, naively) day out.

Track Notes

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

Cars were parked at the end of Hanlons Road North, and our adventure began at 0845. For the first couple of hundred metres, the party moved north near the border of a private property boundary and just below it, always staying within the national park. This is an easy walking country, with moderate to low undergrowth, small patches of hanging swamps and mature trees.

Our first interesting sighting was of a curious insect, Snow Ball Mealybug, *Monophlebus* sp., sitting on a burnt Stringybark. This closely followed by a gnarled Angophora with a huge burl at the lower trunk that looked like Sunfish or some other one of these oceanic monsters of the deep. A few minutes later, we stopped at a small knoll on top of the ridge, at 0918. This was one of the possible locations of Powells Pipe, but nothing could be seen here that would resemble it.



Snow Ball Mealybug, *Monophlebus* sp. Photo: Tracey Williams.



Katrina, Avi and others at the fish monster tree. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From our desk research, I believed Powells Pipe should be located within 200 m north from here, so in order to search a wider area, we split into two groups. Scott's party went straight down the gully to the north, whereas my team headed north east down a minor spur for a little while, until the next layer of rock, where we turned back west and traversed below it. A few good-looking overhangs were encountered along the way, including a wall with an arch in front of it. When, at 1000, the two groups re-united near the original gully, the outcomes were the same –Powells Pipe had not been found. Looking down this small watercourse from our location, we could not see anything like basalt or basalt vegetation underneath us, so I decided not to continue with the search and get on with the other things planned for this trip.¹

Our main objective from here was to traverse just above Tootie Creek, moving upstream, and look for overhangs and any other features. As we were currently about 150 m above the bottom of the gorge, a lot of elevation needed to be shed next. First, the group sidled for a little while, stopping to take photos of a curious rock formation resembling a giant Monkey-like creature. We then descended into the next gully to the east and stopped there for morning tea, from 1030 till 1044.

Afterwards, we kept descending on the right-hand side above the watercourse until the next cliff line was reached at 1105. A steep chute leading down was quickly found just a few metres further to the east. It brought us ten minutes later to the first, very pretty and very deeply eroded overhang of today.



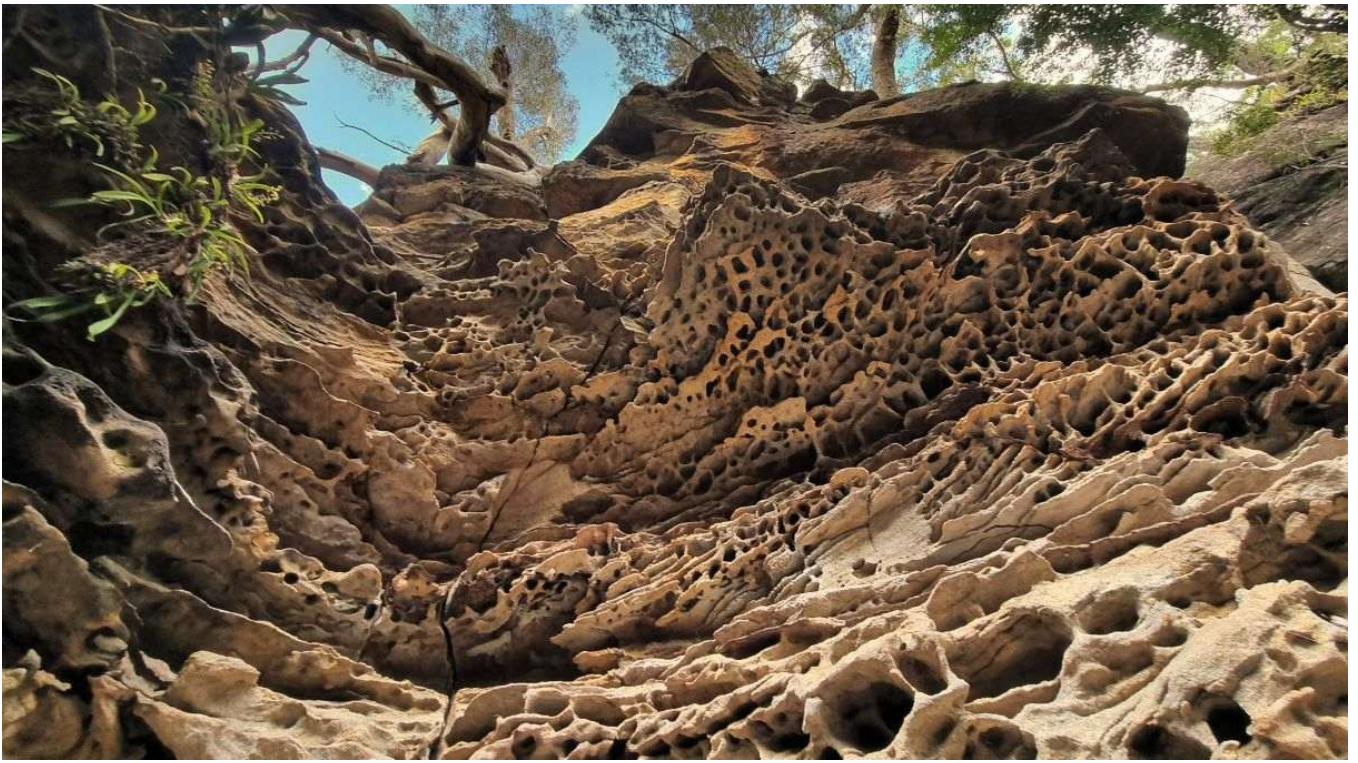
A curious Monkey-like rock. Photo: Scott Marshall.

¹ Upon an instigation from Michael Keats, I did some more desk research after coming home. Comparing with Carne's approximate elevation (533 m), we stopped about 15-20 m higher and 50 m away in distance from his described location. In that country it may make a huge difference, so another visit is now on the agenda.



Tootie Creek gorge. Photo: Katrina Hemingway.

From here, we continued coming down, turning west, in the direction we wanted to explore, and recrossed the gully where we had stopped for morning tea. Descending a bit further but still staying above Tootie Creek, whilst moving upstream, the party next arrived at an exceptional feature, a shallow overhang, rather like a wall, about 10 metres high and 15 metres across. The bottom half of it was covered in some of the finest tafoni formations I have seen in a long while; the rock faces around them were covered most prolifically with the blooming Yellow Rock Orchids, *Cestichis reflexa*. What a sight! I called this place Yellow Orchids Wall. At 1135. A few Sydney Rock Orchids, *Thelychiton speciosus*, were also noted in this area, but we were now outside of their flowering season.



Yellow Orchids Wall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Honeycomb panels in the Yellow Orchids Wall. Photo: Avi Sanjoyo.



Yellow Rock Orchids, *Cestichis reflexa* at the Yellow Orchids Wall. Photo: Tracey Williams.

Just past the wall, and adding to the patches of yellow in the bush, was a large flowering stand of Sweet Pittosporum, *Pittosporum undulatum*.



Sweet Pittosporum, *pittosporum undulatum*. Photo: Tracey Williams.

Next, to add some variety to the walk, I thought we should scramble down to the bottom of the gorge. The party made it there twenty minutes later, to be immersed in a totally different world of cool, dark, moist rainforest. We now headed upstream along Tootie Creek as it was noisily making its way down through little cascades and pools set amongst green, mossy, and often slippery boulders, all beautifully illuminated by dappled sunlight. Quite a few different Fungi were noted here, amongst them Hairy Curtain Crust, *Stereum hirsutum*; *Mycena* sp., and Ghost Fungi, *Omphalotus nidiformis*. After walking in this enchanted forest for a while, we had lunch in a dry-ish flat spot between 1244 and 1300.



Tootie Creek rainforest. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yidan in Tootie Creek. Photo: Eoife Huo.

Continuing upstream, by 1312, we reached the junction with Front Creek, I told the group that this tributary, via a known to me pass, would lead us all the way back to the cars. Should we exit from here? I wanted to continue upstream, via a section I had only been through once before, a long time ago, and then head up the next gully about half a kilometre to the west. The team agreed with my proposal, and I am very glad they did!

Wollemi will never stop surprising me! Only seven minutes after resuming, we spotted a long, dark cavern on the northern side, about five metres above the creek bed. Clambering up the steep, soft, muddy slope, we arrived at the most amazing, one of the most extensive and densely covered walls of stalactites I could recollect. To top it all off, they were multicoloured! Apart from the usual blacks and greys, there were browns, reds, oranges, purples and greens. The wall extended for about 50 metres and was about 5 metres high; the eastern half had the highest density of formations. I called this remarkable feature Stalactite Cavern. The group spent from 1319 till 1325 here. Photography in these dark spaces is always challenging, but we did our best without having tripods and professional cameras, to at least to convey the feel of it.



The group climbing up to the Stalactite Cavern. Photo: Avi Sanjoyo.



In Stalactite Cavern. Photo: Tracey Williams.



Stalactite Cavern detail. Photo: Katrina Hemingway.



Scott, Katrina, Yidan and Eoife in Stalactite Cavern. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Scott in Stalactite Cavern. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Rainforest sketch. Photo: Katrina Hemingway.

Moving along, the group passed through a large rock platform forming part of the creek bed. There were many beautiful small pools here reflecting the surrounding trees and sky. We spotted a few grooves in the

rock, but I was not convinced they were not natural. At 1344. Twelve minutes later, we reached the intended exit gully.

Scrambling up was OK at first, but very soon we were stopped by a three metre high cliff. The only way through seemed to be within the watercourse, but it was slippery and wet with running water. A tape had to be used here for safety. From 1410 till 1420. Once on top of the waterfall, it was not possible to see a clear way forward, and the surrounding bluffs seemed very high, so I was worried for a few minutes, until a magic ramp appeared just ahead on the right-hand side that enabled us to easily ascend above the towering walls.

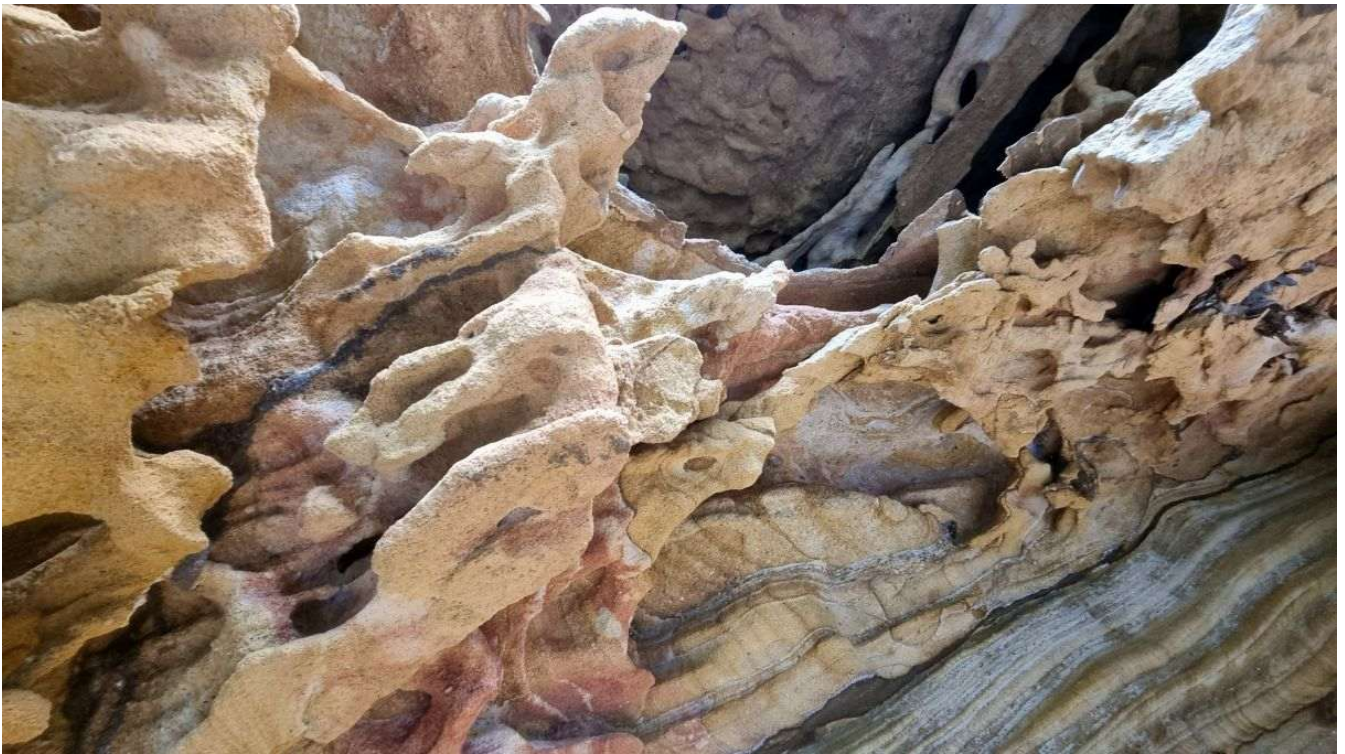


Scott and Eoife at the tape-assisted ascent. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Are you thinking what I am thinking? Photo: Katrina Hemingway.

A bit higher up, there was another waterfall in the creek, which was negotiated on the right side. Just past and further up, there were two caves on each side of the gully. We looked at both, but the one on the western bank was more interesting, with beautiful ornate walls of orange, pink and beige sandstone. At 1435. The overhang on the opposite side was dry, with a nice bit of flat floor, but had no other notable features.



Ornate cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Eoife, Yidan, Tracey, Yuri, Scott and Avi in the ornate cave. Photo: Katrina Hemingway.

Travelling now above the gully on the eastern side, we soon stopped to photograph another very pretty, deeply sculpted cave. At 1455. 1507 saw us on top of a small spur, from where we descended to the bottom

of Front Creek, reached at 1526. Ten minutes later, the party paused at the beautiful lookout, Sunset Rock, to enjoy panoramic views towards Tootie Creek gorge, Mount Tootie, and Mount Irvine. It can be said that the entire walk was in my backyard, in which case Sunset Rock was on my front verandah.



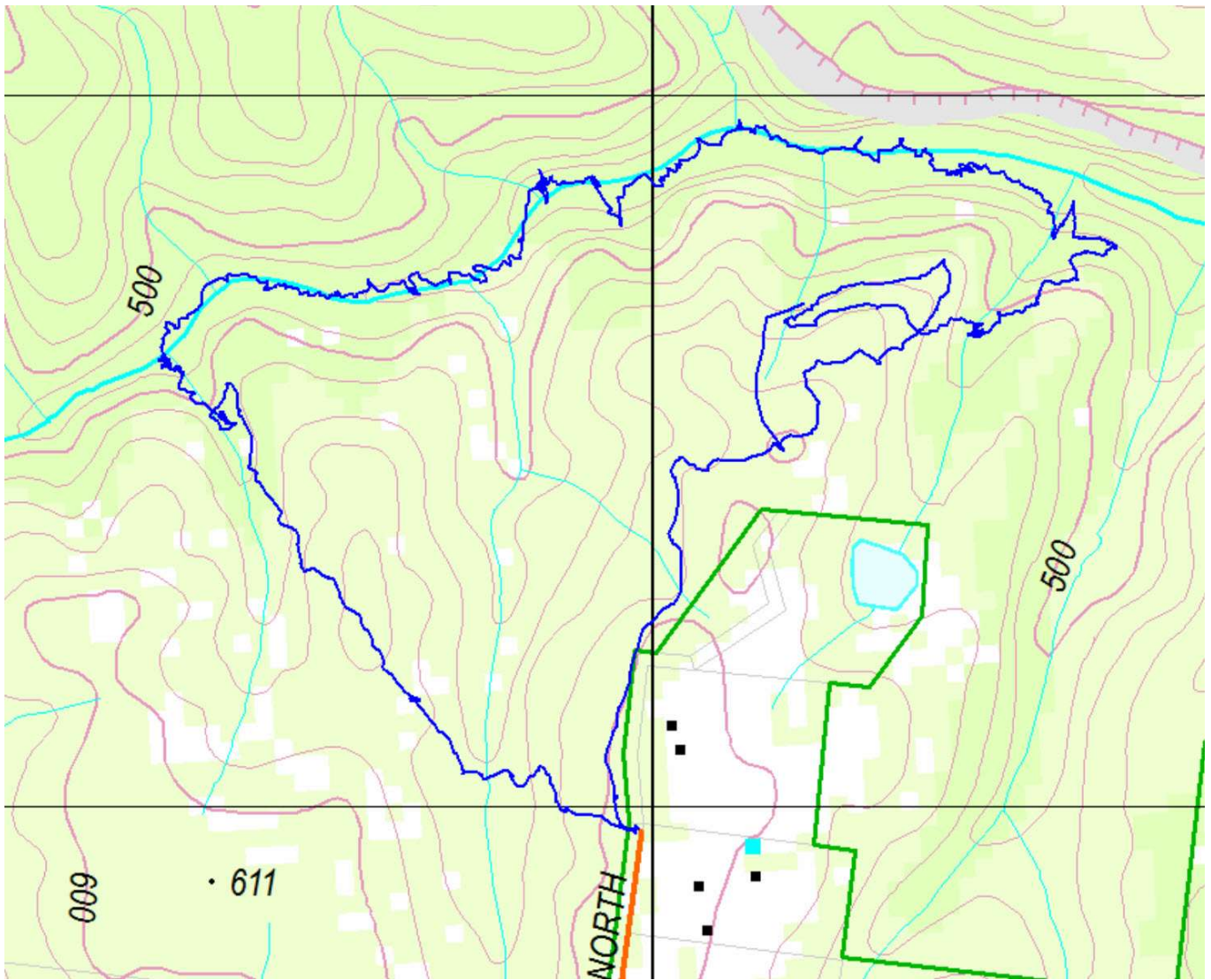
Another very pretty overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Tracey coming up to Sunset Rock. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The group made it back to the vehicles by 1542.

Trip statistics: total distance 7.5 km; total ascent 290 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0845	Cars parked and started walking	GR 6997 9197	605 m
0918	Top of knoll, split in two groups	GR 7018 9251	600 m
1000	The party re-united	GR 7020 9269	550 m
1030-1044	Morning tea	GR 7045 9267	508 m
1105	Cliff line	GR 7063 9278	470 m
1115	Cave	GR 7060 9280	457 m
1135	Yellow Orchids Wall	GR 7049 9289	432 m
1155	In Tootie Creek	GR 7037 9292	420 m
1244-1300	Lunch	GR 6985 9288	430 m
1312	Front Creek junction	GR 6975 9274	450 m
1319-1325	Stalactite Cavern	GR 6965 9275	455 m
1344	Rock platform	GR 6946 9274	470 m
1356	Exit gully	GR 6932 9263	475 m
1410-1420	Tape-assisted ascent	GR 6934 9261	485 m
1435	Cave	GR 6939 9254	515 m
1455	Cave	GR 6948 9242	535 m

1507	Top of spur	GR 6960 9224	580 m
1526	In Front Creek	GR 6977 9204	550 m
1536	Sunset Rock	GR 6988 9200	585 m
1542	Back at cars	GR 6997 9197	605 m