

A photograph of a person standing on the edge of a large, light-colored rock formation (Beagle Head) that juts out over a deep valley. The valley is filled with dense green forest. In the background, a range of mountains (the Wolgan-Capertee Divide) is visible under a clear sky. The person is wearing a blue shirt and light-colored pants.

Walk 1.14

MYSTERY MOUNTAIN SLOT AND BEAGLE HEAD

Brian Fox on Beagle Head, with the Wolgan River below and the crest of the Wolgan - Capertee Divide profiling the horizon. PHOTO: JOHN FOX

Walk 1.14 Mystery Mountain Slot and Beagle Head

The weather

A glorious winter's day with some light cloud but essentially clear skies. The temperature ranged from 4–12 degrees C.

Background notes

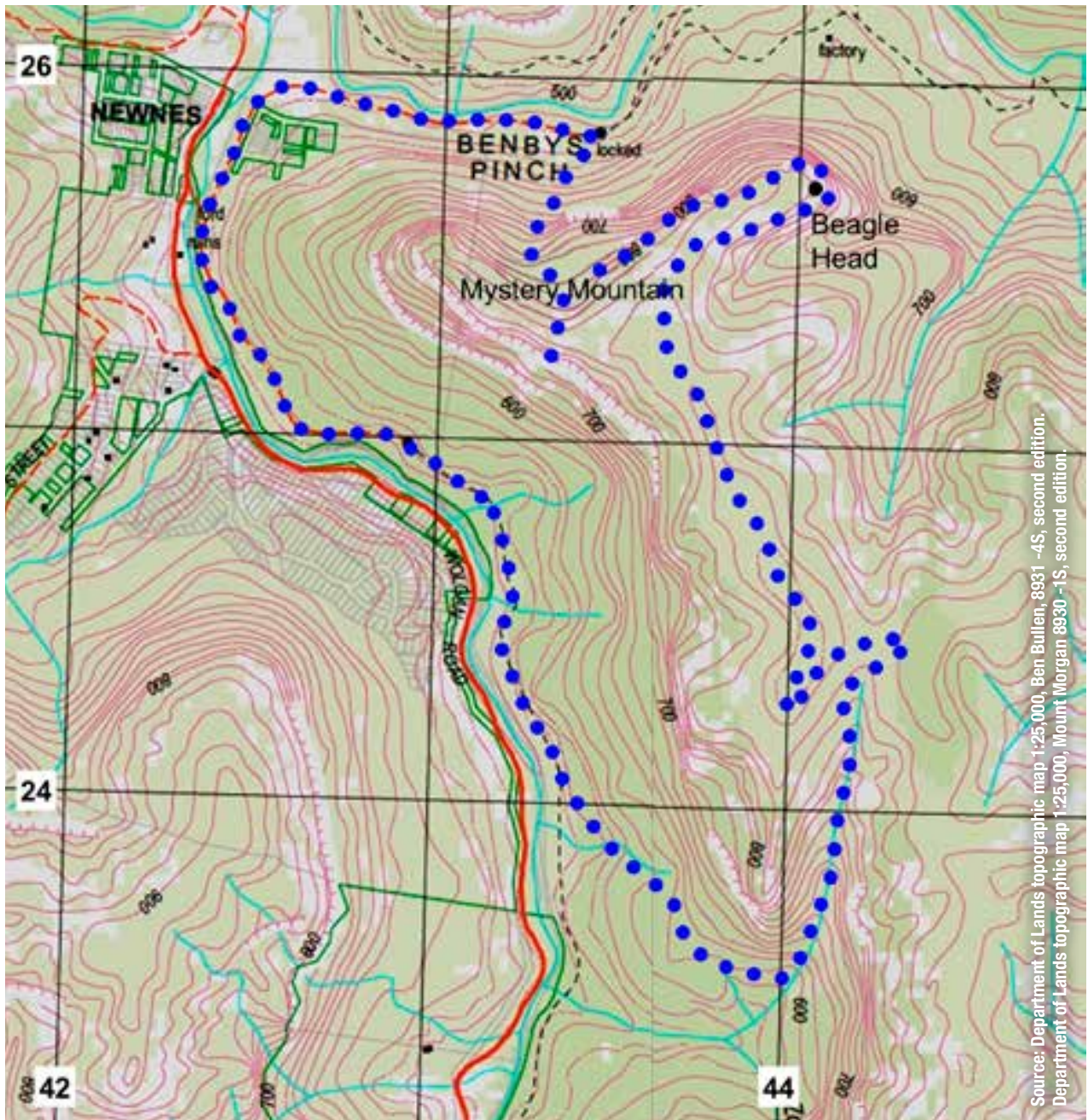
On 21 July 2014, we established that Wolgan Valley Railway (WVR) and the Glen Davis to Newnes Junction Petrol Pipeline each had dedicated telephone services that respectively followed the railway and pipeline. What could not be explained was a section of telephone line from the northern end of the Tiger Snake Canyon plateau walking track,

across Constance Gorge and then along the cliff line north towards the former industrial site at Newnes. The purpose of the walk as devised was to try and find evidence of any northern extension of this telephone line.

Track notes

Being a small party of three meant that we could be entirely flexible in what we did – and we were. As soon as we jumped out of the vehicle at the car parking area, I looked up at the cliffs where there appeared to be a notch. The question raced through my mind, ‘Why walk along the Wolgan River Trail for nearly two kilometres when we could possibly get to the top of the cliffs right here?’ I shared my thoughts, and so it was that we went straight into climbing mode (at 0847).

Maps etc.	Department of Lands topographic map 1:25,000, Ben Bullen, 8931 -4S, second edition. Department of Lands topographic map 1:25,000, Mount Morgan 8930 -1S, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.
Walk description and route	Park vehicles at the locked gate; walk some of the Wolgan River Trail to approximately GR 434 258; then head up the cliffs to the plateau top of Island Mountain. Commence exploring the plateau area to the south west, seeking evidence of a suspected former telephone line. Particular focus will be made on studying the ridge line from about GR 443 245 to the cliff edge at GR 440 257. With luck, we will find evidence of the former line that is suspected to have been the COC works private line. 350 m +/- up to 6 km.
Gear issues	First aid kit, two litres of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head- and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, tape (leader). Have clothes to change into in the car for afterwards.
Comments	Possible scrambling, some off-track. Date walked: 28 July 2014.



Zieria smithii, a common species on Island Mountain. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX



Very different is the terrain on top of Island Mountain. PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

The slope is steep, very close to 1 in 1, or 45 degrees. About 100 metres up there is evidence of benching, possibly an old oil-shale mine adit access road. We crossed this and kept going. At 0911, we stood at the base of the top cliff line. A pretty good effort; and better still, we could see that the notch continued, with a nice profile of sky now clearly visible.

Immediately at hand there was a wide gully that looked very negotiable. There was a lot of scrambling to be done, but it was all doable. What made the area so good was its richness of diverse flora including two species of pink flowering *Zieria* and a beautiful *Boronia*. The colour intensity was outstanding.

As we climbed higher, a huge house-sized boulder filled the ravine ahead. Almost at the same time, we noted that we could see daylight through a crack underneath it; perhaps there was a way. More immediately, we had to climb a

short (1.5 metre) rock face to reach the boulder. Brian, who was in the lead, yelled out, 'There is a chain here!' This was amazing.

After climbing the short rock face, the chain was tested for strength, and then we used it to climb another trickier section. Once up, we stopped to examine this chain. It appears to be quite modern, possibly 1970s vintage. It has been secured into rock with three very robust bolts and washers. Someone has been very keen to establish this as a permanent feature for frequent use. Why? Collectively, we speculated it was installed by rock climbers.

Having negotiated the chain, at 0918, we then climbed up under the huge boulder and made for the light source at the far end. It was quite a bit bigger than we originally surmised, and we crawled through easily. Very telling at the other side was some modern graffiti: the word

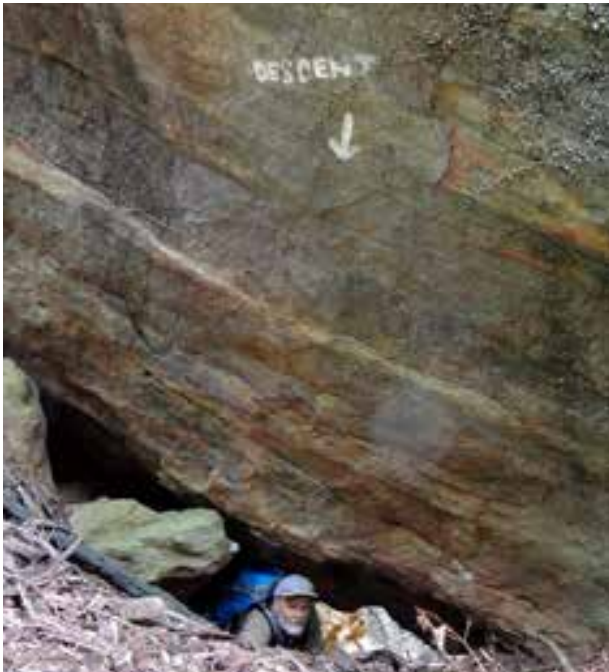


The awesome grandeur of the slot that separates Mystery Mountain from Island Mountain. PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

DESCENT with an arrow pointing to the squeeze we had just emerged from. The graffiti was done with oil paint, which probably means that the installation of the chain and the wording predates aerosol spray cans.

Our thinking now changed as to why rock climbers would be so interested in this place as to establish a permanent

descent point. There are huge cliffs in excess of 50 metres everywhere, and many much taller. There also could be some interesting technical climbs in the area. What we originally saw from the base of the cliffs as a notch now appeared as a very interesting and narrowing canyon. It was full of fallen trees, but otherwise an easy walk up. As



John Fox emerging from the identified rock climber's route to the top of Island Mountain. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX



Brian Fox makes use of the old rock climbing chain on the rock climber's route on Island Mountain.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

we went higher and higher, the canyon developed parallel sides about three metres apart.

Soon, we felt a strong breeze, and the canyon walls became very high, about 25 metres. There was a reason for this breeze, as a few more steps took us to the edge of the cliff line and a yawning void 300 metres down into the Wolgan Valley. We had stumbled across the much talked-about non-negotiable slot that separates Mystery Mountain from Island Mountain, at 1008. Good photos were difficult due to heavy vegetation and a reluctance on our part to go any closer to the edge.

There was nothing else for it – we would need to backtrack as far as the next slot that may take us onto Island Mountain. Up in this high country it was no surprise to come across another mighty slot, at 1017. This slot

is parallel to the cliff line, and a vast orphan rock will one day crash down into the Wolgan Valley. Meanwhile for us it was a stunning area to take photos. The light play was simply gorgeous. Whilst all this beauty was very enjoyable, it was also the case that there was no way we could safely climb to the top of Island Mountain, a generous 70 metres above.

We now began walking east along the base of the high cliffs, checking every slot and ravine as a possible way up. At 1027, we stopped at an interesting slot that Brian could have negotiated, but not John or myself. We decided to have morning tea while we thought about it. Six minutes later, the decision was made: We would try it, and if it did not work we would keep moving east. At 1116, we stood beneath an amazing stepped pagoda-like rock face that

Brian was able to climb. It was in two stages and about 70 metres to the top. Brian went up about 15 metres and then returned, saying that we would probably not like it. He was right. The drop below was close to 250 metres and the exposure was something else again.

We kept walking and crawling as required to reach the end of this cliff line, ever conscious of the incredible drop below, before it wrapped around the point. We also now had a very unusual view of the old coke ovens in the former Newnes Industrial Complex. It was an incredible relief to round the nose of the point, and more so, walk fully upright and be able to look out at the vast view over the drainage of a trident-shaped valley and an expanse of the Wolgan River valley to the east. At 1121, we stopped on a flat rock and had a drink. Our task was still to find a way to the top of the plateau. After all, we were doing this walk to try and find the alignment of a telephone service, which I suspected traversed the plateau as a continuation of the poles and insulators already documented further south.

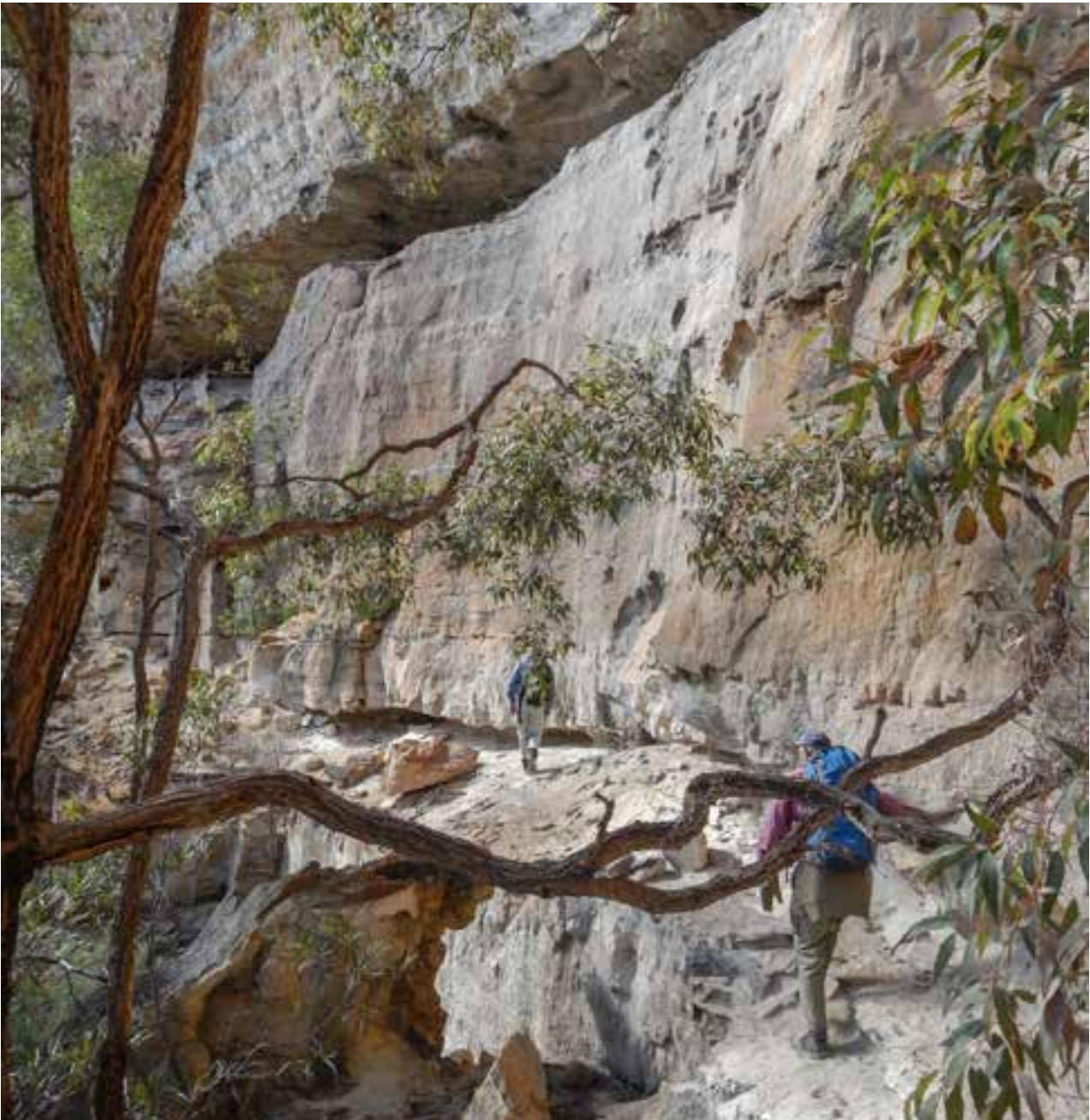
Next, we found a ravine that looked promising as a way up. Brian went ahead, checking for situations that could be difficult. He found two challenging spots but advised us that by helping each other both could be overcome. Of course, they could! And they were; it was all just so much pumping adrenalin. I made a note that on the 1 to 6 grading system this walk



Michael Keats and John Fox climbing in a dry gully to the top of Island Mountain. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

already exceeded most conventional measures. At 1143, the two climbs were behind us, and we now faced climbing a stepped pagoda some six metres high with exposure in order to get to the next level. It was huge fun, as we were now at almost 810 metres and the views were to die for. (Perhaps not a good turn of phrase!)

Finally, at 1205, after walking two very easy ramps we made it to the top of Island Mountain plateau. Dropping our packs, we then walked towards the cliff edge. The view is absolutely amazing. Brian named this feature



This ledge goes, but there are sections with significant exposure. PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATS

Beagle Head, as it reminded him of the head of a beagle dog. We spent a few minutes here recalling just how hard we had worked to get ourselves from below the cliffs to the top (at 1215).

Plans to descend via the trident valley down into the Wolgan River were canned. It would take too long and the route was too unpredictable. What we would do was walk the

plateau ridge line all the way to the top of Zobels Gully, where a known easy route leads down to the valley floor. This way we would also be able to check out the plateau top for any evidence of the telephone line, if indeed it went this way.

First, we needed to get onto the main ridge. To do this we walked south west for about 400 metres,

negotiating some good pagodas and lots of open rock platforms. Again, the views to the north east were very special (at 1227). At 1242, we stopped to have lunch, reckoning that we had earned the right to a break and food. After a 17 minute lunch break we were off on our mission to search the ridge for evidence of the telephone line. We spread out about 10 metres apart and walked reasonably slowly, checking for any signs of insulators in trees, and for piles of rocks that may have supported poles or strands of wire. Our search drew a blank.

At 1325, we reached the cairn at the top of the Zobels Gully pass. While John and I refuelled, Brian went looking to see if he could find any evidence or artefacts to the north east. Again, he drew a blank. At 1345, we commenced the descent on what is now a well-worn track. Although early in the day, Zobels Gully was dark and cold, and we really raced down the gully, reaching the bottom at 1420, which must be a record.

After another quick refreshment stop, we pushed on, walking the lower slopes rather than heading all the way to the old WVR alignment. This was useful, as we came across a levelled area and old fencing, at 1430. I speculated as to whether this may have been a residential site, as the workshop manager for the Constance locomotive workshops would have to have lived nearby. It would have been a 250 metre walk at most to the old workshops site.



The north eastern end of the slot that separates Mystery Mountain from Island Mountain. PHOTO: BRIAN FOX

At 1434, we picked up the WVR alignment and the pace accelerated even more. The old Newnes Railway Station site was reached at 1500. Here, Brian left his pack and jogged the one kilometre back to the vehicle. There may be no rail service at Newnes but there was a great car service for John and me!

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*Total distance walked 12.2 km;
 total ascents 612 m.*

End note

On a walk dated 18 November 2009, I documented an important item that should have been considered when the walk was done today. The following extract from the track notes is relevant:

About 200 m on, a possible rock climb and ramp was tested. It was a bit of a challenge and on the second phase we set the tape to negotiate a rather awkward 2 m section with some exposure. Once up the

top the view north east down the Wolgan Valley from an orphan rock was stunning. It was no surprise but none the less a disappointment to find a toppled cairn on the orphan rock (GR 443 253). Others as determined as us had been here before.

I do have a photograph of this pile

of rocks. It is not definitive evidence of it being a support for a telephone line pole; however, this cairn could be the missing link. According to my calculations it is spot-on the plotted alignment of the telephone service to the former Newnes Industrial Complex.

Table of times, locations and grid references – Walk 1.14 Myster Mountain Slot and Beagle Head.

TIME	LOCATION	GRID REFERENCE	ELEVATION
0843	Park vehicle	4334 2585	520 m
0847	Commence climb up the cliff face	4335 2578	530 m
0851	Old road	4332 2572	560 m
0911	Base of cliffs	4325 2548	740 m
0918	Chain ascent	4329 2548	740 m
0945	Through tunnel + graffiti	4332 2543	760 m
1008	Slot between Mystery Mountain and Island Mountain	4331 2523	860 m
1017	Another major slot	4339 2541	780 m
1027	Morning tea at base of slot, 6 minutes	4350 2546	800 m
1116	Walking under cliff line	4407 2573	780 m
1121	At eastern end of cliff line	4408 2566	763 m
1143	Ravine climb	4388 2557	800 m
1200	Exposed cliff climb	4377 2556	841 m
1205	On Island Mountain plateau	4375 2561	850 m
1215	At Beagle Head	4374 2565	845 m
1221	On open rock plateau	4367 2540	855 m
1227	In open forest	4365 2527	874 m
1242	Lunch on ridge, 17 minutes	4382 2492	877 m
1319	Heading east to top of Zobels Gully	4407 2431	880 m
1325	Cairn at Zobels Gully head + local exploring	4424 2444	874 m
1345	Commence descent of Zobels Gully	4424 2444	874 m
1420	Exit Zobels Gully	4394 2350	580 m
1430	Old infrastructure near Constance workshops site	4342 2397	550 m
1434	On Wolgan Valley Railway	4338 2405	540 m
1500	At old Newnes Railway Station	4243 2580	500 m
1520	Leave the area	4243 2580	500 m