

Wollemi National Park: Kaleidoscope Traverse

Leader:

Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park at GR 725 932 on Mountain Lagoon Road. Walk north along Nirvana Ridge on an old logging trail, then off track to a cliff line starting at around GR 729 954. Traverse north, then north east at that level, then descend to Kaleidoscope Caves. Next, climb back up and continue traversing till around GR 737 961.

Depending on the time, there are a number of options from here, including visiting Byzantine Chamber or Psychedelic Caves. Exit to Nirvana Ridge and follow it back to the cars. About 10 km. Scrambling and exposure.

Rating:

5M. SM323E

Gear Issues:

2 litres of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass, first aid kit, tape (leader only). Change of gear for afterwards.

Date walked:

28 May 2025.

The Party:

Yuri Bolotin (leader), Helen Heng, Chris Barnes, Adam Feng, Kiki Huang, Yidan Saladine, 6.

The Weather:

A cold morning followed by a beautiful, warm, sunny day. Blue skies and occasional light cloud cover. Chilly wind in the morning gave way to light breezes for the rest of the day. Temperature range 9 to 19 degrees C. Ideal walking conditions.

Existing Names in the Area

Kaleidoscope Caves are located in a gully above the southern side of Tootie Creek, 2.2 km north east of the locality Flat Rock. Named by Yuri Bolotin on 31 March 2021, *...a few steps further along is another cave, sporting panels of striking white, chocolate brown and yellow tafoni (honeycomb) formations. I called this stretch of bewildering Nature's creations, Kaleidoscope Caves.* Mountain Lagoon topographic map, 1:25,000. GR 7342 9578, middle cave.

Byzantine Chamber is located in the western cliff line of Nirvana Ridge above Tootie Creek, 2.7 km east north east of Tootie Creek Trail and Mountain Lagoon Road intersection. Named and described by Yuri Bolotin on 31 March 2021, *the place reminded me of best examples of Byzantine architecture I had seen in Constantinople. These buildings were externally simple, but inside they contained richly inlaid mosaic walls, and often a central cupola surrounded by small windows. I therefore called it Byzantine Chamber.* Mountain Lagoon topographic map, 1:25,000. GR 7363 9600.

Nirvana Ridge extends from Mountain Lagoon Road and trends in a north east direction for about 4 km to terminate as a cliff face above Tootie Creek. Named by Yuri Bolotin on 31 March 2021. Mountain Lagoon topographic map, 1:25000. GR 725 932 to 748 967.

Background Notes

We discovered the amazing Kaleidoscope Caves on 31 March 2021, using the 1:25,000 Department of Lands topographic maps that contained very little or no detail of the complexity of this landscape. Since then, the Lidar maps became available that reveal much more information about the geological forms and layers around that site. The objective of this walk was to explore these extra layers, creating a round trip that would include the new discoveries, as well as the known features such as Kaleidoscope Caves and Byzantine Chamber.

Note: we had several keen photographers on this adventure, who took time practicing their craft (or art!), with my full blessing, as there was an abundance of subject matter. This, however, extended the duration of our walk. A group that spends less time at each location could cover the same area much faster, but the experience may not necessarily be as enjoyable as the one we had today.

Track Notes

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

After a ten-minute drive from Grumpy Baker, we parked the cars on Mountain Lagoon Road and, at 0819, began our adventure by walking towards an old timber trail, hidden by a small hill. It follows Nirvana Ridge northwards and leads to our area of interest.

It was a beautifully sunny morning that was especially welcome after all the inclement weather of the past couple of weeks. Although the wind had died down from the gale force of yesterday, it was still quite strong and made the 9 degrees C temperature feel lower. After a quick briefing stop away from the sealed road, it felt good to start moving.

The old trail was distinct and wide at first, but as we progressed, it quickly became a narrow track, which sometimes was hard to follow. We were in the Wollemi after all, so any trail needs to be treated as a luxury. During most of our walk today, we were accompanied by beautiful Lyrebird songs. Maybe they too were rejoicing the first day of decent weather.

The time flew quickly, and by 0855, the party reached the point where we needed to leave the man-made road and head off-track. Before that, we had a quick drink and shed some of our clothing, as the wind had now calmed down and we were feeling warm from the rapid walking.

The company now headed north, north west on a broad, almost flat side ridge covered in a fair amount of vegetation, which, nevertheless, allowed for an easy progress. At 0909, we slipped off the watershed to begin a steep descent towards the line of cliffs above Tootie Creek we were aiming to investigate. Immediately, there were good distant glimpses towards Little Tootie and Mount Tootie, with the end of Mount Irvine poking out to the left of them.



An army on the upward march. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Chris is having a good morning. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

It took us a further eight minutes and a few small scrambles to locate a small side spur we could use to approach our destination. After only seven minutes following it down, the group was positioned directly above and to the east of our target, a small ledge suspended between two high cliff lines. The detailed map shows the only tiny spot where it could be accessed, so the navigation here had to be precise.

At 0934, the group descended to a lookout rock over Tootie Creek that was also the start of the ledge. Five minutes later, we inspected a beautiful overhang with animal head-shaped mauve-coloured rocks at the bottom; above them, was a riot of cream, beige and white layers of weathered and twisted sandstone. A few steps further along, a striking high wall rose up, boasting rows after rows after rows of astonishingly fine, sculptural erosions. Wow!



The first find of the day. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Wonderful shapes in the cave next to it. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The terrace level we were walking on was wide enough and almost flat. After a while, the company rounded a point and entered a gully, which had a vigorously flowing stream at the bottom. Just before crossing, we decided to inspect a low deep overhang, about six metres across. It was wonderfully lit by the sun and had a water dripping down its entire roof span. A search for signs of Aboriginal habitation did not yield any results. At 1010.



Kiki, Chris and Yidan in the low overhang. Photo: Helen Heng.

Once on the other side of the gully, we had a look at another great cave, which even had a couple of windows, and then stopped for morning tea. Between 1022 till 1033. Straight after, an interesting wall was spotted about ten metres above our heads. It featured a small but astonishing marble-white tafoni panel that looked like coral. To get a closer look required quite a scramble, and I insisted on installing a tape to assist coming down. The views of Tootie Creek gorge from that elevated perch were not bad either. From 1036 till 1041.



Windows in a cave. Photo: Helen Heng.



Chris and Adam in a cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The coral-like tafoni panel we had to climb to access. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



High, spectacularly eroded cliffs above. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

The ledge continued for another couple of hundred metres. This section had a string of good-looking but not exceptional overhangs. At 1111, as expected, our elevated walkway ran into a solid rock wall. At this point, we were located directly above Kaleidoscope Caves. A small retrace was necessary to find a way down through the high cliffs. The descent did not take long, and six minutes later, we were at the right level, first having a look at a sequence of fine caves that served as a suitable entrée for the main course coming up.

Kaleidoscope Caves. I had been here several times before, and each visit was a mesmerising experience. Today, we were progressing through them from west to east, in the opposite direction to all previous occasions. The first cave, about ten metres across, starts with an orgy of distorted snowy, beige and cream deeply carved multi-layered tafoni panels overlaid by Liesegang Rings. That remarkable section morphs further along into an almost flat wall featuring extravagant long licks of pink, white and brown-coloured rock, with abundant Liesegang Rings decorating the surface.

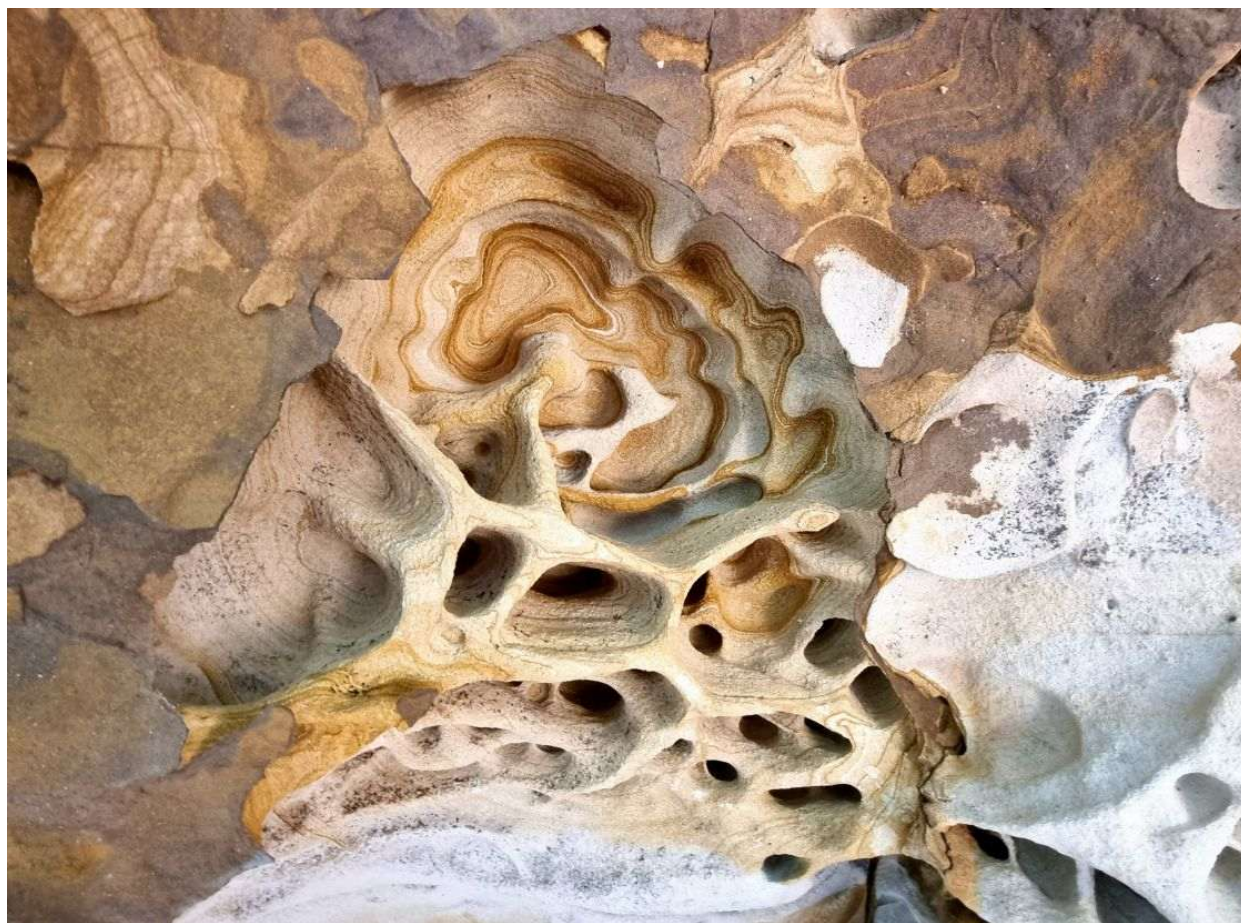
You think, Wow, this is truly amazing, but when you turn a corner and enter the second cave, your mouth, already wide-open, drops even further down as you are confronted by an incredible house wall-size webbed curtain grille of honeycombs, guarded by a huge dog-like rock formation.

Having recovered from the beauty shock, you feel, nothing could any more surprise you, but it does once again as you come to the third cave, with its psychedelic ceiling resembling a mad painter's palette, which opens up to a vast, high wall adorned with baroque tafoni and Liesegang Rings.

This overload of visual stimuli would stay in our minds for a very long time. The central cave is at GR 7343 9579, 396 m. We spent from 1125 till 1208 at this jaw-dropping location, and I had difficulty coercing some team members into moving on from here.



First Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



First Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



First Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



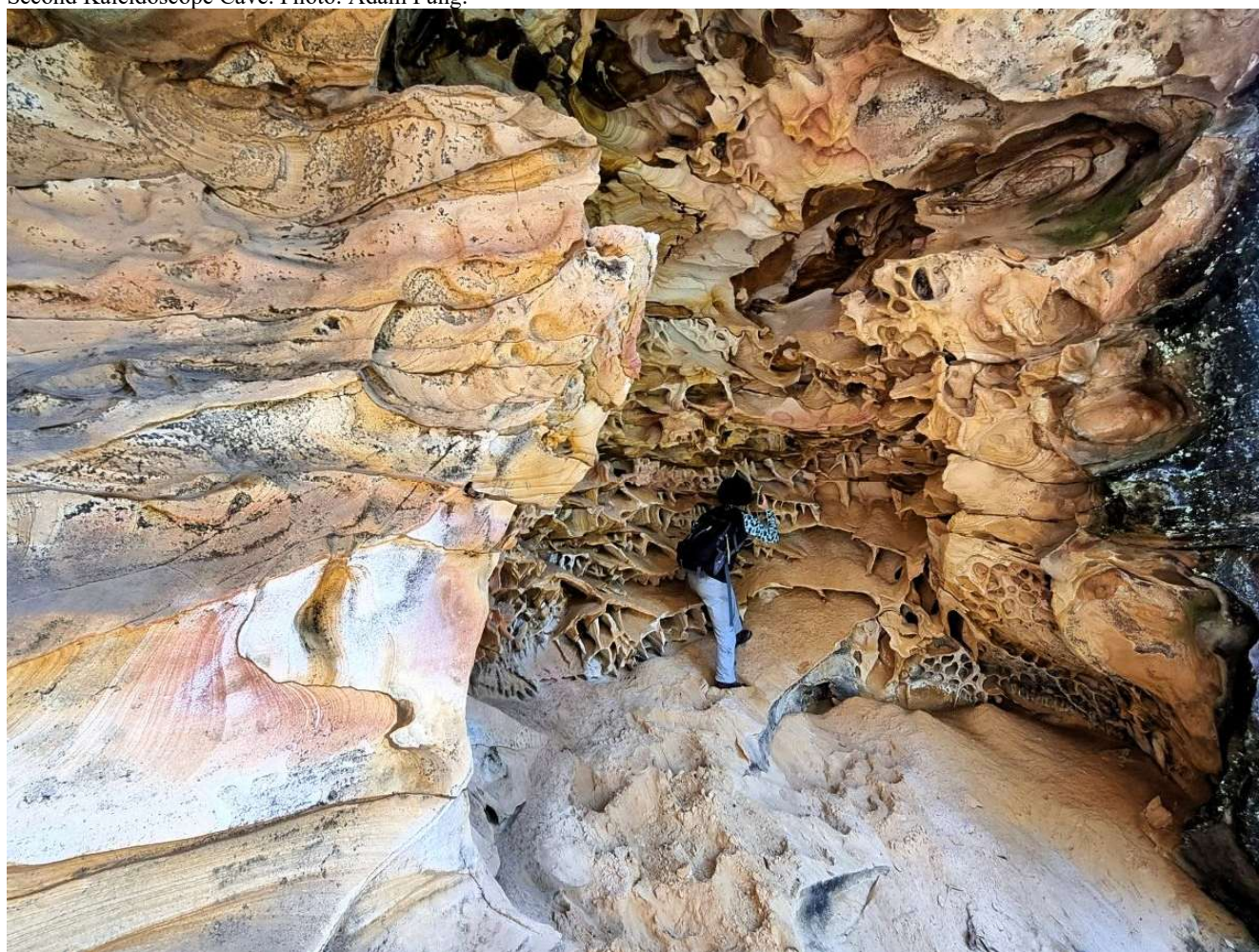
Helen and Chris in the first Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



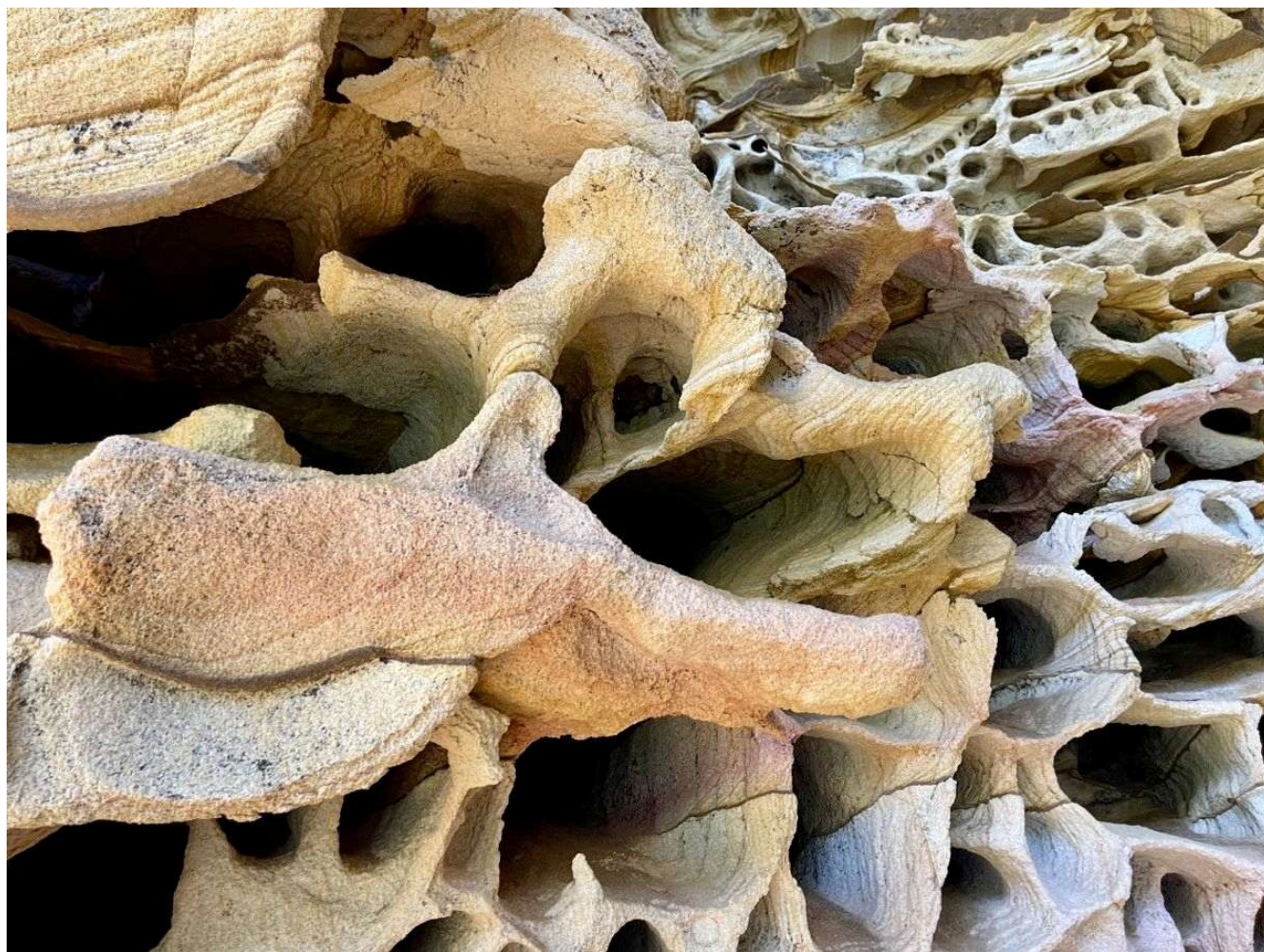
Second Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Second Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Adam Fung.



Yidan in the second Kaleidoscope Cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



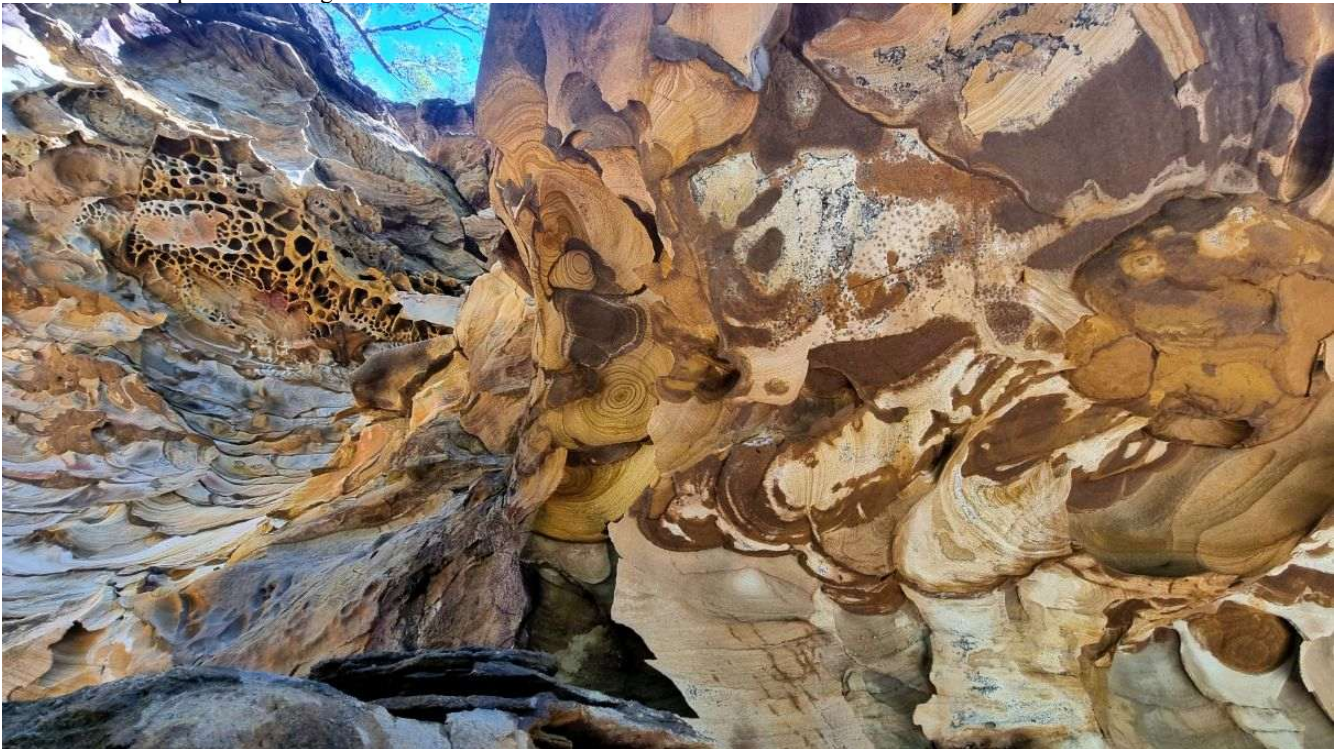
Second Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Third Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Adam Fung



Third Kaleidoscope Cave ceiling. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Third Kaleidoscope Cave detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

When we finally did, the landscape within a couple of minutes underwent a dramatic change, from dry multi-coloured sculpted rock to a moist, lush, green, shady ravine, with a small waterfall coming down in

front of a wall decorated with abundant emerald Ferns. At 1215. On the opposite side of it, the group had lunch in a large dry overhang, from 1223 till 1241. We did not really need the physical rest, but I thought an emotional respite would be very good at this point.



What a change of scenery! Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Four minutes after resuming, the party stopped to photograph a beautiful cave with paper-thin Indonesian puppet theatre Wayang style formations of brown stone. A little further, we decided to investigate several attractive overhangs that stood out ten metres above. We made it up there after a few scrambles to enjoy more wonderfully sculpted formations brightly lit by the afternoon sun. From 1256 to 1310. Once down at the ledge, another beautiful honeycomb cave was noted only a few steps further.



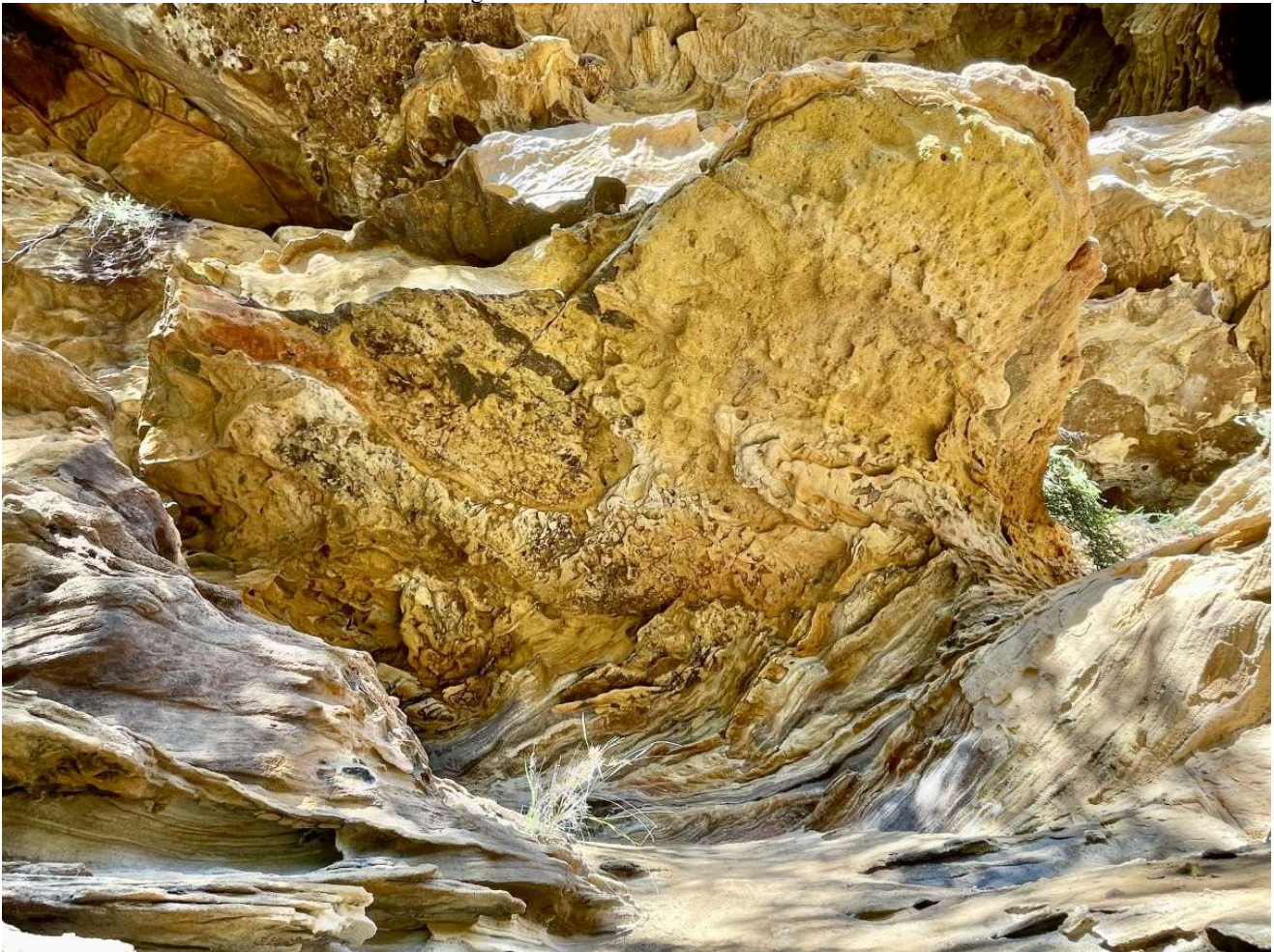
Wayang-like formations in a cave. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



We simply had to check out these overhangs. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The view towards Tootie Creek from the top ledge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



More wonderful weatherings at the top level. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

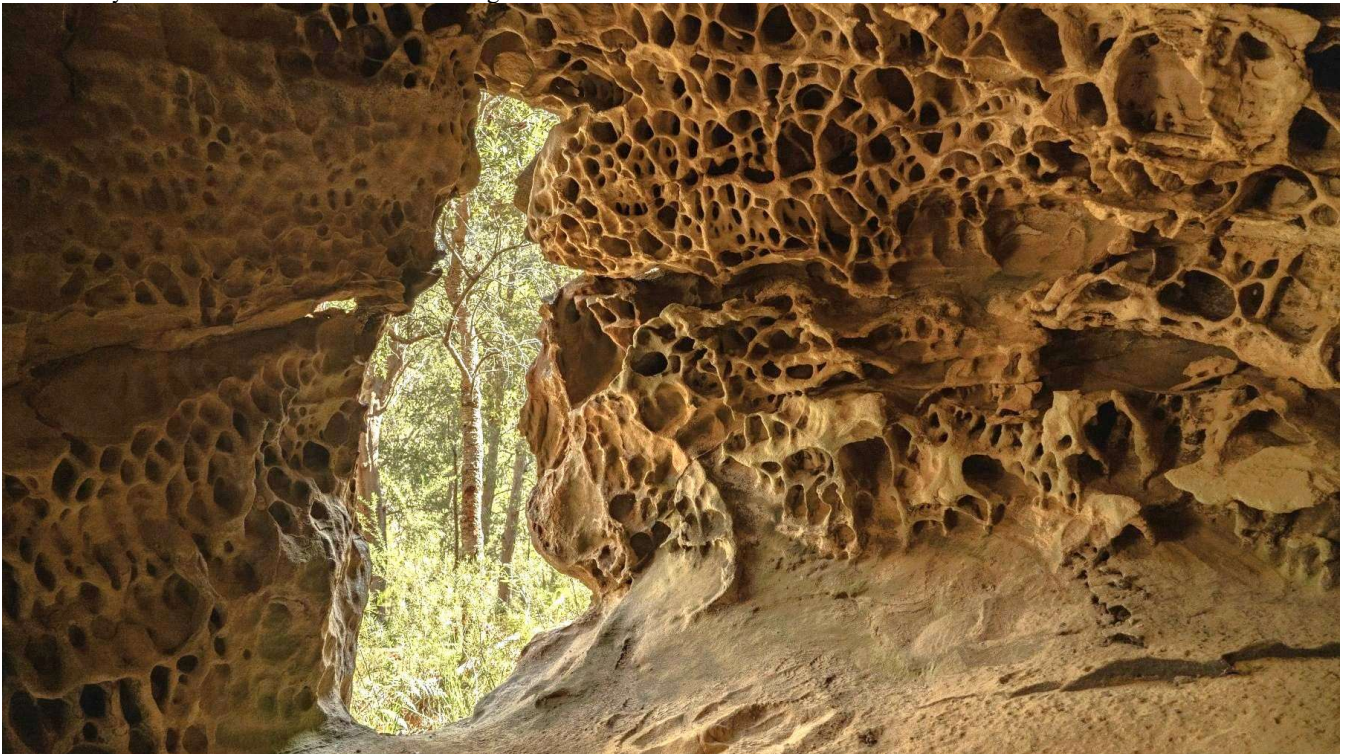


Descending back to the ledge, with care. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

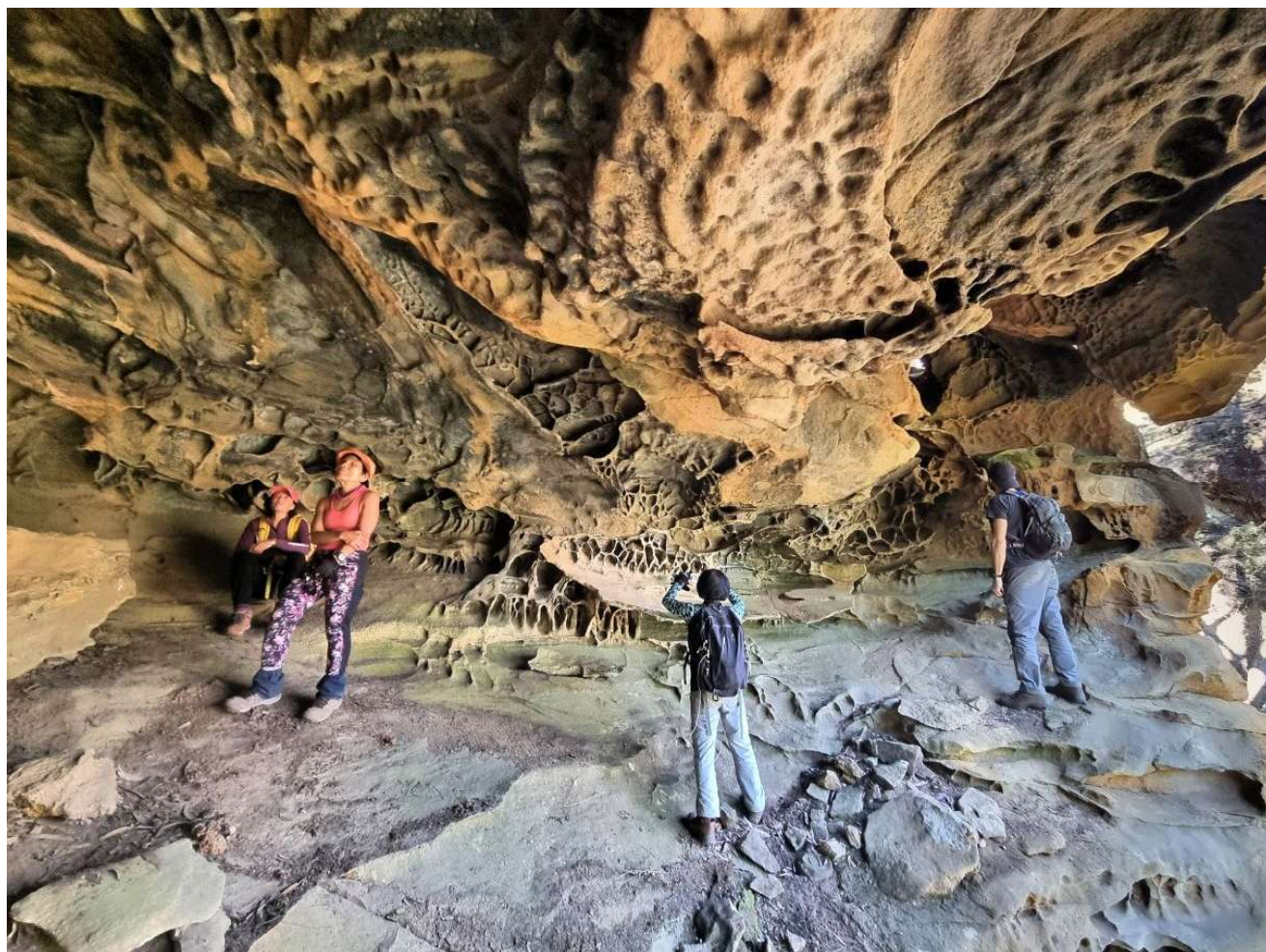
The wonders of Nature just kept coming! At 1315, we came to the next big-ticket item on the geological wonders connoisseur's list, Byzantine Chamber. Its design is unique. From the outside, this cave appears as a large area of flat brown rock with two tall entrance archways/holes pierced through it. As you step inside and get used to the dimmer light, you realise that the inside walls of this large chamber are completely covered with tafoni formations. The dark interior and the elaborately decorated dramatically illuminated walls create a feeling of being in an ancient palace or inside catacombs. All previous visits had been in the morning, when the space looked gloomy and cold (it faces the west), but today, the sandstone was beautifully glowing in the afternoon sun. It was a completely different experience. Twenty-five minutes suddenly evaporated, and I once again found myself having to hurry the crew along.



Adam in Byzantine Chamber. Photo: Helen Heng.



Byzantine Chamber. Photo: Adam Fung.



The group in Byzantine Chamber. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Ten metres further north along the ledge, we passed the familiar (to me) stone animal head with a round eye punched in the rock, guarding the chamber. In another variation from the original walk route, we now headed very steeply up via some ramps and terraces, being careful in a couple of difficult spots, to scramble above the lower cliff line. 1355 saw us on top of the bluffs, enjoying a fantastic view towards Tootie Creek, our entire route today and far beyond.



Tootie Creek panorama. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

From here, the group progressed further up and seven minutes later reached the next cliff line we wanted to explore. The first part of the ledge was quite tricky, with frequent ups and downs, but it then normalised a bit and became easier to negotiate. A few attractive caves were noted along this traverse. They would have been great to see on their own but could not match the grandeur we had just left behind. A low long overhang with a water drip and a very pretty area of short grass in front of it was noted just before we reached our exit gully.

At 1431, we were at the bottom of the flowing watercourse and now headed up it. A few small caves were noted as we progressed. The going was easy, and at 1500, the company made it to the top of the access spur of this morning. A couple of striking Angophoras with amazing Octopus-like root systems were photographed along the way. By 1510, we joined the old timber trail along Nirvana Ridge. We were again greeted here by the Lyrebird's song, perhaps belonging to the same performer.

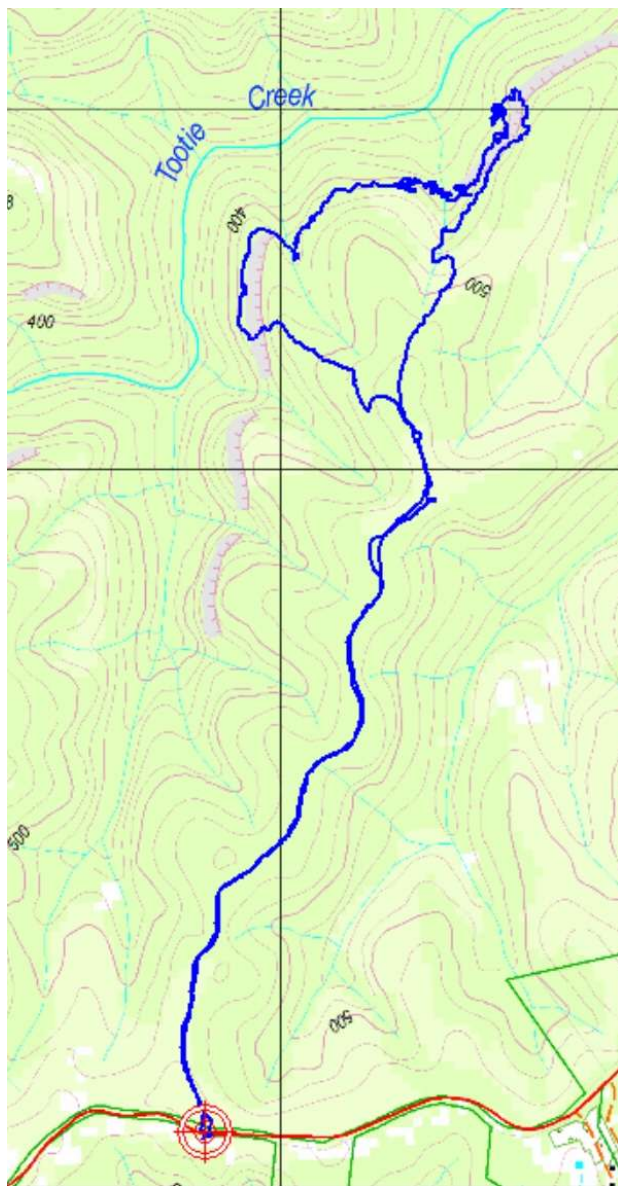


Angophora with an octopus-like root system. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Thirty-five minutes later, as the winter's chill began to be felt, we reached our parked vehicles.

It had been a truly exceptional walk. I would like to call this entire route Kaleidoscope Traverse, as, apart from Kaleidoscope Caves, it includes a kaleidoscope of other remarkable geological features. I think this is a great complementary walk to the original adventure described in *Wollemi National Park: Walks from Bilpin*, Book 1, Walk 1.2, Byzantine Chamber and Kaleidoscope Caves.

Trip statistics: total distance 9.5 km; total ascent 365 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0819	Cars parked and started walking	GR 7279 9315	550 m
0855	Left Nirvana Ridge	GR 7343 9492	550 m
0909	Left the side ridge	GR 7333 9519	555 m
0917	On side spur	GR 7320 9528	520 m
0924	Above the target cliff line	GR 7298 9541	480 m
0934	Lookout and start of the ledge	GR 7292 9537	430 m
0939	Two overhangs	GR 7290 9549	432 m
1010	Cave above side gully	GR 7304 9559	435 m
1022-1033	Morning tea	GR 7308 9568	436 m
1036-1041	Climbing to wall with tafoni panel	GR 7309 9570	445 m
1111	Ledge stops	GR 7337 9578	433 m
1125-1208	Kaleidoscope Caves	GR 7343 9579 (middle cave)	396 m
1215	Crossing wet gully	GR 7347 9575	385 m

1223-1241	Lunch in cave	GR 7352 9577	405 m
1245	Wayang-style overhang	GR 7354 9581	406 m
1256-1310	Investigating the level above	GR 7361 9591	420 m (top)
1315-1340	Byzantine Chamber	GR 7362 9600	395 m
1355	On top of the bluffs	GR 7366 9606	430 m
1402	Below the next cliff line	GR 7368 9602	450 m
1431	In the gully, heading up	GR 7346 9567	425 m
1500	Top of the access spur	GR 7334 9519	550 m
1510	On Nirvana Ridge timber trail	GR 7338 9491	550 m
1545	Back at cars	GR 7279 9315	550 m