



Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk Statement of Heritage Impact

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Cover Page

Name of heritage item	<i>Gondwana Rainforests of Australia; Escape Road</i>
SHR / LEP heritage schedule item number and name	<i>SHR: #1002, NHL: #105704 and WHL: #368; Bellingen LEP #A5</i>
Address and location	<i>Dorrigo National Park and Bindarri National Park</i>
SOHI for	<i>Construction of the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk</i>
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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
Burra Charter	The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 1999 (revised 2013)
CHL	Commonwealth Heritage List -- A list of places that are of National significance and protected under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> that are owned or leased by the Commonwealth or Australian government agency
Conservation	Means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance (<i>Burra Charter Article 1.1</i>). Conservation can include 'maintenance', 'preservation' and 'restoration' works
DEGW	Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk
DRC	Dorrigo Rainforest Centre
DARC	Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre
DCP	Development Control Plan
EP&A Act	Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
EPBC Act	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cmth)
Heritage Council of NSW	An independent statutory body that advises the Minister for Environment and Heritage on heritage matters in New South Wales
Heritage NSW	The NSW government department <i>within</i> the Department of Planning and Environment responsible for administration and protection of items listed under the <i>NSW Heritage Act 1977</i>
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
LEP	Local Environmental Plan
Maintenance	Means the continuous protective care of the fabric, and setting of a place, and is to be distinguished from 'repair'. Repair involves 'restoration' or 'reconstruction' (<i>Burra Charter Article 1.5</i>)
NHL	National Heritage List - A list of places that are of National significance and protected under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
Preservation	Means maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration (<i>Burra Charter Article 1.6</i>)
PoM	Plan of Management
Restoration	Means returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material (<i>Burra Charter Article 1.7</i>)
Reconstruction	Means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from 'restoration' by the introduction of new material into the fabric (<i>Burra Charter Article 1.8</i>)
REF	Review of Environmental Factors
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
SOHI	Statement of Heritage Impact
State Heritage Inventory (SHI)	An inventory of all heritage listed place in NSW including those on the SHR, NHL and others

Abbreviation	Description
State Heritage Register (SHR)	A register of places that are of State significance and protected under the <i>NSW Heritage Act 1977</i>
S170 Register	Section 170 Heritage and Conservation Register, a heritage register of items owned and managed by a government agency, as required by the <i>NSW Heritage Act 1977</i>
UFP	Unexpected Finds Protocol
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHL	World Heritage List - a list of places that are World Heritage Sites meaning they are cultural and natural heritage as defined in Articles 2 and 3 of the World Heritage Convention, deemed to be of 'Outstanding Universal Value'.

Summary

Eco Logical Australia (ELA) on behalf of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) prepared this Statement of Heritage Impact (SOHI) relating to the proposed construction of a new multi-day escarpment walk, linking existing facilities and tracks across Dorrigo National Park and Bindarri National Park.

The DEGW is a single direction 4-day, 3-night walk starting at the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre (DARC) in Dorrigo NP and finishing at the Bindarray picnic area in Bindarri NP. The walk covers a distance of approximately 44.1 km and includes:

- approximately 44.1 km of 600 to 900 mm wide walking track (in accordance with *Australian Standard 2156: Walking tracks classification and signage*, where possible)
- approximately 8.6 km upgraded management trails (8.1 km) and dormant roads (634 m)
- 3 new camps, incorporating hut accommodation, a camping area and communal buildings
- 1 upgraded remote camp area, including camping, tracks and amenities
- 1 future upgrade to the existing Baliiga picnic area, including parking, roads and amenities
- 43 waterway crossings including 5 single-span pedestrian bridges greater than 20 m long and one vehicle bridge
- 14 scenic viewpoints
- wayfinding and interpretation components
- temporary access
- temporary construction sites.

Construction is expected to start in mid-2025 and would take 24 to 48 months to complete.

Part of the study area is within Dorrigo National Park which is of World Heritage significance and is located within the curtilage of the New England Group of the ‘Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’ heritage item listed on the State Heritage Register (SHR #1002), National Heritage List (NHL #105704) and World Heritage List (WHL #368). The significant values of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia comprise evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, exceptional biological diversity and habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals.

Parts of the study area, in Bindarri National Park, are located within the ‘High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest’ heritage listed item listed on the SHR (#1487). Part of the study area is within the locally listed ‘Escape Road’, which is an Archaeological site listed on the Bellingen LEP (Item #A50). Note this road is shown as ‘Escarp Road’ on some old maps.

The proposed works are to create a new continuous track known as the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk (DEGW) that utilises existing tracks and new sections in a progressive approach to construction that responds to local conditions on the ground and that minimises environmental impact using existing natural materials wherever possible.

This SOHI has found that the proposed works would result in a negligible direct (physical) and negligible indirect (visual) impact to the heritage significance of the study area. Recommended management and mitigation measures are detailed in Section 5 of this report.

1. The Heritage Item

1.1. Site description

1.1.1. Project overview

Eco Logical Australia (ELA) was engaged by NPWS to prepare this SOHI for the DEGW project (the Project). This SOHI supports a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) prepared under Part 5 of the EP&A Act 1979.

The project area spans Dorrigo National Park and Bindarri National Park. Dorrigo National Park is located within the curtilage of the World Heritage-listed 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia'. Bindarri National Park adjoins to the east and parts of Bindarri National Park are within the curtilage of the SHR listed 'High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest'. Collectively the Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks currently have several separate day-use areas and walking tracks which were developed in the 1960s.

The DEGW is a single direction 4-day, 3-night walk starting at the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre (DARC) in Dorrigo NP and finishing at the Bindarray picnic area in Bindarri NP, a distance of approximately 44.1 km. A shorter overnight 2-day loop walk is proposed between the DARC and Camp 1 at Baliiga, with the return leg following the existing Rosewood Creek and Blackbutt walking tracks.

The proposed track route will use existing formal and informal walking routes, historical logging tracks, open ridges and areas of new construction. A variety of pedestrian bridges and crossings will be used to traverse 43 rivers and creeks. A total of 14 viewpoints and rest locations will be established, including 2 small lookout platforms. A design principle is to manage the walk alignment to ensure minimal impacts, both to natural surface level and vegetation, in order to maintain a sustainable outcome ecologically and culturally.

The proposal includes the construction/development of 3 new hiker camps and the upgrading of an existing remote camp on previously disturbed sites with existing access roads. The camps will accommodate up to 24 people on the 4-day walk and 48 people on the 2-day walk.

The DEGW includes:

- approximately 44.1 km of 600 to 900 mm wide walking track (in accordance with *Australian Standard 2156: Walking tracks classification and signage*, where possible)
- approximately 8.6 km upgraded management trails (8.1 km) and dormant roads (634 m)
- 3 new camps, incorporating hut accommodation, a camping area and communal buildings
- 1 upgraded remote camp area, including camping, tracks and amenities
- 1 future upgrade to the existing Baliiga picnic area, including parking, roads and amenities
- 43 waterway crossings including 5 single-span pedestrian bridges greater than 20 m long and one vehicle bridge
- 14 scenic viewpoints
- wayfinding and interpretation components
- temporary access

- temporary construction sites.

Construction of the track will mainly occur using hand track building techniques, with the use of small mechanical tools and machinery using natural materials from the construction footprint (2 m) where possible. Some small excavator machine work may be required on some sections, along with stonework in fragile and steeper areas. Where imported materials are required, the use of sling loads under helicopter may be used. Experienced specialist track builders will be used on new and sensitive sections that require experience in detailed alignment and construction to manage erosion control and safety, and to reduce direct and indirect impacts to the ecology.

The DEGW location is identified in Figure 1 below.

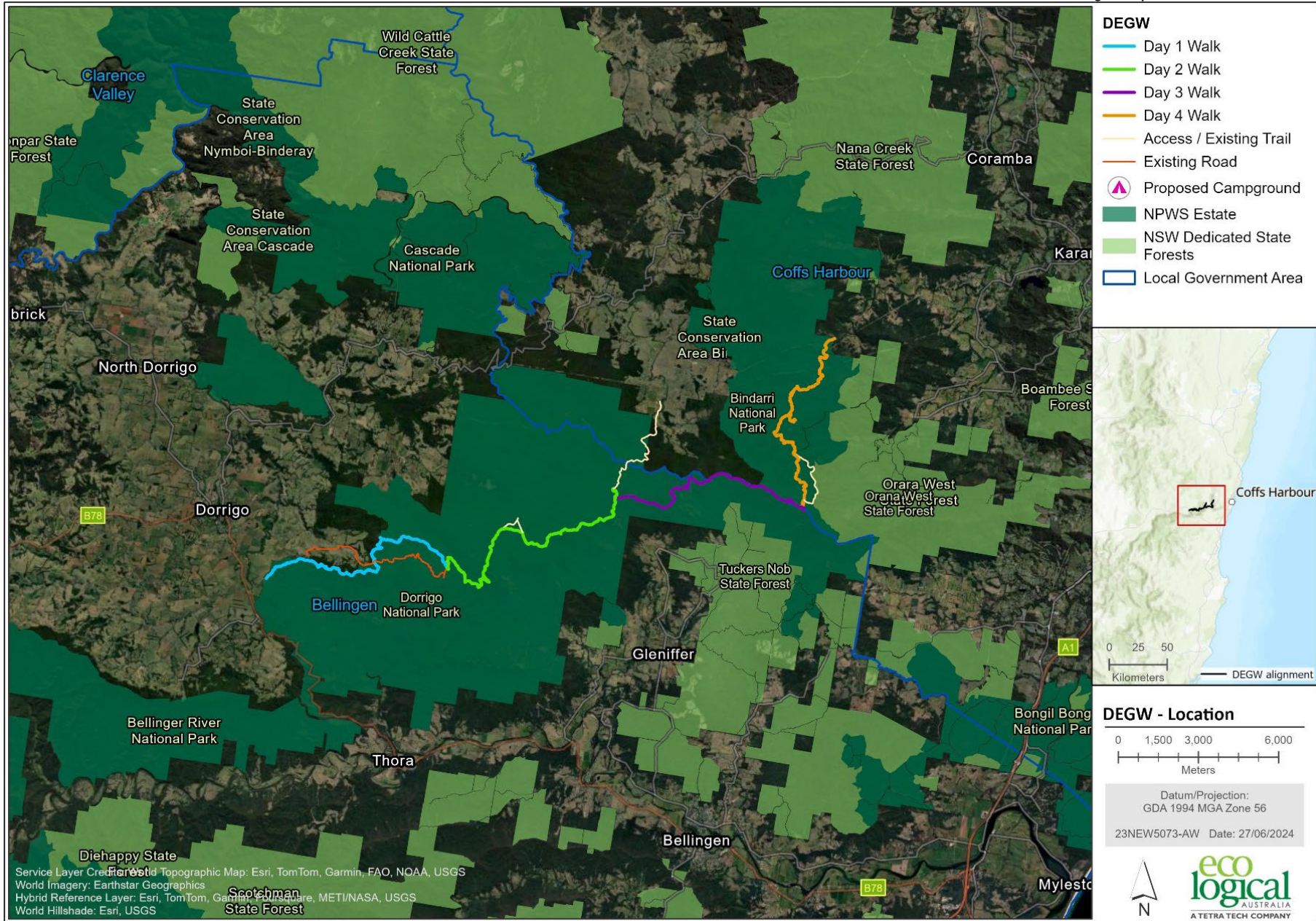


Figure 1: Location of the proposal

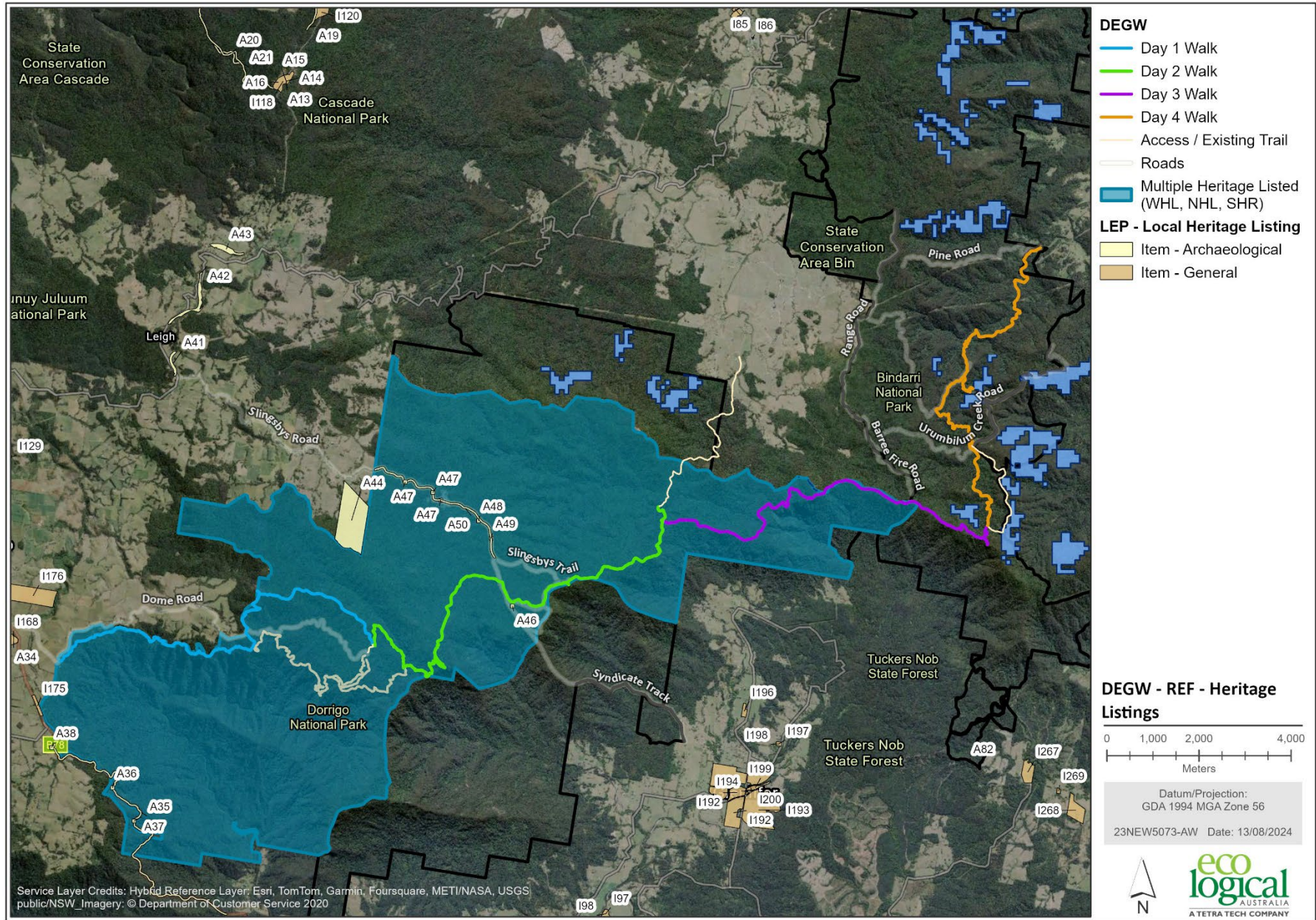


Figure 2: Location of surrounding heritage items

The DEGW will provide economic benefits for the local and regional community and has the potential to become a popular multi-day walking experience on the North Coast of NSW, where hikers of all levels can go on a range of walks.

1.1.2. Heritage item

Part of the study area is located within the WHL and NHL listed 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia' heritage item as outlined in Section 1.1.3, and a further part is within the SHR listed 'High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest' (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

There are also five locally listed heritage items within an approximate 500 m radius of the proposal. Due to the distance of the DEGW from these items and nature of the proposed works there will be no direct (physical) or indirect (visual) impact to these heritage items. The items identified are presented in Table 1.

1.1.3. Heritage listings

Before making decisions to change a heritage item, it is important to understand its values. This leads to decisions that will retain these values in the future. Statements of heritage significance summarise a place's heritage values – why it is important, why a statutory listing was made to protect these values.

The significant heritage values of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia comprise evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, exceptional biological diversity and habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals (see section 2).

The study area is within the curtilage of multiple heritage items as shown in Figure 2, Figure 3 and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Listed heritage items within a 500 metre radius of the study area

Listing Type	Item name	Listing number	Location
Bellingen Local Environmental Plan (LEP)	'Syndicate Tramway – Top Station'	A46	Approx. 120 m south
	'Escape Road'	A50	Study area partially within
	'Slingsby's Road Group – box cutting'	A49	Approx. 290 m north
	'Slingsby's Road Group – hut'	A48	Approx. 380 m north
	'Slingsby's Road Group – bridges'	A47	Approx. 500 m north
State Heritage Register (SHR)	High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest	01487	Study area partially within
	'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia'	01002	Study area partially within
National heritage List (NHL)	'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia'	105704	Study area partially within
World Heritage List (WHL)	'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia'	368	Study area partially within

1.1.4. Statutory Controls

The study area is listed under multiple Commonwealth and State Acts. The listing under the EPBC Act overrides the NSW Heritage Act and as such this listing is primarily discussed within this SOHI.

1.1.4.1. *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (Cth) 1999*

Australia's World and National Heritage Properties are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The EPBC requires that an assessment process is undertaken for proposed actions that will, or are likely to, have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of a declared World or National heritage property. This process allows the Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to grant or refuse approval to take an action, and to impose conditions on the taking of an action.

The EPBC Act creates a mechanism for the Commonwealth and State to enter bilateral agreement to achieve the requirements of the Act and to remove duplication of regulatory processes. This provides an avenue for formalising existing cooperative arrangements through Commonwealth accreditation of State World Heritage management plans and environmental impact assessment processes. To be accredited, the relevant State plan or process must be consistent with the Australian World Heritage management principles, which are regulations made under the EPBC Act.

The nine matters of national environmental significance (MNES) are:

- Australia's world heritage properties
- national heritage places
- wetlands of international importance (listed under the Ramsar Convention)
- migratory species
- listed threatened and ecological communities
- Commonwealth marine areas
- the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
- nuclear actions, including uranium mining
- a water resource, in relation to coal seam gas development and large coal mining development.

By law, no one can take an action that is likely to have a significant impact on any of these matters without approval. There are penalties for those who do. An action includes a project, development, undertaking an activity or series of activities. A matter of national environmental significance concerns all places on the National, Commonwealth and World Heritage Lists.

The EPBC Act makes sure that world and nationally significant animals, plants, habitats, and places are identified, and any potential negative impacts on them are carefully considered before changes in land use or new developments are approved. Approval must be sought if plans/works/changes might significantly impact on MNES.

A 'significant impact' is an impact which is important, notable, or of consequence, having regard to its context or intensity. Whether or not an action is likely to have a significant impact depends upon the sensitivity, value, and quality of the environment, which is impacted, and upon the intensity, duration, magnitude, and geographic extent of the impacts. The EPBC Act defines 'environment' as both natural and cultural environments and the intent of the Act is to avoid significant impacts. In the case of World heritage items, assessment of impacts on World Heritage involves determining whether the proposed action would affect the property's Outstanding Universal Values.

1.1.4.2. *Heritage Act 1977*

The *Heritage Act 1977* (Heritage Act) provides protection of the environmental heritage of New South Wales which includes places, buildings, works, relics, movable objects or precincts that are of State or Local heritage significance. The SHR is the statutory register under Part 3A of the Heritage Act. Listing on the SHR means that any proposed works or alterations (unless exempted) to listed items must be approved by the Heritage Council or its delegates under Section 60. Section 57(2) of the Heritage Act provides for a number of potential exemptions to Section 57(1) approval requirements to reduce the need for approval of minor or regular works such as maintenance. Exempted development does not require prior Heritage Council approval. Standard exemptions do not apply to the disturbance, destruction, removal or exposure of archaeological relics.

Archaeological features and deposits are afforded statutory protection by the 'relics provision'. Section 4(1) of the Heritage Act (as amended 2009) defines 'relic' as any deposit, artefact, object, or material that relates to the settlement of the area that comprises New South Wales, not being Aboriginal settlement, and is of State or Local heritage significance. The 'relics provision' requires that no archaeological relics be disturbed or destroyed without prior consent from the Heritage Council of NSW.

Archaeological sites that are not located within a state heritage curtilage are protected under Section 139-140 of the Heritage Act. A person must not disturb or excavate any land knowing or having reasonable cause to suspect that the disturbance or excavation will or is likely to result in a relic being discovered, exposed, moved, damaged or destroyed unless the disturbance or excavation is carried out in accordance with an excavation permit.

The Heritage Council must be notified on the discovery of a relic under Section 146 of the Heritage Act.

1.1.4.3. *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)*

The EP&A Act requires that consideration is given to environmental impacts as part of the land use planning process. In New South Wales, environmental impacts are interpreted as including cultural heritage impact. Proposed activities and development are considered under different parts of the EP&A Act, including:

- Major projects (State Significant Development under Part 4.1 and State Significant Infrastructure under Part 5.1) require the approval of the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces;
- Minor or routine developments requiring local council consent are usually undertaken under Part 4 activities which, in limited circumstances, may require the Minister's consent; and
- Part 5 activities which do not require development consent. These are often infrastructure projects approved by local councils or the State agency undertaking the project.

Notwithstanding this, under Section 5.5 of the EP&A Act, a determining authority has the duty to fully consider the environmental impact of an activity and is required to "take into account to the fullest extent possible all matters affecting, or likely to affect the environment" arising from the proposal. This is facilitated through the current assessment, the purpose of which is to identify,

assess, and determine the significance of potential heritage impacts, as well as mitigating actions and responsibilities that can be taken to minimise potential impacts.

1.1.5. Compliance

- This project will be assessed under Part 5 of the EP&A Act, which applies to activities undertaken by or on behalf of a public authority or which requires the approval of such an authority. The works would be carried out in a National Park, as such, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service are the determining authority.
- The Minister for the Environment would only be the approval body if it was determined that the proposal will result in a significant impact. No significant impact regarding heritage has been identified.
- Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest are listed State heritage listed items. Approvals for works within a State significant curtilage are required from the NSW Heritage Council (Section 60).
- No approval is required from Bellingen Shire Council.
- Relevant authorities will use this final impact assessment report to make informed decisions provide conditions for the project.

1.1.6. Site and its context

The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk will traverse Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks along the rugged escarpment of the Great Dividing Range, west of Coffs Harbour, New South Wales.

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks are part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage protected area. It represents outstanding examples of major stages of the Earth's evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, and exceptional biological diversity. A wide range of plant and animal lineages and communities with ancient origins in Gondwana, many of which are restricted largely or entirely to the Gondwana Rainforests, survive in this collection of reserves. The Gondwana Rainforests also provides the principal habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals.

The DEGWS study area is primarily a linear corridor assessment of approximately 44.1 km along the Dorrigo escarpment sitting between Bellingen and Dorrigo townships, eventually ending in the Upper Orara Valley within the Coffs Harbour hinterland, NSW. It includes existing access roads to 3 new camp precincts and 2 existing camp upgrades. The altitude ranges from about 150 m metres near Bindarray picnic area to 990 m at Dome Mountain.

The DEGWS encompasses a diversity of rough terrain and significant landscape features including mountains, steep escarpments, rivers, creeks, gorges and waterfalls. Important landform features include Dome Mountain, Rosewood River, Dibbs Head, Wild Cattle Creek, Never Never River, Gleniffer Falls, Mt Wondurrihah, Triple Peak, Tuckers Knob, Urumbilum River, the Junction and Urumbilum Falls.

Heritage listings are identified in Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4 below.

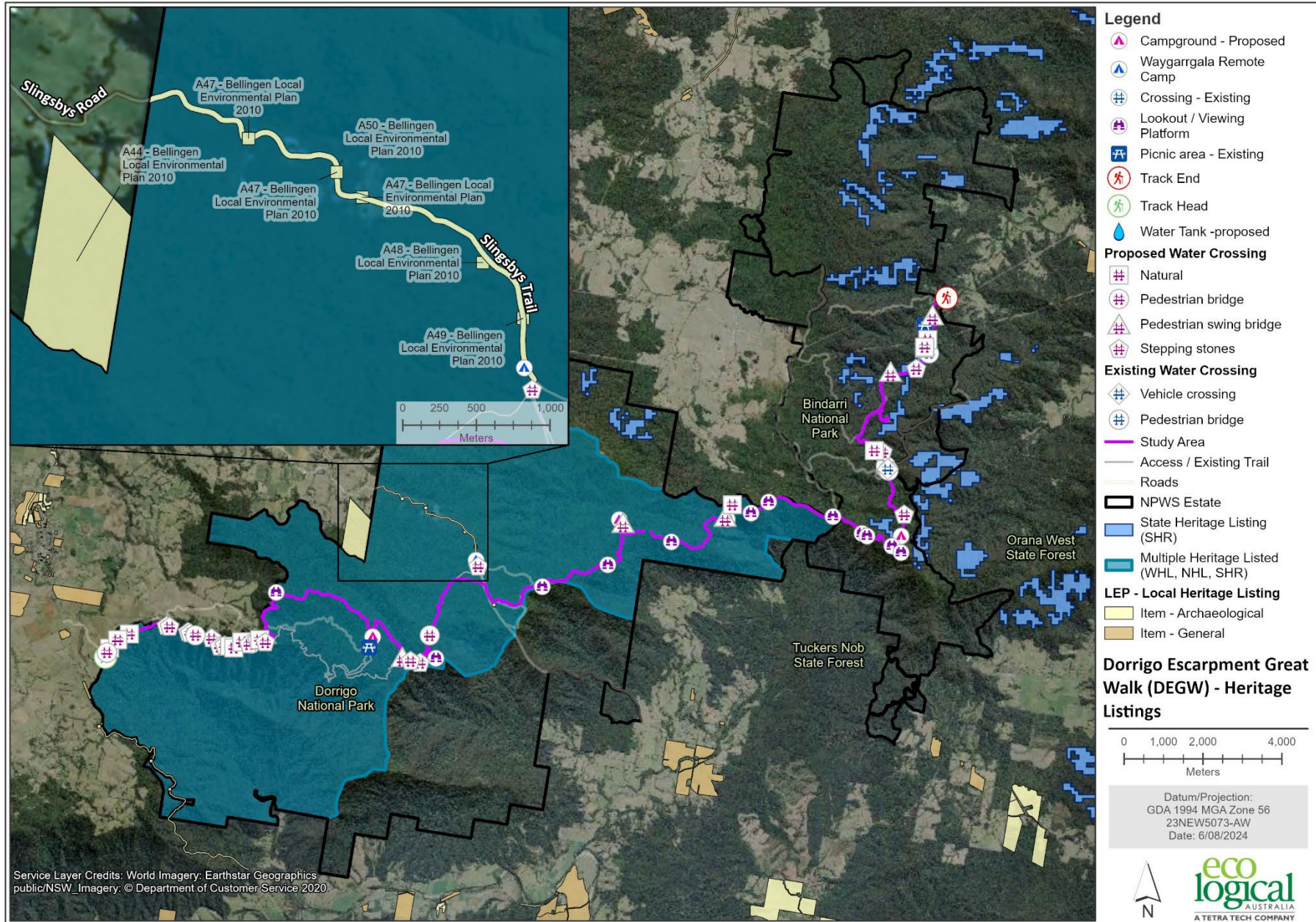


Figure 3: Dorrigo NP heritage listed sites in relation to the study area

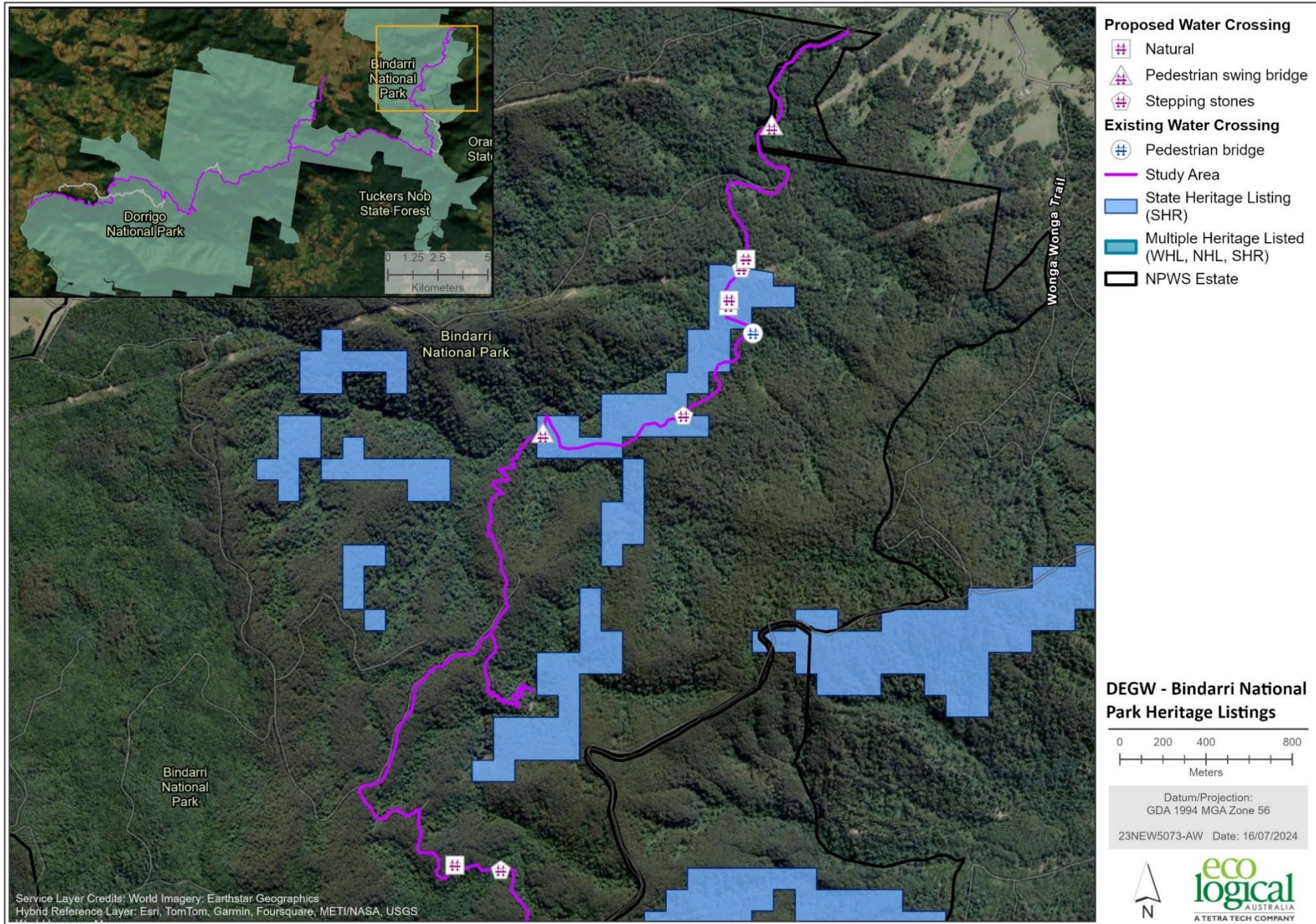


Figure 4: Bindarra NP heritage listings in relation to the study area

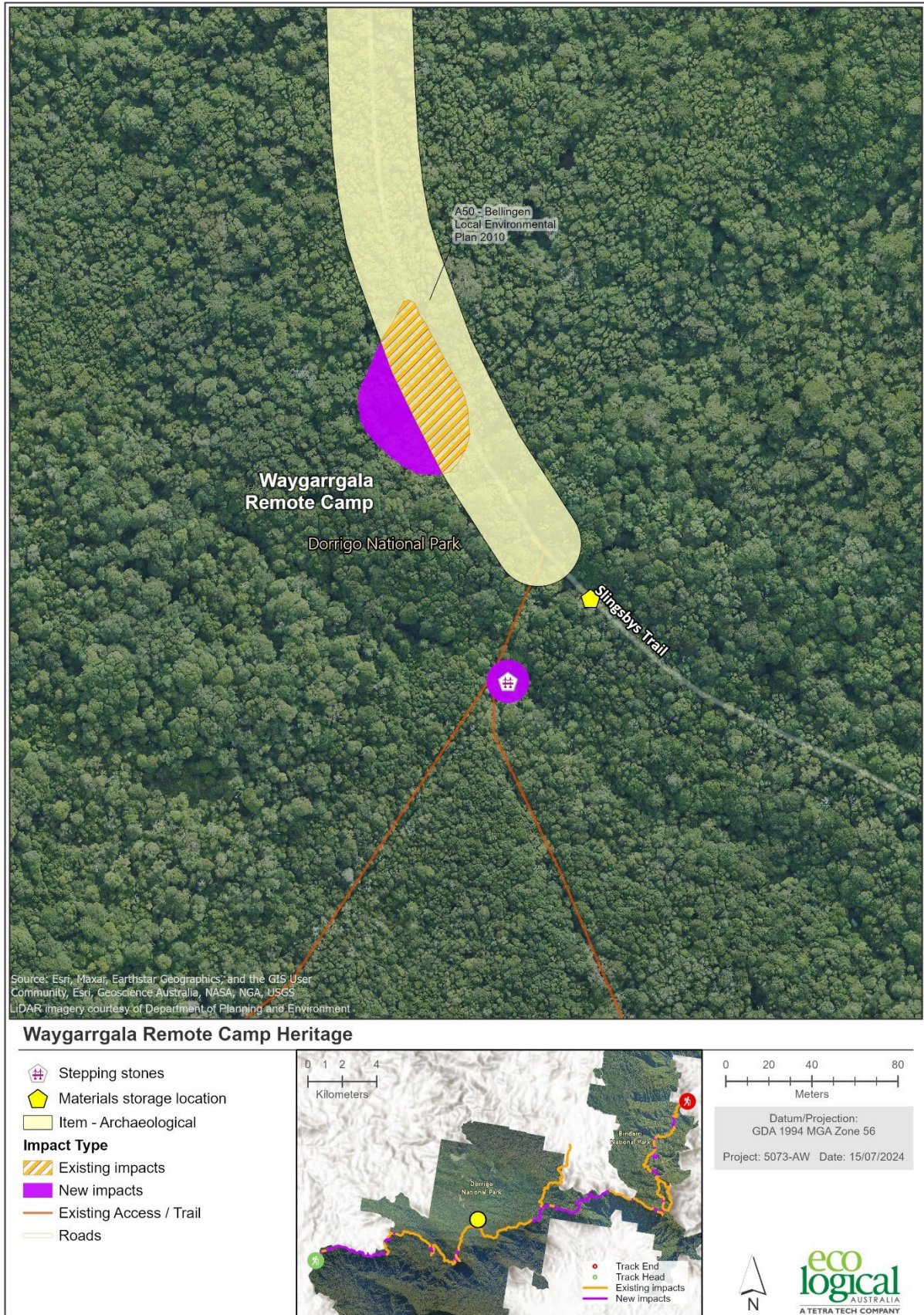


Figure 5 Waygarrgala Remote Camp (Item A50 BLEP)

1.1.7. The proposed work area

The DEGW will utilise the Wonga Walk at the proposed DARC as the starting point, located at 142 Dome Road, Dorrigo Mountain NSW and end at the Bindarray picnic area, in the upper Orara valley near Dairyville (see Figure 1).

The walk ranges in elevation and will traverse Gondwana old growth rainforest and eucalypt forests, cross rivers on swing bridges, visit waterfalls and swimming holes and provide vistas over the Bellinger Valley towards the ocean. The proposed route will provide several new day walking opportunities with various entry and exit points. Minimal vegetation removal is expected as the walking track has been located to avoid trees through the forest and sensitive landforms.

The design and construction of the walking track will be undertaken in accordance with *Australian Standard 2156: Walking tracks* classification and signage, where possible. The study area and evaluation of the impact assessment is a 12 m wide corridor to enable micro-siting of the activities during detailed set-out and construction.

Figure 1 shows the general route alignment of the new path which is approximately 44.1 km long with approximately 8.6 km of access roads and existing tracks.

1.2. Site summary history

1.2.1. Aboriginal History

The study area is within the traditional lands of the Gumbaynggirr people. Their lands extend between the Clarence and Nambucca Rivers, westwards from the coast to the western edge of the Dorrigo Plateau (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.7). The Gumbaynggirr people of the Bellinger River area traversed between coastal flats, heavily timbered valleys, riverbanks, and Dorrigo rainforests dictated by seasonal conditions and availability of food resources (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.7).

The Dorrigo escarpment, being well watered, supported subtropical rainforest with red cedars, blueberry ash, brushbox, and flooded gum, creating a positive environment for kangaroos, wallabies, kangaroo rats, other small mammals, and birds, with fish and an abundance of aquatic animals in the Bellinger River and associated estuaries (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.7). These acted as food resources for the Gumbaynggirr people of the Bellinger River area. Due to Dorrigo's isolated placement, European invasion did not immediately affect the Gumbaynggirr people's way of life. However, rapid growth northwards from Sydney Cove saw contact occur from the 1830s onwards. The history of Gumbaynggirr Country is vast and rich, expressed in the continued culture and language of its people. (Please see the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report [ELA 2023a] for further information).

1.2.2. Non-Aboriginal History

1.2.2.1. Early European contact, exploration and settlement

Richard Craig is the first recorded European to enter the Dorrigo region. Craig arrived in Sydney in 1821, aged 9, aboard the *Prince Regent*. He technically arrived as a free settler accompanying his convict father, William Craig, who had been sentenced to seven years transportation for sheep stealing (Monument Australia, n.d.). Later, William and Richard Craig were together convicted of cattle stealing in 1828, with William sentenced to 14 years transportation to Norfolk Island and Richard

sentenced to death. Richard Craig's sentence was reduced to seven years hard labour in chains at the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement, where he arrived in 1829 (Monument Australia, n.d.).

Richard Craig escaped Moreton Bay twice in 1829, both times being recaptured shortly after. In 1830, he made a third escape, journeying south to the Clarence River where he gained assistance from the Gumbaynggirr people. He lived with the Gumbaynggirr for twelve months, traversing the Dorrigo-Guy Fawkes Plateau and valleys of the Nymboida and Bellinger Rivers before eventually surrendering himself at Port Macquarie (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.8). By this time, cedar getters had begun to gain interest in the region. In October 1842 the *Sydney Morning Herald* told readers:

"The Bellinger abounds in timber of the richest quality, we are informed, and in the greatest abundance. It is growing on the very banks of the river, which forms three arms, each 35 miles in length" (SMH 21 Oct 1842, p.2).

Further, in December 1842, the *Sydney Morning Herald* informed:

"...cedar is found in great abundance, and of very superior quality. The Bellinger may now therefore be safely said to have been thrown open, and a most important discovery it is to the colony, for the Macleay and Nambucca Rivers are nearly, if not quite done up, for supplies of cedar" (SMH 15 Dec 1842, p.4).

Sawyers had moved to the Bellinger by late 1842, including cedar merchant William Wright, followed by William Scott and the Small, Benson and Wood families. By 1845, there were twenty pairs of sawyers working on the Bellinger River, and their output has been estimated at two million feet of cedar each year (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.11).

Dozens of squatters are known to have entered the Dorrigo Plateau during the late 1830s, the first being Major Edward Parke who set up the Guy-Fawkes River Station at present-day Majors Creek from c.1838. Sheep were trialled throughout the valley; however, cattle had become the preferred animal stock in the region by the 1850s (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.16).

The Robertson Land Act (also referred to as the Free Selection Act) was passed in NSW in October 1861, allowing for free land selection to take place. This saw settlers trickle into the north coast valleys, eliminating most squatters from the region (Perumal Murphy Wu 1992, p.17).

The Dorrigo Mountain Road was opened in 1893 which caused a further increase in the timber trade in the area as it facilitated easier access and transportation (NPWS 2009). This enabled a visit by botanist J.H. Maiden in December 1893 who wrote extensively on the flora of NSW and praised Dorrigo for its beauty, climate and diversity. Regarding the cedar tree, that had once been so abundant, Maiden wrote:

"...now very few mature trees remain standing, and I did not see one which was fit for cutting." (Maiden 1894).

Despite the declining numbers of cedar, cutting of timber on the Dorrigo Plateau continued into the 20th century.

1.2.2.2. Township of Dorrigo

Dorrigo's isolated position made it difficult to reach, keeping settlement slow throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. A bridle track had been established from Dorrigo down the mountainside into the Bellinger Valley in the mid-1860s whilst the Dorrigo Road was surveyed in 1876, with construction taking place from 1882-92 (Dungog Chronicle 7 Jun 1932, p.4).

Small allotments had been marked out following the passing of the Robertson Land Act (1861) for agricultural purposes, resulting in a fierce period of felling, burning and clearing of rainforest (Proudfoot, Prineas & Byrne 1984, 42). At this time, the cost of allotments was ten shillings per year for 40-acres (Aussie Towns n.d.).

By Federation (1901), Dorrigo had been officially proclaimed and the district had largely been subdivided with known agricultural pursuits to have included dairying and maize growing. Settlers arrived in the area throughout the early 20th century seeking opportunities with the increase in agricultural activity (Figure 4) the Dorrigo Butter Factory opened in 1906, and the Omeda Cheese Factory opened nearby in 1914. Farm allotments were made available to returned soldiers throughout the 1920s, who further contributed to the dairying industry (Aussie Towns n.d.). Timber getting remained a widespread activity also at this time (Figure 5)

A cemetery was established at Dorrigo in 1900, with a police station built in 1904, In 1924, the railway came to Dorrigo via Glenreagh exporting timber, livestock and butter, closing in 1972 due to flood damage. St John's School opened in 1924, the Hotel Dorrigo opened in 1925 and potato growing became popular within the region during the 1930s. As of the 2021 Census, Dorrigo maintains a population of 1,214 people.



Figure 6: Settlers at Dorrigo 1906 (Coffs collections 1906, mus07-6961)



Figure 7: Bullock team hauling timber, Dorrigo c1920 (Coffs collections, c.1902, mus07-3668)

1.2.2.3. Dorrigo National Park

In 1900, District Surveyor Edward Ebsworth proposed a small area on the Dorrigo Mountain be reserved for recreation and preservation of the rainforest's flora and fauna; this became the nucleus of the Dorrigo National Park (Proudfoot, Prineas & Byrne 1984, p.40).

Surveyor H. A. Evans marked two small areas for the protection of two cascades and a large flora reserve (1,600 ha) was established in 1917. Extensive clearing and burning of the rainforest had been carried out across the Dorrigo Plateau by this time, for the establishment of the dairying industry, causing irrevocable damage (Proudfoot, Prineas & Byrne 1984, p.41). Further areas were gazetted as flora reserve in 1927 and 1936, with trusteeship of the rainforest transferred to Bellingen Shire Council from 1954.

Illegal timber removal is known to have occurred throughout the 1960s. The Park came under the responsibility of National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1967, formalising Dorrigo National Park. Additional areas were added throughout the 1970s and 1980s, increasing the size of the Park to 7,819-ha by 1982 (Proudfoot, Prineas & Byrne 1984, p.41). The Park forms part of the World Heritage Listed New England Group 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia,' inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1986. Today, the Park covers a 11,900 ha area and is recognised internationally for its exceptional natural beauty with significant habitats of outstanding value to science and conservation (NPWS n.d.).

1.2.2.4. Slingsby's Road and Tramways

The first tramway in the Bellingen Shire, was located on the edge of the Dorrigo Plateau, and was built by the Bellinger Timber Company to gain access to the hoop pine forest, also known as the 'Pine Syndicate'. Prior to the development of the Gleniffer inclined tramway, access to these forests had

been difficult, so the tramway was developed over a two-year period around 1911 (McNeil 1988, 7). It featured a 4-foot gauge line with timber rails that were cut from local brushbox. The tramway was initially powered by a steam boiler and double drum steam winch, located halfway up the incline and bullock teams carried the logs to the top station, though later a steam traction engine was used to haul the logs (SHI Bellingen LEP A46).

In early 1932, GL Briggs & Sons purchased the assets of the Bellinger Timber Company, which until 1928 had operated the Gleniffer Inclined Tramway and sawmill up to Syndicate Ridge (Banksia Heritage and Archaeology 2005, 13). Briggs used the incline and winding engine to haul recovered material from the disused Gleniffer Mill to the top of the plateau. The recovered material was then re-erected and used in the construction of a small, steam powered mill at the end of Slingsbys Road, known as the 'BT' (Bellinger Timber) mill (NSW Historic Heritage Information System Inventory Form [HHISIF], n.d.). The mill commenced operations in September 1932 and cut coachwood, sassafras and crabapple drawn from the thickly timbered headwaters of Wild Cattle Creek (O.H.M Consultants 2006,13).

The 3-foot, 6-inch 'Briggs Slingsbys Road Tramway' was built running south-east from the mill towards the edge of the plateau, parallel to Wild Cattle Creek, and had a combination of timber and steel rails, with steel utilised on curves and gradients (Figure 6, Figure 7). Earthworks were minor and bridges along the track were typically made from large logs. The tramway was run by a Fordson rail tractor, powered by kerosene. The tractor hauled two log bogies, loaded from logging ramps, and could bring in up to 3000 feet of logs at a time, requiring three trips a day to keep the mill operating (NSW HHISIF, n.d.).

In 1937 the mill acquired a caterpillar logging tractor which rendered the engine redundant, and the tramway ceased operating in 1942, though the mill operated until it was destroyed by fire in 1956 (Banksia Heritage and Archaeology 2005, 13). Since that time, the former tramway alignment has been used for forestry and as a national parks access road and fire trail (NSW HHISIF, n.d.).



Figure 8: Bellingen Timber Company's inclined tramway at Gleniffer, c.1913 (Source: McNeil 1988, 7)



Figure 9: Gleniffer inclined tramway, c.1913 (Source: McNeil 1988, 11)

1.2.3. Bindarri National Park

Logging within the area that would become Bindarri National Park began in 1862. By the 1880s concern grew that the remaining timber in the Orara Valley would be cleared, so Forest Reserve no. 642 was declared, which included parts of Bindarri National Park (NSW Gov. Gaz 07 Jan 1881). In 1917, the Orara West State Forest was dedicated.

By the twentieth century, most of the red cedar had been logged from the Orara forests and Eastern Dorrigo Plateau. The subsequent shift from cedar to other timbers boosted local town settlement in the surrounding region. This resulted in an increase in sawmills including the Ashton Mill around 1910, 100 m northwest of the park (Bell 1977).

Pine Road follows a track used for hauling hoop pine from Eastern Dorrigo to the Upper Orara via Dairyville. Land selection around the Urumbilum River included some river flats of the park, and in 1943 several contained cleared paddocks and dairy farms. In the 1950s many farms were abandoned and dedicated as state forest. Now reforested with the only evidence of former logging activities within the park comprising old machinery and snig tracks (NPWS 2009).

Bindarri National Park adjoins the World Heritage Listed Dorrigo National Park. Dedicated on 1 January 1999, it covers an area of 5,365 hectares. The name of the park is derived from the local Gumbaynggirr language meaning ‘creek system’. The park comprises land that was formerly part of the Orara West and Tuckers Knobs state forests and links together the plateau and coastal forests, containing a complexity of landscapes and diverse biodiversity (NPWS 2009, 12-13).

A timeline summary of the key historical events is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary timeline of the key historical events

Date	Event
1831	First recorded visit by a European into the Dorrigo area
1840s	Sawyers into the Bellinger by late 1842
1862	Logging begins in Bindarri National Park
1892	Dorrigo Mountain Road opens
1900	First portion of Dorrigo Mountain reserved for recreation and preservation – will later become Dorrigo National Park
1917	Orara West State Forest dedicated
1967	Dorrigo Mountain reserve trusteeship comes under responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service
1986	‘Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’ inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List
1999	Bindarri National Park dedicated as a National Park

1.2.4. Previous physical changes

All previously physical changes in the vicinity of the study area are largely the result of logging activities including the construction of infrastructure related to logging such as the inclined tramways. Aside from previously cleared areas that are now experiencing regrowth, the majority of the study area remains largely unaltered rainforest aside from very minor impacts caused by scarce visitation.

1.3. Physical analysis

A site inspection of the study area was undertaken by ELA Senior Heritage Consultants Jessica Horton and Jennifer Norfolk on 17-21 July 2023.

1.3.1. Buildings – exterior and interiors

There are no built structures, formal paths or fences within the study area.

1.3.2. Landscape and Landscape elements

The walk mostly follows rocky ridge lines and steep slopes, the walk had low visibility overall due to the dense leaf litter covering the rainforest floor and the dense overgrowth of the understorey. The few areas of visibility identified earthy loose brown and red earths and eroding bedrock (Figure 8, Figure 9). There is evidence in some locations of logging activities including tree stumps with springboard holes (Figure 10, Figure 11) other stumps (Figure 12), and metal items protruding from trees (Figure 13).

The drainage lines and creek lines that dissect the walking track were mostly dry with large angular boulders and outcropping bedrock that likely flow during seasons of high rainfall. The permanent watercourses had fresh water and were at the base of steep valleys. The rocky outcropping was eroded smooth, and the fluvial gravels were rounded.

The rainforest has evidently experienced disturbance from the past land use and logging activities. Large areas of previous clearing are slowly re-vegetating. The proposed walk utilises small areas of existing tracks that were graded and scraped for the logging equipment. In these locations the rainforest is dense with thick understorey plant species and few remnants of old growth trees. Small portions of the proposed walk navigate through sections of old growth forest that the logging activities could not reach. The tall canopy trees created an open understorey favourable for hunting and navigating.

1.3.3. Archaeological Potential

Historical research, including analysis of mapping, demonstrates that the study area has never been in private ownership. Early 19th century activities (c1830s-40s) within the region were largely limited to timber getting. Evidence of timber getting is ephemeral in nature with remnants usually restricted to tree stumps with springboard holes, and scattered sawing materials. Limited evidence of timber getting activity was encountered during the site inspection (Figure 10 and Figure 11). There is ample information regarding 19th century timber getting activities within northern NSW. As such, these resources would not reach the threshold for local or State significance, nor would they be considered 'relics' under the *Heritage Act 1977*. However, they contribute to the historic setting of the place, and their retention would be considered a positive heritage outcome, providing opportunities for heritage interpretation.

Parish mapping indicates that parts of the study area in Dorrigo National Park were dedicated nature reserve by the c1920s (Appendix A:). Prior to this in the 1880s portions of Bindarri National Park were included in the Forest Reserve No 642 and subsequent Orara West State Forest when declared in 1917. Dorrigo National Park was formalised in 1967. Bindarri National Park was formalised in 1999.

The study area includes a small section of the locally significant 'Escape Road' archaeological site listed on the Bellingen LEP (2010). No justification or description for the listing is available on the SHI. The listing relates to logging activity in the area in the 1930s when the road was first opened and enhanced to support the BT Sawmill and associated tramway. The road ceased to be used regularly in the 1950s with the end of logging. The Bellingen Heritage Study (Perumal Murphy 1991), which informed the LEP listing, notes that the overall road area contains a series of bridges, a ranger's hut, and a box listing. These specific features are all also listed on the LEP as archaeological items but are all more than 400 m away from the study area. Despite being listed as an archaeological site, it is highly unlikely that any archaeologically recognisable evidence of the logging industry will be present on this section of Escape Road. At best, the trackway would have been cleared of debris and compacted either intentionally via a roller or more likely as a byproduct of haulers and other mobile machinery using the road. This compacted surface is all that likely remains within the study area, and this would not meet the threshold of local significance as it has no real research potential, and aside from its loose association with logging, would not meet any other assessment criteria. Without at least local significance, the potential road surface cannot be defined as a relic as defined by the Heritage Act and therefore is not considered part of an archaeological resource. Note also that old forestry maps show an 'Escarp Road' (more likely name) to the southeast of the listing, from Dibbs Head Road towards Lanes Lookout.

No evidence of substantial structural development or long-term occupation has taken place within the study area and therefore an archaeological resource has not accumulated. Both parts of the study area have been protected from development since at least the early 20th century. The 'Escape Road' archaeological site is highly unlikely to have any historical archaeological resource that meets the threshold of significance and as such the study area does not contain archaeological potential.



Figure 10: General view of the DEGW



Figure 11: General view of the DEGW



Figure 12: A tree stump with cut springboard holds



Figure 13: A tree stump with cut springboard holds



Figure 14: Large tree stump



Figure 15: Metal item protruding from tree trunk that has been partially grown over

2. Significance Assessment

2.1. Relationship to NSW Historical Themes

The NSW Heritage Council have developed a series of state themes to provide a thematic framework for historical research. Table 3 discusses the NSW Historical themes.

Table 3: NSW Historical Themes

National theme	NSW theme	Comment
Tracing the natural evolution of Australia	Naturally evolved environment	The Dorrigo National Park is recognised on State, National and World heritage registers for its outstanding naturally evolved environment. The ancient rainforest has significance independent of human intervention. It is home to numerous rare and important native flora and fauna as well as a respected and enjoyed landscape. Bindarri National Park is part of the dramatic escarpment hinterland of the mid north coast and contains a complex and diverse range of vegetation. It has been identified as a future candidate for world heritage status. The creation and maintenance of both national parks has contributed to the cultural life of NSW and Australia as a whole.
Peopling Australia	Aboriginal cultures and interactions with other cultures	Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks fall within traditional lands of the Gumbaynggirr People. Aboriginal sites are known to be present within both national parks and research has shown the Gumbaynggirr People utilised a variety of resources across the region including food sources and plants. Discussion of Aboriginal cultural values and research themes in relation to the study area are contained in the ACHA (ELA 2024c).
Developing local, regional, and national economies	Environment – cultural landscape	Dorrigo National Park has been recognised for its exceptional natural beauty and utilised for recreational activities (i.e., hikes) since early European settlement. Government Botanist J. H. Maiden noted the significance of the vegetation within the Dorrigo Rainforest in 1893, whilst the place became National Park in 1967 following NPWS trusteeship. The construction of the existing rainforest centre in 1988 established the study area as part of the cultural landscape and a key physical and educational opening to the national park. The precursors to Bindarri National Park, Forest Reserve No 642 and Orara West State Forest, were both early 20 th century attempts to manage and protect environmentally important landscapes whilst still enabling the timber industry to grow and develop.
	Forestry	The Dorrigo Plateau has been associated with timber getting since the 1840s. There have been numerous sawmills, and timber plantations established across the area all of which demonstrate the development of the forestry industry in the region. The LEP listed Briggs Slingsbys Road Tramway was built in 1932 to enhance access to forestry resources in Dorrigo National Park.
	Industry	The Dorrigo Plateau has been associated with timber getting since the 1840s. Timber mills were established, with cedar transported from the Plateau to the coast at Coffs Harbour. The LEP listed Briggs Slingsbys Road Tramway was built in 1932 to enhance access to forestry resources in Dorrigo National Park.
	Pastoralism	Land clearances associated with timber getting within the Dorrigo Plateau allowed for the dairying industry to flourish.

National theme	NSW theme	Comment
		No specific evidence of pastoralism has been found for the study area.
	Transport	In September 1932 the 'Briggs Slingsbys Road Tramway' was built running south-east from the Bellinger Timber mill towards the edge of the plateau in Dorrigo National Park, logging cedar, coachwood and crabapple. Today the former tramway alignment is used by NPWS as a fire trail and walking track.
Developing Australia's cultural life	Leisure	Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks have been recognised for their exceptional natural beauty and utilised for recreational activities (i.e., hikes) since early European settlement. Since the first walking tracks, lookouts and picnic areas were established in the 1960s, the area has been promoted for leisure activities.

2.2. Relationship to NSW National Parks' Key Heritage Stories

The NPWS Key Heritage Stories are a thematic study defined to investigate, define, and describe the key heritage stories and associated places within NSW national parks. Table 4 discusses the Heritage Stories identified for the study area.

Table 4: NSW NPWS Key Heritage Stories

Key Story	Notes	Relationship
1 Creating and experiencing national parks	Development of national parks in NSW and the changing ways that visitors have experienced and understood nature and culture in national parks	The Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks have been recognised for their exceptional natural beauty and utilised for recreational activities (i.e., hikes), lookouts and picnic areas since early European settlement. Government Botanist J. H. Maiden noted the significance of the vegetation within the Dorrigo Rainforest in 1893, and the place became national park in 1967 following NPWS trusteeship. Bindarri National Park was dedicated later in 1999 but its precursor, Forest Reserve No 642 protected the area from the 1880s onwards.
2 Aboriginal Country, shared history	Experiences of Aboriginal people occupying, working in or moving through areas of land that now form part of the NSW national parks estate	Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks fall within traditional lands of the Gumbaynggirr group. Aboriginal sites, including campsites and open artefact scatters, are known to be present within the parks. Native plants and landscapes within Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks are significant to Aboriginal people for medicinal purposes, food and culture, and the park name Bindarri comes from a Gumbaynggirr word meaning 'creek system'
3 Arriving and settling	Examines the stories of arrival, exploration, and settlement in NSW	Richard Craig is documented as being the earliest European explorer along the Dorrigo Plateau and subsequently, within Dorrigo National Park (c1830s). Squatters, timber getters and sawyers followed shortly after.
6 Making a living from nature	Examines the exploitation of natural resources within NSW national parks estate for commercial gain	Timber getting was the first industry across the Dorrigo Plateau, including in both national parks. Following the decline of timber getting, dairying became the favoured industry in the region, whilst maize was a preferred crop. Both national parks are largely protected from agriculture today.

2.3. Statement of Significance

The study area includes parts of the 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia' which is listed as a heritage item on the World Heritage Register and the State Heritage Register. These listings include the following statements of significance:

The brief synthesis of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the study area on the WHL states:

"The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia is a serial property comprising the major remaining areas of rainforest in southeast Queensland and northeast New South Wales. It represents outstanding examples of major stages of the Earth's evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, and exceptional biological diversity. A wide range of plant and animal lineages and communities with ancient origins in Gondwana, many of which are restricted largely or entirely to the Gondwana Rainforests, survive in this collection of reserves. The Gondwana Rainforests also provides the principal habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals."

The following Statement of Significance was taken from the SHR listing for 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia':

"The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, comprising several protected areas, is situated predominantly along the Great Escarpment on Australia's east coast. The outstanding geological features displayed around shield volcanic craters and the high number of rare and threatened rainforest species are of international significance for science and conservation."

An outstanding example representing major stages of the earth's evolutionary history; an outstanding example representing significant ongoing geological processes and biological evolution; and containing important and significant habitats for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity."

The study area also includes parts of the High Conservation Value Old Growth forest which is listed as a heritage item on the State Heritage Register with the following statement of significance:

"High Conservation Value Old Growth forest is ecologically mature eucalypt forest showing few signs of human disturbance. The upper canopy trees are no longer growing in height or spreading their crowns and show signs of old age. High Conservation Value Old Growth forest represents the best examples remaining of such forests."

The statement of significance for the LEP listing for 'Escape Road' per the Heritage Study states:

"This is a rare, intact forestry road associated with the logging of the areas in the 1930's. It was associated with the exploitation of this area by Briggs timber mills. It is a typical forestry road with a series of timber bridges and other structures which are typical of the changes happening to forestry with changes in technology in the early 20th century."

2.4. Criteria for Assessment of Cultural Heritage Significance

2.4.1. Gondwana Rainforests of Australia (WHL #368, NHL #105704, SHR #01002)

The part of the study area within Dorrigo National Park has significance (Outstanding Universal Value) under multiple Criteria of Section for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Its relevant significance for each criterion as established on the WHL is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Criteria of Selection on the World Heritage List for the study area

Criteria	Assessment of Significance
Criterion (i):	<i>to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (ii):	<i>to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (iii):	<i>to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (iv):	<i>to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (v):	<i>to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (vi):	<i>to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (vii):	<i>to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;</i>
Not applicable	
Criterion (viii):	<i>to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;</i>

The Gondwana Rainforests provides outstanding examples of significant ongoing geological processes. When Australia separated from Antarctica following the breakup of Gondwana, new continental margins developed. The margin which formed along Australia's eastern edge is characterised by an asymmetrical marginal swell that runs parallel to the coastline, the erosion of which has resulted in the Great Divide and the Great Escarpment. This eastern continental margin experienced volcanicity during the Cenozoic Era as the Australian continental plate moved over one of the planet's hot spots.

Criterion (ix): *to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;*

The Gondwana Rainforests contains outstanding examples of major stages in the Earth's evolutionary history as well as ongoing evolutionary processes. Major stages represented include the 'Age of the Pteridophytes' from the Carboniferous Period with some of the oldest elements of the world's ferns represented, and the 'Age of Conifers' in the Jurassic Period with one of the most significant centres of survival for Araucarians (the most ancient and phylogenetically primitive of the world's conifers). Likewise, the property provides an outstanding record of the 'Age of the Angiosperms'. This includes a secondary centre of endemism for primitive flowering plants originating in the Early Cretaceous, the most diverse assemblage of relict angiosperm taxa representing the primary radiation of dicotyledons in the mid-Late Cretaceous, a unique record of the evolutionary history of Australian rainforests representing the 'golden age' of the Early Tertiary, and a unique record of Miocene vegetation that was the antecedent of modern temperate rainforests in Australia. The property also contains an outstanding number of songbird species, including lyrebirds (Menuridae), scrub-birds (Atrichornithidae), treecreepers (Climacteridae) and bowerbirds and catbirds (Ptilonorhynchidae), belonging to some of the oldest lineages of passerines that evolved in the Late Cretaceous. Outstanding examples of other relict vertebrate and invertebrate fauna from ancient lineages linked to the break-up of Gondwana also occur in the property.

The flora and fauna of the Gondwana Rainforests provides outstanding examples of ongoing evolution including plant and animal taxa which show evidence of relatively recent evolution. The rainforests have been described as 'an archipelago of refugia, a series of distinctive habitats that characterise a temporary endpoint in climatic and geomorphological evolution'. The distances between these 'islands' of rainforest represent barriers to the flow of genetic material for those taxa which have low dispersal ability, and this pressure has created the potential for continued speciation.

Criterion (x): *to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.*

The ecosystems of the Gondwana Rainforests contain significant and important natural habitats for species of conservation significance, particularly those associated with the rainforests which

once covered much of the continent of Australia and are now restricted to archipelagos of small areas of rainforest isolated by sclerophyll vegetation and cleared land. The Gondwana Rainforests provides the principal habitat for many species of plants and animals of outstanding universal value, including more than 270 threatened species as well as relict and primitive taxa.

Rainforests covered most of Australia for much of the 40 million years after its separation from Gondwana. However, these rainforests contracted as climatic conditions changed and the continent drifted northwards. By the time of European settlement rainforests covered only 1% of the landmass and were restricted to refugia with suitable climatic conditions and protection from fire. Following European settlement, clearing for agriculture saw further loss of rainforests and only a quarter of the rainforest present in Australia at the time of European settlement remains.

The Gondwana Rainforests protects the largest and best stands of rainforest habitat remaining in this region. Many of the rare and threatened flora and fauna species are rainforest specialists, and their vulnerability to extinction is due to a variety of factors including the rarity of their rainforest habitat. The Gondwana Rainforests also protects large areas of other vegetation including a diverse range of heaths, rocky outcrop communities, forests and woodlands. These communities have a high diversity of plants and animals that add greatly to the value of the Gondwana Rainforests as habitat for rare, threatened and endemic species. The complex dynamics between rainforests and tall open forest particularly demonstrates the close evolutionary and ecological links between these communities.

Species continue to be discovered in the property including the re-discovery of two mammal species previously thought to have been extinct: the Hastings River Mouse (*Pseudomys oralis*) and Parma Wallaby (*Macropus parma*).

2.4.2. High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest (SHR#01487)

The parts of the study area that are within the High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest have significance under multiple heritage significance criteria (DPE, 2023). Its significance under each criterion as established for both state and local heritage items in NSW is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Criteria for listing on the SHR for the study area

Criteria	Assessment of Significance
Criterion (a):	<i>an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the local area)</i>
High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest is important for its potential to demonstrate the history of their use and exploitation, as well as key sites demonstrating evidence of Aboriginal occupation over a long time period.	
Criterion (c):	<i>an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area);</i>
High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest are by the nature of their tall trees areas of high aesthetic values which are valued and sought after by the community.	
Criterion (e):	<i>an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the local area);</i>

Criteria	Assessment of Significance
High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest is important for its potential to contribute to our understanding of the life cycle of eucalypt forests.	
Criterion (f):	<i>an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the local area).</i>
High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest is a forest type which is now rare or uncommon at a regional and state-wide basis. They provide a valuable habitat for a wide range of native animal species including a number of rare and endangered species.	

2.5. Heritage Curtilage

Figure 16 and Figure 17 show the relevant curtilage of Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and how it intersects with the study area.

Figure 18 shows the curtilage of 'Syndicate Tramway – Top Station', 'Escape Road', 'Slingsby's Road Group – box cutting', 'Slingsby's Road Group – hut', and 'Slingsby's Road Group – bridges' and how they relate to the study area.

Figure 19 shows the relationship between the study area and 'Escape Road'.

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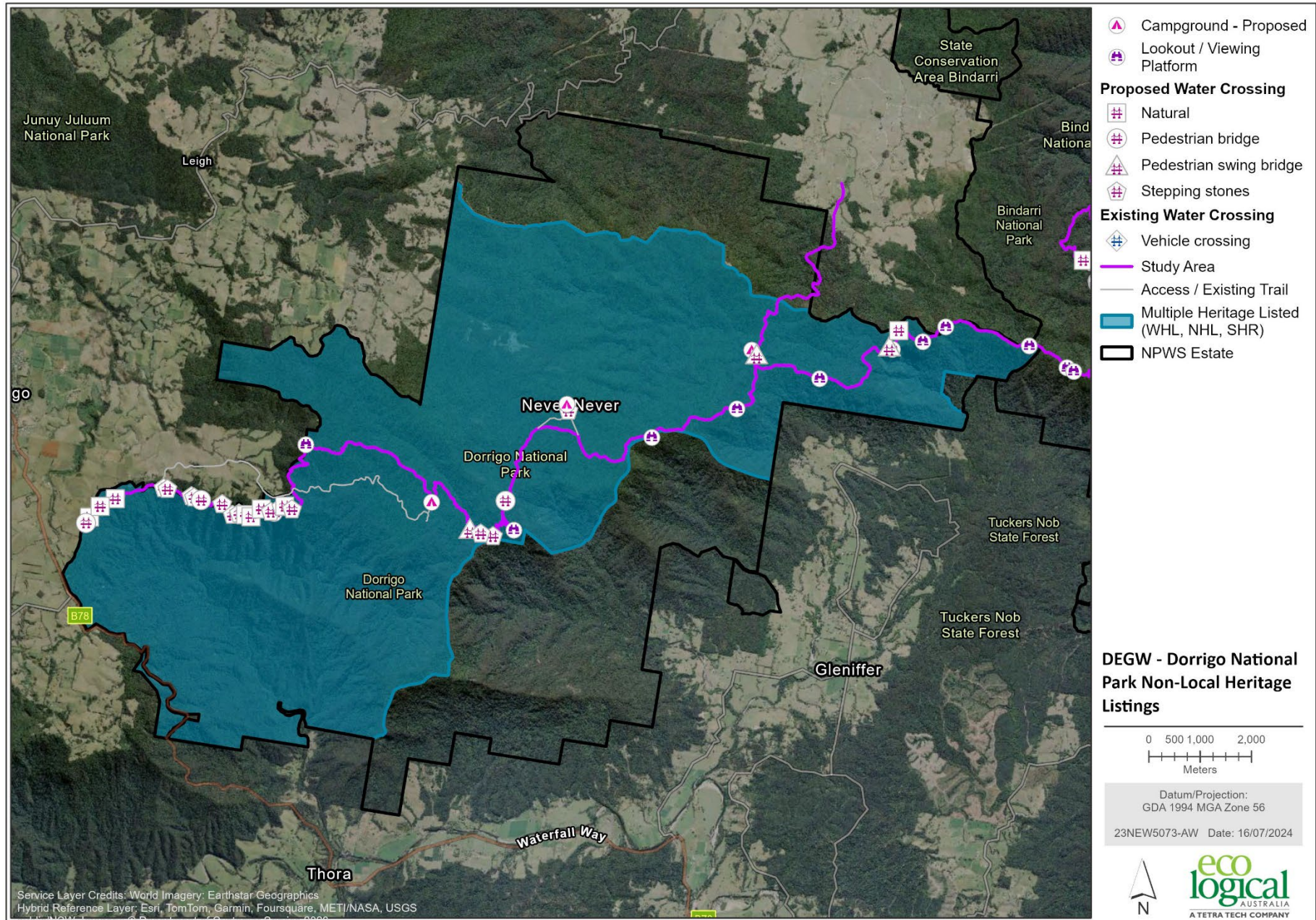


Figure 16: The study area in relation to the listed heritage items (excluding LEP items) within Dorrigo National Park

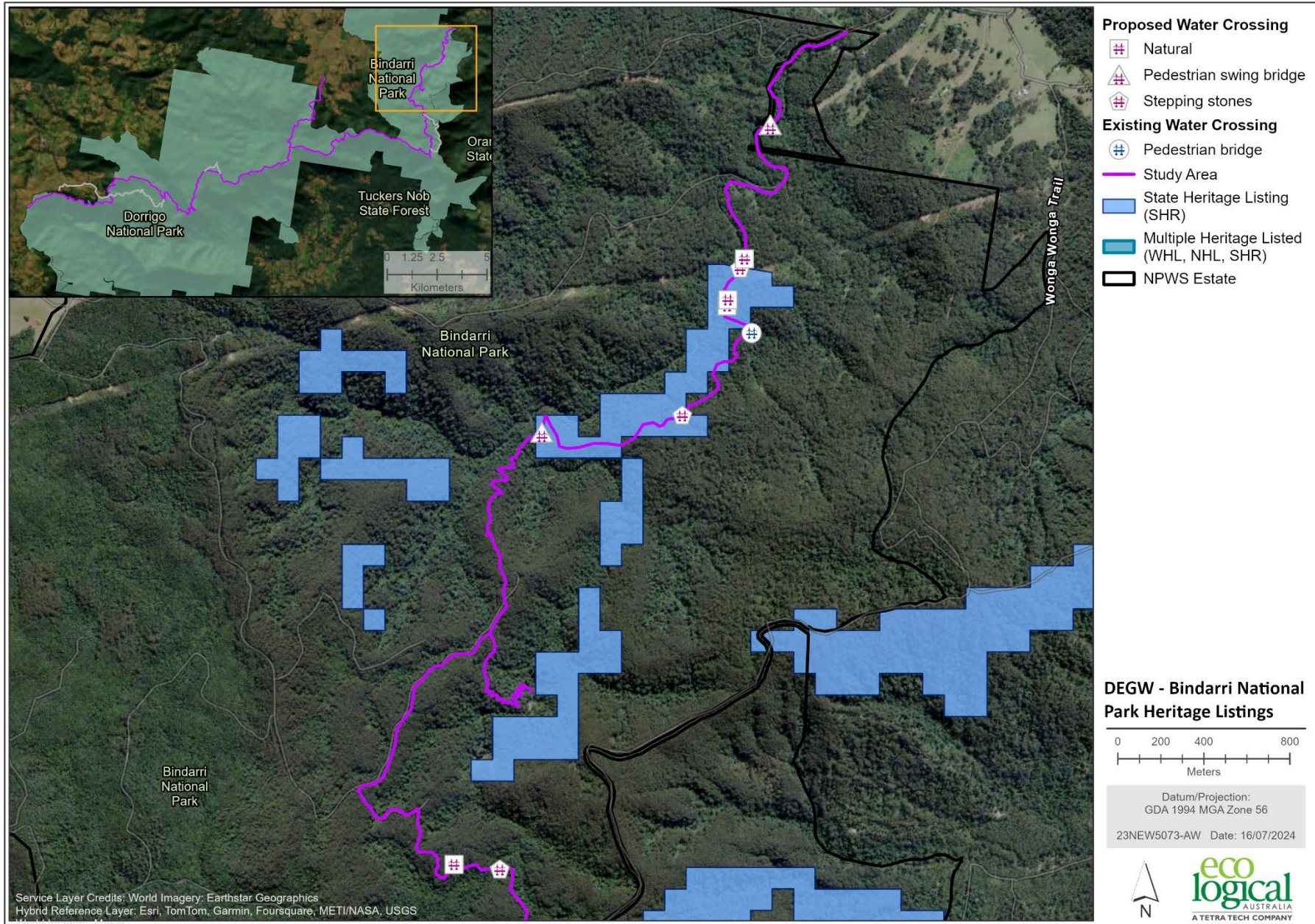


Figure 17: The study area in relation to the listed heritage items in Bindarra National Park

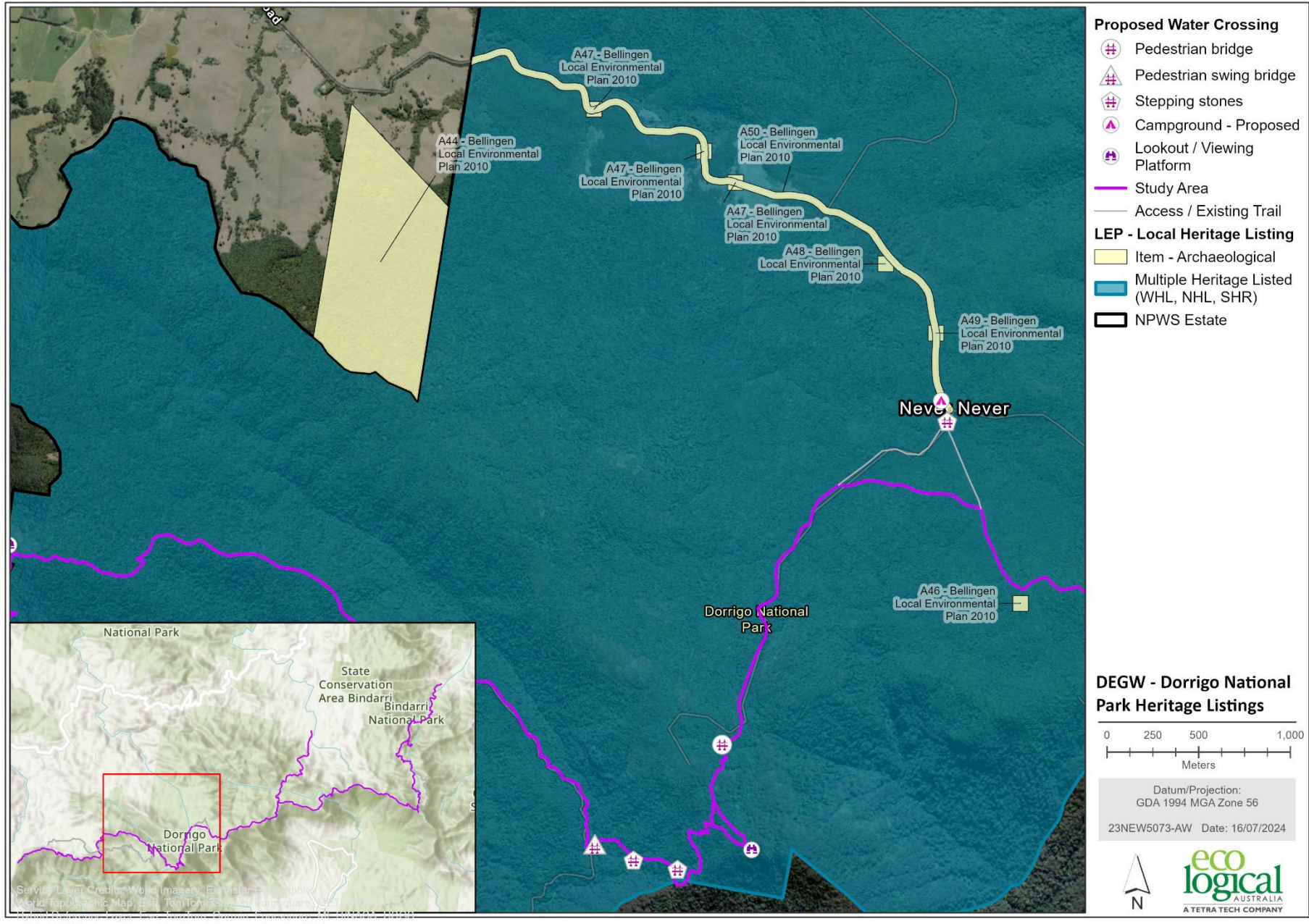


Figure 18: The study area in relation to the LEP listed heritage items within Dorrigo National Park

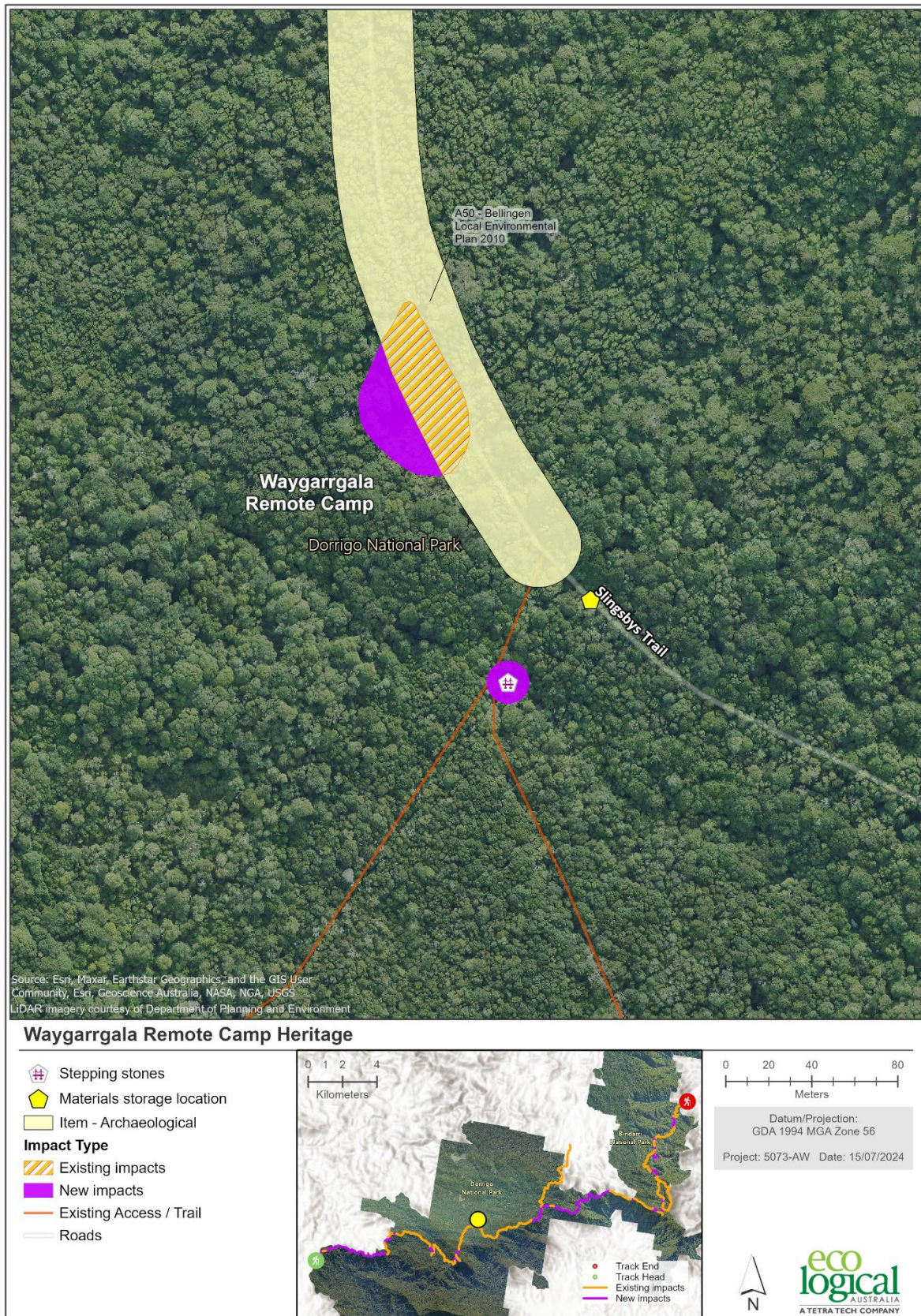


Figure 19: The study area in relation to the LEP listed archaeological site 'Escape Road'

3. Proposed works

3.1. The proposal

The proposal involves the construction of the DEGW, a multi-day walk exploring Dorrigo and Bindarra national parks.

The DEGW is a single direction 4-day, 3-night walk starting at the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre (DARC) in Dorrigo NP and finishing at the Bindarray picnic area in Bindarra NP, a distance of approximately 44.1 km. A shorter overnight 2-day loop walk is proposed between the DARC and Camp 1 at Baliiga, with the return leg following the existing Rosewood Creek and Blackbutt walking tracks.

The proposed track route will use existing formal and informal walking routes, historical logging tracks, open ridges and areas of new construction. A variety of pedestrian bridges and crossings will be used to traverse 43 rivers and creeks. A total 14 viewpoints and rest locations will be established, including 2 small lookout platforms. A design principle is to manage the walk alignment to ensure minimal impacts, both to natural surface level and vegetation, in order to maintain a sustainable outcome ecologically and culturally.

The proposal includes the construction/development of 3 new hiker camps and the upgrading of an existing remote camp on previously disturbed sites with existing access roads. The camps will accommodate up to 24 people on the 4-day walk and 48 people on the 2-day walk.

The DEGW includes:

- approximately 44.1 km of 600 to 900 mm wide walking track (in accordance with *Australian Standard 2156: Walking tracks classification and signage*, where possible)
- approximately 8.6 km of road upgrades, including management trails (8.1 km) and dormant roads (624 m)
- 3 new hiker camps incorporating hut accommodation, a camping area and communal buildings
- 1 upgraded remote camping area, Waygarrgala Remote Camp
- 1 future upgrade to an existing day use area, Baliiga picnic area
- 43 waterway crossings (including 5 single-span pedestrian bridges greater than 20 m long, and one vehicle bridge)
- 14 scenic viewpoints
- wayfinding and interpretation components
- temporary access and temporary construction sites.

Construction of the track will mainly occur using hand track building techniques, with the use of small mechanical tools and machinery using natural materials from the construction footprint (2 m) where possible. Some small excavator machine work may be required on some sections, along with stonework in fragile and steeper areas. Where imported materials are required, the use of sling loads under helicopter may be used. Experienced specialist track builders will be used on new and sensitive sections that require experience in detailed alignment and construction to manage erosion control and safety, and to reduce direct and indirect impacts to the ecology.

Construction is expected to start in mid-2025 and would take 24 to 48 months to complete.

3.2. Project aims

The DEGW aims to inspire future conservation advocacy and stewardship by providing a hiking experience that allows a greater number of people to spend time in the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage property. Both parks contain extensive areas of subtropical rainforest, large areas of warm temperate rainforest, and Antarctic beech cool temperature rainforest. These extraordinary areas will become more readily within reach. The driving philosophy is to provide an experience that allows more people to connect to nature, culture and landscapes within the parks.

The aims for the DEGW are:

- To create inspiring experiences that connect people with the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal culture for generations to come.
- To provide ongoing protection of our natural and cultural heritage, new opportunities for visitors to explore and connect with nature, increased contribution to the regional economy through visitor expenditure and employment, and health and wellbeing benefits for visitors and local communities.

The project aims to deliver on the following objectives:

- Create a new multi-day walking experience of international standing that showcases the dramatic Dorrigo Escarpment.
- Protect, respect and promote the parks' environmental and cultural heritage.
- Create nature-based experiences which grow awareness of Australia's ancient landscapes and foster future conservation advocacy and stewardship.
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal communities to rightfully share their culture, participate in and benefit from the regional visitor economy.
- Offer opportunities to connect to nature, which provides ongoing health and wellbeing for participants.
- Generate economic benefit for the local community and sustainable growth of the regional economy.
- Create safe and durable walking tracks and camps which are designed for minimal impact and long-term sustainability with climate change impacts in mind.
- Support participation of a diverse cross-section of the community.
- Build strong partnerships with business, government and local communities.
- Contribute to ongoing maintenance costs and ensure financial sustainability.

3.3. Key design principles

The following broad principles have been used for the design and alignment of the track and facilities:

- Reduce the impacts on the environmental and cultural values as far as possible by using existing tracks and previously disturbed areas.
- Built infrastructure (such as track surface, camp facilities and viewing platforms) are designed in a manner that minimises its footprint and accounts for climate change resilience, with best practice design, material choice and construction methods.
- Options for camping with hard-roofed shelter and platforms for independent hikers.
- A communal philosophy of shared facilities that promotes connections.
- Overnight camps and huts are managed by NPWS and not for exclusive or private use.

- Each day is between 10 and 15 km in length at a class 4 standard with a natural surface providing a 6 to 8 hours daily walk time.
- The walk provides a level of challenge at moderate difficulty for experienced walkers.
- All designs and construction methods suitable for the extremes of conditions including very high rainfall, humid summers and cool winters.
- Hiker camps have a maximum capacity between 12 and 24 people/day, with the exception of Camp 1 – Baliiga which has a maximum capacity of 48 people/day.
- The camping precincts are to be accessible by management vehicles for construction purposes and ongoing maintenance and emergency access to reduce costs and improve overall sustainability.

4. Heritage Impact Assessment

Both the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest listings focus primarily on the importance of the ecological values of the respective heritage items. As such the impact of the proposal on the heritage value of the items can be considered jointly. The impact of the proposal on the biodiversity of the place is considered elsewhere (ELA 2024b).

4.1. Matters for consideration

Before making decisions to change a heritage item it is important to fully consider all its parts. This leads to decisions that will retain heritage values in the future. Each of the following aspects have been considered in relation to *Assessing heritage significance* (DPE 2023a) and *Guidance and toolkit for impact assessments in a World Heritage Context* (UNESCO 2022). It follows the approach presented in *Guidelines for preparing a statement of heritage impact* (DPE NSW 2023b).

4.2. Fabric and spatial arrangement

The proposed new sections of the route are designed to be sympathetic to its setting. The DEGW construction will use natural materials, including local and imported stone, timber, and other sustainable materials to blend into the natural environment where possible. Significant vegetation removal is not proposed. Where vegetation clearance is required, the recommendations and mitigations outlined in the Ecological assessment (ELA 2024a) and the REF will ensure negligible impacts at worst occur. The final alignment will be selected to minimise the impact on localised vegetation. The track itself will be predominately comprising the natural topography and geology, will include little work and minor impacts, and will not include formal sealed paths.

4.3. Setting, views and vistas

The new sections of the proposed DEGW including campsites and other features will be screened by existing vegetation and remote location. It will create or re-establish 14 viewpoints that will enhance the views across both national parks enhancing appreciation and enjoyment of aspects that the heritage item is significant for. The proposed track and camping sites would not dominate the heritage character, its setting or compromise existing views and vistas. Where possible they will be constructed over areas that have previously been cleared by logging activities or disturbed, and designs of the huts and track will be low impact and use local materials.

4.4. Landscape

As far as possible existing tracks and previously disturbed areas will be utilised. Built infrastructure will be designed in a way that is light on footprint impact, campsites will be on raised platforms and natural materials such as timber and stone will be used at viewing platforms and along the track to minimise impacts to the heritage item and its setting. Further, due to the density of the rainforest, the proposed DEGW will be invisible from all major viewpoints above the canopy, and would be considered localised below the canopy, shielded by vegetation.

4.5. Use

The purpose of the DEWG is to provide a hiking experience that allows a greater number of people to connect to, spend time in and explore the Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks and thus appreciate its World Heritage natural and cultural significance. Daily walker and visitor numbers will be capped to minimise impacts.

4.6. Demolition

Some vegetation removal will be necessary. No structures are proposed to be demolished.

4.7. Curtilage

The curtilage of both heritage items is expansive to best preserve the ecological environments they seek to protect. No change to heritage curtilage would be required as the proposed works can exist within a listed item.

4.8. Moveable heritage

There will be no impacts to moveable heritage. No movable heritage is present in the study area.

4.9. Aboriginal cultural heritage

The study area is important for the potential evidence of Aboriginal past land use. This is discussed in detail in the ACHA (ELA 2024c).

4.10. Historical archaeology

A historical background has been provided within Section 1.2. No evidence of previous occupation has occurred in the study area. The new sections of track have been surveyed on foot and no potential areas of archaeology were observed appears to exist within the study area as the study area is undeveloped national park. The part of the study area within the LEP listed archaeological site 'Escape Road' is highly unlikely to contain and historical archaeological resource that meets the threshold for local significance. Protocols for unexpected finds can be found in Appendix B.

4.11. Natural heritage

An impact assessment was prepared against the Significant Impact Criteria for natural heritage values of a World Heritage property in the DEGW MNES (ELA 2024b) and determined the impacts to be negligible and are not considered to significantly impact the natural heritage values of a World Heritage property. The MNES will be referred to the minister to confirm if the proposal is a controlled action.

A key design principle is to finalise the track alignment on the ground to ensure minimal impact and sustainability. The new sections of the route will be built to blend into the natural environment using primarily hand tools and local materials where possible. Where possible the development will be constructed over areas that have previously been cleared by logging activities or disturbed, and designs of the huts and track will be low-key, use sustainable materials and blend in with the environment. No disturbance to important geological, landscape features or land formations are expected under this proposal. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Operational Management Plan (OMP) will be developed with relevant mitigation measures to ameliorate potential impacts to

biodiversity values outside and within the development footprint. Further details of the CEMP are provided in Table 39 of the DEGW Ecological assessment (ELA 2024a).

Flora species known as important Gondwana Rainforest relicts recorded within the Study area include large numbers of ferns and conifers occurring in many of the mapped PCTs, and *Nothofagus moorei* (Antarctic Beech) which was identified within two mapped PCTs (PCT 3031 and 4107). Songbird species belonging to some of the oldest lineages of passerines, including the superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*), various scrub-birds (*Atrichornithidae*), treecreepers (*Climacteridae*) and bowerbirds and catbirds (*Ptilonorhynchidae*) were observed within the Study area via sightings, bird calls, lyrebird mounds and nests. These species occur predominately in rainforest habitats. In terms of 'Gondwana Rainforest' an analysis was undertaken on the impacts of the proposal on Keith Formation 'Rainforest' Plant Community Types (PCTs) mapped by ELA, which occur within the Dorrigo National Park only. A precautionary approach was undertaken, whereby all PCTs associated with Rainforest communities were considered as associated with 'Gondwana Rainforest'. A total area of 8.87 ha of 'Rainforest' Keith formation PCTs occur within the Proposal area within Dorrigo National Park, where up to 4.57 ha will be directly impacted. Of this a total area of 0.02 ha is commensurate with the EPBC Act listed TEC Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia, with 0.01 ha expected to be directly impacted. A detailed impact assessment of such habitats and additional threatened flora and fauna species can be found in the DEGW Ecological assessment (ELA 2024a) and the DEGW MNES (ELA 2024b).

The overall proposal spans over 44.1 km, it has a very small overall footprint of only 9.61 ha (a study area of 16 ha). This represents less than 0.07% of the Gondwana Rainforests within Dorrigo NP (7,885 ha).

Given the very small area, the design which focuses on minimising impact, and deliberate limiting of people permitted to walk the path, this impact assessment considers the impact to be negligible and not considered to significantly impact the natural heritage values of a World Heritage property.

4.12. Conservation areas

There are no relevant LEP listed heritage conservation areas in the vicinity of the study area.

4.13. Cumulative impacts

Cumulative impact assessment considers the accumulated changes caused by multiple projects within a defined place or site type. It acknowledges that no project exists in isolation and that impacts which may appear minor in the local scale, can be much more significant when viewed in collaboration with others. There are currently multiple projects occurring across both Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks. These projects all have the general aim to enhance the preservation, appreciation, and enjoyment of the natural environment. Each of these projects is small in scale and is restricted to a localised impact in the immediate vicinity of their surrounds. These projects include:

- Slingsbys trail bridge replacements which includes the ongoing management of Killungoondie Plains and upgrades to the remote camp on Wild Cattle Creek
- The related DARC project that is focused on the redevelopment of the Dorrigo visitor centre and associated skywalk

- The Glade development project that is related to the DARC and focuses on the use of the Glade as a temporary hub with permanent improvements
- Wonga Walk upgrades which have been ongoing for the last three years and continuing
- Dome Road Bridge upgrade project which has upgraded four timber culvert style bridges on Dome Road. The new construction was built over the previous timber bridges so that they remain preserved in situ.

Although the DEGW project spans over 44.1 km it has a very small overall footprint measuring 9.61 ha (a study area of 16 ha). Within the confines of the World Heritage listed Gondwana Rainforest area in Dorrigo National Park which measures 7,885 ha, this represents less than 0.07% of the total space. When considering the impact across the NPWS estate that the project intersects with (Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks, and Bindarri Conservation area) collectively, the project will alter less than 0.09% of the total area (17,793 ha).

Given the very small area, the design which focuses on minimising impact, and deliberate limiting of people permitted to walk the path, this SOHI considers the impact to be negligible. When considered collectively with the other impacts presented above, the combined impact remains very low to negligible.

4.14. Plan of Management Policies

The relevant management policies from the Dorrigo National Park, Bindarri National Park and Bindarri State Conservation Area plan of management (PoM) (NPWS 2024) are outlined below in Table 8. The newly published 2024 PoM supersedes the previous Dorrigo National Park PoM (1998) and the Bindarri PoM (2009). It contains five key management themes with individual policies under each theme. The policies within the new PoM should be followed for the project. In addition, the relevant sections of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA) Strategic Overview for Management (DEH 2000) are considered below.

Table 7: Relevant policies from the Dorrigo National Park, Bindarri National Park and Bindarri State Conservation Area Plan of Management 2024

Management Theme	Policy number	Policy	Assessment and compliance
Supporting Healthy Country	1 Work with Gumbaynggirr people to support healthy country	a) Support access to Country for the local Aboriginal community to maintain, renew or develop cultural connections and practices, including cultural fire management activities and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage values and sites.	Not applicable to this assessment, refer to the ACHA (ELA 2024c)
		b) Improve understanding, protection, interpretation and promotion of the cultural values of the parks through strengthened partnerships between NPWS and Gumbaynggirr people.	
		c) Support the development and operation of formal and/or informal agreements or partnerships with	

Management Theme	Policy number	Policy	Assessment and compliance
		Aboriginal people and communities for the management of the parks.	
Supporting Healthy Country	2. Aboriginal cultural heritage values in the parks are respected and protected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal cultural values and language as part of a cultural visitor experience. This includes encouraging cultural tourism and opportunities for language in the naming of places. b) Support research and cultural heritage surveys that assist in the understanding, recording and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage values. c) Monitor and assess visitor use for impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage values and prevent and/or mitigate impacts as necessary. d) Prioritise protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage values and sites when implementing fire and pest and weed management strategies. 	Not applicable to this assessment, refer to the ACHA (ELA 2024c)
Protecting Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage areas	3. World Heritage and National Heritage values are identified, protected, conserved, presented and transmitted to future generations and, if appropriate, rehabilitated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Manage the parks consistent with World Heritage and National Heritage management obligations, the Gondwana Rainforests strategic plan (once prepared), and any other subsequent planning documents relevant to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage property. b) Undertake actions to provide the public with an understanding and appreciation of the parks' values, including their World Heritage and National Heritage values. 	<p>The proposed works comply with the overall management strategy. The proposed works would ensure the ongoing use and visibility of the site as an educational facility promoting the importance of the park. The significant values of the park will remain unchanged by the proposed works.</p> <p>The proposed works will allow for the heritage values of both national parks to be understood, transmitted and enjoyed by future generations. The DEGW would facilitate greater use of the heritage sites, encouraging an appreciation of their natural and heritage values.</p>
Conserving a unique and biodiverse landscape in a changing climate	4. Protect and conserve the parks natural values through active management of threats and adaptive management	a) Develop and implement feral animal, weed and pathogen management strategies to target priority threats and adapt to emerging threats and improved knowledge and practices. Strategies should prioritise protection of significant park values including World Heritage, National Heritage and state heritage values, including	An ecological assessment has been produced which assesses the impact of the project on the biodiversity values of the various locations (ELA 2024a).

Management Theme	Policy number	Policy	Assessment and compliance
		<p>protection of refugia and conservation of significant species and ecosystems.</p> <p>b) Develop and implement reserve fire management strategies (including maintaining access for fire management and response). These strategies should prioritise protecting key park values including World Heritage, National Heritage and state heritage values, including protection of refugia and conservation of significant species and ecosystems.</p> <p>c) Encourage research and undertake monitoring to build knowledge about priority values, impacts of threats and trends in their condition to inform and adapt management responses.</p> <p>d) Protect waterway health, including water quality, through whole of government landscape-scale integrated planning and coordination and minimising impacts of activities locally within the parks.</p> <p>e) Support landscape-scale conservation outcomes by delivering complementary conservation actions on-park, including exploring strategic acquisitions and additions to the national park estate to improve connectivity.</p> <p>f) Support the implementation of relevant actions (as identified in the Biodiversity Conservation Program and any conservation action plans) to promote the recovery of threatened species, populations, ecological communities and assets of intergenerational significance in these parks.</p>	
<p>Providing a world class Gondwana Rainforests visitor experience</p>	<p>5.Promote, protect and build an understanding of the values of the Gondwana Rainforests</p> <p>6.Enhance the appeal of the NSW North Coast as a tourism destination</p>	<p>Upgrade visitor facilities within the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and The Glade visitor facility zones. This will include replacement of the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Skywalk lookout.</p>	<p>The proposed works directly address Policy 5 and Policy 6. Enhancing visitor experiences of the DEGW will in turn enhance the appeal of the NSW North Coast as a tourist destination. The works will also allow for visitors to spend an extended length of time within the vicinity of the Gondwana Rainforests, promoting and</p>

Management Theme	Policy number	Policy	Assessment and compliance
			building appreciation and understanding of the values of the heritage item.
Enhancing the range and quality of nature-based opportunities for visitors	7. Provide opportunities for a range of appropriate and sustainable recreational activities	<p>a) Develop an iconic multi-day walk that showcases the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, with overnight hiker camps along the route (see Table 1 and Figure 2 for the indicative alignment and location of camps).</p> <p>b) Upgrade existing visitor facilities and provide new facilities in accordance with Table 1 and Figure 2.</p> <p>c) Provide a range of sustainable visitor opportunities in accordance with Table 2 and Figure 2.</p> <p>d) Monitor any impacts associated with recreational use and implement strategies as necessary to avoid impacts and risks to natural and cultural values.</p>	The proposed works directly address the policy objectives by improving visitor experience of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, providing additional tracks and overnight camping allowing for further appreciation of the World Heritage site during the day and night.

4.14.1. CERRA SOM

The CERRA Strategic Overview for Management (CERRA SOM) was prepared to ensure appropriate consideration is given the World Heritage values when developing management prescriptions for the CERRA reserves which includes Dorrigo National Park (note: CERRA was the previous name of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage area when the plan was prepared in 2000).

The CERRA SOM identifies six key strategic objectives:

- To ensure that the World Heritage values of the property are clearly **identified**.
- To ensure that the World Heritage values of CERRA are **protected** through appropriate long-term legislative, regulatory and institutional arrangements.
- To ensure that the World Heritage values of CERRA are **conserved** through both pro-active management and the control of threatening processes.
- To ensure that degraded areas of CERRA are **rehabilitated** to a natural condition.
- To ensure that the World Heritage values of CERRA are **presented** in the most appropriate and sustainable way to the community.
- Through achievement of the above objectives, to **transmit** the outstanding universal values of CERRA to future generations.

Table 8 discusses the relevant issues and management responses in the CERRA SOM.

Table 8: Consideration of the issues identified in the CERRA SOM

Identification		
No relevant identified issues		
Protection		
<i>Issue:</i> Environmental impact assessment requirements vary between States and between local government areas, and between the different levels of government, including the Commonwealth.	<i>Management response:</i> Ensure that environmental impact assessments for proposals that may affect CERRA (whether or not on the reserves themselves) adequately address potential impacts on World Heritage values and are carried out in accordance with the Australian World Heritage management principles.	<i>Discussion:</i> This SOHI identifies the relevant World Heritage Values in Section 2.4.1 and these are addressed throughout Section 4. It has been prepared following <i>Guidelines for preparing a statement of heritage impact</i> (DPE 2023) and with reference to the <i>Burra Charter</i> (Australian ICOMOS 2012) and the <i>Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage context</i> (UNESCO 2022).
There remains a level of concern within some sectors of the community about the possible implications of World Heritage listing on their activities.	Utilise existing mechanisms and develop innovative approaches to increase understanding and support for CERRA among the community by promoting the World Heritage values of the property and the benefits of World Heritage listing.	This project actively enhances the use of the listed area for a variety of community groups through actively promoting a wide area. This includes campers, hikers, and tourist more generally.
Conservation		
<i>Issue:</i> Inappropriate and or intensive recreation activities may negatively impact on conservation.	<i>Management response:</i> Encourage appropriate visitor use through planning and provision of infrastructure. Manage and maintain existing visitor infrastructure to cater for planned levels of visitation and use, while ensuring impacts on the environment are minimised.	<i>Discussion:</i> The DEGW actively promotes appropriate use of the World Heritage listed area and has been designed in such a way that an appropriate level of users may engage with it and that the construction will minimise impact.
Rehabilitation		
No relevant identified issues		
Presentation		
<i>Issue:</i> Increasing visitor numbers have the potential to adversely affect World Heritage values.	<i>Management response:</i> Ensure that the prime consideration in the face of increasing pressures for recreation is the conservation of an area’s values. Ensure visitor facilities and recreational activities are planned and managed to have minimal or no threat to the values of the area.	<i>Discussion:</i> The DEGW will have strict controls on the number of people allowed to utilise the route capped at 96 overnight visitors. The route construction has been planned to minimise as much as possible any impact to flora and will be constructed in a pragmatic way to enhance this practice.

4.14.2. Significant Impact Guidelines

According to the *Significant Impact Guidelines 1.2* (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2013) a 'significant impact' is an impact that is important, notable or of consequence, having regard to its context or intensity. The factors to be considered on determining whether an action is likely to have a significant impact depends on the sensitivity, value and quality of the environment that is impacted and upon the intensity, duration and magnitude of the impacts.

To judge the severity of potential impacts, it is necessary to consider the likely scale, intensity, duration, and frequency of impacts collectively. The following scale of impact assists in distinguishing between different relevant levels of severity:

- **Severe:** Severe impacts generally have two or more of the following characteristics: permanent/irreversible; medium-large scale; moderate-high intensity.
- **Moderate:** Moderate impacts generally have two or more of the following characteristics: medium-long term; small-medium scale; moderate intensity.
- **Minor:** Minor impacts generally have two or more of the following characteristics: short term/reversible; small-scale/localised; low intensity.

There are no threatened species, significant buildings or landscape features, Indigenous sites or potential historical archaeology identified in the study area. Considering the level of the proposed works with the DEG, the impact on heritage fabric is considered to be no more than minor.

Due to previous disturbance and the existing buildings, it is considered the study area is able to tolerate change as long as it does not impact on endangered species, view lines or dominate the landscape. In accordance with the *Significant Impact Guidelines 1.2* (EPBC Act 1999) the proposed works will **not**:

- permanently destroy, remove, or substantially alter the fabric (physical material including structural elements and other components, fixtures, contents, and objects) of a heritage place,
- involve extension, renovation, or substantial alteration of a heritage place in a manner which is inconsistent with the heritage values of the place,
- involve the erection of buildings or other structures adjacent to, or within important sight lines of, a heritage place which are inconsistent with the heritage values of the place,
- substantially diminish the heritage value of a heritage place for a community or group for which it is significant,
- substantially alter the setting of a heritage place in a manner which is inconsistent with the heritage values of the place, or
- substantially restrict or inhibit the existing use of a heritage place as a cultural or ceremonial site.

4.15. Summary

The significant values of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia comprise evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, exceptional biological diversity and habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals. Compliance with the legislation, aims and/or policies relevant to the proposed works is detailed below in Table 9.

Table 9 Summary

Legislation or Guidelines	Aims/policy	Compliance
EPBC Act	<p>Automatic protection for World and National Heritage properties by ensuring that an assessment process is undertaken for proposed actions that will, or are likely to, have a significant impact on heritage values.</p> <p>The World Heritage Convention recognises that it is primarily the duty of the country where heritage property is situated to ensure its identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations.</p>	<p>Complies</p> <p>The current assessment, identifies, assesses, and determines the impact on significant values as well providing mitigating actions that can be taken to minimise potential impacts. The National and World Heritage values are concerned with evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes and biological diversity which will not be impacted by the proposal.</p>
CERRA SOM	<p>Ensures that appropriate consideration is given to World Heritage values when developing management prescriptions which are developed and implemented in a consistent and coordinated way.</p>	<p>Complies</p> <p>This SOHI addresses several identified issues and enhances the management responses outlined in the CERRA SOM. In particular regarding protection, conservation, and presentation.</p>
NSW Heritage Act	<p>Any proposed works or alterations (unless exempted) to listed items must be assessed and approved by the Heritage Council or its delegates under section 60.</p> <p>No archaeological relics be disturbed or destroyed without prior consent from the Heritage Council of NSW.</p>	<p>Complies</p> <p>In accordance with legislative requirements of the Act, the current assessment, identifies, assesses, and determines the impact on State significant values which are principally concerned with ecology and geology. No state significant buildings or archaeological relics are located in the study area.</p>
NSW NPW Act	<p>Conserve the natural and cultural heritage of NSW. Where works will disturb Aboriginal objects, an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP) is required. Approvals are also required for impacts to threatened species and endangered vegetation communities.</p>	<p>Complies</p> <p>In accordance with legislative requirements of the Act, the assessment, identifies, and assesses, the impact on significant values which are principally concerned with ecology and geology. Impacts have been identified as negligible.</p> <p>No Aboriginal archaeological sites or potential sites are located in the Study area. Impacts to flora and fauna are minor have been assessed elsewhere.</p>
NSW EP&A Act	<p>Assess all matters affecting, or likely to affect the environment arising from the proposal.</p>	<p>Complies</p> <p>In accordance with legislative requirements of the Act, the current assessment, identifies, assesses, and determines the impact on significant values as well providing mitigating actions that can be taken to minimise potential impacts.</p> <p>No Aboriginal archaeological sites or potential sites are located in the Study area. Impacts to flora and fauna are minor have been assessed elsewhere.</p>

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The study area partially falls within the curtilage of the ‘Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’ (WHL #368, NHL #105704, SHR #01002) and ‘Escape Road’ (LEP #A50) in Dorrigo National Park, and small areas in the curtilage of ‘High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest’ (SHR #01487) within Bindarri National Park. The Outstanding Universal values of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia comprise evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, exceptional biological diversity and habitat for many threatened species of plants and animals. Aside from these areas there are no further heritage listed items within 100 m of the study area.

The proposed works include the construction of sections of an approximate 44.1 km long walking track with associated facilities such as lookouts and 3 overnight camps. The DEGW would result in a negligible direct (physical) and indirect (visual) impact to the Outstanding Universal values of ‘Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’ as ascribed on the World Heritage list. The impact to the known heritage value of High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest’ is also assessed as being negligible. This assessment is due to the expansive size of the areas, the low impact construction methodology, and the restricted use policies. There would likewise be a negligible direct or indirect impact to the heritage value of ‘Escape Road’ as there is unlikely to be a historical archaeological resource within the section of the study area in the item’s curtilage and any subsurface impact is restricted to areas outside of the LEP listing. No further built heritage or historical archaeological items have been identified within the study area in either national park.

The proposal is deemed acceptable from a heritage perspective as the proposal complies with the relevant legislation, management aims and/or policies and will not have a negative impact on the heritage significance of the heritage item as it:

- enhances the understanding and appreciation of ‘Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’ (WHL #368, NHL #105704, SHR #01002) and ‘High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest’ (SHR#01487) by facilitating greater visitor numbers
- enables controls to be placed on visitor numbers ensuring that the heritage items are not oversaturated by visitors
- continues a use in keeping with the original intention of the existing tracks and the continued ecological preservation intended by their dedication as a national parks
- complies with the relevant conservation policies identified in the management plans of both national parks and the CERRA.

5.2. Recommendations / Mitigation

As the impact of the project is considered negligible, no referral under the EPBC Act to manage the World Heritage aspect of the project is required. An s60 works applications under the Heritage Act is required. The project is not eligible for a fast track s60 application due to the value of the project exceeding \$150,000.

This section details mitigation measures to prevent adverse heritage impacts that may result from the proposal.

1. Section 60 approval. All works that occur within the curtilage of a State Heritage Register item require either an approval under Section 60 or be exempt under Section 57(2) of the Heritage Act. The proposed works will likely have little to no adverse impact on the heritage significance of either High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest (SHR #01487) or Gondwana Rainforests of Australia (SHR #01002). As the estimate project value exceeds \$150,000 though, the project cannot be considered minor works however, so a Section 60 Works Approval under the Heritage Act is required. The application must be granted prior to works commencing.
2. Follow advice and best practice. All works should be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations set out within this SOHI and all other REF supporting documents. In all instances works must be undertaken in accordance with the provisions contained within the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter particularly the provision of 'as much as necessary, as little as possible'.
3. Inform on changes. Minor design changes that have no appreciable impact on the overall layout, size and design of the project do not require any further assessment. Should detailed design change occur, including substantial alterations to the project footprint, size and shape, then this SOHI should be updated to assess these proposed changes. A precautionary approach should be taken.
4. Identify conservation and interpretation opportunities. The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia heritage item is largely listed for its significant ecological value. All efforts should be made to impact the rainforest as little as possible, whilst the recommendations outlined within the Ecological report should be endorsed. Dorrigo National Park maintains various opportunities for heritage interpretation. High Conservation Value Old Growth Forest is important for its potential to demonstrate Aboriginal history and contribute to understanding and aesthetic appreciation of rare eucalypt forest. It is recommended that a Heritage Interpretation Plan for the park be prepared.
5. Unexpected Finds. Unexpected finds protocols for Aboriginal and historical archaeology should be followed at all times during works. This can be found in Appendix C.

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Appendix A: Parish Maps and Historical Aerial Imagery

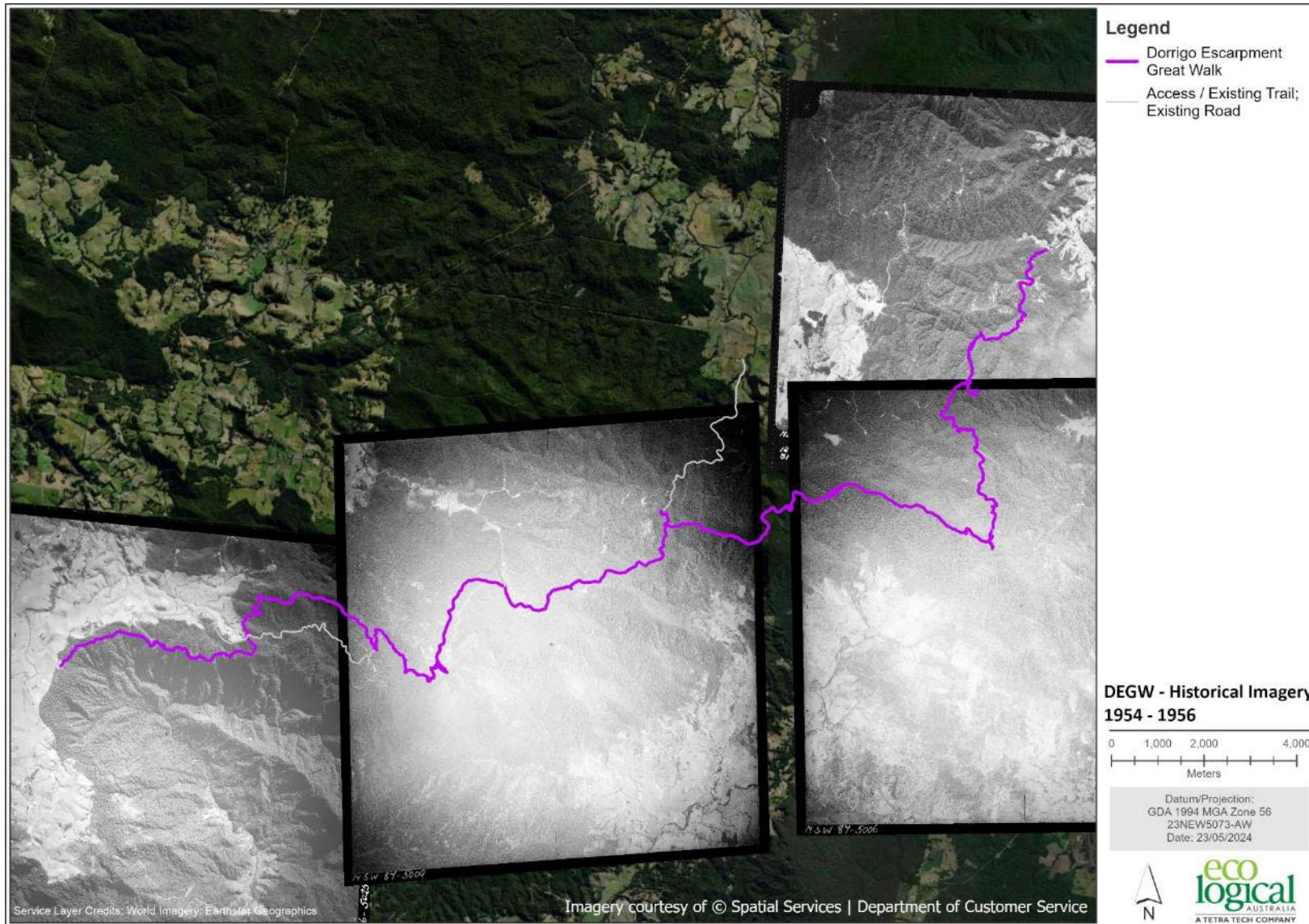


Figure 20: 1954-1956 aerial imagery showing the study area (Source: NPWS)

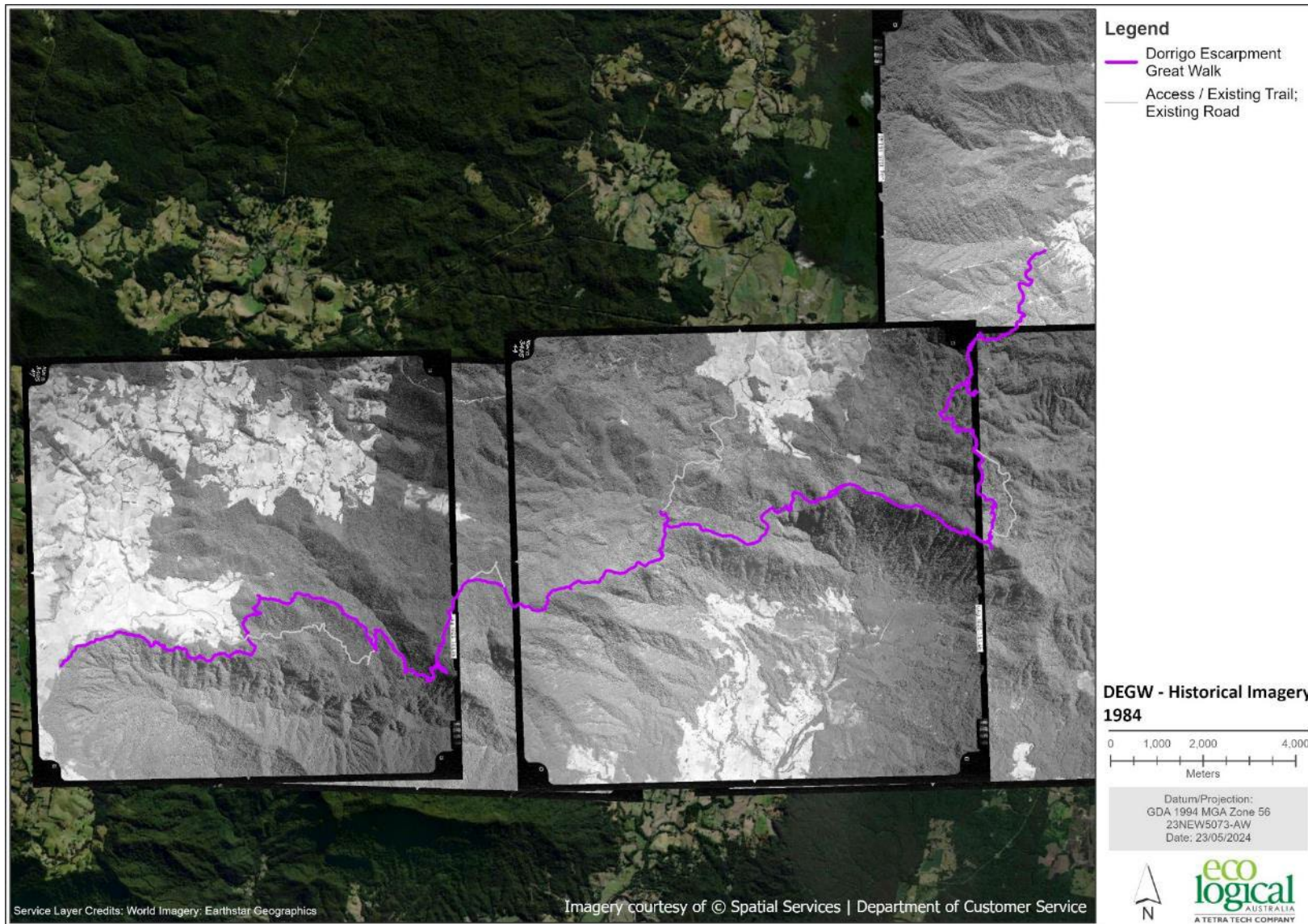


Figure 21: 1984 aerial imagery showing the study area (Source: NPWS)

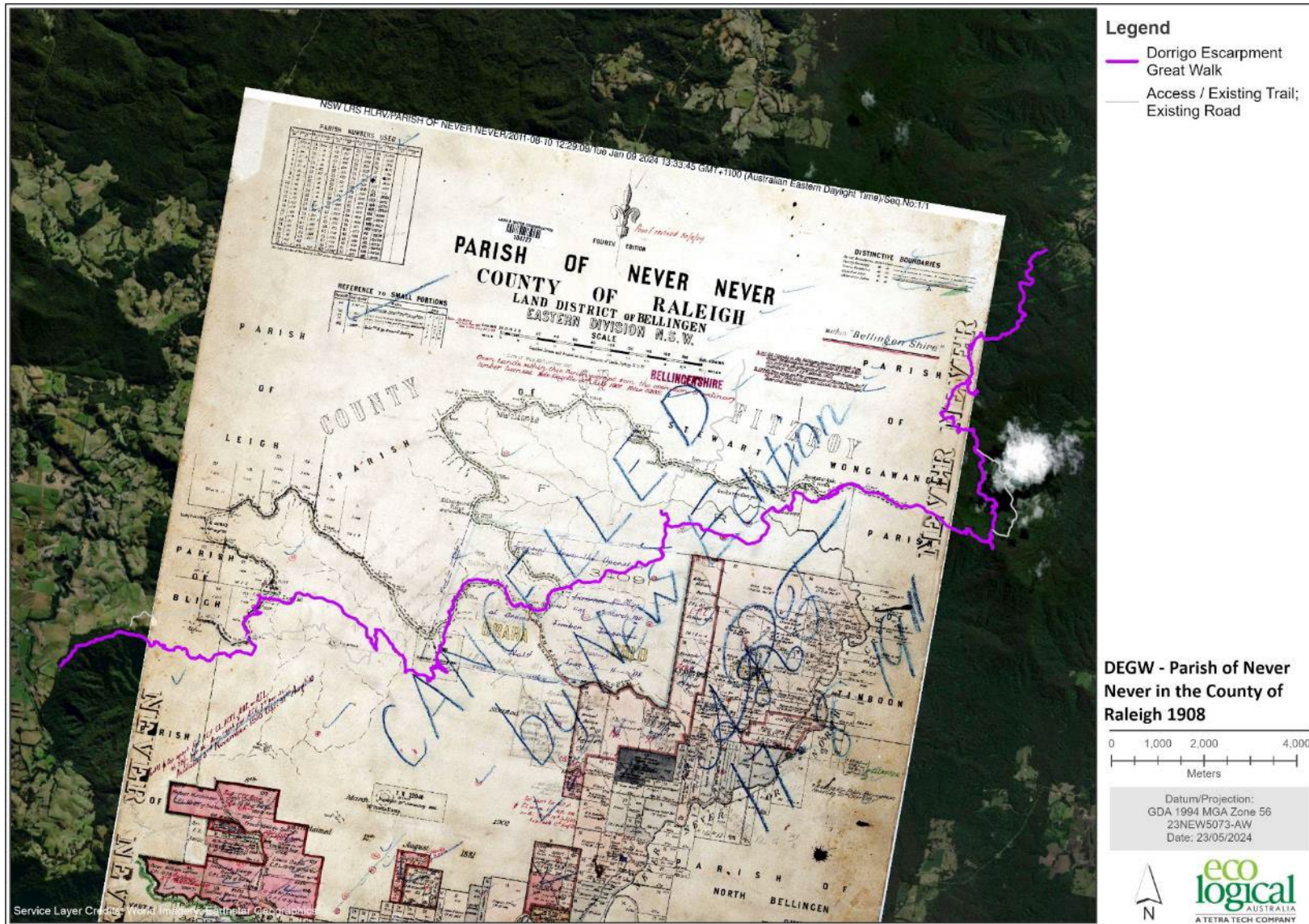


Figure 22: Parish of Never Never, 1908 (Source: HLRV)

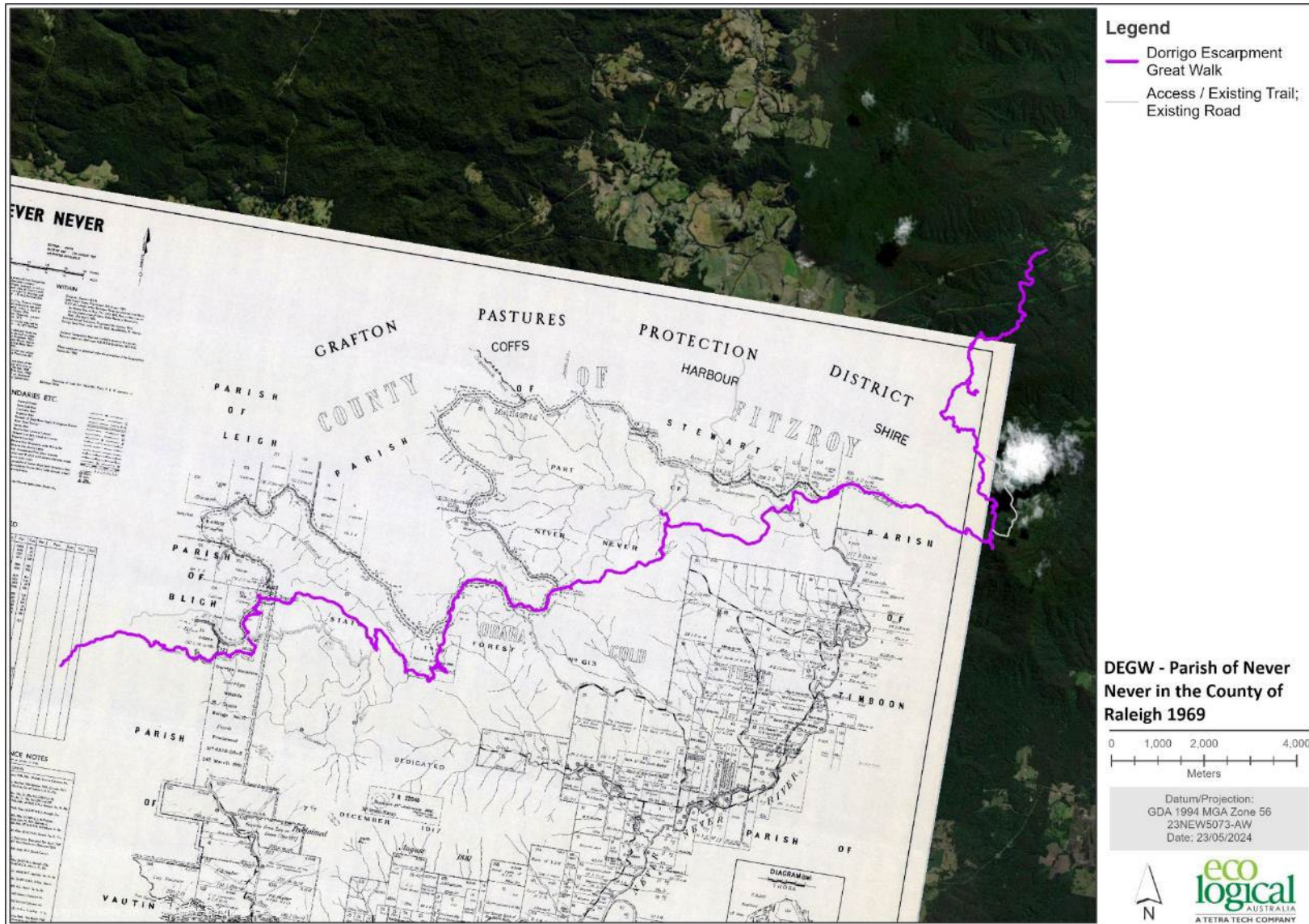


Figure 23: Parish of Never Never, 1969 (Source: HLRV)

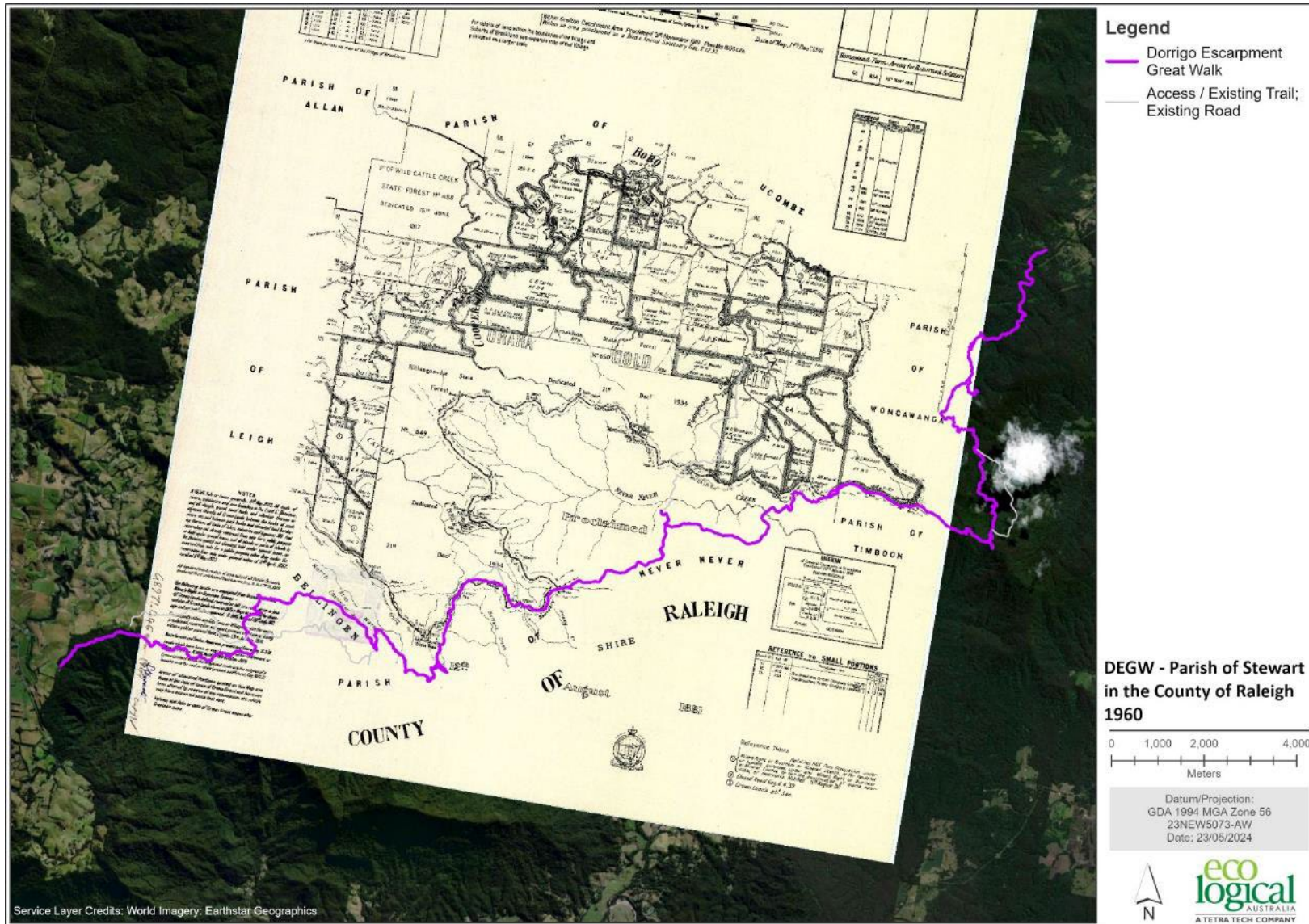


Figure 24: Parish of Stewart, 1960 (Source: HLRV)

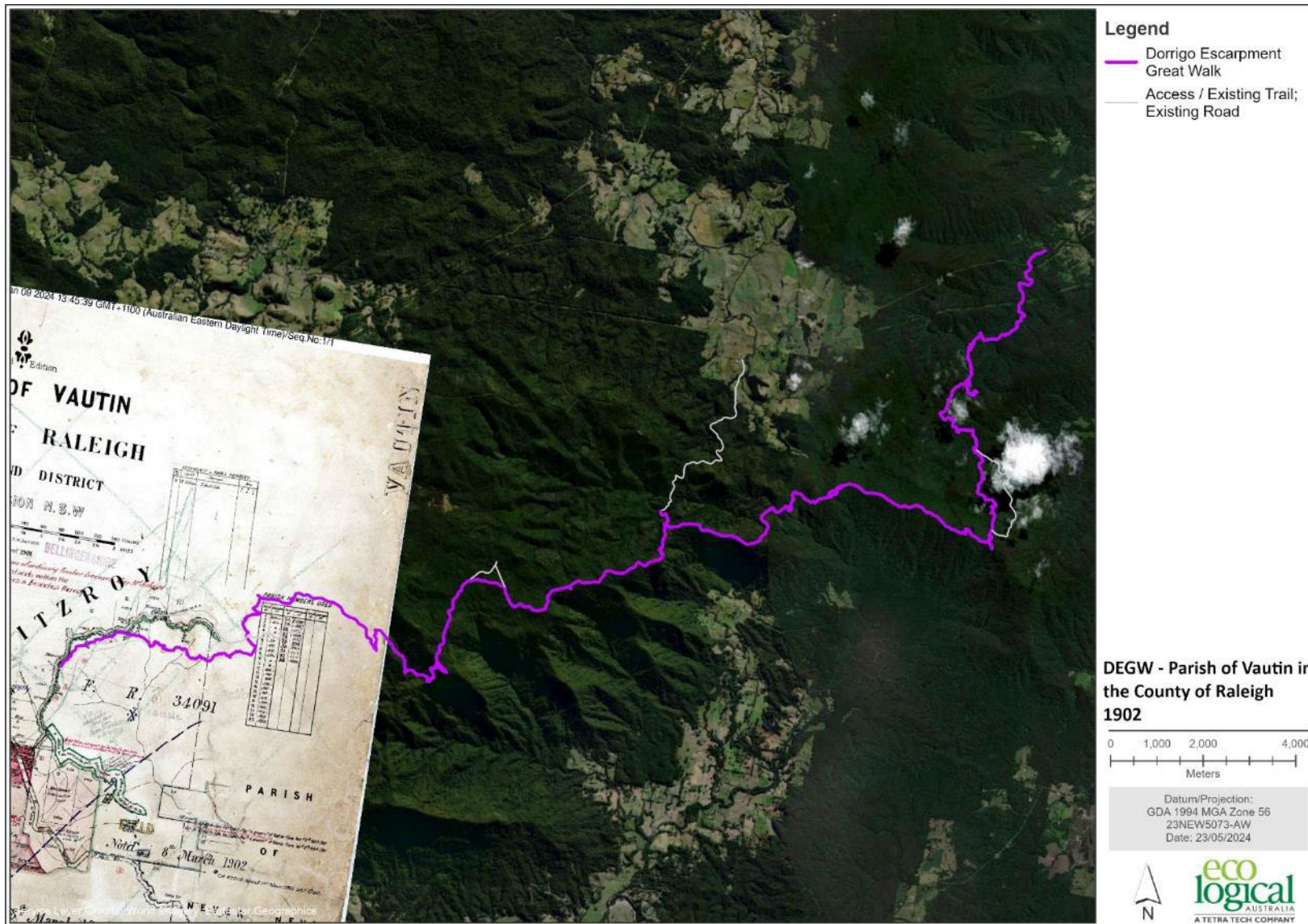


Figure 25: Parish of Vautin, 1902 (Source: HLRV)

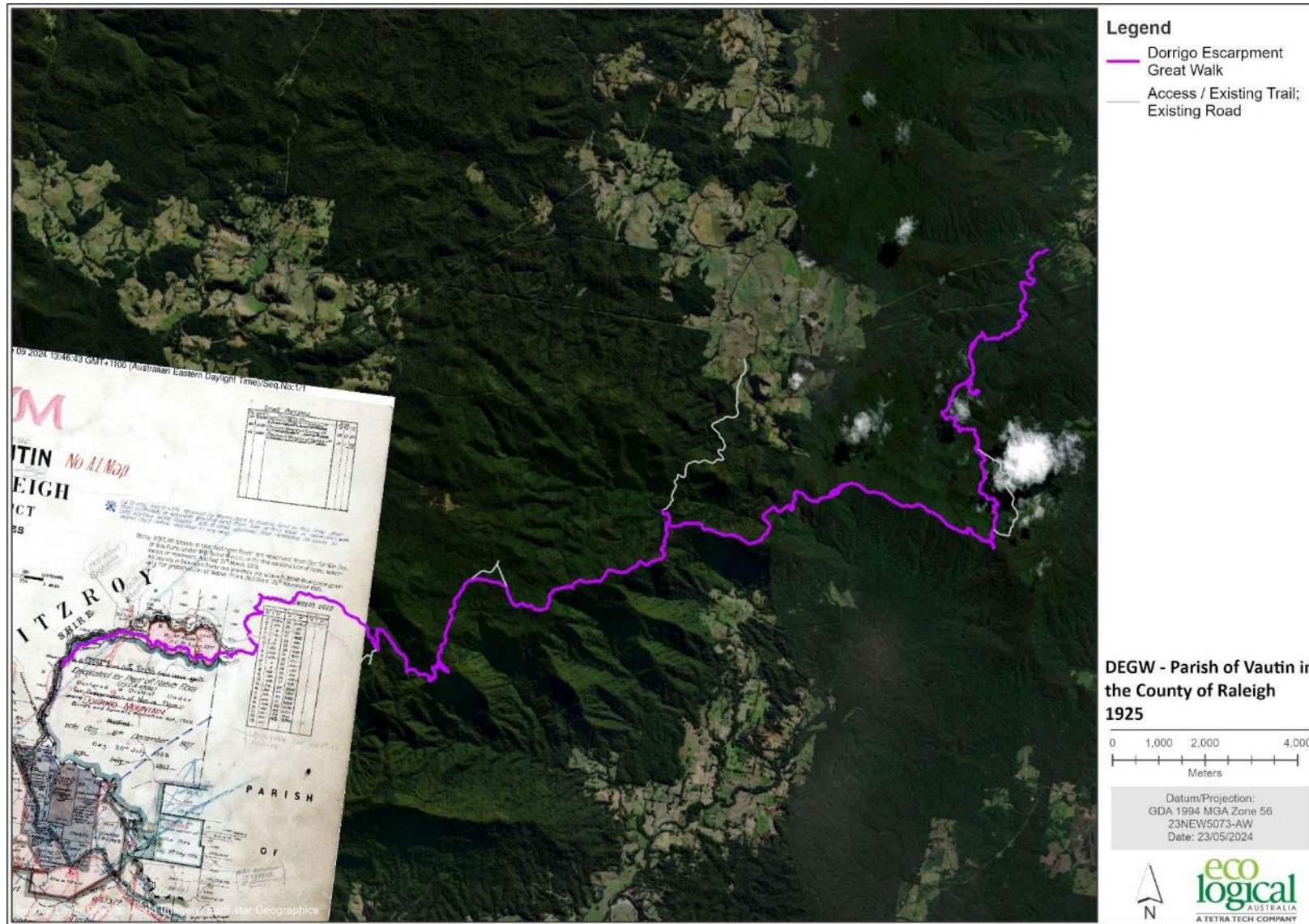


Figure 26: Parish of Vautin, 1925 (Source: HLRV)

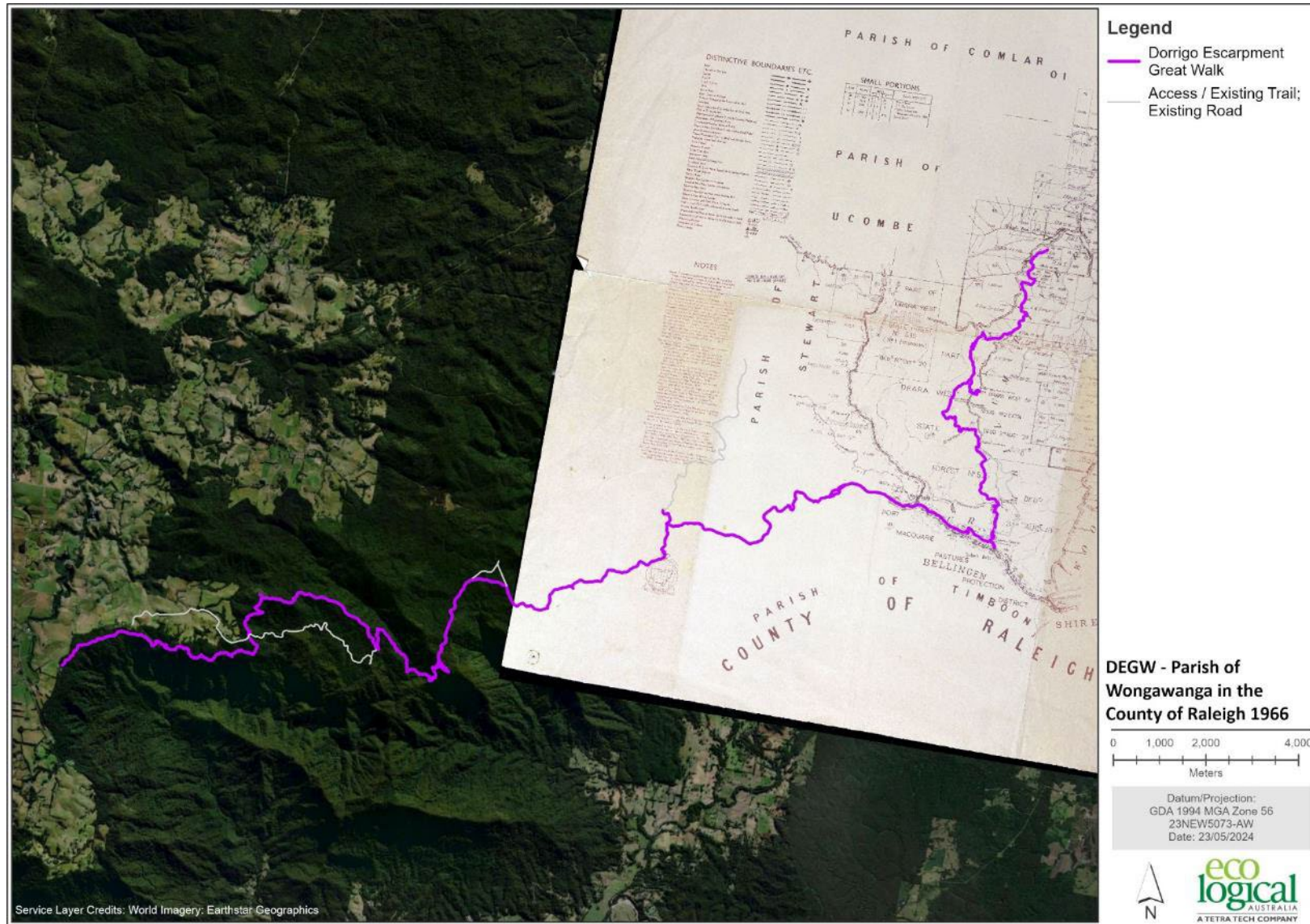


Figure 27: Parish of Wongawanga, 1966 (Source: HLRV)

Appendix B: Unexpected Finds Policy

