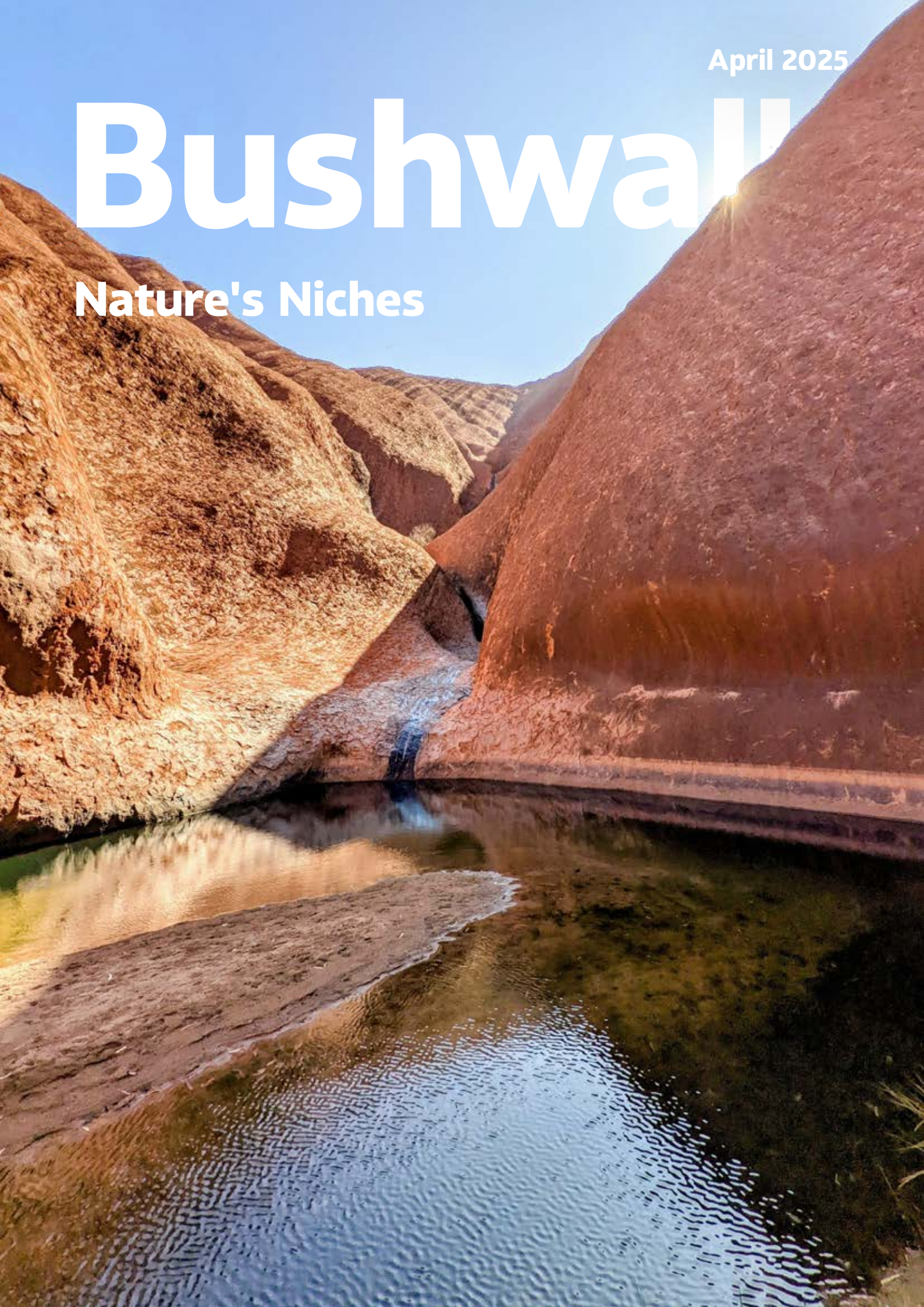


April 2025

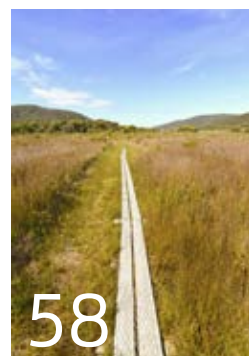
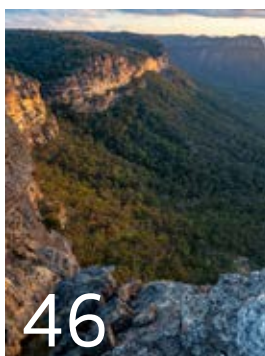
Bushwall

Nature's Niches



Contents

- 4 **Uluru Walks**
John's birthday walks
- 14 **Cooling Off in The Colo**
Heart-in-mouth bravery
- 24 **Forster to Anna Bay**
A beautiful coast walk
- 40 **Urupukapuka**
That island that begins with a 'U'
- 46 **Photo Gallery**
A selection of stunning vistas
- 58 **Luxury hiking developments**
Are they supporting nature and community?



**Always Was
Always Will Be
Aboriginal Land**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of this vast land on which we live and explore. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this great south land.

Editor's Letter



Hi all,

I hope this edition finds you well and ready for some autumn adventures.

This issue takes us across diverse landscapes, from the heart of Australia to coastal tracks and even across the ditch. John shares his memorable birthday exploration of Uluru, tackling the Base Walk and experiencing the magic of Mutitjulu Waterhole and Kantju Gorge (keep an eye out for the next edition as he continues this trip). Rob recounts a challenging "Cooling Off in The Colo" trip, navigating the stunning gorge, tricky descents, and helping a mate after a dramatic fall. Greg continues his epic "Dreamtime to Eden" coastal journey, taking us on the beautiful 118km stretch from Forster to Anna Bay, including the new Tomaree Coastal Walk. We also venture to New Zealand as Ian explores the scenic trails of Urupukapuka Island in the Bay of Islands.

Beyond the walks, feast your eyes on the stunning images in our Photo Gallery, our photographers capture stunning echoes of hidden places. Then we ponder the role of "Luxury hiking developments" in our national parks. Are the promises of extra money to support nature actually playing out, or are we allowing the privatisation of these places by stealth.

As always, if you have a story to share with the bushwalking community, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to Eva with your articles, photos, or ideas for a future edition.

Happy walking and reading!

Matt :)

Matt McClelland (aka Wildwalks)

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Cover image
Mutitjulu Waterhole
by Matt McClelland

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Please send any articles, suggestions or advertising enquiries to Eva. We would love you to be part of the magazine and we are here to help.

Declaration

The opinions stated in articles are those of the authors and not of those involved in the production of this edition. If you are worried about transparency or any editorial aspect please either write to me or raise the issue on Bushwalk.com. The bushwalking community is a small world and paths often cross. To improve transparency I thought it would be helpful to list my main associations within the outdoor community.

I operate Bushwalk.com, Wildwalks.com and Overlandtrack.com, a number of other smaller websites (and related apps) and have written several walking guide books, published by Woodslane. I contract to National Parks Association NSW and I am a member of the Walking Volunteers. I have had contracts with state and local government departments regarding bushwalking and related matters. I have also partnered with a large number of other organisations in environmental campaigns. Any commercial advertising or sponsorship will be clear in the magazine.

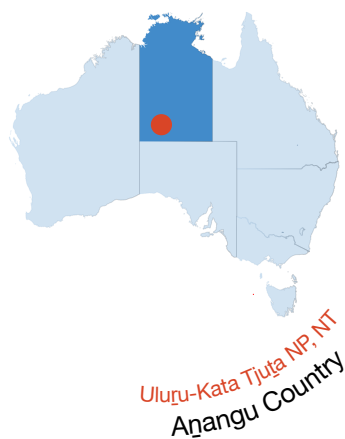
Warning

Like all outdoor pursuits, the activities described in this publication may be dangerous. Undertaking them may result in loss, serious injury or death. The information in this publication is without any warranty on accuracy or completeness. There may be significant omissions and errors. People who are interested in walking in the areas concerned should make their own enquiries, and not rely fully on the information in this publication.

The publisher, editor, authors or any other entity or person will not be held responsible for any loss, injury, claim or liability of any kind resulting from people using information in this publication.

Please consider joining a walking club or undertaking formal training in other ways to ensure you are well prepared for any activities you are planning. Please report any errors or omissions to the editor or in the forum at Bushwalk magazine.

Uluru Walks



Text and photos
John Walker

To celebrate a major birthday last July, my wife asked me what I wanted to do.



Approaching some welcome shade on the eastern side of Uluru



Open plain vegetation

I'm pretty much the polar opposite of a party animal, so I said that I'd always wanted to visit the Red Centre and Uluru. Up until then, we had been to every state and territory except the NT. We had planned a top end trip several years earlier, but Covid put an end to that and we haven't yet rescheduled it. So we agreed to fly to Ayers Rock airport for a five night stay at the resort/town of Yulara near Uluru, as a base from where we could do some exploring. My wife is not a bushwalker or camper so we opted for a basic but comfortable hotel.

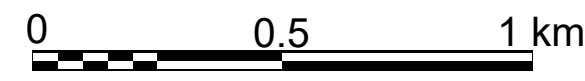
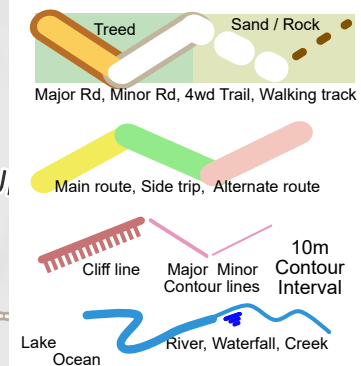
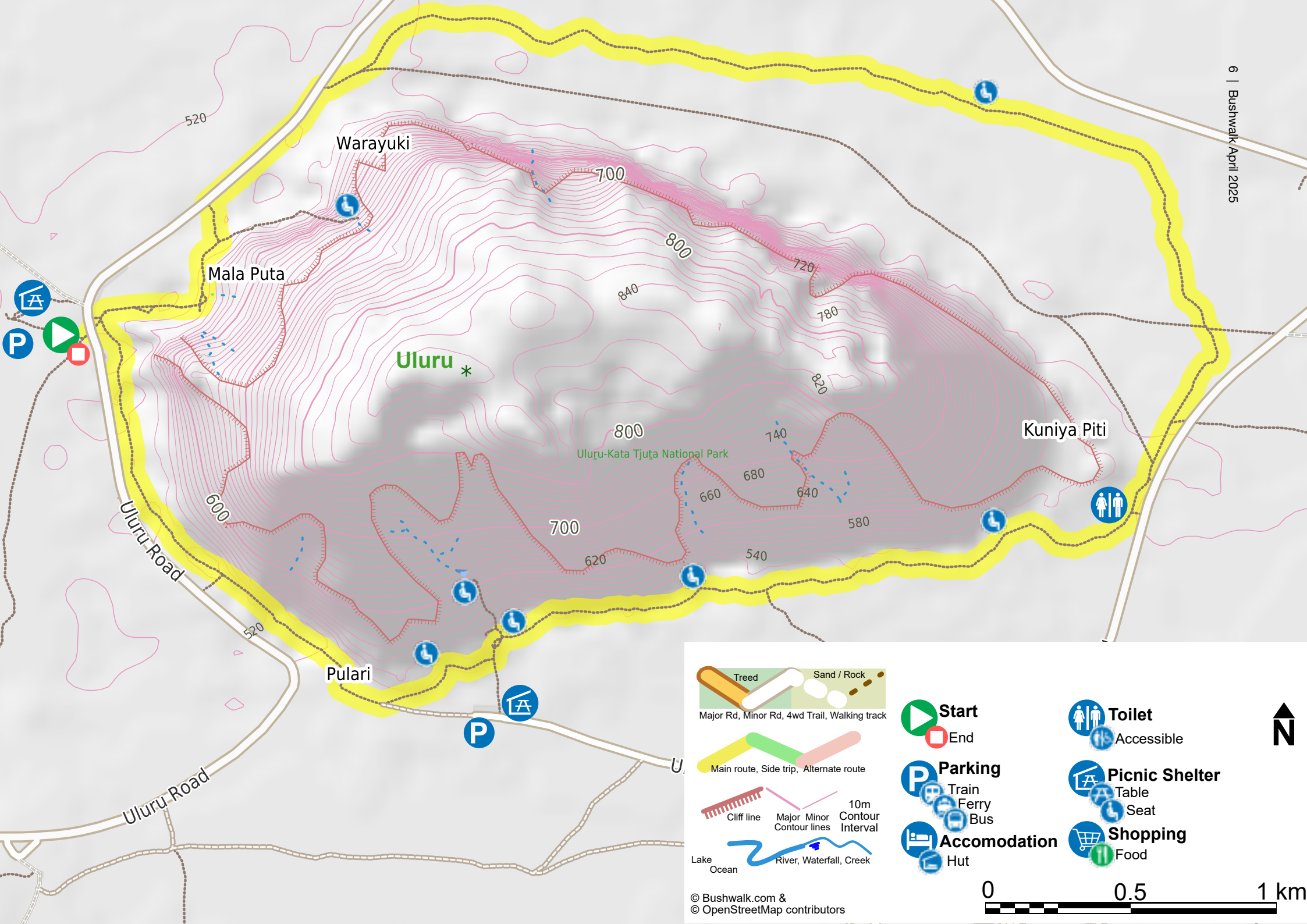
Our first glimpse of both Uluru and Kata Tjuta from the aircraft was inspiring, fuelling my enthusiasm for our visit. We picked up our rental car at the airport, ready for several days of adventure. I had not fully appreciated how cold it can get out there at that time of year, depending on the time of day. Fortunately I'd done some research beforehand, so down jackets and other warm gear had been packed along with lighter options.

I had researched walks in the lead up to the trip and identified a couple of easier ones that we could both do, and something more

challenging for me as a solo outing. As it turned out, I ended up visiting both Uluru and Kata Tjuta twice, but the challenging solo aspect of the plan went awry. More about that in a future article. For something different we had booked a morning camel safari on one of the days, and I was also looking forward to that.

One of the first things that you notice is the talcum powder consistency red dust that makes up much of the landscape and gets into everything. Don't even bother trying to completely clean it off shoes and clothing until back home. Even then you may have trouble removing it. Just enjoy the novelty and wear clothing that makes it less obvious. And don't wear anything white!

It is good to note that many of the walks around Uluru are wheelchair accessible (gradient less than 1:10), including the 10.6km Base Walk, in ideal conditions. It would be wise to contact the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park office for current conditions and access before setting out. Rain may cause large, deep and muddy puddles in some places,



and at times deep sand drifts can also cause problems for wheelchairs. You may still be able to do sections of the walk even when it's not possible to complete the entire circuit. Many of the side trips do have steps or narrow access points. There are regular seating areas, with 4 sheltered seating areas 2km apart on average (the largest gap is 3.6km). There are toilets at Kuniya Piti, Mala Carpark and the Uluru Visitors Centre.

Uluru - Base Walk

My first challenge was to convince my wife to complete the 10km base walk around Uluru with me the day after we arrived. I was aware that it's pretty much dead flat and should be achievable for her if we took a relaxed pace. I was also still recovering from a total knee replacement, although mostly back to functioning normally. In fact the level of difficulty of the terrain was possibly the easiest I have ever done, anywhere. As is often the case there, it was a bright sunny day and things warmed up fairly quickly after the early morning chill. The 20 something minutes drive from Yulara for the first time is a



Tough survivors



Singing Honeyeater (*Gavicalis virescens*)



Wandering along the trail

spectacular sight. Uluru dominates the horizon as you approach, becoming ever larger and more impressive with every kilometre. After parking at the Mala car park we took the preferred clockwise route around the rock. I noted the now-closed climbing route as we walked past. We decided to skip the Kantju Gorge side trip, as a very large tour group was about to enter, cancelling any appeal it had at that moment. However we did return and visit there another day, with only a handful of people about. Continuing on we eventually left the crowds and only occasionally encountered other walkers or cyclists for most of the walk.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the Anangu people as the traditional owners of the locations we visited. We met many of them, either working at Yulara or in the national park, or giving talks on aspects of traditional Aboriginal life and culture. There are



A lone sentinel

many sacred sites around Uluru, and signage asking not to take photographs in those designated places, mainly around the north east face. All photos that I took were taken outside of restricted zones. Both at Uluru and



A welcome shady stroll



More than just a rock

at Kata Tjuta, you do need to remain vigilant when taking photos to ensure that you are within a designated area where photography is allowed. Sometimes you can shoot a feature from one angle but not another, or you may need to be some distance away. Anyway just be aware of the signage before you hit the shutter release, and if you do photograph something in error please delete it so as not to cause any offence.

For a very flat landscape that can look barren and desolate from a distance, up close it's full of life. I spent much of the morning photographing wildflowers and birdlife as we circumnavigated the rock. Well, attempting to photograph birdlife at least. Their fleeting visits to nearby branches don't provide much time to compose a shot.

Stops were enjoyed for morning tea and lunch at the small shelter sites on the trail. The weather became quite warm as we progressed and any shade was welcome. Thankfully, traversing the eastern side gave us that during the warmest part of the walk.

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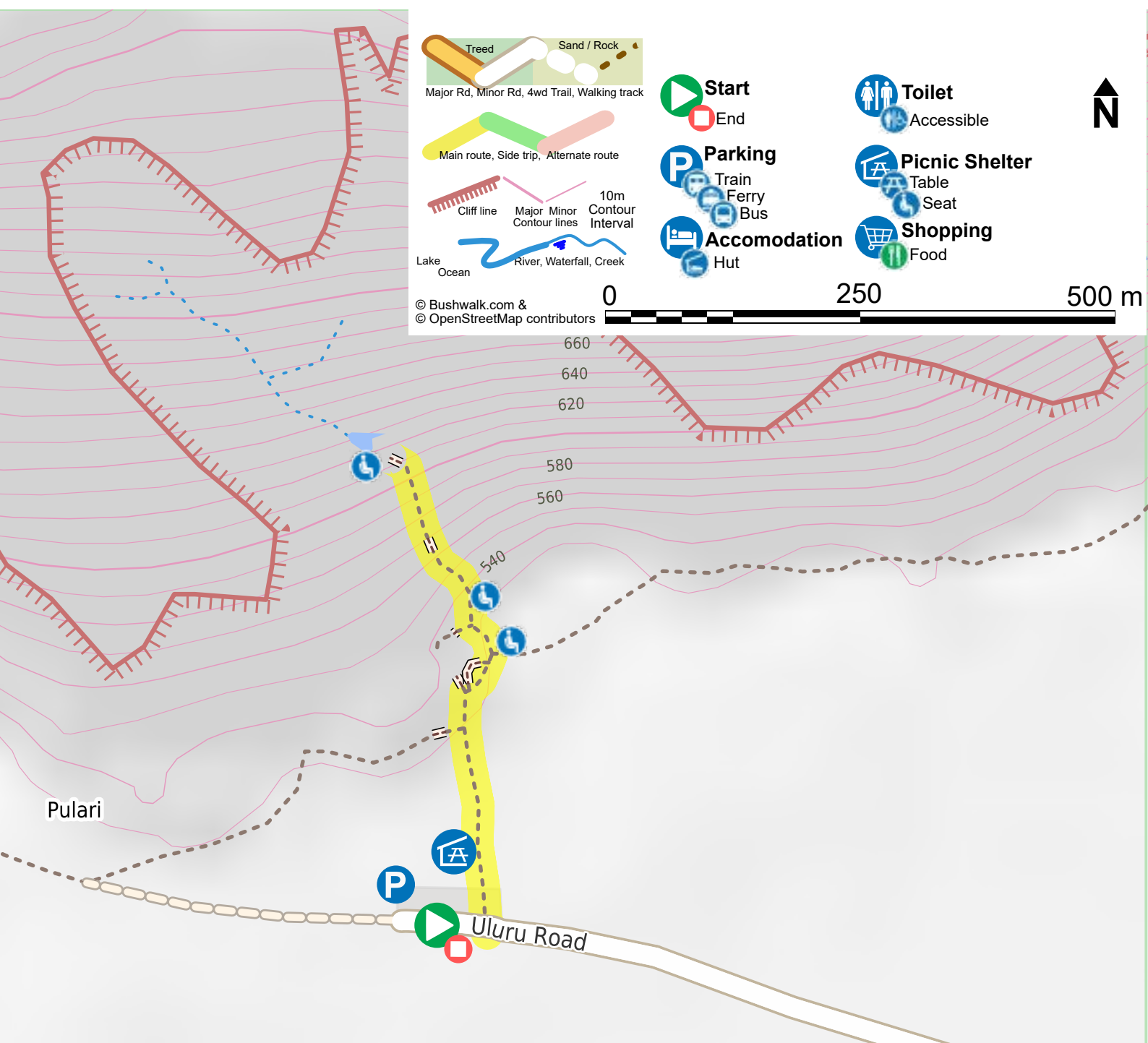
Brachyscome Ciliaris

I could not imagine being here during the summer months, and can appreciate the warning signs about dehydration etc.

At one point the sight of a Segway tour group left me scratching my head, and approaching the Kuniya side trip to Muṯitjulu Waterhole, the cacophony of noise from yet another tour bus group already there was so incredibly loud that we very quickly opted to continue on and come back at some other time. That is not my idea of an enjoyable experience. We pressed on back to the Mala car park in now very warm conditions and little shade, but had both really enjoyed the walk.

Uluru - Muṯitjulu Waterhole and Kantju Gorge

Today my original plan had been to visit Kata Tjuta and walk the Valley of the Winds full circuit while my wife attended a bush tucker walk back at Yulara. However the weather conspired against me, and we had unexpected and quite heavy rainfall in the morning. Once the weather cleared a bit we decided to head back to Uluru and visit both Muṯitjulu Waterhole and Kantju Gorge, which we had skipped early in the week due to the crowds and associated noise. Thankfully this time there were few people about, probably





A very wet Uluru approaching Mutitjulu Waterhole



Mutitjulu Waterhole in the wet

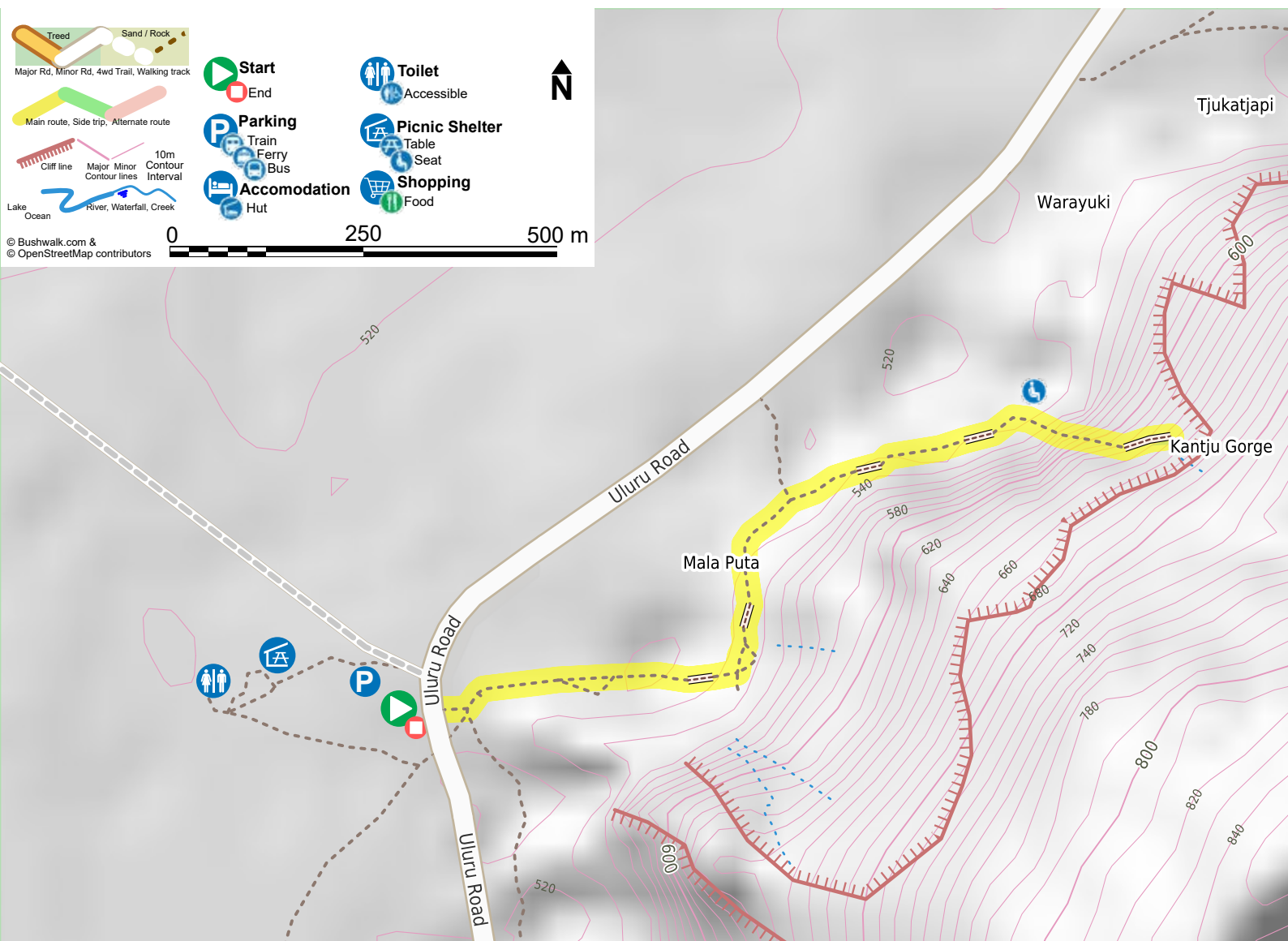
due to the weather. We had passed both locations on the Base Walk. They are a fair distance apart so we had to drive to each separately.

Starting with Muṯitjulu Waterhole it was still raining when we arrived, so umbrellas were carried on the short walk in. On arrival at the waterhole the waterfalls running off Uluru were spectacular and something I had not been expecting to see. It probably also gave the waterhole a very different appearance to what I think it would be when dry.

Moist dark clouds still remained overhead and my photos of Uluru at that time much different from typical postcard shots.

After a short drive we arrived at the Mala car park and retraced our Base Walk steps to the Kantju Gorge turnoff. This pleasant stroll is along a well vegetated track into a narrowing slot along a watercourse. The shade here is a bit more expansive than elsewhere around the rock. We appreciated it as the rain had now stopped and the temperature rose quickly after the sun appeared.

There is a lot of interpretive signage around both Uluru and Kata Tjuta, which explain the legends and stories applicable to the various spots that you visit. I won't try and replicate any of that information here, but I read almost all of them and it does help you appreciate the history and reasons for the particular use of a site, or why it may be sacred.





The main face of Kantju Gorge



Arriving at Kantju Gorge endpoint

Camel Safari

OK, I acknowledge that this is not actually bushwalking. I've included it as it was a trip through the desert environment that traversed terrain most people probably would not normally walk through out here. And it was something different, and a bit of fun. I have to note that camels are feral animals in Australia, and problematic for the environment, but have existed in the red centre for so long that they have become part of the landscape. The history surrounding them is interesting and I was fortunate to have a friendly one that behaved well.

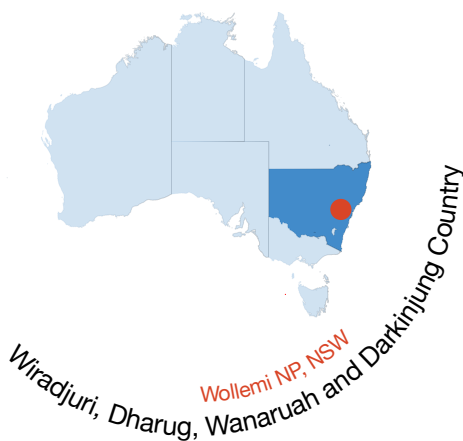


Dromedary train

Cooling Off in The Colo

Text and photos
Rob Wildman

Walkers Rob Wildman, Helen Jones, Christine Smith and Clay O'Brien were cooling off in the Colo from Friday 28 Feb 2025 to Sunday 2 March 2025.



Descending to Wollemi Creek
Clay O'Brien



Clay, Helen and Chris at the start
Rob Wildman

Day 1: Colo Heights to Wollemi Creek and Colo River Junction, 10.5km, 6.75 hours

We were crisscrossing the boulder strewn creek bed looking for easier routes to an exit point. This took us up sloping, fern covered, vine strangling stretches that used up a lot of energy. Clay was just ahead of me and about to negotiate a log that blocked his path when his left foot, which was unknowingly on a litter-covered sloping rock, started to slide. In his rush to stop the slide he reached out, only to find his right foot now sliding quickly as well. In a second he was flat on his face heading down the rock. I looked up to see him disappearing over the edge and just held my breath. The ledge revealed a three metre drop to the creek bed below where he landed feet first and then toppled backwards onto his pack. All we heard then were his screams of pain.

The Colo River is a magnificent gorge slicing its way from the western part of the Wollemi National Park right through to the Nepean. It is the playground for many adventurous walkers, especially those with climbing skills to match the sheer vertical cliffs which line the river for long stretches.

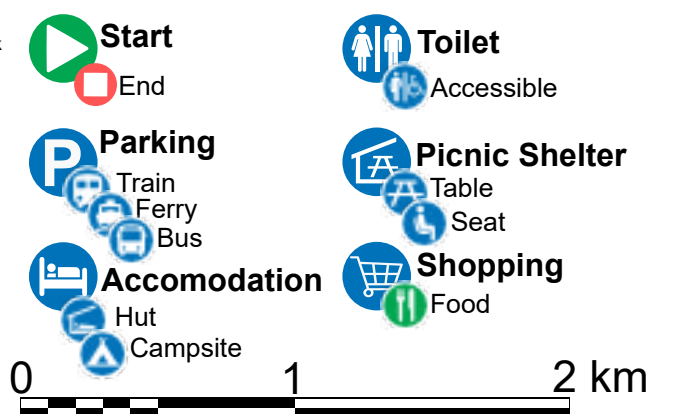
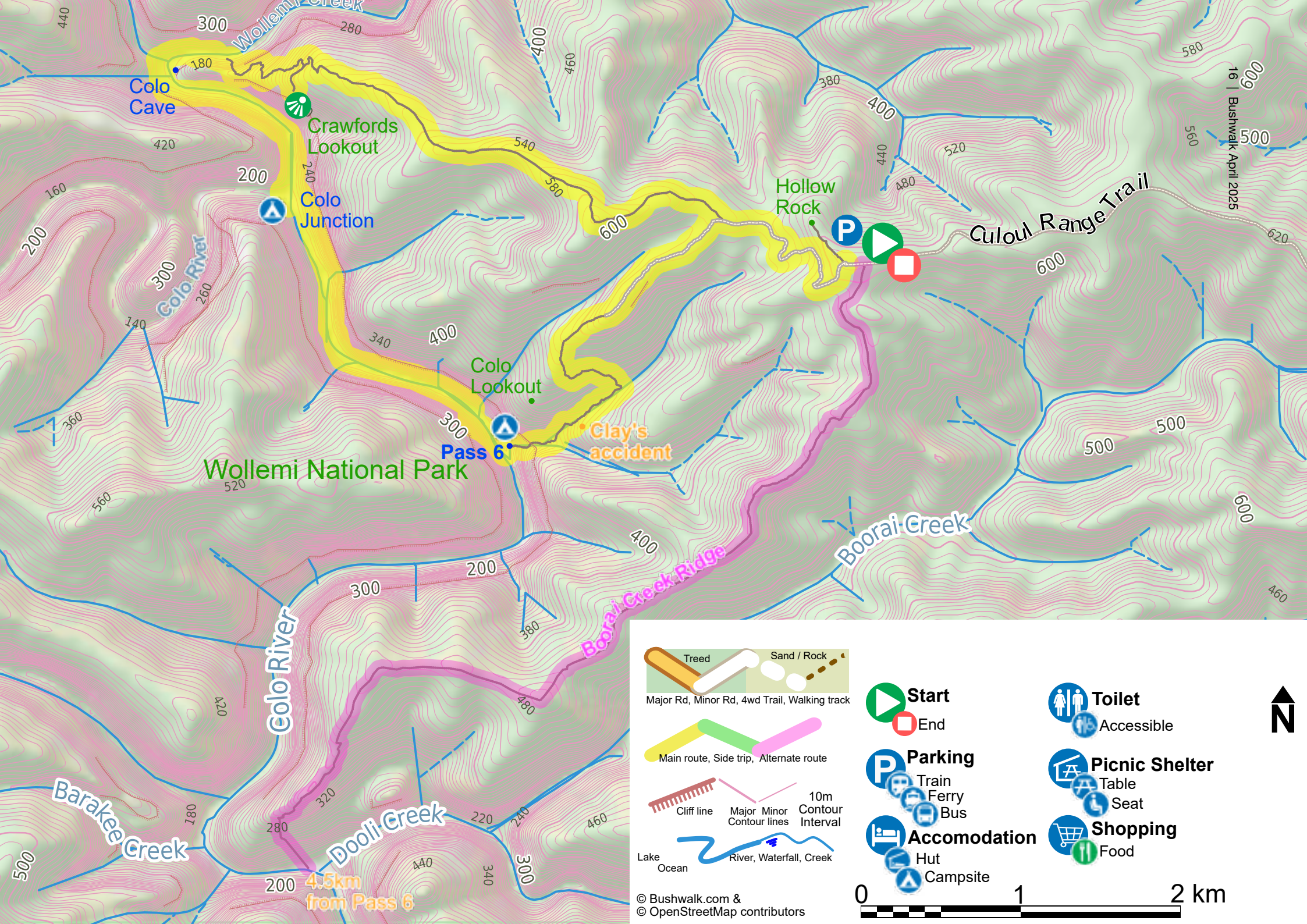


Chris and Helen stopping for morning tea high above
the river by Rob Wildman

We had decided to make what Anthony Dunk calls a 'two day hard' walk into three days and to also cut it short. Yes, wimps! The next few days were forecasted to be oven hot so taking a few short cuts was definitely part of the plan. The beaches along this very beautiful watercourse are so inviting that you just want to spend as much time as you can on them and avoid thinking about the climb back to the car.

As much as the walk is difficult, so is the access road to get to the start. After driving seventeen kilometres north of Colo Heights petrol station, the indistinct turnoff to the Culoul Range trail sneaks off to the left. This is actually a quite pleasant twelve kilometre road but it does have some short steep sections and another part where it passes over the basalt layer which is soft and potentially very boggy. While it is not strictly 4WD territory, it is when conditions are wet.

We arrived around 9:15 and pulled up at the turning circle. This spot is the logical place to leave your car but, of course, we foolishly thought it would be better to drive to the actual start of the ridge track.



© Bushwalk.com &
© OpenStreetMap contributors



Pressing on, with the acacia closing in and seriously scratching both sides of the car, we sheepishly decided to back out – not so easy. With more damage done to the poor old car, we parked and headed off, by now around 9:45.

The first five hundred metres is a gentle downhill along the old 4WD track which, after our turnoff, eventually continued to the helipad, but once, implausibly, went much further. At the junction the right turn takes you onto another old 4WD track, barely recognisable as once being a road. This was our track. The walk out along the ridge is delightful, with views popping up at every rise and vistas of the cliffs along the Wollemi Creek suddenly giving us an idea of what we were in for.

The vegetation started to become more sparse as we neared the cliffs and then suddenly we were starting to drop through the first small cliff lines, views of the gorge ahead opening up everywhere.

Deceptively, the route (sometimes indistinct in this area) falls down to what can only be described as like being on the rim of a Venus Fly Trap. Both Clay and I were both feeling vertiginous. The creek could be seen a very long and steep way down.

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Deceptively, the route falls down to what can only be described as like being on the rim of a Venus Fly Trap.



Looking down from Crawfords Lookout to Wollemi Creek
Clay O'Brien

Almost by accident, we stumbled onto the track which swings around the front of the ridge and brings you to the fabulous Crawford lookout. It's a lot to take in as you are both amazed at the closeness of the river almost directly below and the very rocky and broken ridge leading down to the bottom. It just looks so inviting, especially on this day which was expected to be hot.

Heading back along this track, we found the first of the pack-passing drops onto the next level. This pass is unusual in that it literally swings to the right to lower altitude and this then allows another pack passing section to take you under the cliffs. It gradually works back under the overhangs and heads back towards the brow of the ridge.

At the second large drop, Clay was again the keen explorer and dropped his pack before climbing down after it. Except that it didn't stay there and rolled over slowly, and then rolled again, picking up speed as it rolled and bounced toward the next cliff. It did stop, propped between two saplings on the edge of the next major cliff. We did retrieve it but it zapped lots of energy from our dehydrating bodies.

And energy we really needed. By the time we had got to the top of the cliffs, the temperature was nudging thirty-two degrees and we were now directly under the sun's midday rays. Unknowingly we were getting quite dehydrated and had to stop several times on the way down just to rest and fill the tank. Hitting the creek at the bottom saw us do full immersions in the cool water.

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Unknowingly we were getting quite dehydrated and had to stop several times on the way down just to rest and fill the tank.

It had taken us only about an hour to get to the cliff tops but almost an hour and a half to descend to the welcoming creek below. Despite the short walk we were exhausted and really needed the long break we took for lunch. The one kilometre walk from the creek down to the Colo junction consisted of half a kilometre of rock platforms (nice!) and



Resting at lunch on Wollemi Creek. Note the wet gear. By Chris Smith



Chris and Clay at 1st Camp Rob Wildman



Colo river at Camp 1 looking downstream
Chris Smith

half a kilometre of big boulder hopping, up and down the slope on the side of the creek (not so nice!) but, like the happy ending on a Disney movie, the last short section leads onto a high grassy flat on the corner of the junction (very nice!). The hills were alive! But seeing the open and inviting flat sandy beach on the other side of the river, we decided to move on and spread ourselves there.

Most of us had decided that the hot weather was going to continue through the night, so we erected our tarps, stripped off the flies of the tents and looked forward to a benign but humid night.

Except for the burning log! For whatever reason, habit or desire, Clay gathered firewood and started a small fire. But, with the weather being so hot, we couldn't get near it. There was, however, a tree stump which was near it and part way through dinner we noticed smoke emitting from the stump.

After dousing it and then heading to bed, I was woken in the night to the sight of flames licking the side of the trunk. I guessed that the stump was already alight down in the bowels of its roots in the sand, possibly from the last bushfire, and it was now hot enough



Colo and Wollemi Creek Junction. Crawfords Lookout is visible high on the ridge behind
Rob Wildman

to actually start burning. In the morning we poured as much water on the stump as we could and left, wondering if the burning would linger on in places we could not reach.

Day 2: Colo Junction to Pass 6, 2.8km, 1.15 hours

So now we had a choice; we were either going to plough down the river six or seven kilometres to the Boorai Creek junction and take the steep but safe route back to the car or we would brave the unknown Pass 6, one of Bob Buck's original passes out of the Colo. Mr Buck had spent many years in his early life exploring and documenting all the passes he could find out of the Colo (there are over thirty). Some years later, poor Bob was involved in a car accident and could never walk his wonderful Colo again. None of us had been through here so we decided to go early to Pass 6, have a look and then if impassable, trudge on to the Boorai Creek camp spot.

The river at this point, and for the next two kilometres, is silted up with sand. Which means that you can just walk down the stream, avoiding the deeper pools and skipping along the many sandbanks in the middle of the river. The walk is spectacular. You are surrounded on both sides by towering

cliffs, broken up into all shapes and colours. We were early enough to enjoy this in the extensive shadows of the cliffs. With the day promising to be another hot one, we had pitched camp and were at Pass 6, two kilometres downstream in just over an hour. Pass 6 is marked in the river by a massive rock fall which spills right across the river and onto the other side. This is visible from a fair way upstream and is intriguing in its structure, very large boulders falling into and across one another.

The next hour or so was critical. We had expected some difficulty in scaling this pass and with Clay being an amputee (with one arm) we had to find a way which would be acceptable to him and to which he would feel comfortable. We found the first, professionally installed rope, which allowed us to scale the fissure up to the first platform. Helen and I then pushed on directly up the creek, crawling on all fours through a small cave, until we came to a massive blank wall. Wasn't going to be this way!

Coming back down, we then saw the second rope hanging down over on the southern side of the ravine. Following this led to a ledge



Camp 2 and Helen at edge of large swimming hole
Rob Wildman

which had another rope dangling over the edge but this one looked like it had been a Bunnings special and not a climbing rope. With difficulty, as the wall of the ledge sloped backwards, we managed to get up and over. Helen checked that this had broken the back of the climb and we now had to ascertain whether Clay would be able to get through what we had just been through.



Looking up into Pass 6
Chris Smith



Clay and Chris at Camp 2 - in the distance is the entrance to Pass 6
Rob Wildman



Looking down the Colo from Pass 6
Chris Smith



Crossing the Colo on last day before hitting the
quicksand
Chris Smith

With a lot of help and heart-in-mouth bravery, he did mount almost all the route and then confidently decided that it was acceptable. This would then be tomorrow's exit.

With the worst decision now over, we stripped down and spent the next few hours either swimming in the very large and deep pool right next to the beach or snuggled up to the rockfall in the river to experience the 'spa'. The water was by now quite warm; we realised that the sun did a great job of being a heater the day before and we kept returning to the water between meals, just lapping up the fact that we had the rest of the day to frolic.

Day 3: Pass 6 to Hollow Rock Car Park, 6.3km, 4.5 hours

Given there was no relief from the heat during the night, we decided to head off as early as we could, starting at 7:30. Wanting dry boots to use on the climb up through Pass 6, we crossed the river hanging onto boot laces

and all the other gear. I was the only one to fall into one of the quicksand spots, which are prevalent all along this part of the river. It is impossible to tell where they are and this time, I went down to my waist, wetting almost everything including the camera bag. No pictures of the pass!

Even though we had scoured the pass route the day before, it still took us about an hour and a half to get through the first hundred metres of the creek and start to feel we were past the ravine- blocking boulders. The creek still presented lots of sections where we were crawling halfway up the slopes on either side in order to move to the next flat section. At least it was cool and we weren't getting blasted by the sun. The rainforest surrounding us was a delight with lots of soft earth, mosses, rotting logs and vines looping down from coachwood trees above. And of course leeches!

We passed the first creek which swung off to our right, and which can be followed up to Boorai Ridge (leave that for a later trip) and in the small cave which formed the dry waterfall we found evidence of earlier human habitation: a tuna can. Luckily there was a pad most of the time and interspersed between it disappearing and re-appearing, we found useful cairns to reassure us that this was indeed the right way.

And then the fall.

We all were standing there horrified at Clay disappearing over the edge and rushed down to the creek bed to find him still talking but lying very still. Chris, a registered nurse for many years, used all her skills to assist him with pain relief and to check out what damage had been done. He had fallen onto a sandy patch of creek; to the right, a metre away, was a spear-like branch sticking out of the sand and to the left was a large awkward shaped rock, both of which would have meant much worse injuries.



The ledge and patient Clay
Clay O'Brien

We emptied Clay's pack and shuffled everything into each other's packs, then strapped his empty rucksack onto the back of Chris' pack and helped him up. He was obviously in pain but at least he could walk, even over the rough surface we had to negotiate. By the time we had found the exit from the creek and then were halfway up the slope, which was still covered in after-fires regrowth, Clay was able to take the empty pack back from Chris.

Suddenly we burst out of the vine-filled undergrowth and dropped onto what was the original old timber getting 4WD road, almost unrecognisable now as a road. We rested as we were now getting into the sun and had been drinking lots of water to get through a very humid morning. The packs weighed a ton with the extra weight but just then, the track turned up the hill in order to scale the ridge and to reach the old helicopter pad at the top. I had a navigational embarrassment at this point and kept telling everyone we were almost there, forgetting that there was at least another kilometre to go to the turnoff we took on the way in. "Never mind" I was told but I know I didn't want to do that extra kilometre as much as anyone else. The sun was now relentless and the slog to the car seemed to take forever.

In the end, the walk from the river to the car took us only about four and a half hours; we were quite happy at this point to be out of the sun and in the air conditioning and on our way back to refreshments.

This is the shortest loop walk in this part of the Colo but there are several others which would make great weekend walks or, as we did, leisurely 3 day walks. The tracks that are there are now negotiable and not filled with the horrible vines we had for several years after the fires.

The Colo gorge is quite special; the depth of the gorge, the sheer ferocity of the rock walls above you and being part of one of the largest pieces of wilderness in Wollemi National Park leaves you wondering what else is out there to be found.



Wollemi Creek and the descent ridge above
Clay O'Brien

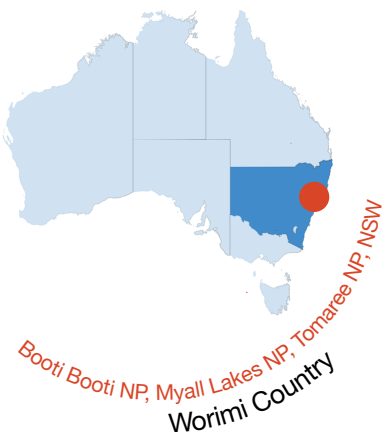
Forster to Anna Bay Coast Walk

Text and photos
Greg Keaney

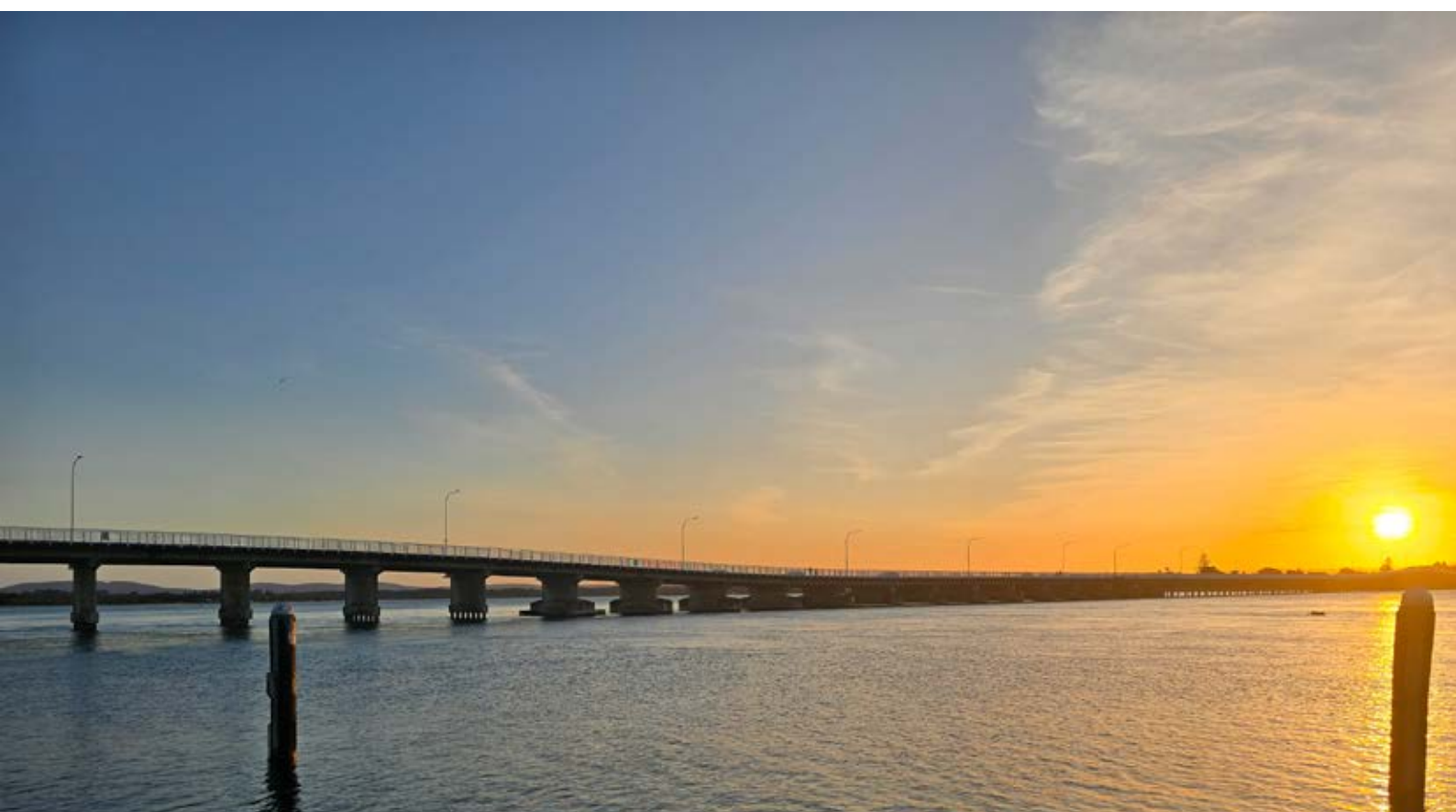
The ocean stirs the heart, inspires the imagination and brings eternal joy to the soul.

Robert Wyland

Greg is walking from 'Dreamtime to Eden' along the length of the NSW coast. The first five stages of the walk appear in previous issues of this magazine (commencing in June 2024). In this article Greg recounts the 6th stage of the coast walk; 5 days and 118km from Forster to Anna Bay including the recently opened Tomaree Coastal Walk.



Day 1: One Mile Beach Forster



Day 1: Sunset over the Forster Tuncurry Bridge

I'm doing a 'thousand mile, thousand beaches' NSW coastal camino, aiming to walk almost every beach and headland of this magnificent edge of the Pacific. I do the walk in stages and this article recounts Stage 6, from Forster on the Coolongolook River to Anna Bay a little south of Port Stephens. This stage was 5 days of incredibly varied coastal sauntering, a few challenges, idyllic scenery and some splendidly isolated beaches and headlands. Just glorious!

Day 1: Forster to Elizabeth Beach 28km, 10 hours

Headed out at first light for the first day's walk southwards to Elizabeth Beach. I had stayed the previous night in Forster (where I did make sure, for quest purity's sake, to walk across the beautiful bridge from Tuncurry).

The Bicentennial Walk from Forster Beach past Forster Ocean Baths, Second Head Lookout, Pebbly Beach, The Tanks (a unique place to swim with natural horizontal rock shelves making a huge pool) and Pine Point Lookout made for an excellent dawn start to the day. I had a post-sunrise break at

Bennetts Head Lookout before dropping down to perfect little One Mile Beach and its amazing dune at its northern end. Then it was around Turtle Cove past Caves Bay and on to steep, steep Burgess Beach. The access is a little hidden here – it lies directly across from Link St - but is a 'totally worth it' beach to explore. From the south end of Burgess Rd, it was a steepish link trail to enter Booti Booti National Park and the trail to Cape Hawke Lookout. While this track wasn't indicated on my [Google Maps](#), you can see and confirm the entrance on street view with a 'full zoom'.

Then it was down to McBrides Beach, a steep one-hour diversion, but an excellent little secluded 'natural' beach. Next, it was time to walk up, up, up to Cape Hawke Lookout (224m elevation plus a few more flights of steps up the tower) with splendid views of the coast to Big (North) Brother and beyond.

Sadly, no magic track appeared to take me to Janies Corner and Seven Mile Beach, so it was a bit of a road trudge along pleasant enough Cape Hawke Drive (4km) back to the Lakes Way - a high-speed road with narrow

verges of 'snake-y' long grass. It was about 4 more km along Lakes Way, plus another 2km or so of dirt road from the turn-off back to the beach. Oh well, can't have perfection all day every day and this was an exceedingly rare occasion where a serious road diversion has been required along the coast. Read on though for some good news on this score.

So, I was delighted to finally get to Janies Corner. As a reward for my travails, it was as if some of the older gods and goddesses of sand and sea and headlands had seen my plight and so put on a splendid display of breaching whales and soaring eagles, along with a cooling northerly breeze, a few perfect resting logs, and the endless whiteish sands and dunes of Seven Mile Beach to saunter away the afternoon. It was a longish beach walk on soft sand (the softest, I think, that I have experienced so far) to the Ruins campground at the southern end of the beach.

“

As a reward for my travails, it was as if some of the older gods and goddesses of sand and sea and headlands had seen my plight...



Day 1: Turtle Cove



Day 1: Cape Hawke Lookout



Day 1: Track to Cape Hawke SLSC



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Start

End

Toilet

Accessible

Picnic Shelter

Table

Seat

Shopping

Food

Parking

Train

Ferry

Bus

Accommodation

Hut

Campsite

0 5 10 km



The day got even better with the insanely great, newly remediated Booti Walking Track past Morley Cove and Lindeman Cove, before coming out on the perfection of Elizabeth Beach (regularly nominated as one of the best beaches in Oz) where I was staying for the night. The track designers and builders and consultants deserve a medal for this Booti Hill trail - gentle gradients, and rainforest and erosion protection, but a perfect 'bushwalking feel' through lush coastal vegetation with plenty of outstanding coastal views along the way. Great to wind up the day's saunter with yet another 10/10 headland walk on this amazing coast.

In case you're wondering 'Booti Booti' means 'lots of honey' in the local Gathang language. No honey this time but a few cheeky schooners of Old for sundowners at The Rekkie (Pacific Palms Recreation Club) to reflect on a wonderful day of coastal walking, and plan for Seal Rocks and Treachery on the morrow.

“

In case you're wondering 'Booti Booti' means 'lots of honey' in the local Gathang language.

Day 2: Elizabeth Beach to Seal Rocks 18km, 7 hours

Today was an unusual traverse from Elizabeth Beach to Submarine Beach and included a planned bus ride cheat and an unplanned NP 4WD interlude. It was a day of mighty fortune, wind and sun and rain and remote trails and formidable dunes and unadulterated wonder. Hard to find the words to best describe such a day of 'miracles and wonder'.

The golden rule of any kind of travel is expecting the unexpected – with a corollary that you must also 'go with the flow'. I started out according to plan with a first light saunter along wonderful Elizabeth Beach and then an out-and-back track to perfect little Shelly Beach. It would be even more perfect with a more original name - I vote that every Shelly or Pebbly Beach on the coast gets an immediate, preferably Indigenous, name change! Anyway, then it was round Charlotte



Day 1: Elizabeth Beach



Day 2: Boomerang Beach



Day 2: Blueys Beach and Headland



Day 2: Bungwahl – Fuel and Liquor



Day 2: Dunes behind Submarine Beach



Day 2: Perfect beach walking. Magic!

Head to Boomerang Beach, which even in the cloudy gloom was another 'supermodel beach' on this part of the coast.

Next up was Boomerang Point Lookout and around to Blueys Beach and its imposing headland. A steep uphill section and some private land block the coast here. Smiths Lake entrance was open to the sea at that time, and the range of almost trackless land between there and Seal Rocks Beaches 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, so I cheated a little and caught the 151 bus from Blueys to Bungwahl.

And then, well, unfortunately, into each life some (bucketing) rain must fall. Fortunately, it only started pouring while I was waiting in a little bus shelter and it was a short ride to Bungwahl with a stop at the Bungwahl 'Fuel and Liquor', the Aussie equivalent of 'Gas n Guns'. It's a 13km road walk from there to Seal Rocks and Treachery so I rugged up in my rain gear and walked a few km down the Seal Rocks Road. Fortunately, I saw a National Park vehicle drive past. Unfortunately, I didn't think quickly enough to do more than wave as the ranger drove past. Fortunately, just as I was thinking to myself, "I wish I'd asked her to stop", the ranger 'chucked a u-ey', came back and then after a short chat about my journey, offered me a lift down the gated Old Gibber Trail in her 4WD to Middle Camp Trail. This was the area I had been planning to do the following day as a back up to the headland nemesis of the northern way – BIG GIBBER. This was the only headland that had caused me some grief in the trip planning. Only minimal information available, almost all of it indicating that it was difficult to impossible to get around.

Katrina, the NPWS ranger, gave me plenty of information along the way. Wonderful to chat with someone who lived to share her love of our wild places, who was such an amazing ambassador for her organisation - a true Tolkienesque 'ranger of the north'. She had worked on the Booti Walking Track so I was able to convey my thanks and appreciation, and she also let me know that planning was underway for a through-trail from Cape Hawke to Janies Corner – five stars to the NP planning department who are far, far ahead of me.

I was dropped part way down Middle Camp Trail (this is about as NSW coastal middle-of-nowhere as it gets) with some clear instructions for getting to Submarine Beach (turn right at the T-intersection at the end of Middle Camp Trail, walk about a km to a turning circle in front of a swamp and then climb over the back dunes from where you can see the ocean). For those interested and coming from the beachside, the trail is exactly (and a little surprisingly) where Google maps says it is, in between two vegetated dune hillocks, about 3 km south of Yagon Gibber. I had to traverse about 500m westward of a huge area of undulating dunes, but could then see the Middle Camp trail before descending the (steep) back side of the dune array. I won't bore you all with further details, but happy to share more precise info with anyone planning this route.

Anyway... and so... there I was, in the 'dunes complex' in the middle of probably the most remote beach I've visited on my journey so



Day 2: Yagon Gibber

far. I've had many, many magic moments in my life but in terms of sheer, unadulterated transcendental bliss this was right up there. Don't know if it was the tinge of nervousness about the unknown, the unexpectedness of suddenly being there, my readings of mishaps



Day 3: Middle Camp

getting around Big Gibber (a drowning, hours lost in the scrub, dehydration from over-exertion, etc), the kindness and kindred spirit of the ranger, or the many days of beach wandering that had brought me to this magical place; probably all that and more combined. Even the windy, squally weather only added to the sublime perfection of the experience - a 'realm of pure blessedness'. Some days you just feel so alive, so fully and gratefully alive... Magnificent!

Submarine/Fiona Beach and the back dunes and swales are a national treasure... hats off to the folk (Don Brown and others) that preserved it from the potential ravages of sand mining. Just incredibly, incredibly incredible!

So, unusually for my walk, and not since Stage 1 Day 1 up the Tweed spit to Dreamtime, I then headed north to Yagon Gibber and around to Treachery Head and Seal Rocks.

I stayed the night at Treachery Camp, which is itself a coastal gem in the lee of Treachery Head. It's a place full of quirky history and plenty of local knowledge. I drifted off to sleep wondering about the walk to Mungo Brush the following day.

Day 3: Seal Rocks to Dees Corner 31km, 9 hours

Day 3 was the walk from Seal Rocks and Treachery Head to Dees Corner and Mungo Brush.

Commenced the day with a sunrise walk along Treachery Head and then back to Yagon Gibber via the campground (gorgeous place but BYO drinking water). I retraced my steps along Submarine/Fiona Beach past the Middle Camp dunes to a km or so north of Big Gibber. On the day I was there it truly was impassable – at least for a novice like me – perhaps with climbing gear and/or more expertise than I possess, it would be possible to get around the steep rockface or negotiate the once-existing trail through the broad melaleuca swamp, but I discreetly cut my losses and returned to the Middle Camp dunes. I was relieved to have a back-up plan and was fully at ease with the nemesis of Big Gibber. In fact, it was strangely satisfying to be bested, but not quite defeated, by a worthy opponent.



Day 3: Old Gibber Trail

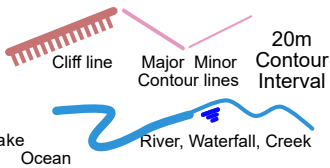


Day 3: Grass trees



Major Rd, Minor Rd, 4wd Trail, Walking track 32 | Bushwalk April 2025

Main route, Side trip, Alternate route



Bushwalk.com & OpenStreetMap contributors



Parking



Accommodation



Picnic Shelter



Shopping



0 5 10 km



Up and into the 'dune-field', tinged with purple (I guess because of the rutile) in the morning light. It was just as moving a place as the day before, and I spent some time wandering around and exploring just to drink it all in.

I was glad I'd left a boy scout arrow (sticks and stones) in the final dune ridge to mark the entrance down – as no bushwalker ever needs reminding how incredibly tricky the Aussie bush can be. For future reference, it is the only tiny sandy break in the vegetation, close to the very southern end of the final dune ridge.

So, Plan B, head up the pretty Middle Camp trail and along the Old Gibber Trail. The road bends within a few hundred metres of Big Gibber - I could hear and feel the ocean but had to 'accept and adapt' to my destiny (as Stoic philosophers always advise) on the inland route. I did spot a couple of possible points where a scramble through the scrub might have been possible, but I was mindful of being solo in rather isolated country.

Much of the rest of the day was on the Old Gibber Trail. It's pretty enough but, as it's a management trail, I think it would be best enjoyed on a gravel or mountain bike. 'The long and winding road' was on repeat in my mind! There were lots of grass trees and some beautiful angophoras and eucalyptus trees and melaleuca swamps along the way, but my heart was at the beach!

Finally came out on the Mungo Brush Road not far from the Bombah Point Ferry and Myall Lakes. It was a few more kilometres of walking to head back to the beach for a good sticky-beak at the southern end of Mungo Beach at Dees Corner.

Day 4: Dees Corner to Hawks Nest 18km, 6 hours

Day 4 was Dees Corner to Hawks Nest, and it was 'everything is awesome' time again. The first highlight was a long wander around Dark Point and Little Gibber while waiting for the high tide to peak. What a smashing spot! An absolute 'must see' for those who've never been. Huge field of wonderful sand dunes, rich Indigenous history, a few non-threatening dingoes (many tagged by the NP) with whales



Day 3: Incredible trees along the trail



Day 3: More incredible trees



Day 4: Resting log

and dolphins all around and a few totem sea eagles as well. Similar sand dune as at Submarine Beach and Middle Camp but much easier to get to.

Morning fog lifted to beautiful sunshine. I just love the brilliant Aussie light on a perfect spring day, and I had to stop too many times at any and every nicely positioned 'Captain's log' just to drink it all in and contemplate the majestic glory of our coast. When driving along Mungo Brush Rd previously, I had never stopped off at any of the amazing little camping spots and picnic areas along the way – each one is a treasure. That's one of many wonderful things about walking the coast – you see all the bits that the folk 'a-hurrying by' miss.

My heart was just singing, as so often happens on this walk. Impressive to see the coast curving north to Seal Rocks with Sugarloaf Point, Treachery Head, Yagon Gibber, Big Gibber and Little Gibber all now a bunch of 'mates' in their rocky regality.

The beach extends south from Dark Point for about 15km and is just such an absolute stunner. It morphs along the way from Dark Point to White Sands then Lemon Tree, The Baskets and Lovers Walk curving southwest past the dune array and ultimately facing northeast in the lee of Yacaaba Head. Broughton Island lies a few km off



Day 4: Mungo Dingo



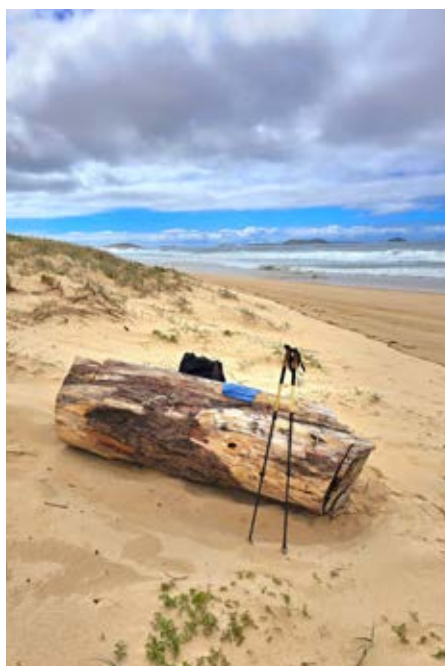
Day 4: Sandy Point



Day 4: Dark Point



Day 4: Everything is awesome



Day 4: Time for a swim



Day 4: Yacaaba Headland and Jimmy's Beach

the northern end and Cabbage Tree Island a similar distance off the southern end. Spectacular!

As many would know, this stretch has the most extensive series of active sand dunes in NSW, extending 10km down the beach and up to 1km inland. According to Beachsafe (great source of info) the old foredunes were formed over 6000 years ago making Dark Point a significant indigenous site. What can I say? Lots of little pig faces/beach bananas in flower too.

Simply go to Little Gibber/Dark Point and enjoy yet another piece of coastal perfection.

Day 5: Shoal Bay to Anna Bay/Birubi 23km, 7 hours

Day 5 was the final day of Stage 6 on the National Parks-featured Tomaree Coastal Walk from Shoal Bay to Anna Bay/Birubi. A fantastic way to wind up the outstanding stretch of the coast on this stage. With a white bellied sea eagle as the symbol to represent the walk, of course it could do no wrong! A coast walk that packs many, many powerful punches as it weaves around the many headlands, beaches and inlets south of Port Stephens.

The route makes a superlative, but longish, day walk (the official recommendation is 2 days which would give more opportunity to



Day 5: Snapper Point



Day 5: Rocky Beach



Day 5: Fingal Bay

enjoy the many and varied delights along the way). It would be a perfect walk for anyone wanting to do a long coastal meander without wanting to stray too far from 'civilisation'. The walk has clear signage and plenty of practical and interpretive information. There are also reasonable public transport connections (hourly) along the way which can run you back to Nelson Bay or Newcastle Station. There's plenty more information on the NPWS website for those interested.

There were almost too many highlights to list. Every few hundred metres was another exquisite pleasure. Wonderful Fingal Beach with its half-tide spit to Fingal Island, Snapper Point, Big Rocky and the Cauldron (incredible), Samurai Beach (clothing optional – absurdly beautiful beach but a bit of a 4WD cluster zone), Middle Rock and One Mile Beach, Slot Canyon (totally incredible), Kingsley Beach, Boat Harbour, Little Kingsley Beach, Eddie's Beach and, and, and, and... it's all delightful - another walk where the only recommendation can be 'just do it'. Such a magical coastal walk along a geologically fascinating part of the coast...



Day 5: Skate Bay



Day 5: Samurai Beach



Day 5: Middle Rock

I completed the day and the stage at Anna Bay. I looked longingly out across mighty Stockton Beach, the longest in NSW, with its dunes stretching to 'infinity and beyond'. Stage 7 was going to be grand – as indeed this stage, and every other one has been.

Conclusion

With so many magic moments during this stage I was reminded of a quote from George Macdonald Fraser:

"That's a moment I remember still... as far ahead as the eye could see... [were] fleecy clouds against a blue sky that seemed to stretch forever... And I absolutely laughed aloud - why, I can't tell, except in that moment I felt free and contented and full of hope, with my spirits bubbling as high as they've ever done in my life... There's an exhilaration, a sense of leaving the old, ugly world behind, and that there's something splendid waiting for you to go and find, far out yonder..."

And that's about as good a summary as any about how this coastal camino, with all its up and downs and rain and sunshine and sand dunes and waves and headlands and beaches and eagles and whales and dolphins and challenges and magnificence and grandeur and wonderfully 'simpatico' folk along the way so often makes me feel...

Happy wanderings one and all...



Day 5: One Mile Beach



Day 5: Slot Canyon



Day 5: Fishermans Bay Track



Greg grew up in Sydney but lived for many years in SE Asia. He has now returned home to Sydney and loves exploring Australia's magnificent bushwalks, parks, coasts, and waterways. When he's not bushwalking or mountain bike-riding, he works in education for Deloitte Australia and Ecctis UK.

More detailed information on each day of his walk, pics and future posts are all available on Facebook - either on his [personal page](#) or in the FB groups [Hiking in Australia and New Zealand](#), [Take a hike NSW](#) and [Hiking and exploring NSW](#).



Day 5: Stockton Beach

Urupukapuka

Text and photos
Ian Smith

Urupukapuka. I looked at the word. Some part of my mind wanted to blank it out. Didn't want to know about a word with that many "u"s in it.



Cliff Pa Loop



Lorraine on track

After years of playing Scrabble, Words With Friends, delving into cryptic crosswords and testing my etymology knowledge on anagrams, I'd decided that 'u' was my least favourite vowel and second only to 'c' as my least favourite letter, the latter because there are no two letter words containing 'c'.

So it was that when I was talking to locals about it or trying to book a boat to take us out there, I started saying, "That island that begins with a 'U'". After a couple of days I started to feel inadequate and decided to add the word to my vocabulary. Couldn't be that hard, surely. No, it wasn't. When you realise that the bulk of it is only the same two four letter words it suddenly becomes a whole lot easier. In no time at all I was pronouncing it and

flaunting it in conversation as if to show off my new found skill. I hoped the island would be the same when it came to walking.

There are three islands available to the casual traveller and Urupukapuka is far and away the most popular. Research had indicated that the trail was good, though the reviews were mixed and the eating house, the only one on the island, didn't get rave reviews from hardly anyone. At least I was prepared for that.

We booked the day before we caught the boat; at least the catamaran ferry wasn't as packed as the Russell boats, but it was still reasonably full as we departed the Paihia wharf under nine tenths cloud. While Lorraine thought they harboured precipitation, my take was that they'd burn off as they'd done the previous day.

“

There are three islands available to the casual traveller and Urupukapuka is far and away the most popular.

That the skipper was a comedian became evident early and we looked forward to his occasional interludes. At one stage he remarked that the Duke of Marlborough, where we'd had a cuppa the day before, was the first licenced premises in New Zealand and that Russell was the first capital, though

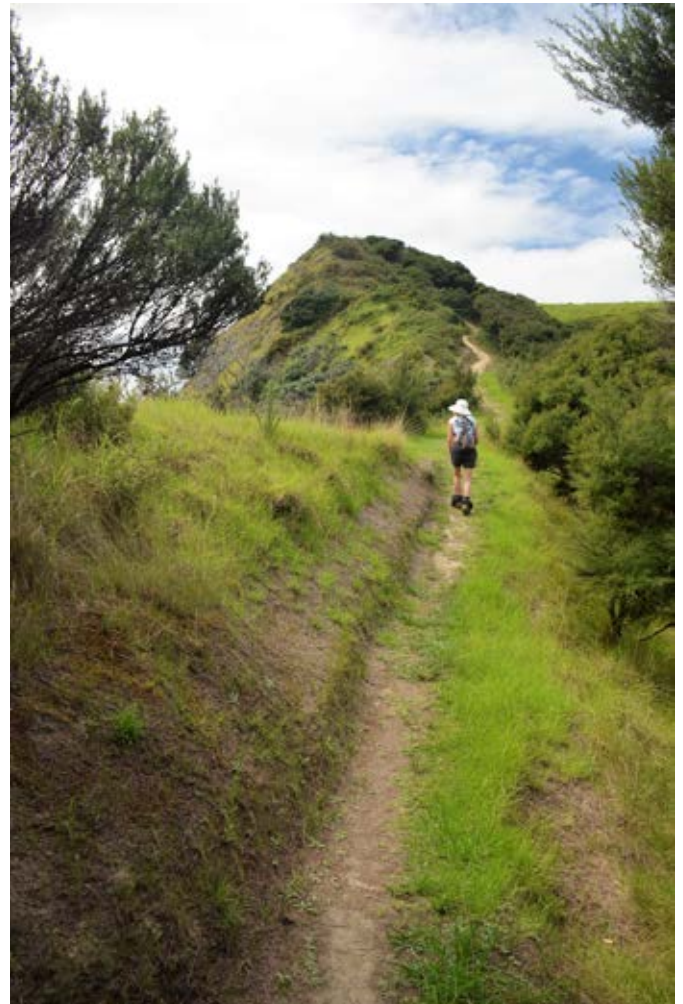


Urupukapuka

it was also known as the Hell Hole because of all the debauchery that was partaken in by the lads from the whaling fleets, and others. These days, he said, only nice people lived there. He was one of them.

From Russell it's a long way to Urupukapuka, around $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour, but the time passes quickly as you cruise past one picturesque island after another. Rocks jutting from the water, odd shaped trees, occasional lichen and, in front of every one, all manner of watercraft, with the accent on yachts, because this is their paradise. 100 sheltered coves, a lee shore around every corner, secluded beaches, for what more could they ask? I ponder the idyll of it and reflect that in two days the bad weather is supposed to roll in. I'm glad I'm based on shore.

Then we're there, filtering down Otehei Bay to the wharf and everything is new to us as we embark. We're fortunate that I'd asked the female attendant about tracks on the island and she'd indicated where the maps were and suggested to do the main loop (which was what we'd intended) but add in the Cliff Pa track.



Cliff Pa Loop

So we trudged off past the eatery and around the back of the restaurant into a number of shacks and we had to ask a young man Where do we go from here? and he pointed us in the right direction. Apparently we'd come around the wrong side, but we weren't the only ones. An effervescent American lady of Chinese extraction from Boston asked if she could link up with us because we had a map and knew where we were going, ha, ha.

Then we were at the start of the track, or should I say, tracks, because there were several in fact, but to access all of them you started here.....unless you had your own boat and could pull in anywhere.

The lady couldn't stop chatting as we ascended the first hill and I guessed, correctly, that our association would be a brief one. We passed through the first gate and made a beeline for the second, our gaze fixed upon a sheep that was scratching itself against the adjacent fence. In doing so we completely ignored a marker post, one of many dotted around the island, and slipped through the second gate. Immediately after the gate, there was an intersection in the trail, itself only a mown path through luxurious paddocks.

Somehow it just didn't seem right but the trail headed uphill, as I'd been told it would, so we must be going in the right direction.

At the next intersection we took a 5 minute diversion to a lookout over a bay. While it was nice, nothing prepared us for the 360 degree panorama when we reached the top of the hill. The vastness of the Bay of Islands was apparent from here and our cameras happily clicked away. Then we referred to the map again. I saw people back from where we'd come earlier and they were taking an intersection we hadn't noticed. Immediately it was clear that we'd come the wrong way again but now, having our bearings, it suddenly became obvious. All the trails on the map fell into place.

“

The vastness of the Bay of Islands was apparent from here and our cameras happily clicked away.

So we had to backtrack and the Chinese-American lady disappeared over the hill, never to be seen again. We'd only lost about 20 minutes so it wasn't that bad. As we started the climb from the main intersection, I remembered the lady on the boat had said it was a hike up the first hill, something I bore in mind as it ramped up more than a few



Urupukapuka

degrees. It was time to give Lorraine a push or two as we laboured through the first bit of cabbage tree forest we'd come to.

Reaching the top was a blessing, because I'd gotten the impression that this was the only major hill around the place and we'd climbed it. Everything else would be a breeze; except we'd soon after come upon another hill and then start descending rapidly, which meant only one thing, we'd have to go back up again at some stage.

The long descent wound up at a beach and, referring to the map, we figured we'd gone the wrong way yet again. Lorraine is not happy. Actually, I was disappointed as well. We met a family coming the opposite way along the beach and complained about the maps to them. We'd worked out that we were at Paradise Bay, some distance from where we'd hoped to be and we'd just added about an hour to our journey. The family indicated there was a sign not that far ahead and that would hopefully set us right.

And so it did, except that it clearly said "Entico Bay", while our map said Otiao Bay and had "Indico Bay" written in brackets. Near enough, neither sounded remotely like Paradise Bay. Happiness reigned, we were on the right trail, even if the signs and maps were like an unanswerable puzzle.

We were climbing again, heading towards the recommended Cliff Pa loop and finding it about 10 minutes later. The sign clearly indicated where we were so we turned off with confidence and started heading seriously

uphill again, a long, winding trail where the grass hadn't been manicured for some time. As we gained height, more islands became clearly visible. It was beginning to be the most picturesque portion of the whole walk. In fact, over 1/3 of all photos I took this day were on this section.

The next thing we came to was a steep stairway descent that led to the cliff, the first of a few, only it would more accurately be described as a severe cleft in the rocks. Then we ascended once more to the summit of the cliff on the other side and here were vistas over the bay that exceeded anything we'd seen so far, though that hardly had seemed possible 10 minutes ago.

“

The climbing and steep downhills were relentless but the rewards were many as our shutters clicked obsessively in an effort to encompass all before us.

The climbing and steep downhills were relentless but the rewards were many as our shutters clicked obsessively in an effort to encompass all before us. This was also the most taxing part of the entire walk, and that was saying something. At some point we agreed to stop for lunch, though it had only just gone 11. It was atop the final descent from the Cliff Pa Loop before we made our way up to the main loop again and, by the



Urupukapuka - Cliff Pa Loop



Urupukapuka

time we reached it, our bodies were sending clear messages that they weren't entirely happy with the situation.

We still had about 1/3 of our drink supply as we moved up to yet again another cliff, every one seeming more dramatic than the last. At times the trail skirted the edge and when we were in the middle of a forest section soon after, we stopped for a drink. As I sat down I had a dizzy spell. Though it lasted only 3-4 seconds it was scary. You couldn't help but think what might have happened had I been adjacent to a cliff.

At the next intersection, where the Pateke Loop meets the Urupukapuka Loop, a decision had to be made. I was firm in my decision to go left, a seemingly slightly longer route but it took us over terrain we hadn't been on before. Though this met with severe disapproval from the other member of our team, for once in our relationship I won out, despite continuing protests for the next 15 minutes.

This would take us past Urupukapuka Bay, one we'd overlooked briefly at the commencement of our journey. Luckily it was the right choice. There were other people for a start. Two dads with their 3 young daughters were frolicking along the trail, much to our amusement because the track was riddled with sheep droppings and one of the bubs

was barefoot and doing everything she could to avoid the trail. At the bottom of the slope leading to the cove was an unlimited water supply and I gleefully refilled our water bottles and we drank like it was our last on this earth. The joy of drinking plain water had never seemed so good.

Now there was but one hill remaining and one member of our party was suffering as we approached the four hour mark. It seemed every part of her body rebelled against the thought that it had to go further as the sun came out and made us sweat even more, although that's an area I excel in.

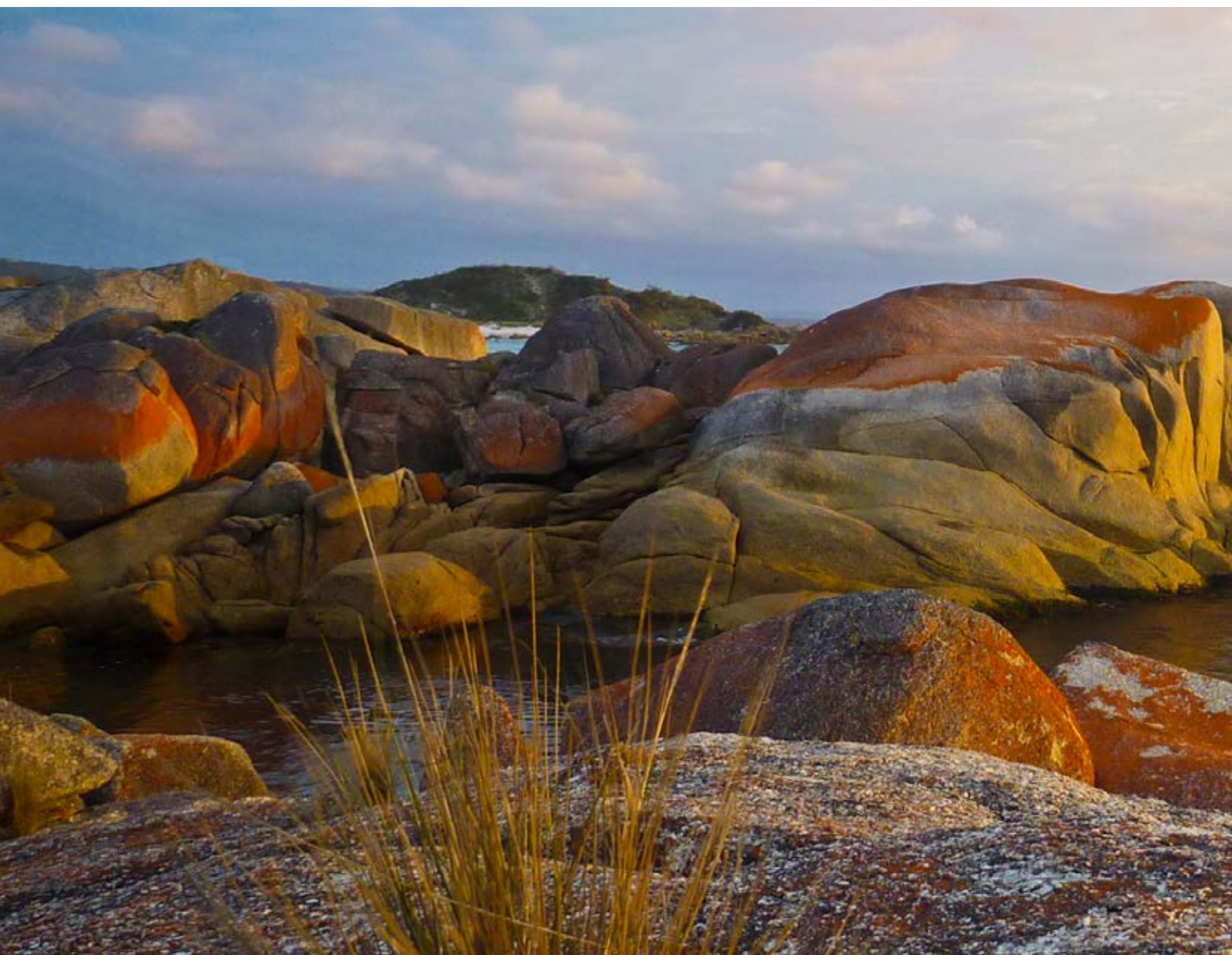
The blessed view of the café at Otehei Bay meant that we only had a relatively short downhill to go and the seats there had never borne two more overjoyed posteriors than ours, I beg to suggest.

We had 1 ½ hours to wait for the ferry and as we downed our ginger beer/beer/salt and pepper squid/hot chocolate and Magnum, we gazed out over the delightful sands and regretted not having a pair of swimmers so we could be even more refreshed, as some others were.

Still, it had been a grand, if tiring, day. The rewards had been many and we had much to retell. We figured it ranked somewhere in our top ten day walks ever.

Photo Gallery

Photos
Bushwalk.com photographers



Check this and
other entries at
[Bushwalk.com](https://bushwalk.com)
Photo competitions



Sunrise - Binalong Bay Coastal Walk
Stepbystep

Landscapes

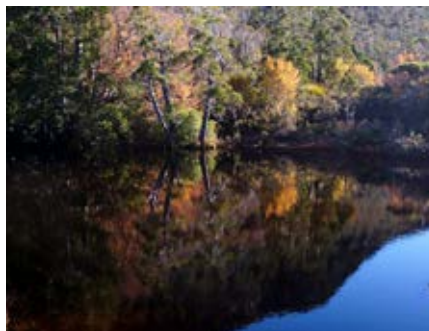
April 2024

Winner
Wollondilly afternoon
Tom_brennan

From a high camp on the cliff edge above the Wollondilly River, the late afternoon sunbeams duck under the clouds to light up the cliffs of the Wanganderry Walls and Bonnum Pic.



Westons Lake
North-north-west



Autumn glory, Lake Hanson
Whynotwalk



Valley fog
Eggs

Non-landscapes

April 2024

Winner
Sometimes that little ray of sunshine
is just in the right place
Deadwood

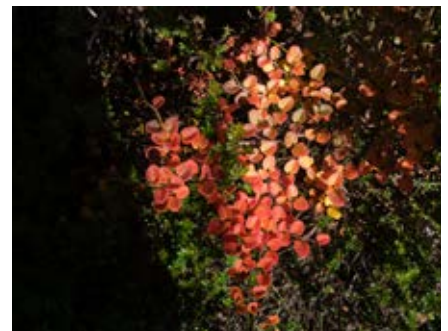
We went for a nice casual 10km day walk out from Pemberton, WA that included a section along the Warren River. Despite seeming like the wrong season, we did spot a few flowering orchids along the trail as well as a few small birds. Just before the trail led away from the river, we spotted a heron hunting on the other side of the river, so I settled down to see if I could snap it with a feed. Mostly it was in some deep shadow and looking uninterested, but then a little flash of light caught it and the riverbank where it was hunting. Patience paid off again!



Symmetry and chaos
Tom_brennan



Fishing
Eggs



Shades of Fagus, Cradle Mt
Whynotwalk

Tasmania

April 2024

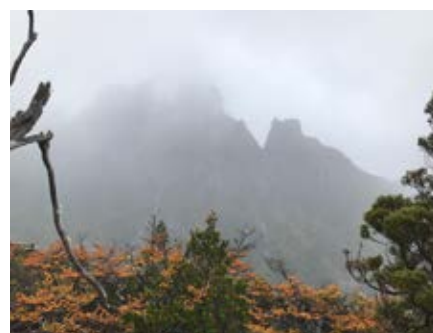
Winner
Late afternoon on Gell
Geevesy



Little Horn
from Twisted Lakes
Whynotwalk



Solitude and serenity
North-north-west



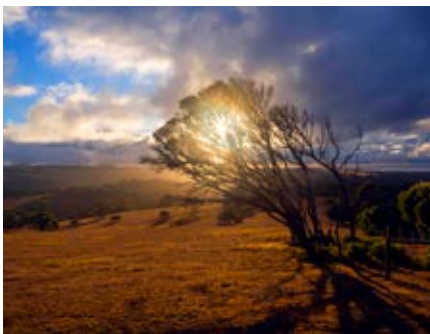
Autumn on The Labyrinth
Graham51

Other States

April 2024

Winner
Stirling Ranges, WA
Deadwood

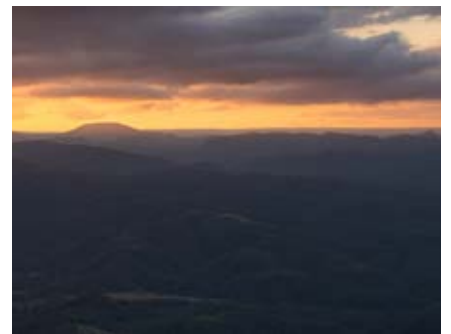
The walk up to the top of Bluff Knoll in the Stirling Ranges is a little bit too well travelled for our liking, but it seemed like the best opportunity to get up for the view while other trails were either closed or inaccessible to a 'sealed roads only' hire car. We were rewarded with not only a wedge tailed eagle circling the summit, but some interesting vegetation and spectacular views. It was I guess unsurprising to see how many people on this trail were ill-equipped for the sun and heat that beated down on it later in the day as well as the elevation gain.



Morning
Eggs



The Glen of Snake Rock
Johnw



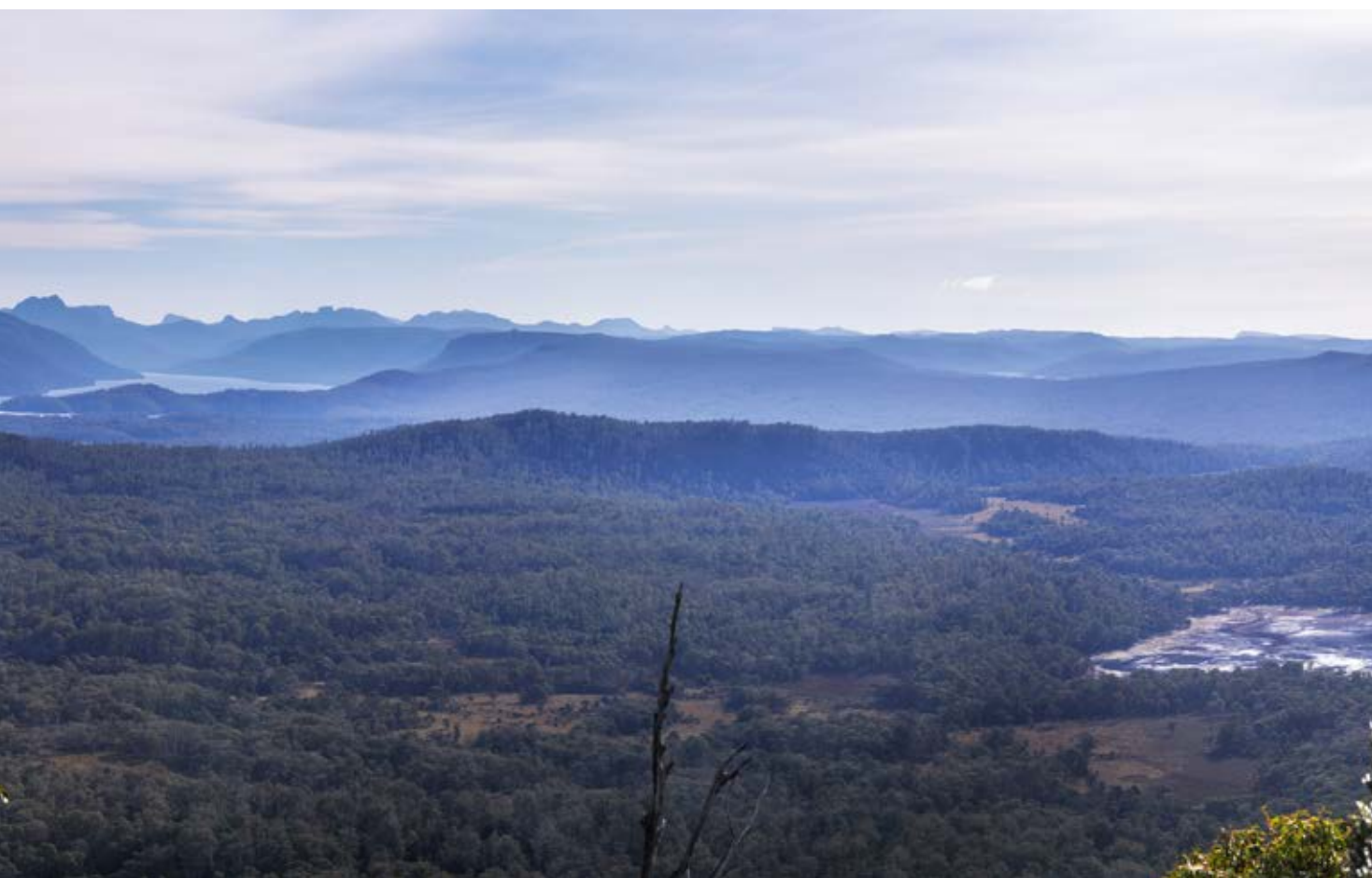
Colong colours
Tom_brennan

Landscapes

May 2024

Winner
D'Arcys Bluff
North-north-west

Reclimbing peaks by different routes can be fun, as long as you don't mess up the navigation. Doing so turned this into a bit of Type 2 fun, especially on the descent. But at least the area is always good value.



Seascape
Johnw

Non-landscapes

May 2024

Winner
Sunburst
North-north-west

Usually this sort of thing happens while breaking camp; this morning it was on a short loosening-up ramble through the foggy forest.



Forest creature
Johnw

Tasmania

May 2024

Winner
Crossing the plain
North-north-west

This is the easy part of getting from D'Arcys to the Wentworth Hills summit.
At least it hasn't scrubbed up the way the stretch south of the lake has.



Other States

May 2024

Winner
Minerva Falls
Johnw

These small pretty falls sit at one end of Minerva Pool in Dharawal NP. The park is one of my local haunts and is my closest NP, with opportunities for walking, swimming and cycling. The popular Minerva Pool and its falls are well worth viewing, even just from my location at the lookout platform above. It's a short, easy family walk of about 2.5km return. It is also a sacred site for Dharawal Aboriginal women. Women and children are welcome to swim here. The pool is quite deep so observe any park safety information signage. Adult males are welcome to visit but are politely asked to swim at the nearby Jingga Pool.



Videos



Camping on the Edge of a Cliff (Blue Mountains, Australia)

Scotty's Gone Walkabout share's his camping, water collecting and food prepping tools and knowledge.



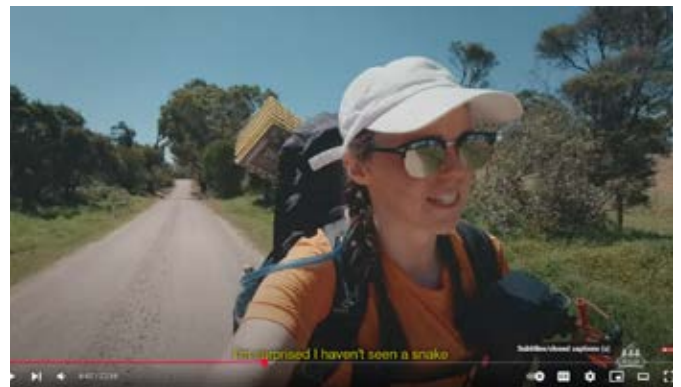
Searching For Australia's Most Remote Mountain Hut - The Opera House Hut

Better Hiking takes us on an adventure to find the remote hut in the steep mountain terrain of Kosciuszko National Park.



Overnight hiking food for a 7 day hike in Australia - ultralight food less than 600g per day

Kate explains her ultralight food plan for a week's bushwalk.



Solo Hiking the Two Bays Trail

Set To Hike shares her experiences as she tackles the one way trail along Mornington Peninsula.

Published

Wildflower Journeys through Southwest Australia

Simon Nevill

40 years of reasearching wildflowers in WA accumulated in one book, divided into 10 journeys to see them all. A book for all wildflower lovers.

Paperback, 336 pages

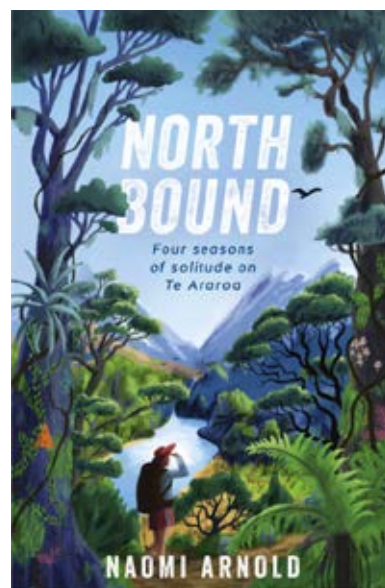
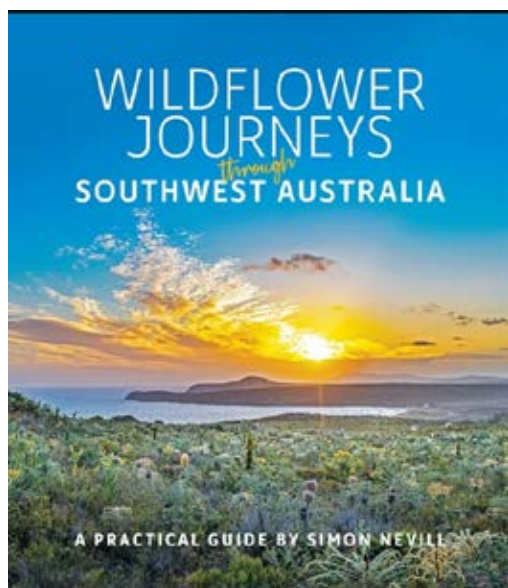
AU\$50

Northbound **Naomi Arnold**

Naomi spent almost nine months discovering New Zealand's wilderness solo and on foot. An inspiring memoir for all wilderness lovers.

Paperback, 320 pages

AU\$29



Luxury hiking developments

Text

Pascal Scherrer

Isabelle Wolf

Jen Smart

Luxury hiking developments are popping up around Australia – fancy lodges, hot showers and extensive walking infrastructure.



Boardwalk on South Coast Track in Southwest National Park, Tasmania



Kosciuszko National Park

While many opt for these deluxe alternatives to a backpack and tent, they can also stop independent hikers with smaller budgets from accessing national parks if not carefully planned.

National parks are open to all and are arguably some of Australia's [least locked-up lands](#). They are fundamental to Australia's tourism offerings with [53 million domestic visits](#) to national parks in New South Wales alone.

National parks are meant to support nature and community. Can remaking sections of them for a select clientele get in the way of these goals?

Why do national parks exist?

The primary purpose of national parks is to conserve nature and cultural heritage. A secondary purpose is for people to engage with and enjoy nature.

Parks agencies use many tools to support conservation and recreation, including building infrastructure or limiting the number of visitors.

Outdoor infrastructure – such as raised boardwalks on hiking trails and cabins for accommodation – can increase visitor comfort and improve physical access. It also helps protect habitat and reduces soil damage and [problem behaviours](#) by visitors.

Capping visitor numbers can prevent crowding and lessen physical and social impact. For example, visitor numbers to Lord Howe Island are limited to the number of guest beds.



Parks agencies use many tools to support conservation and recreation, including building infrastructure or limiting the number of visitors.

Society is changing – and so is hiking

The number of Australians [accessing national parks](#) is growing. But society is changing and people are engaging with nature [differently than they used to](#).

Today's national park visitors come from diverse backgrounds. They increasingly use parks as meeting places and have less outdoor survival experience. There is also a growing number of people seeking – and willing to pay for – 'hero' experiences. These exciting luxury activities showcase unique aspects of a place.

This means parks agencies must cater to a broad audience. To do this, they are diversifying their offerings from basic experiences to include higher-cost adventures.

An example of the latter includes multi-day hiking routes, such as the [Three Capes Track](#) in Tasmania and the [Milford Track](#) in New Zealand.



While these projects may boost tourism, some fear they may exclude visitors on a budget.

They take place on well-established, high-quality trails maintained by parks agencies and catering to a limited daily number of independent fee-paying walkers. Often, the trips are guided by private operators at extra cost.

While these projects may boost tourism, some fear they may exclude visitors on a budget.

Privatisation by stealth?

One of the main concerns with these developments is that private businesses profit from public assets with [little benefit to conservation](#), the primary purpose of national parks.

Private operators are building luxury lodges and being granted concessions to operate guided hiking experiences in national parks.

Independent hikers can still visit the [Three Capes Track in Tasmania](#), though the experience is no longer as accessible, affordable or spontaneous as it once was.



Views on Three Capes Track

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing master plan

People are raising [similar concerns](#) about the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing master plan. It [proposes](#) a multi-day walking experience across the Victorian Alps.

The plan is a clear example of the potential tension between tourism development and accessibility.

A 2022 [community consultation](#) by the Victorian government noted “high levels of concern” for the plan. It centred on increased visitor numbers, the prospect of unprepared and inexperienced walkers, environmental damage, and the costs to stay in huts.

The proposal includes a longer walk, environmentally sensitive track upgrades, and new campsites.

The inclusion of commercially operated huts 'tailored for those who desire an added level of comfort' is a concern for those [opposed to the development](#).



The proposal includes a longer walk, environmentally sensitive track upgrades, and new campsites.

Are there pros to development?

Advocates argue private investments in protected areas can support well-managed, [sustainable tourism opportunities](#) while generating revenue for conservation.

License fees from luxury lodges and guided tours may help fund park maintenance. Visitor caps and track upgrades protect against environmental degradation and offer controlled access that minimises visitor impact and reduces seasonality of visitation.

But opponents worry these projects prioritise profit over public access.

If national parks become exclusive spaces for wealthier visitors, they risk losing their purpose as places for all Australians to enjoy.

Sustainable tourism

The primary and overriding purpose of national parks is nature conservation. Recreation and tourism are secondary and should not undermine the park's environmental and cultural integrity.

Visitor caps and serviced experiences are part of the toolkit to cater to an increasingly diverse population while protecting the very attraction visitors come to see.

Tourism development in protected areas, however, needs a social license and local community engagement is an important [sustainability principle](#).

For national parks to operate as they are intended, free or low-cost options and access must be available alongside premium experiences.

National parks belong to everyone and their management must reflect this. While tourism developments can offer benefits, they must not come at the cost of accessibility, affordability, or most importantly, environmental integrity.

Pascal Scherrer

Associate Professor, Southern Cross University

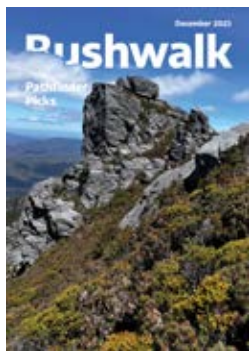
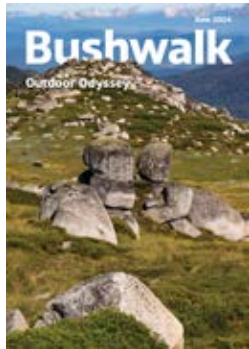
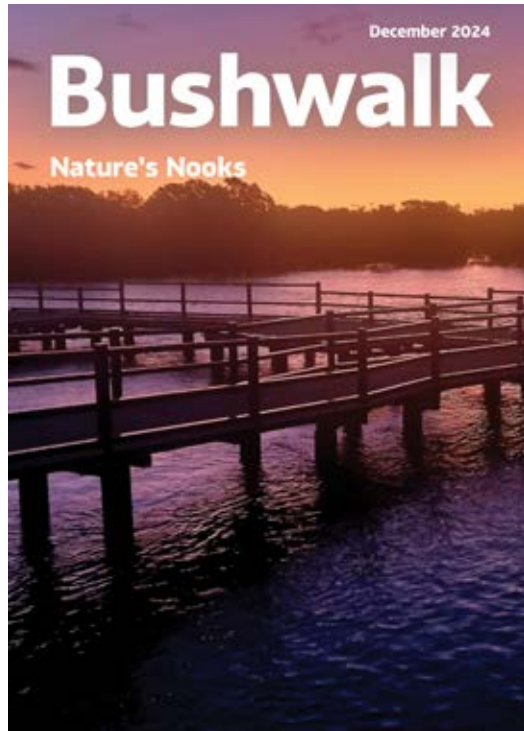
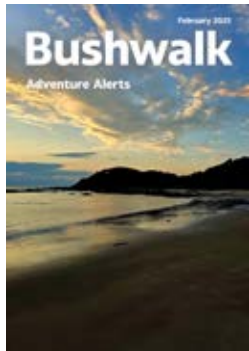
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