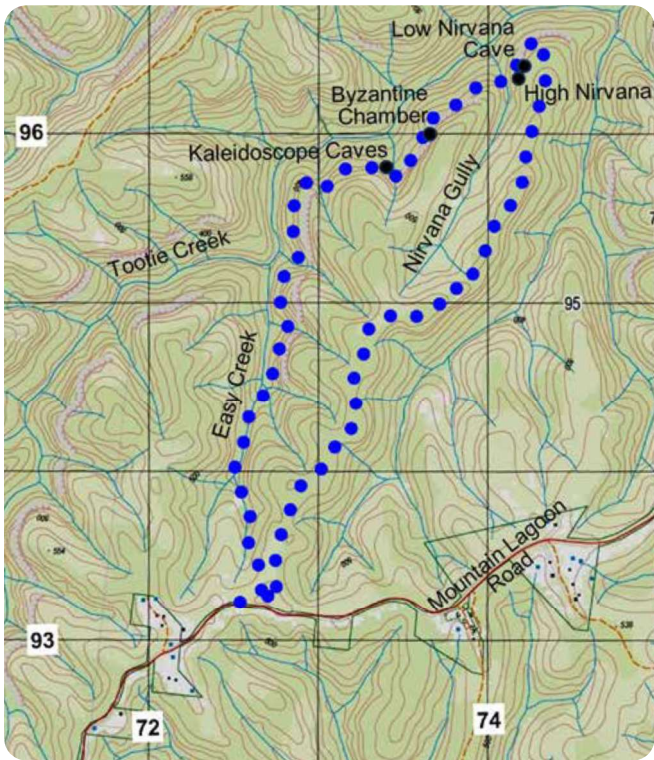


## Walk 1.2 Byzantine Chamber and Kaleidoscope Caves



Source © Land and Property Management Authority, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst NSW 2795. www.lipma.nsw.gov.au

OPPOSITE PAGE: Middle Kaleidoscope Cave detail.  
Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



<b>Maps, etc.</b>	Department of Lands topographic map Mountain Lagoon 9031-35, 1:25,000, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.
<b>Walk description and route</b>	Park at GR 725 932 on Mountain Lagoon Road. Walk north along Nirvana Ridge on an old logging trail, then off track to Nirvana Caves. Next, traverse underneath the cliff line to the south west, then south, looking for more caves. The exit point back to Nirvana Ridge will depend on available time. Once on top, follow the ridge back to the cars. About 12 km.
<b>Gear issues</b>	Two litres of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head- and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, first aid kit, tape (leader only). Change of gear for afterwards.
<b>Comments</b>	Partly exploratory. Scrambling and exposure.
<b>Date walked</b>	31 March 2021

### THE WEATHER

A mostly sunny day with moderate to high humidity and occasional light breezes. The cloud cover increased from 10% in the morning to about 70% by midday, then dropped to 30% in the afternoon. Temperature range 14 to 22 degrees C. Very pleasant walking conditions.

### EXISTING NAMES IN THE AREA

**Nirvana Ridge** is a north-south oriented feature that rises on the Mountain Lagoon Range and extends north for about four kilometres to terminate as a cliff face above Tootie Creek. Named by Yuri Bolotin on a bushwalk on 14 June 2020.

Topographic map Mountain Lagoon, 1:25,000. South end GR 725 932, north end GR 748 967.

**Low Nirvana Cave and High Nirvana Cave** were both named by Yuri Bolotin and described as follows:

*During a walk on 14/06/20, we found two incredible caves on the western face of this ridge, one above the other. In the spirit of Psychedelic Caves nearby, I called them Low Nirvana Cave and High Nirvana Cave.*

**Low Nirvana Cave**, topographic map Mountain Lagoon, 1:25,000, GR 7419 9641.

**High Nirvana Cave**, topographic map Mountain Lagoon, 1:25,000, GR 7417 9638.



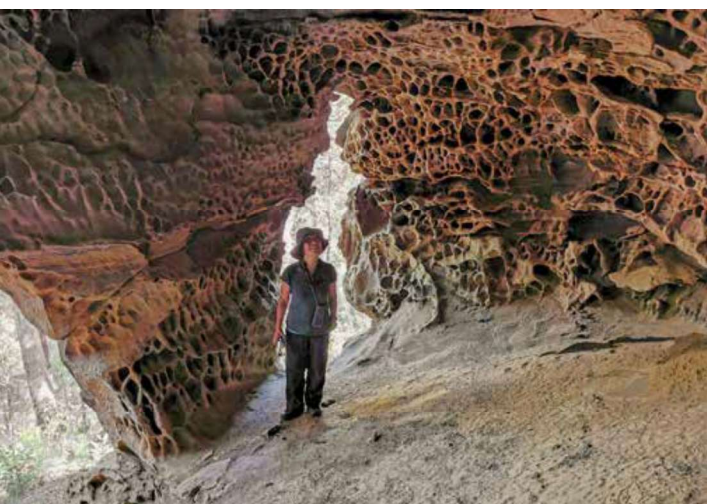
ABOVE: Sabrina Roesner in High Nirvana Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The group reaching the bottom of the descent underneath the cliff line. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: High Nirvana Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.  
Yidan Saladine in Byzantine Chamber. Photo: Bill Beck.

Linda Starkey, Ian Starkey, Harold Thompson, Bill Beck, Yuri Bolotin,  
Scott Marshall, Sabrina Roesner, Sally Kidall, and Daryl Watson in Byzantine  
Chamber. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



#### TRACK NOTES

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

The cars were parked on Mountain Lagoon Road, and, after a short briefing session, the adventure got underway at 0845. The main area of interest for today contained the cliff line above Tootie Creek and one of its tributaries. The plan was to take advantage of an old logging trail to help us reach the point furthest from the road (about 3.5 km away) as quickly as possible, then take our time exploring for the rest of the day, whilst constantly moving back towards the parked vehicles.

The morning air felt pleasantly fresh, the sun was shining, and we made good progress along the easily discernible but little-used trail along Nirvana Ridge, reaching a spot where the ridge splits into two branches, by 0918. There were lots of Flannel Flowers, *Actinotus helianthi*, growing all around, even though I would consider the time of the year to be past their usual blooming season.

Today, we turned to follow the northeastern branch, which was the shortest way to reach our first destination, Nirvana Caves. On the damp sandy ground, I noticed a few clusters of bright orange Coral Fungi, *Ramaria sp.*, their growth no doubt stimulated by



LEFT: First Kaleidoscope Cave ceiling. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: Bushwalkers in the Middle Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Inspecting Kaleidoscope Caves. Photo: Bill Beck.



last week's abundant rainfall and still-warm conditions.

At 0923, the group stopped on the brink of the eastern cliff line to marvel at the dramatic change of scenery in the little time since we had left the cars behind. At least a hundred metres below us was the rainforest-clad gorge containing Psychedelic Caves. (I had called that gorge Psychedelic Ravine on a previous trip.) We could follow it with our eyes to where it merged into an even bigger green expanse of Tootie Creek gorge further away to the north. To the east, our view was framed by the watershed containing Mountain Lagoon Road. Wow! You do not have to walk very far in this country to be immersed in the wilderness.

The old trail now became a bit hard to follow at times, but there was

no problem staying on top of the well-defined ridge that had little undergrowth. Almost at the end of the ridge, the group went up an unexpected (not on the map) rise and soon reached the point, at 0951, from where we needed to commence a very steep descent towards Tootie Creek.

Here, the topographic map shows uninterrupted cliffs directly to the north and a spur coming down to the north east. Although this spur would lead us slightly away from our destination, I was tempted to take it as it looked safer, but Bill, who had been here before, said we could head directly down. That we did, and it ended up being just fine; the cliff line, contrary to the map, was all broken up and therefore negotiable (with care). In one place, a narrow slot was very handy to take us below four metre high cliffs, but I am sure there would be a few other

BELOW: Last Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

RIGHT: In Kaleidoscope Caves. Photo: Bill Beck.

BELOW RIGHT: Middle Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Merridy Cairn-Duff.



*terrace-shaped floors. Its roof and back walls are richly decorated with eroded sandstone formations in a restrained colour palette of white, pale yellow, cream, and grey.*

The cave today was just as striking as last time, with the notable difference being that because we were there in the morning as opposed to early afternoon on 14/06/20, this west-facing overhang was now steeped in deep shadow. Once our eyes got adjusted to the low light, we could again marvel at the myriad of complex, intertangled, phantasmagorical shapes on the back wall of the cave.

During morning tea, I was quite impatient to move on as I knew that the even more impressive High Nirvana Cave awaited nearby, so, at 1024, we walked 50 metres south to find a steep narrow slot that leads to a small ledge five metres above. With ground surfaces still slippery after the rains, a tape was set here for safety. Another short scramble was required before we reached High Nirvana Cave at 1031. Once again, I refer to my track notes of 27/06/20:

*Dimensionally, it is almost identical to the lower cave, but as the floor here is less steep, one can step deep inside, to be enveloped in the magic of the space. What makes it really beautiful is the abundance, the richness and the geometrical composition of the sandstone decorations. There is also something special about being in a room of an almost uniform golden colour. The high elevation of the cave also means there are great views out towards Tootie Creek gorge.*

ways down in this area. By 1003, we made it under the cliffs and were greeted here by a small but noisy flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, *Calyptrorhynchus banksii*. Our journey was going to continue at about this elevation for most of the day, as we needed to always stay well above Tootie Creek.

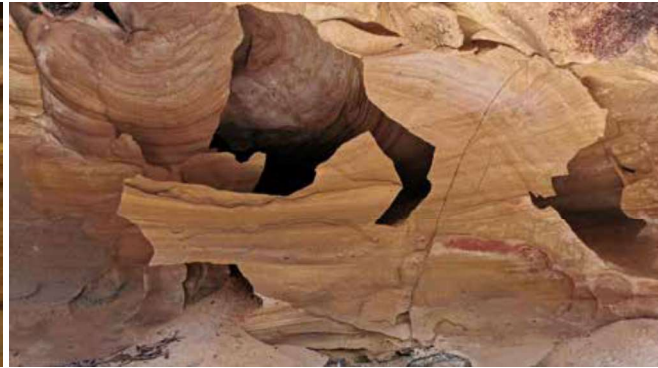
At 1012, the party came to Low Nirvana Cave in good time for the morning tea break. I quote here from my track notes of 27/06/20:

*During our walk on 14/06/20, we had found two incredible caves on the western face of this ridge, one above*

*the other. In the spirit of Psychedelic Caves nearby, I had called them Low Nirvana Cave and High Nirvana Cave. As explained in the Background Notes, I ended up having no recorded coordinates for this new discovery but was fairly confident I would be able to locate the caves today, using the map and my memory of the terrain.*

*I was nevertheless quite relieved when, without much trouble, we quickly made it to Low Nirvana Cave at 1253. This is a very impressive cavity, about 10 metres across, 8 metres high and 5 metres deep, with steeply rising*





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Middle Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Merridy Cairn-Duff.

Cave with large cut-out shapes. Photo: Bill Beck.

Traversing beneath a huge richly decorated overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We spent until 1043 admiring this remarkable feature and taking photos, then made our way underneath the cliffs and continued our descent along a very steep slope to the rainforest at the bottom of Nirvana Gully where a stream leaps down a couple of rocky terraces (at 1107).

Whilst crossing the creek on high boulders, I thought I could see a few Aboriginal grinding grooves submerged in the water just below me, but the slippery conditions made it unsafe to come any closer, so I was not sure in the end – they might have been just water ripples. Something to check next time when the creek level returns to normal.

Leaving Nirvana Gully behind, we faced a steep but short climb until the bottom of the cliff line on the other side was attained. A long traverse, roughly following the 400 metres elevation level, began here. A few small caves were passed and briefly looked at during the first few minutes. Beyond them, was a bigger overhang, and then another one even bigger. This one was a shallow wall of golden eroded sandstone, lit by the sun and capped by a protruding rock that formed a richly decorated ceiling.

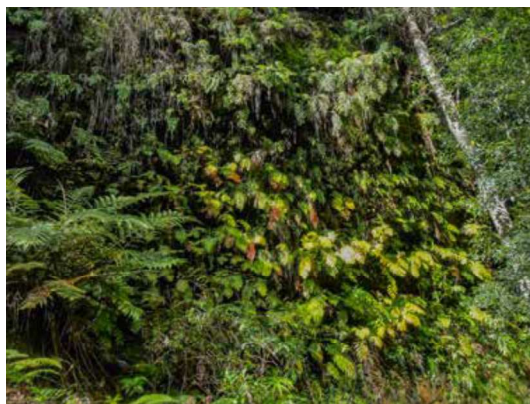
We kept sidling and enjoying the scenery, but suddenly the ledge stopped. We were too high! After a 20 metre descent to correct that, we were once again at the bottom of the cliffs, where wonderful caves were now presenting themselves with rhythmical regularity – one every couple of minutes.

At 1147, we stopped to take a photo of a small cavity with a cut-out shape inside resembling a horse's head. Right next to it, there was an extensive, flat, unadorned surface of dark brown rock. Nothing interesting until you come closer and see two door-sized openings, one much larger than the other, that lead into a large hall, eight metres across by five metres deep by three metres high. It takes a while for your eyes to adjust to the semi-darkness inside, then you realise that the inside walls of the chamber and its cupola-like ceiling are abundantly decorated by exquisite honeycomb formations. We sat there quietly for a while, completely in awe of this creation of Nature. The place reminded me of best examples of Byzantine architecture I had seen in Constantinople. These buildings were externally simple, but inside they contained richly inlaid mosaic walls, and often a central cupola surrounded by small windows. I therefore called it Byzantine Chamber (after Scott Marshall's suggestion).

After 12 minutes in this amazing location, it was time to continue our explorations. More sunlit, wonderfully sculptured walls soon followed; they were beautiful but perhaps not quite a match for the stunning, mysterious Byzantine Chamber. At 1210, we photographed a small overhang containing a multitude of paper-thin cut-out shapes of dark brown ironstone. I had documented a bigger, geologically similar cave not far from here during the walk of 30/10/20, naming it Wayang Cave due to the strong resemblance of these formations

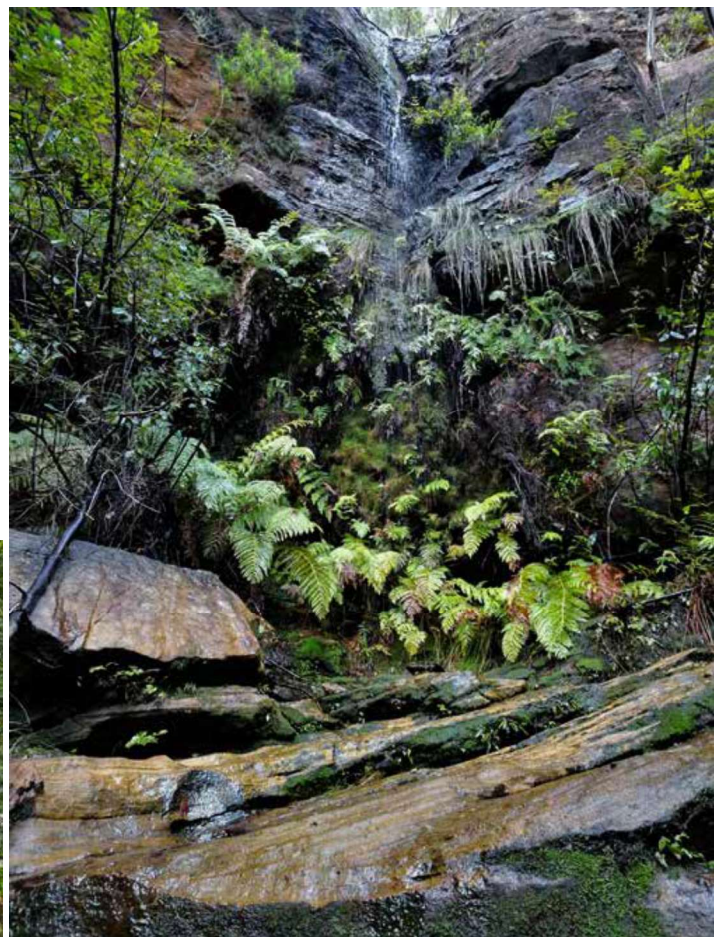
to Indonesian Wayang shadow puppets. Perhaps that could now be used as a generic term: Wayang formations.

A shelter containing Aboriginal art (charcoal drawings) was visited next. This was followed by a 50 metre long string of exceptional overhangs. The first one rises to about 15 metres in height, but its most striking feature is the underside of its low canopy that displays a phantasmagoria of mind-bending colours and shapes. The highlight of this complex for me, however, was an astonishing middle cave with its overlapping layers of pink, yellow, brown, and white flat shapes, some of them patterned with colourful concentric circles (called Liesegang Rings by geologists). A few steps further along was another cave, sporting panels of striking white, chocolate brown and yellow tafoni (honeycomb) formations. I named this stretch of bewildering



BELOW: Waterfall in the gully. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

BELOW LEFT: A wall of Ferns on our way. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.





OPPOSITE PAGE: Daryl Watson leads the way through a recent landslide. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

LEFT: Cascades in Easy Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

natural creations Kaleidoscope Caves. We spent from 1228 till 1238 there.

It will come as no surprise to readers that all these wonderful discoveries caused a sensory overload, so a stop for lunch became a matter of necessity. We had it in a small overhang with fallen rocks providing furniture, from 1246 till 1304. The sky was now mostly overcast, so the air temperature felt comfortable, and a light breeze helped alleviate the humidity we had been feeling during the last couple of hours. It was wonderful to sit down, eat and have a little time to digest both the food and the wonders we had just experienced.

Only a few minutes after resuming, the group stopped to admire another

striking cave, this one with large yellow cut-out shapes contrasting against the dark background of the surrounding rock. That was quickly followed by a long, high, intricately eroded sandstone wall. Here, we were treated to a spectacle when it suddenly 'caught fire' from the sunlight coming out of the clouds as we were passing.

At 1318, a deep wet gully was crossed, and our course of travel changed from west to south, in line with the orientation of cliffs and of Tootie Creek below. Soon, another small retrace and a 20 metre descent were necessary to deal with a 'no-go' ledge. At 1349, we had to come down to the bottom of the next ravine, which contained big boulders but only a small amount of

flowing water. The way up from there was through a dense field of Soft Ferns and Sword Grass.

Stopping for a drink on the opposite side, we spied a huge cave above, and I decided to have a look at it whilst the group rested. The cave was very nice, but I thought the 40 metre plus climb was not going to be worth it for the rest of the team, given the wonderful things we had seen before.

We were now above the confluence of Tootie and Easy Creeks, and the rest of our journey was going to entail following Easy Creek south, all the way to Mountain Lagoon Road and the parked cars. After a few hundred metres of easy walking, the ledge we

followed suddenly stopped, so we had to backtrack once more, until it was possible to descend beneath the encroaching cliff line and continue our progress.

At 1421, a boisterously running stream that came down the cliffs via a 20 metre waterfall was crossed. On the other side and above our heads was another stunning wall of orange sandstone, framed by lofty pink Angophoras and contrasted by thick green clumps of Grass Trees.

At 1442, we descended another gully containing a 20 metre waterfall plunging from the cliffs above, surrounded by a beautiful, high, green, wet wall of Ferns. After a photo or two



and a cool drink, we slowly worked our way up from here through a thick mass of King Ferns and Black Wattle, making sure to come out above a waterfall in the adjacent ravine. Next, a substantial, very fresh landslide, about 25 metres across, had to be negotiated. Judging by the fallen and smashed large Angophora tree, its leaves still fresh, this rock collapse happened during the huge rainfalls of last week.

We were now traversing a narrow slippery ledge that was steeply falling towards the dark rainforest below. As the map suggested a constriction in the gorge ahead, I decided it would be safer and more pleasant to continue at the bottom of Easy Creek. After a short search, a way of descent was found, and by 1500, we were in a dark rainforest, amongst towering Coachwoods and lush Ferns. During our journey upstream, several gurgling, leaping cascades and waterfalls were encountered. This environment, so different to the sunlit slopes above, added fresh variety to today's adventure.

In a few hundred metres (too soon!), the creek widened and the rainforest was replaced by open wooded slopes. We were now steadily gaining height whilst progressing towards the vehicles. However, I had one more beautiful cave up my sleeve that I wanted to visit, which we had found on a previous trip. The group crossed another stream and walked underneath a small waterfall to get there at 1535.



LEFT: High Nirvana Cave from the ledge below.  
Photo: Yidan Saladine.

## TIMES, LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0845	Cars parked and started walking	7255 9323	563 m
0918	Ridge splits	7239 9490	558 m
0923	Lookout	7378 9503	540 m
0951	Top of descent	7434 9636	490 m
1003	Bottom of descent	7432 9655	401 m
1012–1024	Morning tea at Low Nirvana Cave	7418 9642	410 m
1031–1043	High Nirvana Cave	7417 9638	425 m
1107	Crossed Nirvana Gully	7410 9630	370 m
1147–1159	Byzantine Chamber	7363 9600	396 m
1210	Cave with Wayang formations	7355 9582	406 m
1228–1238	Kaleidoscope Caves	7342 9578 (middle cave)	395 m
1246–1304	Lunch	7318 9582	400 m
1318	Crossed gully	7304 9566	423 m
1349	Crossed another ravine, confluence of Tootie Creek and Easy Creek	7291 9225	392 m
1421	Crossed gully	7282 9486	398 m
1442	Gully with waterfall and Fern wall	7275 9451	395 m
1500	In rainforest at the bottom of Easy Creek	7258 9427	423 m
1535	In cave	7258 9378	470 m
1558	At the vehicles	7255 9323	563 m

This large, 20 metre long dry cave with flat floors and richly adorned walls and ceiling could be the highlight of any other trip, but today we only had a short stop there, to have a drink and take a few photos.

almost constant temperate gradient all the way back to the cars, reaching them at 1558. This was the end of a terrific, memorable day out in the Wollemi, featuring some of the best cave formations I have seen.

Proceeding, the party climbed above the overhang and continued up an

**Trip statistics: total distance 12 km; total ascent 520 m.**