

7.12 Lost City and more

MAPS, ETC.

Department of Lands topographic map Lithgow, 1:25000, 8931-3S, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.

WALK DESCRIPTION AND ROUTE

Park vehicles at GR 373 010. Descend a south flowing tributary all the way to Marrangaroo Creek, checking on a semi canyon and a known Aboriginal art site. We will then visit a dam that was the original water supply for the settlement of Marrangaroo. From there, follow Marrangaroo Creek upstream to another dam. At approximately GR 373 987, we may have an excursion up a cliff lined ravine for about 800m. We will then return to Marrangaroo Creek, weave in and around the pagodas of Lost City and also check out the vegetation of the Snow Gum Flora Reserve. At approximately GR 379 993, we will start a double hump climb back to the vehicles. About 5km, 400m of ascent.

GEAR ISSUES

2 litres of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, tape (leader only).

COMMENTS

A very full and challenging day. Possible wet feet. Scrambling, exposure.

Date walked 5th December 2014.

THE WEATHER

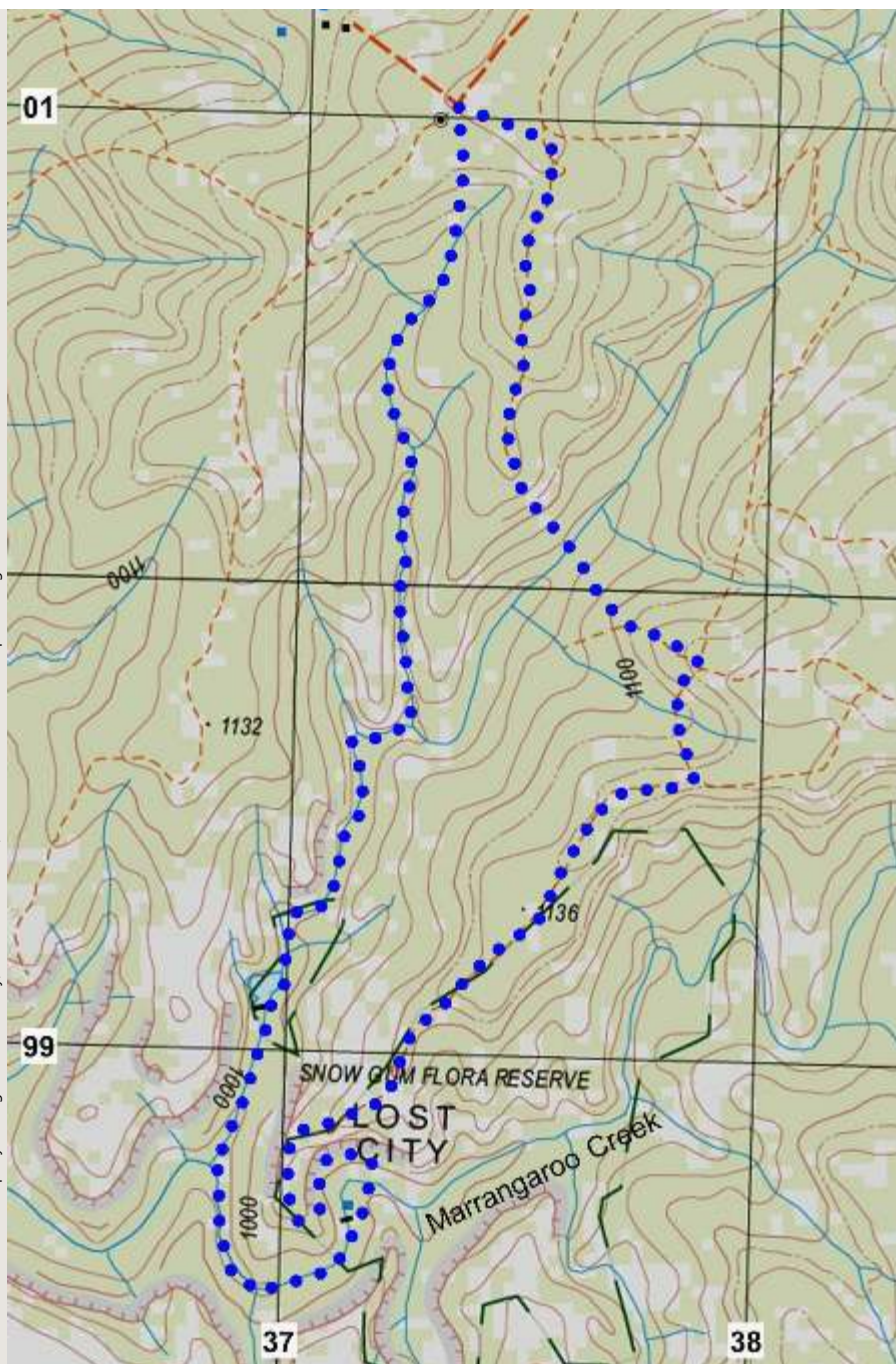
A very warm day with light variable winds keeping the humidity down. Initially, a cloud free sky, but this changed as storm clouds developed. No rain fell in the walk area while we were there. Temperature range 16 to 23 degrees C.

BACKGROUND NOTES

Part of this walk was visited on 5th August 2013. Some extracts from track notes of that date are set out below.

The Marrangaroo catchment contains some remarkable landforms and pagodas, diverse vegetation and is also home to a major Australian Defence Force facility that is not shown on the topographic maps produced by the NSW Department of Lands. It is understood that this protocol of non-disclosure reflects the historical sensitivity of this area that extends back to WWI.¹⁵⁸ The Australian Army in the past operated a bombing range and other more clandestine operations within the lower catchment. Current usage by the ADF is unknown.

There is a dam on a tributary of Marrangaroo Creek, GR 370 991 that was constructed in the early 1900s to provide the settlement of Marrangaroo with potable water. This water supply was only superseded in 1987, and the dam and reticulated pipe network allowed to fall into disrepair.¹⁵⁹



Information from Stephen Imrie,

"The Middle (Marrangaroo Creek) River Dams were built in 1910 and used until the 1980s. Water was supplied to Lithgow via a 10" cast iron main. The condition of the pipes in later years limited supply to 1.6M litres per day. Platforms were built at the dams in the 1970s."

TRACK NOTES

The vehicles were parked at the starting point at 0840, GR 373 010. The immediate area, and indeed the whole area, had been stripped of all vegetation by the October 2013 fire. Thanks to the current warm conditions and several days of soaking rain, the ground was now a garden bed, with many species usually hidden by ferns flowering profusely. Of particular note, were pink Hyacinth Orchids, *Dipodium punctatum*, Blue Pincushions, *Brunonia australis*, Common Fringe Lilies, *Thysanotus tuberosus* and the bright blue *Lobelia dentata* - making a very colourful start.

Minutes into the walk, we were descending steeply into a valley of recovered forest. Trees that had survived the fire were in full leaf, and the valley floor - a sea of many shades of green as tens of millions of dormant seeds of several fern species competed for space. In the upper reaches of the valley, old logging tracks made the best paths as they were generally less attractive than seed beds.

These tracks soon disappeared and

soon our clothing was sporting charcoal stripes from pushing through blackened sticks and negotiating fallen logs. By 0927, GR 372 001, our valley developed cliff lines. Successively, as side creeks entered from both east and west, GR 372 997, the cliffs became higher, and the proportion of the visual landscape dominated by rock faces and pagodas increased. Along the western side, the cliff line was more continuous and more attractive for us to walk. The creek lengthened its course by swinging from one side of the valley floor to the other. Fallen trees provided welcome bridges of varying degrees of user-friendliness. No one fell off any of them.

Our rate of downstream progress was good, and at 1006 we entered an Aboriginal art cave discovered on an earlier visit, on 5th August 2013. This elevated overhang was also our morning tea site. The art in the cave is a single image of an animal, possibly a small wallaby. It is executed in red ochre, and the clearest part of the image is a leg with three toes. Due to the compressed nature of the site of the work, the head and tail are distorted; further, due to the decaying of the work, the image is very poor. As on our previous visit, we spent a lot of time searching for more images and possible tools. We had no luck.

After morning tea, a descent and creek crossing to the eastern side, GR 370 992, was made as we knew that the flooded section above the dam made it impossible to walk the western side. Post the fire, the creek bed and flood



The Blue Pincushion, *Brunonia australis*.
Photo: Brian Fox



Pink Flannel Flower, *Actinotus forsythia*.
Photo: Brian Fox



Keith Maxwell stands on a silt bank, Marrangaroo water supply dam. These dams were in use from 1910 until the 1980s. Photo: Brian Fox

plain regrowth were lush and dominated by Native Violets, *Viola hederacea*. This species created a series of intense and dramatic violet floral carpets. Interspersed with the violets, were hundreds of tall stemmed white flowering Sundews, *Drosera auriculata*.

Fifty metres on, a section of wire netting was found. This meant one of two possible things - a research site or a marijuana plot. It did not take long to find more evidence and confirm the discovery as a marijuana plot. A spade and mattock with decaying handles were found nearby, together with the burnt remains of several plastic containers.

At 1051, after some bush bashing, we arrived at the wall of the dam, GR 370 991. Siltation continues to reduce the dam capacity as shown in a picture with a bushwalker standing on a sand spit that is rapidly filling the entire storage area.

After walking to the centre of the wall and taking photos, we descended on the eastern side and carried out an inspection of the slide and butterfly valves that once were used to control water flow. Whilst these are still in a good state of preservation, they are rusted into position and act as reminders of past engineering activities. The valves are housed in an open fronted, dome roofed concrete bunker. The pipeline is made of 10" internal diameter cast iron pipe.

The fire has removed all the bush that obscured the original access road, and

so it was a relatively easy walk downstream following the cut and filled banks. We had only advanced about 50m when we came across a rare sight, an embankment covered with *Drosera auriculata* and Pink Flannel Flower, *Actinotus forsythia*. It is only the second time I have seen this species in 14 years of bushwalking. It only appears 18 months to two years after a major fire. Conditions could not have been more perfect.

The alignment of the road was so clear after the fire that we picked up many different things. At two separate sites, we found graffiti initials carved into the rock, 'BG', and elsewhere, 'FC'. In the case of the later example, the workmanship was almost tombstone quality, with each letter beautifully fashioned. At one of several creek crossings, the timbers from an old bridge complete with steel bolts were found, GR 369 989.

Moving downstream and continuously looking for anything of interest, we found half buried a concrete box with a cast iron lid, GR 368 988. It was exactly the same as one unearthed on 5th August 2013. In the track notes for that report I wrote:

"A much more curious device was found at GR 367 986. Made of cast iron and about 18" x 10" and about 6" deep with the letters "DAV" cast into the top, hinged and also with a valve like feature recessed into it at one end. We think it was a discharge air valve used for 'bleeding' the line when air locks occurred."



Winch gear at the Marrangaroo Creek Dam, 1910 . Photo: Brian Fox



Uncovering evidence of the pipeline from the Marrangaroo Creek Dam, 1910. This pipeline supplied water to the village of Marrangaroo. Photo: Brian Fox

At 1130, GR 369 987, we reached the junction of our unnamed tributary creek with Marrangaroo Creek. This location is also where the pipeline has been exposed by erosion. At this point, we also changed direction and headed upstream in Marrangaroo Creek. Almost immediately, we began to find artefacts, including another 10" cast iron pipeline, this one coming from the dam on Marrangaroo Creek. Large diameter pipe sections (750mm) and coils of old rusting steel cable; a fragment of an old soft drink bottle with impressed lettering that proclaimed "Bathurst, Blayney and Lithgow".

As we looked around, we started to see

a lot more, including a concreted in power pole next to a cubic concrete block with a metal topping, and nearby, a 1" diameter brass rod set into the ground with the tail of a copper cable that would have been an earthing point. A decaying steel ammunition box was nearby.

The goodies discovered went on. A small narrow gauge railway truck complete with a double set of wheels and hauling hook was located; a porcelain switch; a very old milk glass face cream bottle branded 'Nyll'; more wire cable; sections of light rail line, and so it went. Almost by accident, we looked up and then the whole picture



Morning tea at an Aboriginal site. Photo: Geoff Fox

dawned: we had arrived at the base of the old State Coal Mine Airshaft. Here, I quote from information provided previously by Stephen Imrie and incorporated in track notes from a walk done on 27th May 2013.

"State Mine Airshaft located some three miles from the State Mine Pit Top. Built in 1940/1941 and used for air, water, power and access. Problems with rock falls in the shaft caused a second 6" shaft to be sunk for a power assisted air supply (from the top) The old airshaft and associated infrastructure for the State Mine Colliery is reached via a set of crudely formed cut steps and an overgrown pathway, GR 370 983.

Signage in the form of yellow painted words on a pagoda reads, 'mine 7 min' plus an arrow. The way is through a cliff line that today was very wet and slippery. During the descent, we saw the top of a power pole with a cross beam and an insulator poking out above some trees.

At 0932, GR 370 984, we arrived at the site. It is absolutely mind blowing. Here, and abandoned in the bush, is a set of huge, geared wheels, a winding drum, brake mechanism, auxiliary braking system and more, set on an elevated, raft like platform made of squared timbers 30cm x 30cm. The sensation I experience on arrival was a bit like finding a piece of space junk: it was alien and unexpected. We slowly explored every element of this machinery and then the associated crumbing built works.

A hole has been cut into the side of the

former airshaft tower. Brian found his headlight torch and peered in. The shaft is circular, about 6m across and reportedly some 600 feet deep. A chain wire fenced platform was seen inside. After twenty minutes or so of exploring and photography, we descended the scree slope below the shaft base, formed with some of the rock removed to make the vertical hole.

At the bottom of the slope, there is an access road that would have been used to bring in the materials for construction and the winding gear. This road would also have been used to construct both the 'Middle River Dams'."

Quickly, we revised our plans and decided to climb up the rock scree slope to the airshaft. What we had been finding at the base were materials that had been either jettisoned from the mine or just left when the whole installation was abandoned. Three quarters of an hour was spent visiting this industrial relic, taking photographs and recording objects seen. It was 1233 as we wound our way along the old access road towards the dam on Marrangaroo Creek. Sheets of perforated steel used by the ADF for getting vehicles over soft ground were found along with more cable and other objects. The dam wall was reached at 1248, GR 371 987.

This dam is very similar in construction to the one on the tributary creek. The valve set is almost identical. A section of pipe bears the date 1948. We climbed to the top of the dam wall on the eastern side and found a protected



The spillway wall of the 1910 dam, the Marrangaroo water supply. Photo: Michael Keats



Discarded wire cable used at the State Coal Mine. Photo: Brian Fox

overhang to have lunch, at 1252, GR 371 986. Part of the lunch break was spent exploring and photographing the area.

Over lunch, the maps came out and a way of route was planned. The first exercise was to scale the cliffs at the dam as there is no shore line as such. A small crevice and a handy tree got us up, and then a tunnel formed by collapsed rocks was negotiated to lead us onto a set of pagodas overlooking the dam. Ahead, north and west, were the vertical cliffs that form the ramparts of the Lost City; they are about 60 to 70m high. To reach the cliff base, we had to descend, cross Marrangaroo Creek and then scramble over a great boulder scree.

It was 1336 when we came to the cliff base. Again, the big fire of 2013 was our friend, removing all the vegetation and freeing our route of many impediments. Where we scrambled would have taken an extra half hour if we had to battle vines and fallen timber. An overhang with a fine droplet waterfall was walked under while all the time we were on the lookout for a way up through the cliffs.

At 1347, Brian spied a slot, GR 371 987. It was awesome as it penetrated the cliffs and appeared to provide a way right to the very top where most visitors drive to, park, look down on the Lost City and say they have seen it. Agile Brian was up the first section in no time, I followed next, and with a shove from below made it over an outward curving boulder to then perform an almost escalator ascent that subsequently allowed me to walk out onto a small platform and a view of the Lost City seen by very few. The top of this slot is at GR 371 988. I positioned myself to take pictures of each member of the group as they came up.

On top, we relaxed, took photographs and noted the grandeur of this aspect of the Lost City. I reckoned we came up the fire escape! While the top was explored, I found a spot that, if I could get to it, would make a great photo. All watched while with help from Geoff I installed myself on a very narrow 12" ledge for the cameras. It is one of those truly awesome places. As I looked down on the other side, there was a 65m vertical drop. This was special. This was worth the walk and more.

Refreshed, we now made our way north to connect to the road that terminates at the Lost City Lookout. Whilst crossing a burnt area between two large pagodas, we came across another huge display of Pink Flannel Flowers, GR 370 988. Just amazing. During the final climb to the road, we could hear music. There was mutual surprise as we came across two musicians rehearsing at the



Blackened branches after the October 2013 bushfire. Photo: Brian Fox



The steep climb out of the Lost City. Photo: Brian Fox



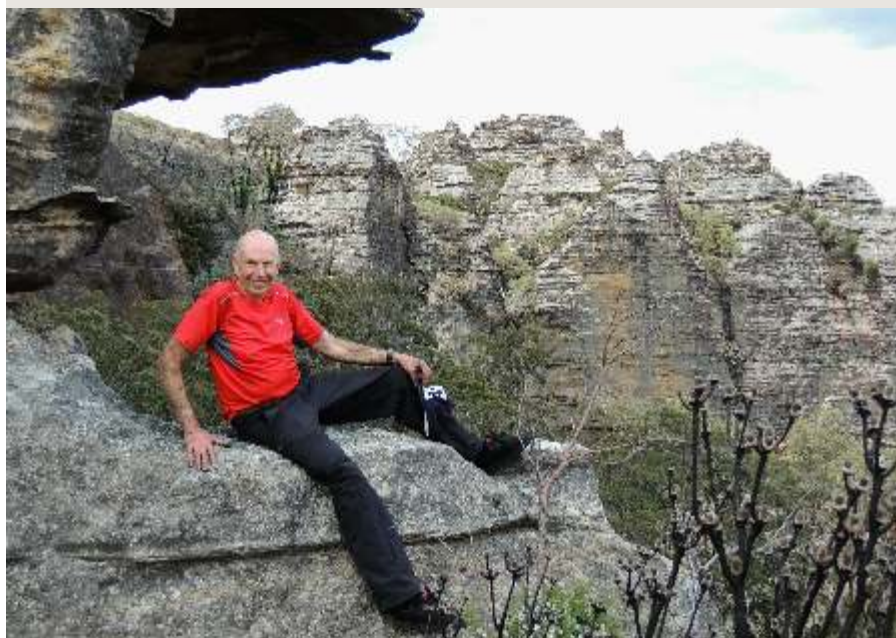
Rusted equipment of a bygone era, State Coal Mine. Photo: Brian Fox



Massive winding wheels of the State Coal Mine shaft site. Photo: Brian Fox



Marrangaroo Creek Dam, c1948. Photo: Brian Fox



Michael Keats, a vivid contrast to Lost City in the background. Photo: Brian Fox



John Anderson at the State Coal Mine Airshaft. Photo: Brian Fox



North south tributary of Marrangaroo Creek above the 1910 dam. Photo: Brian Fox

end of the track, GR 371 989. I could not resist the open guitar case and dropped in some coins as you do for buskers in town. I reckon they will long remember their rehearsal and meeting with crazy bushwalkers.

We were now in the centre of the Snow Gum Flora Reserve.¹⁶⁰ The heath/mallee community that occupies the exposed ridge tops here occurs on very shallow, low fertility soils derived from siliceous sandstones. This closed community of small xeromorphic shrubs, largely dominated by Dwarf She-oak, is overlaid with the fragmented distribution of the dwarf eucalypts, the most significant of which is the Dwarf Snow Gum, *Eucalyptus gregsoniana*.

Other associated eucalypts are Whipstick Ash, Hard-leaved Scribbly Gum, Snow Gum, *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and *Eucalyptus mannifera* ssp. *gullickii*. The common heath species, which in association with Dwarf She-oak make up the understorey through the mallee stands, are *Isopogon anemonifolius*, *Acacia hamiltoniana*, *Boronia microphylla* and *Banksia marginata*.

Regrettably, the big fire had treated the flora reserve with little respect. We found nothing to stop and take photographs of. Perhaps this should be revisited next spring when recovery is a bit more complete. As we walked through this area, rumbles of thunder could be heard, and from time to time



Faint ochre drawing of an animal or bird at an Aboriginal site. Photo: Brian Fox



Marion Davies at what's left of the 1940s building at the State Coal Mine site. Photo: Brian Fox



Narrow gauge rail trolley below the State Coal Mine Airshaft.
Photo: Brian Fox



Lost City, so named as it looked like Inca ruins. Photo: Brian Fox

the sky darkened threateningly. Fortunately, the rain held off completely. A track junction was reached at 1432, GR 378 996. Rather than plunge into more big pagoda country or walk boring roads, we decided to mix it up a bit and do something different, so we took this road north to GR 378 998, where another old service road headed west. Our map showed that if we could cross a major gully at GR 376 000, we should be able to link up with another old road and then go cross country to the vehicles.

At 1441, we left the road and descended into a very steep gully. It was all charcoal black except for occasional

spots of luxurious new growth. One of these 'growth spots' was a clump of the finest *Xyris operculata* I have ever seen. It had dozens of brilliant sulphur yellow flower heads, whereas normally one or two would be regarded as special. That was enough to take my mind off the climb ahead. In due course, the creek was crossed and the climb undertaken. Surprisingly, we found a deep cave at GR 376 001, but it contained no art or signs of use. It would, if needed, make an excellent shelter cave.

We kept on climbing, and at 1504 reached the end of the track as shown on the map. Time for a good, deep drink before tackling the final stretch



Climbing the cliff slot to access the Lost City. Photo: Geoff Fox

back to the vehicles. The road walk was punctuated by sights of many plant species including some magnificent stands of *Xanthorrhoea resinifera*, all

sporting great erect flower spikes. Total distance walked 9.3km, total ascents 413m.

TABLE OF TIMES, LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Ref	Time	Location	Grid Ref
0840	Park vehicles	373 010	1220	At State Mine Gully Shaft No. 4.	370 984
0855	Old logging road	373 008	1233	Walking road towards dam	370 986
0927	Under cliff line in ravine	372 001	1238	At dam wall lower	371 987
0945	Side creeks enter west and east	372 997	1248	At dam wall upper	371 987
1006	Aboriginal art site, morning tea, 13 minutes	n.a.	1252	Lunch, 21 minutes	371 986
1032	Above the dam, beds of violets	370 992	1313	Climb up rock face + negotiate tunnel	371 986
1043	Marijuana plot (abandoned)	370 992	1323	At base of cliffs below Lost City	371 988
1051	At the dam wall, above and below	370 991	1347	Up the Lost City fire escape (a narrow slot)	370 981
1104	Sighting of Pink Flannel Flowers	370 990	1403	Second sighting of Pink Flannel Flowers	370 988
1114	Old graffiti	370 990	1412	Musicians at the end of Lost City track	371 989
1122	Remains of old timber bridge, valve control box	369 989	1417	In Snow Gum Flora Reserve	373 993
1130	Junction with Marrangaroo Creek, 10" pipe	368 988	1432	Track junction	378 996
1138	Head up Marrangaroo Creek	369 987	1438	Second track junction	378 998
1142	Discovery of large diameter pipes	369 986	1449	Cross Creek + <i>Xyris operculata</i>	376 001
1144	Discovery of many old artefacts	370 985	1452	Cave	376 001
			1459	Climbing	375 002
			1504	End of track	374 003
			1518	At vehicles	373 010



Outlet float on the Marrangaroo Creek Dam, c1948. Photo: Brian Fox

NOTES

- 158 For a more complete history of the Defence operations at Marrangaroo, readers should consult Geoff Plunkett, *Chemical Warfare in Australia, a history of Australia's involvement in Chemical Warfare 1914-1945*, 2007.
- 159 This information was gathered by Brian Fox in a conversation with the Caretaker of the Marrangaroo Army establishment at the end of the walk.
- 160 Snow Gum Flora Reserve. Plan of Management approved 3rd July 1994. The reserve is located on the

Newnes Plateau, 7km north of the City of Lithgow. The reserve is bounded in the south by Marrangaroo Creek and in the east by part of the Lithgow Water Supply Catchment. Drainage lines, rough tracks, or compass bearings delimit perimeter boundaries to the north and west. The Lost City, an area noted for its magnificent pagoda formations, adjoins the reserve on the south eastern boundary and is co-incident with the gazetted Lithgow Water Supply area.