

7.8 Pagodas south of Angus Place Trail

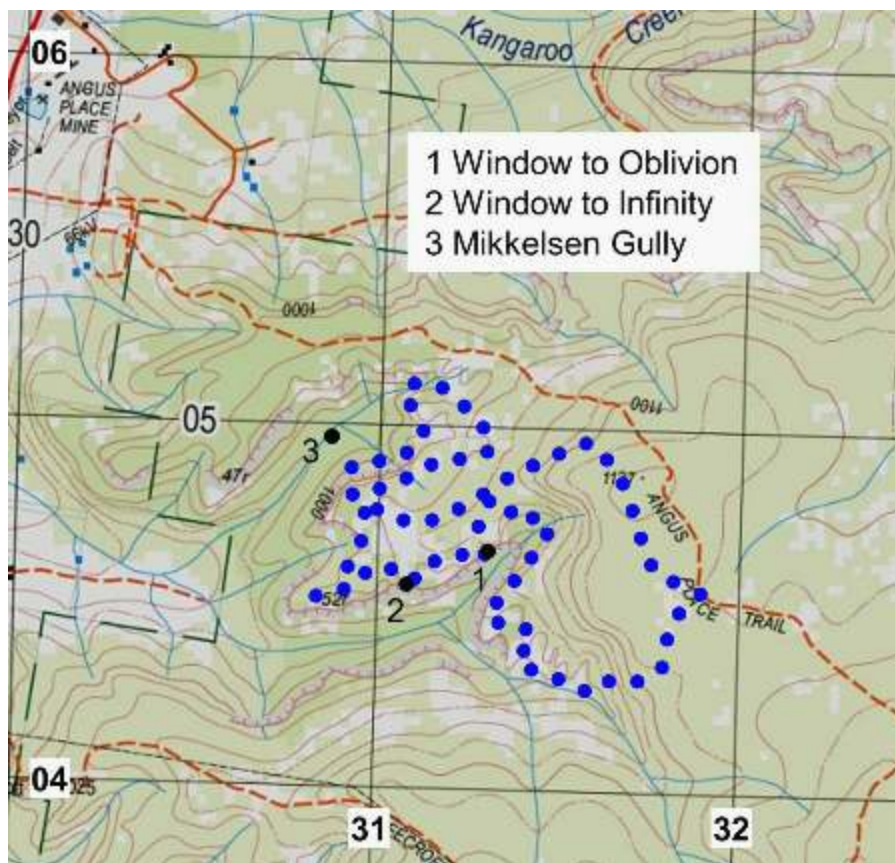
MAPS, ETC.

Department of Lands topographic map Cullen Bullen, 8931-3N, 1:25000, second edition. Department of Lands. GPS setting WGS 84.

WALK DESCRIPTION AND ROUTE

Park one vehicle at the junction of the Angus Place and Beecroft Firetrails and

another at approximately GR 313 052 on the Angus Place Trail. Return to vehicle 1 and commence walking down a creek to the north west, staying on the northern side of it. Explore the cliff line tops between GR 315 044 and GR 315 088, head out walking the southern edge of the peninsula to GR 308 046; then cross to the north of the peninsula and explore the cliff edge and deep into the pagodas at the headwaters around



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www.lpma.nsw.gov.au

GR 313 048. Proceed west and follow a cliff line topped with pagodas to GR 305 049 before descending the cliffs and exploring the deep ravine gully on the way back to the vehicle on the Angus Place Trail. About 10km.

GEAR ISSUES

Have clothes to change into in the car for afterwards. 2 litres of water. GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, tape (leader).

COMMENTS

Scrambling, exposure.

Date walked 30th May 2014.

THE WEATHER

After the warmest May on record, autumn finally arrived. The sky was cloudy 8/8th cover with fleeting, intermittent, small patches of blue. In exposed positions, variable light wind was quite chilling. The mercury hovered between 9 and 12 degrees C.

BACKGROUND NOTES

The area explored is subject to an application by Centennial Coal for an extension of underground long wall mining at the Angus Place Colliery that will impact on 1,860 hectares of Newnes Plateau forest in Stage Two of the Gardens of Stone National Park reserve proposal. The proposed mining will



Brian Fox and Michael Keats above one of the deep slots in this area. Photo: Daryl Watson

unacceptably affect cliffs, pagodas, 41 nationally endangered swamps, including 11 shrub swamps and the headwater catchments of three creeks, causing reduced stream flows and water pollution.¹⁴⁹

This area was visited by a party of bushwalkers on 11th April 2014 and documented in track notes. The pagodas and associated features were so impressive that the area was earmarked for urgent re-walking and documentation of significant features and vegetation, as, if the mining application is successful, NSW stands to lose some of its most significant geo heritage.¹⁵⁰

During the walk, a delightful example of a brilliant turquoise green fungus was

observed. This was a *Chlorociboria*, a genus of fungi within the subphylum *Pezizomycetes*. The genus includes 17 species. Two common temperate zone species, *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* and *Chlorociboria aeruginosa*, can only reliably be distinguished by microscopic examination. *Chlorociboria aeruginosa* has larger spores ($9\text{--}15\text{ }\mu\text{m} \times 1.5\text{--}2.5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$) and the worm-like cells of the outer surface are rough, unlike the commoner *C. aeruginascens* that has the spores of $6\text{--}10\text{ }\mu\text{m} \times 1.5\text{--}2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$. The hyphae and fruiting bodies of all species make xylindein, a secondary metabolite that stains the substrate wood blue-green, with "green oak" being a valued commodity in woodworking. The blue-green pigmented wood is featured in "Tunbridge Ware".



Deeply incised country. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

TRACK NOTES

During the course of the drive, Yuri shared with the writer thoughts to focus the walk on maximising our time in the threatened pagoda country by eliminating unnecessary walking in less interesting terrain. As a result, the vehicles were parked at GR 319 046 on the Angus Place Trail, at 0840.

Under a threatening sky, the walk was underway at 0846 across open forest that had been logged over 50 years ago. There were dramatic splashes of yellow as numerous specimens of the Wattle, *Acacia terminalis*, lit the bush with vivid colour. Whilst this species has a long flowering season, it is unusually

early for Newnes Plateau above 1100m.

A bike track was encountered at GR 318 044. This proved handy, as about 10 minutes into the walk I realised I was without my pack. Accompanied by Ian, I quickly retraced our steps to find that I had left the pack alongside the vehicle. No wonder there was a spring in my step as we strode along. At 0854, the group assembled on a cliff edge and we had our first of many sightings of the brilliant lipstick pink *Styphelia tubiflora*. It looks similar to *Epacris reclinata*, however this species does not flower until August.

Although our plans called for us to explore the high cliff line, we also



Perched on the ledge for morning tea. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

wanted to investigate the complex convolutions of the creek system sandwiched between the Angus Place Trail and the Beecroft Firetrail that crosses several creek junctions before exiting through towering portals. The terrain of this creek system is a succession of great pagodas, secret slots, hidden caves and glorious short rock tumbles encrusted in ferns and mosses. It is also one of those locations that entice the explorer to look around just one more bend, to see what is revealed.

Several slots leading up to the cliff tops were noted, and after deciding on the one that would be our route, packs were left and we went exploring successive seductive places until we could see the portals into the valley. This point is where the creek system

drops about 20m. It is also a place that we walked underneath on 11th April 2014 and looked up and wondered what treasure lay beyond. After taking photos, we returned to our packs and commenced an interesting climb up a slot that was more watercourse than slot. The lower sections were covered in moss and slippery, making it hard to find footholds.

On top, GR 317 045, we began exploring pagodas that form a knotted complex of unbelievable beauty with views downstream to the cleared land of the property, *Rocky Acres*. The prospect that all these delicate formations become a rubble as a result of underground long wall mining is horrific. We had the cameras busy taking picture after picture. The complex of pagodas we were on is a short deep



Michael Keats and Monica Eckert below a carved cliff line. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

ravine back from the main cliff edge, where the views are totally captivating.

Coming down into this ravine revealed more complex formations and a mighty descent, GR 316 043. The traverse of this ravine led us out onto minor platforms with even more eye candy revelations. This country is totally magic. Scrambling around the pagodas at different levels, we could enjoy constantly changing micro landscapes. I found myself covering only a few metres in distance before I just had to stop and take another picture. By 0932, I had covered less than hundred metres but taken 20 photos, GR 314 044.

The cliff edge was now before and

above me, GR 313 043. I found a slot that just might lead to the top and so went up it, pushing away dead vegetation and using ironstone projections as hand and footholds. At the top, I was both excited and disappointed - excited by the stunning view deep into a pagoda filled ravine; disappointed by the fact that there was no way forward. Back tracking and descending about 4m, there was another precarious way of route to the south that worked, GR 314 044.

Using this route we all (but one) made it up to the crest of a small pagoda ridge that had just enough room for the group to spread out and have morning



Nature in all its glory. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

tea. Being exposed, every breath of wind was chilling, so it was hard shells or jackets to survive as we had morning tea in a place where few others have ventured, GR 313 045. After refreshments, it was time to head north and keep exploring. The first objective was to climb a major pagoda face. Ten minutes of climbing, and then we could look down on the morning tea site with pagodas so special and so free of vegetation that they command respect as do monuments in ancient Mesopotamia. We were enchanted, rapt and awed - all at once.



Clare Jackson amazed at the tenacity of the green moss.
Photo: Brian Fox

The next two hundred metres was a continuous viewing of pagodas and the cliffs to the north west that contained the amazing Window to Oblivion. As I recorded on 11th April 2014,

"We had only been walking a few minutes when a recently used bike track was encountered, GR 315 050. For while as it served our purpose, this track was followed. It was not for long, as at GR 314 049, we came across the first of many jaw dropping views of pagodas, cliffs and 'WOW' panoramas. The topographic map gives no indication as to the wealth of fine geomorphology,

which we spent most of the next hour exploring and photographing. At 0916, GR 313 048, I made a simple entry in the field notebook, 'great pagodas'. What an understatement! This terrain is hypnotic, and there is just so much of it. Why has it taken so long for it to be discovered?

We climbed and clambered everywhere. At GR 313 047, a natural balcony overlooks a 50m vertical drop. This is no ordinary balcony. It also sports a natural rock eave protecting the



Michael Keats on the rock face at the end of Window to Oblivion. Photo: Brian Fox



Looking back to the Window to Oblivion. Photo: Brian Fox

southern side and commanding views over the valley walls to the south east, that are pocked with caves and overhangs. Also in our line of sight to the south west, were several more outstanding orphan rocks that we successively went to explore. We had many 'kids in a candy shop' experiences that took us close to delirium. What a place! The balcony window view vertically below was named by Daryl Watson the 'Window to Oblivion'. Isolated pagodas at GR 312 041 and GR 311 086 made for magic photos."

We would revisit this site shortly. In the meantime, we made our way to the head of the gully, GR 315 047. On the north western side of the gully, there are several overhangs that are almost caves. As is our habit, the cave walls were inspected for signs of Aboriginal art and/or graffiti. We were in luck, with one set of clear initials, 'AM', executed in charcoal. After the walk, Brian researched these and advised,

"The cave we investigated with the initials A. M. I wondered if they were the Mason family. Masons Lane connects to the property Rock Acres, which was below us in the valley. The Mason family was very active in this area. The Lithgow Cemetery website lists an Arnold Mason and an Archie Mason, both buried in the Wallerawang Cemetery."

The chances are that that this graffiti was done by one of the two Mason family males.

Climbing the north western side of the ravine was via a rather easy slot and

made even easier by the bike trail near the top, GR 314 048. It was now time to show those in the party who had not been here before just how fantastic was the Window to Oblivion with its vertiginous vertical drop. It was also a place to take lots of memorable photographs.

Ten minutes elapsed before we could prise people away from the spot and point out some not so nice aspects of this place. The most confronting damage is a huge fracture caused by subsurface mining that is visible in both vertical and horizontal surfaces. The main fracture is over 500m in length and, when collapse occurs, the damage will be disastrous and disfiguring to the landscape. The main location for viewing the fracture is at GR 312 046.

We moved on along the cliff edge to another viewing platform characterised by a level rock surface that has a 50m plus drop. This is at GR 310 045. This has been named the Window to Infinity. The similarity to an infinity pool is most pronounced. More time was then spent exploring the cliff edge pagodas to the south west. Stops were made at 1201, GR 308 045 and at 1206, at GR 309 048. From this last location, the view to the north east is of an almost endless succession of the most decorative pagodas to the top end of the Mikkelsen Gully.

At 1220, we climbed a massive pagoda, GR 310 048, and declared it perfect for lunch. Descending after lunch, the aim was to explore each of the pagodas to



Suzanne Aubrun peers over the edge of the Window to Oblivion. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Bushwalkers cannot believe this is not a national park. Photo: Brian Fox



Checking out the length of the subsidence crack caused by underground mining.
Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Set of perfect pagodas south of Angus Place Trail. Photo: Brian Fox

the head of the ravine. We had not progressed more than 100m when below was a yawning void. Looking down, giant tree ferns appeared as tiny stars of green, GR 311 049. An inky darkness was the background. Of course, immediately the latest plan was modified to see whether we could get down into this challenging and mysterious place. First, however, we wanted to visit a very large pagoda complex at the head of Mikkelsen Gully.

At 1311, GR 311 050, we stood on top of the highest point in this group of exceptional pagodas. Upon reaching this pinnacle of wonder, we looked down into even more amazing ravines and dark places. Nearly half an hour just 'disappeared' while this beauteous area was explored and photographed.

All efforts to descend any one of a handful of slots were thwarted by large unfriendly drops. In the end, we had to descend the north face of the northernmost pagoda and then circle around anticlockwise underneath this

towering mass. As we went deeper into the ravines, microclimates became the norm. It was within one of these very damp places that we found the brilliant turquoise green *Chlorociboria* sp. fungus. The intensity of the colour makes it stand out. This was at 1339, GR 312 050. Several other relatively unusual fungi were also photographed in this area.

Given that effective daylight time was rapidly running out, we pushed along, seeking the entrance to the deep ravine observed from near our lunch spot. On the way, we entered a large amphitheatre like overhang that extends from GR 310 049 to GR 310 048, making it a significant size. In addition, it has bands of red shale that have decomposed into ochre like material. This is not altogether unexpected given our proximity to known Aboriginal art sites 2 to 3 kilometres to the north in the cliffs above Lambs and Kangaroo Creeks.

At 1405, we were at GR 310 048 and very close to the slot observed from near the lunch spot. In fact, we had been to this slot on 11th April 2014. On that occasion, we were descending. This is what is recorded:

"By 1018, we started an initial descent, GR 310 048, and at GR 310 068 a further descent was made down a watercourse that included several inconvenient logs, leading to a large undercut bowl with several centimetres of water in the basin bottom, where either very long legs or a jump was required. It is an irreversible descent, but a very attractive one."



Green Fungus, *Chlorociboria* sp.
Photo: Michael Keats



Five ladies on the go. Photo: Brian Fox



Daryl Watson in a sea of pagodas. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Red Five-Corner, *Styphelia tubiflora*.
Photo: Yuri Bolotin



A coral lichen, *Cladonia* sp. comes alive
after the rain. Photo: Brian Fox



Beauty and the Beast. Sunlit pagodas vs the belching cooling stacks of Mount Piper Power Station Photo: Emanuel Conomos



Viewing outwards from one of the overhangs. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Ian Starkey and Michael Keats in one of the short sharp defiles. Photo: Brian Fox



Bushwalkers add a splash of colour to a through slot walk. Photo: Brian Fox

Today there was no water, and helping hands ensured that we all made it up to the top of the cliff line. Minutes later, we picked up the motor bike track, GR 311

047, and followed this back to the vehicles. Total distance walked 9.02km, total ascents 550m.

TABLE OF TIMES, LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Ref
0840	Park vehicles on Angus Place Trail	319 046
0850	Motor bike track	318 044
0854	Viewing spot	317 045
0904	In gully	316 043
0926	Exploring pagodas	315 043
0932	Exploring in ravine	314 044
0940	Above drop in ravine	315 043
0945	Climb up watercourse to cliff top	314 044
1015	Morning tea on high exposed pagoda, 10 minutes	313 045
1035	Climbed to top of higher pagoda	313 045
1051	Head of ravine, graffiti in old cave	315 047
1105	Climbing slot to cliff edge	314 048
1114	At the Window to Oblivion	313 047

Time	Location	Grid Ref
1132	Major fracture	312 046
1141	The Window to Infinity	310 045
1201	Exploring cliff tops	308 045
1206	Exploring cliff tops	309 048
1220	Big pagoda and lunch, 20 minutes	310 048
1246	View into deep slot ravine/canyon	311 049
1311	On very large pagoda complex	311 050
1339	Fungus find, Chlorociboria sp.	312 050
1349	Big overhang (north end)	310 049
1357	Big overhang (south end)	310 048
1405	Climb slot seen from lunch spot	310 048
1411	On Motor bike track	311 047
1439	At vehicles	319 046

NOTES

149 Colong Foundation for Wilderness, submission to NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure - Springvale Mine Extension (SSD 12_5594), dated 26th May 2014.

150 Track Notes by Michael Keats, published on 11th April 2014.

END NOTE

The walk done on 11th April 2014 involved quite a lot of time spent in the ravine below the Window to Oblivion. There were some discoveries that are included here for completeness.

"As a team, we have become adept at discovery. This applies to everything from Aboriginal art sites to graffiti to industrial archaeological sites. On this walk, we added two unexpected items. The first was a ladder. This was at GR 309 045. This ladder is made from cut sections of a tree about 70 to 80mm diameter, with two long pieces as the supports and four shorter sections as the rungs. The rungs are joined to the supports with plastic strapping, using a patent fastening system. The ladder is in place against a rock face with a natural cave about two metres further up the cliff. The structure is possibly up to 20 years old. Questions immediately crowded our brains about this artefact.

There was only one thing for it. Brian needed to get up there and see what was so significant to make such a construction necessary. The short answer was, 'nothing observable.' Why then was such effort expended to build the ladder? The cave did not even have a flat floor! There was no evidence of it being used. There was also no evidence of a track of any kind to reach the spot. The location is more or less the epicentre of cliff collapse.

We moved on. At 1138, GR 312 046, we came across a very large area of old rock face collapse. This was near to being

vertically below our morning tea site, and therefore we had arrived at 'Oblivion'. The view looking up was not nearly as awesome as the view looking down, although it was good to know that we had been able to actually reach the site. We continued up the valley to GR 314 047, where there was an interesting dry but otherwise unremarkable cave. It was also noted that if after morning tea we had retraced our steps a short distance, we could have descended the valley from approximately GR 315 048 by using watercourses and slides between the pagodas plus a bit of rock hopping.

As the valley had now narrowed to less than 100m, we decided to search for caves and explore under a cliff line that formed a semi-circular wall about 300m long and up to 40m high between two arms of the creek, roughly at GR 314 047 and GR 316 044 respectively. Only 50m into our journey, there were two fine overhangs; again, they were nothing remarkable. At GR 314 046, we entered a large cave 15m deep, 10m high and 25m wide. This cave was devoid of art or graffiti, but it contained a worked piece of bark about 1.5m long and 300mm wide that had regular scalloped sections cut from its edges. This was the work of some people with time on their hands and a sophisticated tool. There was no hearth in the cave, yet it would have made an acceptable campsite as there as a small waterfall and enough protected level space to lie down."