

Walk

Wollemi National Park: Lee Fortress and Tal Tal Range

Leader

Yuri Bolotin

Maps

Talooby. GPS setting WGS84.

Walk Description and Route

Park at Benjang Gap, walk up Lee Creek till Lost Chord Ravine, GR 327 904, about 5 km, and establish a camp. We will stay at this camp for two nights and do two day-walks in this very complex and spectacular area. This part is partly exploratory.

It is fully exploratory from here on. On Day 3, we will strike the camp and find a way up through the cliffs to the north west and to the pagoda-studded tops. We will then traverse the Tal Tal Range northwards till GR 321 930 or GR 310 941, where I expect to find passes back down to Lee Creek and the vehicles. About 25 km. Mostly exploratory. Scrambling and exposure.

Rating

6M. S333E

Gear Recommendations

Full-pack gear, in addition to day-walk gear.

Date walked

15-17 May 2026.

The Party

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Kevin Songberg, Andrew Dumphy, Paula Kelly, Ivan Littlewood, Lingling Qiu, 6.

The Weather

Day 1 – A cool morning followed by a warm, mostly sunny day. Little or no wind in the morning; strong breezes in the afternoon at exposed tops. Temperature range 13 to 21 degrees C.

Day 2 – A cool morning followed by a warm, mostly sunny day. Little or no wind. Temperature range 9 to 20 degrees C.

Day 3 – A mostly cloudy day with occasional brief sunny periods. No wind. Temperature range 10 to 19 degrees C.

Perfect walking conditions during all three days.

Background Notes

On 7-9 May 2025, one year and one week before this trip, we stayed at the junction of Lee Creek and Lost Chord Ravine for three days and two nights. One of our forays was to the elevated, extremely dissected oval-shaped area of land, completely enclosed by enormous cliffs, between our camp site and Lost Chord Crater, which I subsequently called Lee Fortress. Another adventure took us through an incredible slot we found to the south east of the camp and up to the high plateau above Lee Creek; I named that journey Castle View Traverse because of almost constant views towards Lee Castle during that day.

Last year's experience was spectacular, but I went home wanting to further explore this amazingly complex, spectacular and challenging area.

Track Notes

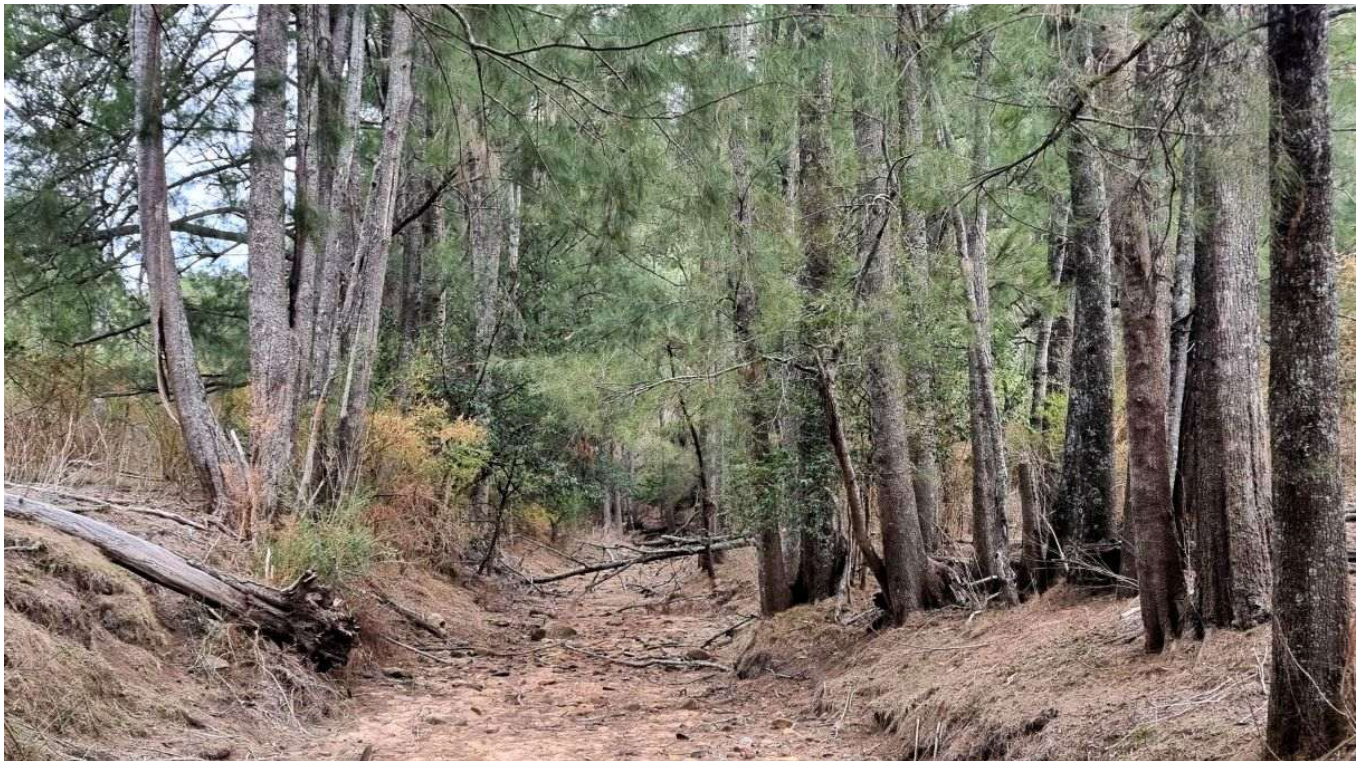
Note: time references in the text relate to Grid References in the table at the end of these Track Notes.

Day 1 – 15 May 2026

This trip nearly did not happen. It had been scheduled months in advance, with many hours, no, days, spent on planning every aspect, but in the last week before the start the weather forecast turned bad. Knowing this was not the place to be when it rains, I had to seriously consider not going. Then, miraculously, in the final few days, the arrival of wet weather was shifted to later in the week, and I decided we could proceed with this walk, shortened by a day, to give us a better chance to finish it in dry conditions. However, it was not the only problem. In the first couple of hours of walking, we faced another issue that nearly derailed this entire adventure.

But let us start from the beginning. Vehicles were parked at Benjang Gap, and after a short briefing, we were off at 0831, following an old trail across dry paddocks towards Lee Creek. The sun was still hidden behind thin cloud cover, and the morning felt fresh. Unlike during other trips, no birds or other wildlife was visible. Enormous cliffs that form the Tal Tal Range escarpment crammed the skyline to the north. If everything went well, we would be coming down from that direction on the final leg of this journey.

Following a quick, brisk and easy amble, at 0851, the party made it to the bottom of Lee Creek. The gorge was shallow here and framed by beautiful old Casuarinas. I was not surprised by the absence of any water, having only seen the creek flowing at this location a couple of times after heavy rains. I assured the guys we would find water as soon as we reached the boulder block-up section about a kilometre and a half upstream.



Dry Lee Creek at the start of the trip. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We were making good time, treading along the sandy bed and occasionally following a faint trail that jumped from one bank to another. Twenty-eight minutes later, the old road terminated at the start the block-ups. Here, the ravine became much deeper and contained house-size boulders at the bottom that required time and patience to negotiate. Also, it had been here that we found water on all occasions, except during the six month-long drought preceding the bushfires of 2019-2020. Over the last several weeks, the weather had

been mainly dry, with some occasional rainfall, but these conditions certainly could not be classified as a drought, so I was very surprised to find no pools anywhere here today.

We plodded on, hoping they would appear soon. On the positive side, our progress was easier than during most other trips through this boulder field because we did not have to worry about wet feet. About half a kilometre further, a couple of very small stale puddles were noted – not good enough and not big enough for the group. They soon disappeared altogether.

After clambering over a series of big rocks, I descended into the creek bed and was very surprised to see, only a couple of metres away, a black young bull, staring at me intensely. As I took a step forward, the animal charged, and I had to jump back, seeking refuge behind a barricade of fallen trees between us. The animal looked well-fed and sported a red tag in one of its ears. It looked like he was now trapped in a small room surrounded by large boulders on all sides, and this is why he had stampeded at me. I could not even imagine how this bull had traversed a few kilometres of very rough terrain separating us from the nearest farm land. We gave him a wide berth and went on our way.¹ At 0938.



Big boulders in Lee Creek. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

By 1000, our group made it to the end of the rough section, only about 600 m to the intended campsite at the junction with Lost Chord Ravine, but no water had yet been found. We stopped for a short morning tea and a conversation here. Over the last half an hour or so, I had been considering our options and now shared them with the team. Believing that the likelihood of finding pools immediately upstream was very small, I proposed to proceed for another kilometre or so beyond the planned campsite, to the junction with a big tributary where we had stayed overnight and found some water a few years ago; if that did not bring the desired result, there would be no choice but to abort the trip and walk back to the vehicles. I calculated that we would have enough daylight to do that. Of course, this outcome would be very disappointing, but we could not stay here for three days without water.

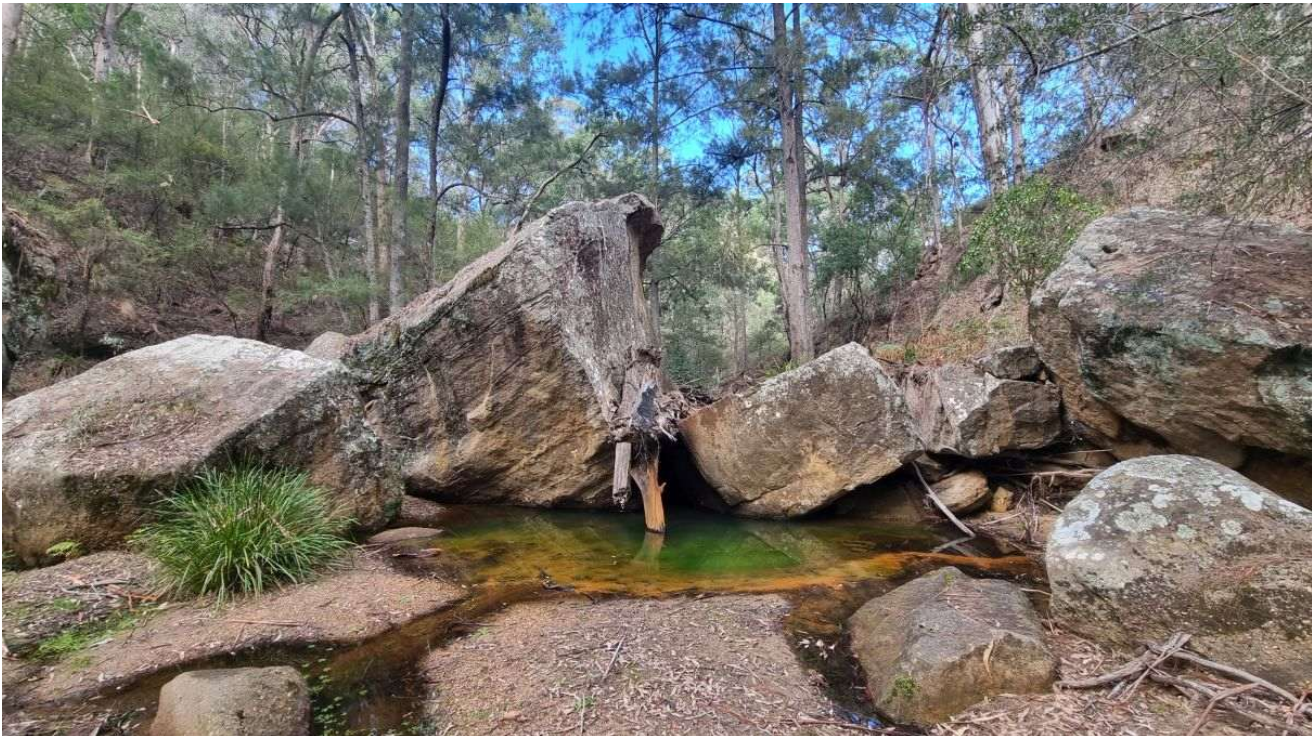
Eight minutes later, the group continued up Lee Creek, hoping for a miracle. And this is exactly what happened! A couple of hundred metres on, I noticed a few wet patches, and after a short while, first small reservoirs appeared; a little further still, the creek exhibited a small but steady flow. Because we were by

¹ After the walk, when we had phone reception, I reported this encounter to a local farmer I know. Hopefully, they were able to extract the bull from this challenging terrain.

then located 200 metres from the campsite, I thought we should stop to fill our containers for the next 24 hours. From 1030 till 1045. I now knew we could go on with the rest of the journey! Amazing! This was the first of the series miracles that happened on this trip.



Water at last! Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



A water pool in Lee Creek near our camp. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

After we had resumed, the flowing stream continued for another hundred metres, then disappeared under the sand. My theory was that the water was coming from the Lost Chord Ravine, but I had to wait till tomorrow

till I was able to prove it as there was none at its junction with Lee Creek, reached at 1058. The next 50 minutes were spent establishing the camp, and then, with day packs only, the team embarked on the first exploratory foray, exactly as had been originally planned. We were back on track, in more senses than one!

With still over five hours of daylight left at our disposal, I was hoping to ascend the cliffs to the east and walk out onto a promontory immediately south of and overlooking Lost Chord Crater, where I expected to find good views. We had done part of that journey previously, and considering the time it had taken, I thought it would be 'touch and go' whether we would get there this afternoon. We had to ensure our torches were with us and also needed to be prepared to simply turn around and walk back if the time was running short.

The key to this trip was an amazing slot we had found on 08/05/25 that gave access through the enormous cliffs guarding the tops. From the camp, the party headed uphill in a southeasterly direction. The steep slopes had little understorey and were covered with mature trees, small rocks and occasional big eroded boulders. At 1206, the party entered the familiar slot, which measured less than 30 metres across at that point. This very steep but technically straightforward way of route was over 200 m long, with an altitude gain of about 70 m.

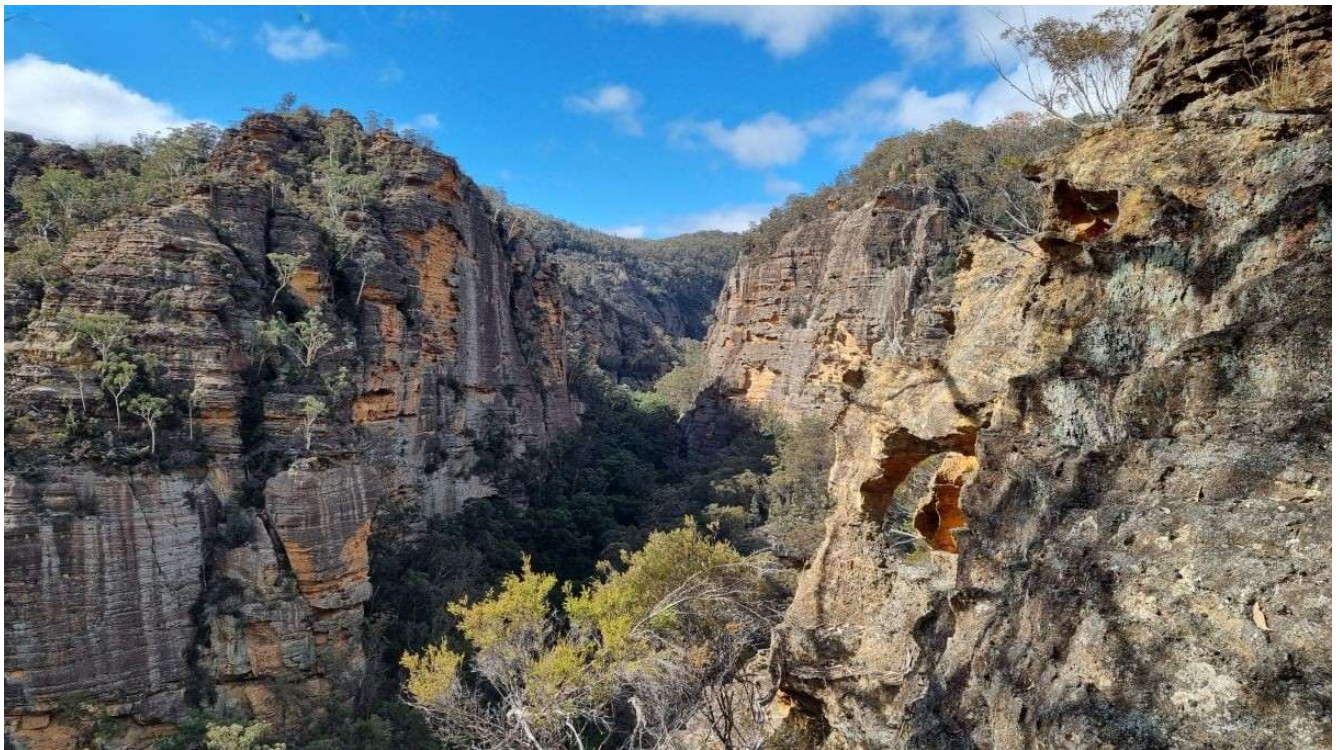


The party approaching the top of the access slot. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.

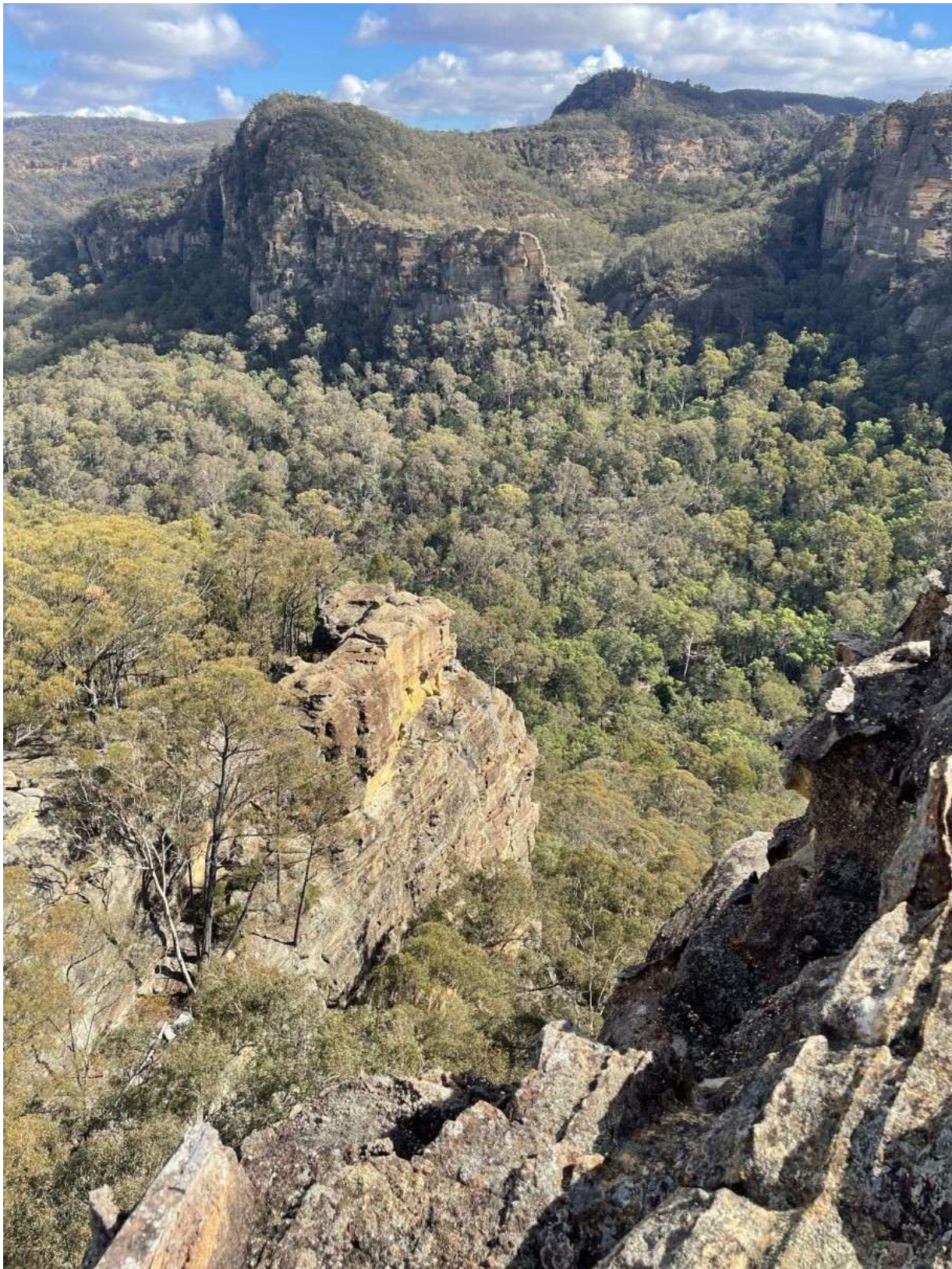


Lingling near the top of the access slot. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

We made it all the way to the top in 16 minutes. From here, we climbed even higher to an edge-cliff pagoda, commanding unbelievable views east towards the dramatic, narrow Lost Chord Ravine surrounded by towering sandstone cliffs, resplendent in the golden sun of the early afternoon. The panorama to the south west, which included Lee Creek gorge, Labyrinth Peak, Lee Castle, and Growee Range, was also breathtaking. We stopped here for lunch and photography. A stiff cold breeze came up during that time and was felt for the remainder of our journey along the tops.



Lost Chord Ravine. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Labyrinth Peak and a knife-edge spur leading towards it. Top of the ascent slot is centre left. Photo: Lingling Qiu.



Yuri and Andrew peering into the Lost Chord Ravine. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Kevin and Lingling with Lee Castle and Growee Range behind them. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

At 1250, it was time to resume the adventure and make our way up a pagoda spur climbing south east. The amazing views from here on were virtually constant. The 1:25:000 topographic map shows an unbroken ridge here, but the reality is very different. At 1305, the party stopped above a deep chasm. Luckily, from the past experience, we knew what to do – to retrace for a short distance and then to get down, sidle into the

split, then clamber back up on the opposite side, to a dramatic view of an arc-shaped razor-thin spur running towards Labyrinth Peak. We had traversed just below it on two occasions, having had other goals in mind. Now, looking at it from this direction, I thought how wonderful it might be to see if it was possible to walk on top of the blade, all the way to where it stopped high above Lee Creek, but it would most likely be an unrealistic task. Something to try next time.



Climbing around the chasm in the ridge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yuri, Andrew, Paula and Ivan underneath an orange overhang. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

After posing underneath a bright orange overhang on the other side of the rift, our climb continued through nice, open country dotted with low pagodas. One year ago, we had spent almost the entire day following this ridge south. Because of the continuous views towards Lee Castle, I had called this part of the journey Castle View Traverse.

However, our plans for today were different. At 1336, the group left the main watershed and crossed a shallow gully to the east, easily mounting a parallel spur, at 1354. Here, we turned north, towards Lost Chord Crater. Initially, with no obstacles on our way, we were doing fast time, but at 1402, the spur suddenly became a jumble of giant boulders with dangerous gaping holes in between. We managed to stay on top, finding a narrow ledge that led to a squeeze and back to the top, where the country was nice and easy.

Here, the party passed some fascinating boulders but, keeping our main objective in mind, I suggested we should have a look at them on the way back, if we had the time. After a few more minutes of walking further north, we found what we came here for – breath-arresting views towards Lost Chord Crater and Tal Tal Range, and even better ones of Lee Fortress and Lost Chord Ravine as well as the amazing country to the west, all the way to Labyrinth Peak and Growee Range. Extreme care needed to be taken here, as best views were from the ledges below the high point, whilst standing above a 100 m+ abyss. We spent from 1412 till 1430 here. I called this remarkable spot Lost Chord Point due to its commanding position above Lost Chord Crater and Ravine.



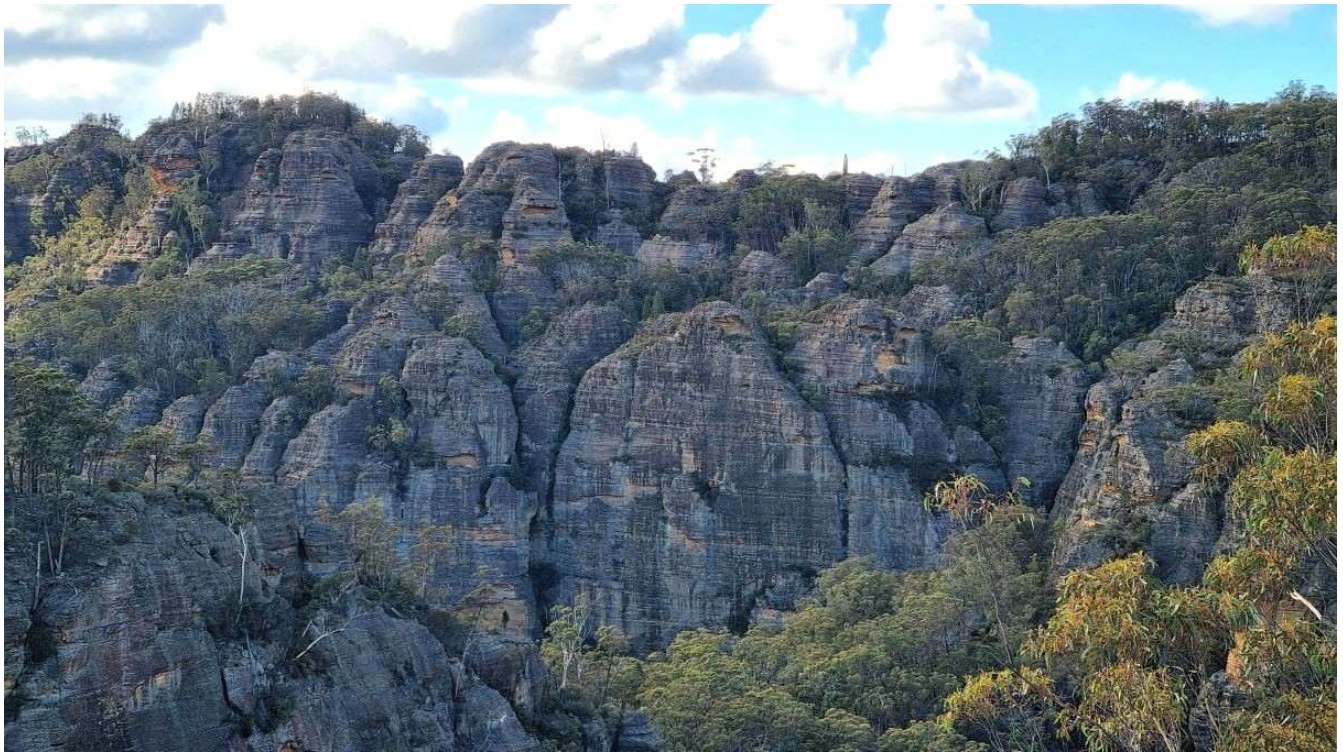
Kevin, Andrew and Yuri at Lost Chord Point. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Looking towards the enormous cliffs of Lee Fortress and Lee Creek gorge from Lost Chord Point. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Tal Tal Range on the right-hand side, with Lost Chord Crater below. Lee Fortress on the left-hand side. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



The cliffs surrounding Lee Fortress. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Yuri at Lost Chord Point, looking towards our campsite at the junction of Lee Creek and Lost Chord Ravine and amazing country further away. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Andrew, Yuri and Kevin at Lost Chord Point. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.

On the way back, the party stopped and checked out an interesting boulder containing a deep dry cave, and a few other big rocks adjacent to it, then retraced our steps across the gully to the main ridge. We reached it by 1508, stopping here to have a drink and take photos of Lee Castle in the afternoon sun.



The big boulder with a cave. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.



Andrew in front of another boulder. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Lee Castle in the sun of the afternoon. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

I think I better stop now and apologize to our readers for incessantly mentioning ‘great views’. My problem is that this whole journey, all three days of it, probably had more ‘great views’ per metre walked than most trips I remember. Whilst writing easily readable and entertaining prose is certainly one of my objectives, the main goal is giving accurate information about the country we explore. So, as we move from one ‘great view’ to the next one, please forgive me if it sounds too repetitive to you.

OK, now we cleared this up, I can say that retracing our journey brought out more incredible views, enhanced by the golden sun of the early evening. Our cameras worked hard until 1554, when the party reached the top of the descent slot. Because of the steepness of it and the abundance of loose rocks, we split into two groups of three here, with a 50 metre gap in between; the people in each group had to stay very close together as they were coming down. Notwithstanding all these precautions, I breathed a sigh of relief when we reunited at the bottom of the slot by 1612. Thirteen minutes later, team made it back to the camp. We were glad that the wind was not felt there, and that the evening air was beautifully mild.



Lost Chord Ravine in the evening light. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



A stone bird looking down at Andrew as he admires the view towards Lee Creek gorge near the top of the slot. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Descending the slot. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Day statistics: total distance 10.5 km; total accent 540 m.

Day 2 – 16 May 2026

On our agenda today was exploring an elevated plateau surrounded on all sides by high cliffs that I had called Lee Fortress on 07/05/25. On that day, we found a way up at the southern flank of the fortress but had to return the same way due to lack of available daylight. Today, I was hoping to cross the plateau and find a way down at the eastern edge, as well as to investigate an isolated tower-like area of land immediately to the east of Lee Fortress.

At 0738, we left the camp and started following Lost Chord Ravine upstream, keeping above the messy-looking creek bed. The first part of today was to stay close to our footsteps of last year, because that seemed like one and only possible way through the fortress parapets.

The understorey along the way was mostly OK, except for the annoying and often prevalent Blackthorn, *Bursaria spinosa*. Within 15 minutes, the party reached the lower cliff line, guarding the fortress. This high wall soon forced us to come down a little, to the bottom of the ravine. I was hoping to see some pools here, to prove my theory about where the water near the campsite came from, but there were none to be found. At 0803.

From here, it was up through now prevalent rainforest to the next cliff line, where we arrived at 0824. Through the trees we could see a canyon-like slot on the opposite side of the gorge that was on the agenda to explore on the way back, but for now, we took a steep ramp that ended up with a dodgy traverse section, only about 10 metres long. It demanded full concentration as losing the grip here would not have been pretty.



A dodgy traverse along the way. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Moving further up, the party quickly made it to a good-looking ledge below another big cliff line. At 0831. We followed it for a while, until, at 0842, GR 3308 9033, 645 m, a gully appeared that gave access up to the next level. Soon, we abandoned that watercourse and climbed to a viewpoint on the western edge of it, for the first great vista of the day towards the Monster Wall (named and explored on 09/05/25) and the bluffs on the opposite side of Lee Creek that guard access towards Labyrinth Peak.



First great view of the day. Labyrinth Peak is on the horizon line left of centre, and Monster Wall is seen immediately in front of it. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Moving further up from here brought us to the next ledge below another huge cliff line. At 0902. As you would have already gathered, Lee Fortress is very well guarded, but from our previous experience we knew this was the last wall before the tops. Three minutes later, our walkway became a crawl-way for about 20 metres, where the ceiling was under a metre high and the ledge sloped out towards a nasty-looking drop. It was good to be on the other side of it, where we could straighten up and stride properly again.



The crawl part of the ledge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From here, it was very enjoyable to traverse beneath the striking mauve-pink cliffs that encircled the gully in a giant arc. On the opposite side, was our way up to the top of the fortress. We first stopped at a great panorama north towards Lee Creek gorge, all the way to Benjang Gap. At 0920².



The group traversing below the striking mauve cliffs. L to R, Ivan, Lingling, Andrew, Kevin and Paula. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Kevin on top of Lee Fortress, with Lee Creek gorge panorama behind him. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

I was now eager to use this opportunity to have a look at the cliff line across the unnamed gorge to the north, which was on our next day's route. By 0926, we stood on the brink of a huge drop, eyeing the walls on the

² The readers who follow this story with a topographic map in hand should note that the cliff line on it is incorrectly shown about 50 m east of its true location.

opposite side that looked intimidating and almost completely impregnable. All I could gather was that we must be prepared for quite a few challenges tomorrow morning, when we would also be carrying full packs. I named the gorge in front of us Fortress Ravine as it defines the northern boundary of Lee Fortress.

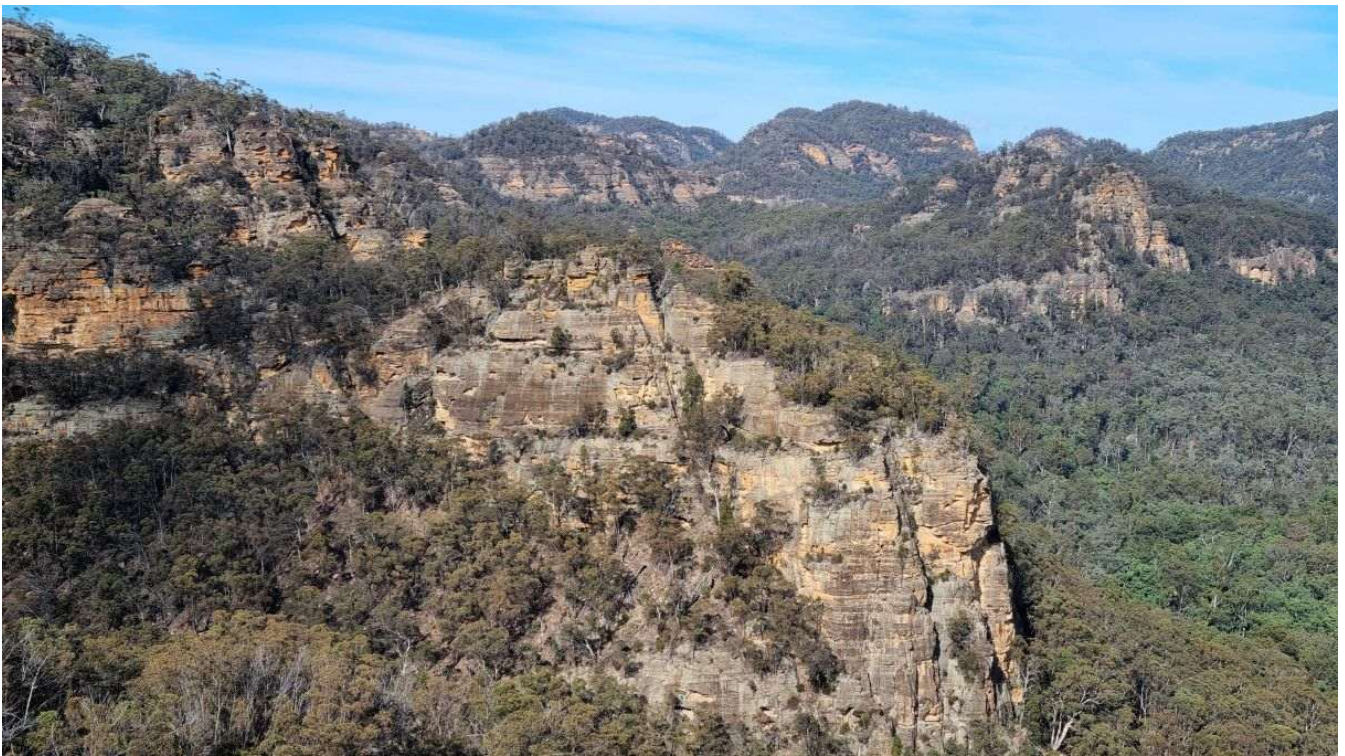


The view across Fortress Ravine from the top of Lee Fortress. Photo: Paula Kelly.



We will need to tackle these intimidating-looking cliffs tomorrow. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

For now, I thought, let's enjoy the place we were at, so I led the party up a pagoda to the south, to morning tea and a jaw-dropping 360-degree view of Bylong Labyrinth. From 0935 till 0954. Our cameras were very well used here. One could point in any direction and get a great photo.



The morning tea view towards Lee Castle Traverse (centre front), Lee Castle (on the right-hand side) and parts of Growee Range. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

This was as far as we had explored last time, so it was uncharted territory for all of us from here on. After negotiating a few narrow passages between groups of pagodas, we found ourselves on an open ridge with huge views in both directions – north and south. For an even more exhilarating experience, we once again

walked to the edge of the enormous almost vertical grey-orange sandstone cliffs overlooking Fortress Ravine, to peer down into the dark, cold, green rainforest lining the bottom of the gorge, then shifted our gazes up and out to the brilliantly warm sunlit valley of Lee Creek in the distance. Turning the other way, we could see, at the top of the ravine, the tower we were hoping to climb later on today. Wow! At 1013.



Yuri and Paula above Fortress Ravine. In the centre, the island-like tower on the agenda later today can be seen. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

We continued to gain elevation, more steadily now, and twenty minutes later reached the open, rocky, pagoda-bedecked top of Lee Fortress, with more astonishing 360-degree views. The panorama to the south and east, towards the inky depth of Lost Chord Ravine and Crater surrounded by huge intricately eroded bluffs was especially dramatic. From here, we were looking straight across the gorge to Lost Chord Point visited yesterday.



Ivan with Lost Chord Point behind him and Lost Chord Crater below on the left. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Whilst studying Lidar maps at home, I had identified two spots where I thought it should be possible to break through the massive walls encircling Lee Fortress on all sides. Earlier today, we used the first one to climb to the top, and now it was time to find the other one that should enable us to exit. It only took a few minutes of following a narrowing spur down to get to the target area, except for one little problem, the cliffs that I had thought would be negotiable were not.

It was another one of these lucky moments during this trip, because right next to that spot, 15 metres to the west, we found a very steep slot, covered in loose rubble, that appeared to go. We went down, one at a time. After the first 20 metres or so, the slot stopped, but it was possible to jump across it, using a tree for safety, and then make our way down to the bottom. Quite an exercise! From 1056 till 1118 (top).



Paula at the escape route from the fortress. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.

Next, the group headed down into the headwaters of Fortress Ravine, towards the high free-standing knoll, which was the next item on our exploration agenda. Along the way, Ivan reported seeing a Wild Pig in a distance, near the bottom of the descent. The tower we wished to climb was separated from the cliffs bordering the main gorge to the north by a compound slot. The first part was a steep ascent through a

tapering down ramp, which terminated at a tiny saddle. At 1137. From here, it looked like we should be able to head down a 50 cm wide slot that led to a high ledge, then find a way to the bottom (second part). My original plan had been to follow this route for some distance, from where I was hoping we could climb through the walls encircling the tower. However, I realised the high saddle we were standing on might give us a more efficient way straight to the top, without losing any elevation.

I asked the team to have a short break whilst I had a look at that option, whilst Andrew would investigate the slot down. From the saddle, I followed a narrow ledge, which in one place had an uncomfortable level of exposure, to reach a small chimney leading up a five metre high cliff face. I climbed it, but it was not without some difficulty. I then made sure there were no significant obstacles further up. Coming back to the edge of the escarpment, I could communicate with the group and hear the outcome of Andrew's recce. He had been able to squeeze down the slot and continue on the ledge to a tree, where a tape would be needed to finish the descent.

We now had two options of how to continue, and I decided on mine because it would save the group's energy. Looking around, I quickly identified a couple of big healthy trees that would provide good anchor points. On Kevin's suggestion, we set two tapes – one down the tricky ledge and another one within the chimney. It took 15 minutes for the party to accomplish this ascent. From 1150 till 1205. I forgot to mention the views from here into the narrow confines of Fortress Ravine and Lee Creek gorge further on, which were magnificent!



The tapes-assisted ascent to the top of the tower. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The tapes packed away, a further short climb brought us to a small, uneven rocky space on top of the tower, with a panoramic view of both Lost Chord Ravine and Fortress Ravine separated by Lee Fortress. I called this small, elevated, island-like feature completely enclosed by high walls Fortress Tower. We had lunch here from 1219 till 1247.



The view from the top of Fortress Tower. Lost Chord Ravine to the left, Fortress Ravine to the right, Lee Fortress in the middle. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Next, we needed to get down from the top of the tower to the slot leading towards Lost Chord Crater. It would have been possible to go back the way we had come up, but I hoped a better way down on the eastern flank could be found. At first, everything proceeded smoothly as we effortlessly lost 50 metres of elevation, but then, at 1307, our progress was suddenly stopped by a 10 metre drop. The main difficulty was the lack of any anchors nearby. Kevin's 20 metre tape was deployed from the nearest reliable tree, but we could see that it did not reach the bottom. Noticing a small ledge near the end of the tape, I went down to have a closer look. Although the remaining height was only about two metres, the rock face below had no footholds, and I did not feel comfortable doing it unassisted. I was able to secure myself on the ledge against a tree, in order to be able to wait a few minutes whilst the tape was being skillfully extended by Andrew using my 15 metre tape, before finishing the descent. The rest of the group followed, but it took 40 minutes to safely complete this exercise.

Whilst all this was taking place, I contemplated the last couple of hours and realised that we had made a good choice on how to proceed from the small saddle. Had we gone down the slot instead of climbing up through the cliffs, we would have arrived at this spot here. We would then have to tackle a tricky scramble up this slot in order to access the top of Fortress Tower, then come back the way we had just done.



We had to join two tapes to get down from Lee Fortress. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

With no more obstacles below us, we quickly made our way down into the now much wider slot and followed it further to a most remarkable cave, 40 m long by 8 m high by 6 m wide, beautifully adorned with intricately eroded sandstone in dark brown, orange, grey and pink. The group spent from 1355 till 1405 there, taking photos. We were now located on the edge of Lost Chord Crater, and I had passed nearby on at least four occasions, but had never noticed this amazing feature, as it must have been hidden from view by vegetation. I called it Lost Chord Cave.



Ivan and Andrew in the cave. Photo: Paula Kelly.

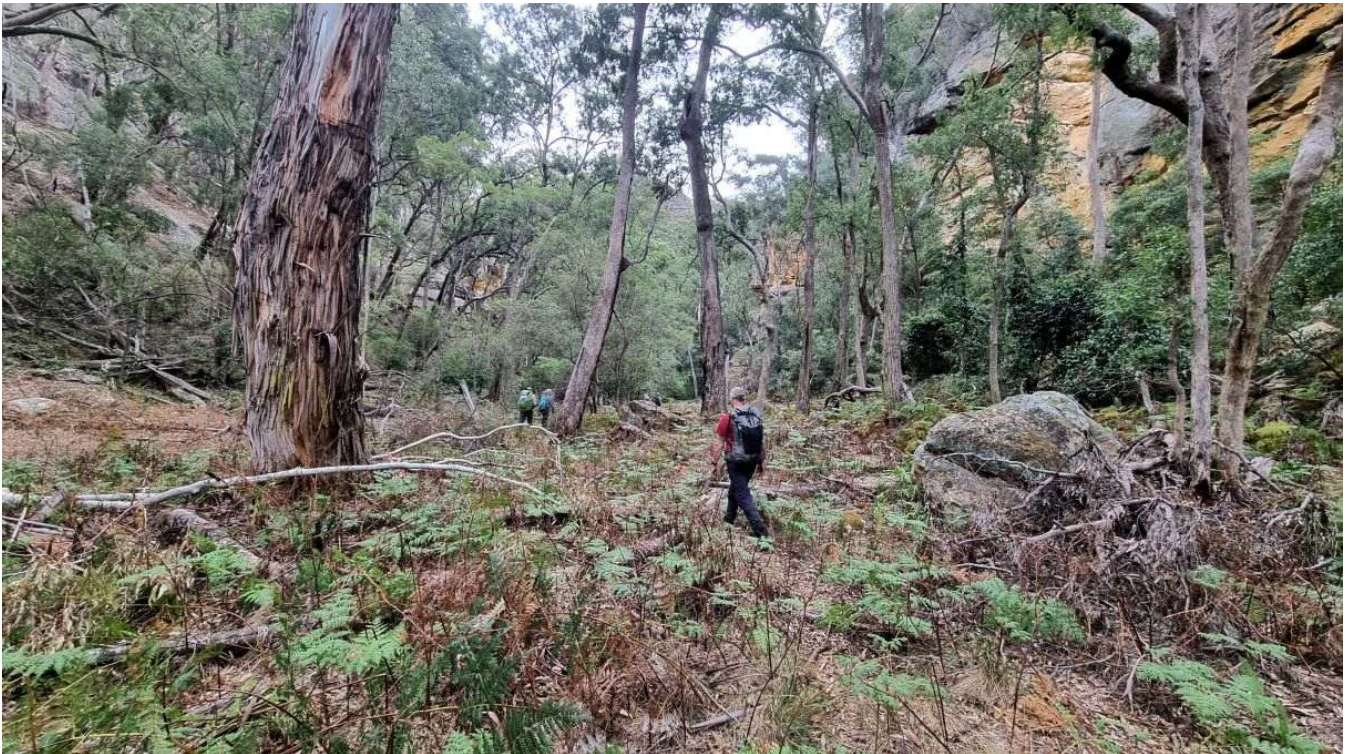


Cave weatherings. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Paula in Lost Chord Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Having left the cave behind, it took us only six more minutes to descend to the bottom of Lost Chord Crater, a large bowl-shaped almost flat area covered in mature trees, Ferns and grasses. It looked dryer than on the previous visits, although this time we only skimmed a corner of it.



The group in Lost Chord Crater. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

As we proceeded down towards the Lost Chord Ravine, the cliffs closed in, and the vegetation changed into the rainforest. At 1426. Tree Ferns, Lianas, ground Ferns and other typical species were all present. The gorge looked rather desiccated, but a few minutes later, we came across the first substantial reservoir of water. The pools continued from here for a long distance downstream. I believe this proved my theory that

the water at the camp comes from this ravine; it then goes underground some distance upstream from the junction with the main gorge and only reappears 100 metres further in the bouldery section of Lee Creek.



Lost Chord Ravine rainforest. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Lianas and bushwalkers in Lost Chord Ravine. Photo: Paula Kelly.

At 1442, the group entered a nearly 100 m long, deep, dark, wet overhang that looked almost like a tunnel. Streams of water ran down its rock walls covered in Mosses and Ferns, in places creating Stalagmite structures as they hit the ground. A notable feature I remembered from other visits.



Ivan, Yuri and Lingling in the tunnel. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Kevin, Andrew, Paula and Yuri in the tunnel. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.

Just where the tunnel ended, was a narrow slot rising south east that I had planned to investigate if we had time. From the distance, it looked like a mysterious deep gash in the vertical cliff face, and I had been intrigued by it on every occasion we passed through, always in a hurry to get somewhere else.

Well, we now did have enough time to have a little investigation, so in we went, up this canyon-like slot, only a couple of metres wide, with Fern-decorated walls and a few rainforest trees gracing the bottom. There were frequent but negotiable debris block-ups. Further up, the ground began to rise steeply, and Kevin, who was in the lead, noted a Rock Wallaby vanishing into a dark cave up ahead. When I approached that spot and looked inside, there was no trace of the animal – there must have been an emergency exit through the rocks at the back. A bit further on, I could see a fairly easy way of climbing up and out to an area where the

slot widened and flattened. We did not have time to continue in that direction as that would be taking us further and further away from the camp, but I thought the slot had a very good chance of going all the way to the tops, towards Lost Chord Point we had visited yesterday. The furthest spot we reached in this canyon was at 1516.



Andrew and Kevin in the slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yuri near the Wallaby cave. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

On the way out, we exited a little bit earlier, at 1531, taking advantage of a ledge running above the main ravine, but soon were forced to get down to the bottom, where we spotted several large pools of water. At 1543. Whilst the rest of the journey downstream was slow due to frequent boulder pile-ups within the creek, it was also easy and scenic. We made it back to the camp by 1612.

Day statistics: total distance 6.9 km; total ascent 660 m.

Day 3 – 17 May 2026

By 0732, the camp had been struck, and our day of adventure and discovery began by following Lee Creek downstream for some distance. Thirteen minutes later, it was time leave the creek bed and start climbing eastwards towards the huge cliffs guarding Tal Tal Range. Our plan was to find a pass to the tops, traverse along them, and finally come back down into Lee Creek near Benjang Gap.



In Lee Creek. Note: no water. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We carried full packs today, and the ascent gradient was steep. Cool morning temperatures and only moderate scrub helped our efforts. By 0817, the party descended into Fortress Ravine, ready to begin our assault on the towering cliffs above. We had been making really good progress; I felt perhaps too good for the challenges that I knew Wollemi would be likely to present very soon.

Next, the party headed up a sharply rising tributary of Fortress Ravine. From my map research, this was the only place within a fairly long distance where a pass to the tops may be found. The maps, as well as our visual examination from the top of Lee Fortress yesterday also showed that getting up to the top of Tal Tal Range was not going to be easy, if at all possible in this vicinity.

A small double overhang with a tunnel connecting both chambers was noted at the start of the climb; it was followed by a single cave, before we had to tackle a very steep chimney, where pack-passing was employed. At 0830. That brought us to a short ledge and past another, beautiful cave with pristine sandy floors. From there, we climbed to a very large, 50 metre long overhang of orange eroded sandstone at the next layer of high cliffs. Clinging to the nearly vertical walls of the cave, were multiple climbing Fig Trees, *Ficus sp.* At 0850.



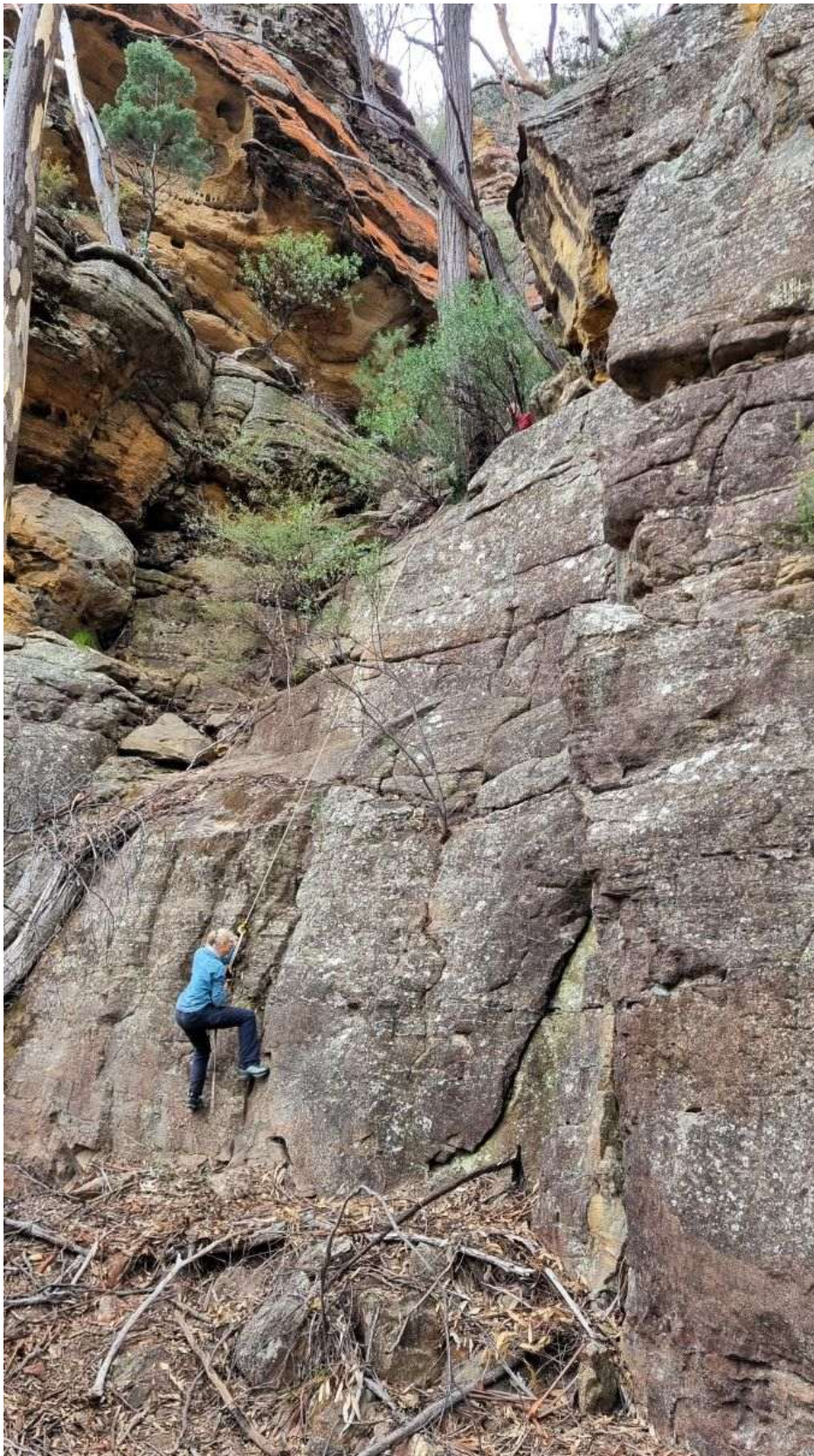
The big overhang we stopped under. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We explored two possible ways forward from here. First, we traversed below the cliffs to the left and soon reached a 10 metre high almost flat and almost vertical wall. I found a ledge on the right-hand side, but it terminated within less than a metre of the exposed part, with unacceptable level of risk required to breach that gap. We then thought we should have a look at the second option that involved turning right. Paula and I went to investigate. We climbed up the main, quickly narrowing gully and were able to proceed for about 100 m to an 8 metre waterfall, which was definitely not negotiable. To the left, a broken tree trunk leaning against the wall could provide access to a high slippery ledge, with more exposed wet surfaces visible above it. I did not think that was a good choice, but was glad we tried. At 0922.

There was nothing else for it but to walk back to the 10 metre high wall and see what we could arrange. At 0931. Four metres from the ground, we noticed a small ledge. If we managed to get to that level, it looked like it may be possible to carefully walk along it and enter a chimney. We could not see if that would provide a way of route, but that was the only option left to us and we had to give it a go.

Andrew left his pack on the ground and with a little push from behind was able to mount the narrow ledge. He continued on it for a few metres, then disappeared from sight but soon emerged on top of the wall. That was great news! But before anyone could get into it, it was necessary to do some landscaping, as Andrew reported both the chimney and the top of the wall were full of loose boulders. Everyone, together with all their gear, stepped well to the side, whilst Andrew systematically dislodged most of the dangerous rocks. Once he was happy with the result, I climbed to the ledge without my pack, also assisted by a push or two. After clambering up the chimney to the top of the wall, I went on a recce to see what it looked like above this obstacle. The ground rose very sharply, but I soon reached a spot where there seemed to be at least two ways up through the next level of cliffs.

We could now commence hauling the backpacks up the 10 metre wall. Andrew propped himself against a large tree and did the pulling, whilst I was busy carrying the packs up the very steep slope to an area about 10 metres away where I was confident that they would not slide down and end up at the bottom of the wall. Everyone had to use the tape to ascent the first part to the ledge and then scramble past Andrew and I, all the time taking care not to dislodge any rubble. It took the team over 50 minutes, till 1023, to complete the climb, but these things cannot be rushed.



Paula tacking the climb. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Twelve minutes after we had resumed our upward march, the tape was redeployed, to safely scale up a five metre long slippery ramp. It was then up and up through the landscape of striking russet Lichen-encrusted sandstone cliffs punctuated by beautiful Grey Gums. A very steep but easily negotiable gully led to a high point for very belated morning tea, from 1052 till 1110, and another knockout view towards Lee Creek gorge and its wonders. Much closer, just across Fortress Ravine, were the enormous buttresses surrounding

Lee Fortress. Twenty-four hours earlier, we stood on top of them, looking at where we were now and wondering how we were going to carry out the climb we had just done.



Lee Fortress cliffs seen across Fortress Ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Our ascent of Tal Tal Range continued as we zig-zagged through clusters of tall pagodas, sometimes squeezing through slots between them and at other times clambering over the tops using available steps and ledges. At 1126, we stopped at a high point to photograph a small arch and...you guessed it...an amazing view; this time, north towards Benjang Gap. The nearby cliffs featured a striking pinnacle resembling a one-eyed monster, who gave us a long stare. Further on, we could see a big rock collapse. I hoped it was not in the area I planned to cross on our way down to the cars; hard to tell at this distance.



Paula staring at the one-eyed monster through her camera. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

1140 saw us finally on top of Tal Tal Range, where I took a shot or two of Labyrinth Peak from yet another, new to me, angle. The country around us, with its low pagodas, tessellated flat rocks, colourful heath and never-ending vistas, was stunningly beautiful. Another great viewpoint was visited at 1151. Did I say, never-ending vistas? Well, next we walked into an area of thick scrub and even wandered off course for a short distance. This was quickly corrected, and the ridge also returned to being open, rocky and scenic.



Top of Tal Tal Range. Photo: Paula Kelly.



I could not resist picking up and holding this beautiful tile for a photo. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

At 1213, the party clocked it at a singularly unremarkable spot height 758 m. Here, we began our descent, gradual at first, into a very deep canyon-like gully on our way that we needed to cross. Nineteen minutes later, it was time to head very steeply down into the ravine below. Through the trees, I could see enormous unbroken cliffs on the opposite side, which made me worry about how we were going to get back up to the top of the range, but I quickly brushed them aside. One step at a time.

Just when we thought we had made it all the way down, a five metre vertical drop stopped us in our tracks, but Paula quickly found a handy chute on the right-hand side that led to the bottom of a deep, narrow gully, a tributary of the one we were heading to. At 1251. Thirteen minutes later, after scrambling down a few big boulders, the group made it to the picturesque rainforest ravine of the main creek. There was no water anywhere in sight. This was very interesting for me. The originally planned 4-day trip (cut short due to bad weather forecast) relied on finding water here, so modifying our plan was another manifestation of good fortune accompanying us on this journey.



Descending to the bottom of the ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

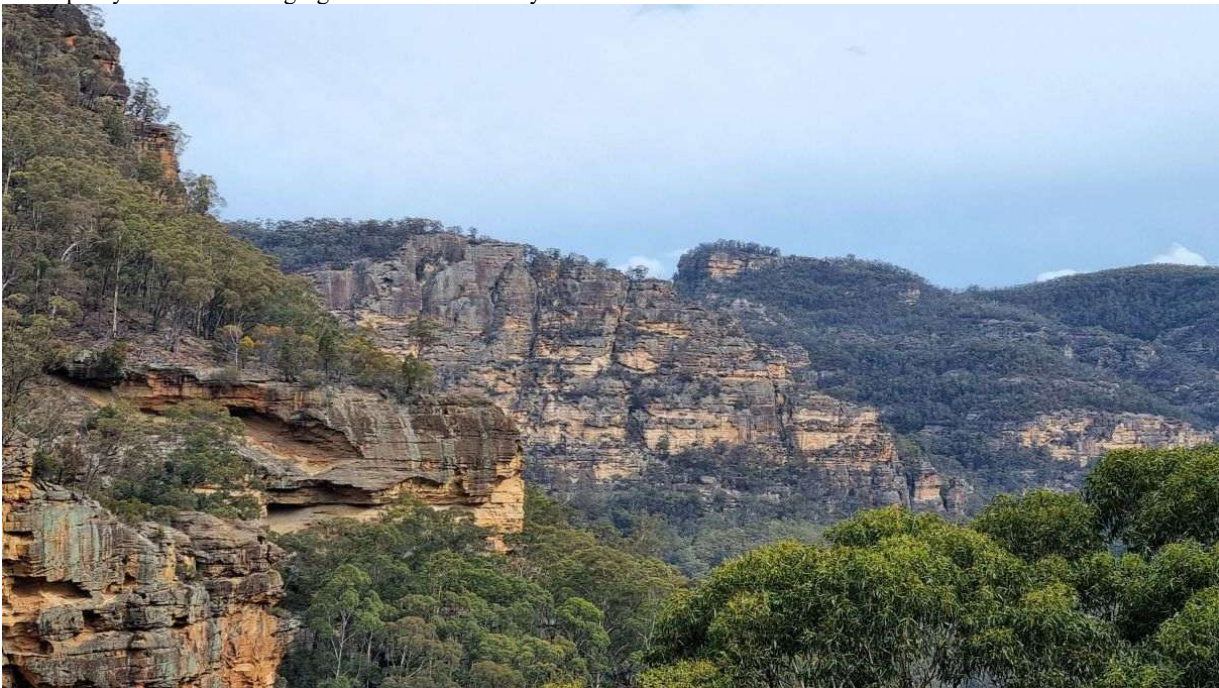
From 1304 till 1330, we enjoyed lunch on the rocks above the dry creek bed. Remembering the impossible-looking walls on the other side of the ravine I had seen when we descended, I thought it was good time to discuss our options from here on. The original plan was to continue downstream for a short distance, where the Lidar map shows a small break in the cliff line to the north; however, I was not at all sure if this would work as in the past two days, a few easier-looking slots appearing on that map ended up being non-negotiable. On the other hand, from our present location, we could see a possible way up to the tops. Upon reflection, I ruled out that idea, because this would take us further away from our eventual destination; we needed to utilise the available daylight as well as we could, given that we had yet to find a pass down from the top of the range towards the cars through wild terrain. The third option was, rather than climbing out of this ravine, to use it for descending all the way down to Lee Creek, thus shortening the Tal Tal Range traverse and eliminating some ups and downs. I said to the guys that, whilst this sounded as a perfectly reasonable and safe choice, my preference was to stick to the original plan but to keep that option as a backup if we got repelled by the impregnable walls on our way out of this ravine.

And so it was that our adventure continued as planned down this very pretty gorge. At first, the cliffs on our right looked completely unscalable, but only after a hundred metres or so, we saw a break on the horizon

line. At 1338, we began our ascent towards it. It proved to be one of the easiest climbs of this trip – scrub-free, gradual, and completely straightforward. It does sound a bit repetitive, but my duty to faithfully record the trip information takes precedence over literary style, so I must inform you that along the way, we stopped to take photos of another spectacular panorama towards the massive cliffs on the western side of Lee Creek gorge leading to Labyrinth Peak. At 1346.



In the pretty rainforest-clad gorge. Photo: Paula Kelly.



Lee Creek gorge view from the ascent. Labyrinth Peak is in the centre right. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

By 1404, after another sustained climb, the party made it back to Tal Tal Range. For a couple of hundred metres from here on, our trail coincided with the routes of the April 2011 and April 2012 trips, when we had used Gowrie Hut as a base for day walks to Lost Chord Crater and other areas.³



Yuri, Paula and Lingling having a quick rest during Tal Tal Range traverse. Photo: Ivan Littlewood.

The ridge here was just as I remembered it – open and dry, dotted with mature *Callitris* trees, as well as Grey Gums, Scribbly Barks and Stringybarks. At 1422, we took photos of a very big old cairn spotted by Kevin; he also noted a cut stump nearby. I was not surprised, because Gowrie Hut and Bylong Trail with its old rural property were only about 1.5 kilometres away to the north east and north respectively.



Kevin at the old cairn. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

³ You can read detailed track notes in *Wollemi Wilderness Adventures – Book 1*, Walk 1.3.

One more grand 360-degree view was recorded at 1429, but the stop had to be short as most of the party had by then reached the views saturation point and, even more importantly, the weather seemed to be changing, making good of the rain forecast for later this afternoon. High on my mind was the looming issue of finding a pass down to Lee Creek within the diminishing daylight hours left in the day.

At 1455, the party reached a high point that signified the beginning of our descent towards Lee Creek. Three hundred and eighty metres of elevation needed to be shed, walking through some wild country. I was hoping to use a small, untested break in the cliffs shown on Lidar maps; Plan B was to go for another unknown pass half a kilometre to the north west, but this would require more time. Given all this, I asked the guys to frequently check my navigation from here on, as we could ill-afford even small errors.

As is often the case, the descent was gradual at first, and our first objective of getting to the edge of the escarpment was achieved without any troubles. At 1516, we stood on the brink of an almost vertical chute, which nevertheless appeared negotiable. We could even see our cars parked in Benjang Gap, about three kilometres away and a very long way down from here.



The view from the edge of the escarpment. Benjang Gap and cars are centre left. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From then on, my main concern was a huge number of loose rocks under foot. I would normally go about this type of descent in smaller groups, like we had done on the first day, but we now simply did not have enough daylight hours for that, so I asked the team to take utmost care with every single step.

We progressed about 150 metres in the next half an hour, but the caution paid off, as everyone made it safely through the steepest part. At 1543, we had a short drink and consolidation stop, before continuing our descent through a much more agreeable terrain and gradient. To my delight, we found the lower slopes literally scrub-free, and by 1616, the party clocked it at the bottom of Lee Creek, virtually at the same spot where we had entered it on Monday.



Kevin, Lingling, Ivan and Paula coming down towards Lee Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



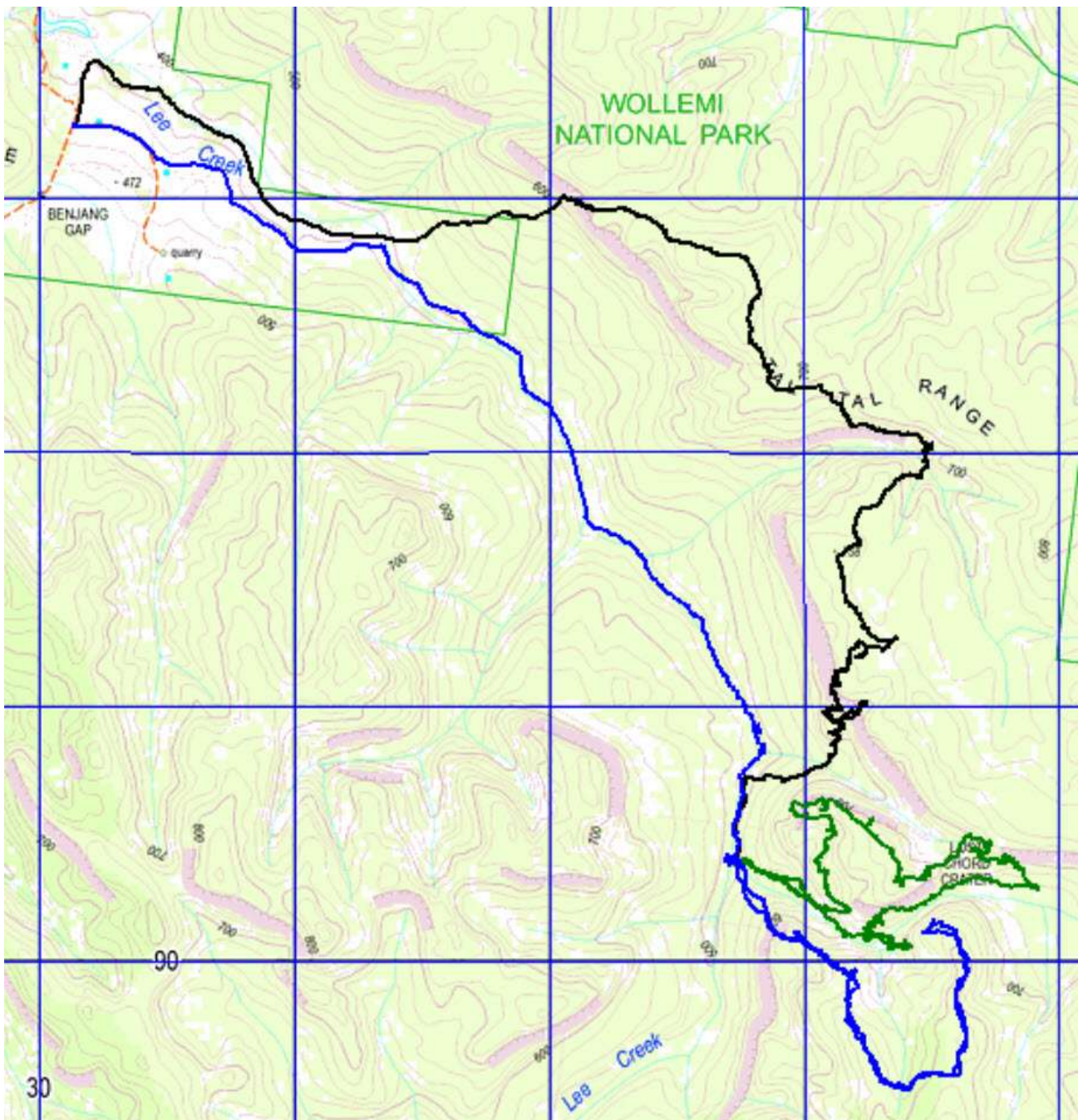
A beautiful Grey Gum on the last stages of the descent. Photo: Paula Kelly.

From here, we still had to walk over 1.5 km, some of it uphill, to Benjang Gap. Several Kangaroos and a single Wombat provided entertainment along the way. We made it back to the cars by 1652.

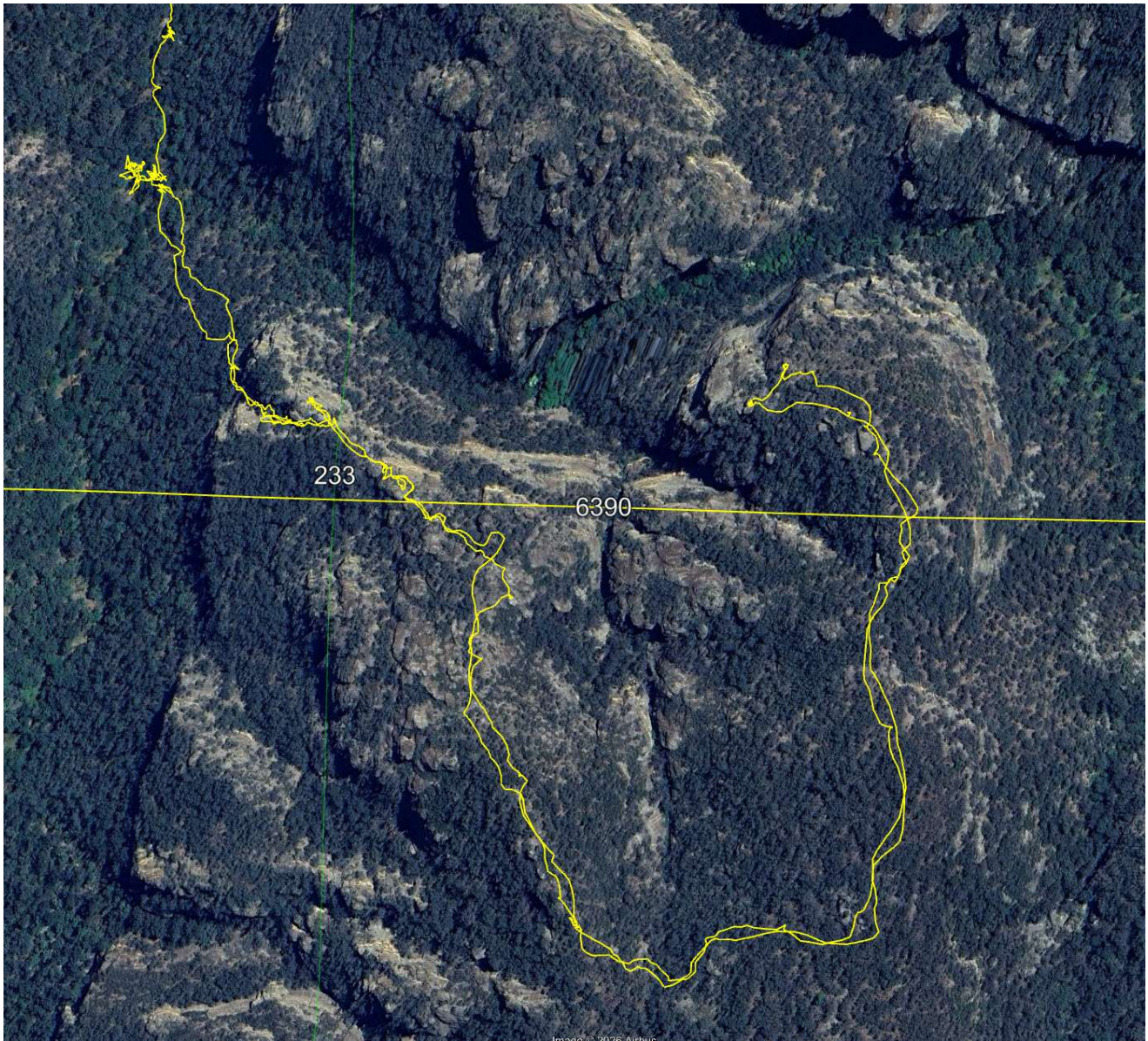
Reflecting on this truly outstanding adventure, I believe there was another side to it that is worth mentioning. I am not at all superstitious, but on many occasions during these three days I felt lucky – the seemingly random events or circumstances resolved themselves in our favour. It was as if our footsteps and decisions were guided by some higher providence. A rational explanation of this is that it was a result of thorough preparation, determination and team spirit. I have experienced similar emotions during other trips, but there was a lot more of it this time. I do not say these things lightly, but this would have to have been one of my top Wollemi walks.

Day statistics: total distance 9.9 km; total ascent 590 m.

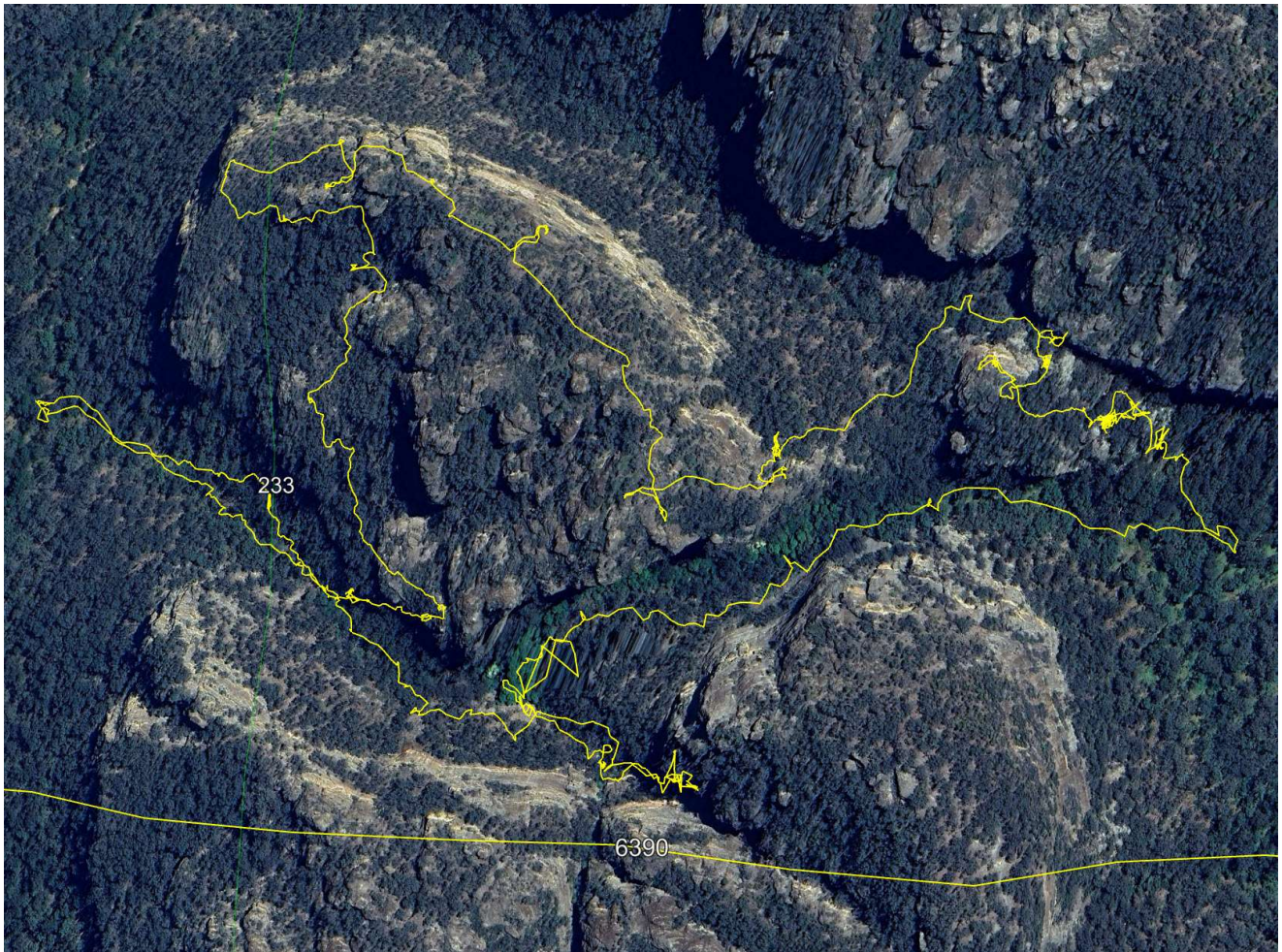
Trip statistics: total distance 27.3 km; total ascent 1,790 m.



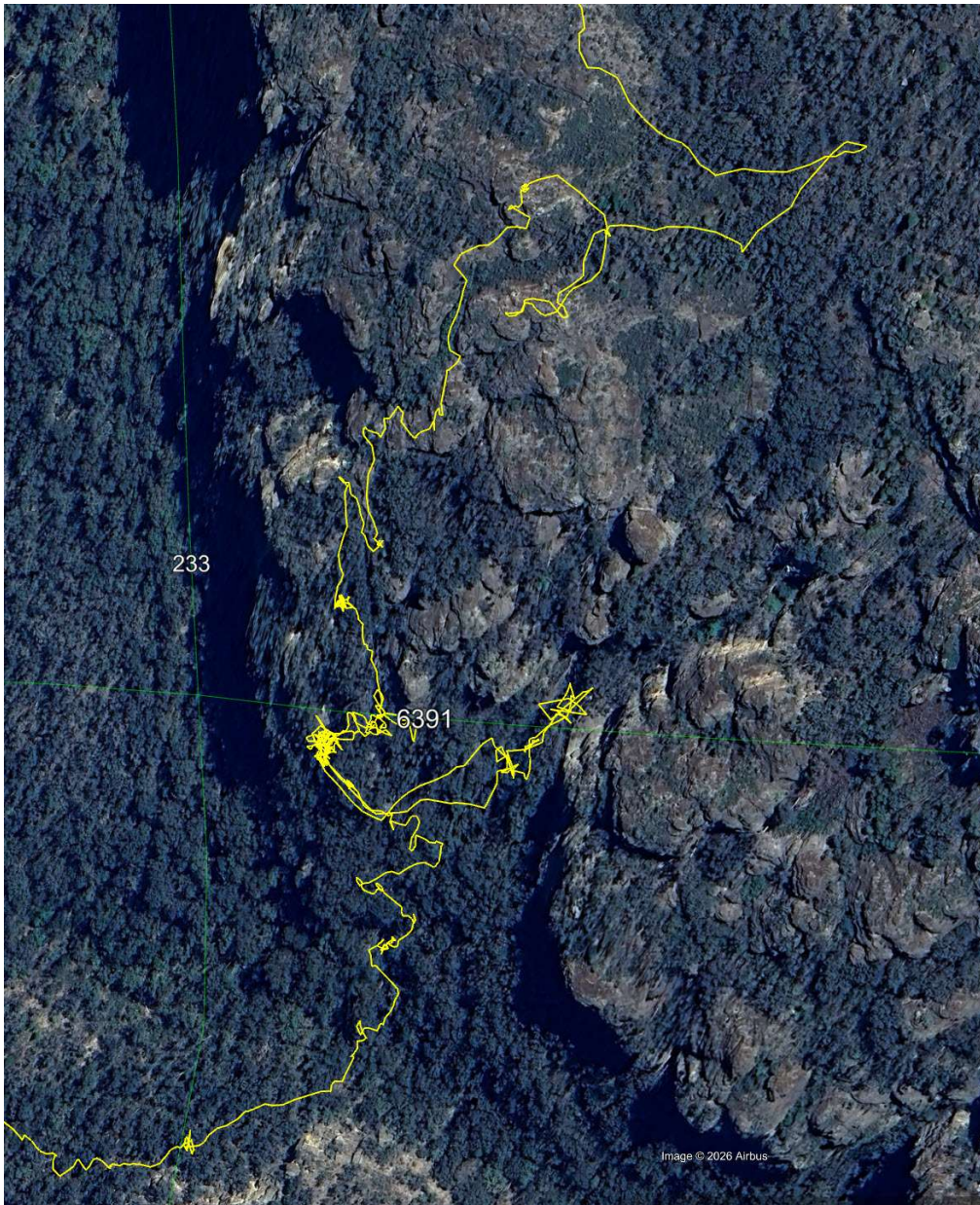
Walk topographic map (Days 1-3). Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Walk aerial map (Day 1, afternoon). Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Walk aerial map (Day 2). Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Walk aerial map (Day 3, morning). Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
Day 1 – 15/05/26			
0831	Cars parked and started walking	3013 9329	435 m
0851	In Lee Creek	3135 9281	395 m
0919	Start of the block-ups	3214 9180	420 m
0938	Steer encounter	3262 9129	450 m
1000-1008	Morning tea	3283 9090	480 m
1030-1045	Collecting water	3275 9058	485 m
1058	Campsite	3274 9041	490 m
1148	Left the campsite	3274 9041	490 m
1206	Bottom of the slot	3286 9015	610 m
1222-1250	Top of the slot, lunch	3297 9009	680 m

1305	Chasm in the ridge	3308 9002	700 m
1336	Left the Castle View Traverse ridge	3329 8955	790 m
1354	Top of spur	3361 8962	815 m
1402	Rock jumble	3362 8993	810 m
1412-1430	Lost Chord Point	3350 9015	740 m
1508	Back on the main ridge	3329 8955	790 m
1554	Top of descent slot	3297 9009	680 m
1612	Bottom of descent slot	3286 9015	610 m
1625	Campsite	3274 9041	490 m
Day 2 – 16/05/26			
0738	Left the campsite	3274 9041	490 m
0753	Lower cliff line	3300 9031	580 m
0803	Bottom of Lost Chord Ravine	3304 9023	575 m
0824	Next cliff line	3314 9020	620 m
0831	Ledge below another cliff line	3318 9020	645 m
0842	Going up the gully	3308 9033	645 m
0902	Ledge below another cliff line	3308 9047	665 m
0905	Crawl section of the ledge	3311 9052	670 m
0920	Viewpoint north	3296 9062	695 m
0926	Viewpoint towards Fortress Ravine	3307 9064	700 m
0935-0954	Viewpoint and morning tea	3306 9060	715 m
1013	Viewpoint	3327 9055	700 m
1033	Top of Lee Fortress, viewpoint	3338 9030	760 m
1056-1118	Slot down	3347 9035	720 m
1137	Saddle	3372 9047	735 m
1150-1205	Tapes-assisted ascent (top)	3372 9045	750 m
1219-1247	Top of Fortress Tower, lunch	3368 9044	760 m
1307-1347	Tape-assisted descent (bottom)	3378 9039	710 m
1355-1405	Lost Chord Cave	3381 9041	686 m
1411	Lost Chord Crater	3391 9030	660 m
1426	Rainforest in the headwaters of Lost Chord Ravine	3360 9031	650 m
1442	Tunnel-like overhang	3330 9019	614 m
1452	End of the tunnel, start of the slot canyon	3326 9012	610 m
1516	The furthest spot reached in the slot canyon	3342 9006	665 m
1531	Exited slot canyon	3326 9010	630 m
1543	Bottom of Lost Chord Ravine, water pools	3312 9015	600 m
1612	Campsite	3274 9041	490 m
Day 3 – 17/05/26			
0732	Left the campsite	3274 9041	490 m
0817	In Fortress Ravine	3310 9081	560 m
0830	Chimney, pack-passing	3313 9087	600 m
0850	Big overhang	3313 9094	625 m
0922	Waterfall in the main gully	3324 9102	650 m
0931-1023	Tape-assisted ascent (bottom)	3309 9098	640 m
1035	Tape-assisted ascent (bottom)	3312 9099	670 m
1052-1110	Viewpoint and morning tea	3311 9106	700 m

1126	Viewpoint	3313 9114	720 m
1140	Top of Tal Tal Range	3321 9125	750 m
1151	Viewpoint	3322 9120	752 m
1213	Spot height 758 m	3313 9158	758 m
1232	Start of the descent	3332 9185	730 m
1251	Bottom of the tributary gully	3346 9191	665 m
1304-1330	Main ravine, lunch	3349 9202	660 m
1338	Left the ravine, heading up	3338 9207	655 m
1346	Viewpoint along the pass	3318 9212	680 m
1404	Back on Tal Tal Range	3306 9226	710 m
1422	Old cairn	3285 9232	735 m
1429	Viewpoint	3271 9238	760 m
1455	Start of Lee Creek descent	3276 9277	775 m
1516	Edge of the escarpment	3220 9295	700 m
1543	Below the big cliffs	3205 9300	620 m
1616	In Lee Creek	3135 9281	395 m
1652	Cars	3013 9329	435 m