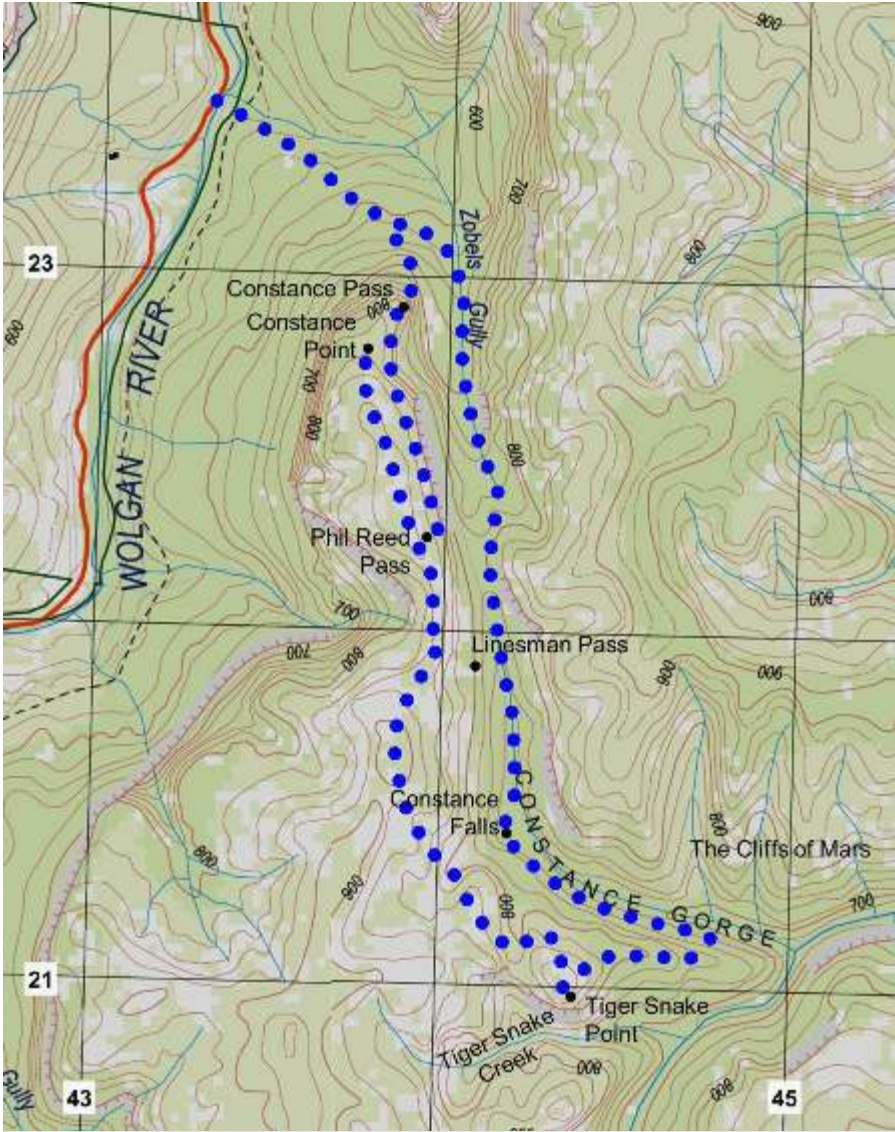


8.21 Tiger Snake Point and Constance Point



Source © Land and Property Management Authority, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst NSW 2795. www.lpm.nsw.gov.au

MAPS, ETC.

Department of Lands topographic map, Ben Bullen 8931-4S, 1:25000, second edition. Department of Lands topographic map, Mount Morgan 8931-1S, 1:25000, second edition. GPS setting WGS 84.

WALK DESCRIPTION AND ROUTE

Park on Wolgan Road. Walk up Zobels Gully and then down Constance Gorge. Turn up Deanes Creek and then up Tiger Snake Canyon exit track. At the top, turn north and walk all the way to Constance Point, then walk back south and use the pass/track to come down into Constance Gorge and back to the vehicles. About 13km.

GEAR ISSUES

Have clothes to change into in the car for afterwards. 2 litres of water. GPS, PLB, appropriate head and footwear, electrolytes, maps, compass.

COMMENTS

Scrambling and exposure.

Date walked 8th January 2016.

THE WEATHER

A warm and humid day with 90 percent variable cloud cover. Temperature range 12 to 26 degrees C.

BACKGROUND NOTES

Zobels Gully is about 1.2km long and flows into Wolgan River approximately



A large crowd of bushwalkers pose in Constance Gorge. Photo: Emanuel Conomos

3km south, south east of Newnes. Its upper reaches flow through part of Constance Gorge. Ben Bullen and Mount Morgan Topo Maps, headwaters GR 441 224, junction GR 433 235.

Martin Francis Zobel (1861-1935) married Sarah Jane Simpson (1876-1961) in 1899. They lived at Sunny Corner (near Bathurst), Mount Victoria and Newnes, and later in life moved to Ashfield (Sydney). Martin was a geologist and miner. The Certificate of Title records his purchase of Lot 22, Section 33 within the Village of Newnes in 1909. This title records his occupation as Mine Manager. Lot 21 was purchased in his wife's name. One of the unformed roads in village of Newnes was named Zobel Street.

Plan of Portion 2, Mineral Lease 12, Parish of Glen Alice and Gindantherie records, "Martin Zobel, Agent for Commonwealth Oil Corporation Ltd 12th July 1907." Ref: NSW BDMs. Rego. No. 9008/1899. Vol. 2118; Fol. 211. Funeral Notice, SMH, 4th April 1935, p. 9.

Zobels Point is the southernmost extremity of Zobels Spur. Located above the northern side of Zobels Gully and directly opposite Constance Point. Extensive views up the Wolgan Valley towards Donkey Mountain. Name coined by Michael Keats on a Bush Club walk, 6th November 2011. Mount Morgan Topo Map, GR 439 237.

The Cliffs of Mars are the northern cliffs which form Constance Gorge and Deanes Creek. Most likely named by

Peter Harris, National Parks Association walker, who wrote a report on the area in the NPA journal in the mid 1970s and labelled the photo 'The Cliffs of Mars'. Peter was also a past president of the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs. Ref: Correspondence with David Warren Noble, 14th October 2009. Mount Morgan Topo Map, central point GR 448 214.

Constance Gorge refers to the narrow cliff lined ravine that extends from near the saddle at the top of Zobels Gully and down the southern side towards Deanes Creek. A perennial stream runs through it. The Sydney Morning Herald, 10th January 1906, p. 7, Proposed Tramway Route, depicts Constance Gorge as "the scenery is described as magnificent, so that with the construction of the line a new centre of attraction will be opened for the tourist."

Carne, J E. Field Book, State Records, 2/663, 11th January 1906, p. 75 records thin chocolate band (shale) in Constance Gorge and a diagram of bridge across it. Constance Gorge was first shown on the Survey Plan, Tramway from Wolgan to Clarence. M12435. Surveyed by John Haydon Cardew, Licensed Surveyor 13th December 1905.

The most likely origin of the name is from Constance Caroline Mary (c1872-1932), who was the wife of Donald Sutherland, Consulting Engineer and General Manager of The Commonwealth Oil Corporation Ltd mine and refinery at Newnes in 1906 at the time when the Wolgan Valley Railway was being constructed.



Constance Falls. Photo: Brian Fox

Constance was also the name given to the Wolgan Valley Railway Shay Locomotive No. 1. Mount Morgan Topo Map, GR 443 215.

Constance Point is the most northerly point on a ridge line between Constance Gorge on the east and Wolgan River on the west. Michael Keats has applied this name in his Bush Club Track Notes, 28th May 2010. Mount Morgan Topo Map, GR 438 228.

Tiger Snake Canyon bottom section was discovered by a Sydney University - Ramblers trip in September 1977. When walking up this creek, they encountered a Tiger Snake. The day after when finalising a map of the area the name was coined by David Noble and Keith Maxwell. Ref: map and correspondence Keith Maxwell 13th February 2016. Jamison, Rick, Canyons Near Sydney by Rick Jamieson, 4th ed, p. 50.

Tiger Snake Creek is a non perennial creek, 1km in length. It flows generally in an easterly direction into Deanes Creek. The creek junction is 400m south of Deanes Creek and Constance Gorge junction. Its name is derived from the name of the canyon. Mount Morgan Topo Map, GR 447 209.

Yuri Bolotin in planning this walk discovered that there were several passes from Zobels Gully/Constance Point into Constance Gorge and there was a group of pagodas above Tiger Snake Canyon on the northern side that appeared accessible from Constance Gorge; these pagodas should have a commanding view over the canyon and eastwards over Deanes Creek.

Over 60mm of soaking rain had been recorded by Thomas at the Newnes Holiday Cottages during the previous four days. The ground was replenished



Stone seats to enjoy the view over the Wolgan Valley. Photo: Brian Fox



Upper section of Constance Falls. Photo: Brian Fox

with moisture and, despite drying winds, there was no dust.

TRACK NOTES

The most challenging part of the walk for some members happened as soon as we left the vehicles – crossing the Wolgan River on a fallen log! After this excitement, we assembled on the permanent way of the former Wolgan Valley Railway, where Yuri outlined the walk.

Immediately, it was into climbing mode, up the north west talus slope of Constance Point. By 0940, we had rounded the lower cliffs and entered the confines of the southern arm of Zobels Gully.

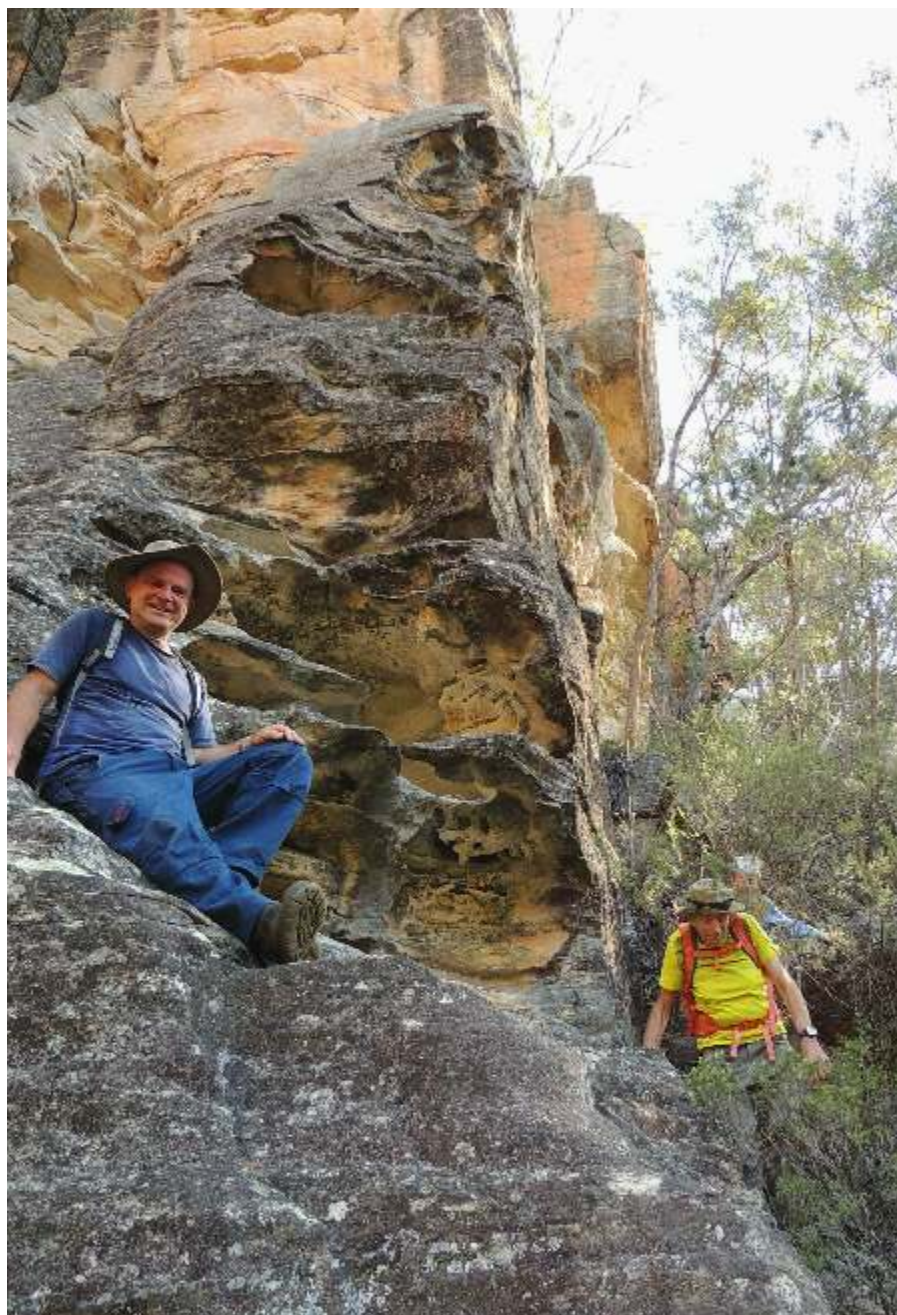
This is the beginning of an enchanted

part of the walk. Just rounding the corner and entering the micro climate area, there was an immediate change in vegetation. The greens were richer and darker. The species mix subtly underwent change. Rocks were home to collections of epiphytes. Eucalypts grew taller.

In a constricted area, there were hints of an old made track. Brian and I debated this and wondered if our imaginations were over active. Back home, I consulted an old mud map in my collection from the 1980s. It shows a track in this area. The existence of such a track is further evidence of built access for the first telephone line that crossed Constance Gorge, c. 1905. The story of the three Newnes telephone services is explored in Book 7 of the 'Gardens of



Geoff Fox peers into a natural basin filled with water. Photo: Brian Fox



Thomas Ebersol waits for Michael Keats to descend Constance Pass. Photo: Brian Fox

Stone National Park and beyond' series, see Essay 8.

Morning tea was taken at 1018, GR 441 224, immediately north of the watershed that separates Zobels Gully from Constance Gorge.

Two minutes on, the high point was crossed. We were now in glorious subtropical rainforest. The Eucalypts were monsters in height, over 60m tall. The natural plantings of Coachwoods and Sassafras were festooned with huge Lianas. So little light reached the forest floor, it was a carpet of shed leaves and rotting logs of former forest titans. This wonderland persisted for over 800m.

At 1108, Thomas invited us to take time out to see a sight that none of the rest of us had seen. We left the track at GR 442 213 and headed up a tributary stream to GR 442 214. Here, an almost circular shallow 10m diameter pool was the terminal end of a narrow waterfall some 40m high that cascaded down from the cliffs above. It was glistening in the sun and was very difficult to photograph. It is also ephemeral, only flowing after sustained rain. We were there at the right time. Later in the walk, we would cross the creek higher up, at GR 441 212. I named these falls Constance Falls. We returned to the main watercourse and followed the



Looking up Wolgan Valley towards Newnes from Constance Point. Photo: Brian Fox



The descent of Phil Reed Pass. Photo: Brian Fox

southeasterly and then easterly trend of the gorge.

At 1137, and less than 200m from the junction with Deanes Creek, we reached GR 448 212. This was the site researched by Yuri as a possible way up to the top of the wedging ridge that separates Constance Gorge from Tiger Snake Canyon. Climbing was initially easy but soon evolved into a succession of short, tight almost vertical ravines. Some were filled with loose rocks, others required chimneying techniques. Multiple choices were everywhere. By 1148, we had reached the crest of the ridge, GR 447 212. The open forest ridge crest rises towards the west, where the first of the

pagodas become evident.

At GR 444 211, we threaded our way through several rising passageways between pagodas, some showing residual water flows from the days of rain. Most were dry. The next 50m or so were particularly special. We emerged from the forest and pagodas onto a cliff edge that comprised five very large interlocking pagodas. Looking at the aerial picture, these pagodas form a triangular bastion high above Tiger Snake Creek and Canyon, GR 444 210. On the south side, the drop is over 60m into the depths of the canyon. The views everywhere are spectacular. To the east and south, Deanes Creek is



Constance Point looking south west down the Wolgan Valley towards Donkey Mountain.
Photo: Yuri Bolotin



The pagodas at Tiger Snake Point. Photo: Yuri Bolotin



Geoff Fox standing above Tiger Snake Canyon. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

seen across the void of space; to the north east, a vertical rock wall cuts off the view; to the west, the pagodas form a staircase down to a balcony view of tree tops that have their roots in the canyon floor. Yuri named this place Tiger Snake Point.

It was now 1225 and lunch time. I chose a western pagoda to just sit and enjoy the scenery. The rest of the group were scattered over three other pagodas.

To return to Constance Point, we headed north west through more pagodas and rock platforms and then west, making a descent of about 40m across a broad ravine. This was followed by a corresponding climb, an enjoyable cliff base walk section and then more ascents and descents. On several occasions, planned descent points proved impossible and the next option west was tested. Ultimately, a way was always found.

It was demanding walking and scrambling, and we all sweated buckets. What we did not do enough of was drink more water. At GR 441 212, we crossed the creek that becomes Constance Falls. What I should have done was refill my water bottle and drink deeply. All I did was soak my hat and enjoy the sensation of cooling off. Later, I would pay the price for my error of judgement.

Climbing out of the creek (Constance Gully), a wet ravine was a challenge, GR 440 214. There were no natural features or shrubs to hang onto. Footwear did not grip. Inelegant but dirty methods

worked. The spine of Constance Point ridge was reached at GR 435 216. Relatively flat walking enabled us to pick up the pace, but this is where I came unstuck, cramping to the point where I just had to stop and search the pack for electrolytes and drink deeply. Thomas was a great masseur, a service truly appreciated. It was now 1420, GR 440 225. We were not far from a known descent point back down into Zobels Gully. There are at least three such points.

Yuri then made decisions that shaped the rest of the walk. Geoff and Anna went in search of a known pass. Keith, John and I stayed and rested. The remainder of the party pushed on towards Constance Point. We would regroup after Geoff and Yuri's excursions were completed.

Yuri now takes up the story. At 1425, GR 439 223, alt. 883m, we arrived at the vicinity of the pass down into Zobels Gully that Geoff had mentioned to me at the start of the day: Phil Reed Pass. I consequently modified the route and was now fully dependent on finding this pass. We decided to make this spot our temporary base, leave our packs and split into three groups: several people stayed behind and rested; others joined me on a brisk excursion to Constance Point; whilst this was taking place, Geoff and Anna offered to climb down and locate the top of Phil Reed Pass. I was very grateful for their offer, as I knew this would potentially save a great deal of time and energy for the entire group.

My group proceeded to Constance



On Constance Point; Thomas Ebersol points to his home, the Old Newnes Hotel.
Photo: Brian Fox



Slender Rice Flower, *Pimelea linifolia*. Photo: Brian Fox

Point, some 400m of almost level walk away, arriving there at 1440, GR 447 226, alt. 878m. The views from the point, and indeed along the way, are simply outstanding. To the west and directly opposite us, the gully leading to Minotaur Lair was spread out in all its splendour. We are planning to visit it again soon. To the south west, the Donkey Mountain could be seen at an unusual angle from its narrow side, proudly standing in the middle of the lush, green Wolgan Valley, soaked by the recent rains. Looking north from one of the high pagodas on the point, we could recognise Newnes and see far into the deep Wollemi, including Glen

Trig and the Tayan Pic. Thomas pointed out the Newnes Cabins, 400m below us and several kilometres away. We could spend the whole day there, but knowing that the rest of the group would be waiting for us, we only went as far as the top of the first major drop and took the quickest time possible - just enough to click a few photos.

At 1453, we were back at our temporary base, GR 440 225. I was very glad to hear the good news from Geoff and Anna that, whilst we were exploring Constance Point, they had managed to locate the pass, so, guided by them, we all proceeded down the slope covered in thick scrub to a small clearing where



Michael Keats is "Tail End Charlie" on the way up Zobels Gully. Photo: Brian Fox

there are two slots leading through the cliff line, GR 440 224, alt. 841m, at 1504. There is a rather steep section of rock leading to the slots, and I even took my tape out of the pack intending to set it up, but, firstly, there were few reliable anchor trees around, and secondly, we found a couple of good footholds in the rock, so I packed the tape away and the group started to slowly descend to a small patch of flat ground in front of the double slots. Whilst this was taking place, Rodney checked the slot leading north and pronounced it doable. Geoff had used the southern slot before. At this time in the day, I decided to take the safe option, so everyone followed

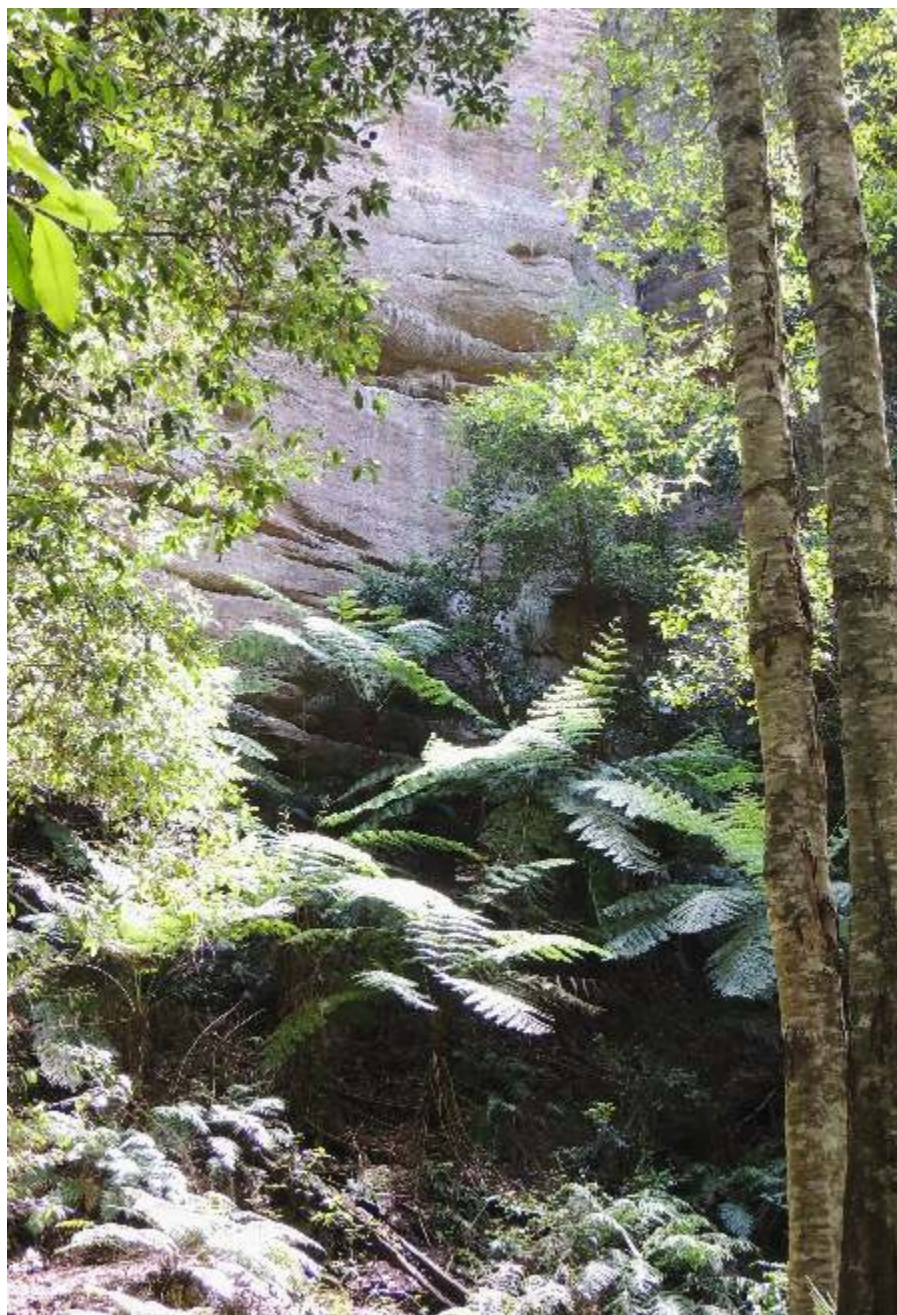
him down underneath the cliffs.

The descent took a bit of time: after all, there were 16 of us, and so the group got a bit spread out underneath the cliffs. I was helping people to come down the steep rocky bit and ended up at the very tail. When I caught up with the group, only about half of them were around, the rest had gone ahead. I then saw Geoff sitting on a rock and applying a blister treatment to his foot, so I stopped the remaining people to wait for him to finish.

When we resumed, a few minutes later, there was no sign of the other group, so we started to sidle down the steep slope



Sheila Zaman and Damon Nomad walking towards the spur which will take them to Constance Point. Photo: Brian Fox



Hemmed in by the cliffs of Constance Gorge. Photo: Brian Fox

covered with trees and leaf litter. After a while, we heard the first group above us. I then realised that they had decided to follow underneath the cliff line, rather than make a direct descent into Zobels Gully. At that time I, too, thought it was a good idea that would add more variety to the walk (it indeed did, but in many more ways than I expected). My party climbed back up, and we were reunited at the base of a small gully, GR 440 226, alt. 813m, at 1531.

The sidling from here on was painfully slow and tiresome, with both the dissected terrain and the debris on the ground tempering our progress and sapping away our energy. Within ten minutes from resuming together, we stood on the edge of a 30m drop, with

no visible way of descent in any direction. To my dismay, I realised that the group was effectively trapped here, until a way forward could be found.

We slowly proceeded for another hundred metres or so northwards, reaching a rock platform above the unforgiving cliff line, GR 440 227, alt. 786m. 1545. At this point, I stopped the group to have a rest; Brian and Rodney went scouting down some slots, whilst Thomas and I decided to have a look at a ledge nearby. Our journey was brief and fruitless. When we returned, Brian and Rodney were not within either the seeing or the hearing range.

I needed to make a quick decision about what to do next. The majority of the group favoured retracing our steps



The impressive cliff line on the eastern side of Constance Gorge. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

to the slot we used to descend from the very top through the first cliff line and then to head straight down the known route into Zobels Gully. This was the safest option, but it would mean a 45 min sidle south (in the opposite direction to where we needed to go to get back), plus a 30 min walk back north underneath the cliff - one hour and a quarter of additional time, conservatively, and most likely more, as the group was now considerably more tired.

If it had been winter time, with its short daylight, my decision would have been obviously in favour of this safe choice. However, I had two strong cards to play in this calculated strategy game - first, that Constance Point was only about 250m away to the north of us (in the direction of our cars), and second, that I knew that Brian had in the past descended from Constance Point straight down to where our cars were, without using the ropes. If this option worked, it would save us a lot of time and energy.

I explained my reasoning to the group, and we began walking towards Constance Point. Brian and Rodney did not come back so I thought, we should proceed regardless, in order not to waste any more precious time - if they had managed to find a way down, we might meet them at the bottom of the cliffs; if they had not, they would catch up with us. Along the way, there was a promising gully, which seemed to be going the right way. I stopped the group and went to investigate, but it

was, once again, a 'no go'.

We trampled on, and were soon directly to the east of Constance Point, some 80m below it. The ground we were walking on seemed to terminate abruptly ahead of us. Being in front of the group, I was the first to come to the edge above the Wolgan River. My heart followed my gaze down the vertical 100m cliffs and the 300m drop all the way to Wolgan Road. At this point, we were 700m away from our cars, but they might as well have been on another planet - totally and utterly unreachable. GR 439 230, alt. 813m, at 1612.

As we had now progressed another half an hour to the north, turning back at this point would have added a further two hours to our journey; and counting the time required to descend into and then walk through Zobels Gully, this would mean at least 3-3.5 hours before we could get back. The group was also very tired by now, and several people had run out of water (the water was shared, so no one was allowed to dehydrate).

I knew that Brian had on another occasion found a way down somewhere underneath Constance Point, but I could not ask him, as he was not with us at that time. I had now played both of my strong cards (getting to Constance Point and relying on Brian's memory of the descent), with no result. But I was not yet going to beat the retreat. I thought, from the available daylight point of view, we could afford to spend perhaps half an hour at this location.

Whilst Thomas (who volunteered his services) and I would scout for a possible break in these impossible cliffs, the group would have extra rest.

At GR 438 229, alt 798m, at 1618, we found a short slot, leading about 10m down to a ledge and took it. From here, I could see a big canyon-looking gully to the west of us; I asked Thomas to go and investigate. Whilst he was doing that, I followed the ledge to the east. It went around a corner and narrowed to about one metre; the cliffs above it had closed right in, but I saw a place where one could crawl underneath the low rock ceiling and then get down another 10m or so, to a half tennis court size flat platform formed by a huge and impregnable orphan rock that had separated from the main cliff many aeons ago. There seemed to be a slot leading down from the base of the rock.

I decided to turn back and hear the news from Thomas before going any further. He had no luck. But, what were these voices we heard just then? These were Rodney and Brian!

My first question, where had they been? They had gone a very long way, looking for a possible descent. The track recorded by Brian's GPS later showed they had tirelessly spent half an hour in this forbidding terrain, covering a distance of at over 300m in one direction and dropping down nearly 80 vertical metres trying to find a break in the cliffs, before turning back. When they arrived to where they left the group, they thought we would be walking back towards the original pass and known way down; they quickly realised this was not the case and found the group on the edge of the cliff. My next question to Brian was, 'Where is



Rodney Nelson atop Tiger Snake Point. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

the way down you had used before?' The answer was, he did not remember this area, so most likely it had been a long way away, on the other (eastern) side of Constance Point. In this terrain, it could mean at least an extra hour before we would even begin to look for ways down. I had only allowed myself half an hour of exploring options before we all turn back, so this was not an option.

On the positive side, I had now two more, very able (but a little bit tired), scouts with me. We had no time to waste. The four of us moved towards the ledge I had found. Thomas and I stayed behind, whilst Brian and Rodney scrambled down onto the flat area below. Rodney then started to test the slot underneath the orphan rock. After a few minutes of anxious waiting, he called, 'No go.' There was one last thing to try before we all turned to walk all the way back.

Rodney had noticed another way radiating from the orphan rock slot that looked like a tunnel. He went down. We waited and waited, but there was no call from him. I was still with Thomas at the ledge, and Brian was down at the flat platform below us. Just to leave no stone unturned, I pointed to Brian a narrow gap in the rocks on the other side of the platform, the furthest away from the slot that they had just tested. I said, 'Brian, I know it does not look likely, but just whilst we are waiting for Rodney to come back, could you have look in there?' Brian walked that way. He was not very hopeful, and neither

was I. Then, I heard his voice, 'It looks promising'.

We swung into action. I had stationed Thomas at the ledge, within an earshot of the group waiting at the cliff edge above, and climbed down to the gap in the rocks where Brian had just disappeared. There was still no news from Rodney. It was probably no more than a minute or two, but it felt like eternity... finally I heard Brian's call, 'It may work, let me get a little further'. I followed Brian down, whilst still making sure that Thomas could hear me as well, if I called out. After another minute ('eternity' again), from far down, I could just distinguish Brian shouting, 'It goes!' This was unbelievable luck, assisted by incredible team work!

The good news was quickly relayed back up to the rest of the group. They slowly started to come down. At that time, Rodney was able to be located (by voice), some 100m down. I thought that he needed to come back, so as not to get separated from us. He eventually joined the group. When we finally caught up, he told me he had descended very far, ascertained that the tunnel slot he had followed also went down (he said it was a harder, but more scenic way), then climbed all the way back again. A feat of fitness few can achieve!

Brian and I stopped below the enormous wall of orange rock we had just conquered, at GR 439 231, alt. 732m, at 1641. In front of us, there were no obstacles, just steep talus slope. We soon saw the first part of the group,

including Michael, finishing their descent through the cliff line. Brian turned his head towards them and said proudly, 'Welcome to Constance Pass!'

The top of the actual pass section midway down from the top of Constance Point is GR 438 230. The same GR applies at the bottom. The pass descent is in several discreet sections: an initial scramble down about 4m; a short easterly ramp walk of about 10m that leads to the ledge; then another descent from the ledge that leads to a suspended platform area (described by Yuri as half a tennis court). This area is surrounded by several huge orphan rocks. The way down is to the east again down a steep scree slope and then hard against a vertical rock face. Significantly, no ropes or tapes are required. The pass took on average 10 minutes for the descent to the top of the talus slope.

Once on the talus slope, a whole mixture of feelings and emotions came into play: euphoria for the success of making a descent believed to be impossible; relief that a retrace was not necessary; great thirst as we were all partly dehydrated; tiredness from the exertion and

jubilant that the walk was possible. It took a further forty minutes to negotiate the terrain to the Wolgan River, walk some of the permanent way and cross the log to the vehicles. Total distance walked 11.8km, total ascents 802m.

In his notes Yuri wrote, "This adventure, and the successful completion of it, would not be possible without the amazing teamwork of all the advance scouts, and the patience and trust the group had in its leader. I do not take this trust for granted and am deeply grateful for it."



Anna Ossig-Bonanno crossing the log used as the access point to Zobels Gully. Photo: Brian Fox

END NOTE

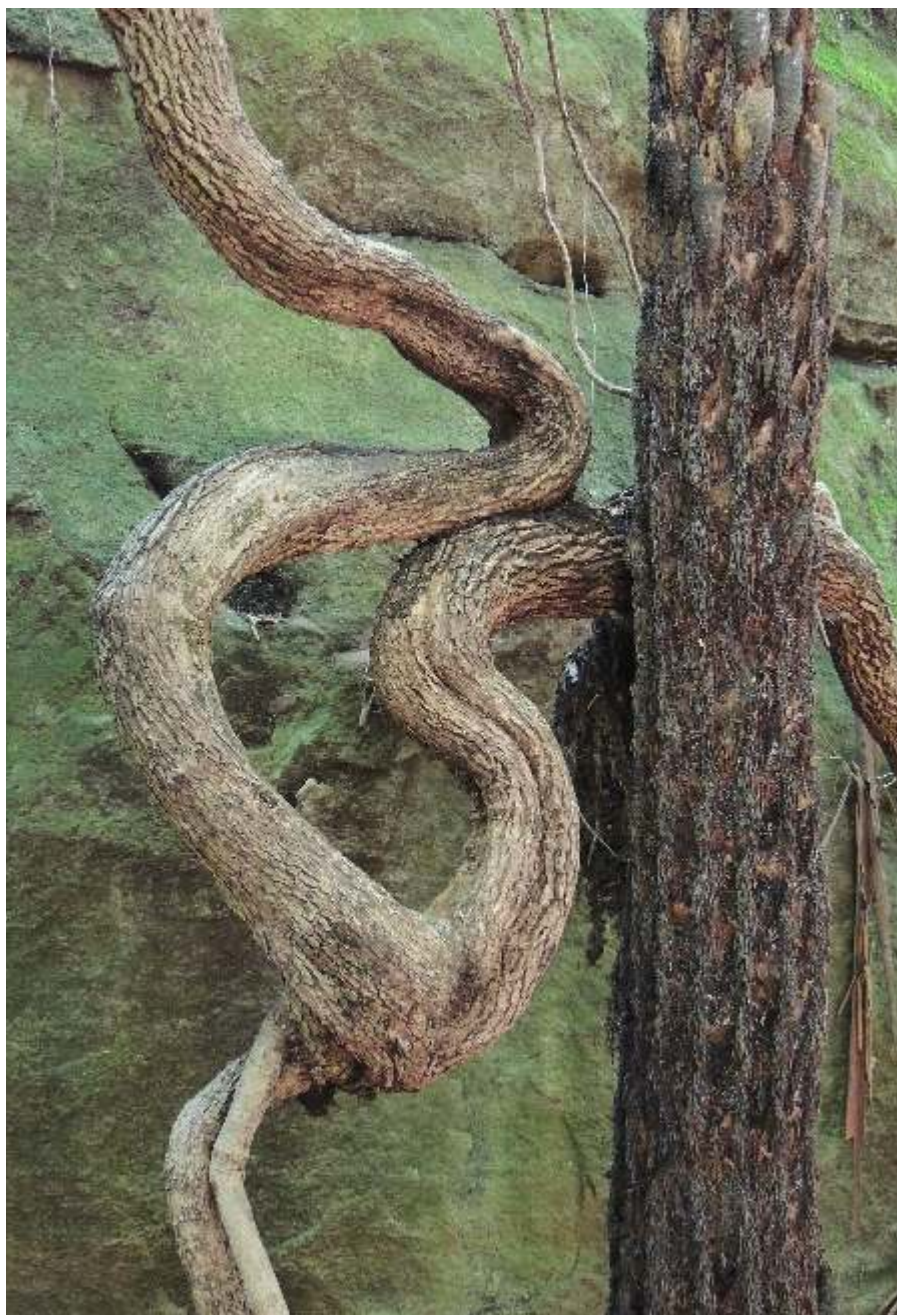
The analysis of our GPS track later on showed that the top of the pass, where the group waited, is 80m below the top of Constance Point, and about 300m north, north east from it. Observations from above showed that there should be no serious obstacles in reaching the

top of Constance Pass directly from Constance Point. Therefore, a possibly better way to do this walk in the future is to head out to Constance Point and make the descent directly from there, using the newly found Constance Pass. There is also interesting and complex terrain on the plateau top to be explored.

TABLE OF TIMES, LOCATIONS AND GRID REFERENCES

Time	Location	Grid Ref	Time	Location	Grid Ref
0904	Wolgan Road, Newnes	434 234	1337	View spot	439 216
0940	In Zobels Gully	440 231	1344	On main ridge	440 222
0956	Evidence of a made track	440 228	1420	Party split to explore options	440 225
1018	Morning tea, 11 minutes	441 224	1457	Group reforms	440 225
1035	Watershed Zobels Gully / Constance Gorge	441 222	1511	At cairn above Phil Reed Pass	440 224
1108	Constance Falls	442 214	1516	Complex slot descent	440 224
1124	Deep in Constance Gorge	445 213	1536	Heading down	440 226
1137	Climbing out of Constance Gorge	448 212	1552	On high ledge	440 227
1202	On ridge	444 211	1602	Sidling below a cliff line	439 228
1213	Tiger Snake Point	444 210	1614	At Constance Point, scouting activity, 30 minutes	438 230
1225	Lunch on Tiger Snake Point, 16 minutes	444 210	1650	Commence descent of Constance Pass	438 230
1305	Slot descent and then ascent	441 212	1728	At vehicles	434 234
1319	Crossing tributary above Constance Falls	441 212			





Nature has its quirks. Photo: Brian Fox