

Walk:

Wollemi National Park: Sanctuary Ravine

Leader:

Bernard Lo

Maps, etc:

Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:

Park at the end of McMahons Road. Walk 3.5 km along McMahons Trail. Drop down via an unnamed ridge to Wheeny Creek and the northern gully. The route from that point on will be dependent on what we discover and ease of progress. Things I want to achieve include seeing: a koala, red cedars (which have distinctive bark and leaflets, and which were heavily logged in the surrounding area), interesting overhangs, and the 25 m waterfall from its base.

Rating:

5M. M333E

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:

21 June 2025.

The Party:

Bernard Lo (leader), Penny Pang, Kin Lee, Heang Cheng, Nash Condran, Tess McCoy, John Kennett (withdrawn at 0950 due to injury), Yuri Bolotin, 8.

The Weather:

A cold morning, followed by a fine, mostly sunny day. Temperature range 3 to 16 degrees C.

Track Notes

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

Background Notes

This walk, designed and led by Bernard Lo, was to explore a wild tributary joining Wheeny Creek from the north at GR 832 934. Initially, Bernard was attracted by examining SIX Maps, which showed a very large part of this ravine in vivid green, indicative of rainforest. Further research revealed an ecological survey, conducted in October 2007, that described a great variety of vegetation types, as well as flora and fauna species found there. Bernard also verified that this gorge escaped the 2019-20 bushfires, which meant that most of the species would likely still be there.

Track Notes

Cars were parked at the locked gate on McMahons Road, Kurrajong Heights, GR 8524 9103, 150 m, and at 0809, the group followed the trail north west and downhill, descending steeply into Little Wheeny Creek,

which was reached 15 minutes later. GR 8479 9143, 50 m. Even though there was a fair amount of flowing water in the creek, a dry-feet crossing was possible twenty metres upstream from the trail.



Crossing Little Wheeny Creek. Photo: Bernard Lo.

From here, the road climbed steeply to the top of the ridge and the junction with Blue Gum Trail, where we arrived at 0848. GR 8393 9236, 215 m. Turning south west, we quickly made it to the point where we left the trail and headed up a gently rising spur in a northwesterly direction. At 0900, GR 8350 9220, 230 m,

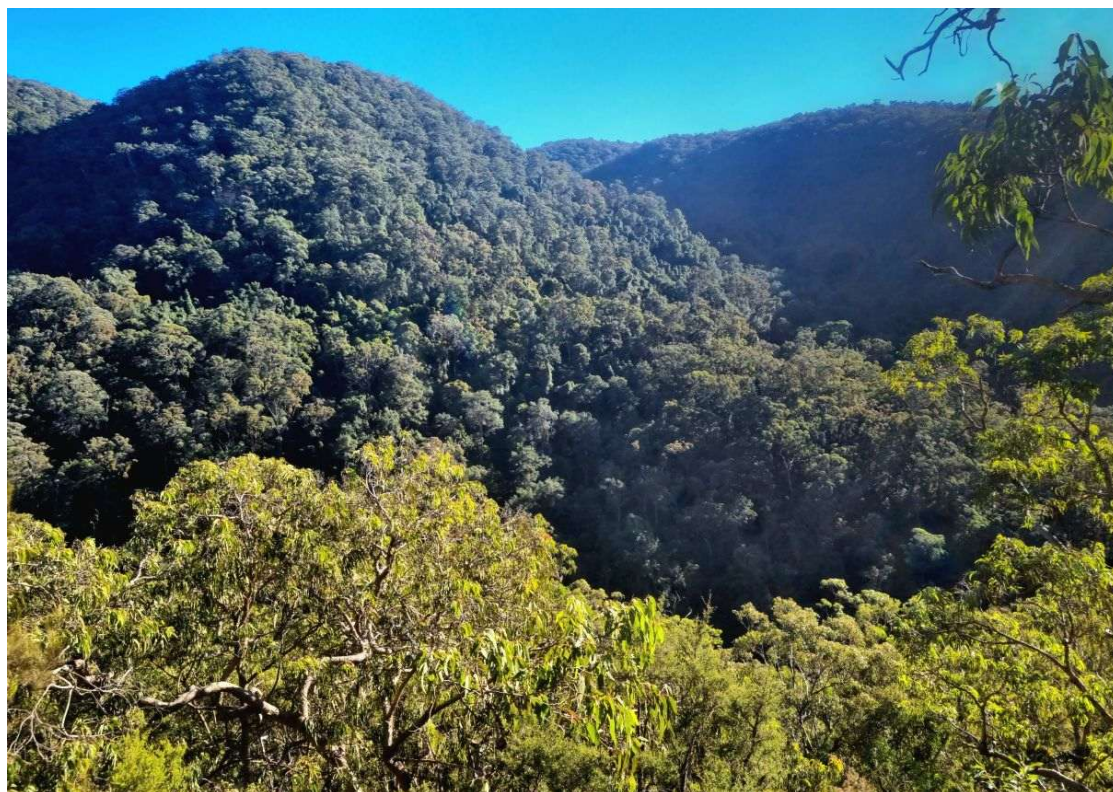
The country along the way was very pleasant, dry, with low to medium density understorey and many mature trees – Angophoras, Stringybarks, Grey Gums, and several others I could not confidently identify. Twenty-eight minutes later, GR 8291 9288, 285 m, the group was at the highest point, from where glimpses of Wheeny Creek gorge could be seen through the dense tree cover.



A pair of rocking horses. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The rate of descent was gentle at first, but soon accelerated; boulders started to appear, along with an occasional low cliff line. It would have been super easy if not for the slippery litter covering the ground, so every footfall required extra attention.

By 0948, GR 8303 9316, 160 m, we made it to a series of rock platforms above a significant drop. It was a magical spot, kissed by the warm morning sun, and with great views towards Wheeny Creek gorge and the ravine we were going to explore. The group stopped here to take photos and enjoy the sunshine. At this point, John decided to head back as his foot injury had been bothering him. Bernard checked that John had all required safety and communication gear, and they agreed on the messaging procedure along the way.



The view towards Wheeny Creek gorge and the ravine we were aiming to explore (on the right-hand side of the photo). Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

The rest of the group now proceeded a short distance to the west, until the cliffs stopped. At 1006, GR 8294 9310, 165 m. As we commenced our descent, a small but exquisite overhang with spheroidal tafoni-decorated roof was photographed. The way down from here was steep, slippery due to leaf litter but straightforward.

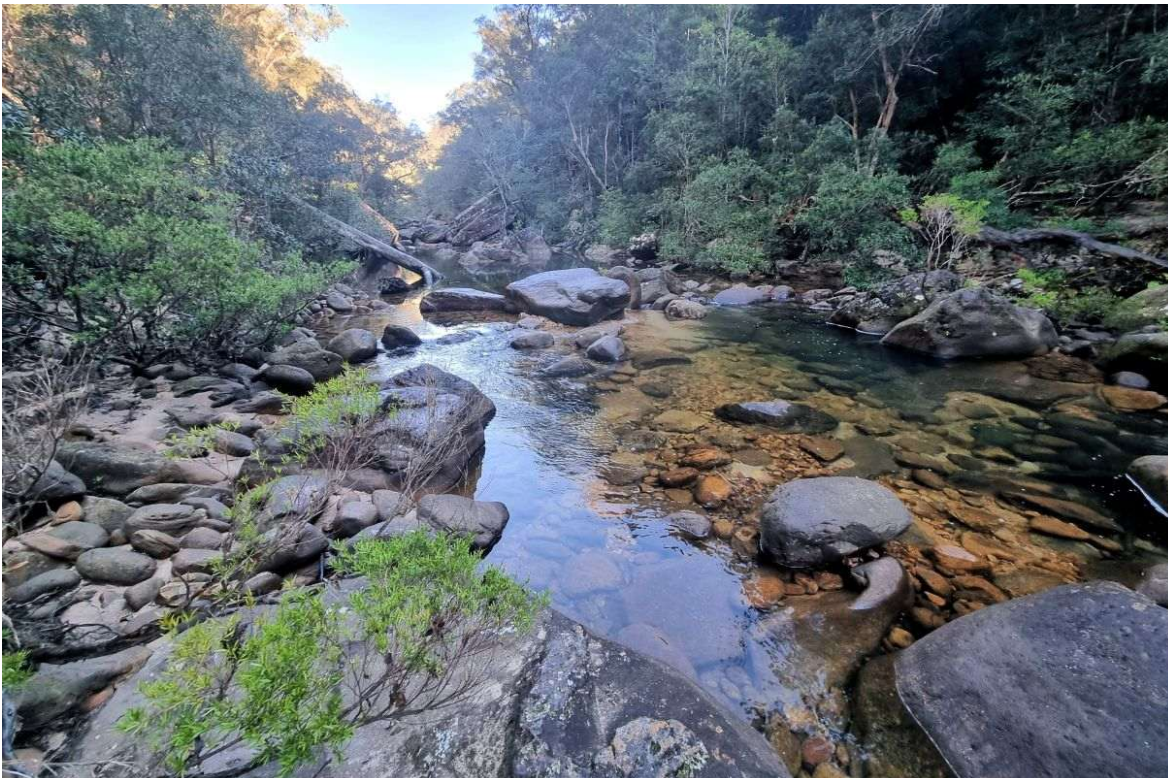


Spheroidal-shaped tafoni. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



The last stage of descent into Wheeny Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

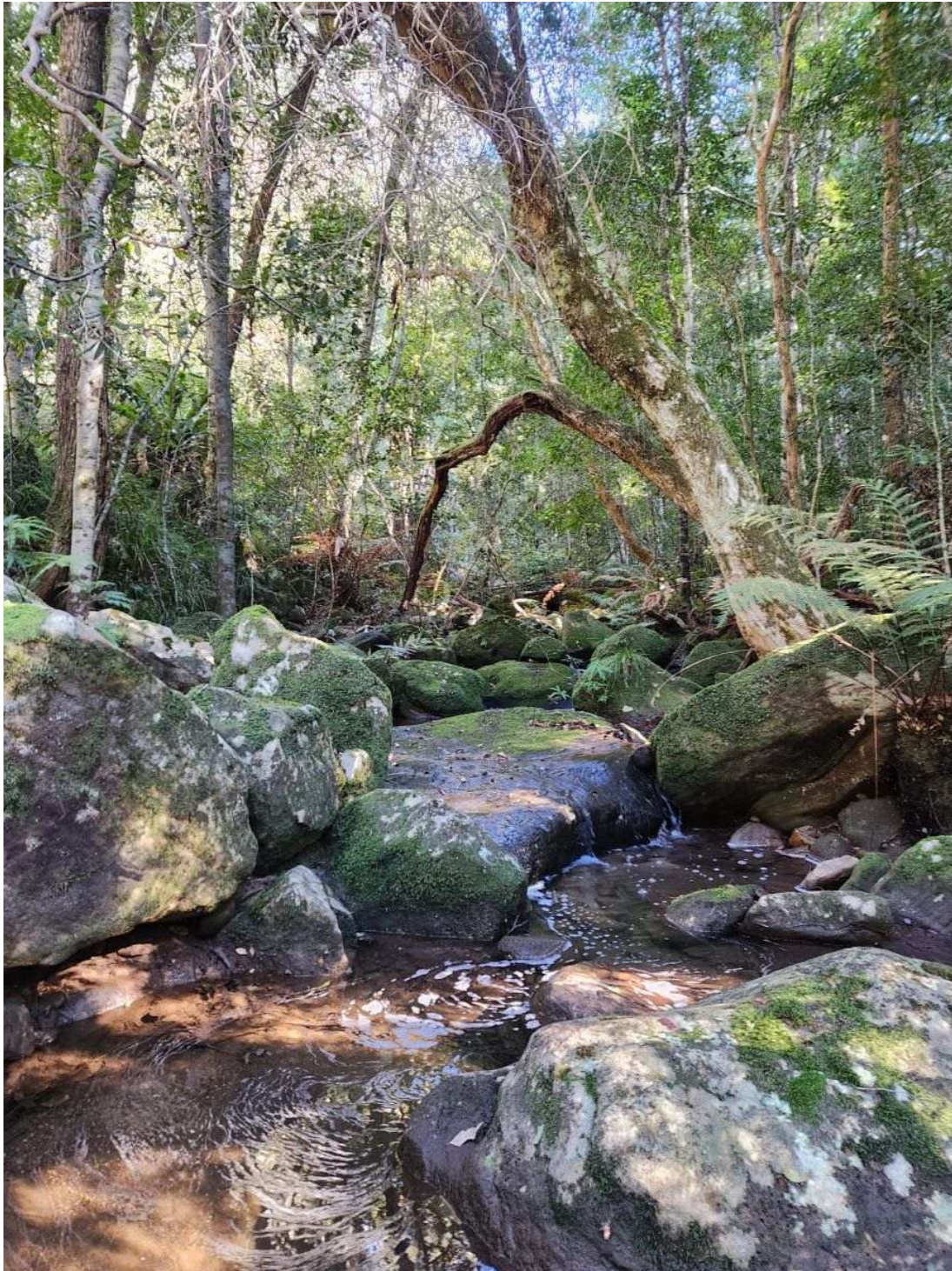
1024 saw us at the bottom of Wheeny Creek gorge, still enveloped by the morning shadows and cold, but looking attractive. GR 8295 9334, 75 m. Turning downstream towards our target gorge, we soon managed to find a sunny spot for morning tea. From 1033 till 1042. GR 8312 9336, 74 m.



Wheeny Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Our first task after resuming was to find a dry crossing. After a search that took almost ten minutes, I managed to get onto the other side without dipping my feet in cold water; I think a few others did too, whilst some decided not to bother and just waded through, which was probably the safest way, but not great for winter.

We were all at the beginning of the target ravine at 1055, GR 8317 9341, 74 m. No water was visible at the Wheeny Creek junction, but it appeared in large quantities about 40 metres further up. Even though the gorge was fairly broad here, we did get a feeling of entering a different world. As we picked our way up the boisterously gurgling brook lined with emerald green mossy boulders, the rainforest species started almost immediately. Ferns covered the ground and nearby rocks. The air felt cool but not cold.

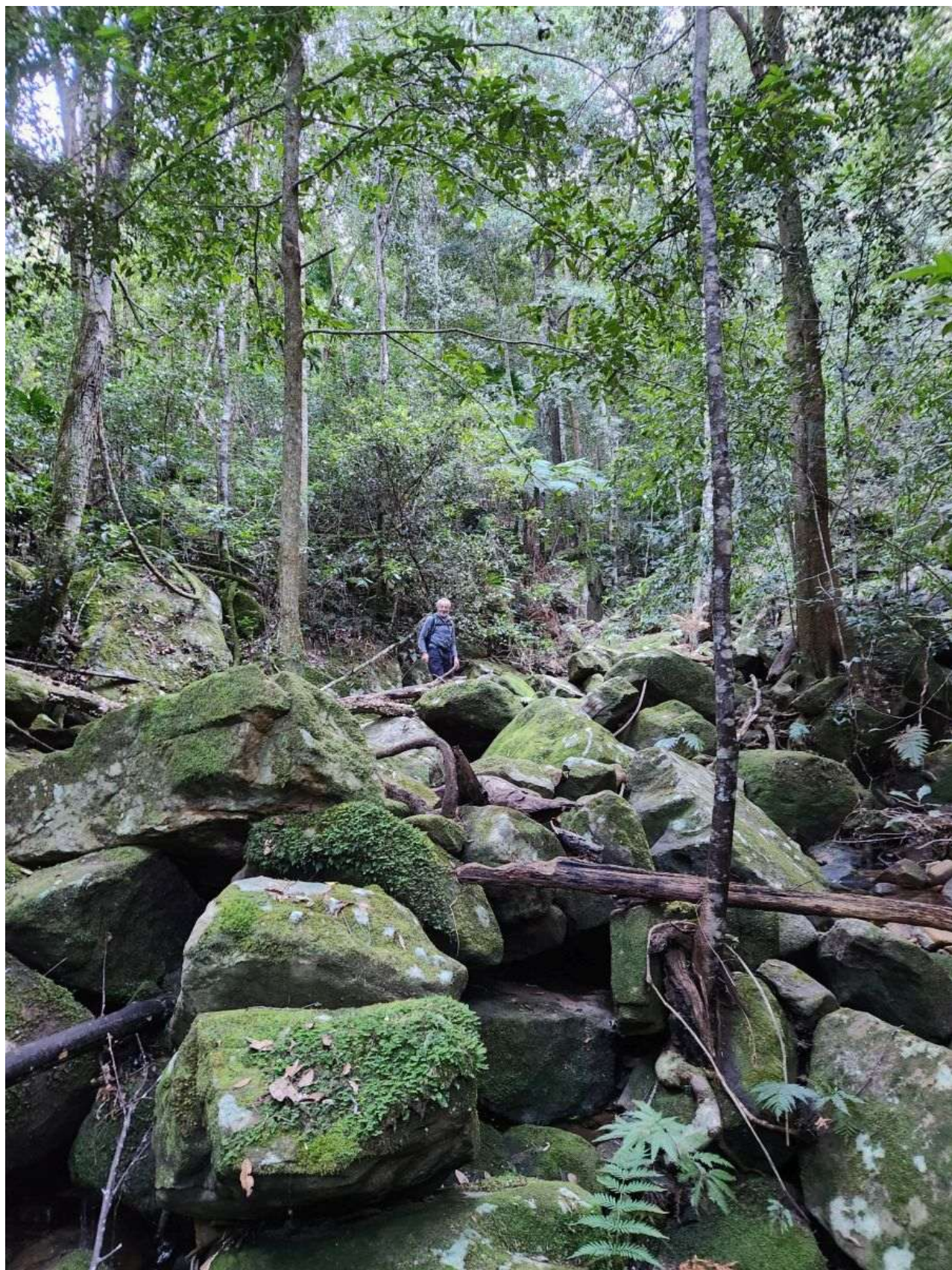


Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Bernard Lo.



A Fern-decorated boulder. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

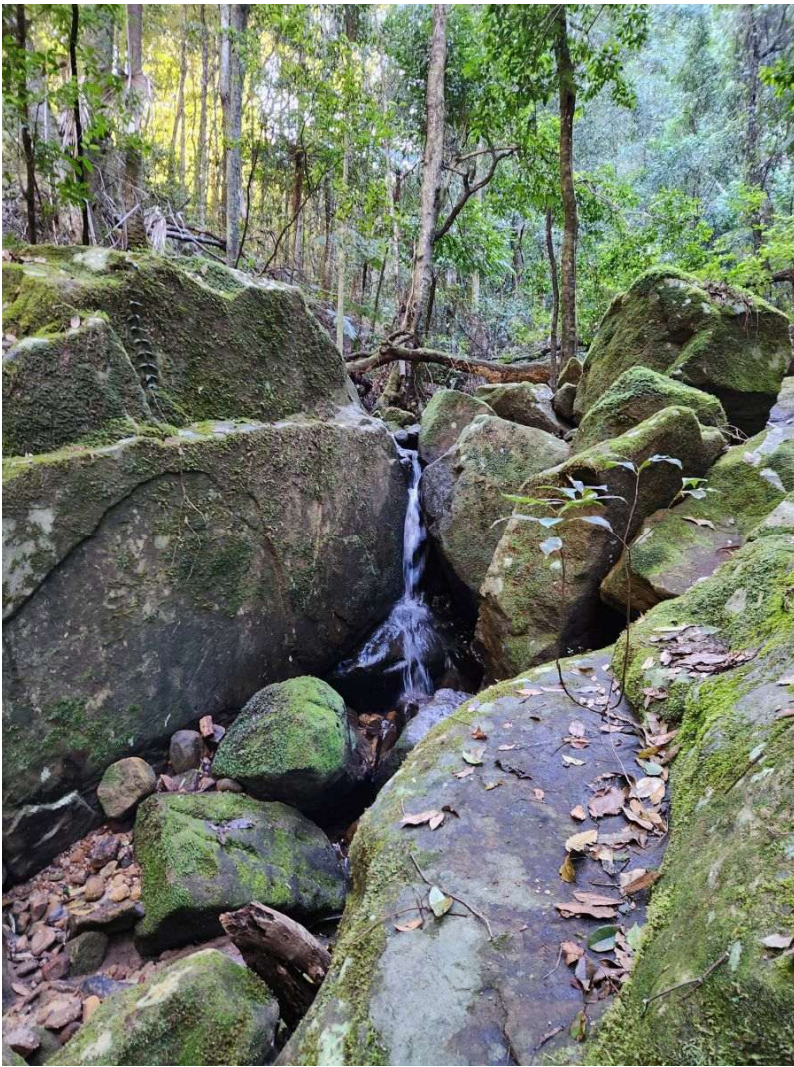
Soon, the walls began to close in, especially from the right-hand side, and at 1109, GR 8309 9350, 95 m, the party came to the first block-up and a three metre waterfall with a small deep pool below. A bit further, a few bushes of Native Hydrangea, *Abrophyllum ornans*, bearing dark blue berries, were photographed. A deep overhang with an obelisk-like rock in the middle was noted next. More and more Cabbage Tree Palms, *Livistona australis*, appeared on our way. Some of them were 20 metres high or more. There were also many big tall Turpentines as well as some Grey Gums growing further up the slopes. The latter is a favourite food of Koalas. The 2007 survey had spotted some, and we were on the lookout for them today. The airspace was occupied by Lianas and Vines, and there were still frequent Fungi sightings on the ground and on tree trunks, even though it was out of season.



Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Bernard Lo.



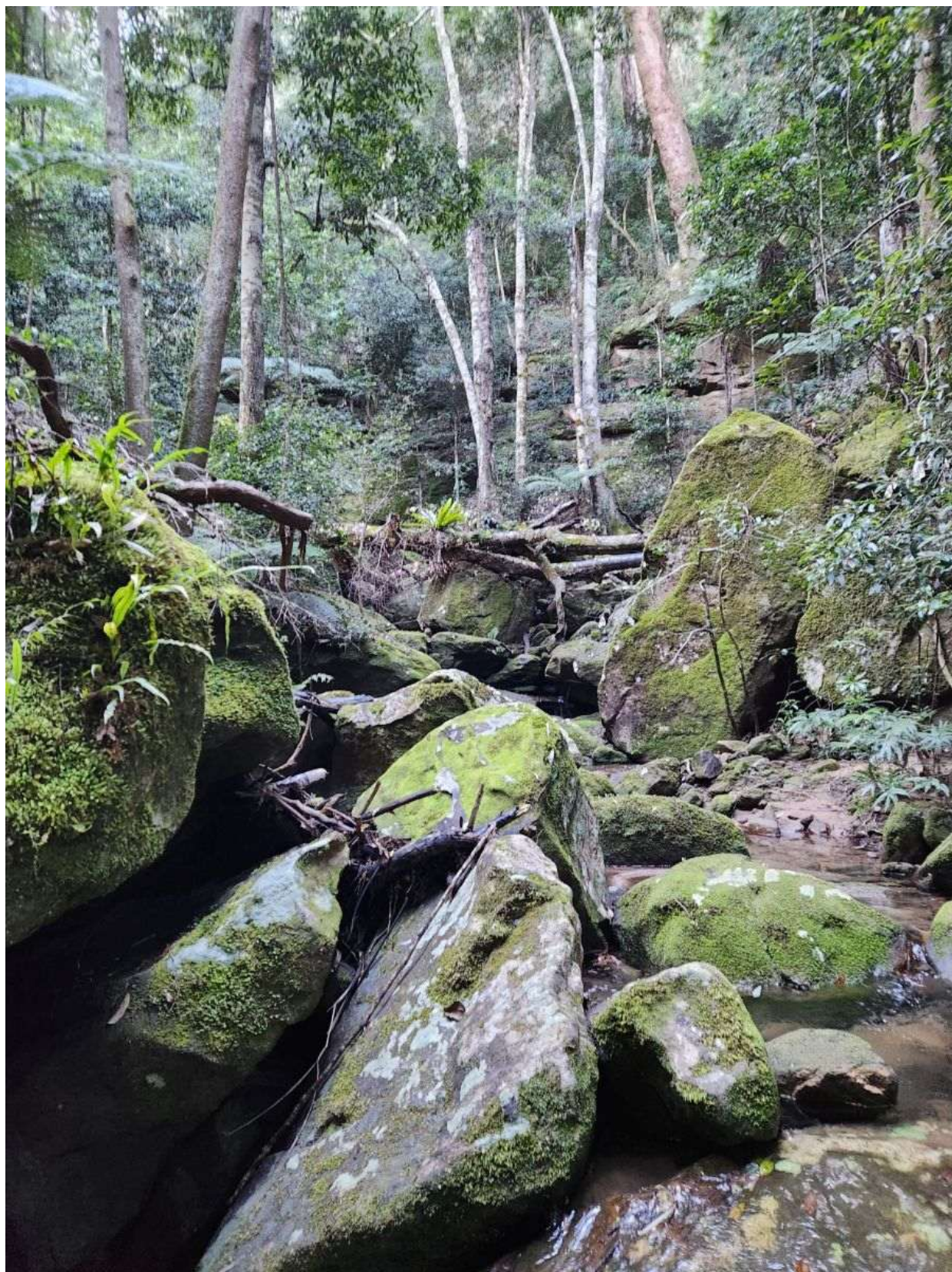
A small waterfall in Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Nash Condran.



Boulders and cascading water. Photo: Bernard Lo.



Bracket Fungus. Photo: Bernard Lo.



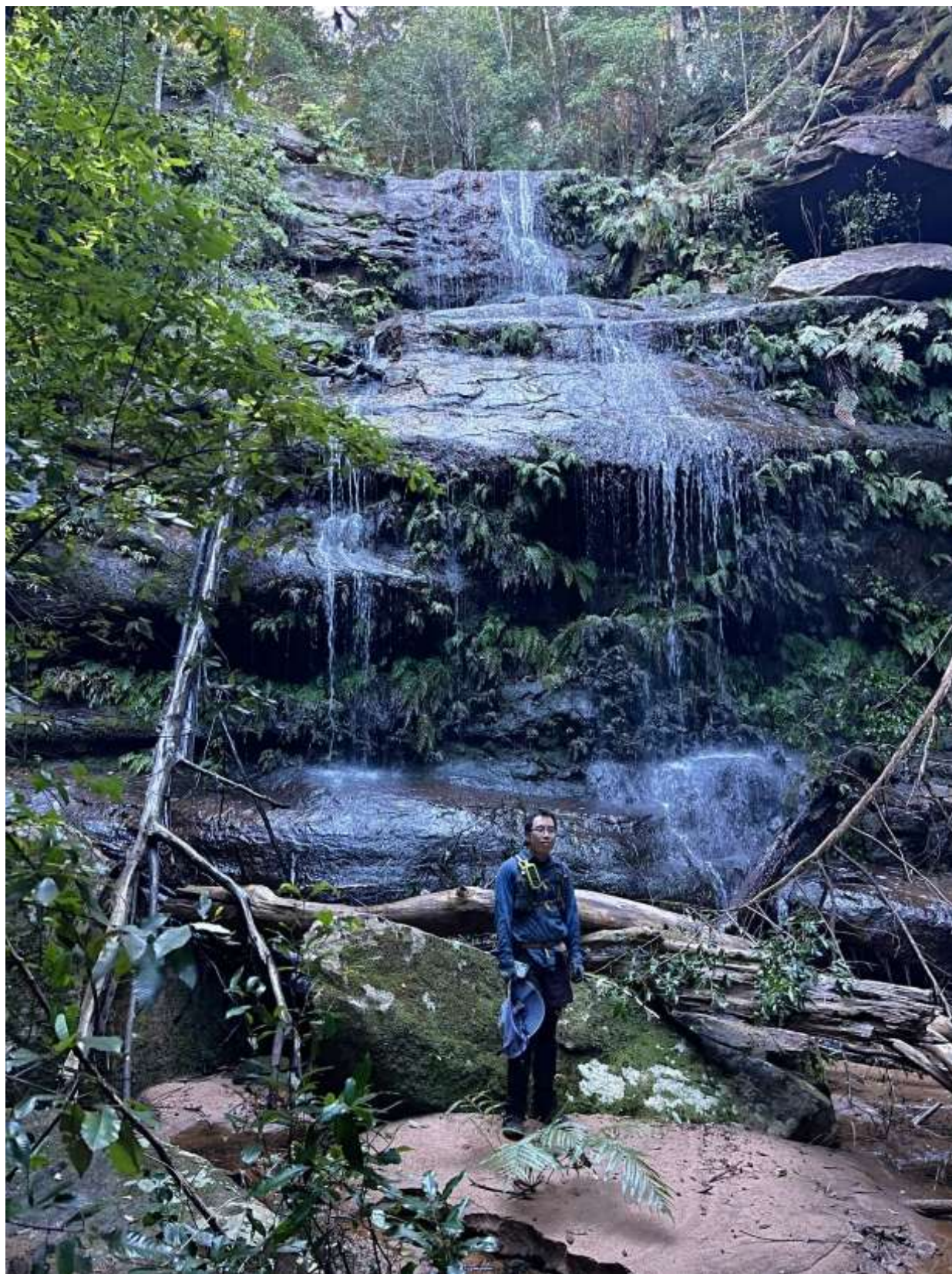
Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Bernard Lo.



Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Moving up the ravine, we scrambled up big boulders and negotiated our way around cascades and pools. In a few places, it was necessary to climb 5-10 metres on either bank, but we always came down promptly into the creek bed as it generally provided an easier way through. The further the party proceeded up the gorge the wilder it looked, probably because it narrowed down, the boulders became bigger, and there were more fallen trees.

At 1244, GR 8244 9430, 270 m, we reached our final destination along this ravine, a 25 metre high waterfall. At eight metres wide, and falling over three levels, it was an impressive sight. The team stopped here for lunch, to take photos, and to ponder what to do next.



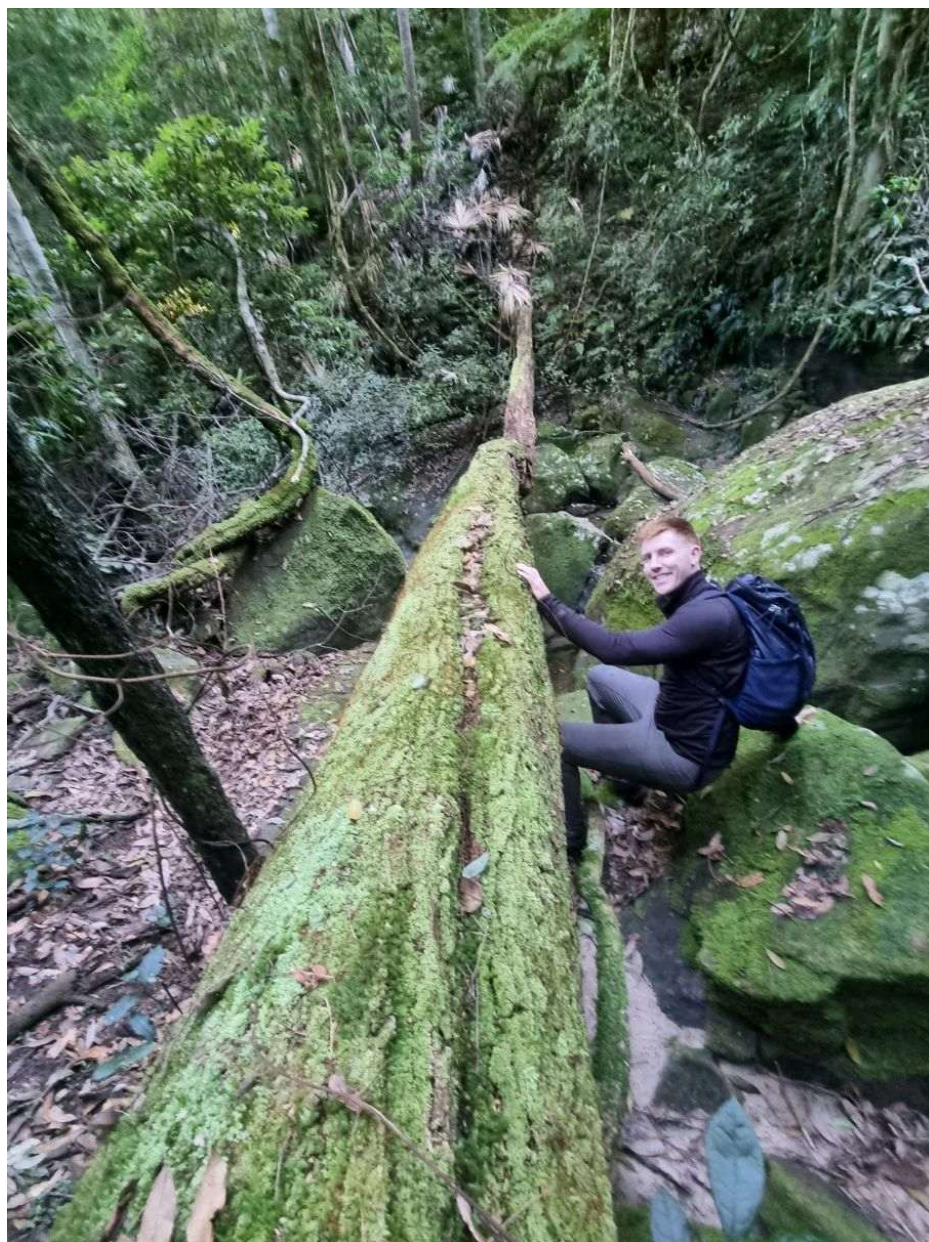
Bernard at the big waterfall. Photo: Nash Condran.

There had been plans to climb above the waterfall and onto the ridge to the east of the ravine, then follow it down to a large pool at Wheeny Creek. Whilst having lunch, we noticed a very steep gully on the left that may have provided a way up on tops. However, this scenario would require a nearly 200 metres extra climb. Given the available daylight hours (today was the shortest day of the year), the leader made the right decision to return the same way, perhaps with a small variation at the end.

And so it was that at 1305, we saddled up and headed back down the gorge. I was amazed how much easier and faster the return journey was – maybe due to our familiarity with the place or because we were going downhill, but most likely, both of these factors, and due to having fewer photography stops.



On the return trip. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Nash in Sanctuary Ravine. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

About 50 metres before the junction, the group moved up the left bank and then south east, doing a small shortcut above Wheeny Creek and then crossing it 100 metres downstream from the ravine. At 1442, GR 8325 9347, 70 m. We managed to mostly keep our feet dry during the last step of the process.

We were now going to take a different route up from here and have a look at a couple of cliff lines along the way. Moving up steeply, the party reached the first cliff line at 1501, GR 8336 9339, 135 m. It was dry and well-eroded, with one particularly attractive cave, but no more than that. Walking underneath it and then up again at a very sharp gradient, we made it to the second cliff line 10 minutes later. GR 8348 9340, 180 m.



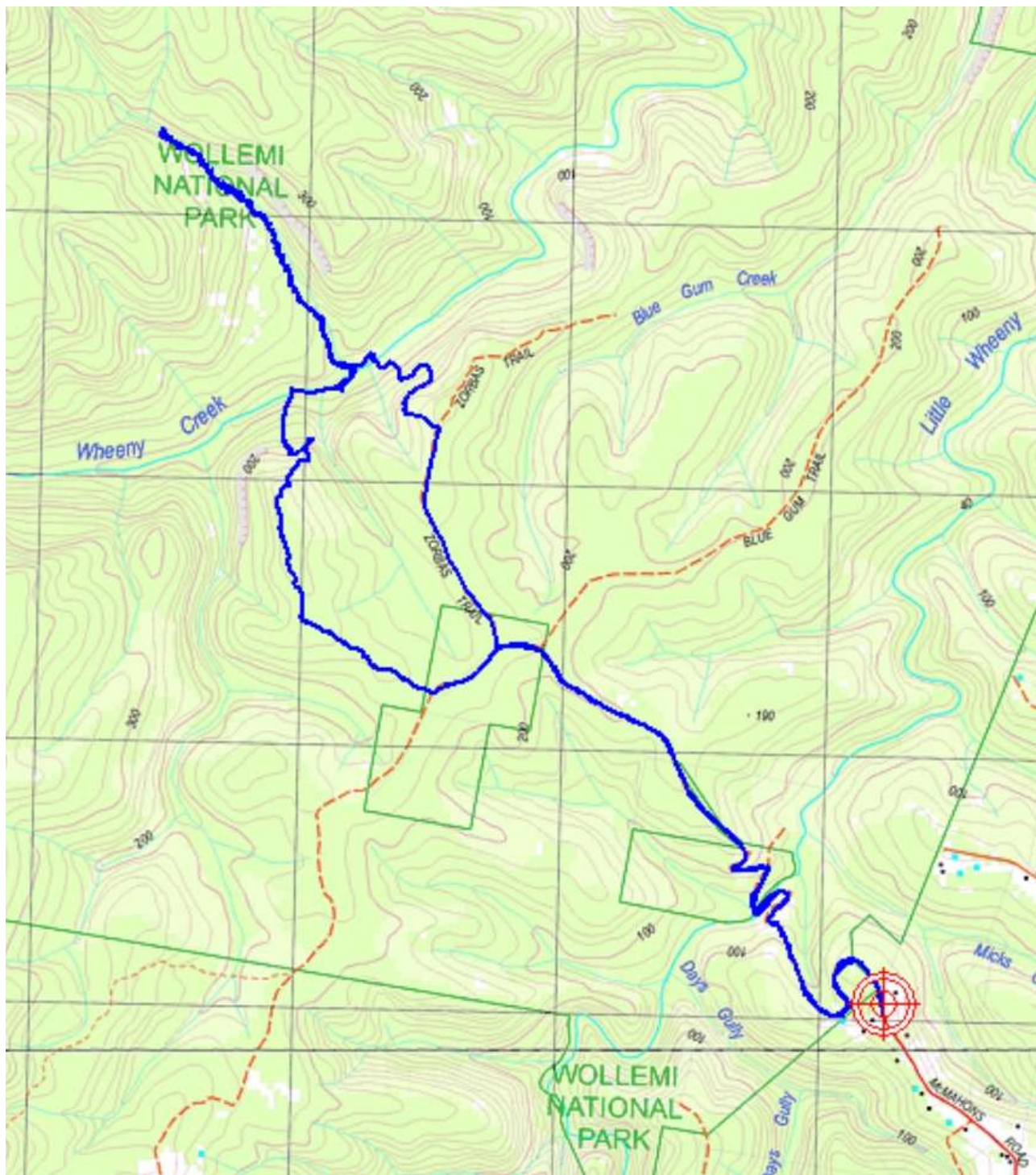
A deeply eroded overhang. Photo: Huang Cheng.

The traverse below it did not reveal anything remarkable, so when the bluffs subsided, the party once again moved up the slope and at 1534, GR 8350 9321, 260 m, came out onto Zorbas Trail.¹ For the first one hundred metres, it was just a narrow track, but then it became a wide bush road. The junction with Blue Gum Trail was reached fifteen minutes later. It was then a matter of retracing our steps back to the vehicles, which involved a steep descent and a subsequent ascent out of Little Wheeny Creek, an exercise that was felt by most of us, being the end of the day. The walk concluded at 1634.

After the walk, the leader Bernard Lo named the tributary of Wheeny Creek we explored today Sanctuary Ravine. See the Background Notes for his reasons. For me, it did feel like a lost world, a hidden sanctuary, a beautiful part of Wollemi Wilderness.

Trip statistics: total distance 13.2 km; total ascent 786 m.

¹ Both Zorbas Trail and McMahons Road, which we had used in the morning, were named after the families living in the area.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0809	Cars parked and started walking	GR 8524 9103	150 m
0824	Little Wheeny Creek	GR 8479 9143	50 m
0848	Blue Gum Trail	GR 8393 9236	215 m
0900	Heading off-trail	GR 8350 9220	230 m
0928	High point	GR 8291 9288	285 m
0948	Rock platforms and views	GR 8303 9316	160 m
1006	Pass down	GR 8294 9310	165 m

1024	Wheeny Creek	GR 8295 9334	75 m
1033-1042	Morning tea	GR 8312 9336	74 m
1055	In Sanctuary Ravine	GR 8317 9341	74 m
1109	Waterfall	GR 8309 9350	95 m
1244-1305	25 m waterfall and lunch	GR 8244 9430	270 m
1442	Crossed Wheeny Creek	GR 8325 9347	70 m
1501	First cliff line	GR 8336 9339	135 m
1511	Second cliff line	GR 8348 9340	180 m
1534	Zorba Trail	GR 8350 9321	260 m
1634	Back at cars	GR 8524 9103	150 m