

Walk:

Wollemi National Park: Yodellers Range South Adventure

Leader:

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Widden. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

In the evening before, drive to Widden Valley and along Myrtle Gully Road. Establish a camp near *Myrtle Grove*.

Days 1 and 2

A two-day walk with a high camp on one night.

Day 1. From the camp, walk on Myrtle Trail and ascend the Yodellers Range at around GR 435 939. Myrtle Trail is about 320 m and the tops around 700 m. Proceed south and find a camp site, maybe at around GR 435 926. Explore around that area. Note that the distance from where we would leave the road is only about 2 km, but the terrain will hopefully keep us entertained.

Day 2. Continue south along the range till about GR 432 917, taking frequent exploratory detours. Descend to Myrtle Trail and walk back to the cars.

Day 3

Day walk.

With day packs, attempt to climb Blue Yodellers Mountain and return to camp.

Rating:

6M. S333E

Gear Issues:

Full pack gear, in addition to day walk gear. Water will need to be carried for the entire two-day walk on Days 1 and 2.

Dates walked:

22-24 March 2025.

Important Note:

Part of this walk is through private property. Access permission must be sought for each visit.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Kevin Songberg (co-leader), Kirstie Wulf (days 1 and 2), Oliver Guerrisi-Watson (days 1 and 2), Gary Green (days 1 and 2), José Luis Núñez (days 1 and 2), Anton Leddin, Susan Luu, 8.

The Weather:

Day 1 –No rain, but the sky was completely overcast early in the morning. Later on, the cloud cover dissipated to around 50%. Very high humidity throughout the day. The still, warm air felt particularly oppressing in the deep gorges below the main range. A light cool breeze on exposed tops was life-saving. Murky conditions made photography challenging in the morning, but that improved dramatically in the afternoon. Temperature range 16 to 28 degrees C.

Day 2 –Full cloud cover early in the morning, with a tiniest drizzle and murky atmospheric conditions. Partly cloudy during the day, with improved visibility and occasional light breezes that helped to alleviate high humidity. Temperature range 18 to 26 degrees C.

Day 3 – A light drizzle and fully overcast sky in the morning. The drizzle mostly stopped by the time we set off, but cloudy conditions remained for the rest of the walk. Extremely high humidity, especially in the early part of the day and/or away from occasional light cooling breezes. Temperature range 20 to 26 degrees C.

Background Notes

The Yodellers Range¹ in the Northern Wollemi contains some of the most exciting and dramatic landscapes in Australia. In August 2020, we had a 3-day trip traversing the eastern part of the range from Watts Mountain to Cats Ear East. The track notes for that walk are contained in our publication, *Wollemi National Park: Wilderness Adventures – Book 1*. The aim of this new trip was to explore the lesser-known southern part of the range, which contains a series of unnamed peaks separated by deep gaps.

There are many ways to experience this amazing terrain. The issues facing a prospective explorer are that there is generally no water on the range; and that many of the chasms can only be breached by abseiling from one side and rock climbing on another. This means, for a complete traverse, one needs to bring several days' supply of water and a substantial amount of equipment.

I had set out to construct a three-day Yodellers Range South Adventure without the need to carry a lot of weight and by using only the bushwalking means of negotiating obstacles. The way to do it was to break it into a one-day walk from a base camp and a two-day overnight walk. This was the fourth time we were going to do this trip due to bad weather on two occasions and unavailability of private property access at our selected dates on the third attempt.

Track Notes

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

The weather once again tried to wreak havoc to our plans, but this time I managed to salvage the trip. It had been originally planned for Friday to Sunday, but with less than a 24-hour notice, the forecast was changed for heavy rain on the first day. The Yodellers Range is not a place to be in wet and slippery conditions, so I moved the trip one day back and reversed the order of the weekend proceedings to have a two-day traverse trip on Saturday-Sunday, followed by a one-day climb to the Blue Yodellers Mountain on Monday. We would all drive to Widden Valley on Friday, to maximise our time for the overnight full pack adventure. As a result, regrettably, half of the party could not join us on Monday, but now, looking back, this had been the only correct and safe way to conduct this journey.

And so it was that we set off in the rain during Friday to meet at the Widden Road and Bylong Valley Way intersection at 4 pm, by which time, as predicted, most of the precipitation had gone away. The party then proceeded to camp overnight near *Myrtle Grove*, as approved by the private property owners. In the evening that day, we drove one vehicle further down along Myrtle Trail, and the good news was that, even though the road deteriorated a bit, it was drivable in our light 4WDs all the way to the locked gate at the national park boundary. That meant we could save some time and energy on the two-day trip by driving about 3.5 kilometres further south. We later discovered that substantial maintenance had been done to Myrtle Trail after it enters the national park.

¹ **Yodellers Range** is a crescent-shaped ridge of dramatic proportions. Located between the parallel valleys of Myrtle Creek and Emu Creek, it stretches more than 17 km from the amazing and challenging Cats Ears that mark the northeastern extremity. The southern end disappears into massive cliffs near Counter Tenor Saddle between Myrtle Creek and Cedar Creek. The highest point is 834 m at the southernmost extreme of the Yodellers Range on the Talooby map near Sandy Camp. The range is endowed with a rich collection of memorable features immortalised by Wilf Hilder when working for the NSW Department of Lands in the 1970s and particularly on the Mount Pomany 1:50,000 map.



Trip briefing at *Myrtle Grove* camp. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Day 1 – 22 March 2025

First thing in the morning, we drove a couple of vehicles down Myrtle Trail and parked near our take-off point, a gully coming in from the east, about 500 m north of the national park boundary. There was no need for the traditional pre-walk briefing as it had taken place during the mealtime the evening before. At 0800 on the dot, the party set off for our overnight adventure. We each carried enough water for two days. In my case, it meant nearly eight litres, which doubled the weight of my pack. Most other people had as much, if not more, and we all felt it, especially in the first part of the day when we were climbing over 400 metres onto the Yodellers Range through rough and unknown country.

When the party left Myrtle Trail, I initially tried to stay within the gully we planned to follow, but it soon became narrow and scrubby, so for a while we had to duck in and out of it, choosing the easiest way forward. Whilst pushing through the vegetation in front of the group, I frequently ran headlong into extensive, sticky web arrangements of Golden Orb Spiders, *Nephila plumipes*. This Spider is believed to be harmless to humans, but the experience of untangling myself from the grip of the imposing webbing whilst being watched by its creator was not a pleasant one. We were going to encounter more Golden Orbs during this trip than I ever remember, so later on, I would swap the group lead to let the others, calling it ‘the Spider duty’. Having said that, on the second day of the trip I walked through a nest of Bull Ants, *Myrmecia* sp., and, after being stung by just one, thought, give me a fifty, no, a hundred Golden Orbs instead.



More Golden Orb Spiders, *Nephila plumipes*, on this trip than I ever remember seeing. Photo: José Luis Núñez.

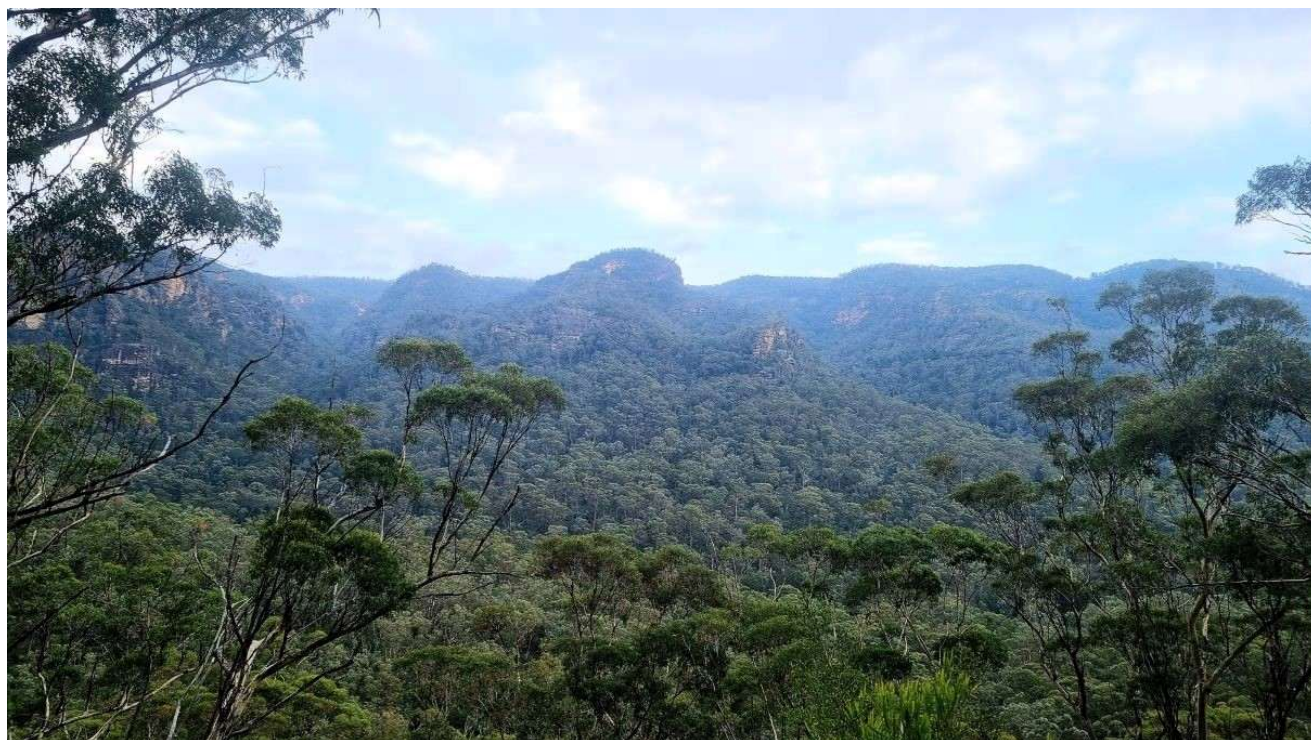


My encounter with a single Bull Ant *Myrmecia* sp., was much more painful. Photo: José Luis Núñez.

Eleven minutes into our journey, we came to a split in the watercourse, and I thought it might be better to ascend a spur in between, not realising, until we climbed too far, that there was another very narrow and deep slot-like ravine, not shown on the map, to our south, which barred our way towards the gully that I hoped would take us up to the top of the range.

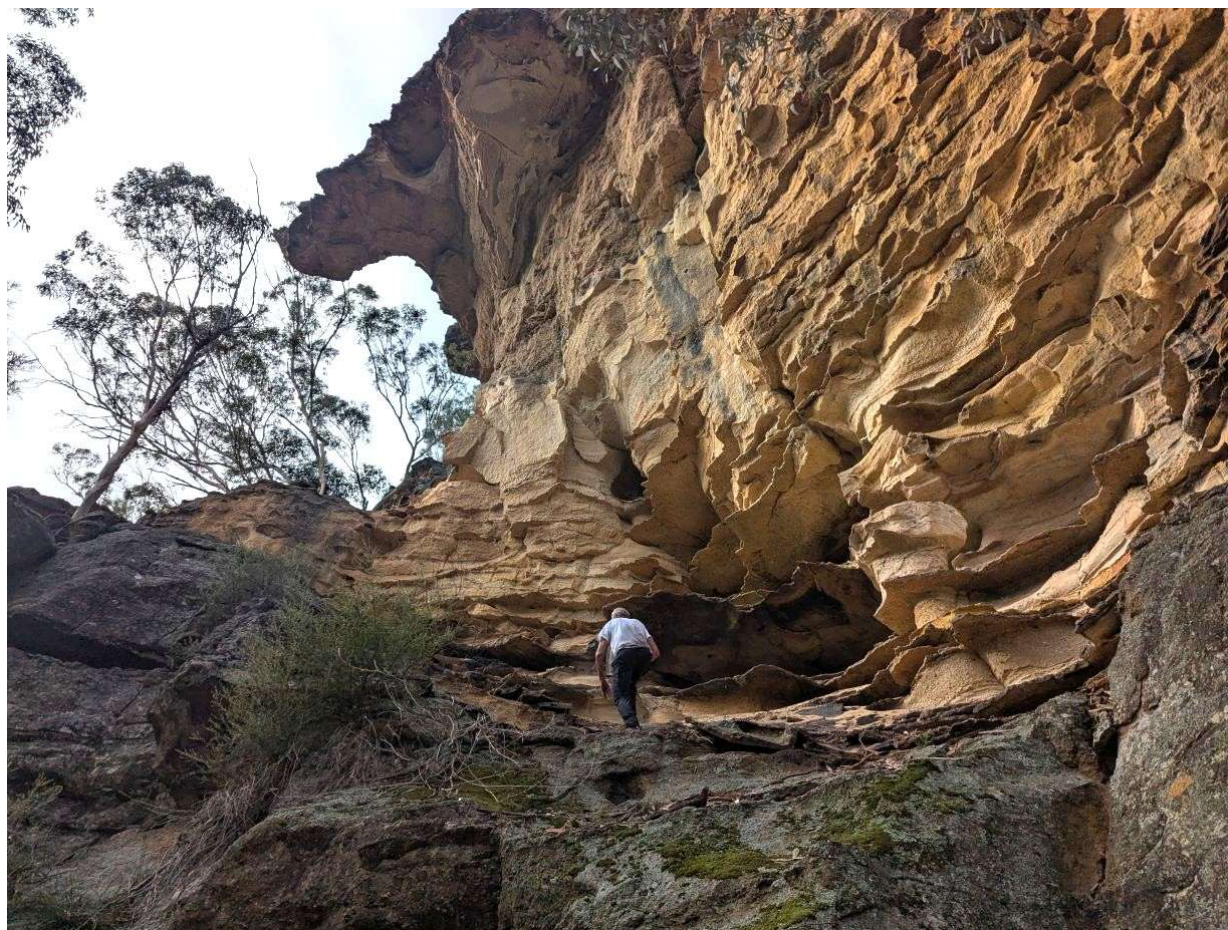
Never mind, we pushed on up for another 150 metres or so, until the slot became shallower, allowing us to cross it. The scrub here was very dense, I felt so disappointed (and guilty) that we were forced to lose 30 or 40 metres of precious elevation we had previously gained at such a considerable effort. On the positive side, the first tantalising glimpses of the Yodellers Range appeared, teasing and encouraging us to move forward.

Now traversing south under a cliff line, we could also enjoy expansive views towards the Nullo Range to the north, dominated by Lovers Leap and Andreany Mountain. By 0853, the group made it to the bottom of the target gully, which here was steep and rocky, with small stagnant-looking pools. Shortly afterwards, we decided to leave this deceptive watercourse and make our way up to the big cliff line looming ahead.



Nullo Range view. Lovers Leap is in the middle. Andreany Mountain is to the right of it. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The rate of incline from here on became much harder to negotiate without frequent stops, which I tried to keep short. Humidity was the real issue, and drinking enough water helped a lot. 0908 saw us below some monstrous-looking high walls, but just ten metres or so higher, I spotted a beautiful small cave. It was a delight to inspect, but, unfortunately, there I could not see any way through it, so a small retrace had to be done, involving a 50 centimetre wide ledge traverse above a 30 metre drop, carrying full packs.



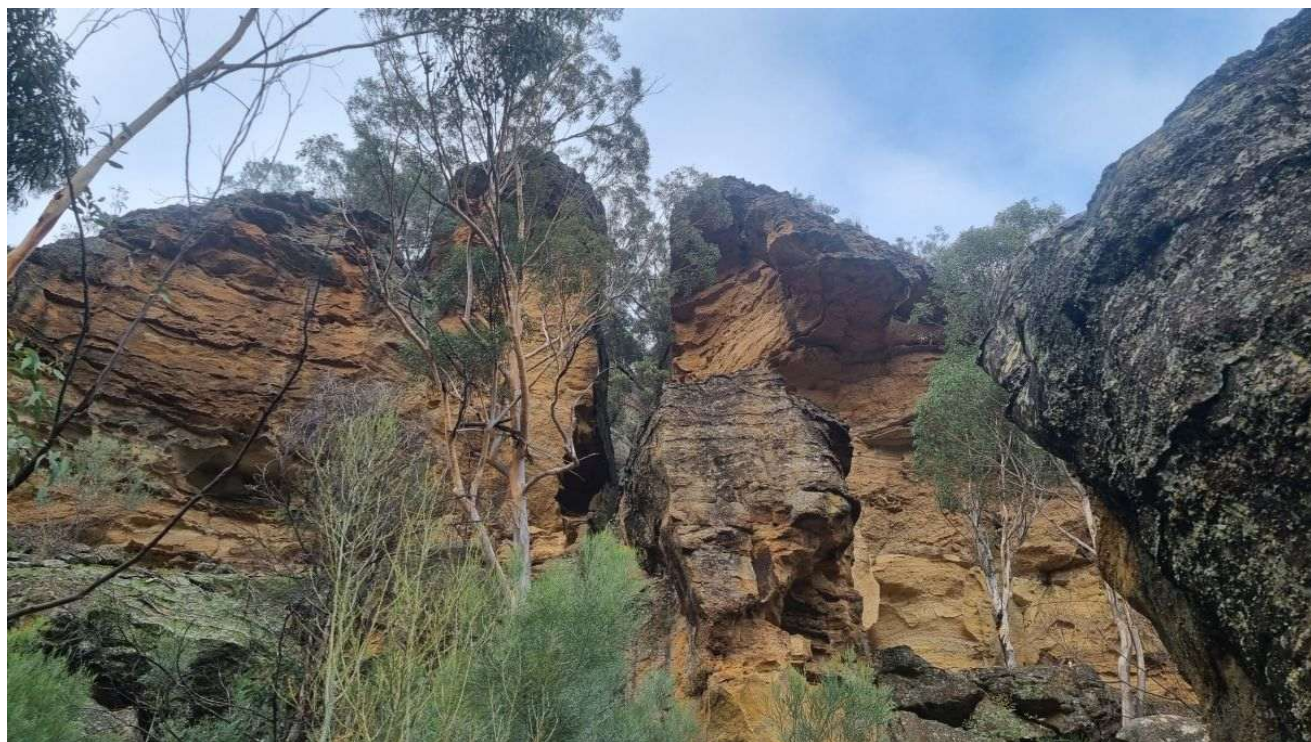
Yuri investigating the cave that did not go. Photo: Oliver Guerrisi-Watson.



Ledge traverse. Photo: Oliver Guerrisi-Watson.

Luckily, the narrow part was only about five metres long. I know a good hand grip is essential in these circumstances, and we found enough solid handholds to make safe crossing. Our reward here was a tremendous view north across the gully we had tried to follow (with mixed success) earlier on, to the enormous, deep, slim gap between the non-negotiable (by bushwalking means) peak south of the Blue Yodellers Mountain and the end of the range we were hoping to scale to start the traverse south.

Much closer in, was a narrow very steep ravine that, surprisingly, looked quite good, at least from the bottom. I took my pack off and went to investigate, wanting to make sure we would not be forced to reverse with full packs after hitting a high wall somewhere. Having progressed 50 metres or so within the slot, I thought it would most probably work, so decided to stop at that and return to the group. From 0923 till 0933.



We used the ravine in the middle of the photo to get to the tops. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

This straight 200 metre long ravine was a wonderful find – a hard, steep but not technical climb. It took us through almost 120 metres of elevation to the top of the Yodellers Range, but I remember the 37 minutes that elapsed before we reached our goal as some of the hardest times I had experienced whilst bushwalking. It was very warm, the humidity was completely stifling, and our packs, very heavy. I felt a bit dizzy at times, and later on, a few other team members admitted feeling the same. A few quick rehydration stops certainly helped, and finally, at 1010, we made it to a place on the Yodellers Range where we could stop for morning tea. And what place it was!

Afterwards, telling some family members about this trip, I described how hard it was to push up through the dense prickly scrub, with no glimpses of the terrain around us, when your mind has not much else to focus on, except the misery of carting your body and a huge pack towards an invisible and perhaps unattainable destination. They asked, why doing it, why punishing yourself so much? My answer was, because of what we saw when we reached the top of the range. And it was the contrast of being in a dusty, scratchy, confined space for a considerable time and now coming to a most jaw-dropping breath-arresting open view that made it so special.

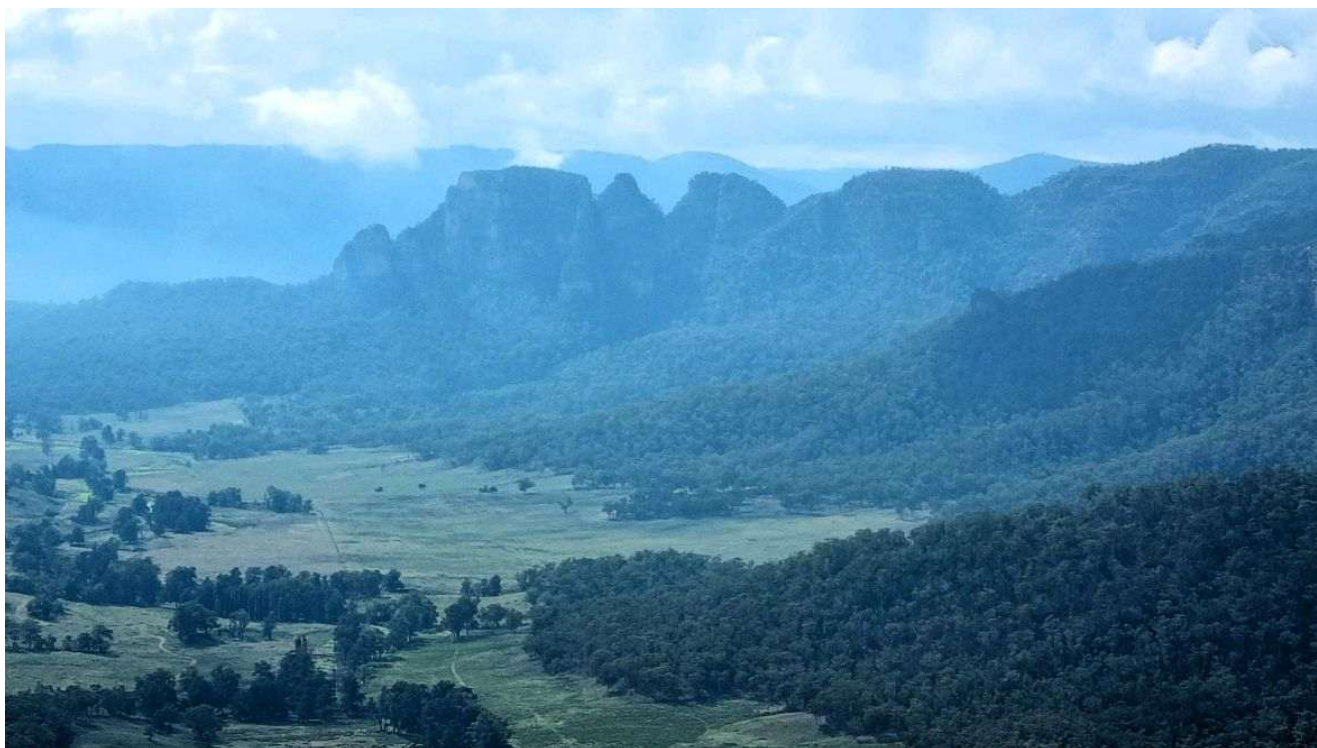
Seconds before that, whilst still being in the rhythm of the climb, I felt a kiss of cool breeze on my cheeks. One more push, and finally...In front of our sweaty, tired bodies but eager eyes, was the 180-degree emerald spread of the Emu Creek valley nearly 450 metres below. We could see Minaret Ridge capped with a towering Minaret Peak across on the opposite side, and beyond it extended the Pomany Range, with its spectacular end of jagged peaks to the north east and Mount Pomany visible far to the south east. Closer to

us, the spectacular arc of the Yodellers Range could be followed all the way to Reverelli Mountain. Due to atmospheric conditions, these remote peaks appeared in a hazy blue mist, which added to the dramatic view, contrasting sharply with the enormous bright yellow wall of eroded cliffs immediately next to the saddle we were standing in.

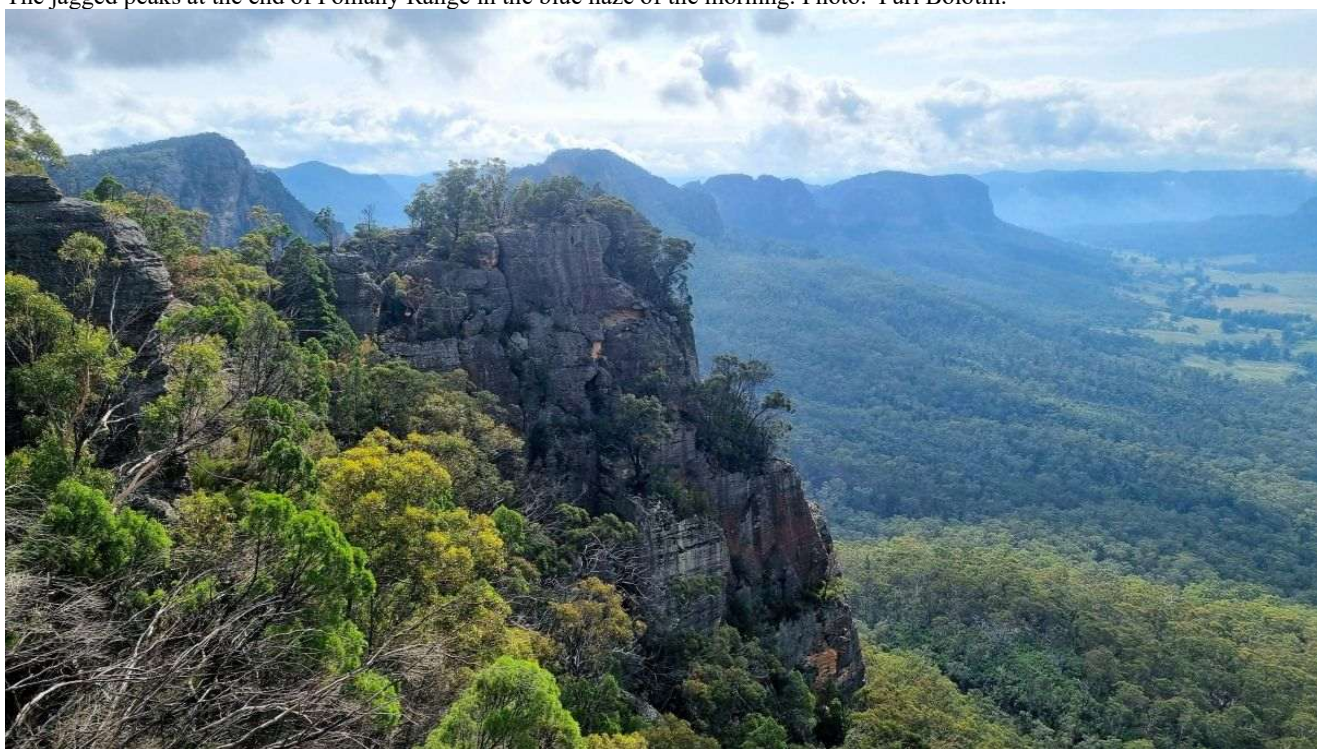
The company spent over 40 minutes here, to savour and explore the beauty of this location. I thought we earned it! During that time, we made several excursions along the narrow, rocky tops, seeking even better views. Looking in the opposite direction from a high bluff fifty metres to the north, parts of the Nullo Range became visible, including Happy and Free Peak, Far Horizons Mountain and Here and Now Peak. We had climbed all these in August last year as a last-minute substitute for this trip that could not take place due to a special function at our hosts' property. Yes, morning tea! As usual, I was so excited about the amazing views, I almost forgot to eat.



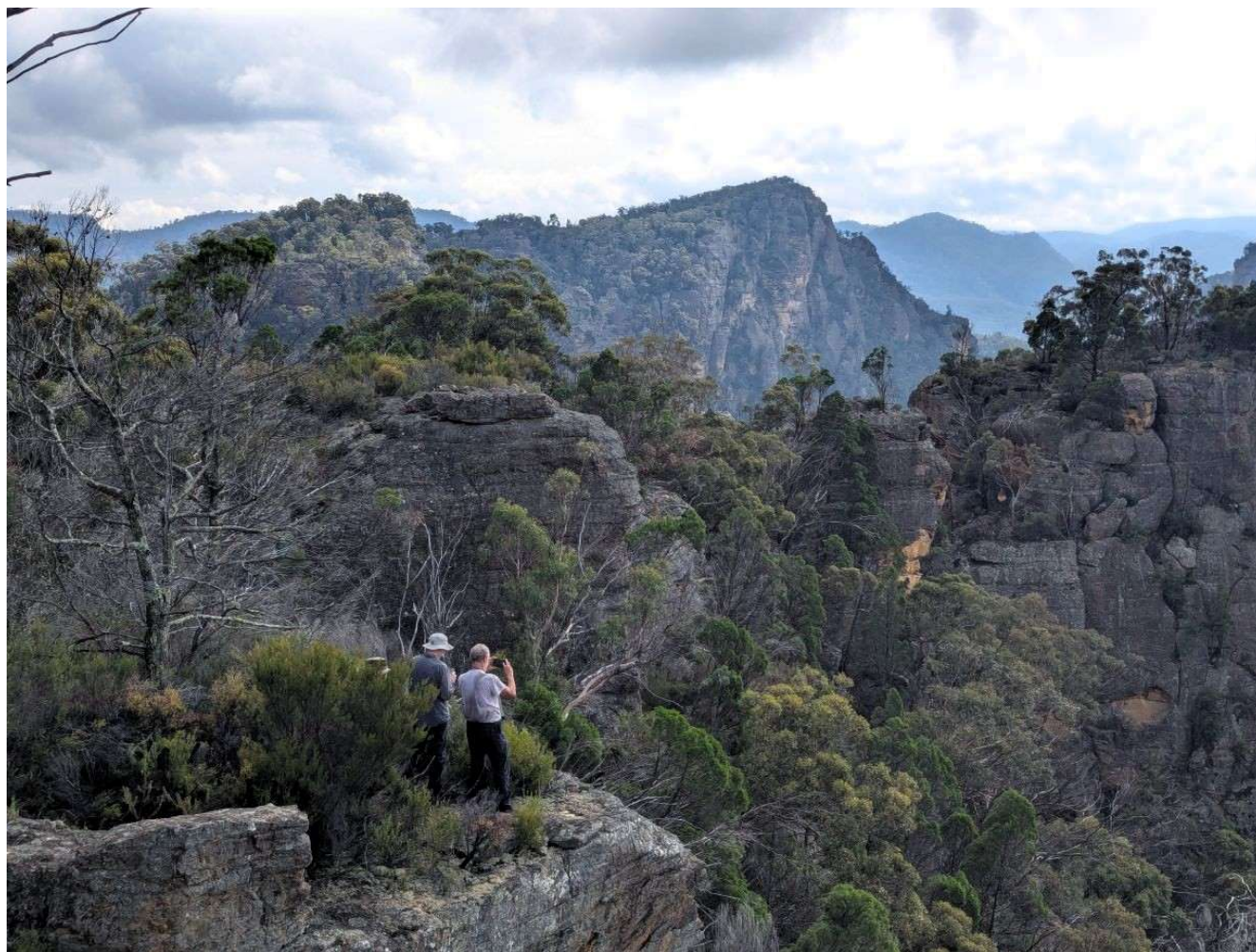
Enormous sunlit cliffs to our right. Minaret Ridge and Minaret Peak can be seen in the distance, and further away, Mount Pomany. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The jagged peaks at the end of Pomany Range in the blue haze of the morning. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yodellers Range view, looking north. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Yodellers Range in our immediate vicinity, looking north. Photo: Oliver Guerrisi-Watson.



The group during a well-earned morning tea break. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Finally, at 1050, we could begin our Yodellers Range South traverse journey by ascending a steep bouldery slope towards a flat round peak, reached ten minutes later. This area, which seemed to have been spared

from the bushfires five years ago, was covered in mature *Callitris* forest. Because of that, the ground had no scrub, allowing for easy progress, but the views were temporarily lost due to dense tree cover. The dark hardy trunks of *Callitris* trees coated in rusty red-orange Lichen stood out from the soft black-brown soil we were treading on. They provided cool deep shade, and somehow it felt less humid here as well. It was a quiet, meditative part of today's walk, in a completely different environment from the scrubby approach march and the glorious views of the past few hours. A wonderful variety!

As we moved south, coming off the high point, the incline became steeper and distant views appeared to our right, becoming more and more alluring as we progressed. Eventually (at 1115), that was no longer possible to resist (and why would we?), so we left our packs and went to explore along a thin, rocky spur jutting out to the west.

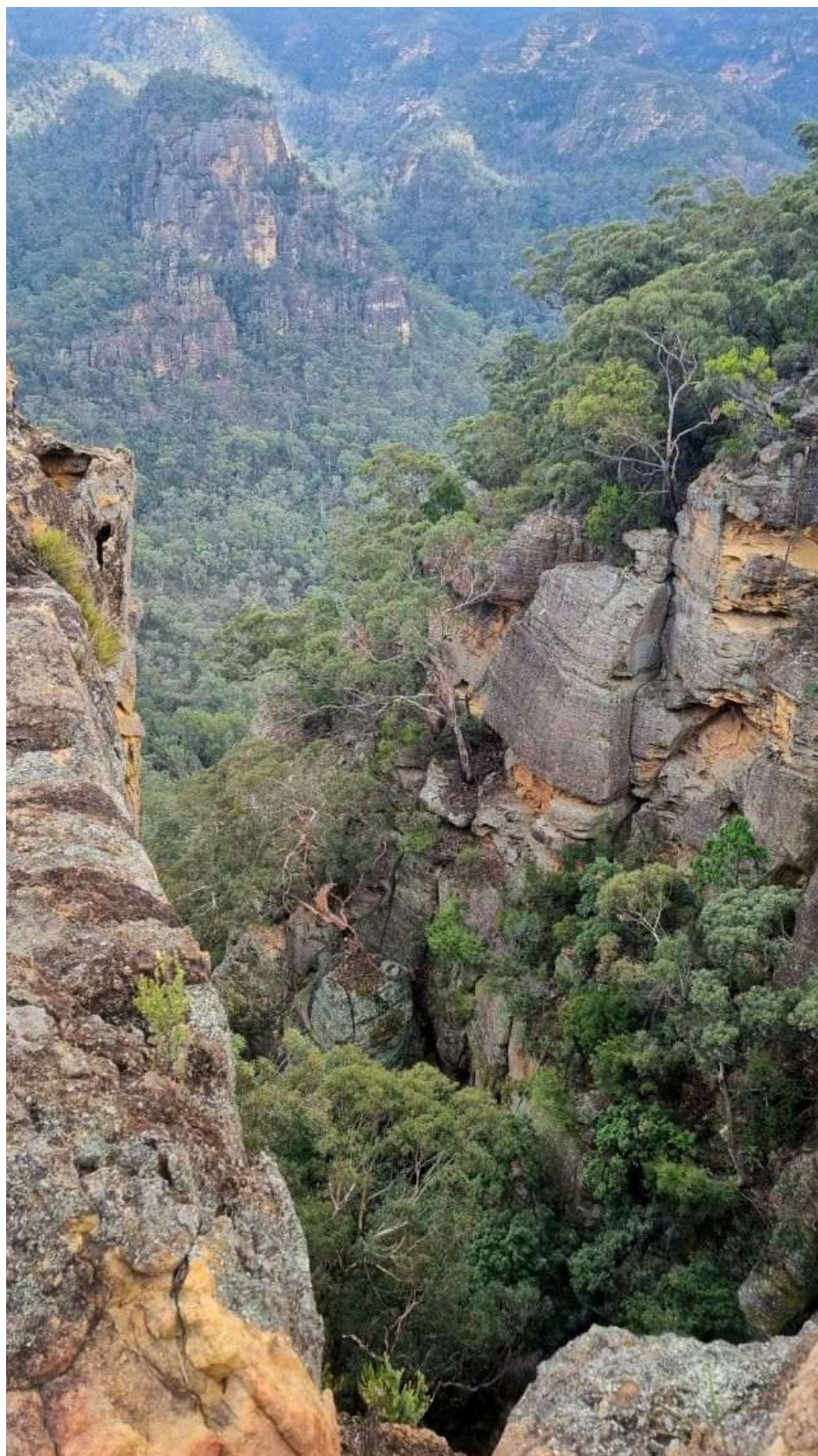
Within a couple of minutes, the company stopped to behold in awe an incredible forest of giant pagoda pinnacles immediately to the north, on the other side of a deep rainforest ravine. One of the spires particularly stood out. It soared 30 metres above the level of the spur we were standing on, and continued for another 30 metres down to the bottom of the gorge. A few steps further, the party stopped on the brink of a dizzying 150 metre drop, with views opening to the west towards Myrtle Valley and Nullo Range, framed by the V-shape of the ravine.



The party on the side trip along a spur. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



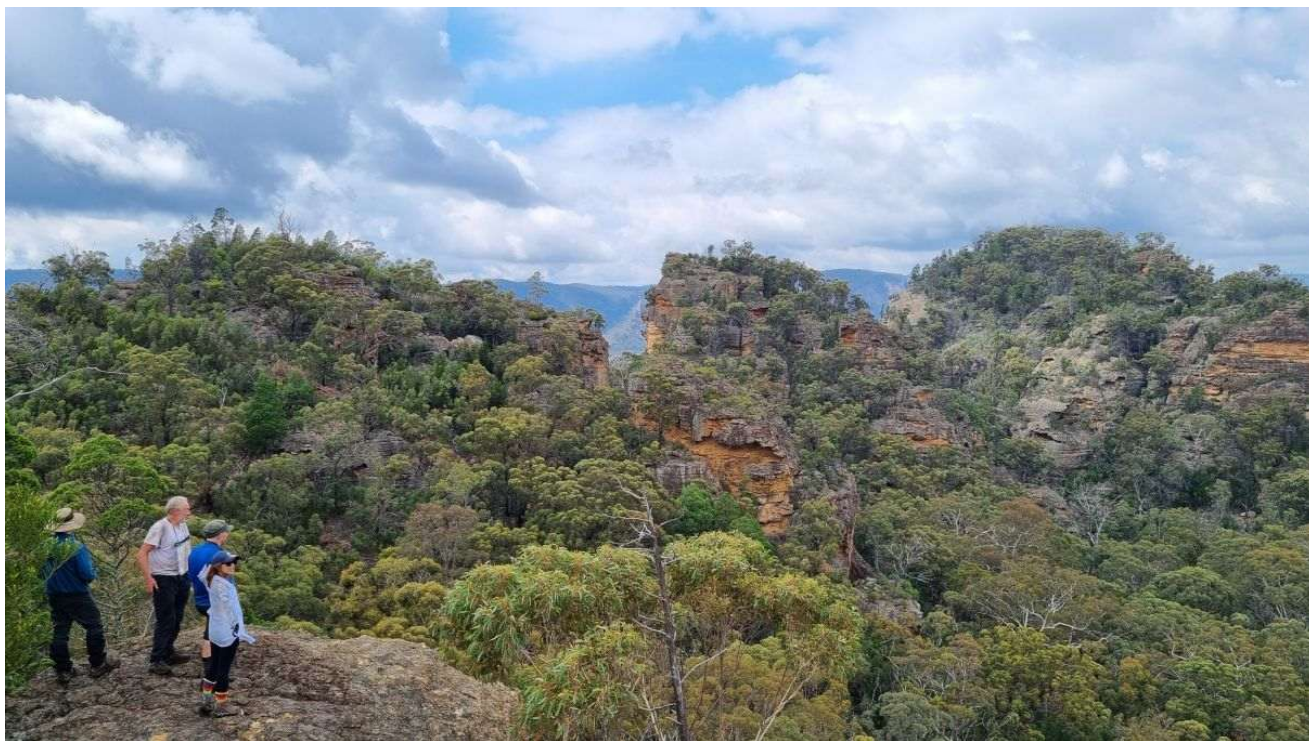
The enormous pinnacle seen from the spur. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The view north from the spur towards the Nullo Range. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

But there was more! Coming to the non-negotiable end of the spur and casting our eyes southwards, we paused to take in another breathtaking panorama. I was hoping to traverse this landscape of standalone peaks covered with pagodas, guarded by high cliffs and separated from each other by deep gorges during the next day and a half. It felt like a tall order indeed, but we were all looking forward to the challenge. Two high

knolls situated on the edge of the escarpment along the Yodellers Range particularly stood out. I took a good long look, knowing we would have to deal with them very soon. At 1125.



The view towards the Yodellers Range, with two peaks prominent on the right-hand side of the photo. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



A Yodellers panorama. Photo: Kirstie Wulf.

Ten minutes later, the group was back where we had left our packs and resumed our descent. It took us onto a side slope of a deep gully, reached by 1145. When preparing for this walk, I had considered two possible routes from here. One would involve ascending in the southeasterly direction, then going up and down over the two precipitous-looking knolls we had just seen from the last lookout. Although this would no doubt be a more spectacular way, I was not sure if it was negotiable, especially with heavy packs; besides, I was hoping to take an excursion that way from the camp later today. Therefore, a safer route was chosen – to continue walking down within the gully to a flat area, where a tributary ravine comes in from the tops, which would hopefully lead us back to the main range past the two knolls. We made it to the bottom of the descent at 1206, and by 1238, after another stiflingly hot, scrubby and relentlessly steep ascent, clogged with spider webs, we reached a deep narrow saddle on top of the Yodellers Range, greeted by a feather-gentle but divine cooling breeze and another enormous, expansive vista.

Lunch and rest were the top two priorities here, followed by the enjoyment of the views. Here, we took photos of a giant protruding rock animal head overseeing the proceedings within Emu Creek valley from the enormous sandstone walls to our south.



An enormous animal head-like protruding rock overlooking the Emu Creek valley. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Thirty minutes later, our adventure continued as the party climbed the next high point, whilst staying close to the edge of the escarpment. Although the vistas were getting better and better as we proceeded higher, when we mounted the top (my first possible overnight camping spot), there was not a square metre of flat, scrub-free ground in sight. At 1317.

Never mind, we now proceeded west along the ridgetop and soon managed to find a better area, covered by scattered rocks and branches – not ideal, but it was roomy enough for all of us and could work with some light landscaping for individual sites. Whilst there were no views from here, I thought we could walk back 100 metres to the escarpment in the evening. But how about a bit further west along the spur? Here, we hit a bonanza! Forty metres from the proposed camp site, up and around a short pagoda, there was a rock platform with panoramic view onto the Myrtle Creek valley and a very unusual perspective towards the Emu Creek valley, seen through the top of the cliff line of the Yodellers Range! The location of our dinner spot was thus settled, and now we needed to decide on the camping spot.

We next descended a little on the southern side of the spur. There was nothing much right there in terms of flat scrub-free areas, but across the next gorge on the opposite side I could see an extensive flat space covered in short grass, like a meadow. This was on our route tomorrow. Should we head there now? It was less than 500 metres away, as the Kookaburra flies. Think carefully, my dear reader, before you say, it is an obvious decision. This is Wollemi we are dealing with. Before making any suggestions, I had a look at the map and considered that we were feeling rather tired, and also how humid and hot it was right now.

I then decided that we would stay here on this spur today. At 1410. We would establish the camp (which would require some time and effort), have a rest, and then, in the cooler part of the day, do an exploration trip back north, towards the two knolls we had gone around and missed on the way here. This would not be possible if we kept going. Notwithstanding this excursion, if you read on, you will learn that tomorrow,

having gone through the 500 m that separated us from the meadows, I was very glad that I made the right choice today.

The next hour and a half was spent on camp building and having a rest, and at 1543, we departed from our now well-set up base on the exploration journey. There were four of us in the party; the others chose to take it easy and stay put for the day. The incredible panorama we saw coming out to the escarpment edge was now even more breathtaking as the air clarity had improved dramatically since the morning. The afternoon sun cast long dark shadows onto this vast landscape whilst illuminating the mountain peaks with its golden glow. Dramatic high cloud formations drifting in the sky above completed the picture. At 1550.



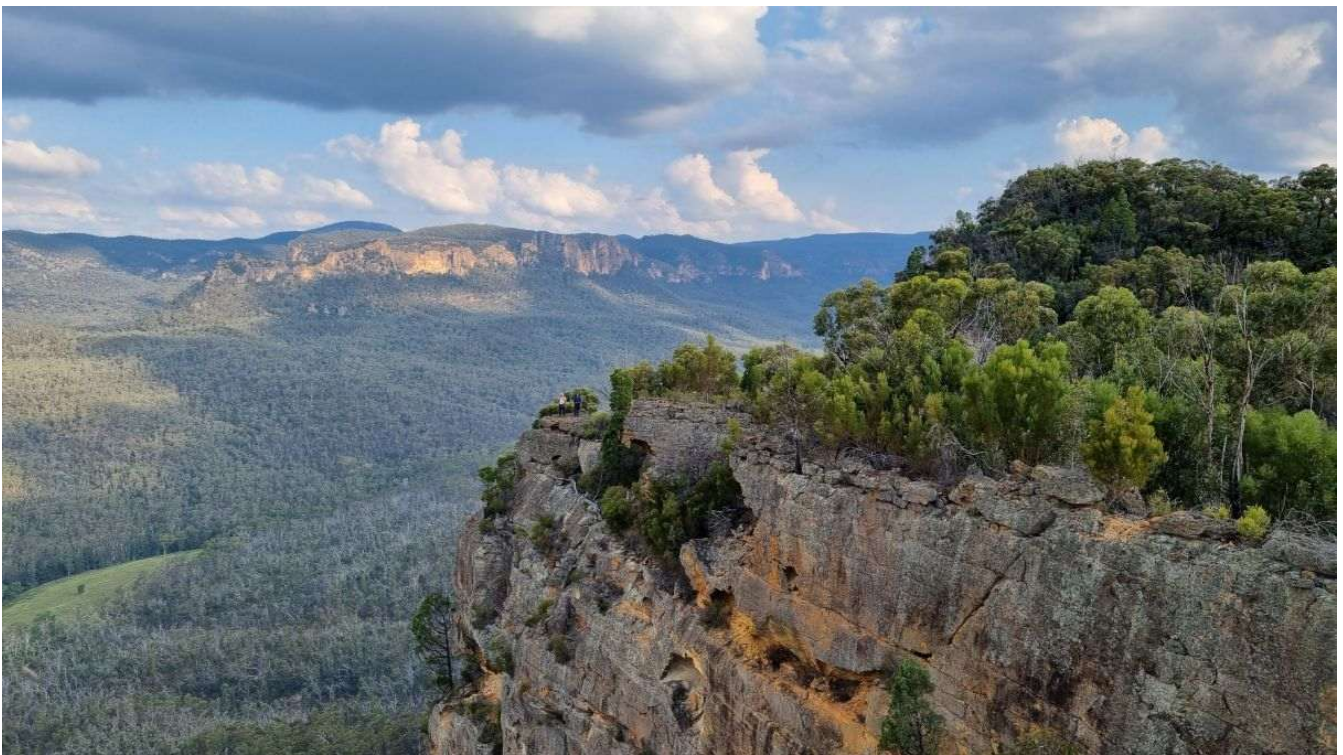
The view towards Emu Creek valley. The Yodellers Range is on the left, the Pomany Range on the right in the distance, and the Minaret Ridge on the right closer in. Photo: Anton Leddin.

We now headed down to the lunch saddle, taking more photographs on the way; amongst them, of an amazing big tree, with its roots attached to the rock and its heavy body-trunk hovering in the air of a huge drop into the valley hundreds of meters below. Our party then proceeded to ascend to the top of the southern hill, reached at 1616. A small old cairn was noted here on one of the prominent points, a reminder that someone had been here before us. It appeared to be quite a few years old, perhaps from the last century. We spent the next 40 minutes clambering over various viewpoints in search of a perfect vista. There were so many to choose from! Frankly, they were all amazing, because this location had inarguably the best sightlines today for seeing the entire northern part of the range - Blue Yodellers Mountain (that we were hoping to climb on Monday), Octave Gap, Watts Mountain, Falsetto Gap, Wedding Cake Mountain, Oakland Peaks, Torrani Mountain, Reverelli Mountain, and the sharp triangle of the Cats Ear West. Much closer home, we had glimpses through the dense tree cover of the tents in our camp on the next spur south.



The Yodellers Range panorama in the afternoon sun. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From the edge of the ravine separating us from the second peak, I could see that it would not be too hard to climb it, but the time left in the day would be not sufficient to take full advantage of that. I now knew that when we had been presented with two route choices coming off the high top earlier in the day and had taken the one going around the two knolls, the other one would have been more scenic but would also require a lot of extra energy that at the time had been at a low point. So, no regrets, but something to keep in mind for future adventures.



Yuri and Gary (if you can spot them) at the cliff edge, with the Emu Creek valley behind them, with Minaret Ridge and Mount Pomany visible. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

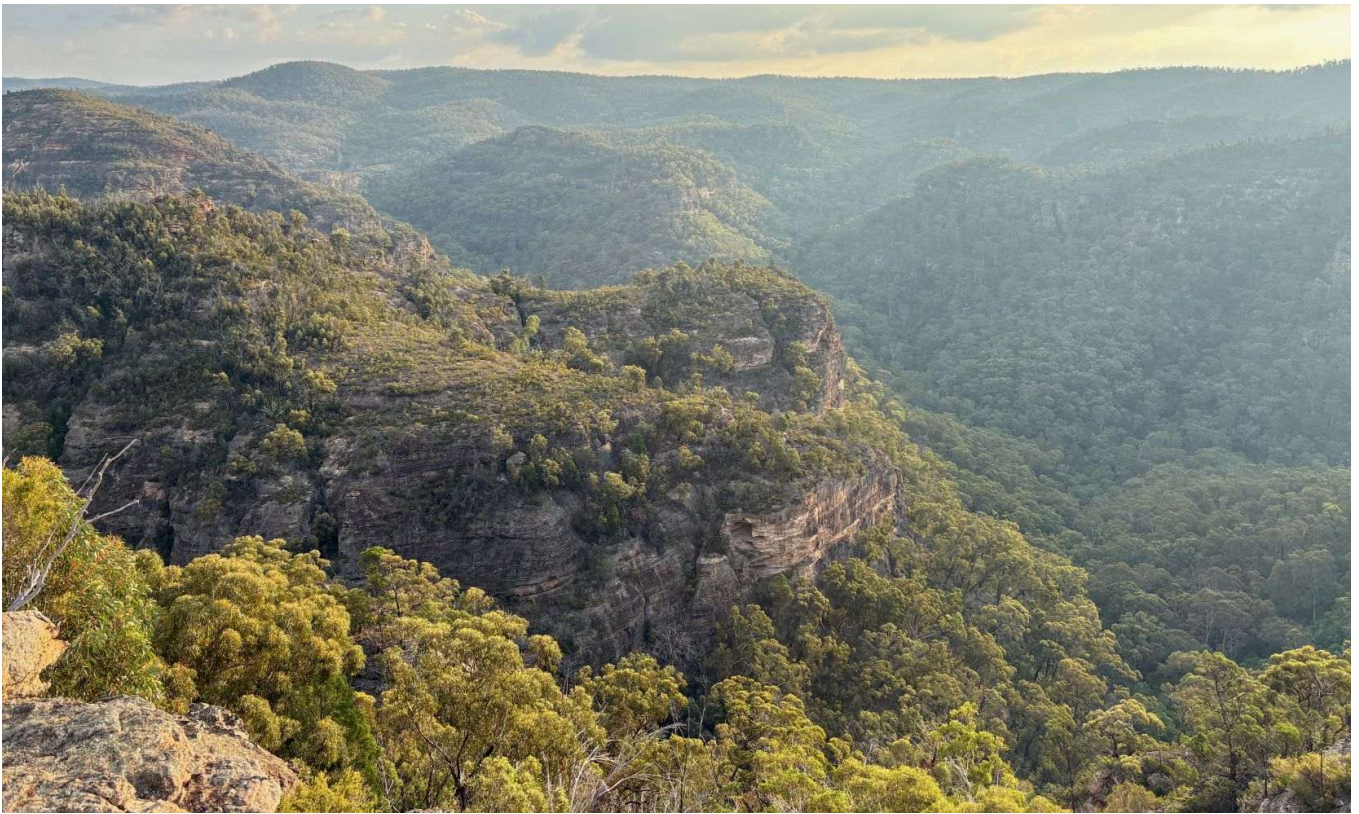
Finally, it was time to head back. Retracing our steps, our party returned to the camp by 1716, very happy with the wonderful excursion and the views. The evening was spent relaxing, having dinner at the stone terrace near the camp, whilst watching a most spectacular sunset over the Yodellers and Nullo Ranges, followed by an equally spectacular view of the endlessly starry skies.



Our campsite. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



The view from the lookout platform near the camp. In the foreground is the knoll we visited in the afternoon (you might see us there, standing on a high rock at centre-left). Further away, is Watts Mountain followed by Wedding Cake Mountain, Oakland Peaks and the triangle of Cats Ear West. In the background, are the pyramid of Here and Now Peak; and Home Call Mountain on the Nullo Range. Photo: Susan Luu.



Late afternoon panorama of Myrtle Creek valley and Nullo Range from the camp lookout. Our alternative camping spot ('the meadows') can be seen on the next spur. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Early evening proceedings at the camp lookout. We passed the high top in the middle after the morning tea today. The high cliff on the side of it, lit by the sun, is at the end of our excursion spur this morning. Photo: Anton Leddin.

Day statistics: total distance 4.82 km; total ascent 694 m.

Day 2 – 23 March 2025

Our hopes for a brilliant sunrise were shattered by intense cloud cover coming in the middle of the night. There was even an occasional very light drizzle, which I probably felt more than others as I had not brought my fly with me on this overnight trip, choosing instead to sleep *al fresco* under the open sky. It was not much of a worry, but the morning was so intensely cloudy, misty and dim that our spectacular surroundings looked shapelessly grey and devoid of any details. It was as though we had been transported overnight to an entirely different area.

With all the deep precipitous drops and sheer cliffs hidden from sight, one could be forgiven for thinking the next phase of our journey would be a very easy one. I thought, why had I allowed the most part of the day to progress one kilometre along the range? Certainly, we would finish before morning tea? One glance at the topographic map was enough to bring me back to reality. I was not even sure how we would get off the spur we were camped on, as it looked challenging to say the least. I knew we would not be bored! And, on the very positive side, our packs were going to be a lot lighter today.

Before leaving our wonderful camp, we did our best to return it to the original condition, removing all traces of our presence here. I was very happy that by the time of our departure at 0807 the visibility had greatly improved. Our first challenge was to find a way down through the cliffs to a deep ravine to the south. We slipped off the spur and through the first significant drop, using a succession of two slots. The first one had a small dry cave on the side with a window in it. Below the second slot, we found high picturesque walls of eroded orange and beige sandstone. An uneven ledge ran past them. At 0820.



Susan and Gary descending a slot. Photo: Oliver Guerrisi-Watson.

My strategy was to travel as far as possible above the ravine below towards its origin point at the Yodellers Range to the east. Ideally, we would then step straight onto the range without having to negotiate the gully crossing. Unfortunately, it did not turn out to be this easy. At 0833, the ledge abruptly stopped at a high wall just below and 50 metres short of Yodellers Range.

From our elevated position, we surveyed with a bit of trepidation the rugged, extremely dissected terrain that we would need to negotiate after we had dealt with this first challenge in front of us. The only way from here was down towards the bottom of the ravine. I thought we should try to find another ledge without losing too much elevation. Indeed, another narrow pathway soon presented, taking us through a small ornately-sculptured cave and around the next corner, where I was hoping it would continue. Instead, it ran out at a 30+ metre drop. What to do next?

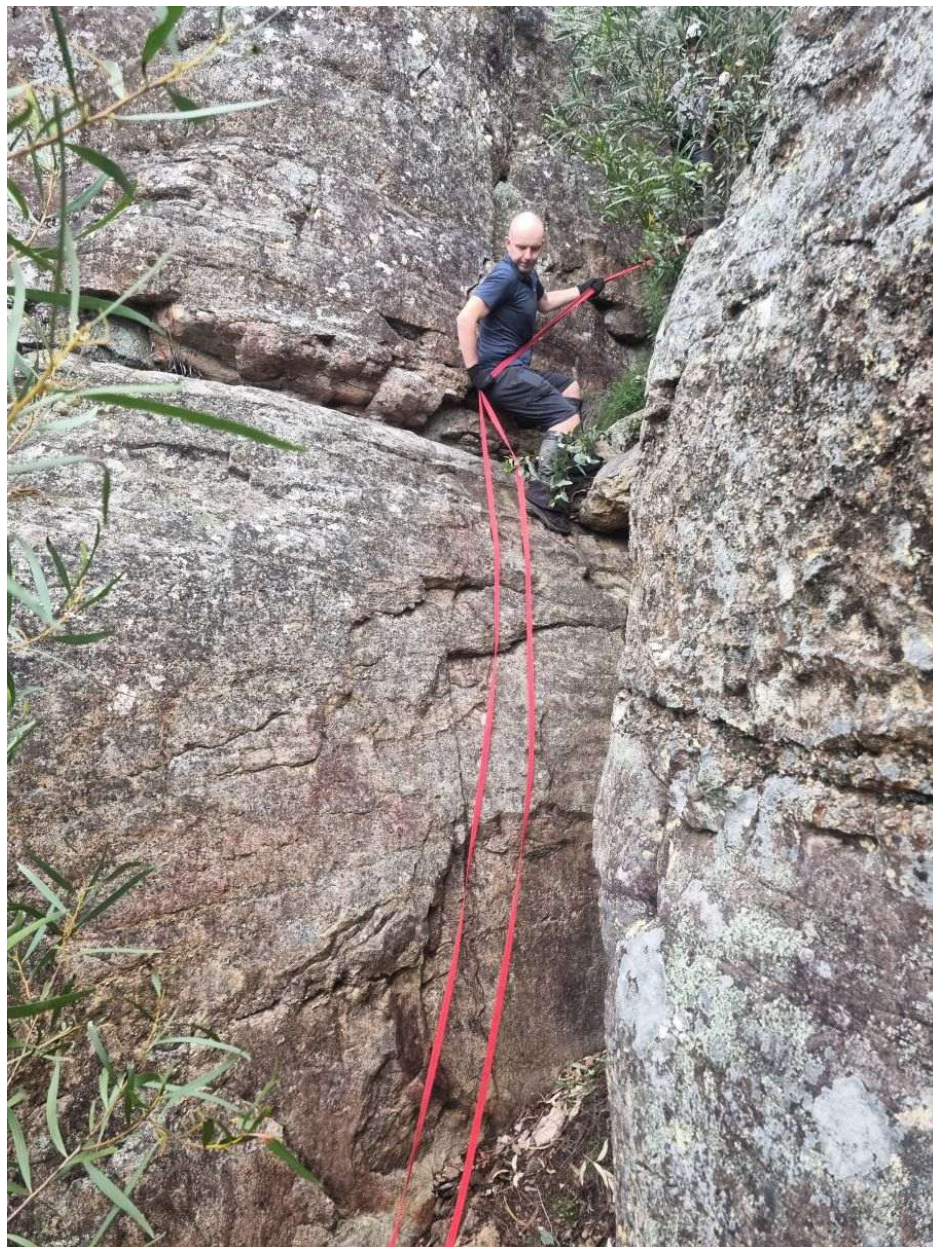


Challenging terrain would be an understatement here. Photo: José Luis Núñez.

Below and just to the right, I saw a tiny 50 centimetre wide slot that continued all the way down to the bottom of the ravine. Above it, was a strong tree we could use for the anchor. At 0845 (top of the slot). Oli and I went to investigate. The initial drop, in the order of four metres, was possible to even do it without the tape, but safer with it. When I lowered myself to the relatively level area at the bottom, I realised several things. First, that the slot became non-negotiable without abseiling from here on; second, that the big rocks jammed on top of me at the start of the climb down looked very dangerous as there was no room to hide here underneath if one gets displaced; and third, probably most significantly, that I would not be able to climb out on the opposite side of the slot without assistance.

I asked Oli to get down and give me a push up a two metre awkward inward-sloping wall. The good news was that, once on top of the obstacle, I found an easy terrace level we could all proceed on, at least for a while. We now swung in full action. Two tapes were lowered down the initial drop – one for packs and another one, for people. I set up the third tape to use for climbing out of the slot, wrapping it around the only

anchor I could find, a large rock jammed in a low overhang nearby. Kevin started to very carefully lower all packs down, one by one. Oli, standing at the bottom of the slot, passed them up onto the other side. I was much relieved when this was done, so he could climb out of the 'firing range' of the rocks above. Everyone then used the tape to descend and then scrambled up with the assistance of the tape on the opposite side. Importantly, only one person was within the slot at the same time. This exercise was completed by 0930. It did take 45 minutes, but safety was by far the main consideration here.

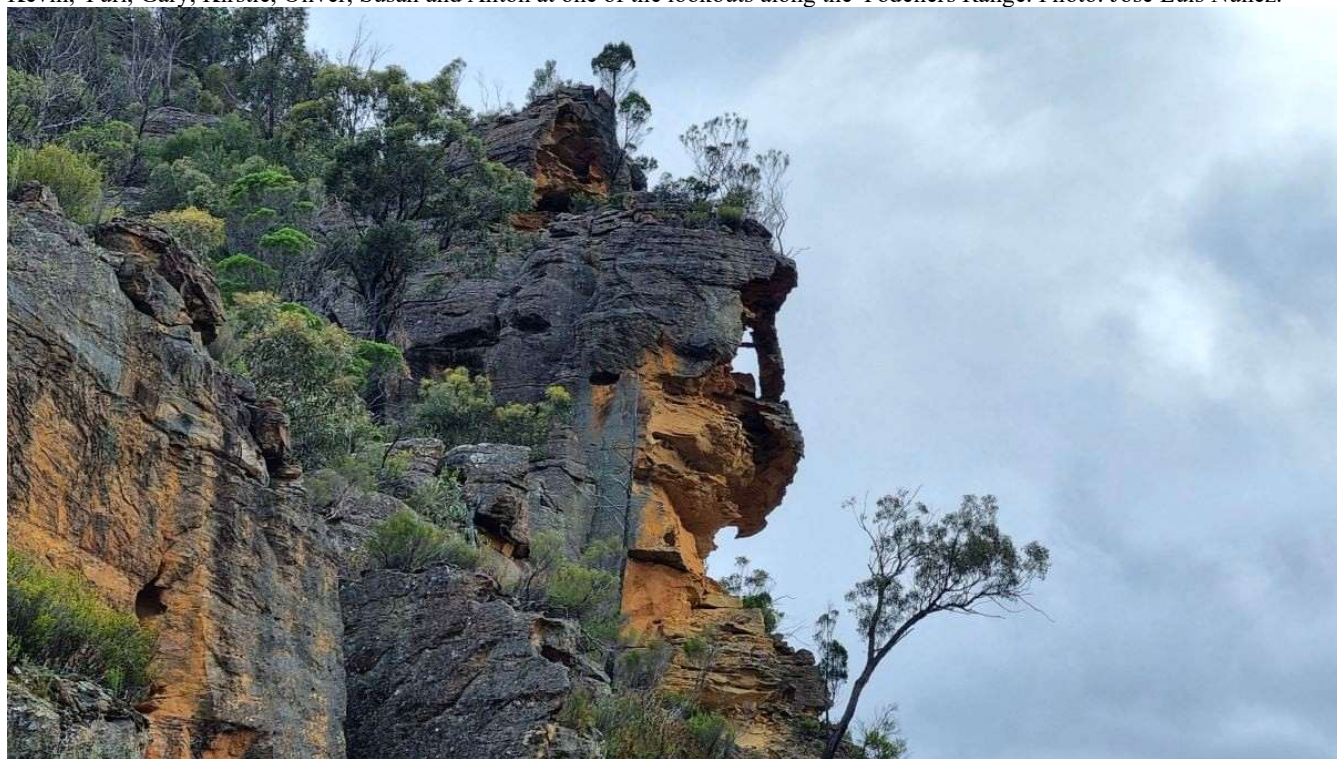


Anton coming down into the slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Having crossed the ravine, the party now traversed on an easy ledge until we could climb back onto the Yodellers Range. Here, we stopped to take zoom photos of an incredible rock pillar within a small cave high above our heads in the wild cliffs facing the Emu Creek valley. At 0950, the group reached a high point along the escarpment with, you probably guessed it by now, a spectacular panorama of the northern part of this remarkable chain of peaks called the Yodellers, now further away but at a different angle that accentuated the gaps between them.



Kevin, Yuri, Gary, Kirstie, Oliver, Susan and Anton at one of the lookouts along the Yodellers Range. Photo: José Luis Núñez.



A cave with a rock pillar. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Wild country all around. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Climbing towards the next high point. The spur we had camped on can be seen below the previous high point in the middle of the picture. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The amazing views continued unobstructed as we climbed further on a narrow, steep and rocky next part of the ridge. Reaching the next high point, at 1014, was a great excuse for a morning tea break. Looking north from here, we could see parts of our route today, including the spur where we had camped last night and a dramatically wild ravine we had just crossed. It did not escape my attention that the terrain looking south, where we were headed next, appeared just as rugged. Right under our feet, we had to carefully tread around a one metre wide tunnel-like hole in the ground, partially hidden by scrub, that had a drop of at least 30 metres to the rock level below.

1031 saw us saddling up once again for a short exploration of the spur to our west containing the meadows we had seen from the camp site yesterday. Walking onto it gave us a different perspective of our route this morning, revealing a maze of giant pagodas and high cliffs we had just negotiated. We positively looked very small and insignificant when photographed against this immense landscape. I thought, just as well that I am seeing it now, after we did it and not before as I would probably have thought it was not going to be possible to negotiate.



View south towards the next part of our route. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Coming down a bit further, the group entered an extensive flat area covered in knee-high vegetation. At 1109. This was 'the meadows', an alternative camping spot for last night. In terms of the location, it was very pleasant, with mainly local views of the surrounding pagoda gorges, and not as striking as the platform where we had our dinner yesterday. However, the main issue was that, as we could not fly across the ravine, the seemingly short 500 m of aerial distance separating us from the spur we had stayed overnight today took us over three hours of challenging walking; and that was being rested and carrying much lighter packs. I was therefore very happy with the decision yesterday not to continue any further from the spur we had camped at.

On the way back from this excursion up to the Yodellers Range, we stopped at the southern edge of the spur for the view of the deep gorge we were planning to use for our exit later this afternoon. By the look of it, I felt that the rest of the day would have plenty of excitement in store for us. The side spur exploration ended at 1141.

We now needed to get around a small deep ravine just below the main range. Coming down towards it, the party was stopped just after ten minutes by another challenge, a four metre drop. It would be easy enough

with a rope, but I could not see any suitable anchors. In the end, we used two thin but robust-looking trees to put the tape around. I went down first and checked that we could carry on from the bottom before everyone else descended. From 1151 till 1210. Sidling on a ledge from here took us to above the next gorge, where we had to use our back sides to perform a fairly long steep slide down to the bottom. Luckily for us and for our pants, there were a few tiny handholds to make it more elegant and controlled. At 1223.



Kirstie on a tape-assisted descent. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Bottom-assisted slide into the gorge. Photo: José Luis Núñez.

We would be returning here for our exit a bit later today, after we explored the last remaining item on the agenda, a high point on the Yodellers Range above us with two narrow cliff-lined spurs coming off it, one running horizontally to the west, and the other, vertically to the south. On the detailed topographic map, it all looks like the hands of a clock showing 8:35 o'clock.

A vertical wall soon barred our advance. The only way from here was via a 50 cm wide steep ascending ledge, which, I thought, was tricky enough going up and would be even harder coming back down. I suggested that people leave their main packs at the bottom and take minimal gear up with them. Most of the party did that.

The initial scramble was not too bad and was followed by a walk up an inclined rocky apron, which fortunately was dry and grippy enough. We felt the effort was certainly worth it when we came up to the top of the hill, gasping at a 360-degree view of the surrounding area – from Minaret Ridge to the east to the Yodellers Range to the south and north, to Myrtle Valley to the west. Not much shade here, but the sky was overcast now, and a chilly breeze was blowing away most of the humidity. A great place to have lunch, from 1249 till 1313.



The view from the lunch spot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

During that time, I had another look at the map and the surrounding landscape and suggested that we take an excursion to the south-trending spur only, as the other one descended sharply and would be unlikely to provide better views than we had right now. This was decided in the interest of saving time, especially for people who were driving back home this evening and bearing in mind we all felt a bit ‘viewed out’ by now.

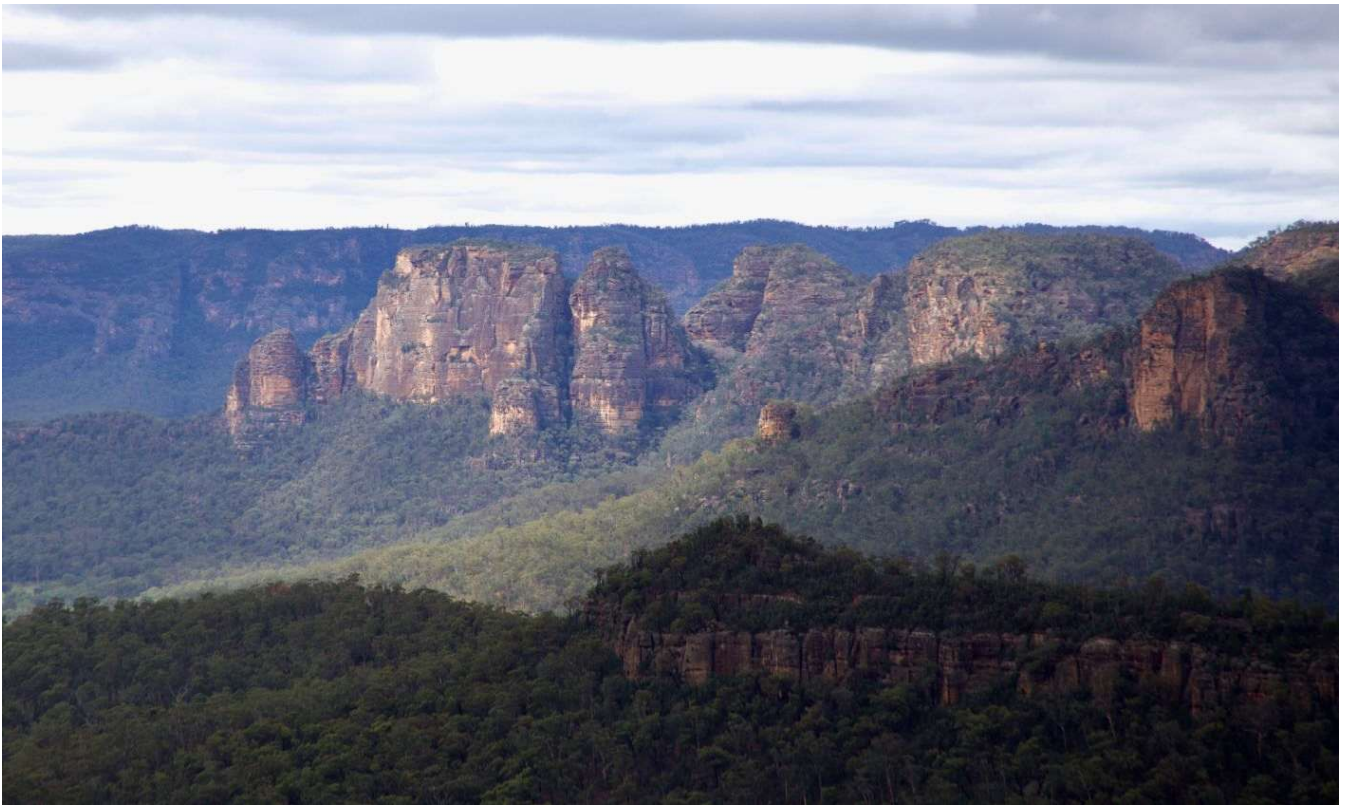
After lunch, the company proceeded along the rocky and scenic southern spur, which was only a couple of metres wide in places, soon arriving at an eight metre high boss of barren red rock in the middle of it. At 1329. To get around it, a ledge was followed for a short distance, before it became too precipitous for comfort. We briefly discussed climbing on top of the stone tower (it seemed possible in one place) but decided against it.



Walking on a narrow spur towards the big red rock. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Yuri at the big red rock. Photo: Anton Leddin.



The northern end of the Pomany Range from our traverse (zoomed). Photo: Anton Leddin.

The party now headed back down underneath the high point where we had stopped for lunch. As expected, the thin steep cornice and slot were rather tricky on the descent as one had to literally hug the rock wall with both hands to stay safe. The top of the exit ravine was reached at 1407. According to the map, all we needed to do now was to follow the watercourse all the way to Myrtle Trail, less than 600 metres away. No cliffs were shown, and the gradient appeared rather gentle. A straightforward task that should take half an hour or so, I thought.



Negotiating the tricky ledge. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

At the beginning, it was indeed simple. We traipsed down a gradually sloping dry bottom of the valley, with hardly any scrub for a little while, until, only 14 minutes into our relaxing journey, the gorge suddenly narrowed down and became rocky. There were a few deep pools of stagnant water. It became clear that the location of the watercourse and the adjacent cliffs as shown on the map did not reflect the reality of the surrounding terrain, so we had to deal with it now by using our wayfinding skills.

A tape was set up to get down a two metre wall. Before the rest of the group would follow, Oli went to investigate. After some time, he came back with an update. There was a 30 metre waterfall ahead; however, he found a ledge that he thought would be Ok but he recommended that I should have a look at it. I went down the tape and followed Oli, to find that the first part of the ledge was indeed fine but the end of it I felt was too exposed for comfort. A pity as at that point we were less than five metres above the bottom of the next gorge.

There was nothing else for it but to join the rest of the party (at 1448) above the initial drop, at 1448. We then reversed our steps until a way around the cliffs could be found, luckily, only eight minutes later, when a ramp was located that did the job. The way down from here was indeed straightforward. We did encounter a few short constrictions with pools and some scrubby sections, so the progress was rather slow, but by 1537, the party made it to Myrtle Trail, which appeared to have been recently cleared and graded².



Walking the Myrtle Trail. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

The locked gate at the national park boundary was reached at 1602, GR 4285 9379, 381 m, and the vehicles, nine minutes later.

Day statistics: total distance 7.46 km; total ascent 302 m.

² Whilst I was writing these track notes, a document appeared in my emails, *Gardens of Stone SCA Infrastructure Masterplan*, dated March 2025. It gives an outline of Wollemi Great Walk, to be constructed in 2025-27. The details are sketchy, but the supplied map seems to indicate that Myrtle Trail will be used in the northernmost section of the route. I wonder whether the upgrading of the trail was part of the construction work for that walk?

Day 3 – 24 March 2025

It was a small party of four that set off at 0745 from the Myrtle Trail to try and conquer the Blue Yodellers Mountain. Kevin had heard from his walking companions that a short rock climb was required, as well as an abseil on the way down, so we approached this challenge with due respect, doing a lot of work with the map and photos beforehand and packing some extra ropes today. However, I said to the team I wanted to find a bushwalking way up, so scrambles and tapes were Ok but rock climbs and abseils were not.



Setting off towards the Blue Yodellers Mountain. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Leaving the trail behind, we struck a course in a southeasterly direction, walking just above a dry watercourse that originates in Octave Gap between the Blue Yodellers Mountain and the Watts Mountain. From the far distance, we could see high cliffs surrounding the mountain, but having previously studied the detailed map and aerial photos, I knew that somewhere hidden in the rocky folds, there is a narrow gully that might provide the way up.

The humidity during this early part of the day was extremely high, making the air feel like sticky jelly. I was hoping we would get some relief higher up, where we would be more exposed to breezes, but in the meantime, we just had to push ahead and take frequent drinks.

Progressing a bit further, we entered an extensive field of one of my favourite bush tuckers, Native Currant, *Leptomeria acida*. It was the biggest I had ever seen, with thousands of mature plants spread over a large area. Unfortunately, the fruit was far too small for eating; they should be ripe in another month or so. After a while, we moved away from the creek and began a steep ascent through a beautiful forest of Grey Gums, *Eucalyptus punctata*, towards a spur, visible on our horizon line, that we were hoping to use in the final stage of the climb.



A forest of Grey Gums, *Eucalyptus punctata*. The ascent spur can be seen on the horizon line. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

By 0834, our small group was on the spur, below a five metre cliff line that was easily negotiated on the left-hand side. We paused at the top, to enjoy good views towards the southern flank of Watts Mountain. There were indeed some whiffs of cool wind felt here from time to time, which helped enormously. The spur from here on rose very gently and therefore looked rather tame, but I was somehow sure the real entertainment was coming soon enough.



The view of the ascent gully from the spur. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

The fun started fifteen minutes later, when the company made it to an enormous cliff line barring further progress. Here, we walked right for just under one hundred metres, to reach the start of a very steep and very overgrown gully. At 0857. This, hopefully, would be our way up, although the thick vegetation blocked most visibility beyond the next couple of steps. We just had to trust the map and our intuition.



Yuri in the ascent gully. No visibility here to see if it is going to go. Photo: Susan Luu.

Nevertheless, whilst tearing through the sea of scrub, we could at times see a high wall to our left, providing some sort of orientation in the otherwise featureless landscape. By 0918, the party was out of the gully and had cleared most of the scrub, stopping underneath of what looked to be the main cliff line with a small cave at the bottom, right in front of us. I first investigated to the right, but that did not work, so we went left, working our way around and above a short wall, which brought us on a sloping stone apron ending at a two metre barrier. Here, it was possible to climb on the right-hand side, which I did, but the exposure made it very risky, so the others used a *Callitris* tree in the middle of the obstacle to scramble up. On the way down, we would be definitely setting a tape here. At 0922.



A scramble up from the inclined ledge was required here. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Once on top, we continued our ascent in a southeasterly direction, reaching, nine minutes later, a prominent eroded cave, which, I thought, would serve as a good pointer on our way down. Another push, and the company made it to just below a tiny spur running on the edge of the mountain.

We decided to halt our ascent here and investigate, and I am so glad we did! A fifty metre walk along this very narrow and rocky walkway brought us to what I now know was one of the best views of the day, a 360-degree panorama of Myrtle and Emu valleys separated by a dramatic pyramid-shaped flank of Watts Mountain, seen across Octave Gap; the rest of the Yodellers Range extended to the south; with the more distant but clearly visible Nullo Range to the north, and Pomany Range, to the east. A rare and breathtaking experience, even taking into consideration all the views of the past few days! From 0941 till 0952.



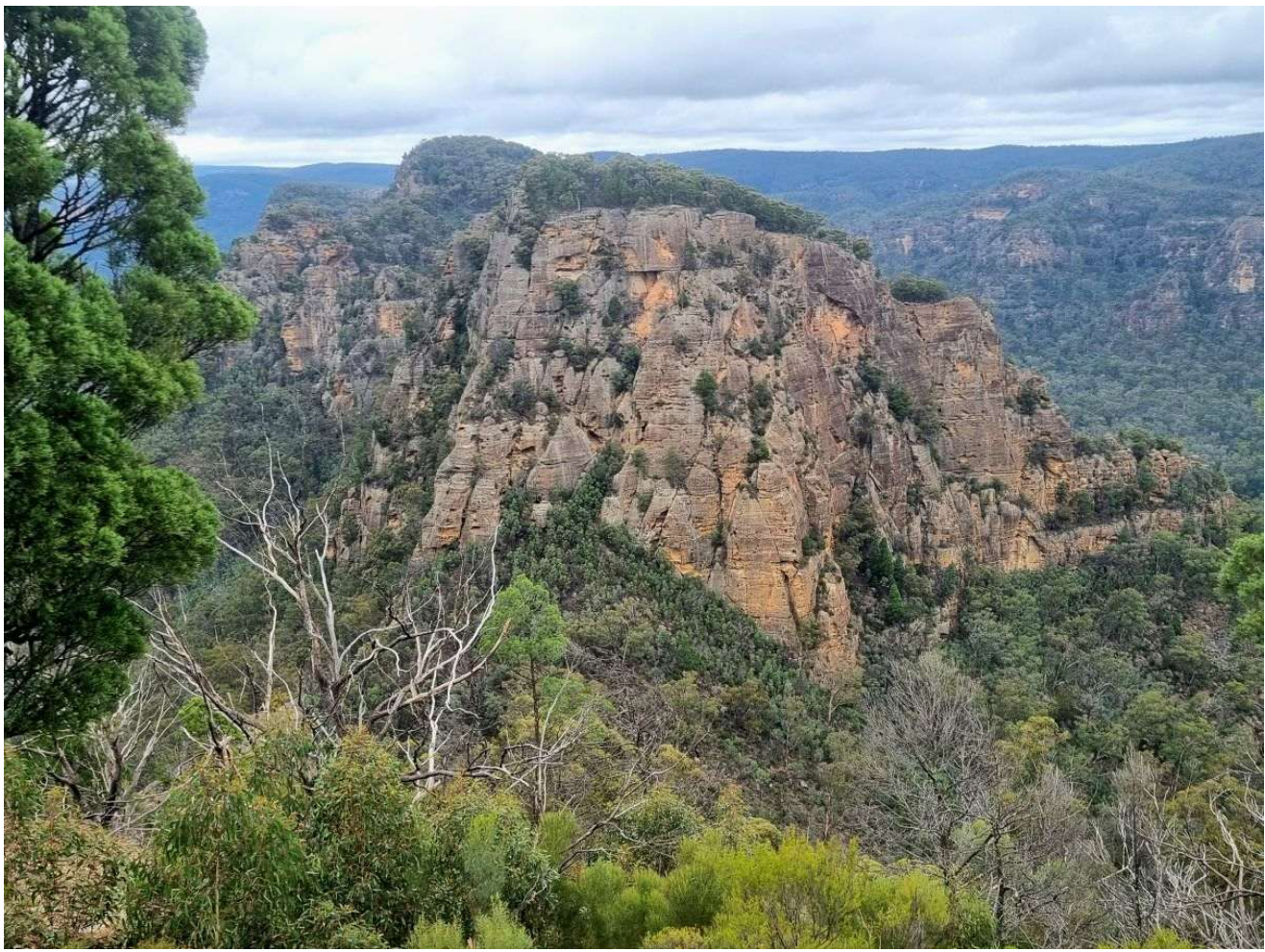
Kevin and Yuri on the Blue Yodellers Mountain, with Octave Gap and Watts Mountain behind them. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Anton at the narrow spur. Behind him, is the rest of the Blue Yodellers Mountain with the Yodellers Range further away. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

It was easy from here on as we continued climbing, more gradually now, through a beautiful *Callitris* forest, until a flat area was reached, at 1004. A map check confirmed it – we made it to the summit of the Blue Yodellers! We decided to stop for morning tea nearby, from 1006 till 1019. The visibility here was limited, but it felt good in a way to rest our view palate during these few minutes as we knew there would be more panoramas to come shortly.

Indeed, one hundred metres beyond the morning tea spot, having descended a little, whilst still keeping on the southern edge of the mountain, we came to the first of a string of fantastic views of the Yodellers Range south we had traversed during the previous two days. This was at 1025. The next view, fifteen minutes later, was probably the best, as it felt we were suspended in mid-air, halfway down an enormous cliff, with the incredible castellations of the hill closest to us being within our touch, but that mountain was in fact completely inaccessible by bushwalking means across a deep ravine separating us.



One of the views south from the Blue Yodellers Mountain. In the centre across a gap, is a non-negotiable peak lined with high cliffs and pagodas. The highest hill visible behind it was the top of our ascent on Saturday morning. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

There were two more notable spots, the view at 1050, even closer to the pagodas on the other side but a bit obstructed by the trees; and the other one, a deep, dramatic non-negotiable slot on the cliff edge eight minutes later. It may have been possible to descend steeply on the left, but we were losing the view of the Yodellers by now as we were moving further and further west; and, truth to be told, some panorama fatigue was also setting in.

We felt it was time now to start retracing our steps. The party proceeded to do that, skirting below the summit at 1118 and reaching the large cave below the lookout spur by 1130, GR 4432 9490, 648 m. At 1143, we secured a tape on a large *Callitris* tree to safely negotiate a two metre drop onto a sloping ledge. By 1210, we were out of the gully below the cliffs and five minutes later, at the start of the approach spur.

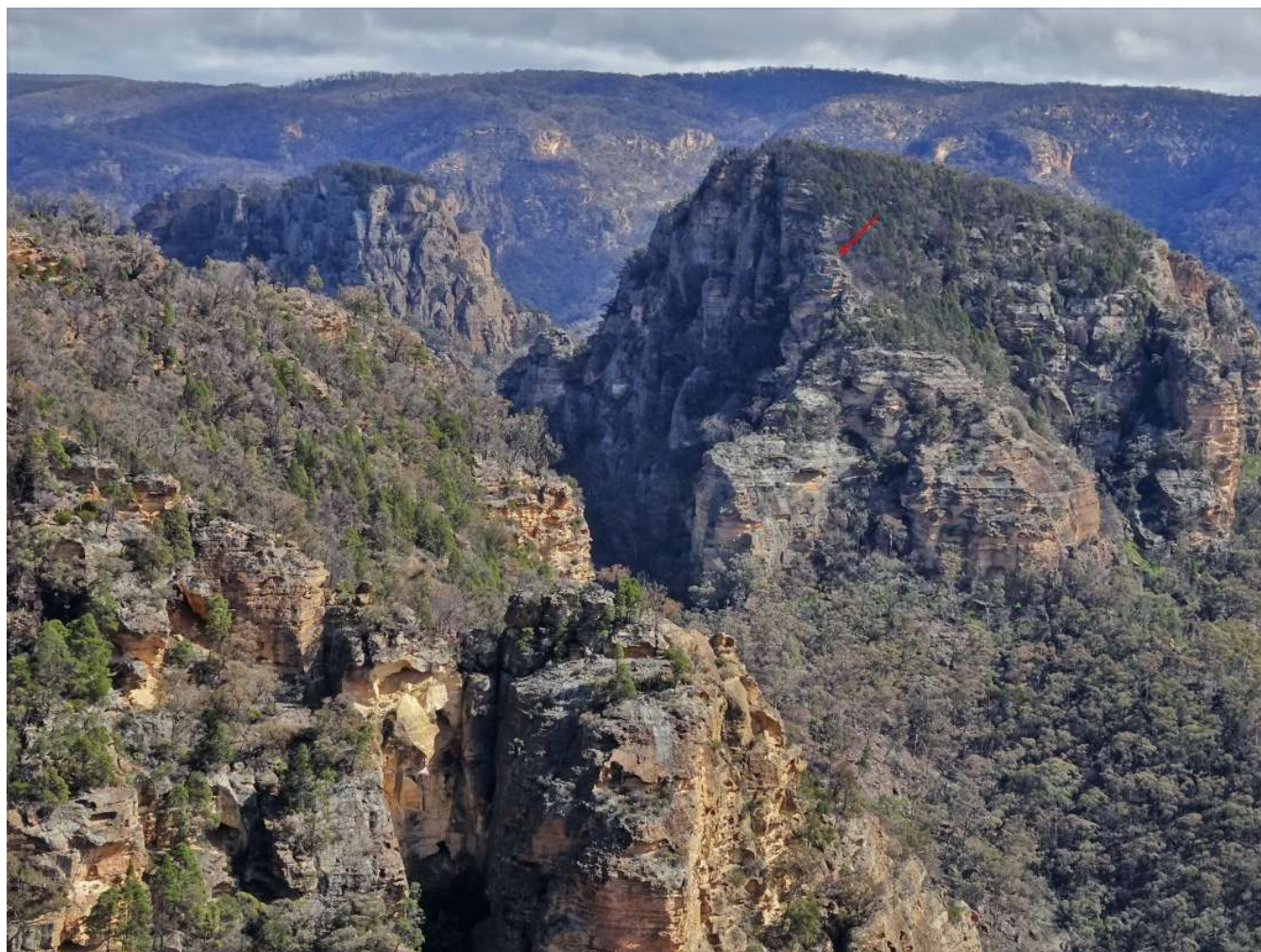
Between 1226 and 1245, the group had lunch at the spur, with a view of Watts Mountain. We continued down through the Grey Gum forest, the *Leptomeria acida* stand and finally across the gentle grassy slopes dotted with Kurrajong trees, towards our vehicles on Myrtle Trail, reached by 1327.



Walking towards the Myrtle Trail. Photo: Anton Leddin.



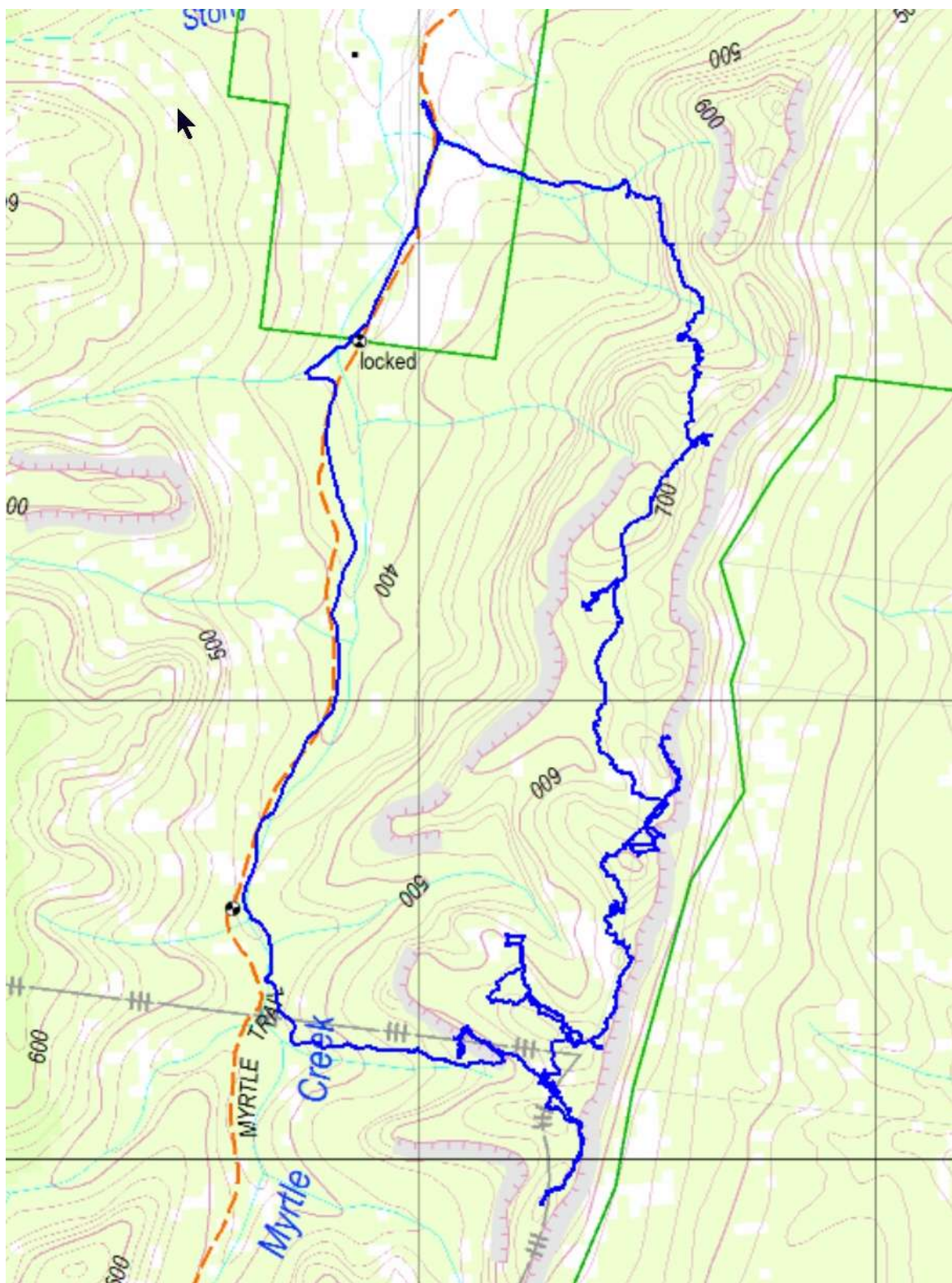
Susan, Anton, Yuri and Kevin with that mountain behind them. Photo: Susan Luu (self-timer).



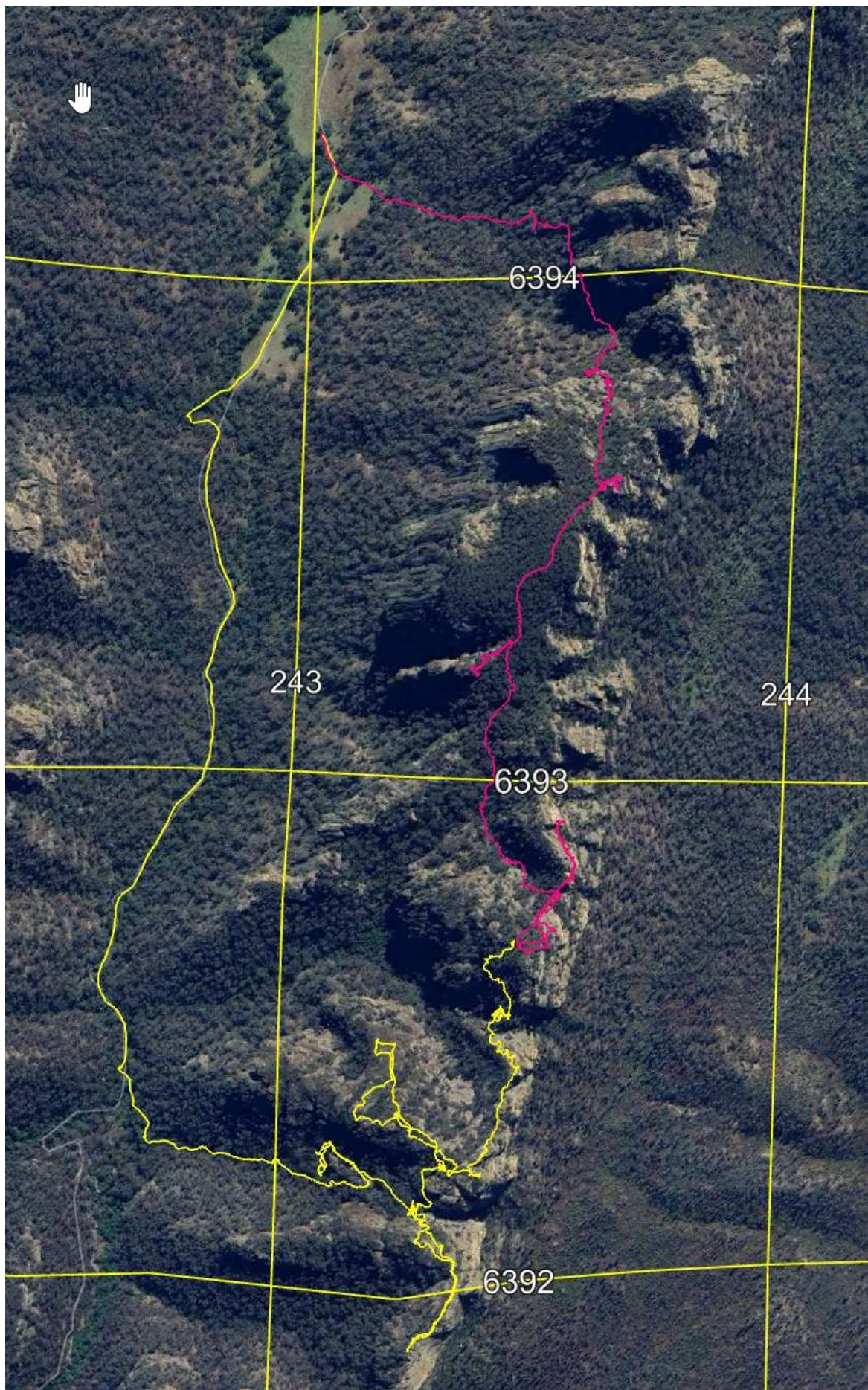
Blue Yodellers Mountain as seen across Octave Gap from the western edge of Watts Mountain. The red arrow shows the scenic spur we visited today on the way up. Photo: Yuri Bolotin (taken on 22/08/20).

Day statistics: total distance 5.93 km; total ascent 499 m.

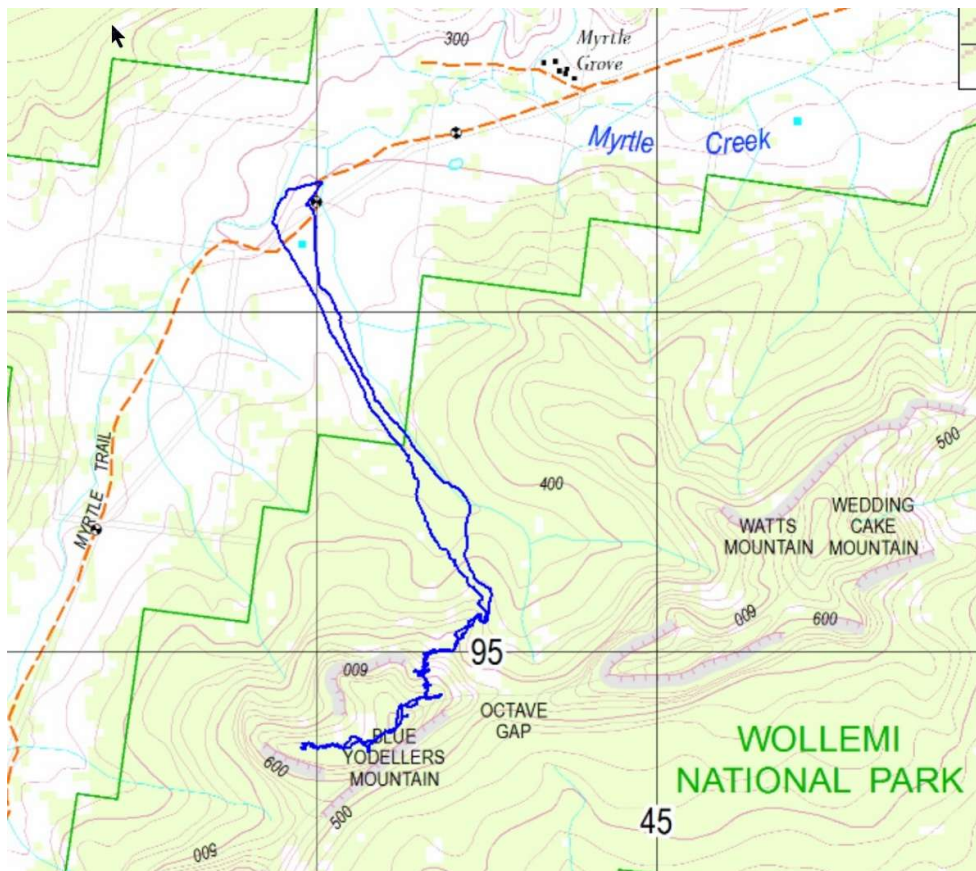
Trip statistics: total distance 18.21 km; total ascent 1,495 m.



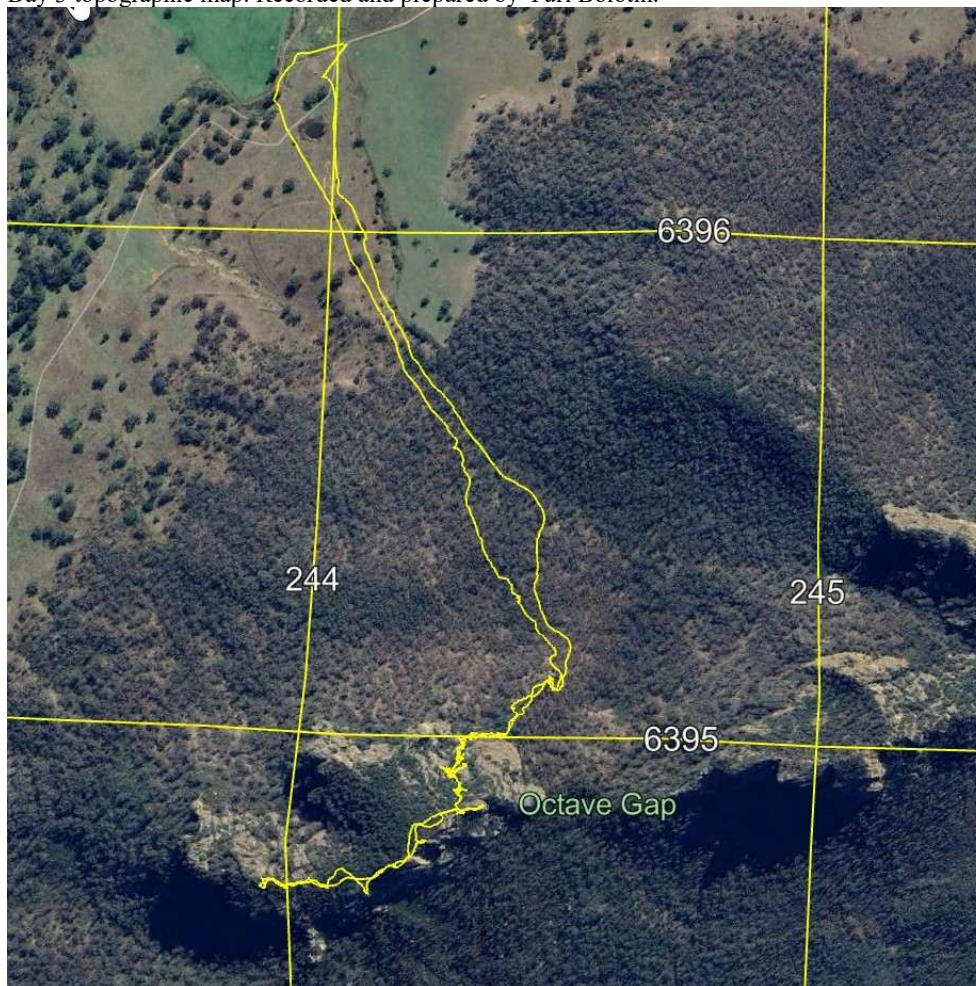
Days 1 and 2 topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



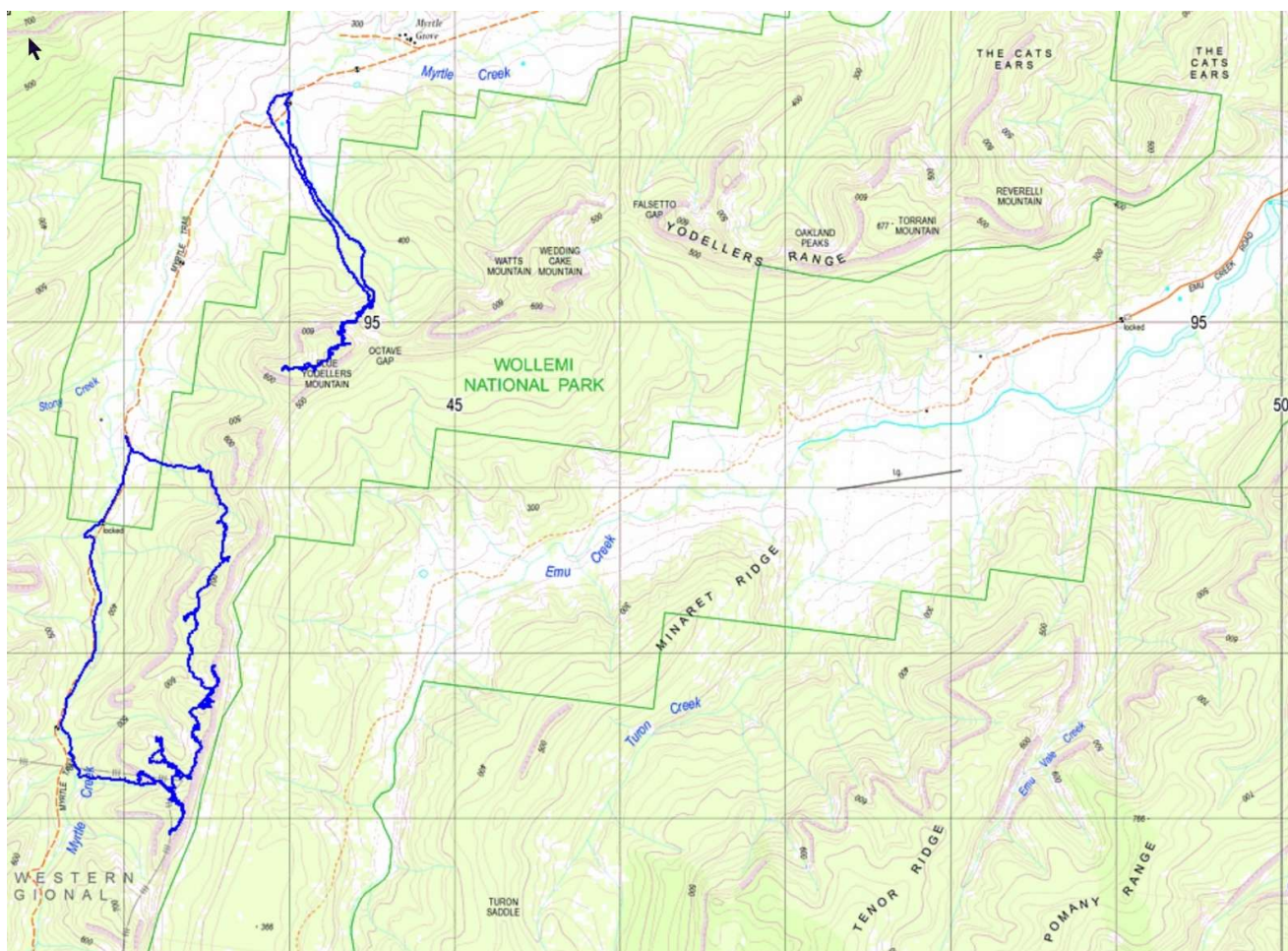
Days 1 and 2 aerial map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Day 3 topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Day 3 aerial map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Days 1-3 topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
Day 1 – 22/03/25			
0800	Cars parked and started walking	GR 4302 9431	293 m
0811	Climbed out on a spur	GR 4336 9413	354 m
0853	In the right gully	GR 4362 9388	488 m
0908	High cliff line	GR 4358 9380	544 m
0923-0933	Recce within access ravine	GR 4361 9378	558 m (bottom)
1010-1050	Lookout, excursions, and morning tea	GR 4360 9356	675 m
1100	Top of a flat peak	GR 4352 9346	721 m
1115	Went to explore a side spur	GR 4344 9326	663 m
1125	Lookout	GR 4337 9320	662 m
1135	Back from the exploration	GR 4344 9326	663 m
1145	In the gully	GR 4344 9319	633 m
1206	Bottom of descent	GR 4339 9295	593 m
1238-1308	Lookout and lunch	GR 4354 9277	657 m
1317	Top of the hill	GR 4353 9268	705 m
1410	Establish camp and rest break	GR 4347 9296	700 m
1543	Departed on excursion	GR 4347 9296	700 m
1550	Lookout	GR 4354 9271	681 m

1616-1656	Top of the hill, lookout and side trips	GR 4355 9292	687 m
1716	Back at camp	GR 4347 9296	700 m
Day 2 – 23/03/25			
0807	Left the camp	GR 4347 9296	700 m
0820	On ledge	GR 4342 9263	654 m
0833	Ledge stops	GR 4345 9254	645 m
0845-0930	Negotiating a slot (tape-assisted descent and ascent)	GR 4344 9256	626 m (top)
0950	Lookout	GR 4361 9246	650 m
1014-1031	Morning tea and start of side spur exploration	GR 4340 9225	675 m
1109	At the ‘meadows’	GR 4320 9249	627 m
1141	End of side spur exploration	GR 4361 9246	650 m
1151-1210	Tape-assisted descent into a slot	GR 4333 9226	648 m (top)
1223	Bottom of the ravine	GR 4328 9218	621 m
1249-1313	Lookout and lunch	GR 4328 9212	669 m
1329	Red rock	GR 4331 9193	663 m
1407	Exit ravine	GR 4328 9218	621 m
1421-1448	Constriction, tape-assisted recce	GR 4311 9228	570 m
1456	Ramp down	GR 4319 9221	592 m
1537	Myrtle Trail	GR 4267 9240	451 m
1602	National park boundary	GR 4285 9379	381 m
1611	Vehicles	GR 4302 9431	293 m
Day 3 – 24/03/25			
0745	Cars parked and started walking	GR 4518 9605	315 m
0834	Access spur	GR 4450 9511	488 m
0849	Cliff line	GR 4440 9501	544 m
0857	Gully	GR 4433 9500	550 m
0918	Cliff line	GR 4432 9494	603 m
0922	Scramble	GR 4430 9495	615 m
0931	Cave	GR 4432 9490	648 m
0941-0952	Side spur lookout	GR 4436 9487	663 m
1004	Top of the Blue Yodellers	GR 4427 9481	702 m
1006-1019	Morning tea	GR 4427 9481	702 m
1025	Lookout	GR 4422 9477	686 m
1050	Lookout	GR 4401 9471	671 m
1058	Dramatic slot	GR 4397 9472	662 m
1118	Below the summit	GR 4424 9483	691 m
1130	Cave	GR 4432 9490	648 m
1143	Tape-assisted descent	GR 4430 9495	615 m
1210	Out of the access gully	GR 4433 9500	550 m
1215	Access spur	GR 4440 9501	544 m
1226-1245	Lunch	GR 4448 9511	495 m
1327	Cars	GR 4518 9605	315 m