

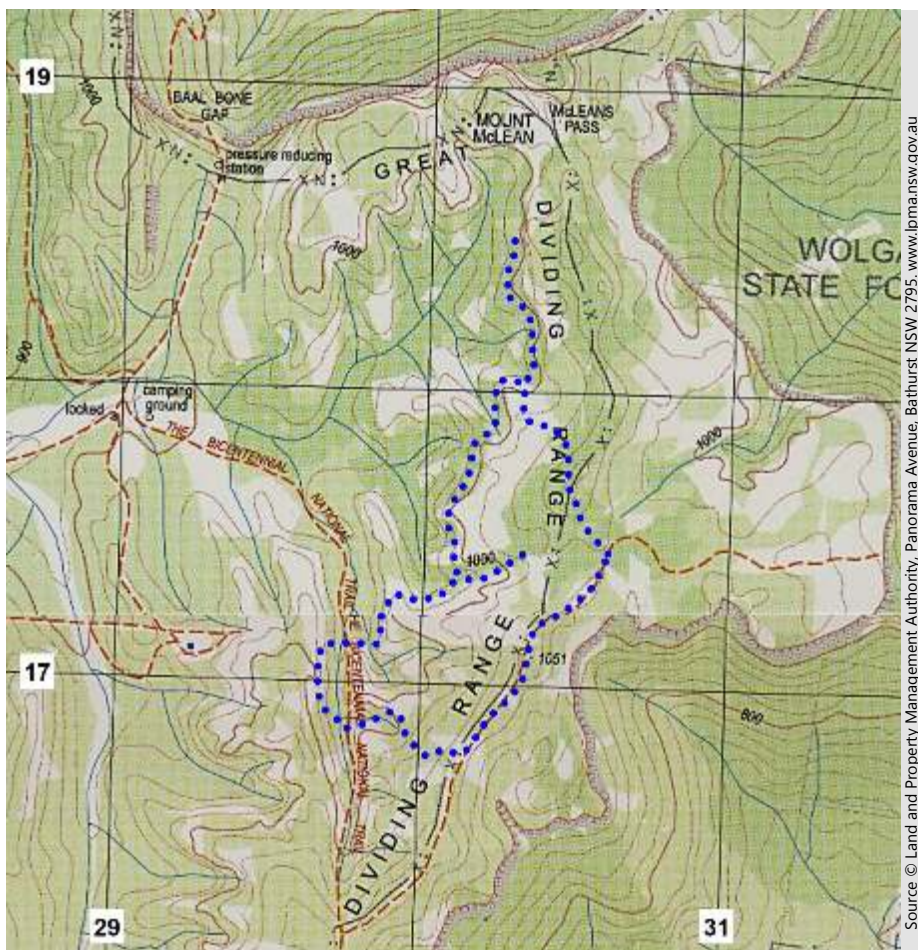
## 5.4 Tara Slot

### MAPS ETC.

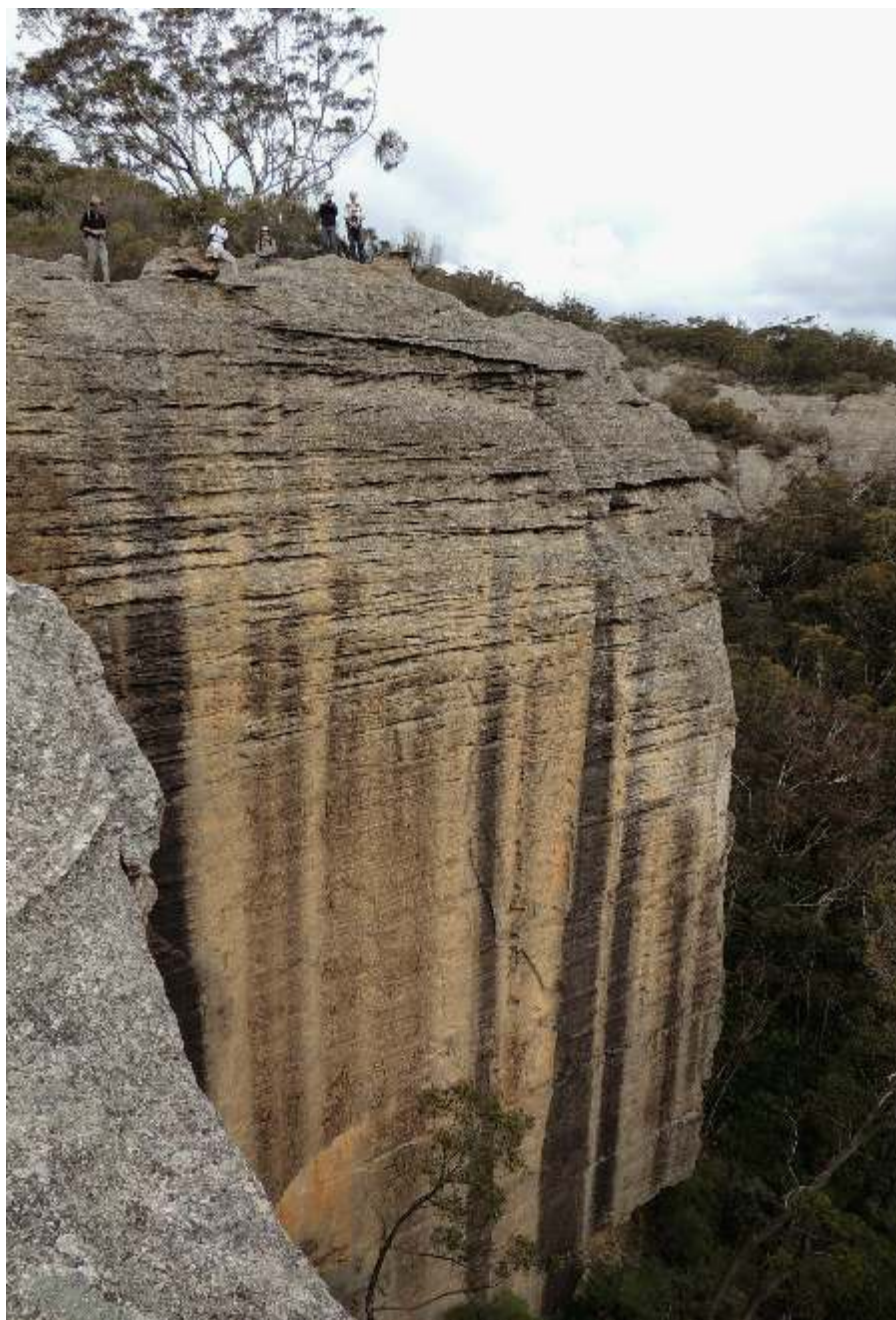
Department of Lands topographic map Cullen Bullen, 8931–3N, 1:25000, second edition and Department of Lands topographic map Ben Bullen, 8931–4S, 1:25000, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.

### WALK DESCRIPTION AND ROUTE

Park at GR 302 168, head west and explore the dissected western Great Dividing Range cliff line for slots, ramps, pagodas and habitation shelters, gradually moving north and exiting at Tara Slot at GR 303 180, with the



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'Barcoded' cliff face above Tara Slot. Photo: Brian Fox



unbelievable view from the top. Use the ferris top track to return to the cars.

## GEAR ISSUES

1 litre of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass and tape (leader only). Have clothes to change into in the car for afterwards.

## COMMENTS

Scrambling and exposure. About 8km.

Date walked 12th July 2013.

## THE WEATHER

It was a day of close to perfect walking conditions, partly cloudy, windless, with

long periods of sunshine, temperature range 8 to 12 degrees C.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

The broad Great Dividing Range crest stretching between the Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests north of the headwaters of the Cocks River and south of the Capertee Valley southern cliff line includes some of the most exquisite and beautiful examples of pagoda, cavern and slot development in the world.

It is a rare place that has given rise to some of the most evocative and euphonious names for features and locations in the Greater Blue Mountains area. More than fifteen significant major features can be found in an area of less



Fern laden valley along The Bicentennial National Trail. Photo: Brian Fox



A natural tiered and sculptured watercourse. Photo: Brian Graetz



than ten square kilometres. Amongst others, the area is home to Hecates Cauldron, Poseidon Arena, Pandoras Box, Zeus Ridge, Alcibiabes Rift, Baal Bone Point, Cape Horn, the Gordian Knot, Hades Ridge, Kevins Watch, The Plain of Shards, Sisyphean Ridge, Stargate Tunnel, Tartatus Slot and Zeus Minor.

No other area in the Greater Blue Mountains is so densely packed with so many magical features. It is a travesty that only Baal Bone Point has any protection. The rest of this natural heritage is up for destruction by coal mining. How we the people have let this happen is a sad indictment against us collectively as citizens and against successive short sighted governments

who do not value our unique and vulnerable heritage.

## TRACK NOTES

The walk today revealed further features to be added to the heritage list. The convoy of four vehicles was parked at GR 302 166 at 0900 at an elevation of just over 1000m. In sparkling sunshine, the walk plan to follow the convolutions of the western cliff line northwards was shared, before we headed west through low *Leptospermum* heath onto a rock platform with stunning views over the multi branched upper drainage of Baal Bone Creek, GR 300 170.

The western horizon is dominated by the profiles of Zeus Ridge and Gardiners Hill. Closer, both to the north and south,



One of the many overhangs. Photo: Brian Graetz



Nearing the top of Tara Slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin





Sorry Yuri, that slot is a no goer. Photo: Brian Fox

serried ranks of pagodas crowded our vision. It is a sculptural park of intense grandeur. Cameras were busy. Each minor relocation of our position was worthy of yet another picture. A commanding ravine and canyon, flanked by pagodas and crammed with caves and slots, was just too much to miss. We went exploring with vigour, seeking and finding multiple routes down.

A major drop seemed as though it might mean reversing to negotiate the way down. Brian descended a vertical crack and pronounced that with a tape to climb down the second stage drop we could do it. It was a memorable initial slide, followed by some ledge walking, a waterfall experience and then a tape assisted descent to the valley floor, all at GR 298 169. It took until 1000 for the whole party to descend.

We now proceeded to walk the base of the cliffs, searching for signs of possible Aboriginal occupation caves and art sites. Generally, the rock was too friable and the surface areas too small for art sites. Most caves and overhangs found were facing west, making them unattractive as occupation sites. There were few that had suitably level floors.



Michael Keats, it does not get any better than this.  
Photo: Brian Graetz

In short, we found no convincing evidence of occupation throughout the walk.

The cliffs are also remarkably diverse in their geomorphology. The variations in height, verticality, rock density and negotiability, coupled with significant exposures of the Mount York Claystone member (the so called red shale band), slump structures and cleavage planes made for an ever changing walk



experience. Heading upwards, we came across a series of rising ledges at GR 299 173 that culminated in a sunny viewing platform ideal for morning tea. The 13 minute break had some members of the party wondering what they had signed up for. This walk was all go.

Having reached the higher cliff line at 1040, we came across a very old cairn of ironstone shards, GR 299 174. With research done of similar rock cairns on Zeus Ridge to the west, we suspect that this cairn would have been built by surveyors pegging coal leases in the late 19th or early 20th century. Such cairns were used where the ground surface made it impossible to drive in wooden pegs.

We moved on generally north, exploring and noting as we went. The density of field notebook entries is indicative how rapidly the scenery was changing. 1053, GR 301 174, 'many overhangs', 1100, GR 302 174, 'top of gully', 1118, GR 301 174, 'ephemeral pools on rock platform', 1123, GR 301 175, 'bottom of slot', 1132, GR 301 176, 'top of slot', 1140, GR 301 177, 'slots and overhangs', 1159, GR 302 177, 'ledge walking.' This is terrain densely packed with nature's gifts.

The slot and climb area around GR 301 175 to GR 301 176 is totally captivating. Not only is there a remarkable and highly photogenic slot, it is capped with a crown of several interlinked pagodas, pierced by tunnels and threaded with



On the track to Mount McLean. L to R. Yuri Bolotin, Paul Barton, Angela Barton, Brian Graetz, Greg Chapman, Michael Keats, Kent Dwyer, Brian Fox, Berenice Torstensson, Marion Davies, Daryl Watson and Tony Bachvarova. Photo: Brian Graetz



Michael Keats defines the height of the sheer cliff face above Tara Slot. Photo: Brian Fox





No stopping us. Photo: Brian Graetz

mini mazes. It is the terrain that brings out the animal spirit within. We played and cavorted for some time in this truly wonderful place.

Play makes you hungry, and at 1220, after exploring a short and narrow slot, GR 302 180, we rounded a castellated point and stopped at GR 303 180 on a rock shelf. This was our lunch place. It also proved to be the other side of the slot just explored. Hunger was soon

assuaged, and at 1242, we continued our northern adventure. This next section was characterised by soaring cliffs, an almost continuous basal cliff ledge, again the Mount York Claystone band, and numerous small waterfalls and soaks. Several potential ochre sites were noted with one of especially fine quality dark red talcum powder consistency.

At 1310, GR 302 185, after searching in vain on the ground for a slot shown clearly on the aerial photos as being a possible access route, we began a retrace towards the lunch site. This locality, GR 302 180, is a proven access route known as Tara Slot.

Before we made the ascent, Yuri told the story of how Tara Slot came to be known (see below, after the

Table). This slot is one of a handful of easily negotiable routes through the western cliff line of the Great Dividing Range in this area. The slot is a narrow, parallel sided cleft that doubles as a watercourse. The lower section flares out as a small stone apron, providing easy access. Internally, the infill rock rises gradually. To use Yuri's words, it is 'a graceful climb'. It is also a great spot for photographs with people positioned strategically along the climb. It is not



Michael Keats and Brian Fox negotiating one of the many levels below the main cliff line.  
Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Michael Keats outlined by the pagodas on the southern side of Mount McLean.  
Photo: Brian Fox



recommended in the wet.

The top of the climb culminates in a most rewarding and dramatic view over the upper Baal Bone Creek catchment, GR 303 179. The clean lines of the rock, lack of vegetation and colourful, sheer Cubist vertical walls make for compelling photographs and indelible memories. It is a singular location for heroic pictures of individual walkers.

From the top of the slot, we headed almost due east to link up with the walking track to McLeans Pass, GR 305 177, at 1077m. We had a further item of interest to locate on the return walk to the vehicles, a feature known as the Gordian Knot. This mass of contorted ironstone was named by Haydn Washington, one of the triumvirate who explored and named the Gardens of Stone National Park. The knot is also the perfect platform to view the Wolgan Valley. It is at GR 305 176 and is located just 25m east of the walking track. The access road to Cape Horn was intersected at GR 306 175, at 1419, and the vehicles were reached at 1429. Total distance walked 8.78km and total ascents 485m.

### TABLE OF TIMES LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Ref	Time	Location	Grid Ref
0900	Vehicles	302 166	1140	Slots and overhang	301 177
0910	View west over Baal Bone Creek catchment	300 170	1159	Ledge walking	302 177
0934	Top of ravine, slots and tape descent	298 169	1216	Slot exploring	302 180
1000	Base of descent	298 169	1220	Lunch near base of Tara Slot, 22 minutes	303 180
1009	On ledge at cliff base	297 172	1305	Heading north under high cliffs	302 184
1024	Morning tea on high ledge, 13 minutes	299 173	1310	Overhangs under high cliffs, furthest north point on walk	302 185
1040	Caves	299 174	1336	Back at base of Tara Slot	302 180
1053	Overhangs and more caves	301 174	1350	Top of Tara Slot	303 179
1100	Top of a gully, 993m	302 174	1406	On McLeans Pass track	305 177
1118	Ephemeral pools on rock platform	301 174	1412	Gordian Knot	305 176
1123	Super slot and pagodas, bottom	301 175	1419	Access road to Cape Horn	306 175
1132	Super slot and pagodas, top	301 176	1429	Vehicles	302 166



Natural simplicity. Photo: Brian Graetz



## HISTORY OF THE NAME TARA SLOT BY YURI BOLOTIN

In the early evening of 13 April 2013, we were at the end of a long and eventful walk in the area. The last part of the walk involved finding a pass through the multiple cliff lines to connect with our exit route back to the cars.

We had just climbed from the other side of the main valley, negotiating several tricky spots, where a few people needed to be assisted up the treacherous ledges. Several members of the group were finding the demands of the day a bit too much. They were tired and openly not happy.

In front of us was the last, most significant cliff line, and I could not readily see any way through it. I decided to let the group rest under the cliffs whilst I and two other members of the group go and look for a lucky break. We walked for some distance but could not locate anything remotely safe and



Yuri Bolotin at the lower end of Tara Slot.  
Photo: Brian Fox

suitable. I remember coming back towards the group, absolutely dreading the moment when I had to announce that we would now need to come all the way down and start looking again in an adjacent valley. I thought I was going to be crucified.

As I started to tell the bad news to the group, Tara Cameron, one of the people who stayed behind, interrupted me. Tara, who is a very competent bushwalker, also happens to be the Vice President of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society. Pointing at the cliffs right above the spot where I left the group, she asked, 'How about this?' 'What do you mean?' I replied as from underneath I could only see a pretty tricky, steep ramp disappearing into a crack in the cliffs. 'I had a look there and I think it might work', Tara said.

I had nothing to lose, so decided to try it. The start of the ramp was indeed tricky, but as soon as you get through the steep part, it opens into a perfect, beautiful, easy slot that graciously leads up onto the top of the cliffs. We were all up within 5 minutes! Even the most disgruntled members of the party were happy. And what a relief for the leader!

But there was more! The slot terminates on a broad, open rock platform with one of the most astonishing views (in my opinion) in the entire Greater Blue Mountains.

As a small thank you to Tara for saving my skin that day and for being such a good walking and working companion, I named this Tara Slot.



Paul Barton leads the charge along the base of the cliff line. Photo: Brian Fox