

Walk:

Wollemi National Park: Miniature Caves

Leader:
Yuri Bolotin

Maps, etc:
Mountain Lagoon. GPS setting WGS84.

Description:
The walk starts on D’Arcy Trail at GR 716 960. Descend under the cliffs above Blacksmiths Creek and follow them north east till about GR 724 973. Return via the upper cliff line above. About 5 km. Scrambling and exposure. Exploratory.

Rating:
5M. S323E

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:
19 July 2025.

Important Note:
This walk starts and finishes on D’Arcy Range Trail in the Wollemi National Park. Access to D’Arcy Range Trail is through private property; permission must be sought for each visit. Access to the start of the walk is by walking the trail. These track notes only describe the off-trail part of the walk, so additional time must be allowed to complete the walk.

The Party:
Yuri Bolotin (leader), Yidan Saladine, Ian Starkey, Chris Dalton, Avi Sanjoyo, Ella Ballhausen, Jenny Lian, Henry Lian, Lou Denel, Rebecca Langton, 10.

The Weather:
A cold morning, then a beautiful, sunny winter’s day with almost no wind; cloudless in the morning and a 20% cloud cover later in the afternoon. A perfect trip for winter as it followed north west-facing cliff lines all the way. Temperature range 8 to 16 degrees C.

Background Notes

On 1 November 2021, we had a walk that included the lower cliff line on the southern side of Blacksmiths Creek. The amazing Tiara Cave was one of the discoveries.¹

That journey was done using the 1:25,000 Department of Lands topographic maps that contain very little or no detail of the complexity of the Wollemi landscape. Since then, the Lidar maps became available that reveal much more information about the geological forms and layers in the landscape. The objective of this walk was to explore the cliff lines not visited during the previous trip.

¹ The track notes can be found in *Walks from Bilpin – Book I*, Walk 1.11.

A Recommended Detour

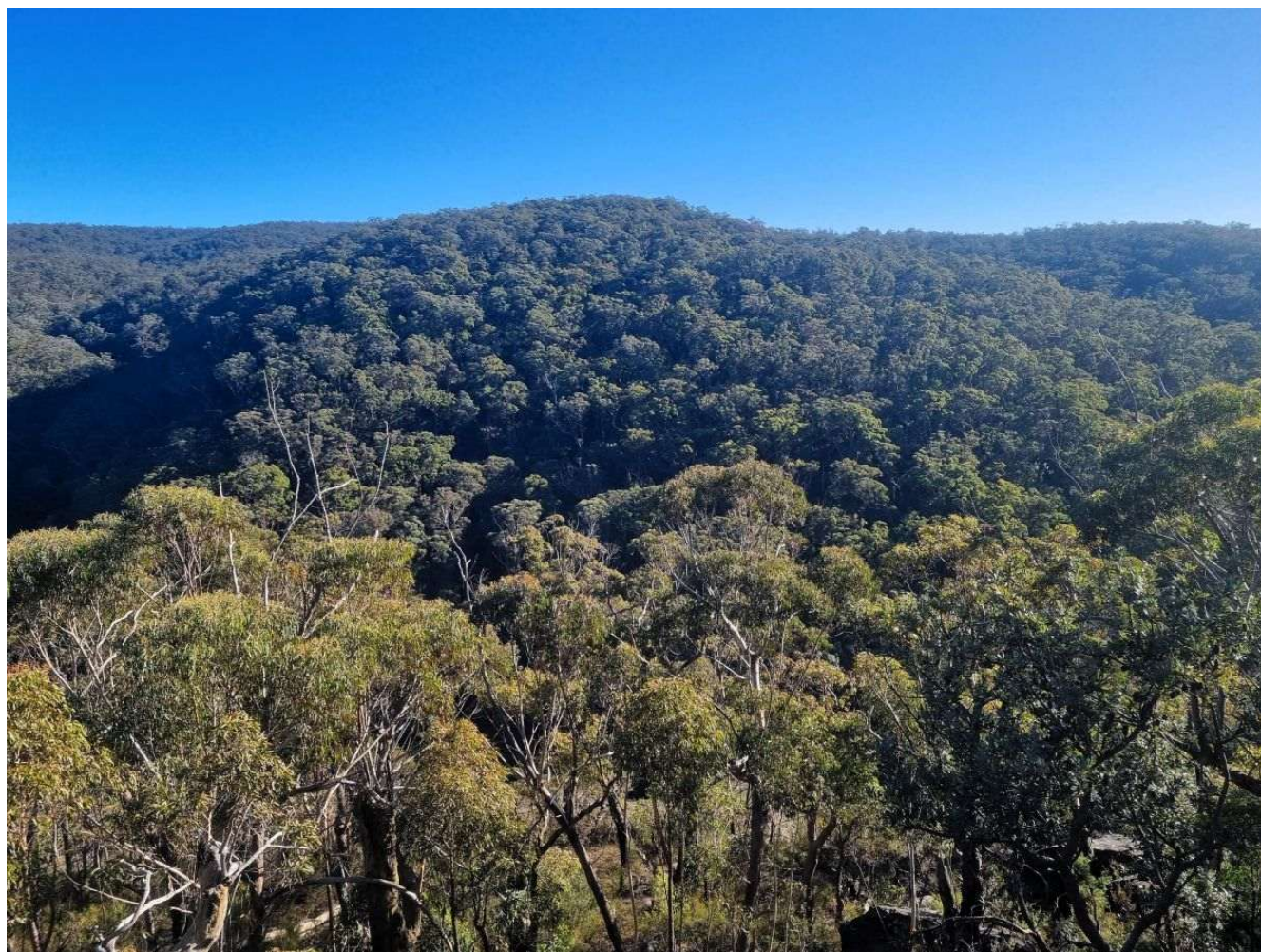
During today's trip, we reached a point less than 250 m away from Tiara Cave (and at nearly the same elevation). A detour to this remarkable location is highly recommended. It is not described in the track notes that follow. The cave is at GR 7211 9684, 460 m.

Track Notes

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

The walk started on D'Arcy Range Trail at 0930, as we made our way down towards the target cliff line above Blacksmiths Creek. Even though the gorge at this point was close to its beginning at Mount Tootie, and was therefore relatively shallow compared to the Colo River end, the valley already had three substantial cliff lines guarding it from the east. Our objective today was to explore a portion of two of these.

After only a few minutes of descent through an easy terrain of medium-size trees and low understorey, expansive views appeared across Blacksmiths Creek gorge towards Bowen Hill. At 0937, we used a narrow ramp to come underneath the top cliff line. We would investigate this row of bluffs on the way back, but for now our journey continued further downhill until, 11 minutes later, we reached a ledge below the middle cliff line, and, right at the start of it, a small but beautifully formed tafoni cave (Miniature Cave No. 1).



The view of Bowen Hill across Blacksmiths Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Miniature Cave No. 1. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Passing underneath some very impressive high cliffs, the party stopped to have a look at medium-size overhang with flat floor and crumbling walls. Next to it, we admired a vast 20 metre long, gloriously sunlit wall of deeply eroded multi-layered sandstone.



A beautifully sunlit overhang. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

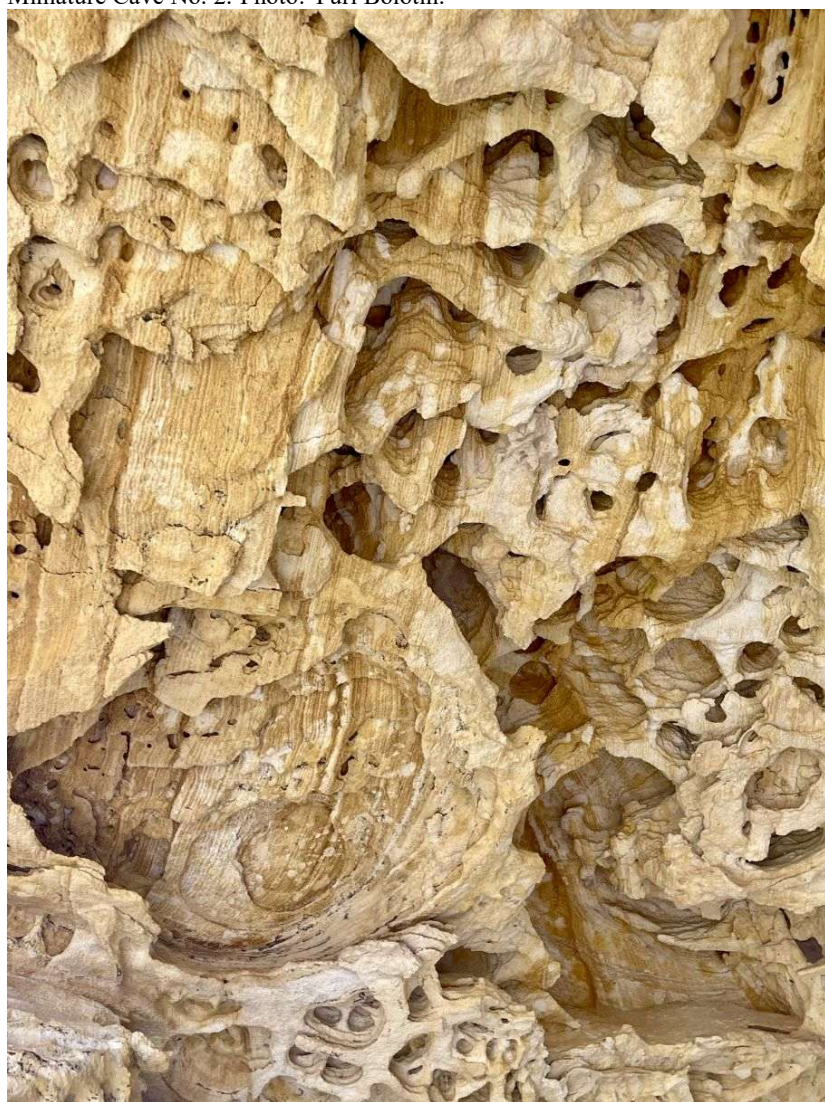
After about 300 metres of traversing, these captivating sites were suddenly replaced by high flat walls of smooth brown rock. I have no doubt that below the dull surface they contained marvelous erosions, but we were there a few hundred or thousand years too early to see them revealed as this outer shell crumbles away.

Between 1026 and 1040, the group had morning tea along the ledge. Ten minutes after resuming, the landscape began to regain its attractiveness as more and more eroded cliffs appeared on our way. At 1052, I recorded a small gully that looked like a possible pass up. Not for us today, as our plan was to continue our trip along the present easy to negotiate level.

After another six minutes of traversing, we stopped to admire and photograph an exceptional small cave, about 6 metres across, adorned with white, beige and yellow multi-dimensional floating panels. We agreed it was the prettiest find so far today (Miniature Cave No. 2). The ledge from here became very narrow, but it was an exciting journey as it wound its way below many high intricately eroded walls.



Miniature Cave No. 2. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Miniature Cave No. 2 detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.

A hundred metres or so further along, we came to a dead end and had to scramble to the next level below. We only followed it for a short distance, before leaving it and descending into a tributary gully of Blacksmiths Creek. With its tall Turpentine, Angophoras and mossy green boulders, the valley looked very picturesque. At 1131.

We would be using this ravine for exiting later today, but for now, we continued down, to find the bottom cliff line that was on my exploration agenda. At 1137. At this spot, we were only about 250 m from Tiara Cave (to the south west, along the same ledge)², but, as I did not know how long the rest of the journey would take, I decided to keep going. In hindsight, we would have had sufficient time to visit the cave.

Climbing out of the gully, we soon located a good ledge. A few small caves were noted before the party paused at a bigger one, about ten metres across, with a few nice but not exceptional panels. A bit further along, at 1153, we hit a jackpot, a small cavity containing an area of intricate honeycomb formations next to a panel of extraordinary beauty formed by elongated white-brown and striped tafoni, shaped like an opening fan. Wow! (Miniature Cave No. 3).



Miniature Cave No. 3 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

We were obviously on a roll as only seven minutes later, having come up a bit, we arrived at another gem. This compact and otherwise not very prominent cave had an amazing area of three-dimensional animal-shaped overlapping plates, in a dazzling array of patterns and colours – stripes, dots, lines, of brown, yellow, pink, white, beige, orange, and black. On the far side of it, were Wayang-style cutouts and shapes. So much beauty crammed in such small space (about five metres across). At 1200, (Miniature Cave No. 4).

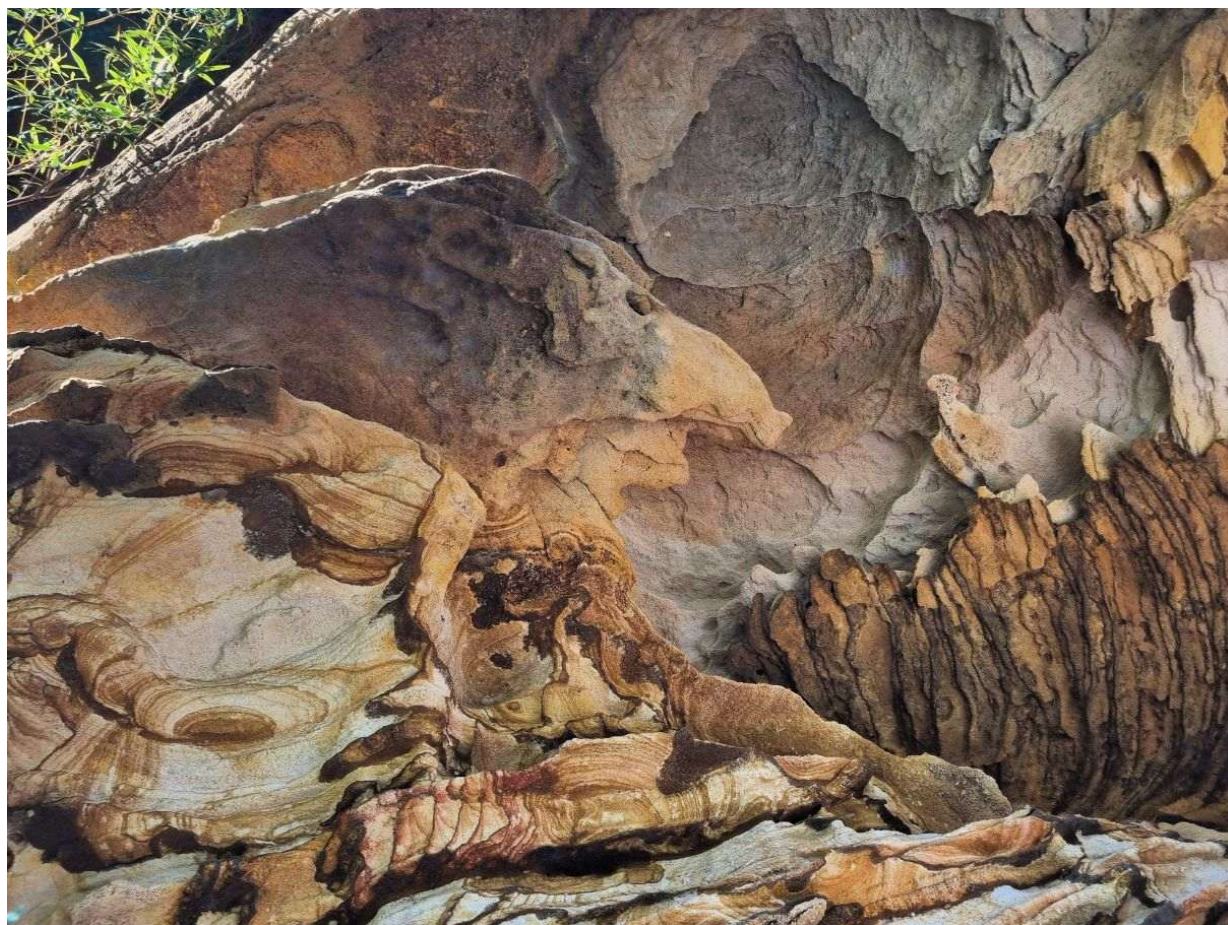
² See my Tiara Cave de-tour recommendation at the beginning of these track notes.



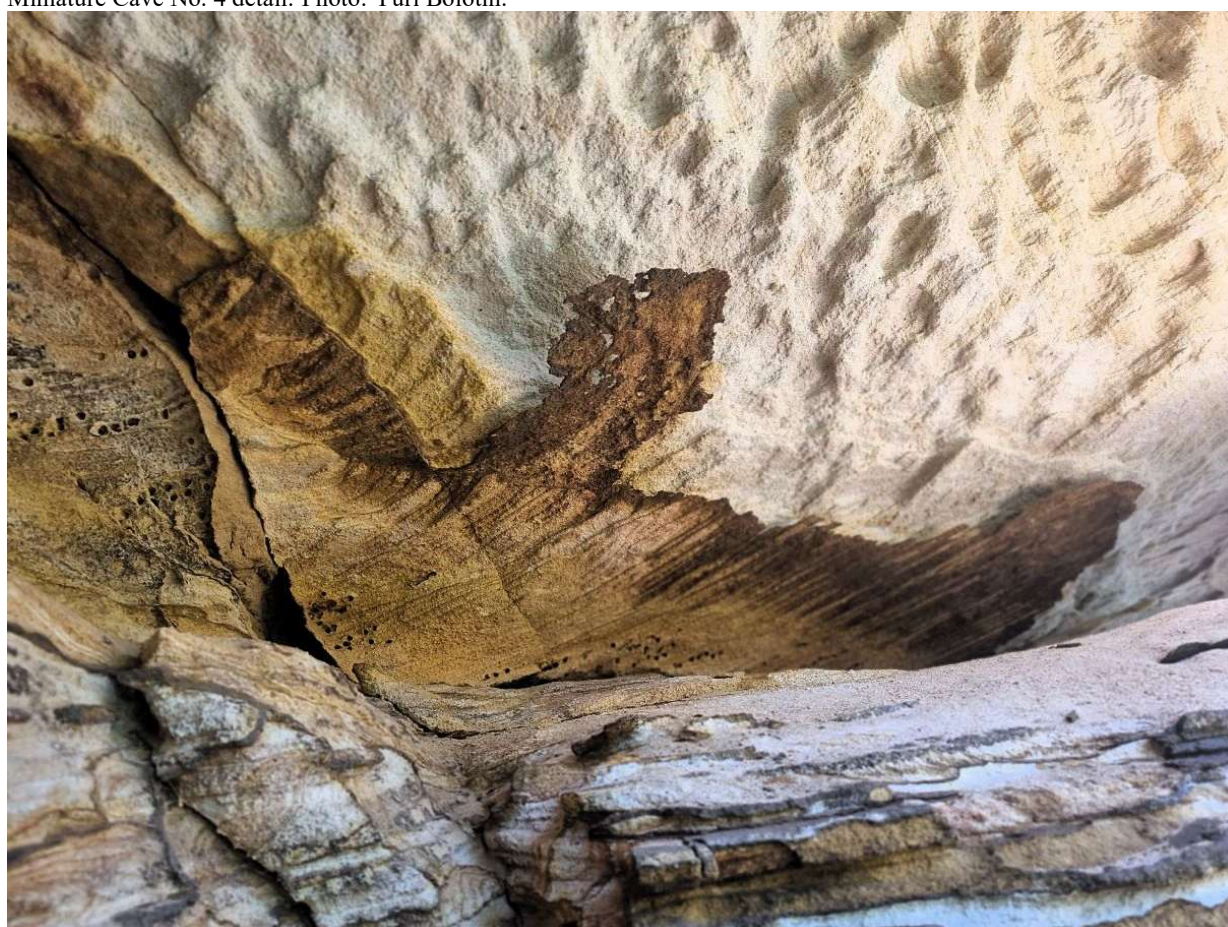
Miniature Cave No. 4 detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Miniature Cave No. 4 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Miniature Cave No. 4 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

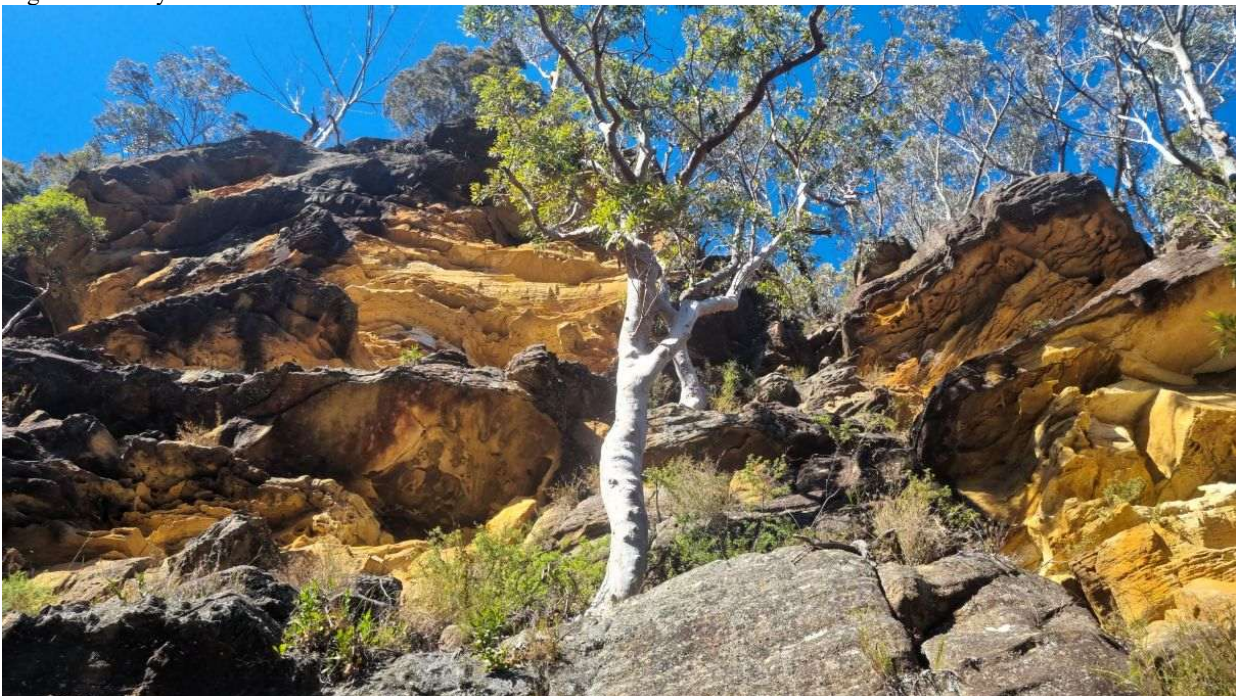


Miniature Cave No. 4 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Our adventure continued below the same cliff line for another 100 metres, but there was not much else of interest there. At 1214, we headed up about 30 metres to the next level, to a very high, wall of overhangs, sparkling in the winter sun. At 1220. It lacked intricate erosions, but the geometric forms, colours and shapes were superb. Scattered craggy Gum trees, with their blindingly white shiny trunks juxtaposing against golden rocks and blue sky added to the beauty of this landscape.



High cliffs lit by the winter sun. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Layers of golden cliffs and white shiny tree trunks. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Carefully maneuvering along crumbly narrow ledges, we explored about 60 metres to the north and then turned back south, in the intended direction of our travel. From this higher elevation, there were constant glorious views towards Blacksmiths Creek gorge. After a while, the group re-crossed the gully we had traversed an hour earlier and then climbed steeply up above it, to reach an ideal lunch spot, a sunlit cave with flat floors, tafoni-decorated roof, and expansive views of the area. At 1247.

Nineteen minutes later, our investigations of the two lower cliff lines now complete, we headed up towards the last, smallest one, that runs almost parallel to D'Arcy Range Trail. We reached it at 1317, right near a small but exquisite small cavity containing white and yellow honeycombs (Miniature Cave No. 5).



Miniature Cave No. 5 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Traversing along this ledge was generally easy, and a few pretty caves were spotted along the way, but at 1333, the group stopped to inspect another remarkable one. Only five metres across in size, it contained abundant phantasmagorical shapes, colours and forms (Miniature Cave No. 6).



Miniature Cave No. 6 detail. Photo: Yidan Saladine.



Miniature Cave No. 6 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

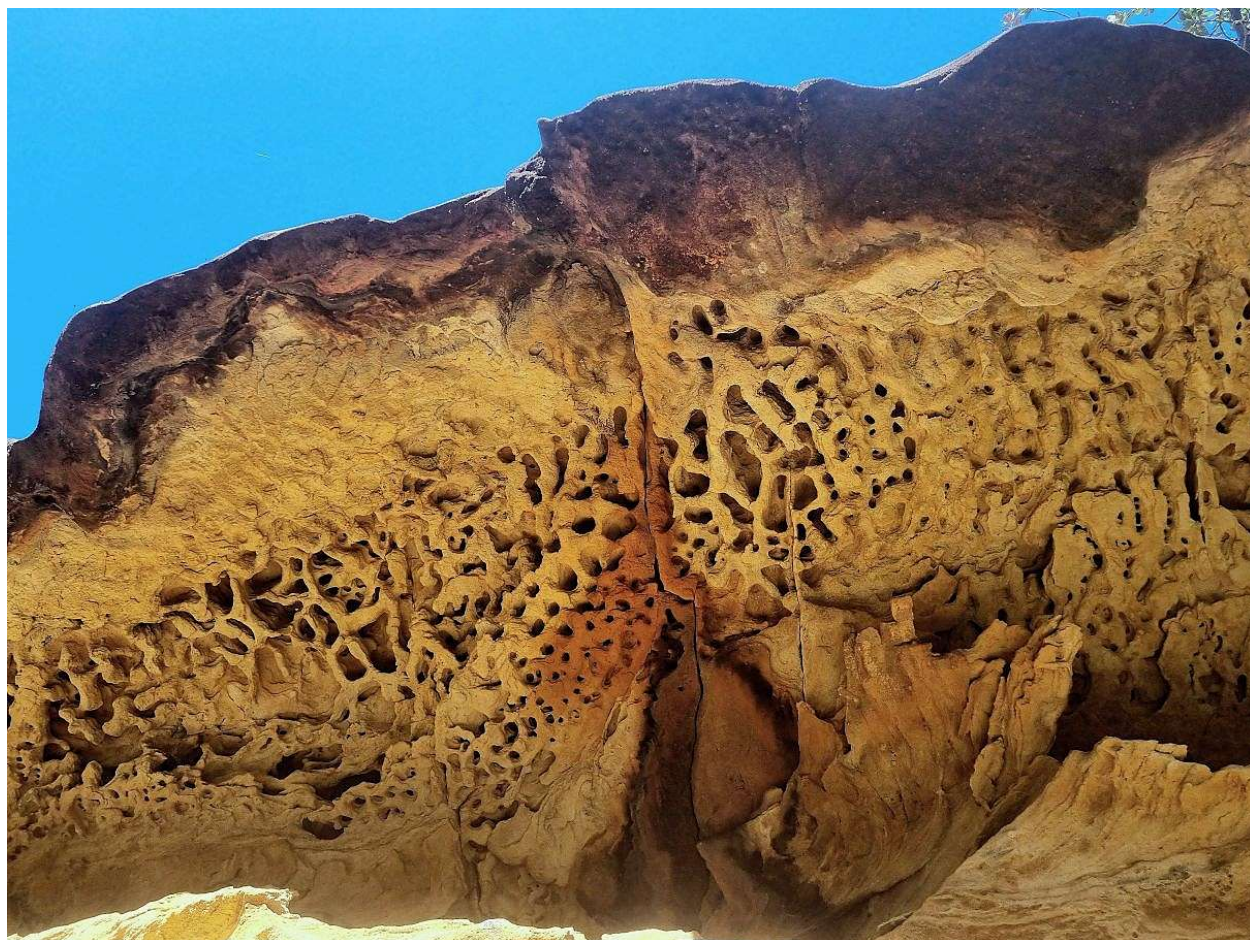


Miniature Cave No. 6 detail. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

Seven minutes later, we photographed a big lion-like head with a huge eye, protruding from the rock face. Several more eroded overhangs attracted our attention as we kept traversing. The last remarkable cave was noted at 1353. It was six metres wide and had a sloping roof densely covered in yellow and orange tafoni formations (Miniature Cave No. 7).

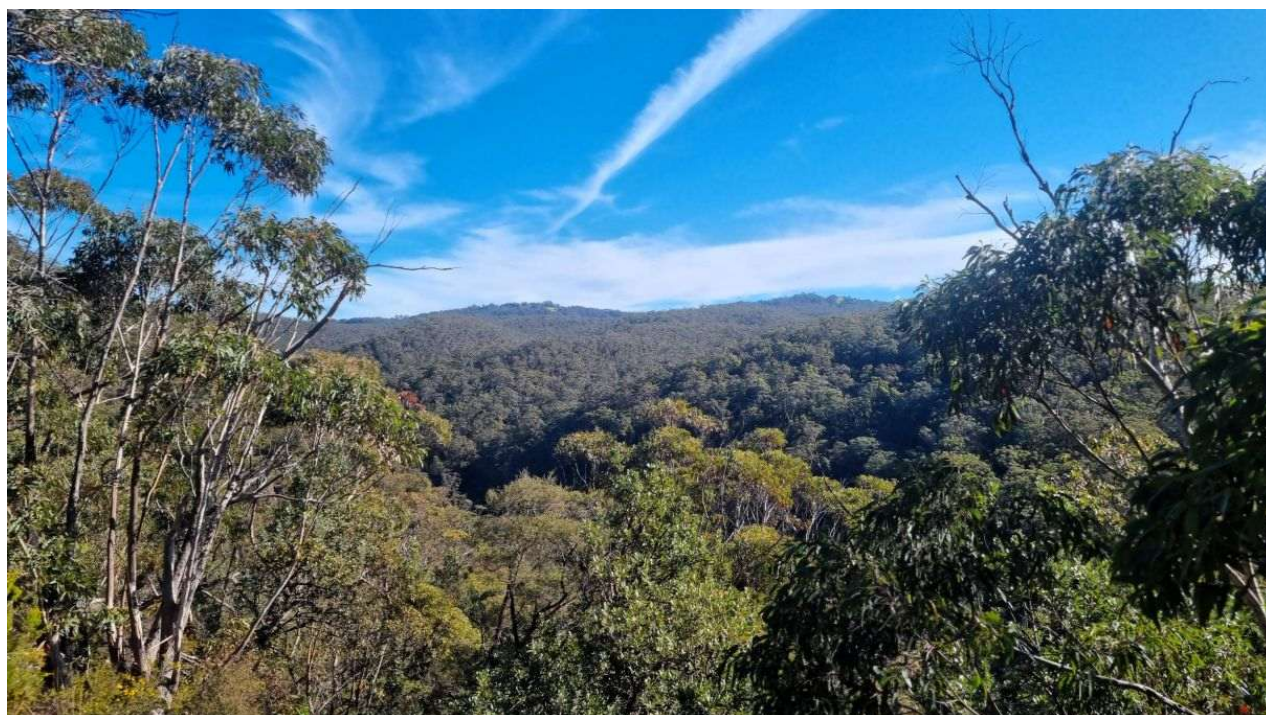


A lion head-like formation protruding from the rock face. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.



Miniature Cave No. 7. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

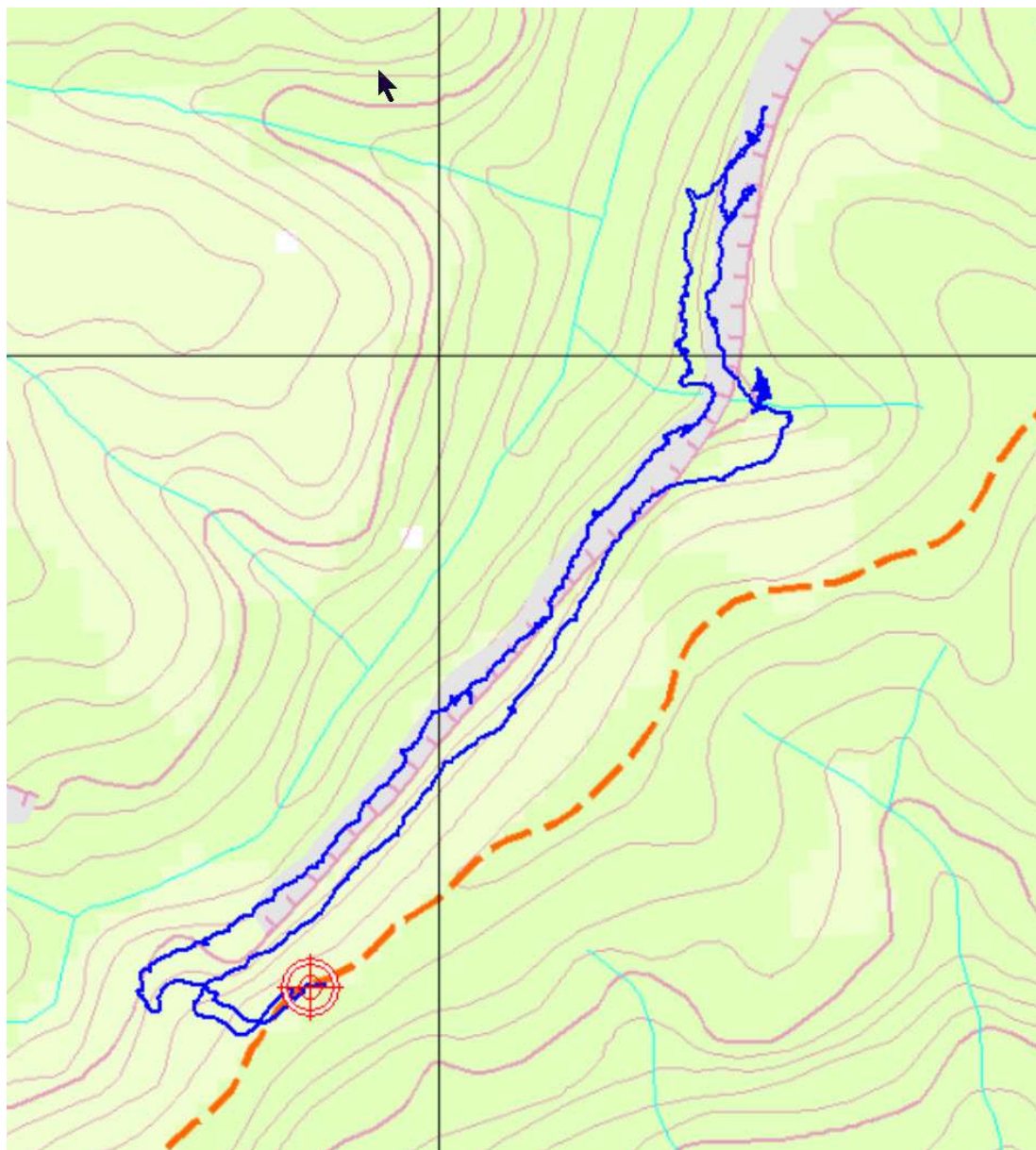
The party now reached the area where our explorations this morning had begun. From here, a short climb took us to the top of the boulders and onto an open platform with views towards Mount Tootie and Little Tootie. At 1400. We made it back to the walk start on D'Arcy Range Trail seven minutes later.



Mount Tootie and Little Tootie are seen on the horizon line across Blacksmiths Creek. Photo: Yuri Bolotin.

This had been a day of unusual discoveries. We had not encountered any grand decorated overhangs; instead, we saw a great number of smaller but exquisite caves, every one of them distinct and memorable, like a beautiful miniature expression of the geological wonders found in this area. I called this complex of caves, spread over a one-kilometre distance above Blacksmiths Creek, Miniature Caves. They are numbered within these track notes, and in the Table of Times, Locations and Grid References below.

Day statistics: total distance 4.8 km; total ascent 283 m.



Walk topographic map. Recorded and prepared by Yuri Bolotin.

Table of Times, Locations and Grid References

Time	Location	Grid Reference	Elevation
0930	Walk start on D'Arcy Range Trail	GR 7185 9626	580 m
0937	Ramp down	GR 7174 9625	565 m
0948	Below the middle cliff line. Miniature Cave No. 1	GR 7166 9629	497 m
1026-1040	Morning tea	GR 7202 9660	505 m
1052	A possible pass up through the cliffs	GR 7213 9670	515 m

1058	Miniature Cave No. 2	GR 7216 9675	507 m
1131	In the gully	GR 7232 9646	479 m
1137	Bottom cliff line	GR 7229 9698	455 m
1153	Miniature Cave No. 3	GR 7230 9717	465 m
1200	Miniature Cave No. 4	GR 7236 9725	484 m
1214	Heading up to the next level	GR 7234 9721	479 m
1220	Below the next cliff line	GR 7234 9716	512 m
1247-1306	Lunch in the overhang	GR 7237 9695	531 m
1317	Upper cliff line. Miniature Cave No. 5	GR 7233 9686	563 m
1333	Miniature Cave No. 6	GR 7209 9659	566 m
1340	Lion head formation	GR 7201 9653	564 m
1353	Miniature Cave No. 7	GR 7179 9630	565 m
1400	Lookout	GR 7172 9625	570 m
1407	Back at the walk start	GR 7185 9626	580 m