

Walk:**Wollemi National Park: Lee Creek Adventures****Leader:**

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Talooby. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park at Benjang Gap, walk up Lee Creek till Lost Chord Ravine, GR 327 904, about 5 km, and establish a base camp.

A series of (3) one-day walks to explore ridges, ravines and pagodas in this part of Bylong Labyrinth. The plan for each walk is to be advised, and our progress will depend on the terrain. Exploratory. Scrambling and exposure. About 8 km every day.

Rating:

6M. S333E

Gear Issues:

Full pack gear, in addition to day walk gear.

Date walked:

7-9 May 2025.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Kevin Songberg, Gary Green, Rachael Kennedy, Andrew Dumphy, Anton Leddin, Anna Ossig-Bonanno, 7.

The Weather:

Day 1 – A dry, mostly sunny day with variable cloud cover. Light breezes. Temperature range 12 to 20 degrees C.

Day 2 – A dry, beautifully sunny day. Light breezes. Temperature range 8 to 19 degrees C. Perfect walking conditions.

Day 3 – A cool, dry, mostly sunny day with cold breezes. Temperature range 5 to 18 degrees C.

Track Notes

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

Day 1 – 7 May 2025 – Lee Fortress

Benjang Gap greeted us with blue sky, warm morning sun and a loud bird chorus. The cars parked along the road, and we were off at 0833, the first task being to walk up Lee Creek to the planned location of the base camp for this three-day adventure.

The initial part of this journey was on a country track that soon joined Benjang Trail, through an idyllic landscape of rolling yellow-green grassy hills dotted with mature Gum trees. There was a flock of Ducks in a small pond we went past, and, as nearly always, several mobs of Kangaroos were seen happily jumping

around in the distance. Jagged triangular peaks of Tal Tal Range bordering the valley to the north east served to remind us of the exciting things we came here to seek.

At 0857, after a little scramble down, we entered the Lee Creek bed, which, to my great surprise, was dry. I did not expect this, especially because the part of Wollemi near Bilpin, where we live, is completely soaked with rain. I knew we would be relying on Lee Creek water for the entire trip.

Walking underneath beautiful big Casuarinas, on the dry sandy bottom covered in small boulders was very enjoyable. We were making fast and easy progress, but I could not help feeling a bit anxious, until, as I had been quietly hoping for, a few hundred metres further upstream, puddles of water started to appear. The first ones were stagnant, but soon it became a steadily running trickle.



Walking along Lee Creek. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

By the time we reached the end of the old trail, at 0924, the stream exhibited many clear pools and gurgling cascades. The gorge tightened here. Large rocks cluttered the creek bed, and soon we entered a section of boulder block-ups. It was very scenic, but our pace slowed down considerably as we had to jump from side to side and often climb high above the watercourse, to avoid getting our feet wet. I had done this trip several times before in both directions and can say that negotiating Lee Creek today was easier and faster than on many other occasions due to moderate to low amount of water. The sun now rose above the gorge, enveloping us in its pleasant warmth, its rays illuminating white-grey boulders crowned with Rock Orchids. Stately Casuarinas swayed in gentle breezes, and the bird song filled the air. It was a very pleasant journey!



Bracket Fungi in Lee Creek. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Rachael under an Orchid-encrusted boulder. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Gary and Kevin negotiating a blockup. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

From 1018 until 1031, at the end of the constriction, the company had morning tea in dappled light, sitting on river rocks next to the gurgling stream. This gentle landscape was punctuated by enormous yellow-orange cliff faces towering to the east and south. I knew we would need to tackle these in a couple of hours' time and did not expect it to be an easy task.



Morning tea break in Lee Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Four minutes after resuming, at a tributary junction, a good-looking campsite on the western bank was noted for possible future use. Twenty minutes later, the party reached our target, the junction with Lost Chord Ravine. With thick Ferns covering the ground here, there were not that many flat spots near the creek. In the end, we found a location big enough for five people under a few enormous Gum trees on the eastern shore for the main camp, whilst Anton and I used a couple of smaller areas on the western shore, a short walk across the water.



The western shore camp – mine and Anton's. Photo: Anton Leddin.

By 1148, having set up our accommodation for the night, we were ready to embark on the new adventure. The plan was to explore a mountain to our east. If you look at the 1:25,000 topographic map, you will think the return trip of about 500 metres each way should take well under an hour, so we would be back in the camp for lunch. The reality on the ground was very different. The hill is encircled by three deep ravines and is completely surrounded by high walls. Thanks to the Lidar map, I was able to discern two spots on the southern flank that may potentially enable us to break through the lower cliff line. Further obstacles would await us from there on. With about five hours of available daylight time, we would travel as far as we could until the turn-around time. I did not believe traversing the entire mountain, less than one kilometre across, to find a single possible tiny descent point shown on the eastern edge, would be achievable today. To reach a high pagoda with a view somewhere in the upper terraces would be a good goal.

Heading out from the camp with day packs, the group began a slow climb up Lost Chord Ravine. There was nothing technical here, just a lot of scrub, debris and hidden rocks. We kept to the left side of the gorge, and I thought it was slightly better than a few other ways we had tried in the past. Soon, we ascended a very steep ramp to find ourselves up against massive flat brown walls underneath the first of the two potential access points through the cliffs. To negotiate them here would require some serious scrambling and rock climbing – not on today's agenda. I thought, well, with only one other possible spot left, if it is similar to this one, it would be a very short walk indeed.

The idea was to move further up, but the terrain now forced us down to the bottom of the gully, where we found running water, at 1220. Interesting, as this watercourse was dry near our camp site. Here was the beginning of the rainforest, which meant less scrub and better progress.

Nine minutes later, we were able to climb back to the walls, reaching what seemed like the only remaining access spot, a steep but doable ramp. Opposite, was an amazing view of a tributary gorge of the Lost Crater Ravine, a canyon or slot bordered by huge cliffs. The ramp was straightforward but it ended at an intermediate inclined wall. A dodgy, slippery and steep traverse, about 20 metres in length, ensued. There was not much to hang on to, and a wrong step would have had dire consequences. We all crossed OK, but I did not like it at all and resolved to have a look around on the way back for a safer route.



The only way up the mountain. Photo: Anton Leddin.

Climbing a little further, the party quickly reached what looked like a descent ledge underneath the next cliff line. We had lunch here from 1240 till 1303. The views of the enormous walls on the opposite side were awe-inspiring. That area was going to be the subject of the walk tomorrow. For now, we continued our adventure along the same level, initially clambering over a lot of debris and fallen trees, but soon the ledge improved, and so did the visibility into the surrounding terrain, including distant glimpses through the trees of Lee Creek gorge and Labyrinth Peak.

At 1319, the company reached a gully leading up through the second cliff line. It contained a section of steep and narrow rock constriction, which was only slightly wet, but it could present a problem on a rainy day. As I thought there may be more areas like that one, we took the first opportunity to scramble out on the right-hand side and made our way up to the bottom of the third cliff line. From here, we had the first incredible view of the trip – west towards Labyrinth Peak, the spur that goes towards it, and the slot below a giant wall we were going to explore on Day 3. At 1329.



Kevin and Rachael below the third cliff line. Photo: Anton Leddin.

From here, I decided to check along the ledge to the right, because, if it went, it would give a much faster access through this forbidding-looking rock barrier compared to the other direction. As we approached the end of the narrow walkway, it seemed to seamlessly lead us across a small gully, from where it looked possible to keep climbing. I was jubilant, thinking we now had a great chance of reaching the top of the mountain.

Not so easy, Yuri. A few seconds later, being able to take a closer look, I saw that the watercourse was in fact five metres below the level we were standing on; its bottom hidden by the narrowness of the gorge, and there was no bushwalking way of getting in and out of it. At 1339. The euphoria gave way to a brief despair, but not all was lost, as we would now try our luck in the opposite direction.

Reversing to the head of the gully we had climbed, the party continued along the ledge underneath the third cliff line. The map indicated we would be up for a fairly long traverse before an opportunity to go higher presented itself. This walkway crossed a number of small gullies, and every time it did, I was hoping it would not stop or become too narrow for safety. So far, so good. It was dry, scenic, and wide enough to tread on. The views down and sideways were not bad, either.



The view from the ledge. Labyrinth Peak is to the right of the middle. To the right of it and lower, is the huge wall and slot we were planning to check out on Day 3. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

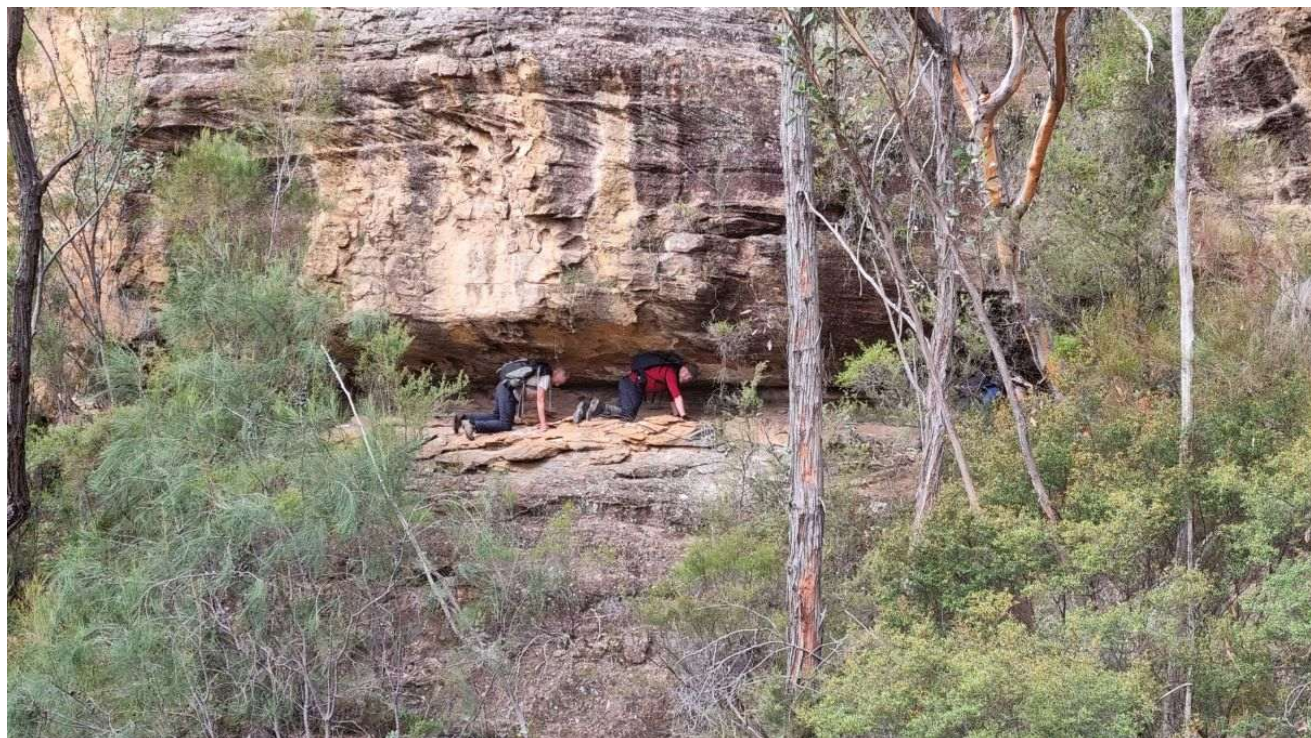


The 'reverse' photo taken from the top of Labyrinth Peak on 14/10/23, two kilometres away. The first row of pagodas in the middle is Labyrinth Saddle. The second, more distant pagoda area across Lee Creek, is the mountain we were now exploring. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Yuri, Anton, Andrew, Gary, Rachael and Anna on the ledge. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Did I say, the walkway was ‘wide enough’? Well, that was true until 1405, when it suddenly stopped. However, we could see a section, about 20 metres long, that was possible to crawl through on all fours and reach the other side, where the ledge seemed to continue. As I did not know what was it going to be like from there on, I said I would go on to have a look. Gary, Andrew and Anton joined me, whilst others stayed behind.



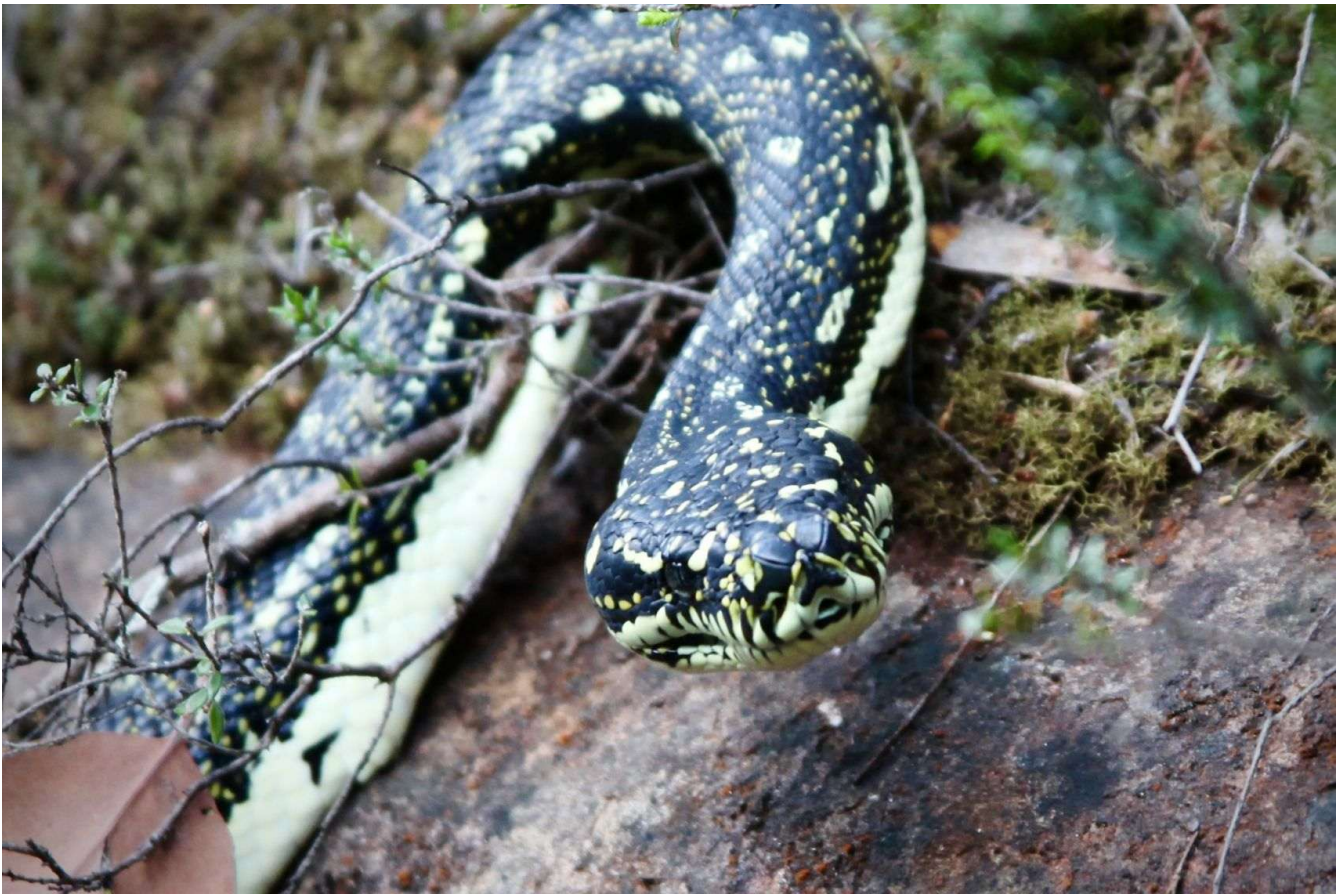
The ‘crawling’ part of the day. This photo was taken on the return leg. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

When the four of us completed the crawl-through, an excitement of a different kind awaited us after only 50 metres along the ledge – an 1.8 metre long Diamond Python, *Morelia spilota*, who crawled up a nearly vertical wall and was clinging to it, whilst its tail was still on the ground. I was quite sure it was trying to get

out of the way as it had felt us coming towards it on this narrow ledge. Being in the lead, I stopped to snap some photos. This took half a minute or so, by which time the creature looked like becoming a bit anxious. When I stepped aside for Anton, the Snake dropped onto the ground and, feeling trapped, tried to escape our attention by crossing the ledge. At that time, Anton stumbled and slid sideways. There was a tense second when we were not sure if he was in any danger, but the Python, of course, had more common sense and instinct, graciously moving away and disappearing into the bush. Despite the brief setback, Anton managed to snap an excellent, close and personal shot.



Diamond Python, *Morelia spilota*, feeling a bit trapped. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Diamond Python, *Morelia spilota*. Photo: Anton Leddin.

As we rounded another corner, the dramatic outline of Lee Castle came into view, about two kilometres to the south. The overhang walls around us were of deeply eroded dark red and mauve sandstone. I thought we probably did not have time to walk back to the other team members, plus I was not sure how far it would be possible to continue from here. Being now so close to the break in the cliffs and having checked the watch, I thought we had just enough time for one last dash. So, we moved on. A decision, which now, in hindsight, I regret.

At 1416, the bluffs gave way to a small easy gully that took us to the western tip of the Callitris-bedecked ridge running across the top of the mountain, to an incredible view north towards Lee Creek gorge and Benjang Gap, as well as west, to the spur leading to Labyrinth Peak. At 1422. Did we have time for a little more? Not really, but we were going to do it anyway! Heading up and east along the ridge and climbing a pagoda or two, we emerged at a jaw-dropping 360-degree panorama of Bylong Labyrinth, gloriously lit by the golden sun of late afternoon. Wow! At 1430. From our commanding position, we could see Anna, Rachael and Kevin on the ledge below. I yelled for them to come up, but they decided against it. Undoubtedly, a prudent choice, as it had taken us 25 minutes to come up here from their location.



The panoramic view of Lee Creek gorge, looking north west towards Benjang Gap. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Yuri, Andrew and Gary at the top lookout. Photo: Anton Leddin.



The view south west towards Labyrinth Peak access ridge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Rachael, Anna and Kevin on the ledge below. Photo: Anton Leddin.

I have full intentions of coming back here one day soon, as, looking at the map, I could see that we should be able to traverse to the top of the mountain from here and then, hopefully, get down using a tiny slot that is indicated in the southeastern corner. This would take us to Lost Chord Crater, from where we could continue downstream to the camp, making it a remarkable day walk.

1455 saw the team reunited and heading back down. At 1521, we completed the bottom-assisted slippery slide to the lower end of the second cliff line access gully. After the party had crossed the dodgy and dangerous inclined apron and descended to a ledge below the first row of walls, I asked them to have a 'smoko', whilst Kevin and I had a look and found what appeared to be a much safer access up a steep ramp a little further to the east, at 1550. We did not have time to go all the way, but it should bypass the tricky section and lead straight to the ledge near our lunch stop point.



The tricky inclined wall traverse. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Coming down a slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We took a very similar way down from here on, stopping to inspect a surprisingly roomy cave (big enough for one person to sleep in) inside a big boulder that we had missed on the way up. By 1635, just as planned, the party made it back to the camp, which was already blanketed by the early evening dusk shadows.

I was very happy with the overall outcome, as we managed, in limited time, to find a way up this formidable mountain. I would like to call it Lee Fortress as it is completely surrounded by deep moat-like gorges and high multiple cliff battlements that bar any entrance save for one on the southern border and one (still to be proven) on the eastern flank, near the edge of Lost Chord Crater.

Day statistics: total distance 8.92 km; total ascent 450 m.

Day 2 – 8 May 2025 – Castle View Traverse

After a beautifully windless night, punctuated by animal sounds and the gentle gurgling of the creek, we were ready to embark on the day's adventure at 0801. The air felt quite chilly inside the shadowy gorge, but the sun was out in a cloudless sky and quickly making its way towards us. We would accelerate this process by climbing up to meet it.

On the agenda, was exploring a route through the cliffs to the south east onto a spur that runs above Lee Creek gorge, then following it for about a kilometre and a half, before finding a way back down. A simple-sounding task, but I was sure we would not be bored. The inspiration for this walk had come from what we saw from the top of the Lee Castle towers during a previous trip in July 2022. I wrote in the track notes,

Five minutes later, the group traversed a narrow but scenic terrace along the eastern flank of the third and fourth towers. Apart from the thrill of following it, there were spectacular views of the pagoda labyrinth lining the major tributary of Lee Creek to our east; we had camped in its headwaters last night. This might well be the subject of another trip, especially as the aerial map shows a long rock platform on the northern edge of that ridge.

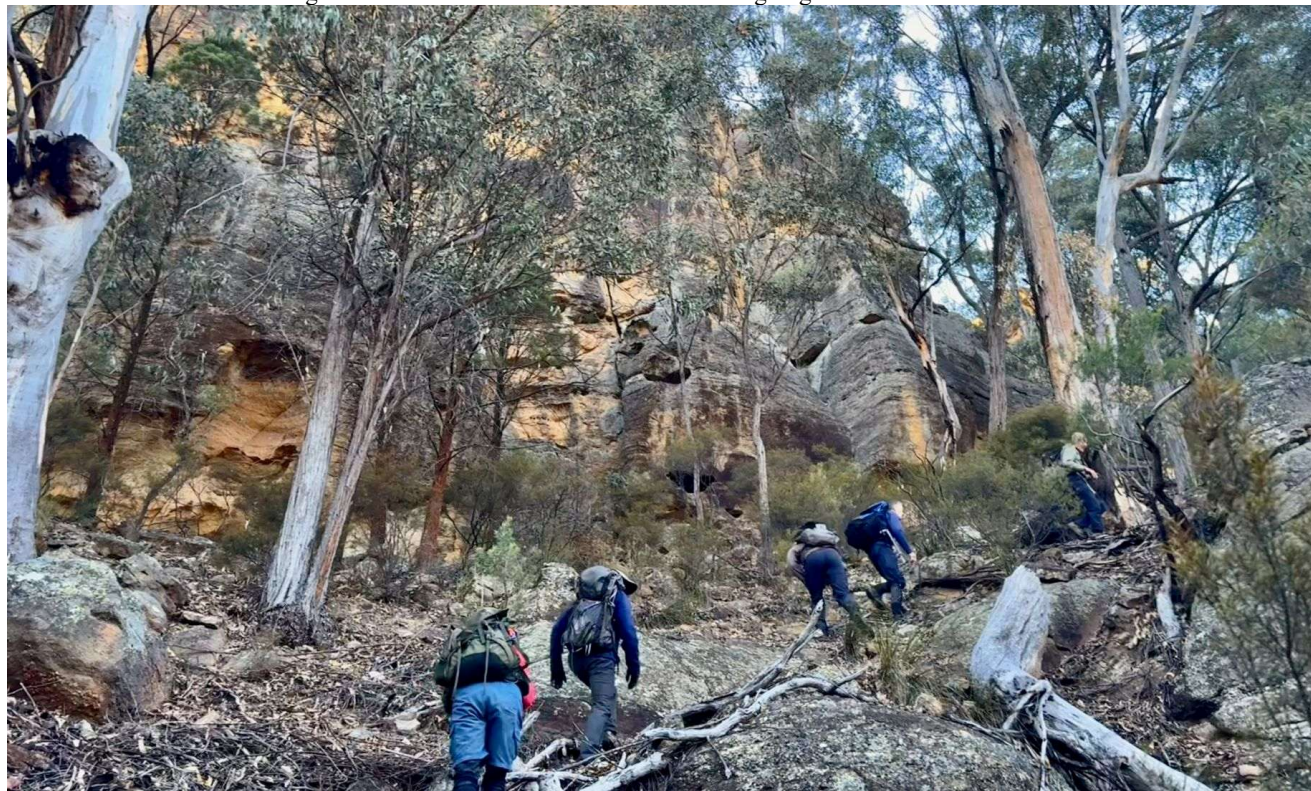


The photo, taken from Lee Castle on 30/07/22, showing the ridge we were attempting to climb and traverse today. The deep dark gorge along Lee Creek on the far side is Lost Crater Ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

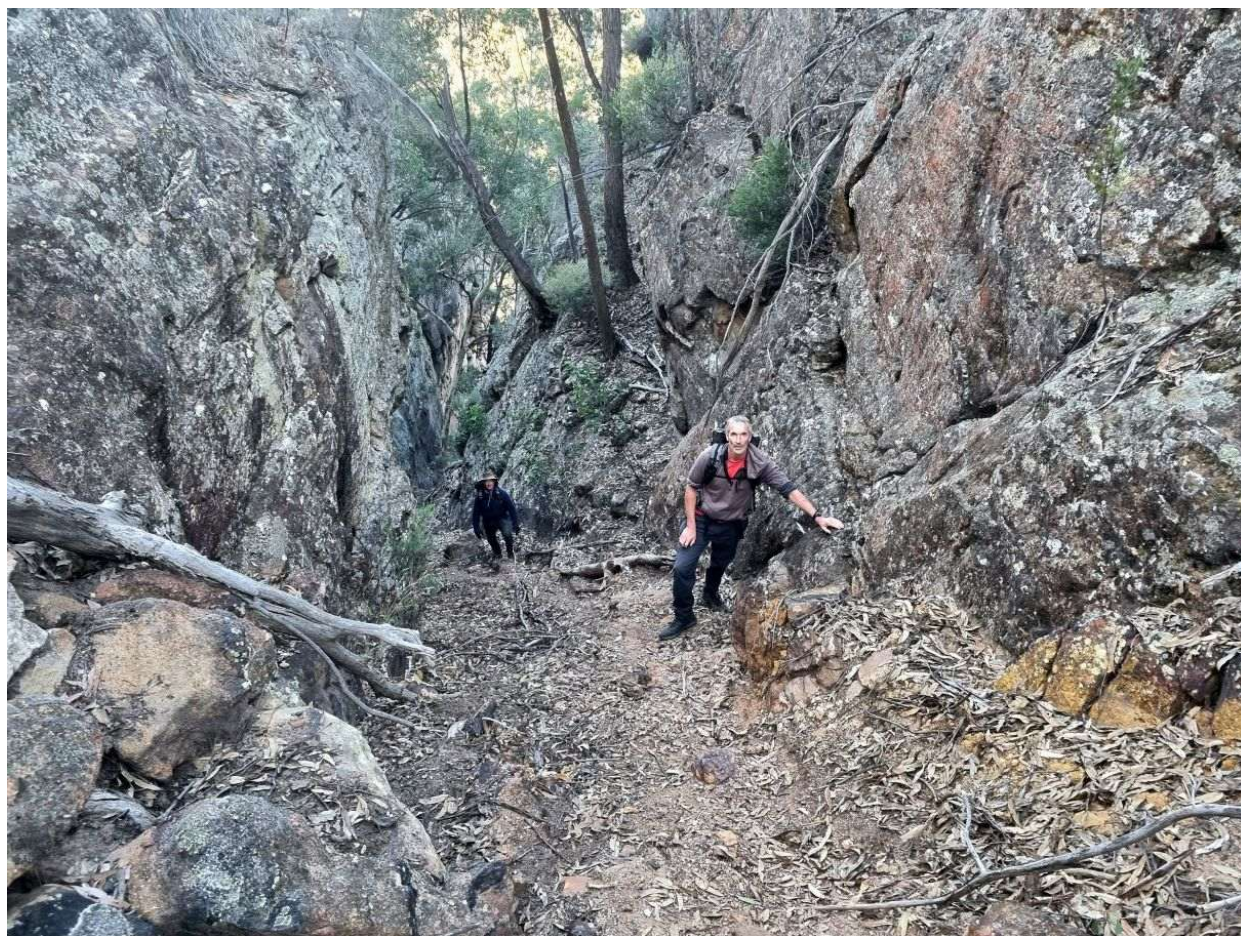
Leaving our comfortable base behind, the party headed uphill towards a break in a massive wall of cliffs that we had observed from the camp yesterday; it also appeared as a possible way up on the detailed rock map. At 0810, we stopped to take photos of a six metre high boulder resembling a human (or Gorilla) face. There was another boulder a little further ahead, looking like the same face smashed by a huge blow. The rate of ascent then accelerated sharply as we moved a bit to the left to avoid descending into a gully, and soon reached the first cliff line. A short traverse took us into the start of a substantial slot or ramp, about 30 metres across, leading through the cliffs. At 0826. It went up like a dream, narrowing towards the end to just about five metres but presenting no challenges along its entire length.



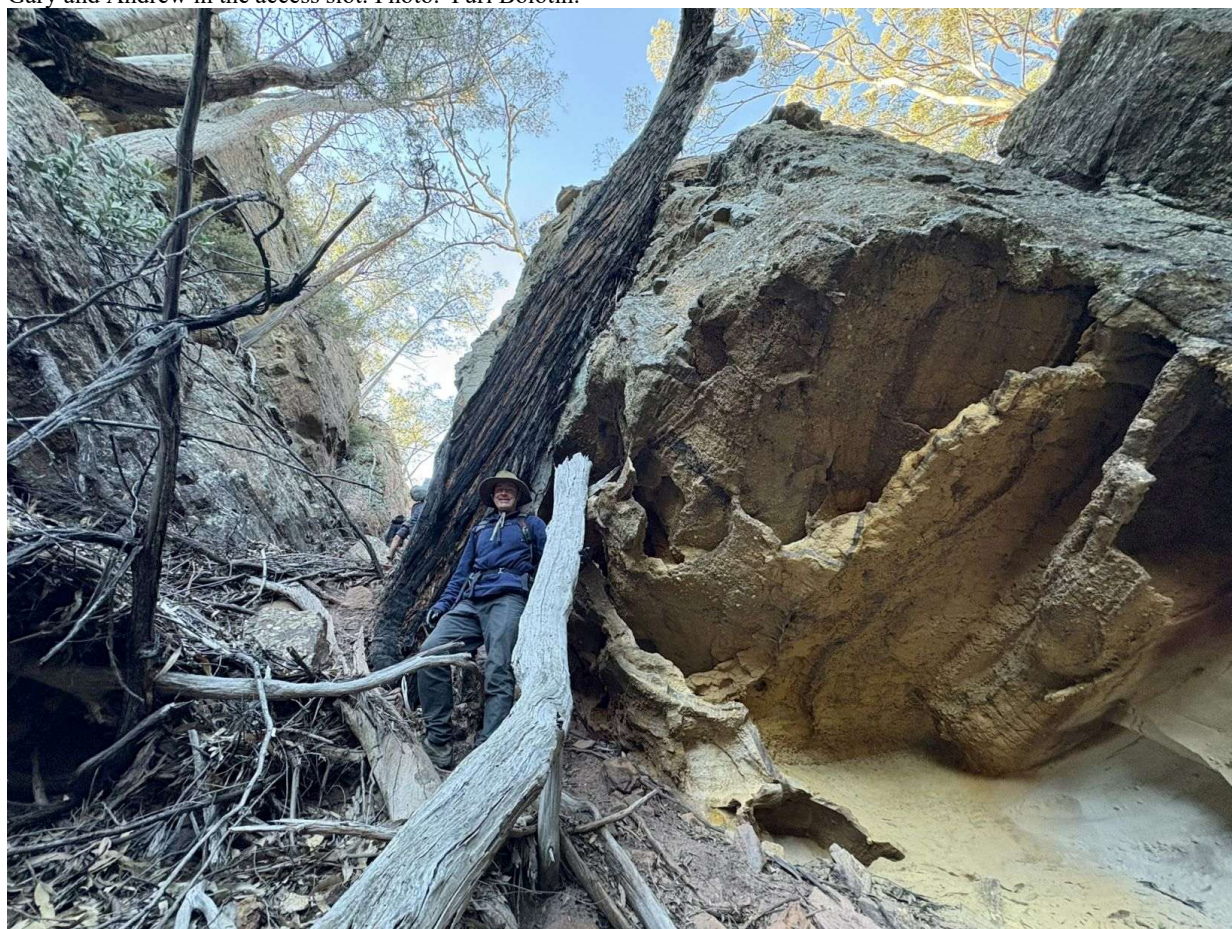
Anton and Yuri underneath a giant Gorilla face boulder. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Approaching the first cliff line and the access slot. Photo: Anton Leddin.

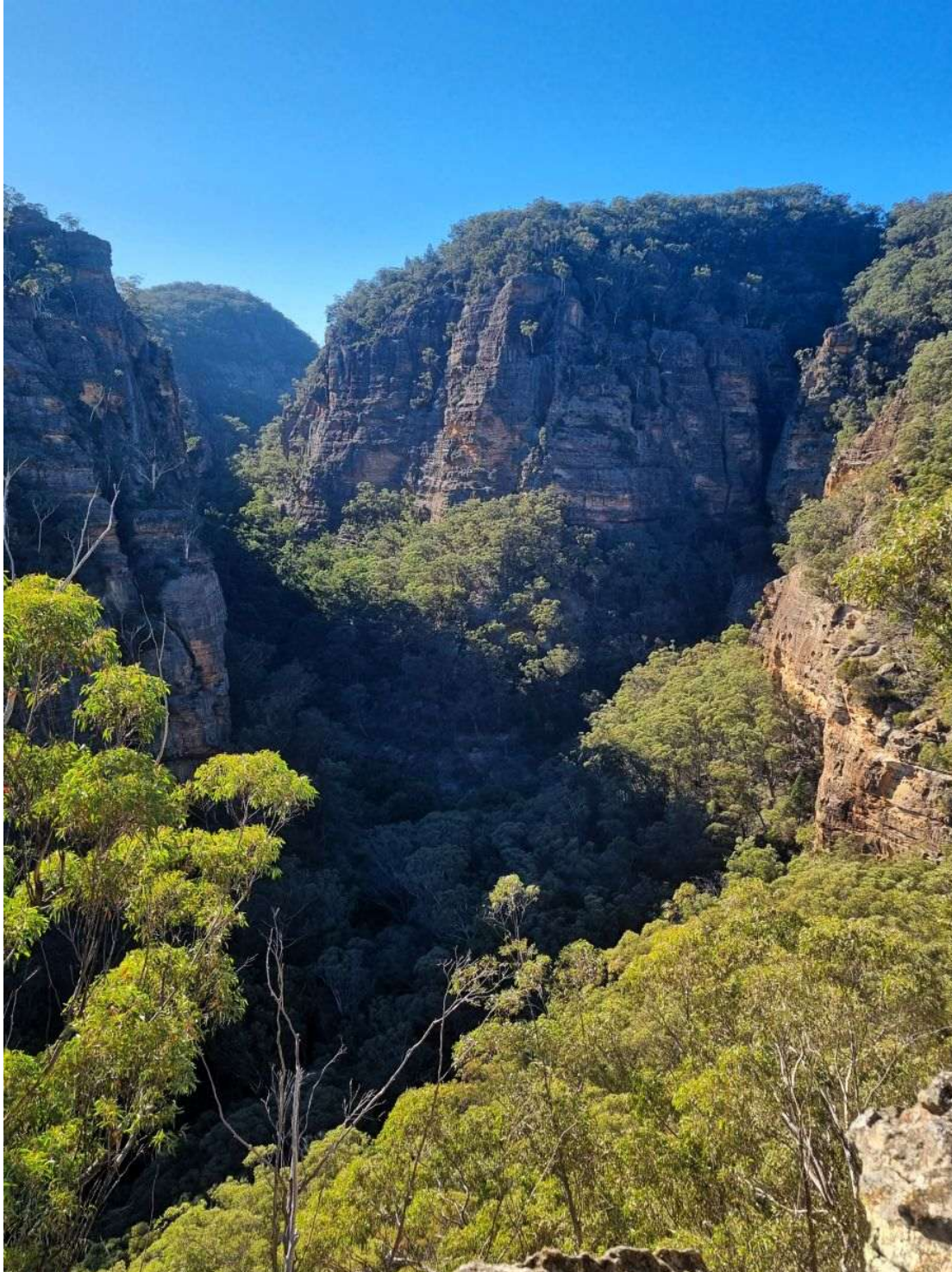


Gary and Andrew in the access slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Gary near the end of the access slot. Photo: Anton Leddin.

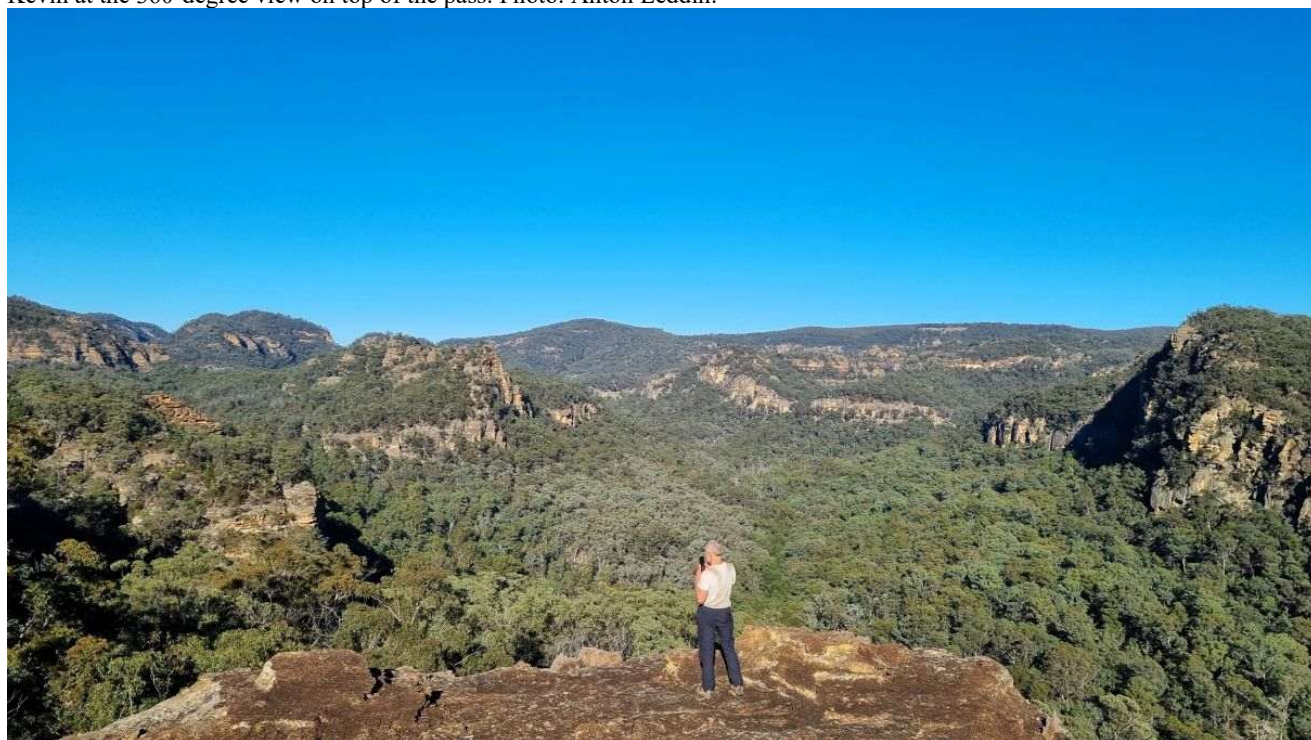
Coming out of its cold, shady confines (at 0840), we were blinded and speechless, literally and metaphorically, by the breath-arresting dramatically sunlit view towards the east into the narrow opening of the Lost Chord Ravine surrounded by enormous cliffs. Lee Fortress, which we had been exploring yesterday, formed the northern flank of the gorge. Having recovered a little from the initial impact, the party moved on to a group of pagodas at the cliff edge facing north west, to be once again stunned by the incredible 360-degree panorama of Bylong Labyrinth, bathed in the bright morning sunlight. Lee Castle and Labyrinth Peak competed for our attention with many other familiar and unfamiliar features, including the giant wall on the way to Labyrinth Saddle that was on our tomorrow's agenda. At 0852. It is interesting to note that the topographic map shows unbroken cliffs where we made an easy ascent from Lee Creek but no obstacles on the northern face, where in fact the walls are enormous.



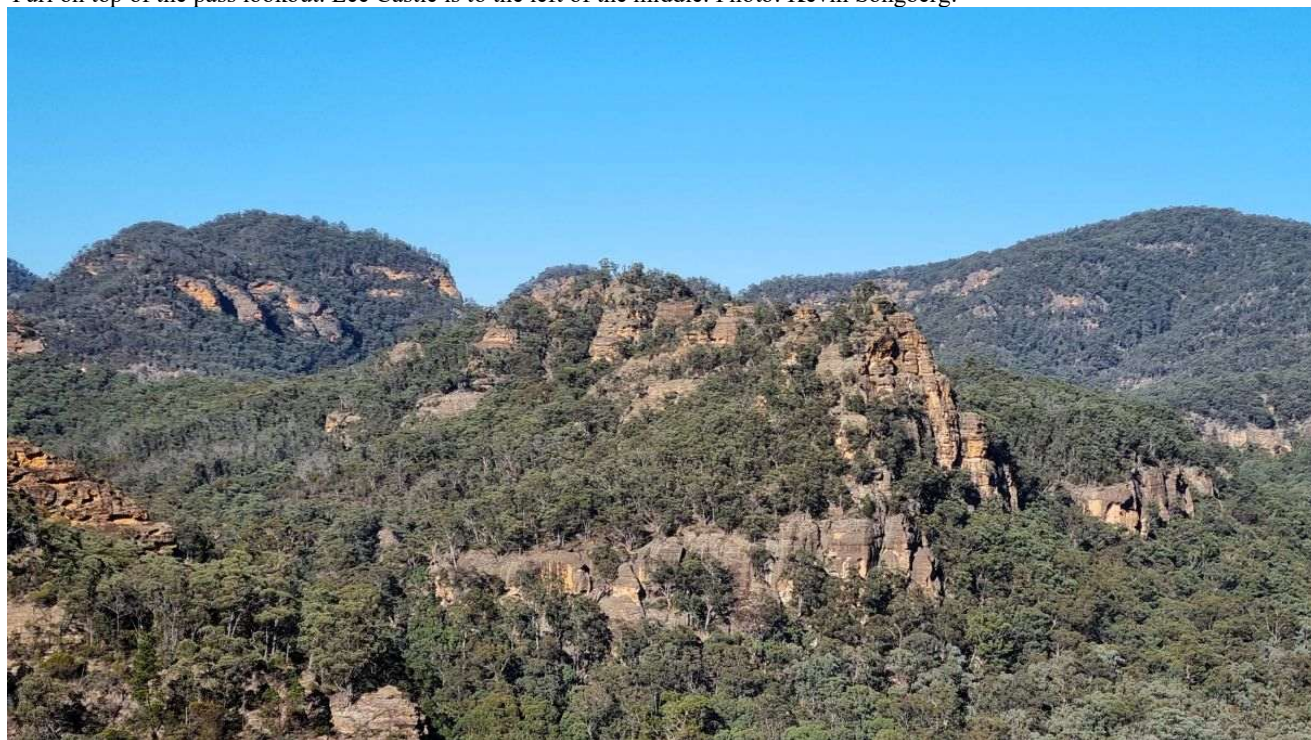
The dramatic view of Lost Crater Ravine from the top of the ascent. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



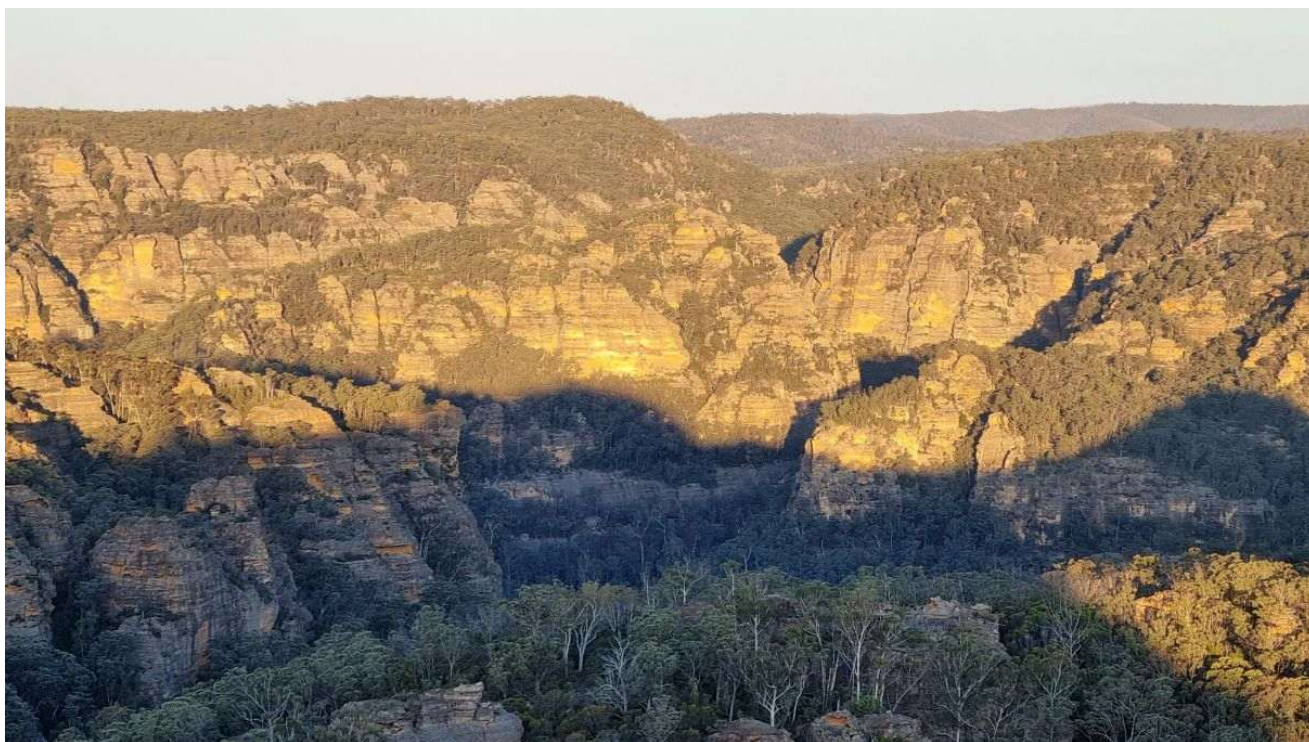
Kevin at the 360-degree view on top of the pass. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Yuri on top of the pass lookout. Lee Castle is to the left of the middle. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



Lee Castle from the lookout. High hills on Growee Range are behind it on both sides. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



The 'reverse' view towards Lee Fortress (left and centre), Lost Chord Ravine (right of the centre) and the ascent slot (a short right from it), taken from the top of Labyrinth Peak on 14/10/23. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

It was 0908, when we finally managed to tear ourselves away from this magical location and its views. The adventure continued as the party headed south east and up over a pagoda-encrusted spur running along the edge of the escarpment that overlooks the Lost Chord Ravine. Fourteen minutes into this traverse, we came to an eight metre drop in the middle of the spur. Having done many trips in Bylong Labyrinth, I was only mildly surprised as this was very typical in this area. The usual approach was applied – backtracking a bit, descending on a side (left one, this time), sidling into the gap, and then scrambling out of the rift on the opposite bank. Luckily, no tapes were required for this maneuver today. At 0922.

A beautifully sunlit large orange overhang beckoned ahead. Climbing up to it, we paused for a few photos in that magical spot. Next, the group stopped at a terrific lookout with the view of the narrow spur we had just ascended and further along Lee Creek gorge, hemmed in between the Tal Tal Range on the right and Growee Range on the left, all the way towards Benjang Gap, where our journey had begun. At 0936.



Andrew, Gary and Anna at the big orange overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Coming to the top of the spur, where it joins a larger north-south oriented watershed, we made a quick detour downhill and northwards to the edge of the walls facing Lost Chord Ravine, for another, closer look of its incredible gorge. At that point, we were just one hundred metres from it horizontally and about as far vertically, with no possible ways down. The bottom of the ravine was still in deep dark cold shadow, a huge contrast to the warm sunlit rock platform we were standing on. To the left, we could clearly trace our adventures of yesterday, climbing up the southern battlements of Lee Fortress, with Lost Chord Ravine serving as a moat. At 0947.



Lee Fortress from the traverse. The ledge that gave us access to it is visible directly across the gorge. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



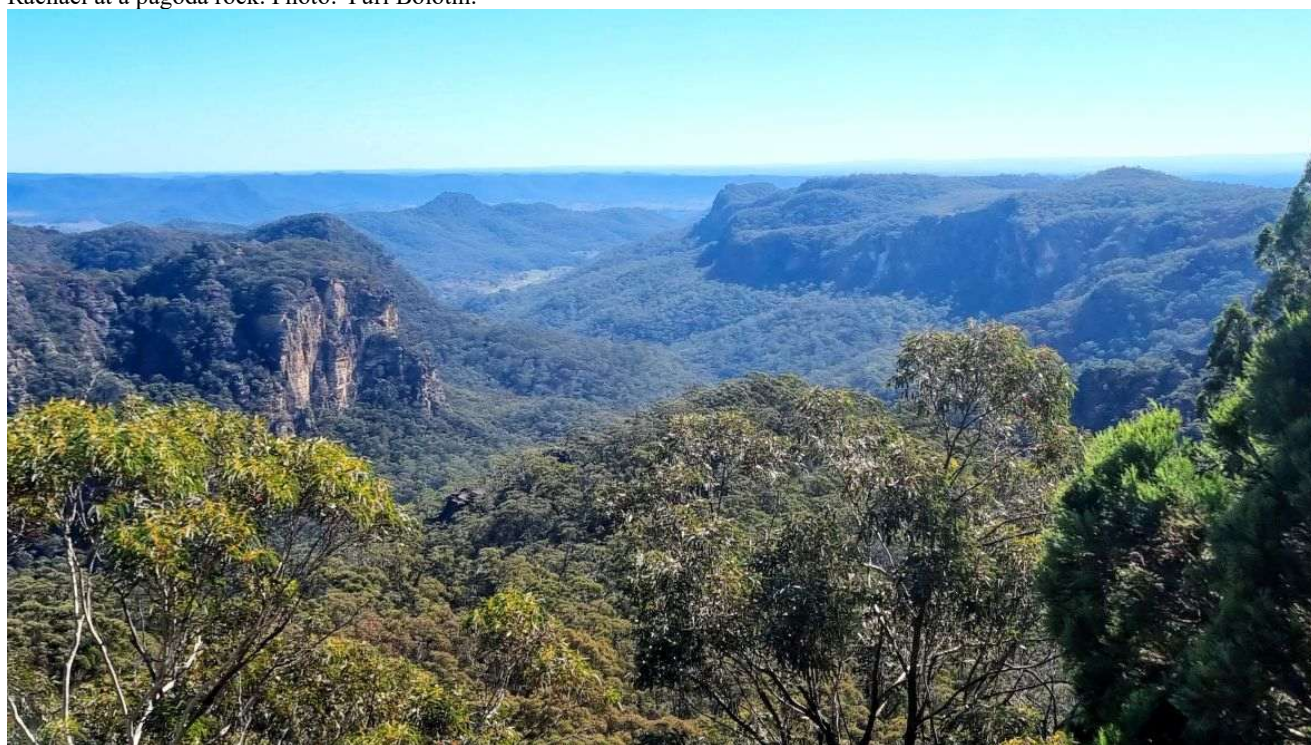
Lost Chord Ravine view from the traverse. Photo: Anton Leddin.

From 1002 till 1020, we had morning tea at another 360-degree lookout point located along the ridge. When we continued, I consciously tried to keep to the tree-covered central part of the watershed, in order to get a little break from the never-ending incredible panoramas, hoping our view palate would be refreshed when we arrived at the top of the climb, still about 800 metres further ahead.

The ridge rose steadily. It was dry and almost completely free of scrub, a Wollemi explorer's dream. We passed some interesting rocks and finally mounted a tall cluster of pagodas, which was the highest point of our traverse. You probably guessed what I am going to tell you next...another amazing view towards Lee Creek gorge, Labyrinth Peak and Lee Castle awaited us there. I thought the forced lookout deprivation of the last half an hour had been successful; it now added to our enjoyment. At 1057.



Rachael at a pagoda rock. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Lee Creek gorge panorama from the top of the climb. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Leaving the high point behind, the party walked through a delightful area dotted with mature, sparkingly silver and grey Scribbly Gums, skirted the perimeter of a deep cave with powder-white sandy floors and underneath some picturesque boulders, then continued downhill on a dry open ridge. After a while, we had

to push our way through dense vegetation covering a shallow saddle, before mounting a knoll with another 360-degree panorama. The amazing turrets of Lee Castle, less than a kilometre across the ravine to the west, could be seen particularly well from here. The view of the country to the north, dissected by giant pagodas, was awe-inspiring. That terrain would test our mettle soon. At 1140.



Scribbly Gums along the ridge walk. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



We were heading down towards this forest of pagodas soon. Photo: Anton Leddin.

Our next objective was going to be finding a way down from this spur to Lee Creek and the camp. I must confess, I had a sense of both apprehension and excitement about it. The trip so far had been all too easy – going up a very straightforward slot in the morning and then traversing along an open ridge whilst enjoying

continuous spectacular views. I felt almost certain that the Wollemi gods would try to balance things out and throw some challenges on our way now. Well, we were ready for them!

Before taking off, a group photo was taken, and then, at 1155, we began by coming down into a gully to our north. After eight minutes of a moderately steep descent, the party reached the top of a slot, which I was hoping would take us below the first cliff line. That indeed worked well, and soon we were sidling below the high bluffs and coming down another gully that I thought would go all the way through the second escarpment. This time, however, it was a 'no-go' – a three metre drop, followed by a five metre drop, the latter would almost certainly be irreversible. At 1220.



Anton, Andrew, Anna, Gary, Yuri and Rachael before commencing the descent. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

If it went, it would have been the fastest way down through to a gully below, then, assuming it could also be negotiated, back to Lee Creek and the camp, but now we had to shift to Plan B – the next ravine to the north, some 500 metres away through a very dissected terrain. This traverse took us through a number of tricky narrow ledges, with a dead end or two that needed to be reversed.



The group on a ledge. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Eventually, by 1258, we made it to a spur that was descending towards our target gully, but before following it down, we had to have a break for lunch. Most of the group stopped at a high point. It was quite warm by now, and they found some nice semi-shade there. Anton and I decided to walk down to the tip of a narrow promontory jutting out into the valley and featuring a cluster of pagodas. It was yet another spectacular location in a day that was overloaded with them.



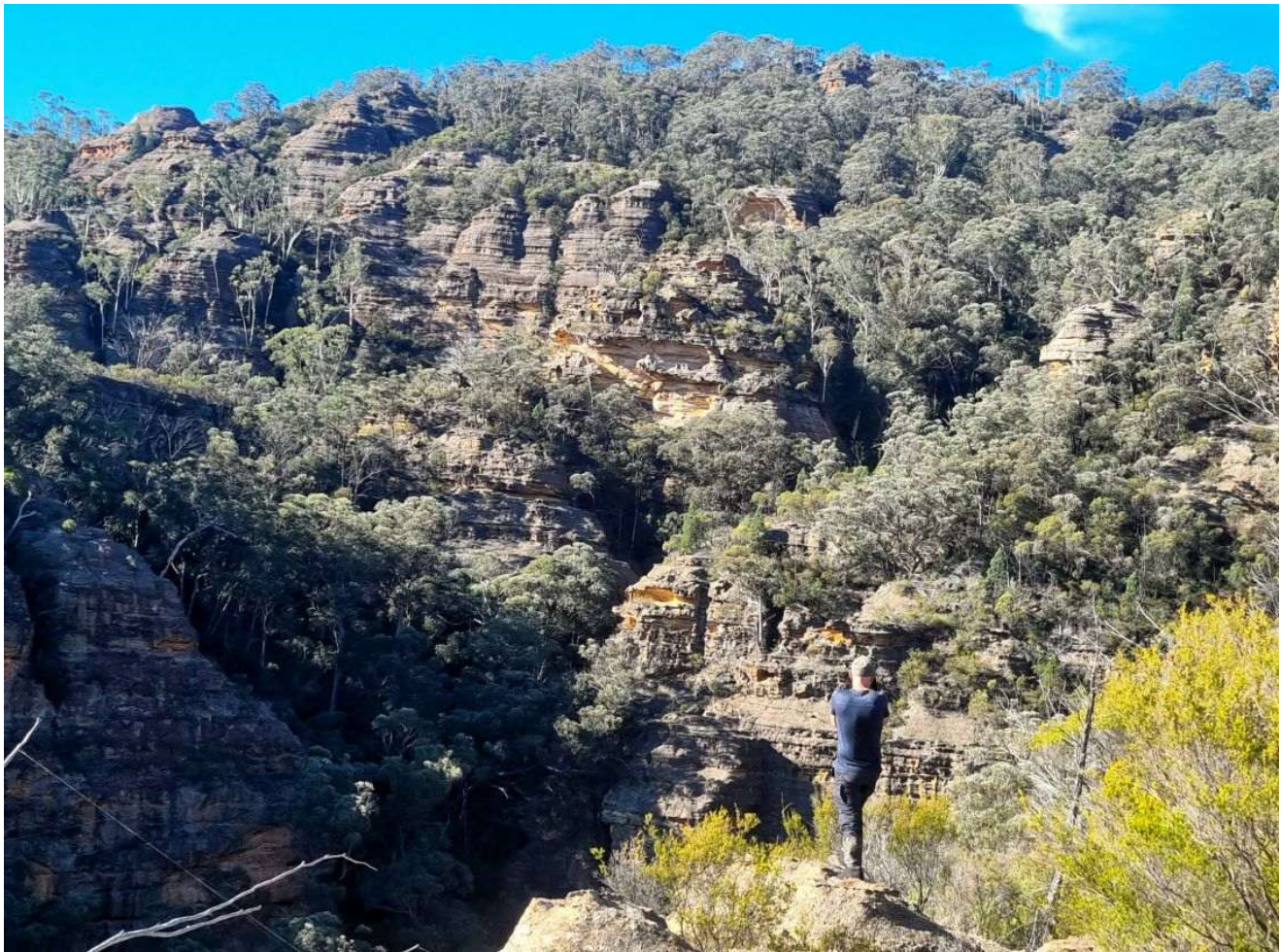
Anton and Yuri at their lunch spot. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

The lunch was over at 1328 and after both groups had re-united, we went down a narrow ramp through a fair amount of tough Banksia scrub. It was going OK first, but then, even before we arrived at a brink of a drop,

I checked the map and realised it was not going to work. At 1349. Another reverse ensued, luckily, only a short one.

Moving north from here, we briefly stopped at a flat rock platform, a good high camp for 3-4 people, with great views towards Lee Castle and all the way to Growee Range, but no water nearby. At 1354.

Fourteen minutes later, the company made it to a ledge that I was hoping we would be able to traverse westwards, where the detailed map showed a break in the cliffs. Before following it, I suggested we should descend a little in the opposite direction, in order to look at an incredibly complex knot of slots and ravines at the head of the gorge we had been heading towards. The view was indeed stupendous, but it did not boost my confidence about our ability to negotiate that terrain.



Anton with the view of the terrain ahead. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Turning around, we walked westwards along a descent-size shelf and at 1423, near the end of it, came to another panorama point that had the best vista towards Lee Castle of the day filled with such vistas. This was because we were now only 600 metres away from it, across a gorge, and almost at the same eye level with the turrets. Thinking about these almost unending views, with the first one being from the top of the access slot this morning and the last one, just now, I called this scenic route Castle View Traverse.



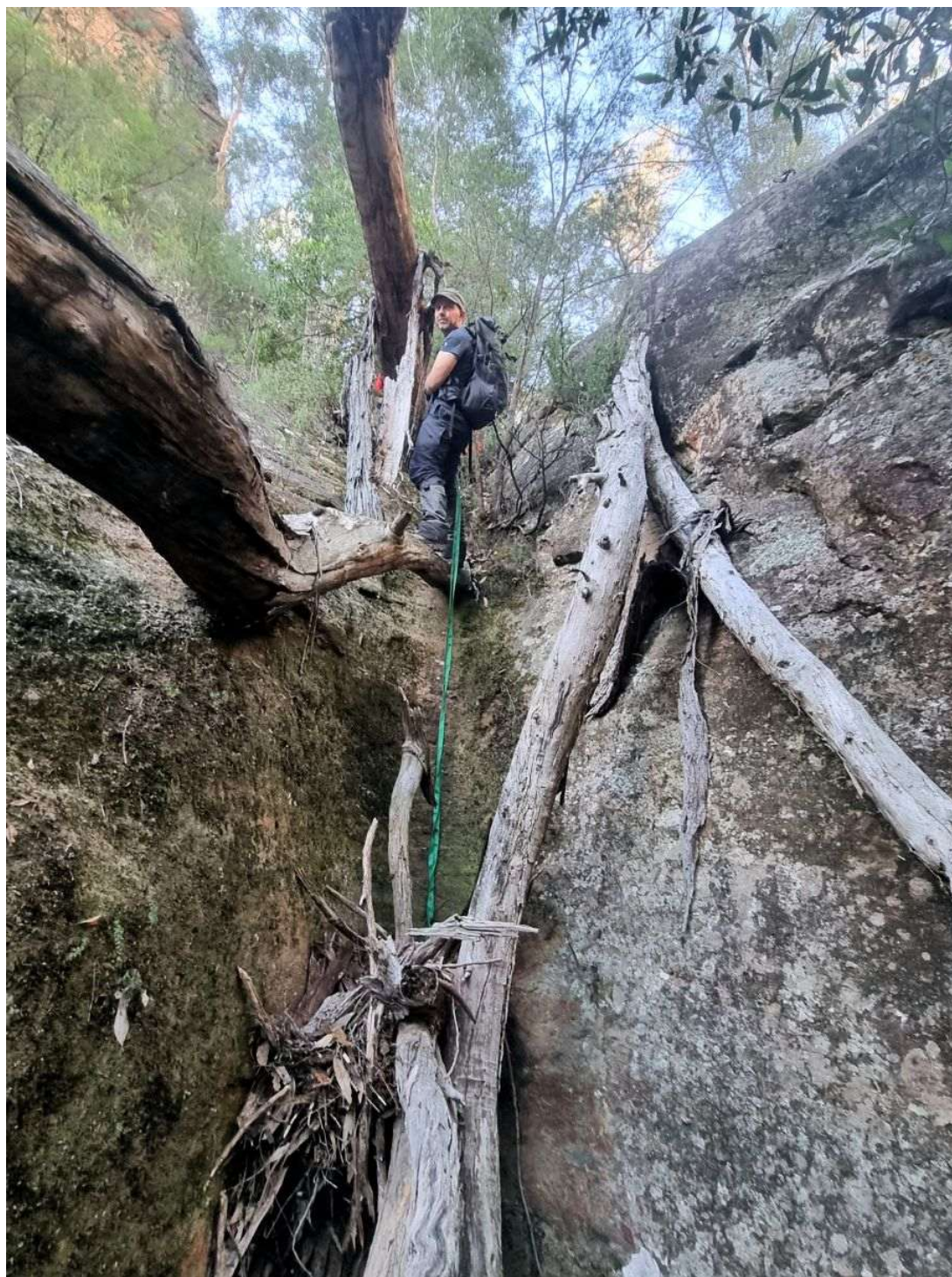
Lee Castle view from the end of Castle View Traverse. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Walking out from the ledge onto a narrow spur, we soon saw, as expected, a way down underneath the second line of cliffs. It was through a sequence of two dramatic but easy slots. At 1430.

The group now traversed underneath the cliffs (at least 35 metres high but not shown on the topographic map) towards the head of the planned descent gully. We had been standing above these walls only a few minutes ago. 1449 saw us in a truly wild-looking country, at a junction of several narrow slots and gorges, below a forest of huge pagodas. We took a peek up one canyon-like ravine. It had thick Ferns and running water, but would be unlikely to serve as a pass up. There was no time to do any side explorations now.

On my mind, was the fact that we were now down to very few (two) options. The first one was to follow a major gully we were now at westwards where my detailed map showed it breaking through the third and last, enormous cliff line. The other choice would be to climb through a slot to the north, north west, then sidle to another gully, where, again, a descent might be possible. I decided we should now try the first alternative.

That route required access to the bottom of the gully 6-7 metres below us, but it could only be down on a tape as its wet inclined walls looked very slippery. I thought we should traverse above it to seek an easier entry. Fifty metres further, the party came to a tributary slot, which, once again, could only be done with a tape. The drop here was not too big, in the order of 5-6 metres, and choked with a couple of fallen trees, providing convenient foot landings. It could perhaps be negotiated without the rope assistance during dry weather. A couple of people went down first, including myself, as I wanted to make sure the entire ravine went before bringing everyone in. At 1510.



Anton at the first drop. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

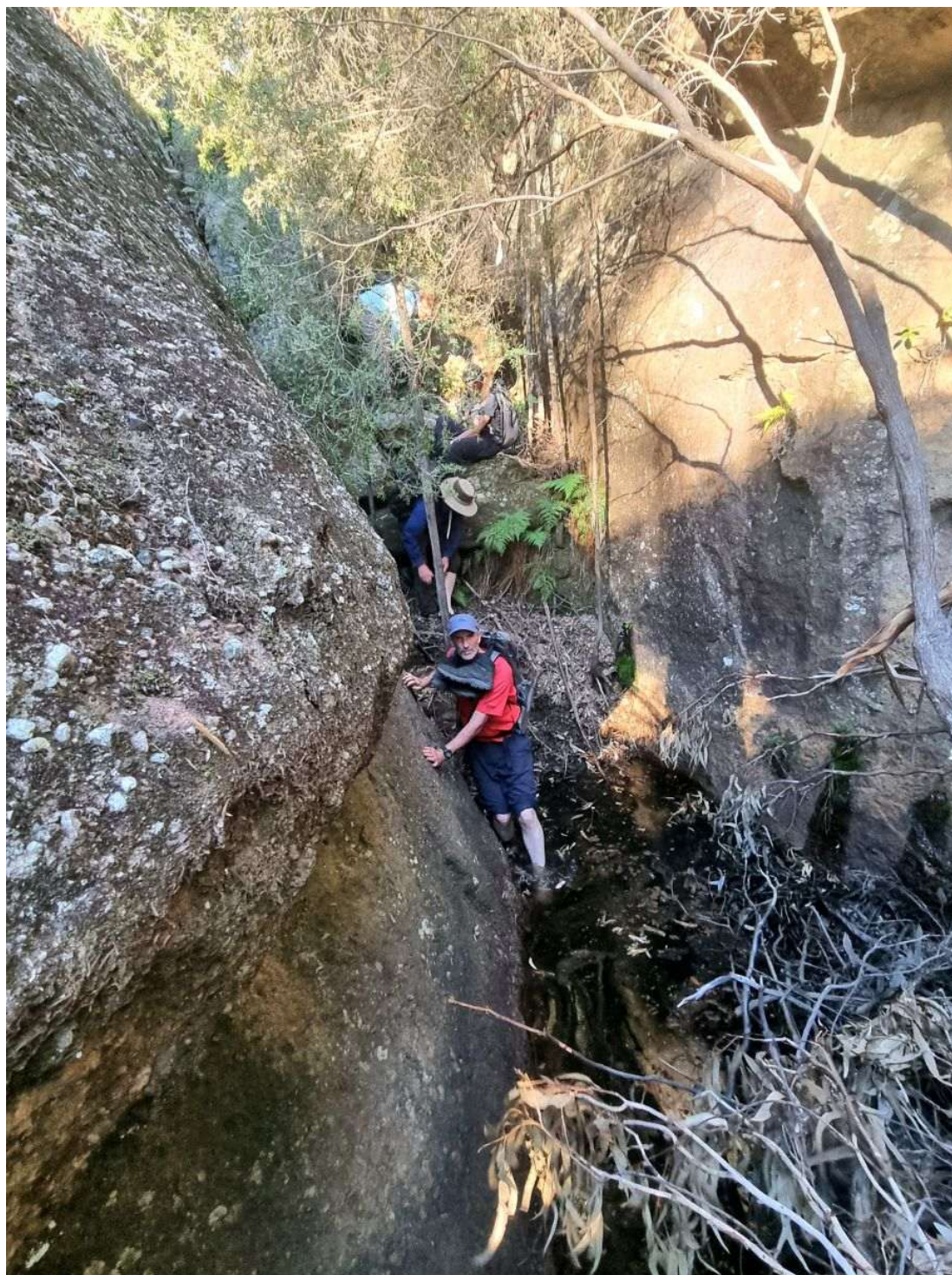
Straight after this first descent, just past the junction with the main gully, we had to use another tape, to secure another, smaller (about four metres) but more awkward drop. I was glad the group had three tapes in our gear today. Coming down the canyon-like gully, we came to a wider section to another Wow! sight, a magnificent 50 metre long north-facing overhang, with flat floors, splendid in the late afternoon sun. In some other, better accessible, place, we would have almost certainly found vestiges of Aboriginal occupation. Still being in the middle of the recce, with the rest of the team waiting, there was no time to explore beyond a quick glance and a few photos, taken in a hurry. At that time, I also thought I would come back to it in a few minutes, but was denied that second chance by the circumstances of the next part of the descent (read on). At 1528.



The group in the sunlit overhang. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

Below the cave, the gorge tightened once more, entering the last constriction where it was breaking through the cliffs. It was OK at first, just a few little jumps and scrambles down, but then I came to a very steep chute with a three metre long pool of water at the bottom. Before subjecting myself and everybody else to this mandatory immersion, I scrambled out on the right-hand side and saw a possible tape-assisted descent, about 8-10 metres, down a sloping rock apron. It did not look very safe to me, plus I thought it would require a lot longer to set up compared with just crossing the pool. The main thing, from my elevated position, I could now be sure that the big cliffs would be behind us after this last descent pitch.

All this bushwalking intelligence collected in the last half an hour or so was quickly conveyed to the rest of the team, and they started to follow the recce group down through the gorge. In the meantime, I returned to the top of the chute, scrambled down to the pool (with difficulty, thinking it may be worth setting up another short tape here or at least have mutual assistance). Taking my shoes and socks off (it was too late in the evening for them to dry), I crossed onto the other side. The water was about knee-deep and not too cold, but coming back out on the far side was a bit tricky due to the debris barring the way.



Andrew is about to cross the pool, with other team members on the way down. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Finally, by 1602, everyone was together underneath the last cliff line. Kevin had descended on tape rather than walking through the pool. He also reported that, whilst waiting at the head of the gully, he had wandered up a slot around the corner from where the first tape was set and even took a few photos. It appeared to be going well in the first hundred metres or so. He did not have his GPS on, and the country has several slots in that spot, but I now believe that he was looking at my second route option.

Our shoes back on, we now headed down the densely vegetated slopes, reaching Lee Creek at 1626. The gorge was already in deep, cool, blue shadow, with only the surrounding cliff tops still illuminated by the sun. By 1650, the group made it back to the camp, in good time but not a minute too soon.

It had been a terrific and spectacular day in the bush, as the Wollemi allowed the party to partake of its delights through an easy access slot first thing in the morning and then presented us with many challenges on our return route in the afternoon.



Starry Wollemi skies above the camp. Photo: Anton Leddin.

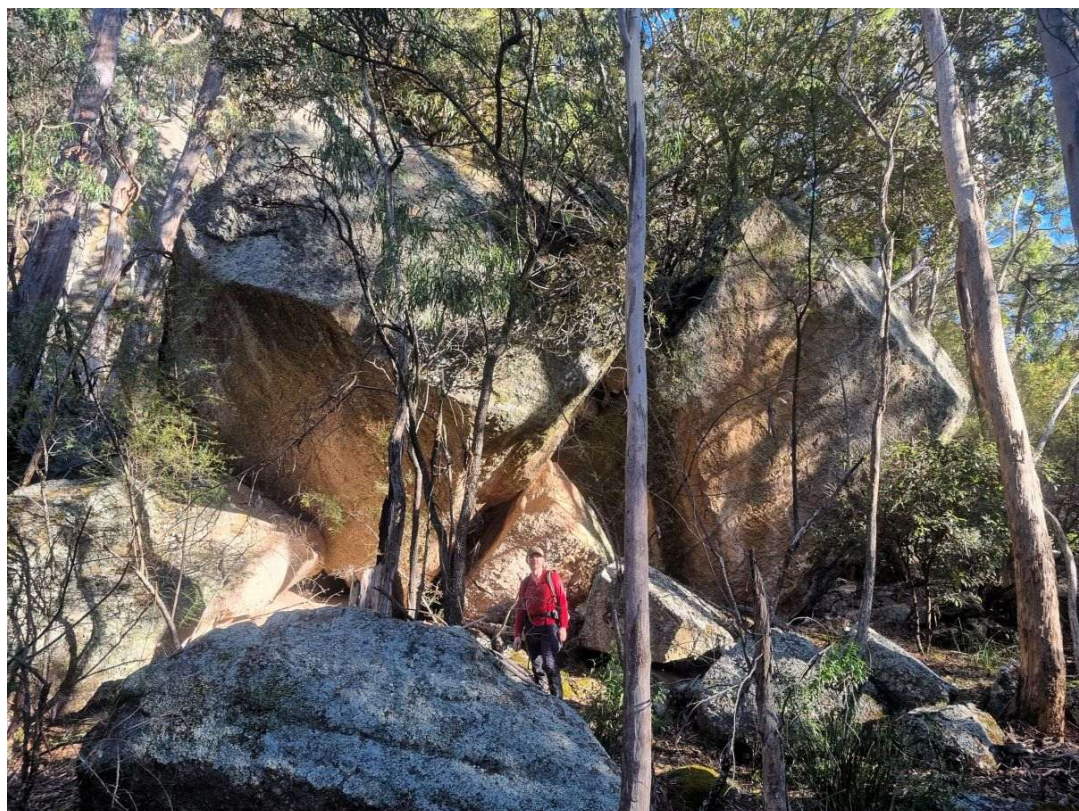
Day statistics: total distance 8.23 km; total accent 539 m.

Day 3 – 9 May 2025 – Monster Wall

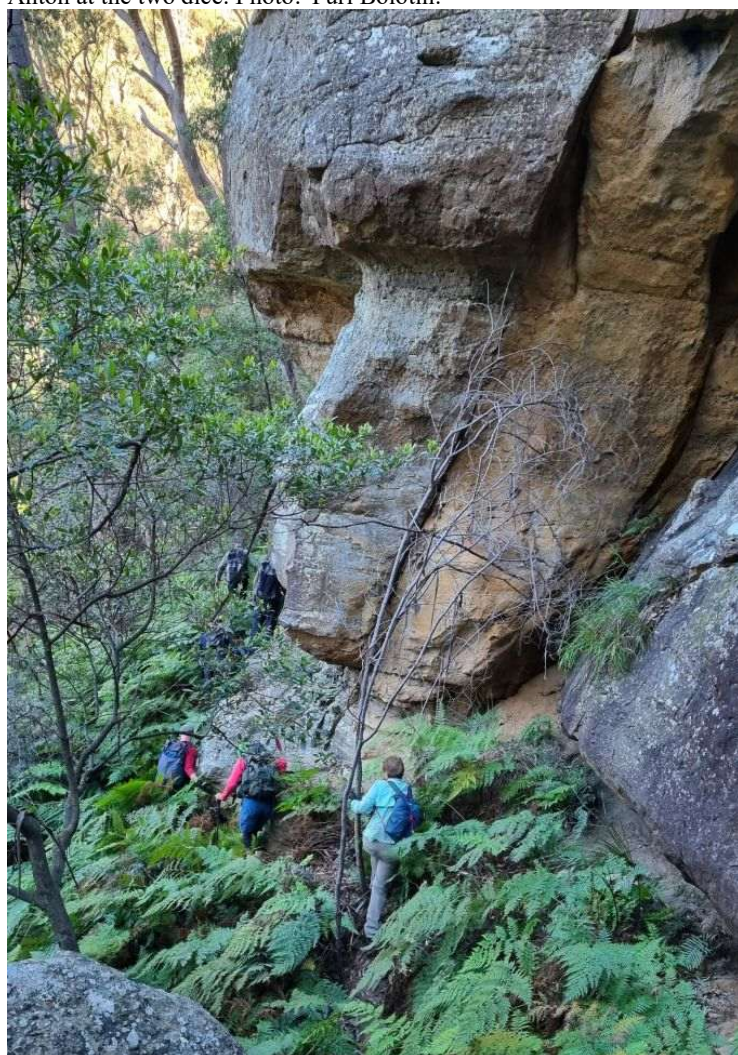
During a few previous trips to this area, we had seen an enormous straight wall and perhaps a slot underneath (it was hard to tell) rising to the west of Lee Creek and stretching all the way to Labyrinth Saddle, about 900 metres in distance. Our camp this time was not far from it, so the plan today was to check it out before making our exit back to Benjang Gap.

It was the coldest morning of the trip, at 5 degrees C, but everyone was out of their warm beds, packed and ready to go by 0757. The camp site was still in the shadow, but we knew that, going up the hill towards the rising sun, we would warm up quickly. Having gained a bit of elevation, we could look back at the slot that had given us easy access to the Castle View Traverse yesterday and Lee Fortress that we had explored on the first day.

The first photography stop was underneath a couple of boulders that resembled huge upturned dice. At 0810. Eight minutes later, the group was below the eastern flank of the wall we wanted to explore. It looked indeed very high, vertical and completely impregnable. A deep gully was forming to our left as we progressed, and I tried to stay above it and as close to the rock face as possible, which was not always easy, due to fickle ledges and the abundant scrub on this south-facing side of the valley.



Anton at the two dice. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Traversing below the wall. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

At 0830, the party entered a constriction, with high walls on both sides. The way forward from here was steeply up through the gorge, which measured about 50 metres across at the start, narrowing down to half of that by the time the left wall stopped, giving way to a flat area bordered on the right by the giant wall that continued unabated. At 0855.



The giant wall. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Constriction narrows down at the end. Photo: Anton Leddin.

This area had a few standalone pagodas separated by slots. We tried one on the left side as it looked easier, but it did not go or, rather, was about to take us too far down into the gully. A short retrace towards the big wall took us to the slot that was both negotiable and scenically narrow.



Andrew coming up the slot. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Near the top of it, the company passed, at 0917, the only break in the wall, according to the detailed map, along its entire length, where it was briefly pierced by a steep gully, guarded by a tall monolith rock. It looked possible to follow that watercourse up, which, if it went all the way, would take us to a very dissected area above the cliffs we had visited on one of the previous trips, coming from Labyrinth Saddle.

That, however, was not part of today's agenda. Instead, we continued along the main wall, up a steep ramp, to the first vista of the day, looking to the south, towards the ridge we had used previously to access

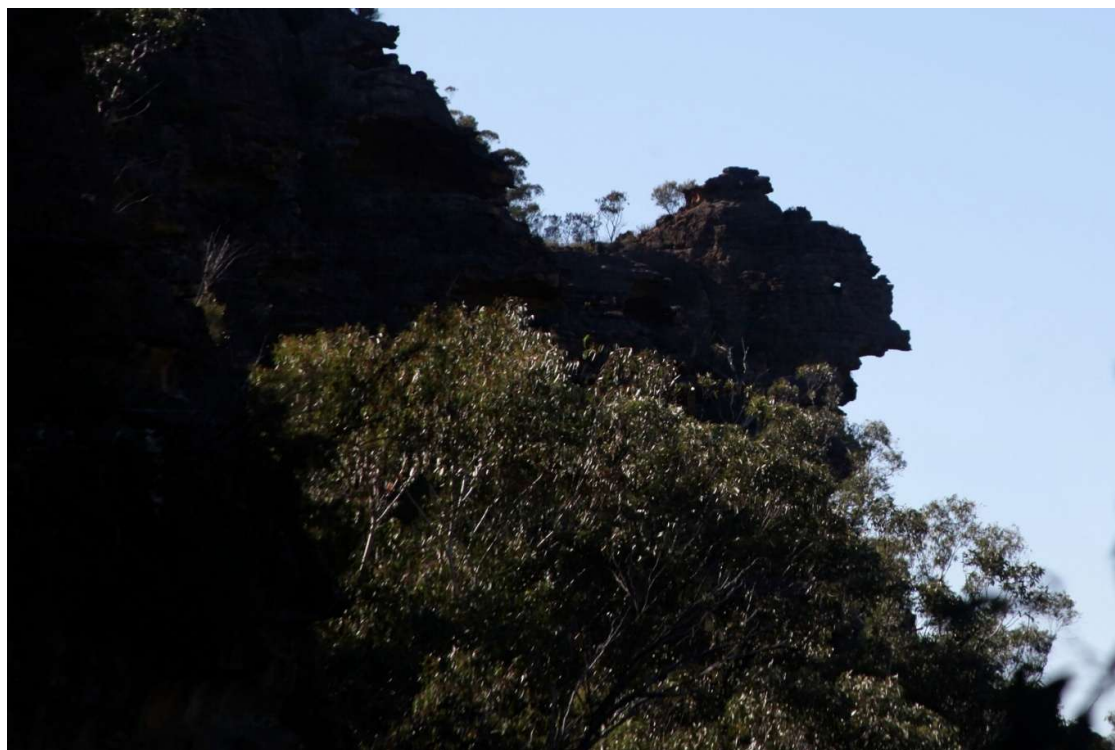
Labyrinth Peak. At 0924. The bottom of the wall here had an interesting geology of eroded multi-coloured sandstone in black, white and purple-red.

Another short climb along the wall yielded a broader panorama that included parts of Growee Range. At 0942. The ledge from here dropped down steeply, and I felt that, having explored this far, it was time to head back. Even though we were located only about 400 metres to the end of the wall and the access point to Labyrinth Saddle and Labyrinth Peak, in this country it would likely take us at least an hour each way, which would be longer than we had allowed for.



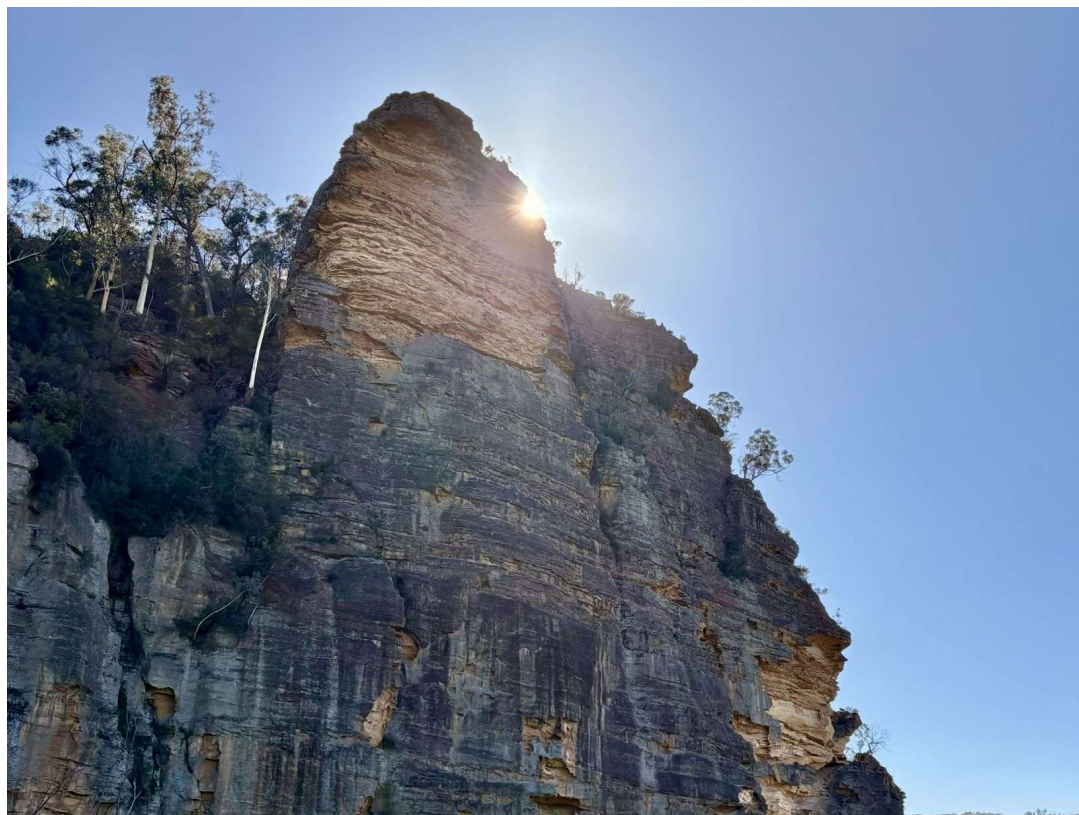
Andrew, Yuri, Rachael, Kevin, Anna and Gary at the turnaround point. Photo: Anton Leddin.

As we turned around and started to head back, an amazing vision came to view, something we had completely missed on the way in. It was a giant monster head on the very top of the wall, with an eye hole pierced through the rock. After a while, the head was no longer visible, but I estimate it is located above the flat area at the end of the constriction we had passed on the way up. I called this entire enormous continuous cliff face Monster Wall because of the striking giant head sculpture sitting above it.



Monster head atop Monster Wall. Photo: Anton Leddin.

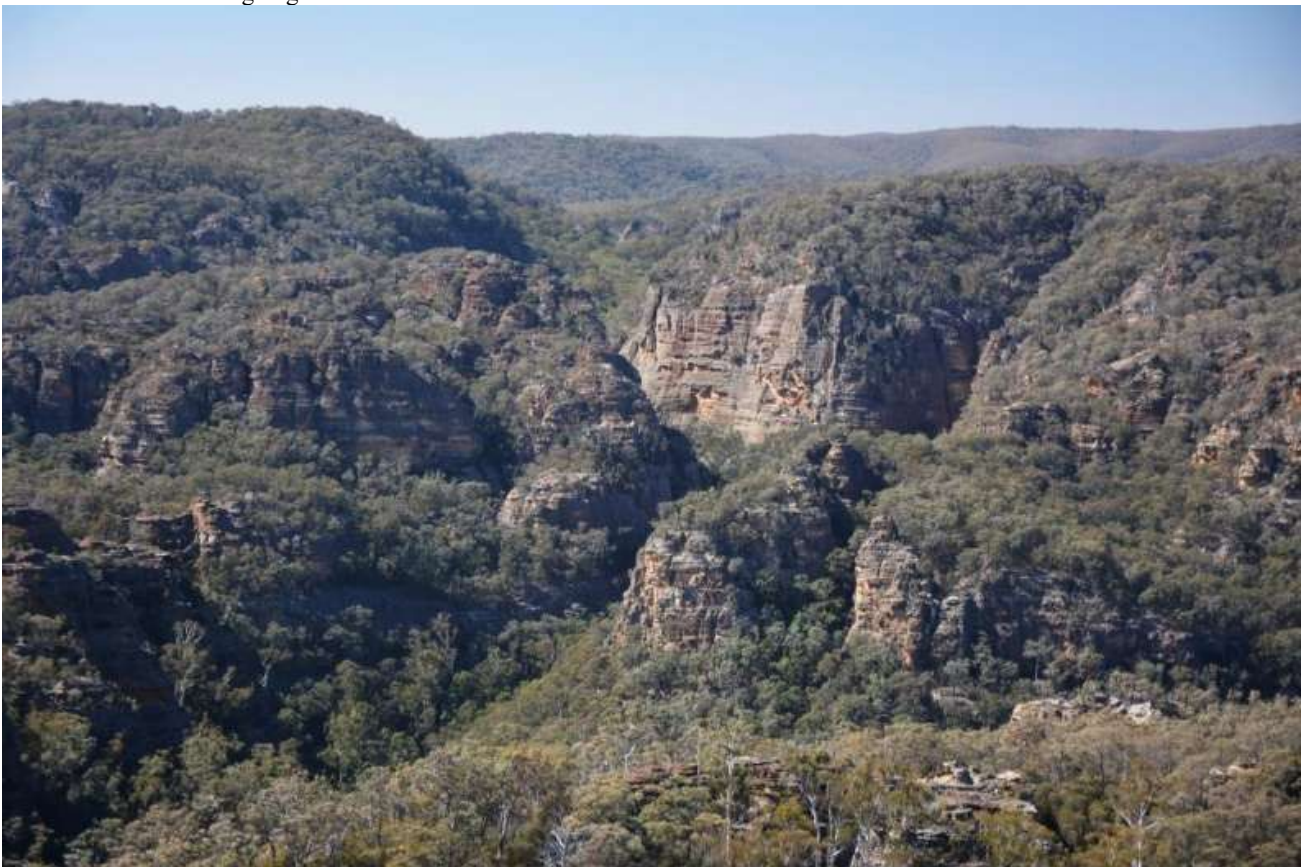
When, at 1008, the group came back down to the flat area, the giant head was impossible to recognise from there, due to the changed lines of sight. I had planned to take a different path at this point, so we turned south along a small spur and mounted a group of pagodas in the middle of it, at 1015. This was our morning tea spot, but also an opportunity to walk out a little further to the edge of the pagodas for a terrific view east towards the Lost Chord gorge and Lee Fortress, with almost the entire route of Day 1 in front of us.



Monster Wall. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Lee Fortress on the left, Lost Chord Ravine in the middle and Castle View Traverse access slot on the right, from below Monster Wall. Photo: Kevin Songberg.



This photo was taken on 23/08/19 with a powerful zoom from the top of Labyrinth Peak, two kilometres away. Photo: Kevin Songberg.

At 1037, our journey continued back down to the spur, past a few intricately eroded caves and then southwards into a small canyon-like gully we were hoping to use for the final descent. The country quickly became very scrubby, and the slope, extremely steep and slippery. Anna and I went to investigate whilst I asked the rest of the party to wait for us. I managed to get down to the very edge of the gully, where even the

detailed map showed no cliffs, but there was still at least 5-6 metres of air between me and the bottom. A tape descent would be required down a slippery rock and with no suitable anchors in sight. Even then, there would be no guarantee this canyon would go, so I decided we did not have time for it today. At 1100.

Turning around, the party headed up the slope and made it back to the flat area and the start of the constriction eighteen minutes later. Hugging the Monster Wall, I stayed too high, and we got cliffed out. At 1137, after an almost face-on encounter with a very surprised Rock Wallaby, I realised we needed to retrace. Fourteen minutes later, the company was back down at the right level, where we had passed before, but this time, we headed further down into the valley, where the going was easier, then gradually moved up and around to pick up the line of the spur leading to the camp, which was reached by 1217.



Anton, Andrew, Gary and Anna near the camp. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Because we had partially packed our gear in the morning, it only took a short time to get organised, and at 1235, the party headed down Lee Creek gorge. The return trip along the familiar ground was enjoyable but not very eventful. Between 1335 and 1356, we stopped for lunch in the semi-shade by the water under some beautiful Casuarinas, with just enough flat boulder seats for everyone.



Lee Creek. Photo: Anton Leddin.



Lee Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

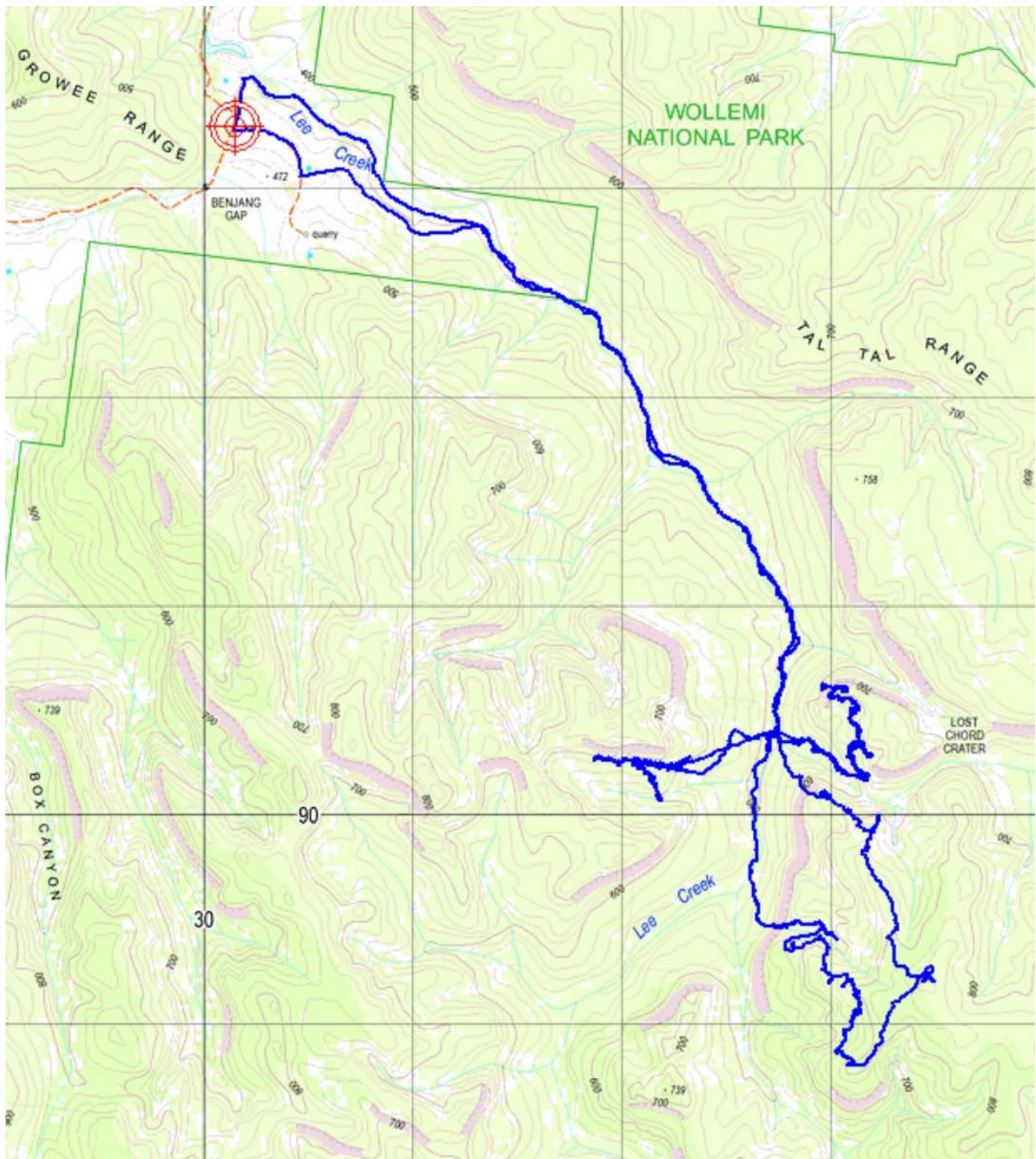
The old road at the end of the constriction was reached by 1412. At 1443, I decided to follow above Lee Creek for as long as possible instead of the usual route we had taken on Day 1. It was a nice journey but took extra 10 minutes, bringing us back to the parked vehicles by 1515.



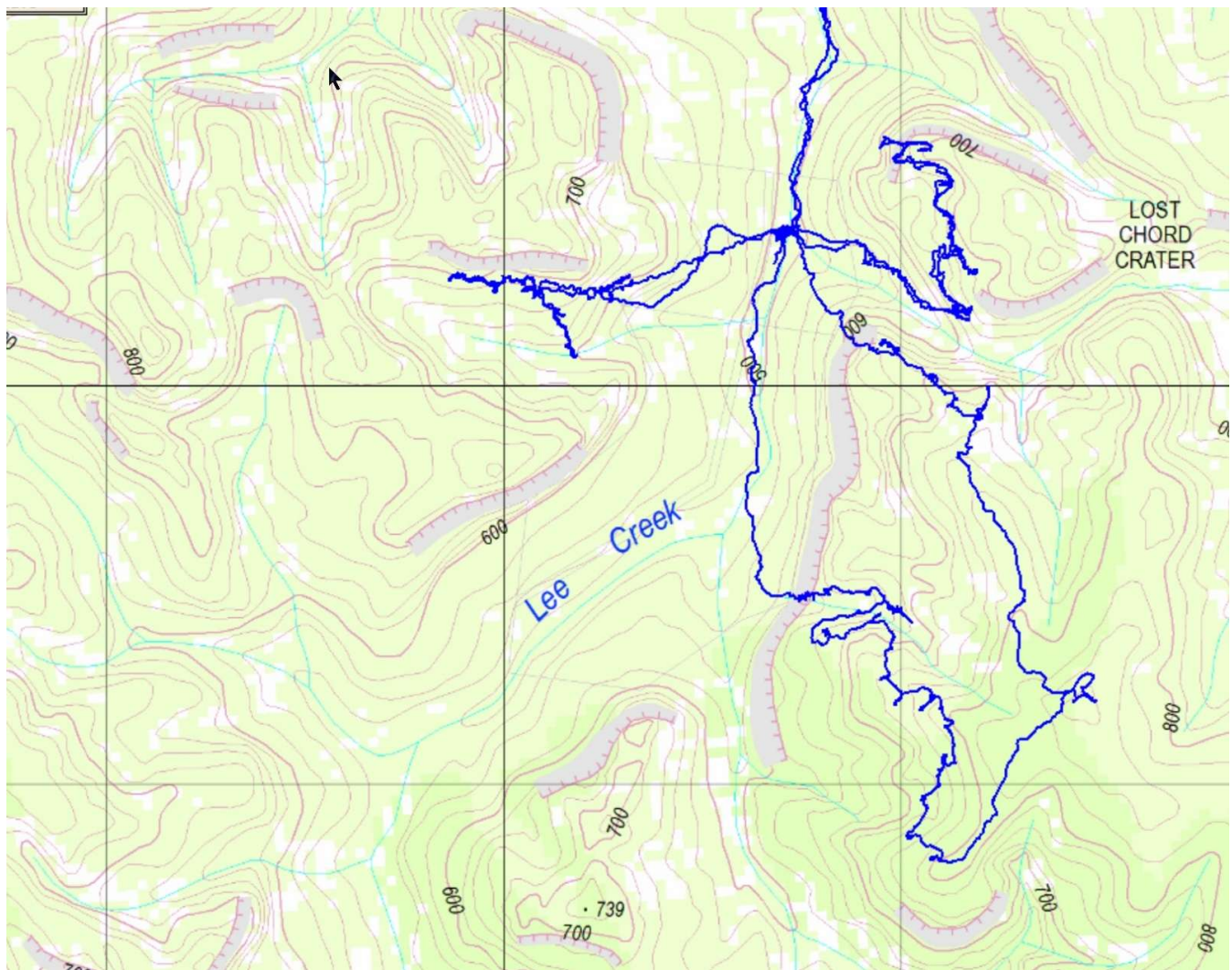
Tal Tal Range view on the return trip. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Day statistics: total distance 8.85 km; total accent 290 m.

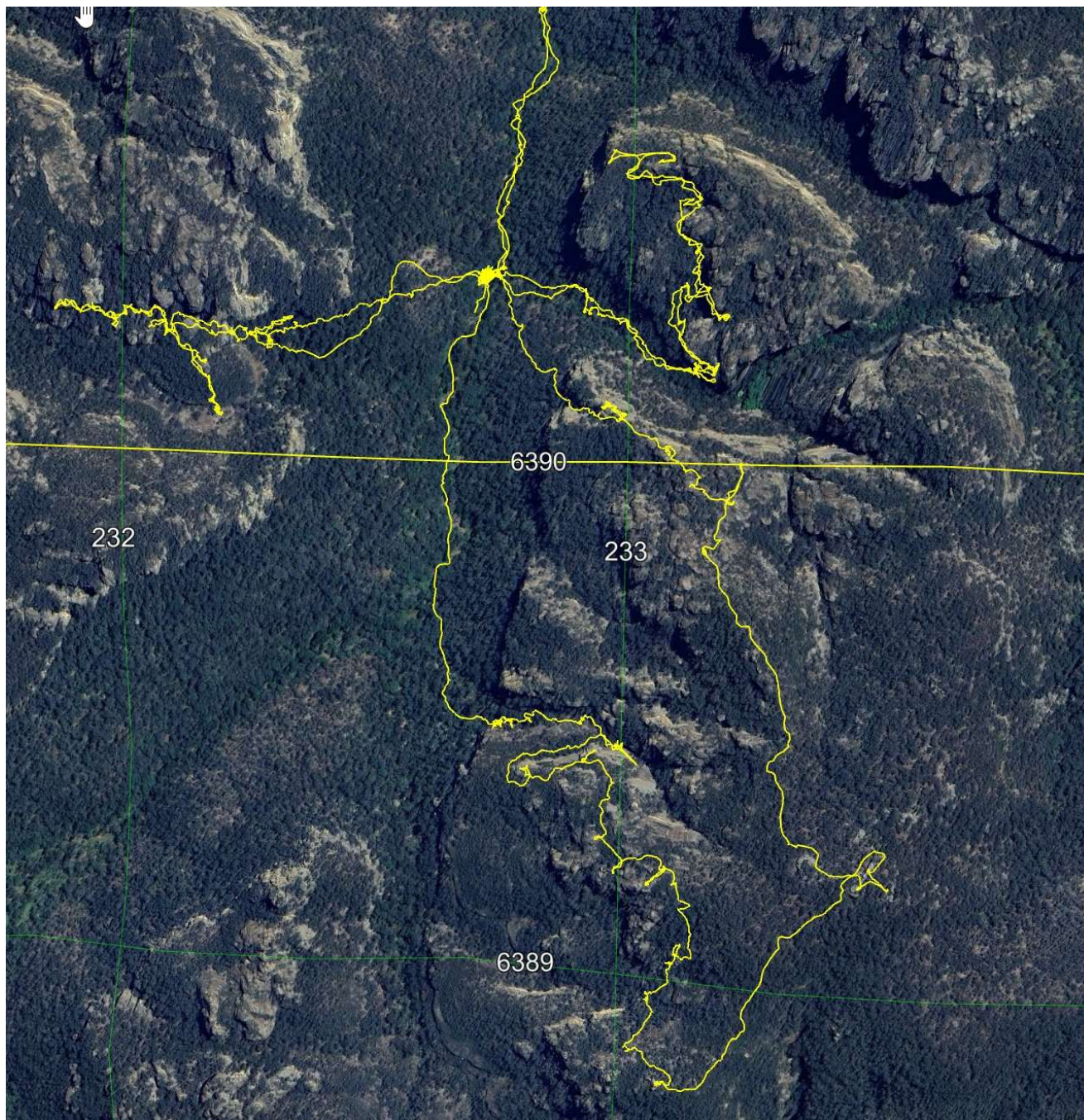
Trip statistics: total distance 26 km; total accent 1,279 m.



Trip topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Trip detailed topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.



Trip aerial map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
Day 1- 07/05/25- Lee Fortress			
0833	Cars parked and started walking	GR 3014 9330	435 m
0857	In Lee Creek	GR 3135 9279	395 m
0924	End of the old trail, start of the block-ups	GR 3215 9180	420 m
1018-1031	Morning tea at the end of the constriction	GR 3281 9096	480 m
1055	Base camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m

1148	Left for the day walk	GR 3273 9040	490 m
1220	Water in Lost Chord Ravine	GR 3305 9022	575 m
1229	Access ramp through the first cliff line	GR 3314 9019	620 m
1240-1303	Ledge below the second cliff line	GR 3318 9019	645 m
1319	Gully leading through the second cliff line	GR 3310 9035	650 m
1329	Underneath the third cliff line	GR 3316 9031	675 m
1339	Ledge stops, reversing	GR 3319 9030	680 m
1405	Crawl through section. Group splits.	GR 3313 9052	670 m
1416	Gully up through the third cliff line	GR 3299 9057	675 m
1422	Lookout northwards	GR 3296 9063	695 m
1430	360-degree panorama	GR 3305 9060	715 m
1455	Group re-unites	GR 3313 9052	670 m
1521	Below the second cliff line	GR 3310 9035	650 m
1550	Safer access ramp through the first cliff line (bottom)	GR 3316 9017	630 m
1635	Camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m
Day 2- 08/05/25- Castle View Traverse			
0801	Left camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m
0810	Big boulder	GR 3276 9030	530 m
0826	Slot/ramp (bottom)	GR 3288 9012	610 m
0840	Slot/ramp (top)	GR 3299 9009	670 m
0852-0908	Cliff edge panorama	GR 3295 9011	695 m
0922	Rift in the spur	GR 3308 9002	703 m
0936	Lookout	GR 3312 8996	720 m
0947	Lookout	GR 3322 8999	705 m
1002-1020	Lookout and morning tea	GR 3315 8983	755 m
1057	Top of the traverse lookout	GR 3344 8921	870 m
1140-1155	Panorama lookout	GR 3308 8881	800 m
1203	Top of the slot leading below the first cliff line	GR 3302 8886	750 m
1220	'No-go' gully	GR 3306 8897	720 m
1258-1328	Lunch (part of the group)	GR 3311 8919	790 m
1258-1328	Lunch at the lookout (Anton and I)	GR 3306 8919	770 m
1349	'No-go' gully	GR 3299 8921	750 m
1354	Rock platform, view	GR 3295 8926	740 m
1408	Ledge	GR 3297 8941	665 m
1423	Panorama	GR 3281 8938	670 m
1430	Two slots down to below the second cliff line	GR 3282 8937	675 m
1449	Junction of slots and ravines below the second cliff line	GR 3299 8943	640 m
1510	Two tape-assisted descents (top)	GR 3293 8949	645 m
1528	Cave	GR 3284 8948	625 m
1602	The group below the last cliff line	GR 3275 8948	590 m
1626	Lee Creek	GR 3261 8972	510 m
1650	Camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m

Day 3- 09/05/25- Monster Wall			
0757	Left camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m
0810	Upturned dice rocks	GR 3250 9033	560 m
0818	Below Monster Wall	GR 3238 9028	581 m
0830	Constriction starts	GR 3227 9022	600 m
0855	Constriction ends, flat area	GR 3209 9025	680 m
0917	Break in the wall, access gully	GR 3200 9028	690 m
0924	Lookout	GR 3197 9025	710 m
0942	Turnaround point	GR 3187 9027	700 m
1008	Flat area	GR 3209 9025	680 m
1015-1037	Top of pagodas, views, morning tea	GR 3215 9018	650 m
1100	Top of a drop, 'no-go', reversing	GR 3217 9008	600 m
1118	Flat area at the top of constriction	GR 3209 9025	680 m
1137	'No-go', retrace	GR 3231 9027	610 m
1151	Bottom of constriction	GR 3227 9022	600 m
1217	Camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m
1235	Left camp	GR 3273 9040	490 m
1335-1356	Lunch	GR 3258 9137	440 m
1412	Old trail, end of constriction	GR 3215 9180	420 m
1443	Decided to stay just above Lee Creek	GR 3135 9281	390 m
1515	Back at cars	GR 3014 9330	435m