

4.21 Howling Arch, the Pool of Diana and the Pool of Aphrodite

MAPS ETC.

Department of Lands topographic map Rock Hill, 8931-2N, 1:25000, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.

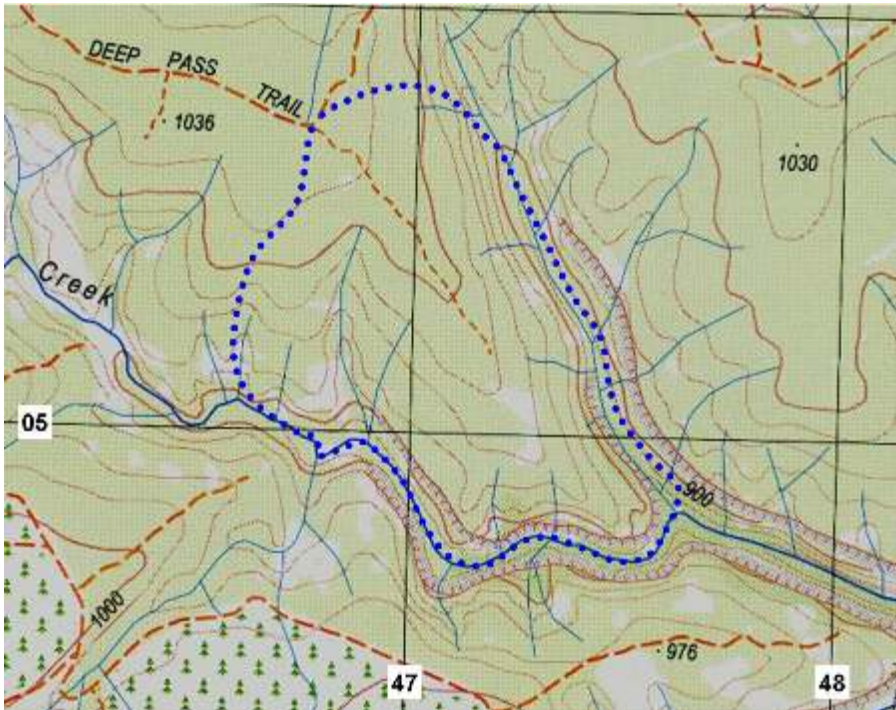
WALK DESCRIPTION AND ROUTE

Drive to approximately GR 468 058 on the Deep Pass Trail. Head down a spur trending slightly west of south and then south as it nears Dingo Creek. Visit Howling Arch, an amazing natural feature. Enter Dingo Creek and progress downstream for about 1.3km visiting the

scenic Pool of Diana on the way, continue underneath high cliffs to GR 476 048, the start of a north north west trending ravine. Follow the ravine up, visiting the spectacular Pool of Aphrodite along the way, to eventually reconnect with the trail and the vehicles. About 6km.

GEAR ISSUES

1 litre of water, GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, camera electrolytes, map, compass. 30m tape (leader only). Change of gear for afterwards.



Source © Land and Property Management Authority, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst NSW 2795.

COMMENTS

Wild, spectacular country. Wet feet possible. Partly exploratory.

Date walked 27th July 2012.

TRACK NOTES

A fine but cold day with morning wind gusts; overnight rain left the already wet ground very soggy and bushes wet in the gullies - temperature range from 4 to 10 degrees. Rock surfaces were wet and treacherous.

This walk was constructed to retake photographs for two walks done in the area several years ago, the magnificent Pool of Aphrodite, 31st October 2007, and the Pool of Diana, 28th April 2010. In addition, and because of its proximity, the Howling Arch, last visited 19th January 2011, was included. Each of these destination features is spectacular. Including three such wonders on one walk is a truly special day out. Having said that, there is a price to pay. None of these places is easy to reach, and the



Howling Arch, north side Dingo Creek. Photo: Brian Fox



Michael Keats on the Howling Arch, north side of Dingo Creek. Photo: Brian Fox

dense undergrowth in this section of Dingo Creek is abominable. In many places, walking progress is measured in metres per hour, not kilometres per hour. The measured map distance for this walk is about three kilometres. On the day, with time to enjoy the featured locations, it took nearly seven hours to complete the circuit walk.

The vehicles were parked at GR 468 057 where a side track heads south east from the main Deep Pass Trail. The wind chill factor made the temperature standing at 4 degrees feel like something closer to zero. I opted to put on my over pants for two reasons, firstly, the bushes in the sheltered gullies would be wet, and secondly, the pants provided some extra insulation. I was comfortable with leaving them on all day. Similarly, the beanie stayed on all day as well.

Having set the scene, we headed off walking generally south south west down towards Howling Arch. As we progressed, the southern cliff line of Dingo Creek became visible through the thinning forest, the early winter sun lighting up the cliffs. Underfoot, it was wet and no rock surface could be trusted. A small deviation from the usual entry ridge was a nice change as we arrived on the western side of Howling Arch rather than the eastern side. It was then only a small scramble down a pagoda to enjoy an easy walk over the arch.

In retrospect, we should have deferred walking over the arch until we had



Pool of Aphrodite.
Photo: Emanuel Conomos

reversed back up the western side ridge to take photos. The Howling Arch is a very tricky photographic item. The gully behind it is very steep and supports strong, luxuriant growth, making picture taking from the northern side a near impossible challenge.

To secure good photos, we walked both north and south along the eastern



Stephen Murray and Michael Keats in the canyon section, Dingo Creek.
Photo: Cotter Erickson

pagoda ridge, where it is possible to gain some idea of the magnitude of this natural wonder. Even so, this is not enough to really appreciate just how massive it is. By following this eastern ridge south, it is possible to descend about 40m into the gully then walk north hard against a shear rock wall and emerge almost underneath the arch. It is from this vantage point that the arch can be best appreciated.

It is such a great arch, that after completing the descent it was decided to have an early morning tea on an elevated dry rock shelf. This natural viewing platform on the eastern side, was just the place to take in its breathtaking majesty. Fifteen minutes later, we were on the move. Ahead of us was one of the most demanding crossings of Dingo Creek.

In this section, Dingo Creek is a bit like the Sargasso Sea. It is a series of thick mats of ferns, scrubby plants, fallen logs, hidden rocks, concealed holes and multiple streams. It took the best part of ten minutes to cross 50m and reach the base of the southern cliffs. Despite our caution, most of us ended up with at least one wet foot.

The southern cliff line of this section of Dingo Creek is magnificent, also by sticking close to the base, it is relatively easy to negotiate, particularly when compared with crossing or trying to walk in Dingo Creek. One disturbing aspect of this section was the incredible damage wrought by feral pigs. Literally, they have ploughed the ground, and in places dislodged boulders up to 40



Waratah, *Telopea speciosissima*.
Photo: Cotter Erickson

kilos. The individuals concerned must be very large. The area of damage is more than 200m long. All this has happened very recently. We also recorded many mounds of fresh dung.

At 1015, we reached the incised ravine entry to the Pool of Diana, GR 468 049. The Pool was even more beautiful than when we visited in 2010. Overnight rain had added significant volume to the waterfall and the pool was beautifully clear. The deep section of the pool glowed intense aquamarine in the sunlight. The beach



Canyon section, Dingo Creek. Photo: Cotter Erickson

area was pristine and the backing fern gallery glorious. We spent over 40 minutes enjoying this spot, taking photos and appreciating the privilege of being in this place.

With help from others, I did some estimates of the dimensions. The actual pool overhang / canopy is about 40m in diameter. The pool itself is about 30m across and at least 2m deep. The height of the roof above the water surface is about 12m. About two thirds of the pool area is under the rock canopy. The uncovered part of the pool is wedge

shaped, with the apex dominated by the discharge point of the waterfall.

Reluctantly, we moved on, continuing our cliff hugging progress to a large dry overhang, GR 476 048, the bioturbation efforts of the feral pigs still very evident. It was now 1205, and an opportune time and place for a quick lunch. The noise of water crashing over rocks in Dingo Creek was awesome. What would our crossing involve? The time passed very quickly as we all knew that once lunch was over, we had to descend into Dingo Creek, cross it and then work our way



Above Dingo Creek, Roger Clarke and Michael Keats. Photo: Cotter Erickson

up the ravine that contained the Pool of Aphrodite.

The descent into Dingo Creek involved a few slide sections, and as we went lower, the noise of Dingo Creek increased and the ground became more saturated and covered with slippery logs. Then, suddenly, down at creek level, the noise disappeared and we were in a remarkable world of quiet, broken only by the cussing of fellow walkers at misplaced footfalls and warnings about this or that particularly slippery, slimy log.

When it came to crossing Dingo Creek, we did it right at the junction with the ravine creek that drains from the Pool of Aphrodite. Better still, the crossing could be done without getting feet any wetter, on a semi submerged log with a handrail log for support. For the record, Dingo Creek was flowing strong, clear and about 30cm deep. This junction crossing was at GR 477 048.

Time now to commence climbing up the ravine to the Pool of Aphrodite. Using our accumulated knowledge, we instinctively went to the dry east side of



Moss near the Pool of Aphrodite. Photo: Emanuel Conomos



Cliff climb. Top down, Stephen Murray, Brian Fox, Michael Keats and Roger Clarke.
Photo: Cotter Erickson



Above Dingo Creek. Photo: Michael Keats

the ravine and climbed up to the first level of cliffs. At GR 476 050, there is the beginning of a long, but intermittent overhang that provides a useful access for about 500m. The overhang is punctuated by several waterfalls, each with an attractive fern and moss glen. Some also had small sandy beaches making for a totally delightful experience.

As we moved higher up the ravine the mix of vegetation changed to Coachwood forest interspersed with an

increasing number of large but contorted elegant Soft Tree Ferns, *Dicksonia antarctica*. Then, at GR 474 052, we arrived at the incredibly beautiful, and unsurpassed, Pool of Aphrodite.

Due to the overnight rain, the multistage waterfall was in full spate, great bridal veils of water formed a succession of offset semicircular curtains as they descended from the cliffs above. The waterfalls alone are extraordinary, quite apart from the amazing beach



Dingo Creek. Photo: Michael Keats



The descent below Howling Arch, front to rear, Adrian Cooper, Brian Graetz, Marion Davies, Leanne Frostick and Michael Keats. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Gnarled tree on the island rock landing stage before crossing the hanging swamp. Photo: Brian Graetz

ringed pool and fern galley surrounds. As I wrote on the first occasion of seeing this extraordinary place,

"...we happened upon one of the most perfect and beautiful natural features – a shallow, circular, crystal clear pool, some 10m in diameter in a setting on an elevated river terrace that can only be described as "Shakespearean romantic." Initially the word Grotto came to mind, but it is more than that. Grottos are small and intimate. This is vast and grand. The surrounding semicircular

walls are decked all round with ferns to height in excess of 15m. Above that, a perfectly proportioned rock shell rises another 20m or so. A gentle waterfall cascades into the pool at the rear. A white sandy beach invites and beckons...

It is a place I suspect few eyes have seen. We spent time here, our cameras failing miserably to capture the wonder and essence of this remote Circean spot. It needs a name. I propose to call it the Pool of Aphrodite, just the place in summer for a passionate interlude."



Cliffs above Dingo Creek. Photo: Brian Fox

It was no hardship to spend 30 minutes here. However, as is always the case, there is a need to move on. We still had some serious walking to do to return to the vehicles. When I came to this spot previously, I had entered via a gentle ramp on the eastern side of the ravine head. Today, we were going to try something a bit different, to scale the western side cliff line. To be fair, the

topographic map does not indicate cliffs but rather a graduated slope extending some 500m towards the ravine head. The aerial photographs also do not tell the full story.

The reality is that, although there are no technically cliffs as such, the contours are close together and hidden between them are slopes that are more vertical than horizontal. For a while, we made



Pool of Diana. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Cliff face east of the Pool of Diana. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Ian Armstrong framed by the Bungleboori Arch. Photo: Brian Fox

excellent progress, finding a long upward rising ramp that seemed as though it would go all the way. All went well, until about GR 472 057. At this point, our ramp stopped and we were confronted with a small vertical climb of about 2m straight ahead, or a 20m drop, or a slot down into a rather messy and wet outfall from a hanging swamp.

A human ladder was built to get Yuri up on top of the vertical climb. Once there, he went reconnoitring to see what lay ahead. On his assessment, we had three choices. One, to drop down into a slot, traverse the base of the hanging swamp and then climb up again further north in the ravine. Two, to retrace our steps until there was a way down and then proceed up the ravine. Three, to negotiate a rather wet rock slope, and then climb up the hanging swamp.

On assessment after discussion, it was decided to go for option three. Out came Marion's trusty rope, which was then thrown up to Yuri who secured it to a tree and we all made it up to what amounted to an island rock landing stage, ready for tackling the wet rock slope. Again, Yuri secured the rope to a tree as a safety measure, allowing us all to negotiate to a more stable area.

Some real fun stuff followed as we climbed the hanging swamp. It was densely matted, wet and slippery, and required excessive pressure to push a path through it. In places, the swamp was so dense you could not fall over, although some members of the party tried because of exhaustion. It was 1526 before the group finally made it

through the swamp and back into more easily negotiable forest, GR 470 058. At 1533, we arrived back at the vehicles, tired but euphoric.

Total distance 3.7km, total ascents 280m.

TABLE OF TIMES, LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Ref
0846	Park vehicles	468 057
0910	On ridge above Howling Arch	466 052
0921	At Howling Arch	466 052
0941	Below Howling Arch + am tea 21 min	466 051
1015	Pool of Diana, 40 min	468 049
1128	Overhang and feral pig evidence	476 048
1205	Dry overhang + lunch, 29 min	476 048
1305	Cross Dingo Creek	477 048
1312	Overhang in ravine	476 050
1320	Pool of Aphrodite, 30 min	474 052
1440	First rope assisted ascent	472 057
1505	Second rope assisted ascent	472 057
1526	Above the hanging swamp in forest	470 058
1533	At vehicles	468 057



Ian Armstrong framed by the Bungleboori Arch. Photo: Brian Fox