

Walk

Wollemi National Park: Draped Chamber, Molten Rock, Anthill Cave, and Thespian Cave

Leader

Yuri Bolotin

Maps

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Walk Description and Route

Park one car at GR 713 920 on Mountain Lagoon Road and drive another to GR 724 931. From the second car, walk north west on a spur and descend below the cliffs overlooking Tootie Creek. Traverse south, entering some gullies along the way, till GR 707 925, then walk to the first car and complete the shuffle. 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

6 September 2026.

The Party

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Yidan Saladine, Mason Browne, Richard Schneider, 4.

The Weather

A beautiful, warm, mostly sunny spring day with light winds. Temperature range 13 to 22 degrees C.

Track Notes

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

Having met at Grumpy Baker before the walk, we realised our vehicles today consisted of my car and Richard's motorbike. The bike was parked on Mountain Lagoon Road, and all participants came with me in my car to the walk starting point a kilometre and a half further. I now had a ride on the back of Richard's bike to look forward to at the end of today's adventure. Not an entirely new thing, but something I had not experienced for a very long time.

At 0830, we climbed a low spur bordering the road and picked our way north west around the headwaters of Easy Creek. It was indeed an easy traverse, with a few small caves along the way and many spring wildflowers embellishing this pleasant landscape. I noted Slender Sun Orchid, *Thelymitra paciflora*; Large Wedge-pea, *Gompholobium grandiflorum*; Black-Eyed Susan, *Tetralthea bauerifolia*, Bitter Pea, *Daviesia latifolia*, and probably missed many others.

Twenty-three minutes later, the party mounted Easy Ridge, a long spur that terminates above Tootie Creek with several wonderful geological sites we had found over the last couple of years, including Palette Wall

and Wayang Caves. There was an old timbergetting trail here, running along the tops, but it was not for us, because we were hoping to find some new wonderful sites today.

Our journey continued down an adjacent spur in a northwesterly direction until 0907, when we slid off it and commenced a steep descent into a deep gully to our left. Straight away, distant views of Tootie Creek cliffs appeared through the surrounding trees. A small cave with a very unusual animal-shaped Gypsum-white formation caught our attention next. It took nineteen minutes to reach the bottom of the ravine, where it was shady and felt quite a few degrees cooler compared to the ridges. We did not see any flowing water at this point, but it appeared very soon after we made our way downstream. Here, I photographed a gorgeous cluster of flowering Sydney Rock Orchids, *Thelychiton speciosus*.



Sydney Rock Orchids, *Thelychiton speciosus*. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



An unusual formation in a cave. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

Two hundred metres or so further, we left the gully to explore a string of overhangs to our west and immediately came to a small but beautifully decorated sandstone wall, hopefully, a precursor of more things to come. Indeed, within 30 metres from there, the group stopped to look at a very attractive-looking overhang guarded by a splendid Angophora tree, about ten meters above us. I could not resist the temptation to investigate but found the climb quite tricky. Having made it to the cave, I thought it would be too much for the other team members, so I yelled back asking them to wait for me at the bottom. I regret it now as what I saw would have been certainly worth an extra effort, especially as it was possible to set up a tape for the tricky section. The cave was an intimate space, about 10 metres across and 5 metres deep, with raked floor. It was adorned with overlapping hanging sheets of sandstone, brown, beige, white, black orange, green (Lichen) that beautifully draped this small room all around, like elaborate fabric curtains. Some of the pieces contained Liesegang Rings, and there was a large honeycombs panel above the entrance. I called this place Draped Chamber. From 0948 till 0956.



Draped Chamber from below. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Draped Chamber detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Draped Chamber detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

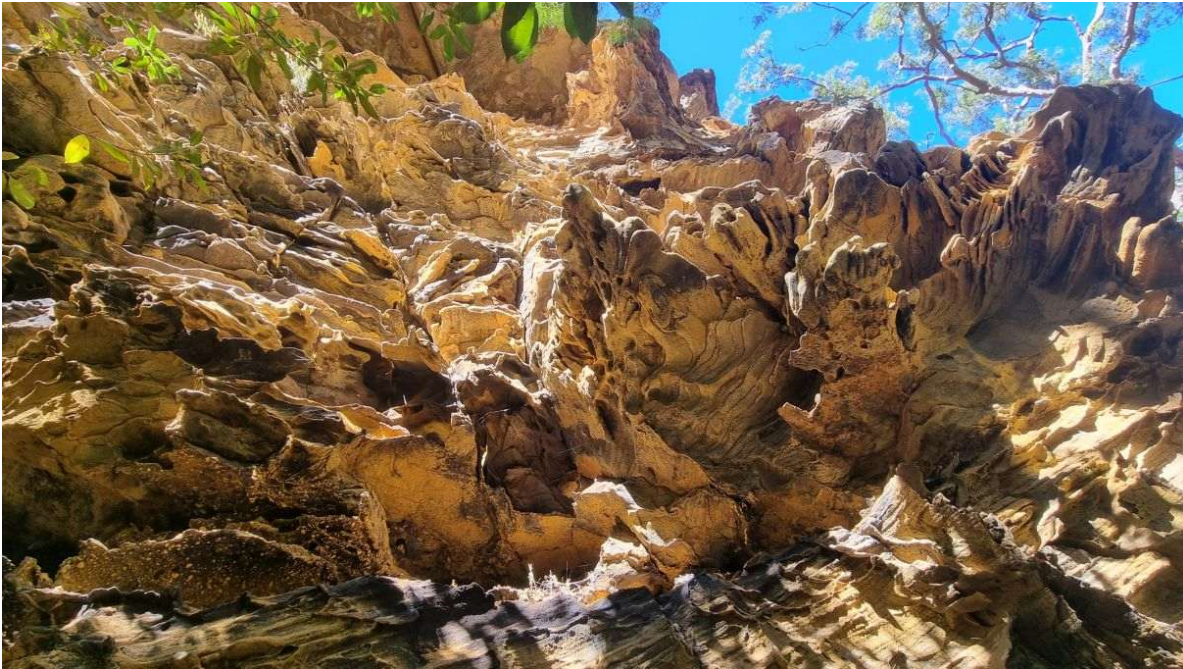
After taking the photos, I scrambled back down to re-join the group, and we proceeded down to Tootie Creek, where we arrived for morning tea on the edge of a deep blue pool, from 1010 till 1020.

Resuming, we walked upstream along the creek in the rainforest for about 300 m. I had originally intended to check some cliff lines on the opposite side, but they were not visible from the bottom, and no surprise, as the map check revealed they were 100 vertical metres higher, and the scrub on that side looked pretty thick. After giving it another consideration, I decided, taking into the account the on-site conditions, to leave that exploration for another time, and to perhaps do it coming from the west. So, instead, we left Tootie Creek (at 1041) and headed up towards the cliff line to our south east, reaching it nine minutes later.

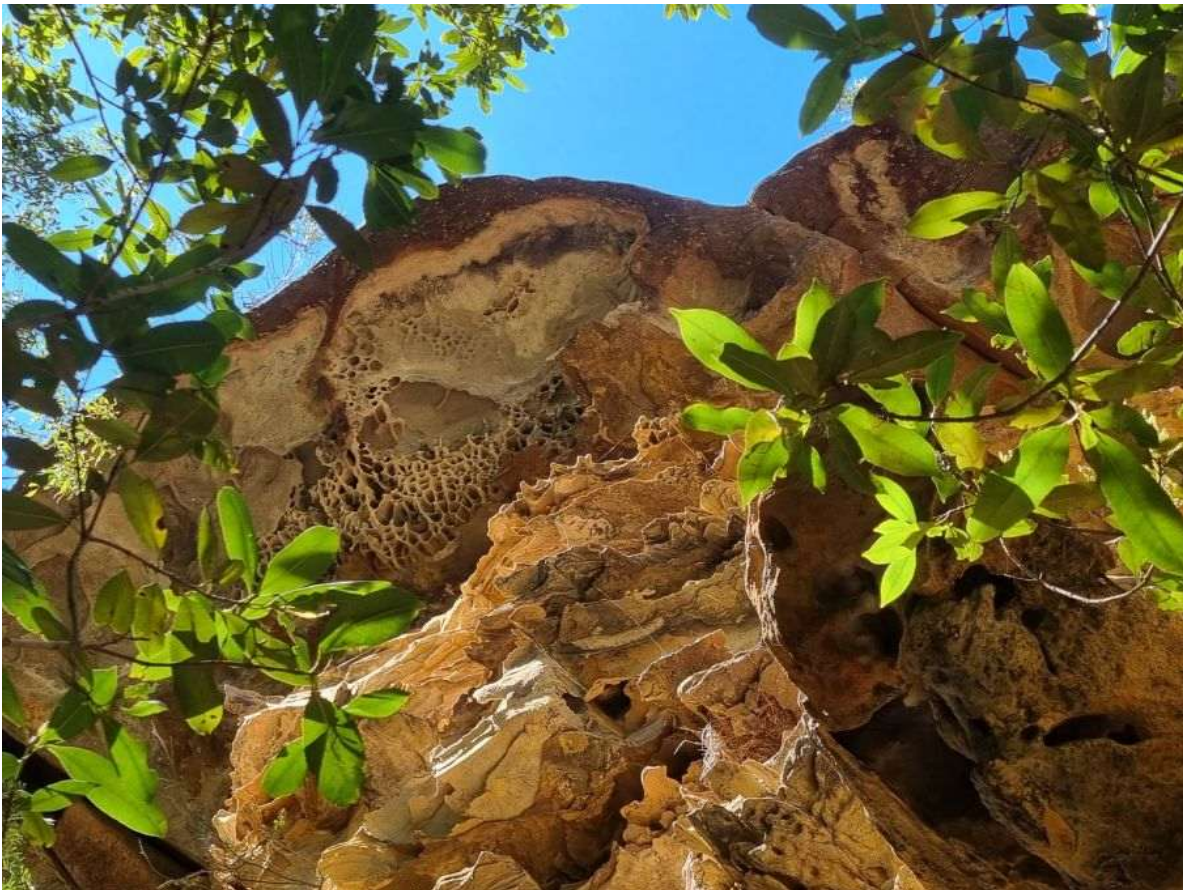


Yidan, Mason and Yuri in Tootie Creek. Photo: Richard Schneider.

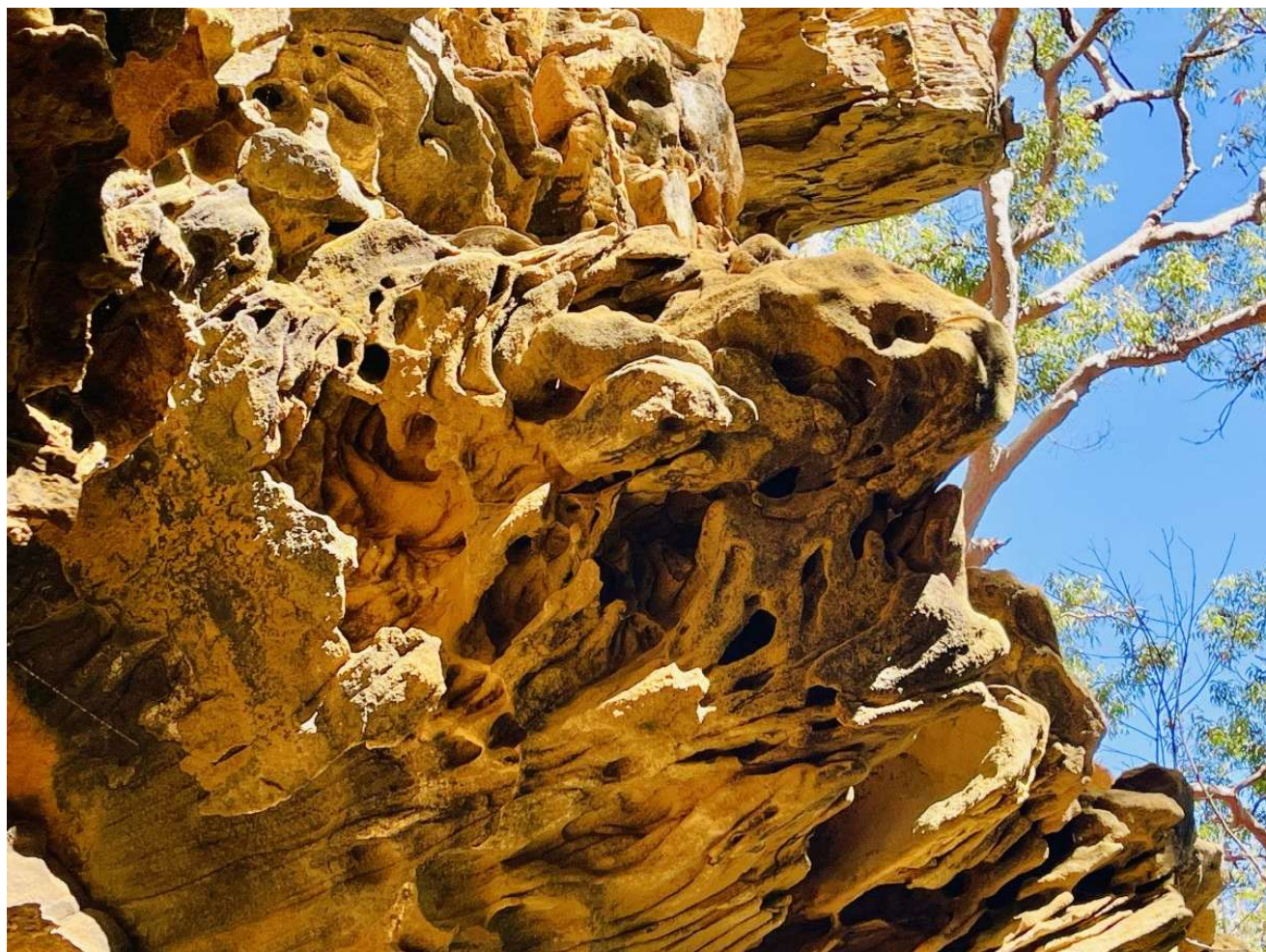
The bluffs here looked quite dull, just flat brown rock, but, when exploring, you learn to take it all as it comes. What came next, was a side gully with a very pretty 15-20 m high waterfall, decorated by Ferns, nicely running with water. At 1112. This was quickly followed by a rock wall, only about 15 m long, of exquisitely eroded and wonderfully illuminated by the sun sandstone, displaying mind-boggling complexity of random shapes, patterns, and overlapping silhouettes. It appeared to be a liquid form rather than made of stone. Well above this rock, and definitely out of our reach, we could see a canopy roof layer adorned with beautiful tafoni. I called this remarkable feature Molten Rock. At 1117.



Molten Rock. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Tafoni panels form Molten Rock canopy roof. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Molten Rock detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

The journey continued on a good, level ledge underneath the expanses of flat brown rock, with a few little caves appearing from time to time. Two curious spheroidal weathering shapes were photographed here. At 1141, the party crossed another side gully with a running waterfall. Immediately after exiting that ravine, we stopped in our tracks, struck by the beauty of what appeared in front of us – a long, narrow, dry, dramatically lit overhang with a huge Anthill in the middle of it, almost touching the low roof. I have seen many caves and many Anthills, but cannot recall both of these things together. There were interesting rock formations here as well, and also, in a niche at the far end of it, a big Lyrebird nest! Wow! This overhang has flat floors and measures about 15 m long, 5 m wide and 3 m high. I called it Anthill Cave. From 1142 till 1150. Just around the corner from here, the party passed another, much smaller cave that would also be suitable as an occupation shelter, but no traces of previous habitation were found in either of these places.



Mason in Anthill Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Lyrebird nest in Anthill Cave. Photo: Mason Browne.



Richard in Anthill Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We were definitely on a roll now, as only seventeen minutes later we came to another stunning cave. That one featured a brilliant variety of sandstone formations stretched over its 30 metre length. Like a gripping, immersive story or a play, it had several distinct but interlinked sections. The first one was a deep overhang, slightly above our heads, that looked like a theatrical stage with curtains just opened and revealing several layers of stone cutout decorations separated by generous spaces, occupying the entire depth of the stage. Bright sunlight illuminated some of the layers, leaving others in dramatic shadow. The next part had several honeycomb panels followed by a wall of golden intertwined Liesegang Rings that had the appearance of a heavy fabric drape or stage curtain. The penultimate section was a mini-tunnel, just big enough to squeeze through with the pack off, which enabled one to leave this theatrical set of a cave and come out on a ledge above the final, dark, black and grey overhang adorned with phantasmagorical heads. It may well be due to the unspoken influence of Mason, a theatre stage and costume designer, who was a member of the team today, that I would like to call this amazing feature Thespian Cave. We spent 13 minutes taking it all in.



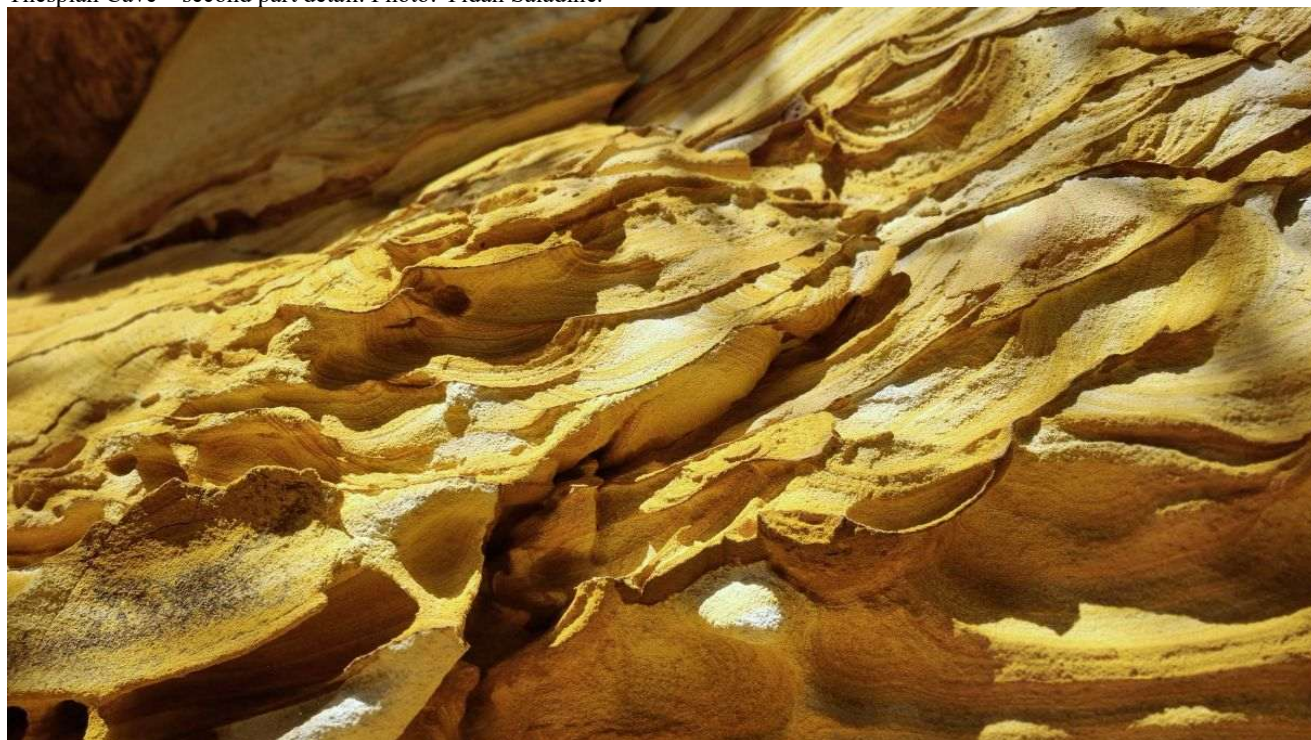
Thespian Cave - first part. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



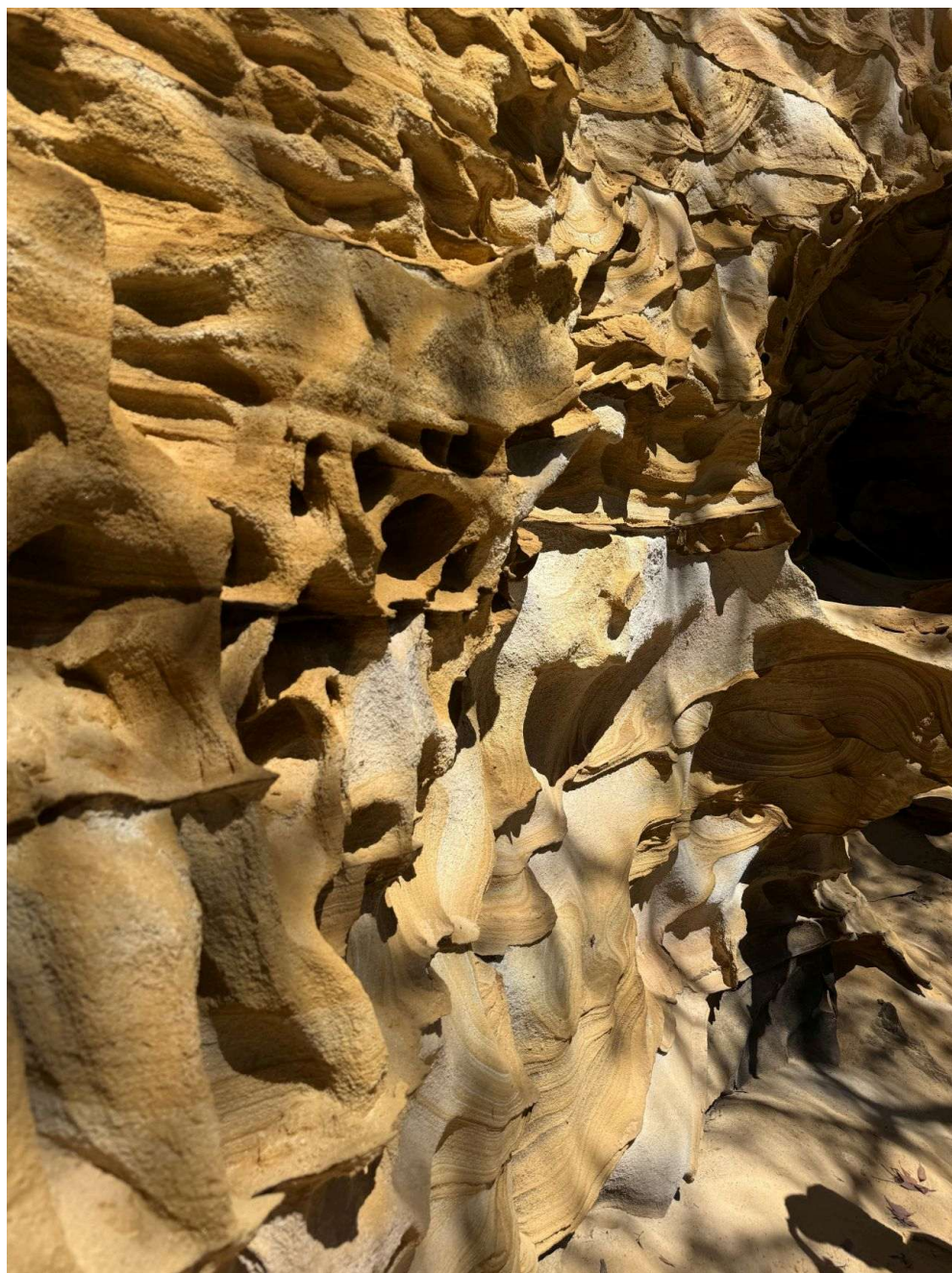
Thespian Cave – first part detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Thespian Cave – second part detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



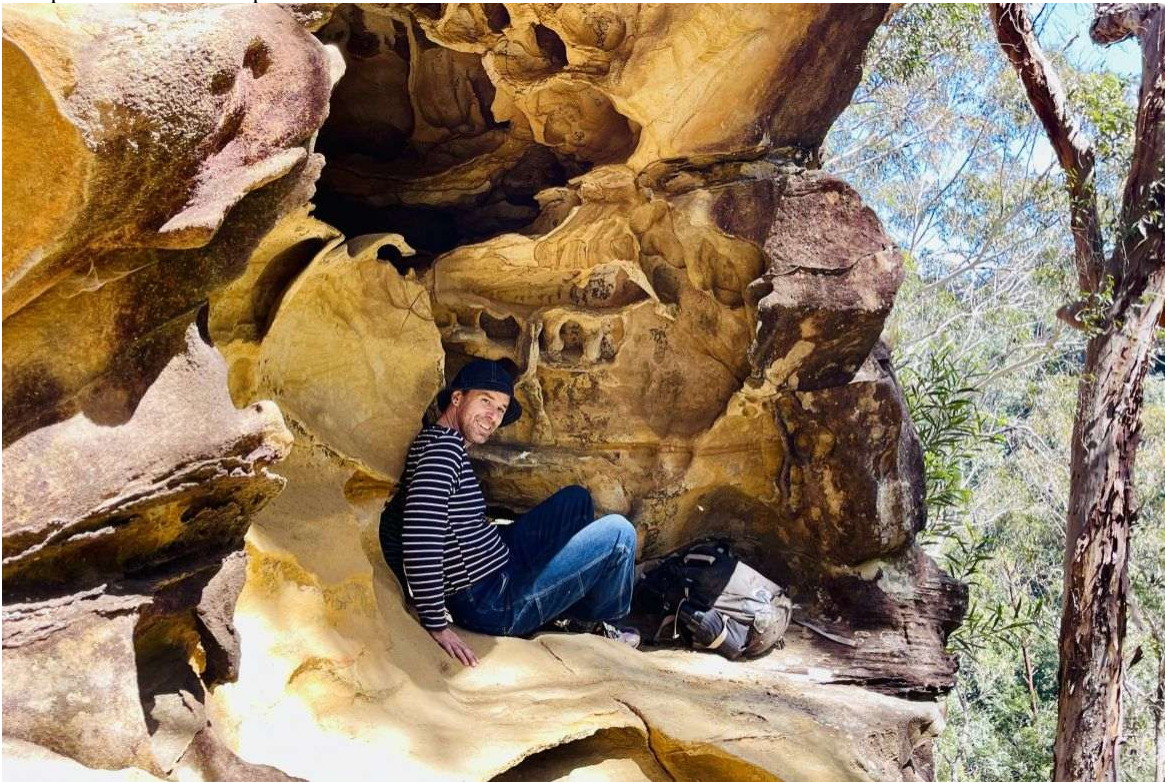
Thespian Cave – second part detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Thespian Cave – second part detail. Photo: Mason Browne.



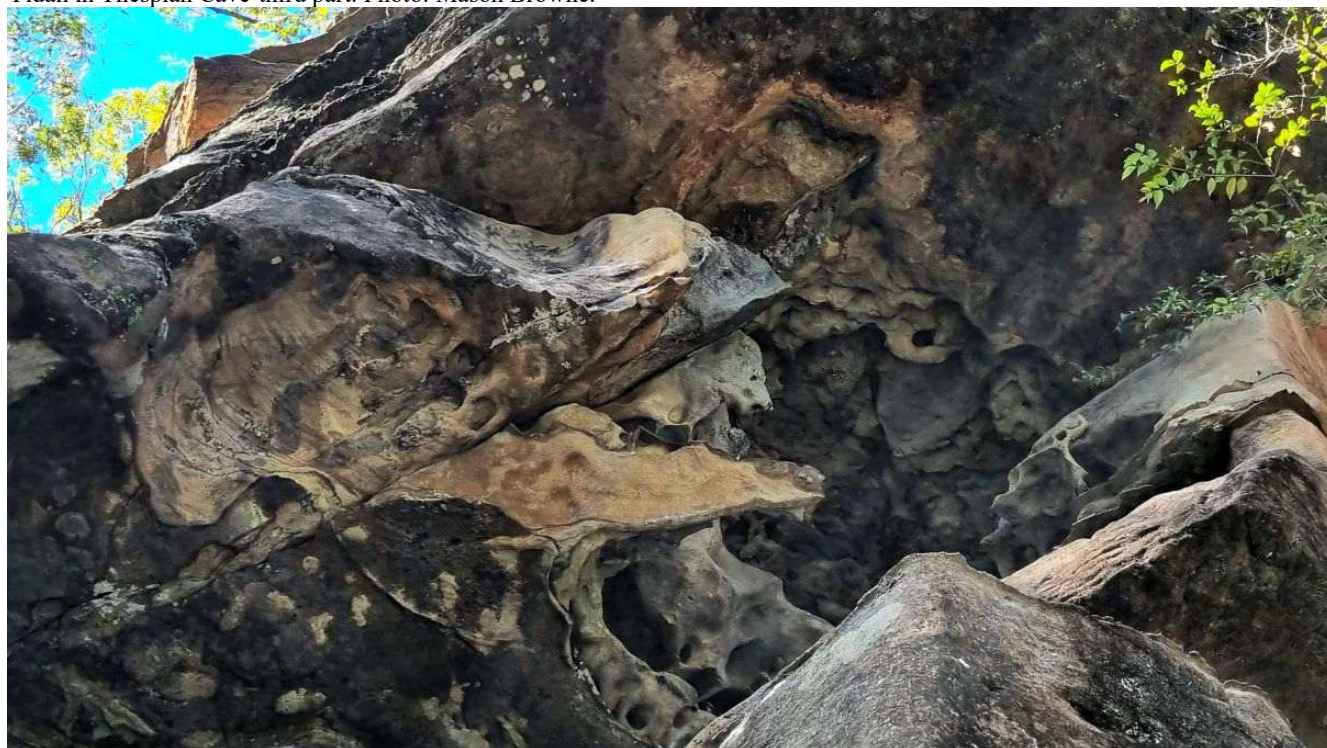
Thespian Cave – second part detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Mason at Thespian Cave – third part. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Yidan in Thespian Cave-third part. Photo: Mason Browne.



Thespian Cave-fourth part. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The Wollemi wonders continued, as only a few minutes after we managed to tear ourselves away from Thespian Cave, two huge Wedge-tailed Eagles, *Aquila audax*, appeared in sight, circling the currents very high above our heads.

Continuing our traverse, the group now entered Potos Creek gully and stopped for lunch in a shady spot on the edge of the rainforest. From 1232 till 1246. During lunch, I pondered the fact that 40 vertical metres away from us, at the next layer of cliffs, was the amazing Potos Wall. I decided not to visit it on this occasion, as it would take some effort and time to get there and back through the high bluffs above us; also, I thought the team was risking a serious case of sensory overload. But, for any intending explorers following these track notes, it would be a very worthwhile excursion. Here is my description of Potos Wall from the walk of 2 June 2021,

...we circled around a jutting bluff and quickly arrived at Potos Wall, a huge expanse of deeply weathered sandstone, its multiple levels jutting out in a riot of jagged shapes and colours. Young bright green epicormic shoots of nearby Gum trees beautifully juxtaposed against the ancient rock of the wall, eaten away by time, chemical decomposition, and water. The wall measures about 50 m in length and 30 m in height.¹

After lunch, the team entered a beautiful rainforest of Potos Creek, which was running very well, stopping for a moment or two to photograph a low overhang adorned with stalactites and a single stalagmite. At 1303.

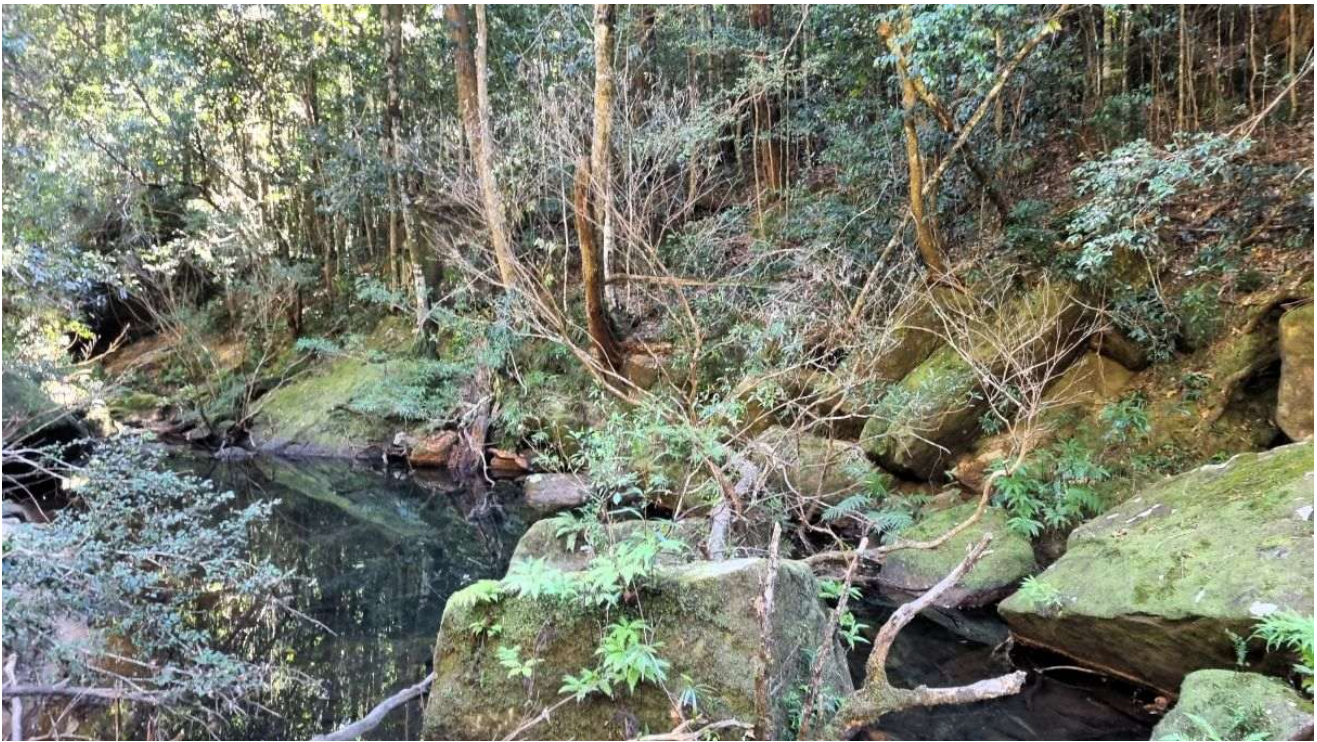


Stalactites in a Potos Creek cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Next, seeking an easier way of route, we made a short descent back to the bottom of Tootie Creek. At 1317, GR 7086 9281, 405 m. The going here was not much faster, mostly due to fallen trees barricading our way, but we only needed to continue for a very short distance before entering Back Creek² at 1322. Here, the party was greeted by a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, *Zanda funerea*. We heard their shrieks before we saw them, and they stayed with us, or rather above us, for the next 20-25 minutes.

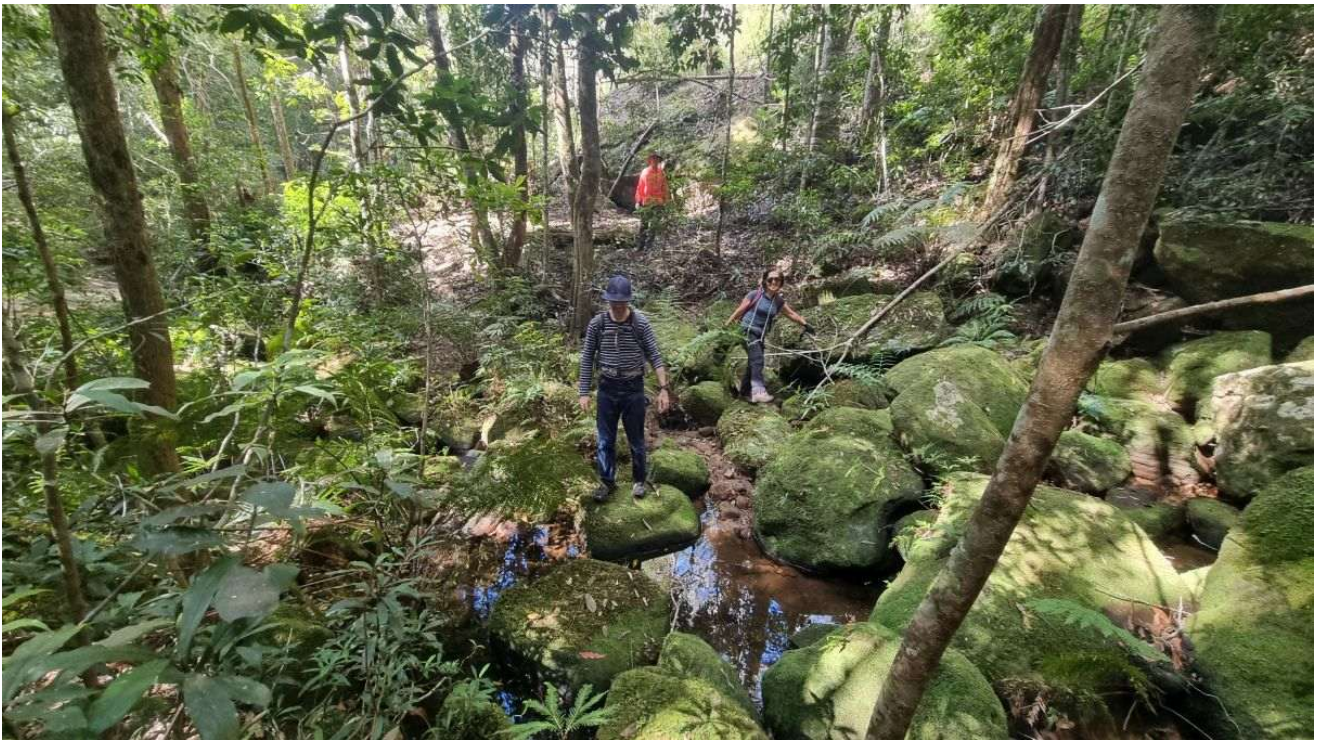
¹ You can find full report, with map and photos, in *Wollemi National Park: Walks from Bilpin – Book 2*; Walk 2.3.

² I called it this in 2019 as its headwaters are at the back of our place in Bilpin.



Tootie Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Back Creek is a tiny shallow gully at its headwaters, but it becomes a true canyon about half a kilometre before its junction with Tootie Creek. I had walked it several times before, but always downstream. Today, the group was going to explore it in the upstream direction. First, we scrambled steeply up the western side, to reach the Cave of Rings, at 1338. It is a small overhang adorned with beautiful Liesegang Ring formations, although I must admit, it appeared to be a lot duller today than on the previous visit two years ago. It could have something to do with the lighting, or was it a case of cave saturation after all the amazing caves we had seen today?



The party in Back Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

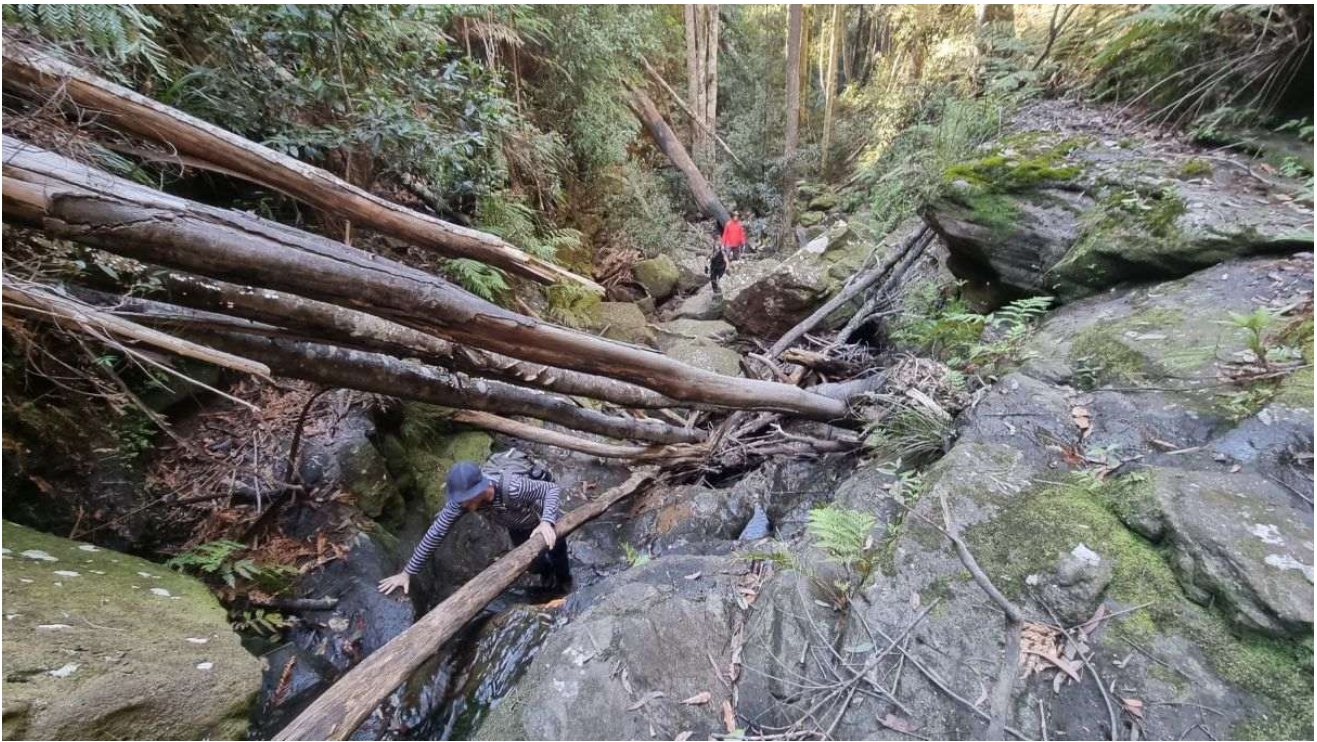


The Cave of Rings. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From the Cave of Rings, we traversed above the creek for a short while before the ledge stopped, forcing us to get back down to the bottom of the canyon, underneath high walls of dark brown sandstone, adorned with emerald green Ferns. At 1351, the party negotiated a slippery waterfall by scrambling steeply above it on the left-hand side. A beautifully sunlit eroded cave was our extra reward at the top. Twenty minutes later, we climbed right through the middle of the second waterfall, taking extreme care on slippery rocks.



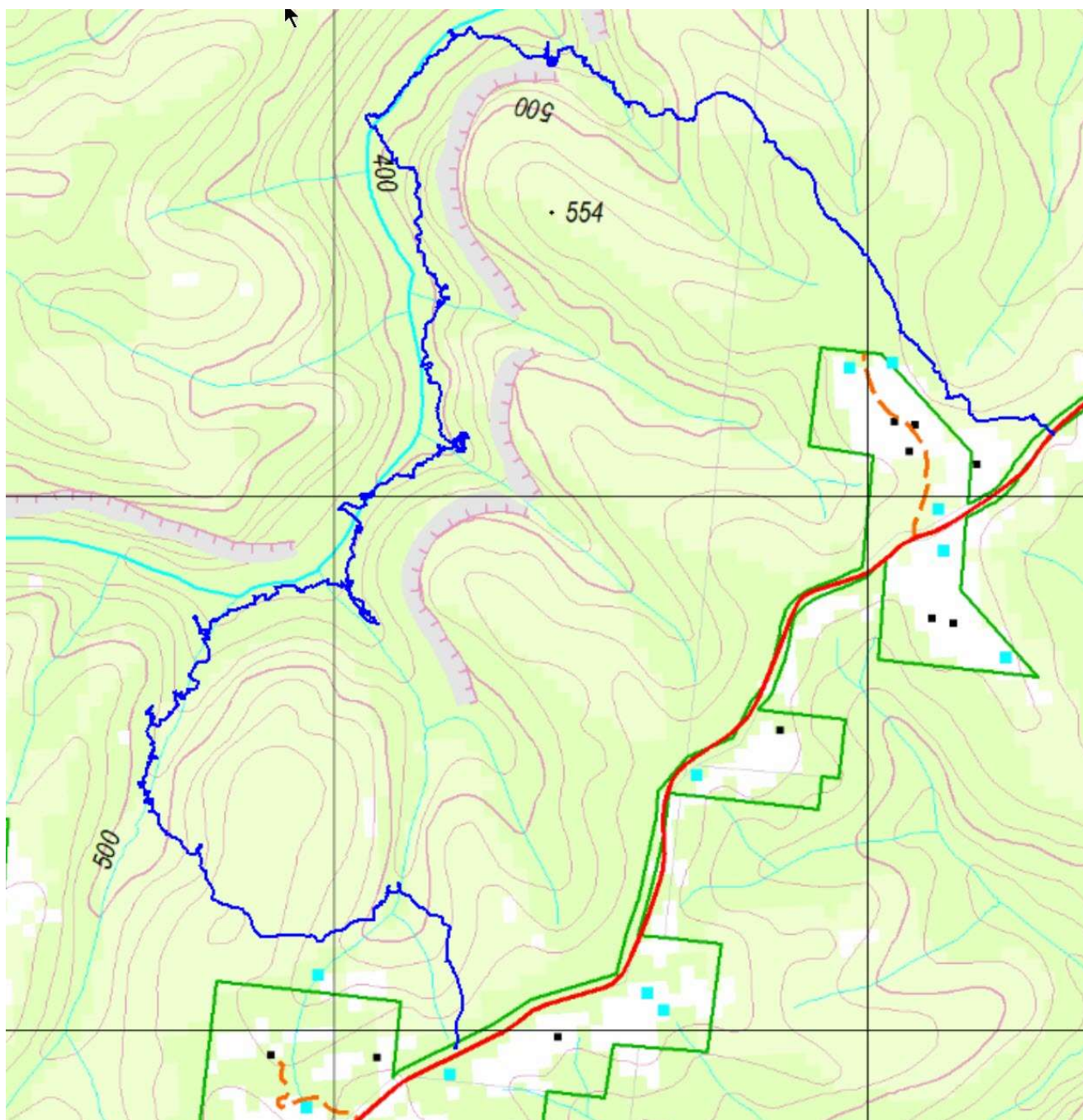
Mason negotiating the second waterfall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The party in the second waterfall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By 1426, the group was above the canyon constriction and began climbing out on the ridge on the eastern side. It was a hot ascent up a steep west-facing slope, and we made it to the top twenty-six minutes later. There was an old timber trail here, which runs along the ridge through a private property. We had to go around, descending into a deep, wet, scrubby gully (headwaters of Potos Creek we had crossed earlier today near its junction with Tootie Creek). The bottom of it was reached at 1515. That brought us back to the elevation that was lower than the start of our exit from Back Creek. Another hot and steep ascent followed, finally ending on Mountain Lagoon Road, at 1538. A short but enjoyable motorbike ride with Richard to my car was a nice ending to today's bushwalking adventure. We completed the shuffle ten minutes later.

Trip statistics: total distance 6.8 km; total ascent 390m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0825	Vehicle parked at the end of the walk	GR 7123 9197	570 m
0830	Car parked at the start of the walk and started walking	GR 7235 9312	545 m
0853	Top of Easy Ridge	GR 7200 9345	572 m
0907	Start of spur descent	GR 7174 9375	551 m
0926	Bottom of the ravine	GR 7156 9374	460 m
0948-0956	Draped Chamber	GR 7142 9382	440 m
1010-1020	Morning tea at Tootie Creek	GR 7123 9386	390 m
1041	Left Tootie Creek	GR 7108 9369	392 m
1050	At cliff line	GR 7116 9361	435 m

1112	Waterfall on a side gully	GR 7121 9338	395 m
1117	Molten Rock	GR 7119 9335	406 m
1141	Waterfall on a side gully	GR 7123 9309	402 m
1142-1150	Anthill Cave	GR 7121 9308	405 m
1207-1220	Thespian Cave	GR 7106 9300	405 m
1232-1246	Lunch	GR 7104 9284	420 m
	Potos Wall (not visited today)	GR 7106 9282	458 m
1303	Potos Creek	GR 7103 9284	415 m
1317	Tootie Creek	GR 7086 9281	405 m
1322	Back Creek	GR 7082 9279	410 m
1338	Cave of Rings	GR 7076 9275	435 m
1351	Waterfall	GR 7072 9263	450 m
1411	Waterfall	GR 7067 9251	470 m
1426	Above the constriction and started to climb out	GR 7065 9243	490 m
1452	Top of the ridge, old trail	GR 7083 9223	575 m
1515	Bottom of the gully	GR 7112 9226	485 m
1538	At the first vehicle	GR 7123 9197	570 m
1548	Shuffle completed	GR 7123 9197	570 m