



**NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service**

# **Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk draft master plan**

**Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks**



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## **This is Gumbaynggirr Country**

**Ngiyalagay junga-ngarraynggi yaam: Gumbaynggirr girrwaa yaam jagunda gungangulam-ay, yilaana ngiyalagay yanggidam juungawaygam, bayaygam garla-ngarraynggi.**

**Gumbaynggirr-Girrwadu, manggarla daalbirrwirr-ambang, yidaa gungangulam juluum-, guunyu-, ganganan-, bindarraygundi marlanyay. Yaam wajaarr malaaw yidaa, yilaana yidaa Girwaanbigundi marlanyay.**

**We acknowledge and respect the rights and aspirations of Gumbaynggirr People as custodians of their Country.**

**Gumbaynggirr People are the first protectors and continual custodians of these mountains, valleys, plains and rivers. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.**

# 1. Summary

The Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project (working title) is an inspiring multi-day walk proposal that connects people with the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area and Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal culture. Along with the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre, the proposal has the potential to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

## 1.1 What is proposed?

The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will traverse Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks along the rugged escarpment of the Great Dividing Range, with teeming waterfalls, old-growth forest and breathtaking views. The challenging 46-km 4-day walk will enhance the status of New South Wales as a walking destination.

Accommodation including purpose-built, low-key communal hiker huts and camping platforms will reduce impacts and support visitation by a diverse cross-section of the community. Thoughtful walking track alignment and construction will keep visitors safe and minimise environmental impacts.

The walk will be managed and operated by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and we will work with tour operators, transport providers and other business partners to provide optional support services on the walk.

This master plan presents an overview of the planned visitor infrastructure improvements for the proposed 46-km multi-day walk. It provides broad details and design concepts along with the guiding principles that will allow the community to offer feedback on the planning approach.



Photo: View over Rosewood Creek valley, Dorrigo National Park

## 1.2 Key facts

- 46 km, 4 days, 3 nights
- Within Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks
- Camps include a communal cooking shelter, toilet, hiker huts and camping platforms
- The walk will be managed by NPWS for independent and guided hikers
- Optional support services to be provided by Ecopass operators
- Minimal impact design principles.

## 1.3 Next steps

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks are recognised and protected for their outstanding biodiversity. The proposed project will undergo rigorous environmental planning approvals to ensure compliance with relevant conservation and heritage management plans under state and Commonwealth legislation.

The current draft concept plans and planned walk alignment are subject to change or strict conditions to mitigate potential impacts on natural and cultural values.

A scenic view of the Urumbilum River in Bindarri National Park. The river flows through a dense forest, with numerous large, moss-covered rocks scattered throughout the stream. The water is clear and appears to be moving quickly, creating white rapids around the rocks. The surrounding forest is lush with green foliage, including various trees and ferns. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

## 2. Introduction

Urumbilum River, Bindarri National Park

## 2.1 NSW Great Walks

NPWS is creating a network of spectacular multi-day walks across New South Wales. These extraordinary walking experiences give people a chance to connect with nature in some of the state's most breathtaking landscapes. The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk is one of 13 great walks identified across the state that are operating or in development.

More and more people are looking for opportunities to go walking in national parks. Bushwalking is fun and supports good physical and mental health. The *NSW Great Walks* will deliver exciting new bushwalking opportunities and drive economic growth in regional communities.

The walks will also help build a legacy of support for conservation. The more people who visit national parks, the more people who fall in love with nature, the more people appreciate the need to protect and restore our environment.

*NSW Great Walks* will build on New South Wales's reputation as a destination for nature-based tourism and walking holidays.

*NSW Great Walks* are designed to:

- celebrate and raise awareness about our natural environment and cultural heritage
- enhance New South Wales's status as a walking destination, nationally and internationally
- improve the quality and range of walking experiences offered in NSW national parks
- deliver economic benefits for regional New South Wales
- enhance public support for conservation
- encourage interstate and international visitors to regional New South Wales
- ensure visitation is ecologically sustainable by providing infrastructure that minimises environmental impacts.



## 2.2 Vision and objectives

### Vision

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.



Photo: Eastern yellow robin

### 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 campsites 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

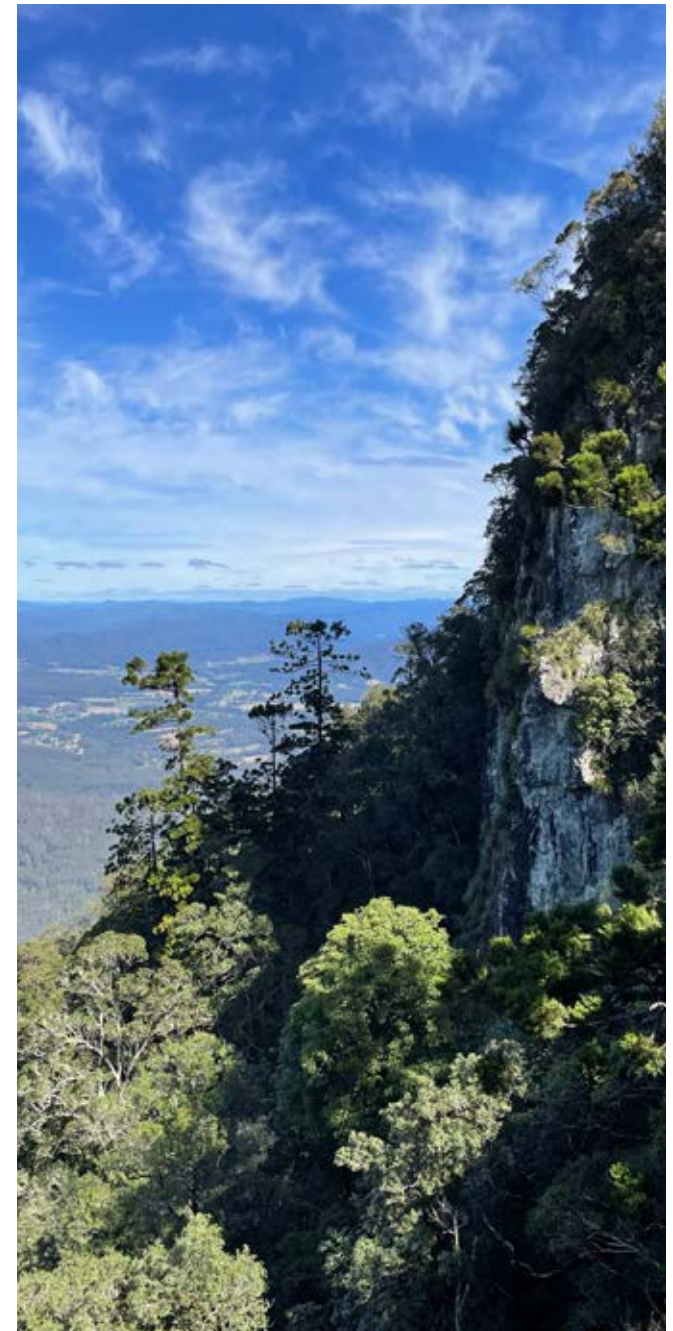


Photo: Escarpment walk view, Bindarra National Park





Figure 2.1 Regional locality

## 2.3 Location

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks are located on the dramatic eastern escarpment of the Great Dividing Range between Dorrigo and Coffs Harbour, part of the Country of the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal People. The parks are around 550 km (6 hours' drive) from Sydney by car, and 450 km (5:30 hours' drive) from Brisbane. The proposed starting point for the walk, the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre, is a 60-minute drive from the main population centre and transport hub of Coffs Harbour, with regular flight connections to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

The centre is a 90-minute drive from Armidale and 30 minutes from Bellingen along the picturesque Waterfall Way. The closest township of Dorrigo is just 3 km away.

Bindarri National Park, where the walk finishes, is 25 km (35 minutes' drive) from Coffs Harbour, making a transfer of 95 km (1:40 hours) between the start and finish points via Coffs Harbour. An alternative route via Ulong on the Eastern Dorrigo Way is just 50 km long but is currently unsuitable for tourist or commercial traffic.

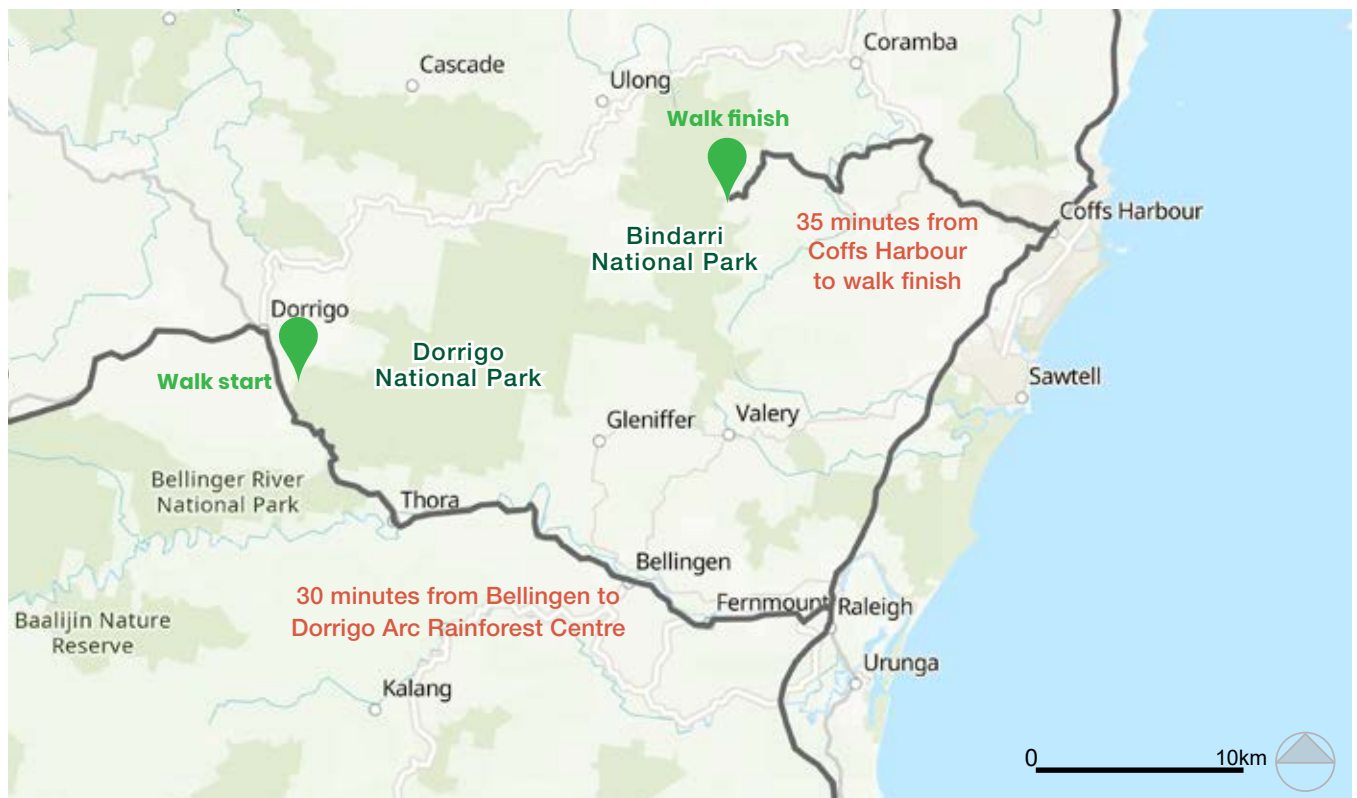


Figure 2.2 Location of the parks

## 2.4 Drivers for the project

### 2.4.1 A haven for nature lovers

Dorrigo National Park is one of the oldest parks in New South Wales and has been a haven for bushwalkers and nature-lovers since 1901. The park is famous for its magnificent stands of rainforest, spectacular waterfalls and stunning scenery. The Dorrigo Rainforest Centre is an established visitor and education hub and welcomes over 150,000 people each year to the wonders of the rainforest with its Skywalk and short walks. Today, visitors come from throughout Australia and around the globe to experience and learn about the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

Bindarri National Park was dedicated in 1999. It protects the rugged landscapes in the headwaters of the Orara River and provides a conservation corridor between plateau and coastal forests, resulting in its recognition as a priority koala habitat protection area. The park is close to the main population centre of Coffs Harbour and currently offers visitors 4WD touring routes, picnic areas and short walks to waterfalls.

### 2.4.2 A walkers hub

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks have several separate picnic areas and short walking tracks which were developed in the 1960-70s and early 2000s respectively. The multi-day escarpment walk proposal links some of these existing walks, and older roads and logging tracks, to create a unique multi-day walk.

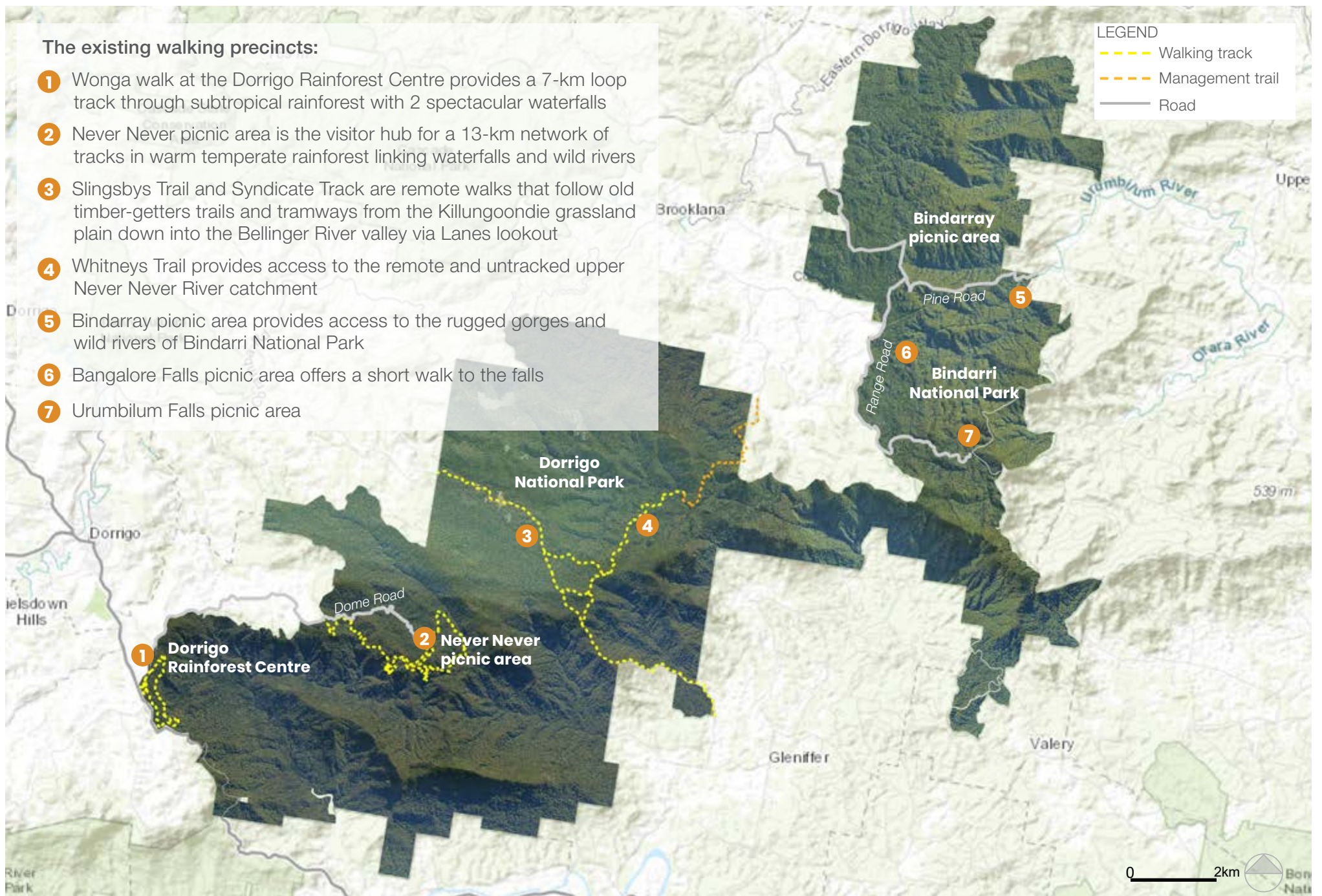
A multi-day walk linking the tablelands to the coast along the great escarpment has been proposed in different forms over many decades. In the early 2000s the New England Ecotourism Society prepared a concept study looking at the various options for walking routes along the Waterfall Way from Armidale to Coffs Harbour. More recently, the NSW National Parks Association has proposed a multi-day walk from Point Lookout to the coast along the escarpment as part of the broader Great Koala National Park proposal.

NPWS undertook planning work in 2019–21 to develop concepts that would meet the future needs of visitors to Dorrigo National Park, including renewal of the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre and Skywalk. The concept of developing a multi-day walk based on these community suggestions was proposed at the same time. The funding of both projects in 2022 will provide a range of world-class sustainable visitor experiences in these parks.

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will complement and expand on the range of walks in the area, establishing Dorrigo as a key visitor hub where hikers of all abilities can undertake numerous day walks, as well as 2 and 4 day hikes.



Photo: Red Cedar Falls, Dorrigo National Park



### 2.4.3 Increasing demand

The NSW Mid North Coast region is experiencing one of the highest population growth rates of any regional area in Australia. Increasing regional travel and improved transport infrastructure will fundamentally change visitor demands over the next decade, making regional destinations like the Coffs Coast closer in travel time to major urban centres, particularly South East Queensland.

Walking in nature is extremely popular and the most common form of exercise and recreation undertaken in Australia. Over 14 million Australians regularly participate in walking for exercise and 5.5 million go hiking or bushwalking. Research demonstrates more than 80% of people in New South Wales are interested in walking in national parks.

### 2.4.4 Nature connection

Whilst demand for visiting national parks is generally increasing in Australia, there are broader indications of declining levels of meaningful engagement with wild nature as the population becomes more urbanised. This is especially true of younger generations who research suggests spend on average less than 1 hour each day outdoors.

Research demonstrates that increased levels of nature connectedness results in measurable improvement to physical and mental health, self-confidence, resilience and social connection. Opportunities which elevate the quality of engagement and duration of people's nature connection experiences can result in significant personal health and wellbeing benefits, associated economic savings to public health services and increased individual pro-conservation behaviours.

### 2.4.5 Gumbaynggirr cultural perspectives

A key pillar in planning the walk is to facilitate meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people that create a deeper appreciation of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives. The proposal aims to provide new opportunities for Aboriginal communities to appropriately share their culture and participate in and benefit from the regional tourism industry. NPWS will encourage Aboriginal employment opportunities and the sustainable growth of Aboriginal businesses.

Aboriginal heritage will be embedded into the fabric of the walk with the involvement of the Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community. This can take many forms including cultural information on signage, use of Gumbaynggirr language, creative interpretation through artwork, and incorporating cultural graphic elements into the built form.

### 2.4.6 Sustainable tourism

The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk aligns with key NSW Government visitor economy plans and numerous local, regional, state and national strategies and goals for sustainable tourism. These are identified in Appendix A. The walk also accords with Bellingen Shire Council's aim of having an ecologically focused and sustainable nature-based visitor economy.

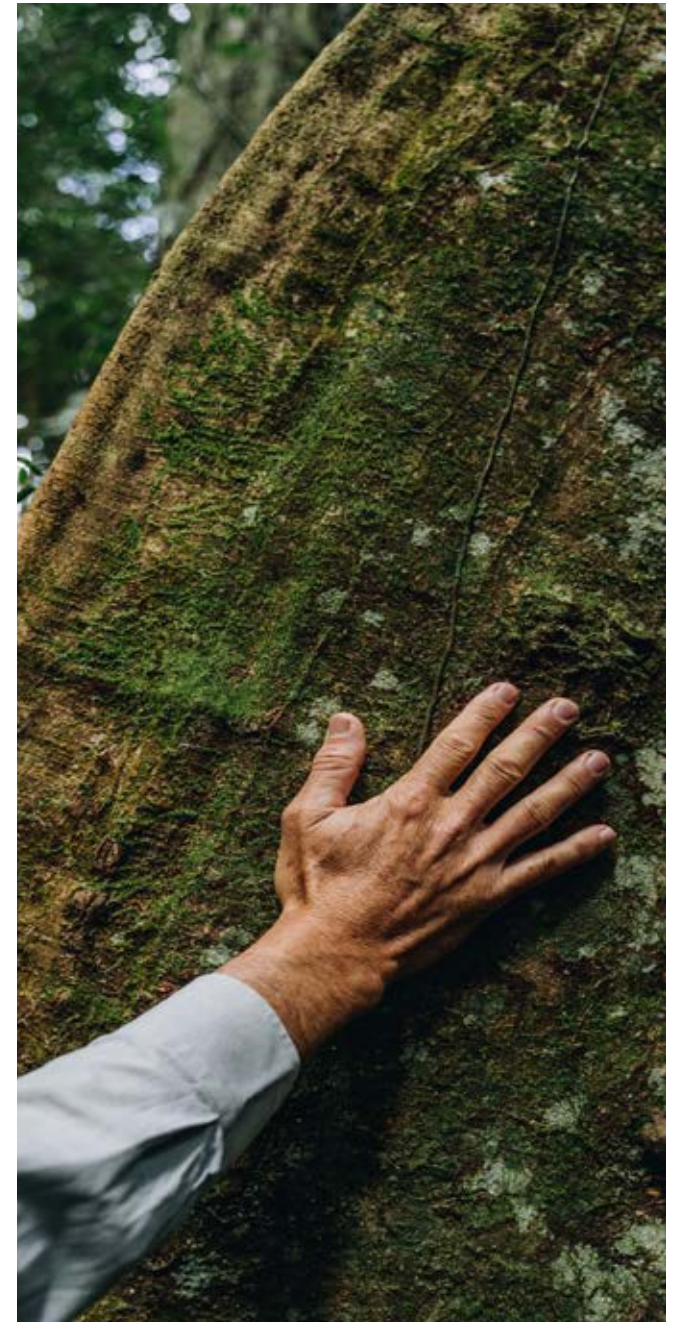


Photo: Ancient forests, Dorrigo National Park

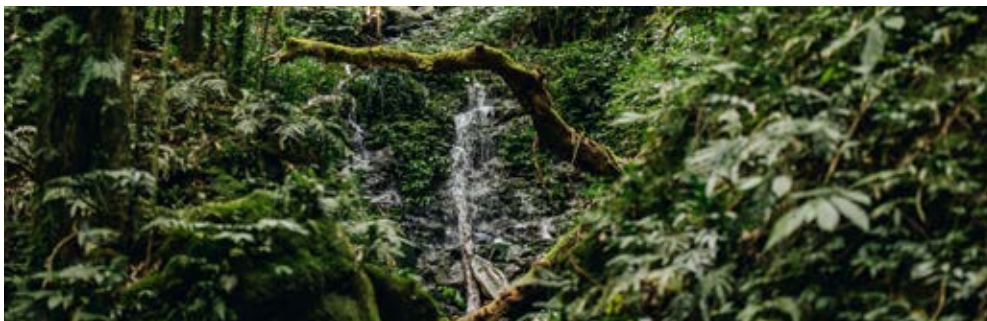
## 2.5 Expected outcomes

The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk has the potential to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits for NPWS and our communities, as summarised below.



Outcomes	Measures of success	Outcomes	Measures of success
<h3>1 Environmental</h3>		<h3>2 Social</h3>	
<p>The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk protects and respects the parks' environmental and cultural heritage and helps build a legacy of support for conservation, and deeper appreciation of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk has minimal environmental impacts</li> <li>• Increase in awareness of parks' values</li> <li>• Increase in visitors' stewardship attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours</li> <li>• Increase in visitor satisfaction</li> </ul>	<p>More people can experience the mental and physical health benefits of spending extended periods of time in nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More access to longer walks</li> <li>• A more diverse range of people visit</li> <li>• Walkers feel prepared and welcome</li> </ul>
<p>Impacts on environmental and cultural values are avoided in the first instance, then if not possible, minimised and or mitigated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal impacts from construction</li> <li>• Minimal impacts from hikers' use</li> <li>• Route avoids highly significant locations</li> </ul>	<p>The new walk builds relationships with the local community and park neighbours, and contributes to social cohesion and community pride</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community feels pride and ownership of the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk</li> <li>• Impacts on neighbours are minimised</li> </ul>
<p>The walk route uses suitable existing tracks and previously disturbed sites where possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of new track requiring excavation or benching is minimised</li> <li>• Hiker camps built on disturbed sites</li> </ul>	<p>Meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people deliver authentic cultural experiences to create a deeper appreciation of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives and contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong partnerships with Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community</li> <li>• Development of skills in track building, design and guiding</li> <li>• Hikers engage with cultural interpretation</li> <li>• Increase in awareness of Gumbaynggirr culture and perspectives</li> </ul>
<p>The walking track and purpose-built camps are environmentally sustainable and employ best practice design, material choice and construction techniques that are effective in extreme conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe tracks and comfortable spaces</li> <li>• Facilities designed for the local environment</li> <li>• Ongoing operation/maintenance costs are sustainable</li> <li>• Facilities have small footprint and a 'light touch' on the ground</li> </ul>	<p>Transformative nature connection practices based on evidence-based scientific research produce health and wellbeing benefits to walkers throughout the journey and beyond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hikers connect with nature and culture in a meaningful way</li> <li>• Hikers' engagement with nature contributes to their ongoing wellbeing</li> </ul>
		<p>The physically challenging 4-day walk and a communal philosophy of shared facilities promotes social connection and a shared adventure experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hikers share facilities respectfully</li> <li>• Shared areas at camps bring people together to socialise</li> <li>• Hikers support each other if needed</li> </ul>

Table 2.1: Prospective outcomes and related measures of success



## Outcomes

## Measures of success

### 3 Economic

The walk generates new employment opportunities for local communities and enhances the contribution national parks make to the regional economy and community wellbeing

- Increased job opportunities during planning and construction phases
- Increased job opportunities during operation
- Other opportunities arise for unique businesses resulting from the walk

The walk is affordable with options for both camping and hard-roofed huts

- Camping and accommodation fees are benchmarked against equivalent experiences

Overnight camps and huts are managed by NPWS with options for guided and self-guided experiences providing flow-on benefits to the regional visitor economy

- New businesses established to support hikers doing the walk e.g. transfers
- High booking occupancy for walk
- Increased visitor spend and occupancy rates for town and visitor accommodation

Strong commercial partnerships deliver a greater range of tours and guided experiences, with before and after off-park accommodation options, contributing to sustainable and resilient regional economies

- Professional licensed commercial tourism operators deliver unique experiences
- Dispersal of visitation to off-peak periods supports local economy

Dorrigo Escarpment great walk achieves stronger financial sustainability over the medium-long term

- Fees for campsites support maintenance and servicing requirements
- Additional revenue supports NPWS programs and operations, including conservation, restoration and education initiatives



Photo: The local economy is set to benefit from new business opportunities



Photo: Dangar Falls, one of Dorrigo township's other main attractions

### 3. Park values



Paradise riflebird

### 3.1 Cultural values



Photo: Ridgelines, Bindarri National Park

#### Gumbaynggirr landscapes

Gumbaynggirr Country has special significance to Aboriginal people, who have an ongoing connection to Country. There is evidence of people from the Gumbaynggirr nation living in the area for thousands of years, using the subtropical rainforest as a valuable supplement to the rich plateau and coastal ecosystems. It is likely groups camped on the grassland plains on the fringe of the rainforest at certain times of year to access abundant foods, medicines and materials. Burning the rainforest margins to maintain the grasslands and stimulate new growth attracted increased numbers of grazing pademelons and wallabies which were an important source of food and fur.

There are a large number of sites of spiritual significance in the broader area with many associated with or including natural features in the landscape. McGraths Hump in Dorrigo National Park, for example, is known to the Gumbaynggirr as Old Man Dreaming.



Photo: Cultural burn Killungoondie Plain

#### Historic heritage

The European settlement of the Dorrigo Plateau reflects the wider story of regional land use with timber-getting and agriculture gathering pace in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Opportunistic cedar felling was followed by more elaborate schemes to remove hoop pine using tramlines and timber shoots to transport logs down the rugged escarpment. Relics of these logging practices are visible today including loading ramps and springboard marks on giant tree stumps, and remnants of the Syndicate tramway.

When many NSW rainforests were formally protected from logging following the 'battle for Terania Creek', Dorrigo National Park doubled in size and was added to the World Heritage list shortly after. This park's story reflects society's changing attitudes to rainforests, and it remains a great place for visitors to learn about our precious rainforest heritage.



Photo: The bull wheel on the Syndicate tramway



## 3.2 Natural values



Photo: Wompoo fruit-dove

### World Heritage

Dorrigo National Park (11,732 ha) is part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area. The Gondwana Rainforests represent outstanding examples of major stages of the Earth's evolutionary history, ongoing geological and biological processes, and exceptional biological diversity. A wide range of ancient plant and animal lineages and communities, many of which are restricted largely or entirely to the Gondwana Rainforests, survive in this collection of 40 reserves. The Gondwana Rainforests also provide the principal habitat for many threatened species of native plants and animals.

Bindarri National Park (5,365 ha) adjoins Dorrigo National Park along the escarpment and has been identified as a future candidate for World Heritage listing.



Photo: View south from Dibbs Head

### Rich biodiversity

The parks straddle the Great Eastern Escarpment, where steep, rugged slopes and deeply incised waterways offer a rich mosaic of ancient rainforest communities and old-growth hardwood forests. The parks support a diversity of wildlife with over 275 vertebrate animal species including over 40 threatened species.

Represented here are some of Gondwana's ancient endemic animals including the superb lyrebird, giant barred frog, pouched frog and southern greater glider. The parks feature forest giants like tallowood and blackbutt, Gondwanan descendants like Antarctic beech and Dorrigo waratah, and rainforest specialists like strangler fig and giant stinging tree. A rich understorey of ferns, woody vines, palms, orchids, epiphytes and fungi thrive beneath the canopy.



Photo: Red-necked pademelon

## Landscape diversity and scenic values

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks' spectacular landforms, ancient volcanic remnants and deep weathering provide unique insight into the formation of the Great Eastern Escarpment and its role in providing moist refuge for relict Gondwanan rainforests. The dramatic upward sweep of the kilometre-high escarpment acts as a significant barrier to moisture-laden coastal clouds, delivering rain to the slopes and providing ideal habitat for rainforest communities, as well as tall open forest, heath communities and grasslands. The Killungoondie grasslands result from regular Aboriginal burning, perpetuated by heavy frosts and grazing – the orchids and wildflowers of these treeless plains create a brilliant contrast to the surrounding forest. Together, the parks protect striking vertical cliffs and precipitous waterfalls and provide a scenic backdrop for the Bellinger Valley.

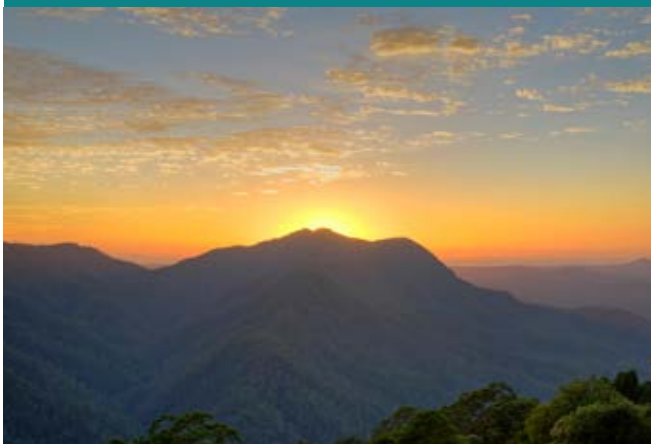


Photo: View from Skywalk, Dorrigo National Park

## Connectivity

The parks are part of a broader conservation network linking tablelands to coastal habitats and forming a wildlife corridor along the escarpment. Bindarri National Park is recognised as an asset of intergenerational significance for the koala, being a critical link from coastal to inland habitats. Landscape connectivity, both latitudinally and altitudinally, are known to be critical factors in enabling the movement of plants and animals as they adapt to a warming climate and habitat fragmentation resulting from increasing human settlement.

Additionally, the parks form part of a vast, contiguous area of high conservation value old-growth moist eucalypt forest which provides vital habitat for hollow-dependent threatened wildlife such as the powerful owl, sooty owl, Stephen's banded snake, southern greater glider and glossy black-cockatoo.



Photo: Ridgelines, Dorrigo National Park

## Protected waters

Dorrigo National Park contains the headwaters of the Rosewood and Never Never rivers that flow east into the Bellinger River, and Wild Cattle Creek that flows north-west into the Nymboida River. The high rainfall and steep escarpment results in spectacular waterfalls, including Gleniffer, Red Cedar and Casuarina falls. Bindarri National Park contains several river gorge systems and waterfalls on the Urumbilum River and Bangalore Creek.

These waters provide relatively undisturbed habitat for a range of animals including several threatened frog species, the Clarence River turtle, platypus, and threatened fish species including the Dorrigo galaxiid and eastern freshwater cod. The parks are within the Bellinger and Clarence river catchments, part of the Bellinger Shire Council water supply and Coffs-Clarence Regional Water Scheme.



Photo: Rosewood River, Dorrigo National Park

### 3.3 Social values



Photo: Birdwatching, Dorrigo National Park

#### Recreation

The importance and diversity of Dorrigo's rainforests were recognised in 1901 with the first areas around the falls on the Dorrigo Mountain Road being reserved 'for public recreation and the preservation of native flora'. The first tracks were built in the 1930s, followed by the development of The Glade picnic area in the 1960s. Never Never picnic area opened in 1975, recognising the demand for walking tracks to explore the newly protected areas of warm temperate rainforest and waterfalls.

Dorrigo Rainforest Centre was built in 1990 and attracts around 150,000 visitors a year. The 6.8-km Wonga walk has been described as the best rainforest walk in Australia and features a suspension bridge, waterfalls, elevated walkways and lookouts.

More adventurous off-track walking and self-reliant camping occurs in the remote areas of the parks. Both parks also contain spectacular gorges used by canyoneers and abseilers.



Photo: Park entrance, Dorrigo National Park

#### Education

Dorrigo National Park has long been a popular destination for school excursions, with quality assured, syllabus-linked programs available for primary, secondary and tertiary students lead by experienced and knowledgeable education rangers. Education programs cover nature conservation, biodiversity, environmental and ecological values, climate change impacts, fire in the landscape, history, rainforests and Aboriginal cultural content areas. An online teachers kit provides worksheets, activities and lesson plans for students to study NSW rainforests in the classroom. Ranger-guided tours during school holidays provide rich interpretation and immersive educational experiences for visitors.

The parks are also important as places for scientific study with easy access to 4 different types of rainforests and other associated habitats. NPWS facilitates and encourages field surveys and research by tertiary institutions.



Photo: School excursion, Dorrigo National Park

A photograph of a dense, lush green forest. In the center, a waterfall cascades over a series of rocks. A large, moss-covered log lies horizontally across the middle of the waterfall. The forest is filled with various types of trees and ferns, creating a vibrant green environment. A teal banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text '4. Proposed walking track route'.

## 4. Proposed walking track route

Cascade on Wonga walk, Dorrigo National Park

## 4.1 Route overview

Starting at the new Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre, the proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will follow the spectacular escarpment through ancient Gondwanan rainforests and old-growth eucalypt forest, and across gorges and wild rivers. It will deliver iconic views from the escarpment looking over the Bellinger Valley towards the sea.

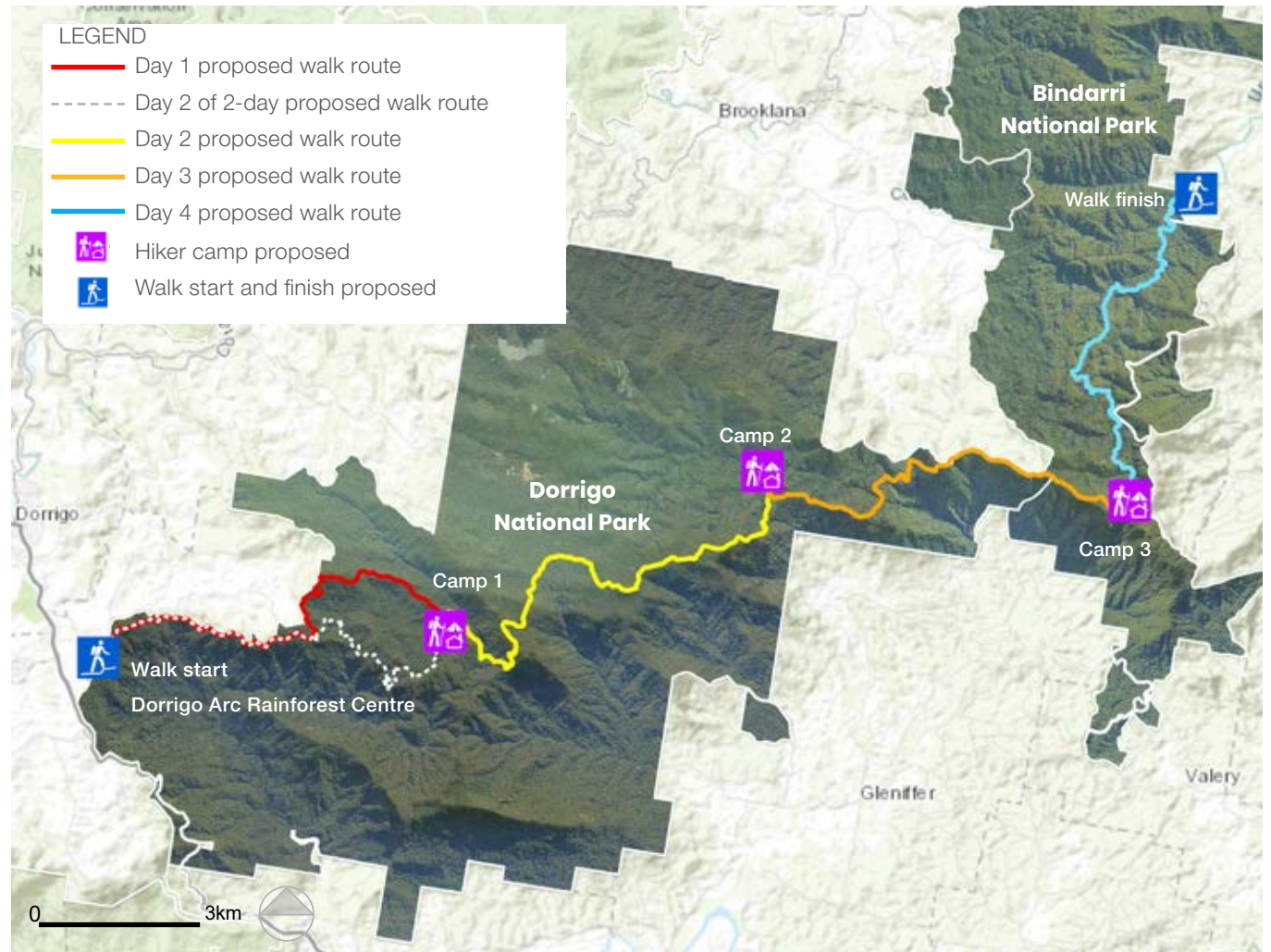
The 46-km trek is designed to be completed over 4 days and 3 nights. A shorter 23-km 2-day, 1-night loop option, from the rainforest centre to Camp 1 via Dome Mountain, returning via the Blackbutt track to the centre, is designed for those with only a weekend available or as an introduction to overnight hiking.

The 4-day walk is designed to be walked in one direction. It will be a physically challenging yet rewarding experience with river crossings, waterfalls, steep ascents and descents, over rocky ridges and through towering forests. The track will be Grade 4 under the Australian walking track grading system, recommended for those with bushwalking experience, with limited directional signage provided. Each day will require a full 6–8 hours' arduous walk to complete.

The walk ranges in elevation from 980 m at Dome Mountain, to 170 m at the finish point, at the eastern boundary of Bindarri National Park. Several high peaks are traversed along the proposed route including Dibbs Head, Mount Wondurrigah and Tuckers Knob.

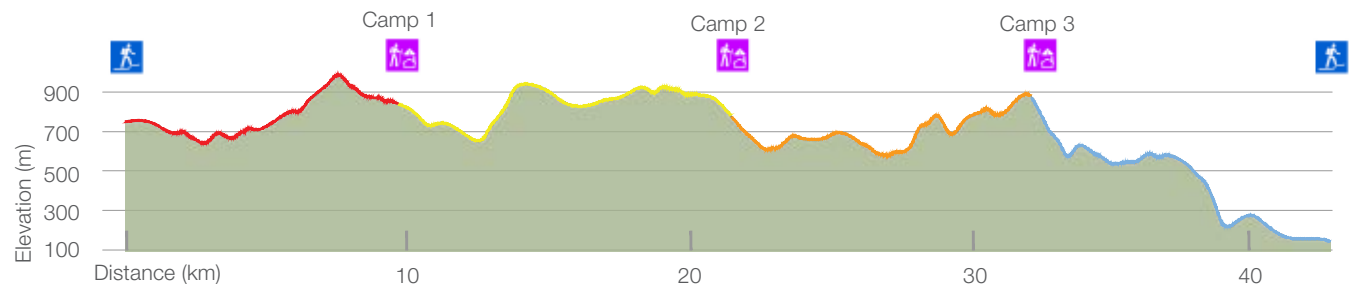
The route provides several new day walking opportunities using various entry and exit points, particularly on Day 1 and Day 4.

**Figure 4.1** Dorrigo Escarpment great walk proposed route and elevation profile



Elevation gain: 2,520 m  
Elevation loss: 3,120 m

Highest point: 980 m  
Lowest point: 170 m

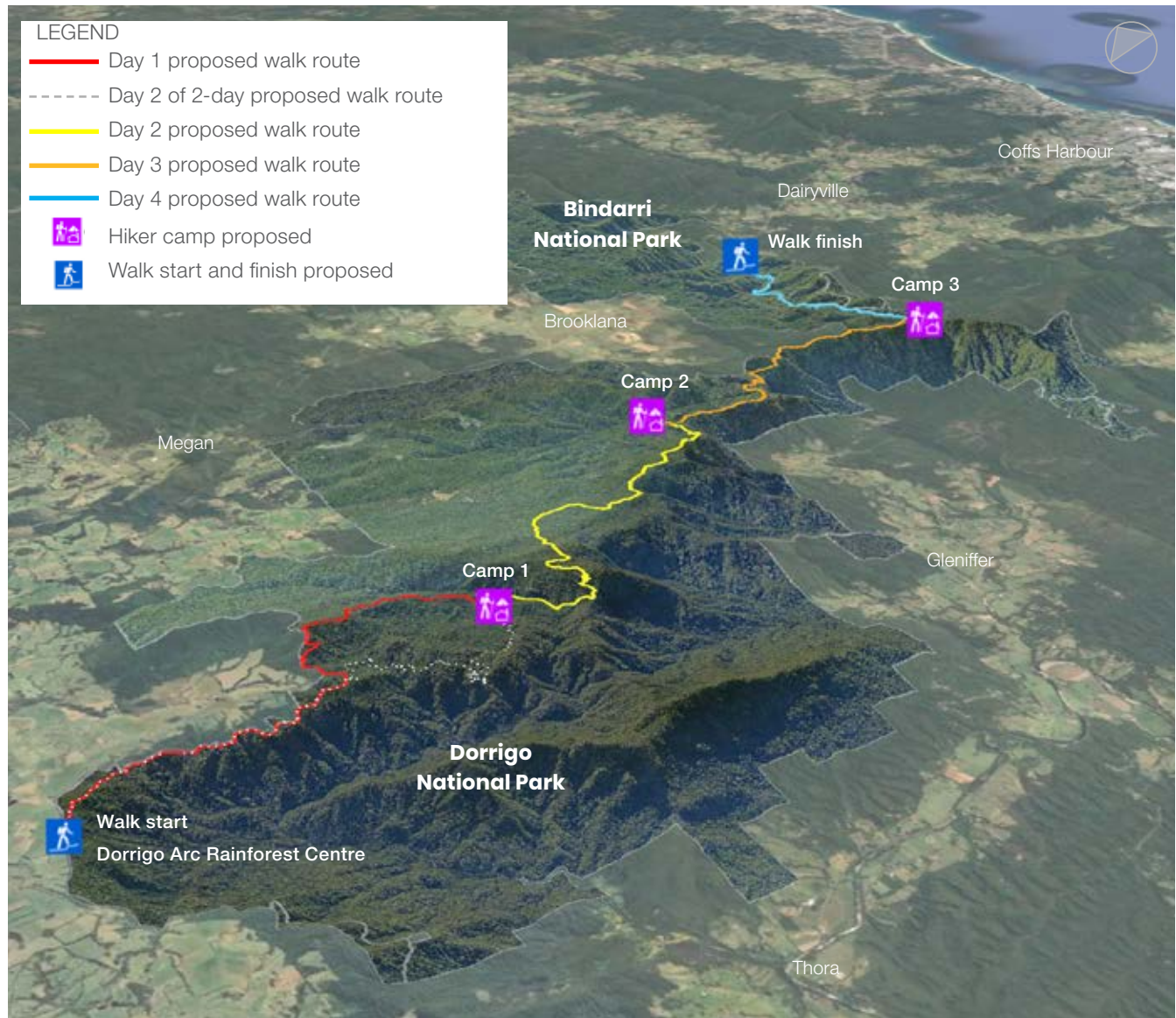


Starting the walk at the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre provides an easily accessible launching point with established transport links and off-park accommodation options in the local area. The centre also affords the opportunity to highlight the international significance of the World Heritage rainforest and its important values. A dedicated check-in facility will assist NPWS in monitoring customer levels of satisfaction and managing the impacts as well as enhancing the experience for walkers. A mandatory briefing will convey critical messages about caring for Country and addressing visitor expectations about the experience, including hygiene protocols, equipment requirements, navigation, sensitive areas, weather forecasts and risks. Essential items may also be available for purchase or hire, such as personal locator beacons.

The proposed track alignment is subject to change following further assessment of natural values and cultural heritage. The proposed route includes existing walking tracks and management trails (6.1 km), old historic logging and snig tracks (21.2 km), and sections of new tracks (18.7 km), as detailed in Table 4.1 below.

Day	Existing (km)	Historic (km)	New (km)	Total (km)
1	0.8	3.0	6.8	10.6
2 of 2	6.5	0.0	5.5	12.0
2	4.0	7.1	2.3	13.4
3	0.0	4.5	6.8	11.3
4	1.3	6.6	2.8	10.7
<b>Total (2-day)</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>22.6</b>
<b>Total (4-day)</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>46.0</b>

**Table 4.1:** Daily distance summary and track types



## 4.2 Day 1 – Rainforest centre to Baliiga

Day 1 (10.6 km) commences at the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre where hikers will receive a mandatory pre-walk briefing. From here, the proposed walk will traverse generally eastward along the escarpment edge along a newly formed walking track.

The walk hugs the park boundary on the escarpment edge with tall rainforest and numerous glimpses down into the Rosewood River valley until it joins with the existing Blackbutt walking track. This first section of track has some of the most challenging construction aspects of the proposal due to steepness of slope.

From the Blackbutt track intersection on Dome Road, the route climbs up to Dome Mountain summit (at 980 m, the highest point on the walk). A new well-graded track leads to a lookout point that provides unparalleled views west over the Dorrigo Plateau. From Dome Mountain a new track will follow the ridge east through tall hoop pine forest and then along an existing overgrown logging track down into Camp 1.



Elevation gain: 740 m  
Elevation loss: 760 m

Highest point: 980 m  
Lowest point: 630 m



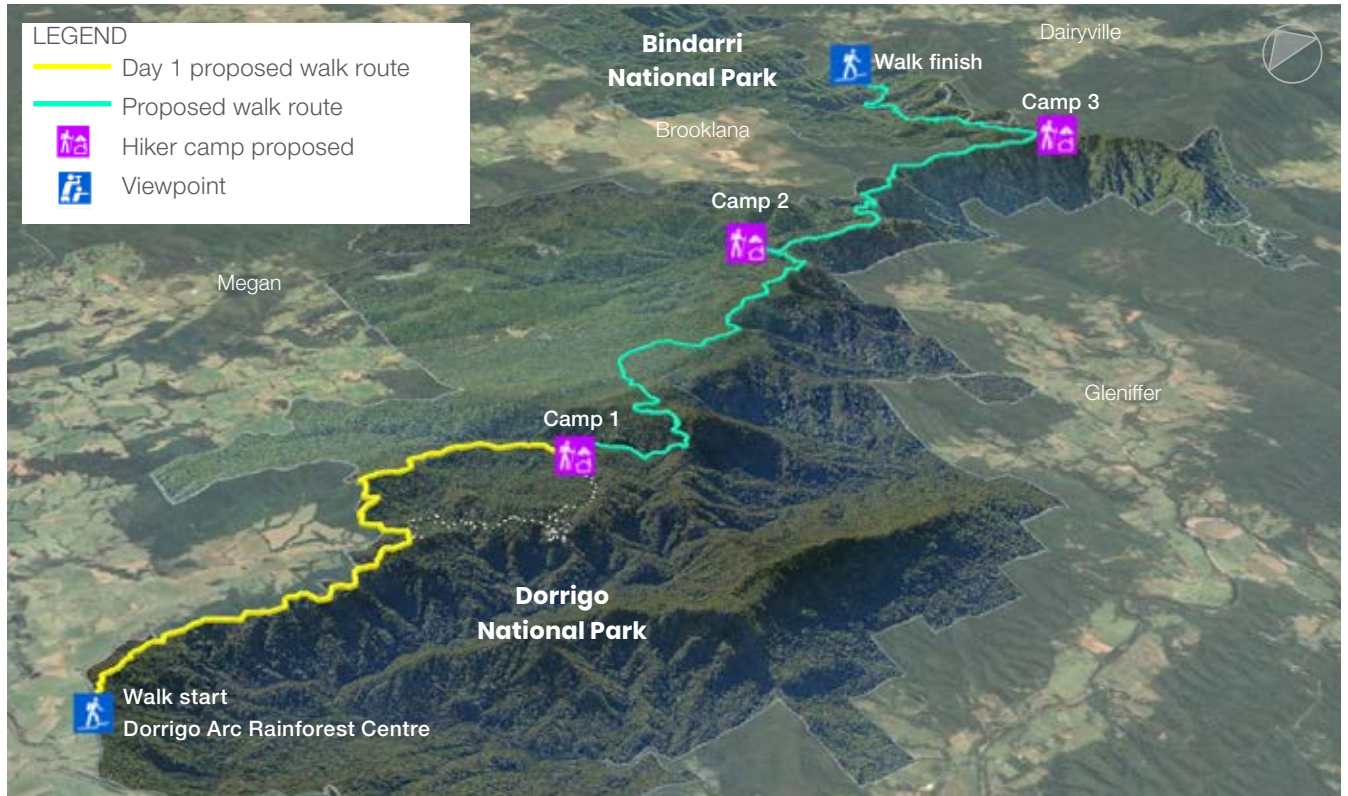
Figure 4.2 Day 1



Photo: View from Skywalk at Dorrigo Rainforest Centre



Photo: View from Dome Mountain looking west





### 4.3 Return to rainforest centre (Day 2 of 2-day walk)

Hikers completing the 2-day overnight return walk follow the existing Blackbutt walking track to the intersection with Dome Road and join the track back along the escarpment edge to the rainforest centre. Numerous waterfalls, swimming holes and vistas are a feature of this 12 km-day including Casuarina Falls. There is the option to extend the day on the Rosewood Creek and Red Cedar Falls tracks.

The Dome Mountain track provides a shorter day walking or overnight loop option from Never Never picnic area (Baliiga), which is only a short drive from the rainforest centre and the community of Dorrigo.

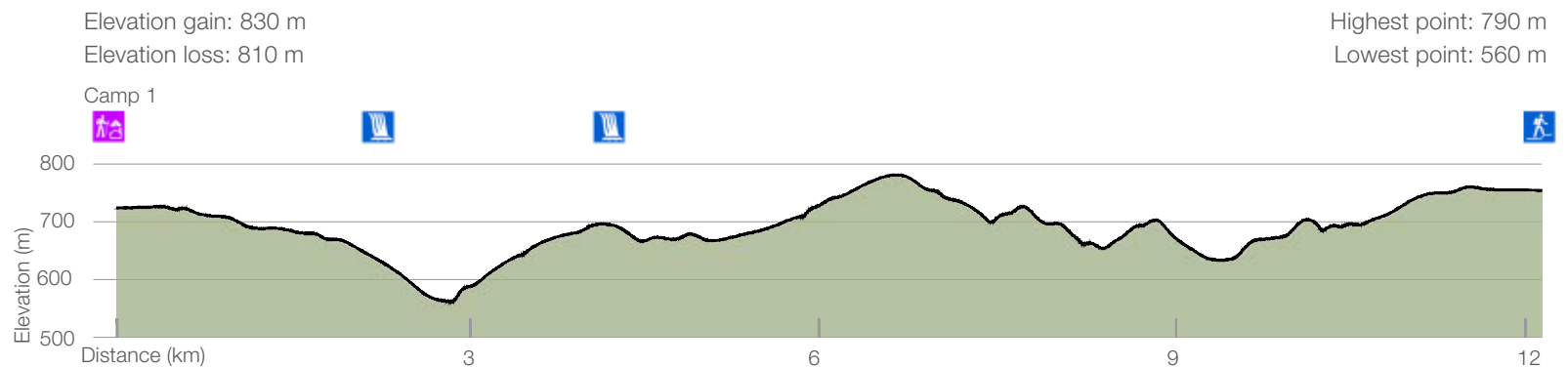
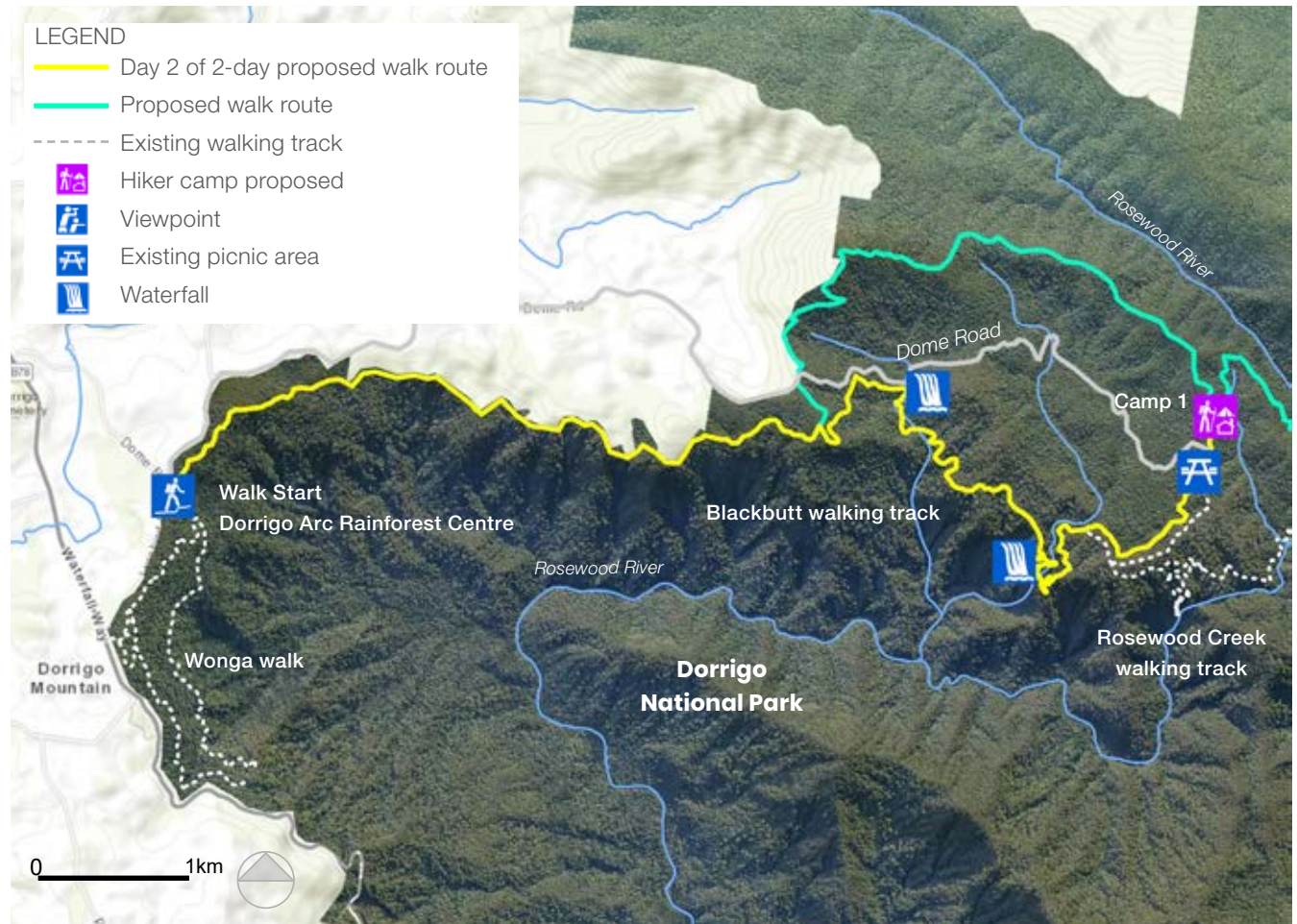


Figure 4.3 Day 2 of 2



Photo: Casuarina Falls, Dorrigo National Park



Photo: Hardwood giant, Dorrigo National Park



## 4.4 Day 2 – Baliiga to Upper Never Never

Day 2 (13.4 km) leaves Camp 1 using the existing Rosewood Creek track then crosses the Rosewood River at a new stepping-stone crossing before making the long climb up to Dibbs Head. This track uses a combination of new and previously disturbed tracks. The final section up to Dibbs Head is steep and will require specialist stone work to construct a suitable track. Hikers are rewarded with views from Dibbs Head over the Bellinger Valley to the coast.

The walk then heads north towards the Syndicate track on existing trails, past historic timber-getting relics to Lanes lookout.

From here the walk traverses the escarpment ridgeline following an old snig track towards Anscombes Hill where a vista rest point is proposed. From Anscombes Hill a new track will be constructed through giant old-growth blackbutt and brush box forest. The track slowly descends to the upper Never Never River where a simple pedestrian swing bridge will take hikers across the river followed by a short climb up to Whitneys Trail and Camp 2.

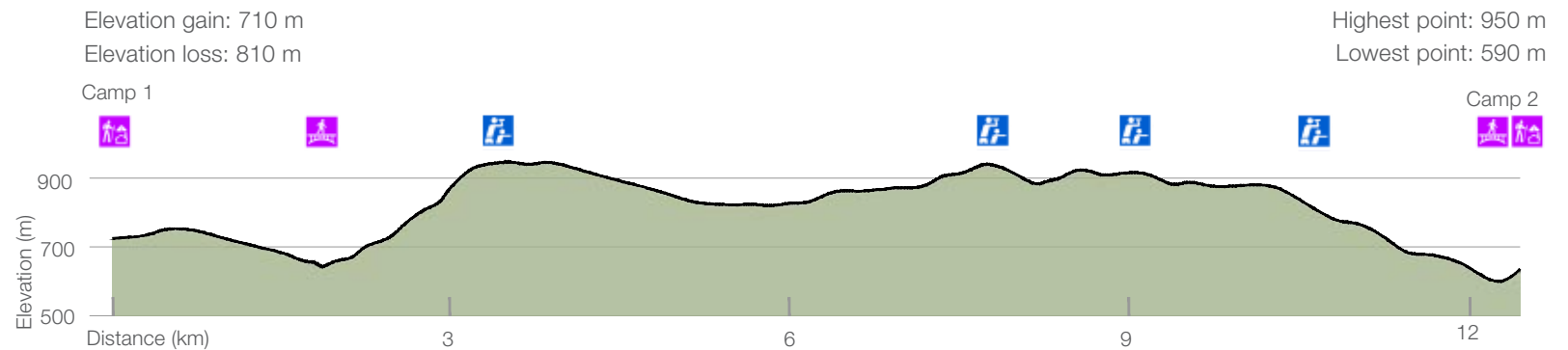
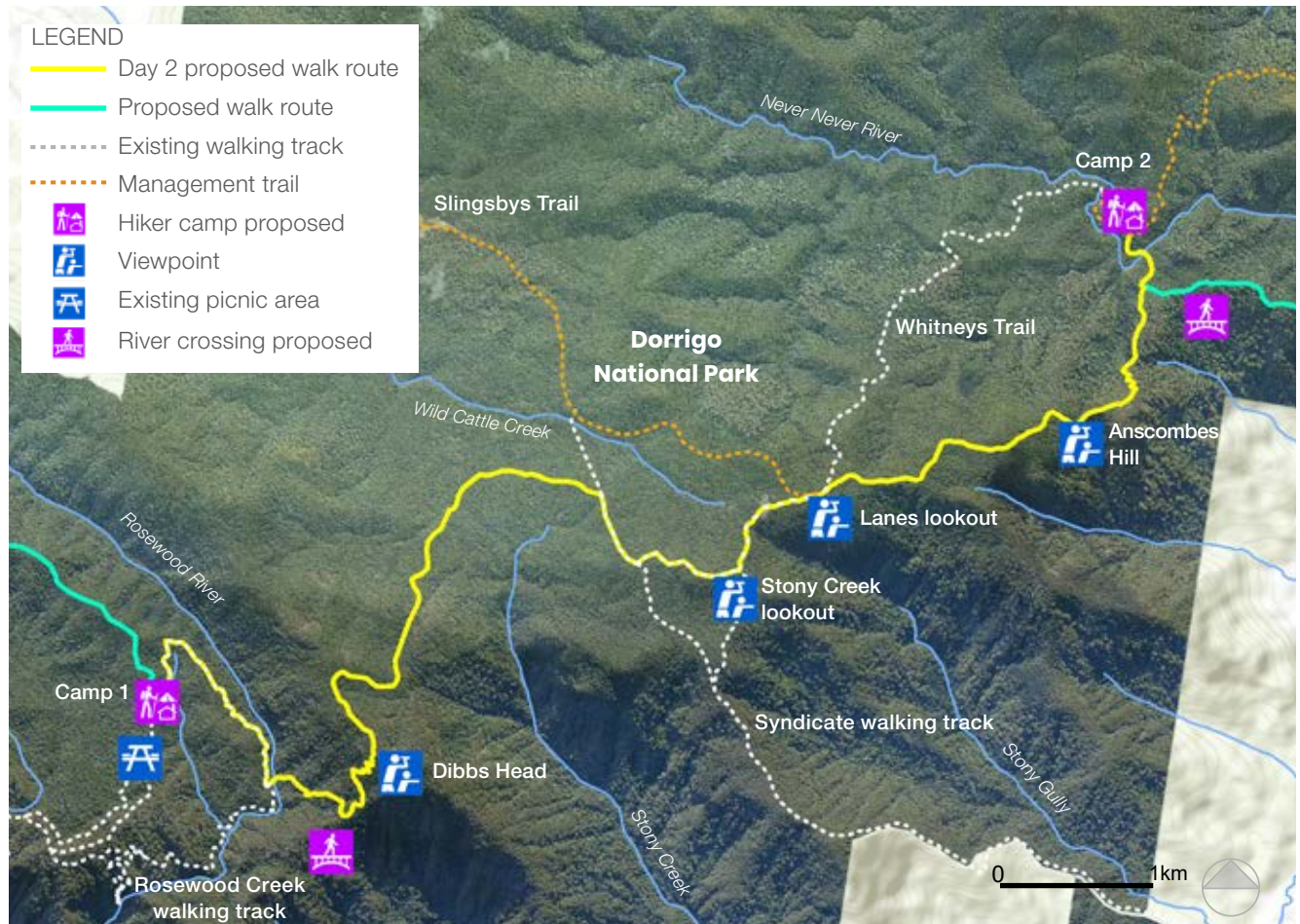


Figure 4.4 Day 2

Once set up at camp, hikers can walk 500 m down to the old historic Whitneys bridge on the existing management trail to spend the afternoon exploring the river.

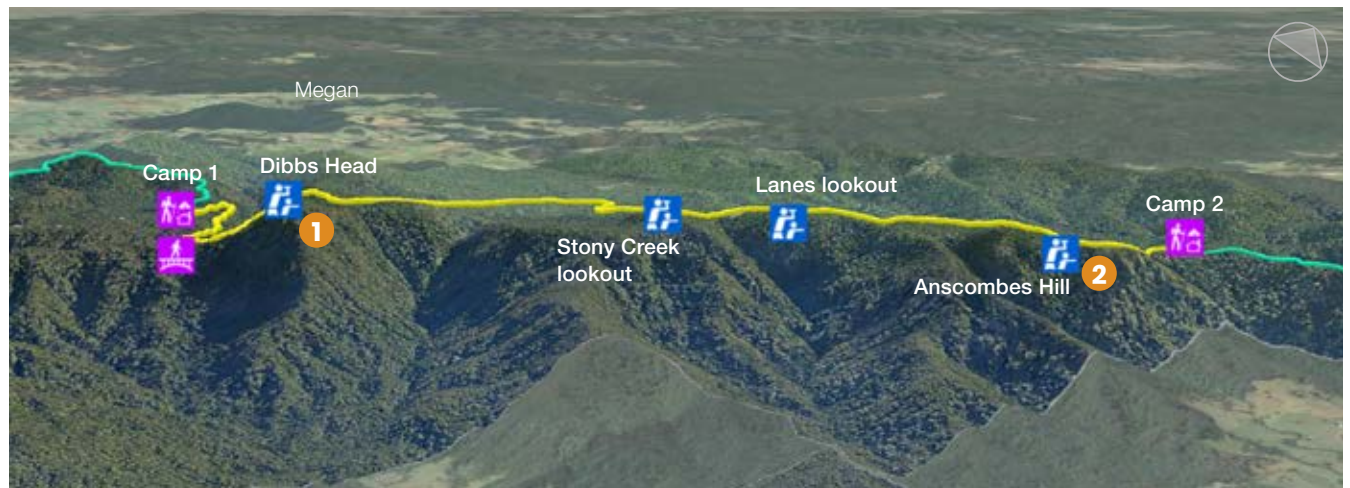
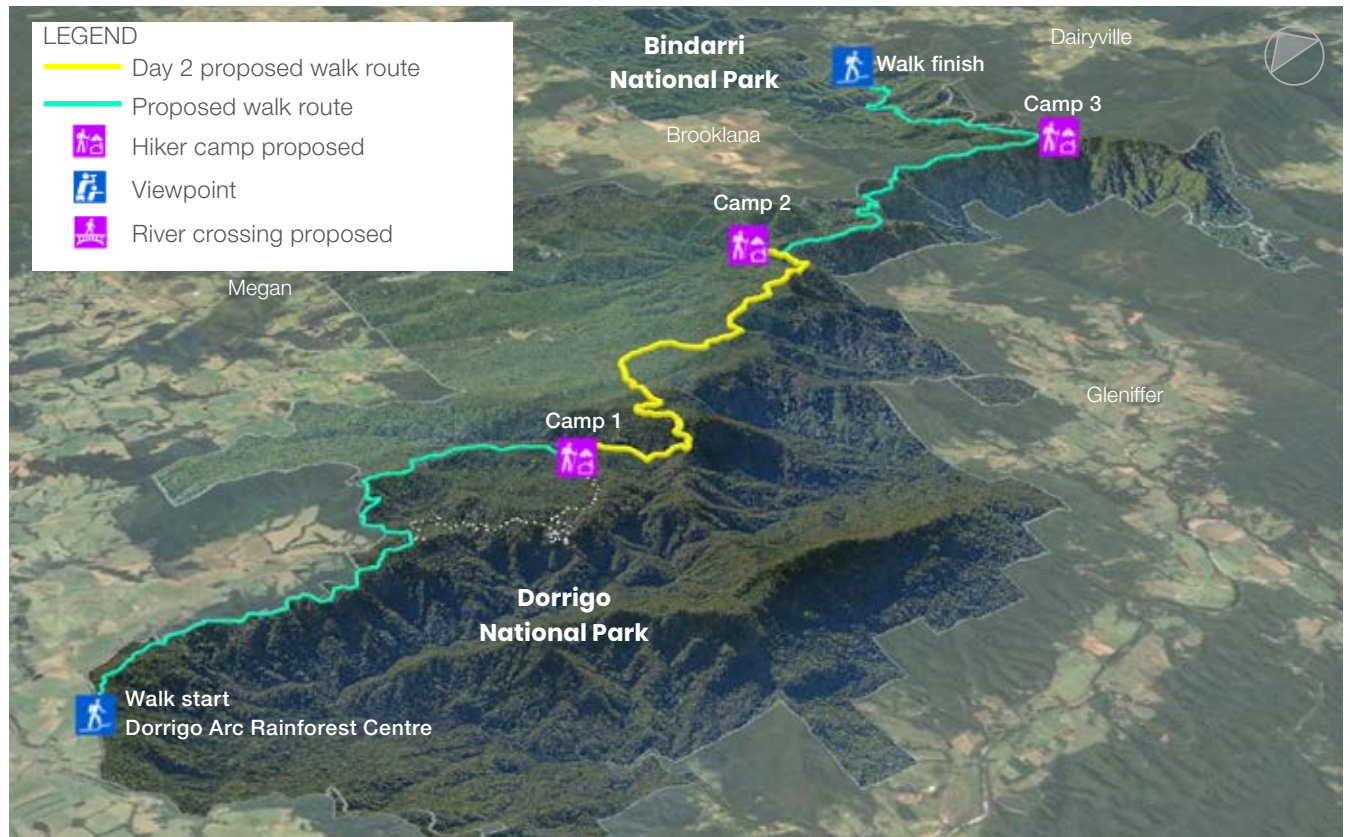
Whitneys Trail on the northern side of the Never Never River will be used for construction and ongoing maintenance of the camp as well as an emergency access and exit for hikers.



Photo: Dibbs Head looking west



Photo: Blackbutt trees, Dorrigo National Park

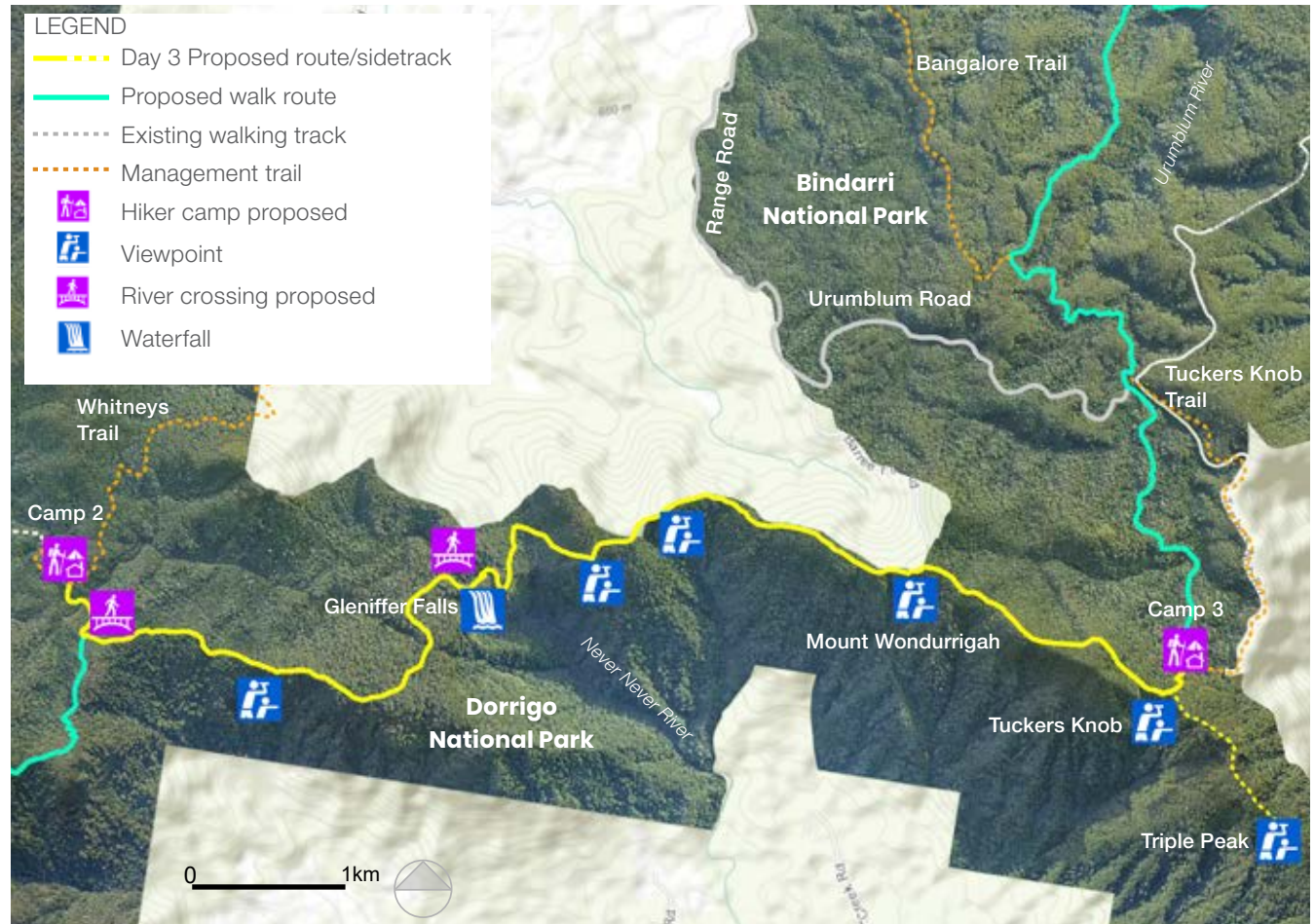


## 4.5 Day 3 – Upper Never Never to Bindarri

Day 3 (11.3 km) is potentially the most challenging day of the walk and begins by retracing the track down over the Never Never swing bridge and back up onto the ridge providing vistas over the Promised Land area of Bellinger Valley. This section of track features large brush boxes in various stages of the ancient battle with giant strangler figs. The walk gently winds down through tall open eucalypt forest to the Never Never River just above Gleniffer Falls. A high suspension bridge crossing is proposed to take hikers onto the river's north bank. The suspension bridge location is subject to assessment but will be located up river to ensure the area around the falls is free from built structures.

The walk then works its way through magnificent rainforest and giant brush box under and around Mount Roogatargah with a viewpoint overlooking the valley towards the coast. A long traverse along the ridgeline takes you past Mount Wondurrigah (with a small telecommunications facility), which has a management access road and will be an emergency and construction access point.

Continuing the ridgetop traverse eastward over Tuckers Knob and into a saddle, hikers will have the option of dropping their packs and heading up to Triple Peak (one km) for more views before returning for the short 400 m descent into Camp 3.



Elevation gain: 890 m  
Elevation loss: 840 m

Highest point: 900 m  
Lowest point: 560 m

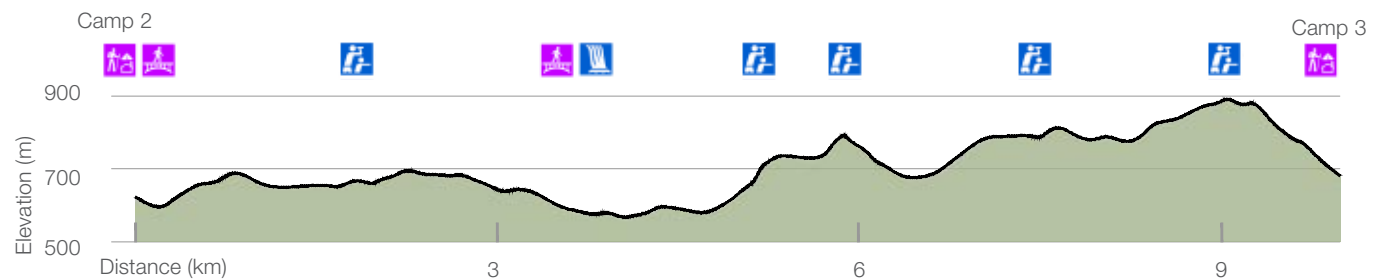


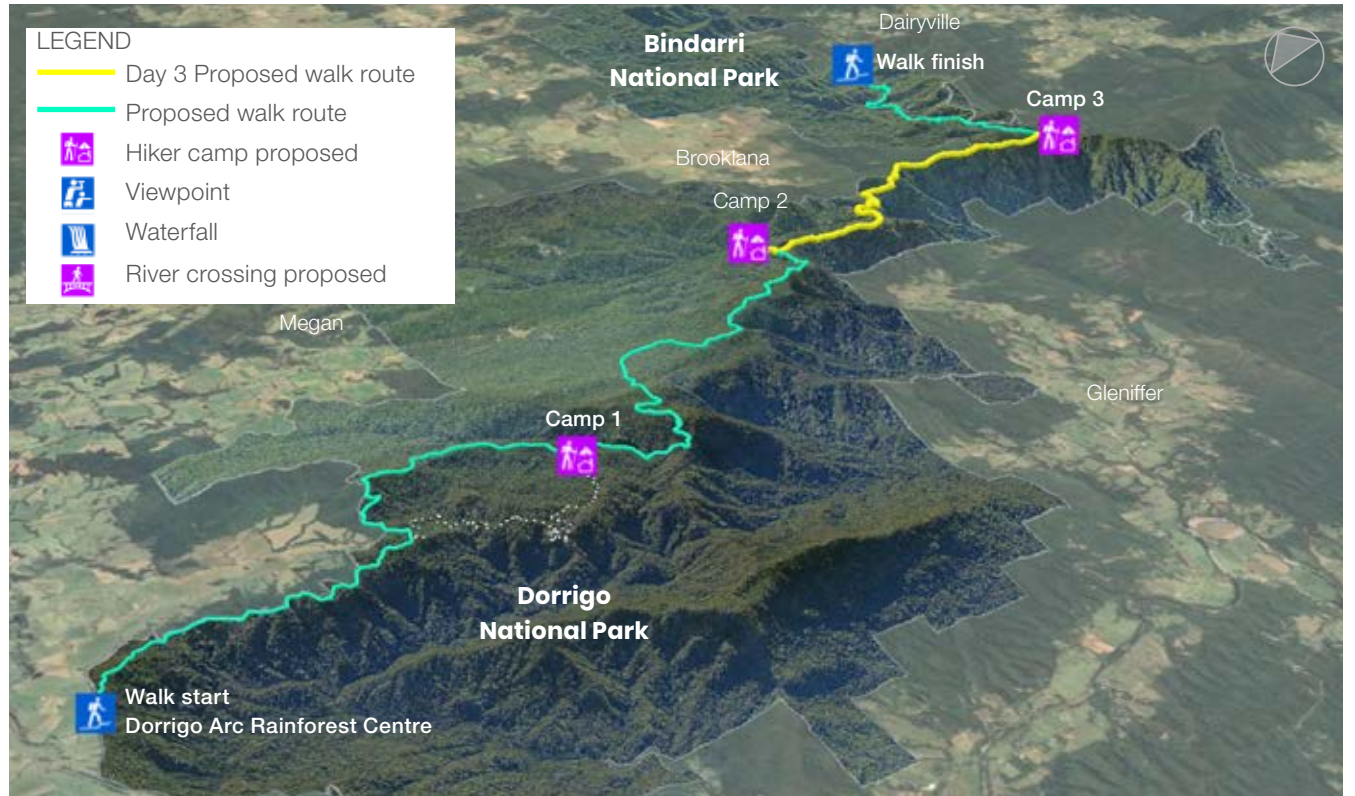
Figure 4.5 Day 3



Photo: Views south from Mount Wondurrigah, Bindarri National Park



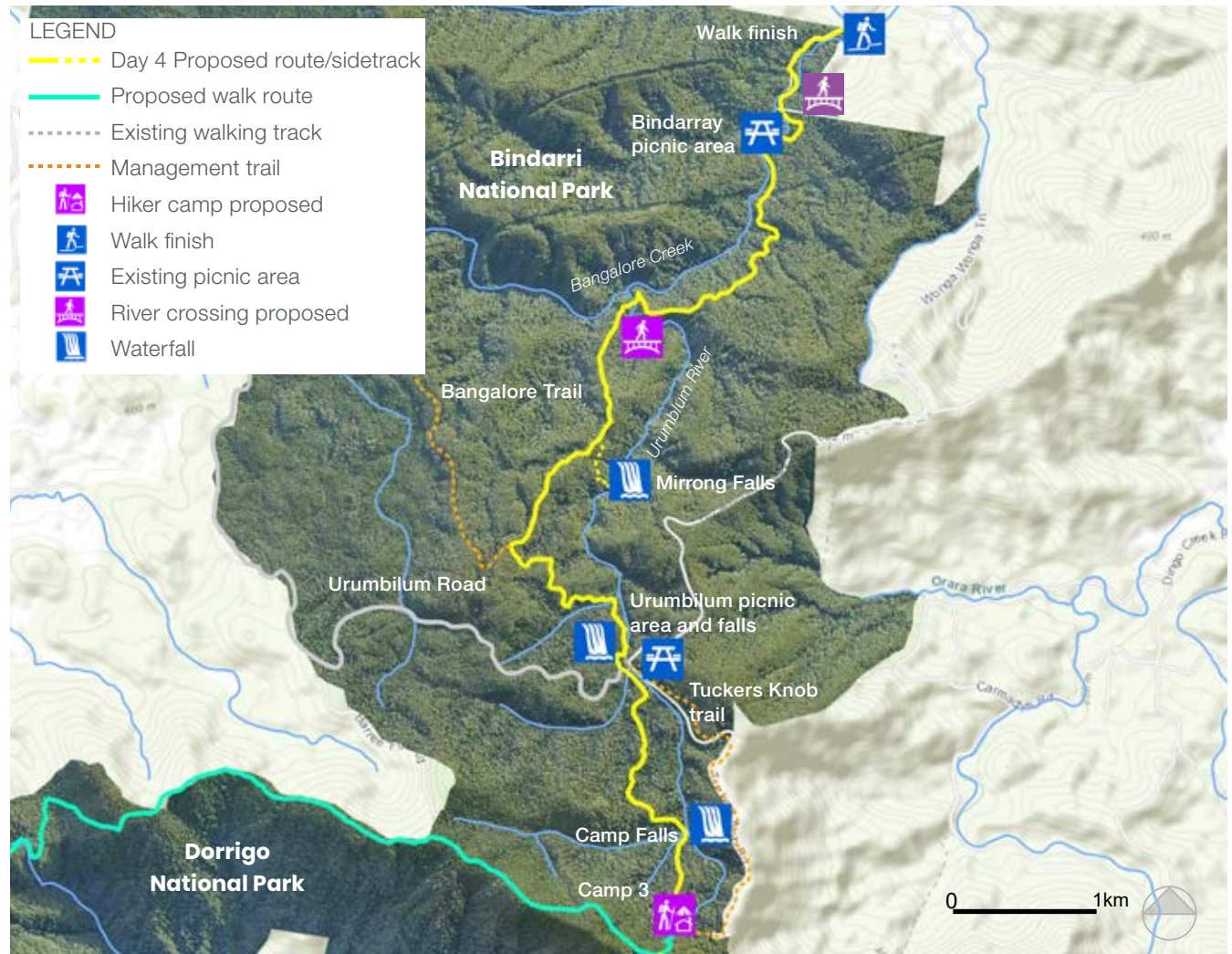
Photo: Views west from Triple Peak, Bindarri National Park



## 4.6 Day 4 - Bindarri to Dairyville

Day 4 (10.7 km) starts with a descent to Camp Falls before a walk along an old logging track to Urumbilum picnic area. A new track takes hikers to the base of Urumbilum Falls and then continues above the river on the western bank before meeting up with Falls Trail and Bangalore Trail. The route follows Bangalore Trail which makes a rapid descent down to the junction of Urumbilum River and Bangalore Creek where another swing bridge crosses the Urumbilum River above the junction. A side trip to Mirrong Falls in the Urumbilum Gorge is an option half way down Bangalore Trail.

The track then follows an old trail and a short section of new track, emerging at Bindarray picnic area. It's then a short walk out to a pick-up shelter at the park entrance at Dairyville where hikers finish the walk. A swing bridge may be necessary to ensure hikers can traverse the lower Urumbilum River adjacent to the current 4WD crossing point.



Elevation gain: 550 m  
 Elevation loss: 1080 m  
 Highest point: 680 m  
 Lowest point: 170 m

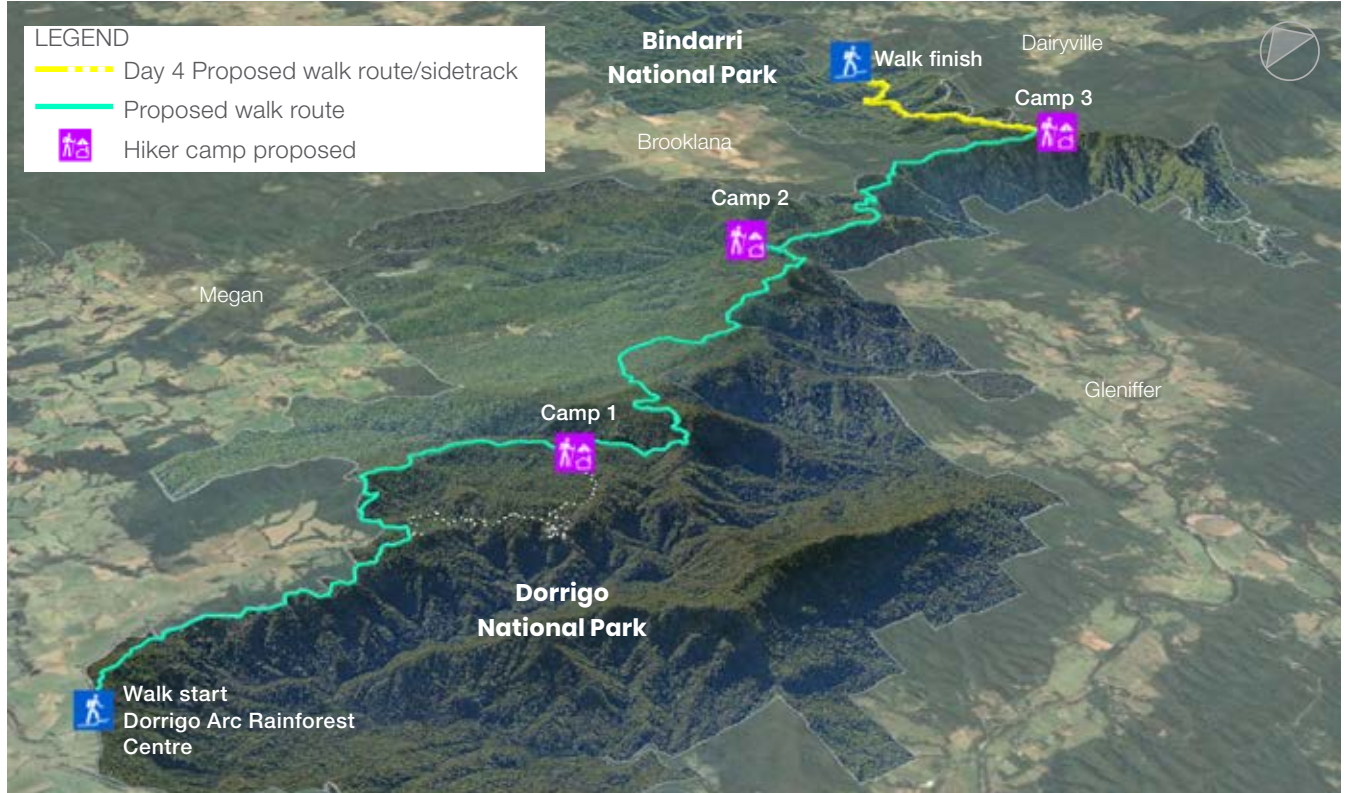
Figure 4.6 Day 4



Photo: Urumbilum Falls, Bindarri National Park



Photo: Mirrong Falls, Bindarri National Park





An aerial photograph of a vast, forested landscape. The foreground is dominated by a dense, green forest. In the middle ground, a prominent escarpment rises, covered in thick vegetation. Beyond the escarpment, the terrain descends into a series of rolling hills and valleys, also covered in forest. The background shows more distant, hazy mountain ranges under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent dark green banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text '5. Track design and infrastructure'.

## 5. Track design and infrastructure

Escarpment view towards Dorrigo National Park

## 5.1 Walk key design principles

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk is designed to promote, protect and respect the environmental and cultural heritage of the area and inspire future conservation advocacy and stewardship by providing a hiking experience that allows a greater number of people to spend a longer time exploring Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks. The driving philosophy is to provide an experience that allows more people to connect to nature, culture and each other.

The following broad principles will be used to influence the planning, design, construction and operation of the track, the hiker camps and the overall experience:

- the walk is affordable with options for both camping and hard-roofed shelter/huts for independent hikers
- a communal philosophy of shared facilities that promotes connection and a shared adventure experience will drive the designs
- overnight camps and huts are managed by NPWS and not for exclusive or private use
- each day of the walk is between 10–15 km in length at a Grade 4 standard with a natural surface providing a 6-8 hour daily walk time
- the walk provides a level of challenge at moderate to hard difficulty
- existing day walks are maintained and enhanced, and new day walking opportunities created by the track will be available
- design and construction must cope with extremes of conditions including very high rainfall, humid summers and cool winters

- designs and facilities including the track and bridges account for forecast climate change
- impacts on environmental and cultural values to be avoided in the first instance, then if not possible, minimised and or mitigated
- existing tracks and previously disturbed sites will be used where possible
- the use of management trails for the walking route is minimised to improve the experience
- before and after walk off-park accommodation options are encouraged
- hiker camps are simple, well designed and functional
- long-term sustainability is achieved through best practice design, material choice and construction techniques
- built infrastructure is designed in a manner that results in a minimal footprint and can be removed with minimal impact if needed
- commercial operators will have access similar to members of the public.

The current draft concept plan describes 3 hiker camps along the 46-km walk. Due to uncertainty in gauging accurate walking times in an untracked environment, consideration may need to be given to including an additional hiker camp if daily distances are too long. If so, site selection will be in line with the other camp sites (previously disturbed and accessible by vehicle) and assessed under the requirements of the review of environmental factors (see section 8). Public feedback would be invited when the review is placed on public exhibition.



Photo: Strangler fig, Dorrigo National Park

## 5.2 Hiker numbers

The number of hikers commencing the walk each day will be in line with design principles. The proposed daily capacity of hikers is 24 people with 50% using camping platforms and 50% using huts. The final capacity will be dependent on detailed environmental impact assessment and will be limited by the allowable footprint of the smallest overnight camp site.

The proposed daily capacity for the 2-day overnight walk is also 24, requiring night 1 to accommodate up to 48 people. There are 2 options to accommodate the overnight hikers:

- increasing the capacity of the proposed hiker camp, sited 400 m from Never Never picnic area, from 24 to 48
- using the proposed camping platforms at the upgraded picnic area (proposed to be re-named Baliiga — see section 7.3).

More detail is provided in the following camp concept plans and the Baliiga precinct plan.



Photo: Walking on a trail, Bindarri National Park

## 5.3 Track grade and aesthetics

The walking track will be a Grade 4 standard which is constructed without major modification using materials such as gravel, mulch or natural surface, and will be built to blend into the natural environment using primarily hand tools and local materials where possible.

The proposed route has been selected to be as low impact and sustainable as possible in terms of maintenance and materials. Best practice principles will be applied to ensure that tracks, camps and lookouts have minimal impact on the natural and cultural values. This minimal impact philosophy allows the natural features and elements to determine the route and reduce the need for new walking track construction.

Around 13% of the walk is along existing walking tracks, 46% on historic logging and snig tracks which have been identified using LiDAR (light detection and ranging) mapping, and 41% are proposed new sections of track. The historic logging tracks generally have existing benching to provide a level surface with only minor vegetation works required for the walk.

Trail aesthetics are also important when designing the track, with a number of elements helping to make it feel natural. For example, natural features help shape the character of the track itself. The more that a track has natural shape in its own alignment, in both large and small scales, as well as natural shape in its materials, the more naturalistic it feels. Anchors, often vertical features in the landscape such as large trees and rocks, can make a track feel like it belongs where it is. Trail shaping with a strong attention to detail will be critical to create a track that has harmony, flow and a coherent narrative in its journey.



Photo: Red Cedar Falls track, Dorrigo National Park



Photo: Example stone stairs, Blue Mountains National Park

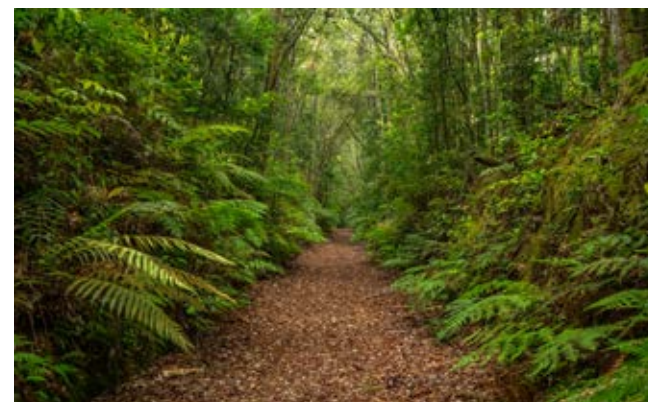


Photo: Syndicate track, Dorrigo National Park

## 5.4 River crossings

The proposed walking route involves several remote river crossings. It is proposed to construct wire swing footbridges at a number of locations on the larger rivers and either rock stepping stones or small single-span low-level bridges on numerous small intermittent creeks. Most locations identified below will require footbridge construction materials to be transported by helicopter sling loads.

- Rosewood River crossing on Day 2 – large stepping stone crossing using suitable imported rock
- The upper Never Never River below Camp 2 – single span wire suspension bridge or stepping stones using suitable imported rock
- The Never Never River at Gleniffer Falls on Day 3 – single span wire suspension bridge
- The Urumbilum River near Bangalore River junction on Day 4 – single span wire suspension or fixed bridge
- The Urumbilum River adjacent to Jersey Bull trail crossing on Day 4 – single span wire suspension bridge.

### Design principles

The following key principles will guide the style and type of crossing:

- located to minimise environmental and cultural impacts
- designed to ensure natural aesthetics are retained including keeping load limits to a minimum to ensure efficiency of structure design and simplicity in keeping with a remote and challenging experience
- suspension bridges will be lightweight structures enabling a minimal impact construction method and to enable repairs in a cost-effective manner should damage occur due to tree fall or adverse weather events
- crossings to be constructed to account for impacts from forecast climate change.



Photo: Swing bridge example, Tasmania



Photo: Swing bridge example, Tasmania



Photo: Example fixed bridge, Milford Creek, Tasmania



Photo: Stepping stone example, Lamington National Park

## 5.5 Viewpoints and lookouts

The walk has several key vantage points on each day which will be investigated for use to provide vistas over the valley and waterfalls. There are also numerous locations along the walk that allow for passing views without the need for formalisation.

Generally, viewpoints coincide with elevation and proximity to an edge clear of vegetation enabling panoramic views. To ensure that risks are managed a briefing will be undertaken prior to the walk together with a booklet outlining the risks.

### Viewpoint treatments

- **Type 1** – natural viewpoint with little to no built structures required. These locations will have low to moderate risk which will be managed through design and may have opportunities for rest spots with low-key bench type seating preferably using natural materials such as rock or timber
- **Type 2** – cliff faces and steep escarpments with a higher level of risk that require some management to reduce the hazard. For example, creating a level surface to define the safe viewing location negating the need for a physical barrier
- **Type 3** – locations with higher visitor numbers and or risks that can't be managed appropriately will have platform style viewpoints and a physical barrier.



Photo: Viewpoint near Mount Wondurrigah, Dorrigo National Park



Photo: Casuarina Falls, Blackbutt Track, Dorrigo National Park

## 5.6 Hiker camps

The hiker camps are all proposed for previously disturbed sites. LiDAR mapping provided valuable insight into potential disturbed sites.

### Hiker camp design principles

- camps are separated from other vehicle-based park users
- low fire risk rating (wetter forest types)
- low tree fall risk – i.e. not in large forest
- short walking distance to water sources (less than 500 m) but not closer than 200 m
- complement not restrict other experiences
- offer camping sites on raised platforms and basic hiker hut/bunk type rooms with a communal kitchen area
- camping sites to be connected using narrow raised platform walkways to improve the experience and reduce impacts on soils when wet
- camps to be simple, modular designs that are efficient and effective in extreme conditions
- kitchen grey water treatment systems will be considered for on-site management where practicable
- basic bucket-style shower proposed for Night 2 with grey water management
- toilet with sealed vault that can be swapped over when full.



Photo: Communal shelter example, Grampian Peaks Victoria



Photo: Shelter internal example, New Zealand

### Amenities

Hiker accommodation may be provided in a larger bunkhouse, or as separate 4-person pod-style huts, depending on the characteristics of the site. All proposed camps will have unobtrusive water tanks to collect rainwater run-off and provide untreated water for hiker use. Open fires will not be permitted on the walk, however, a pellet burning stove is proposed to keep the communal space warm in winter.



Photo: Tent platform example, Three Capes Track Tasmania



Photo: Toilet example, Tasmania


### Access

All solid waste will need to be contained and transported off site for disposal. The proposed hiker camp locations are all accessible by management vehicles for construction purposes and ongoing maintenance such as waste removal, as well as emergency access. This will reduce costs and ongoing helicopter noise pollution and enhance overall sustainability.

## Camp 1 – Baliiga

Camp 1 at Baliiga (rosewood in Gumbaynggirr language) is situated 400 m north of the existing Never Never picnic area (proposed to be renamed Baliiga, see section 7). The site is on a flat saddle and is heavily disturbed from logging in the 1950s. An historic road (visible on the LiDAR image) connects the site to Dome Road, enabling construction and ongoing servicing requirements. The site provides suitable separation from the picnic area whilst easily linking into the existing Rosewood Creek track for Day 2 of the walk. The site provides suitable separation from the picnic area whilst easily linking into the existing Rosewood Creek track for Day 2 of the walk.

### LEGEND

- Day 1 proposed walk route
- - - Day 2 of 2-day walk
- Day 2 proposed walk route
-  Hiker camp proposed

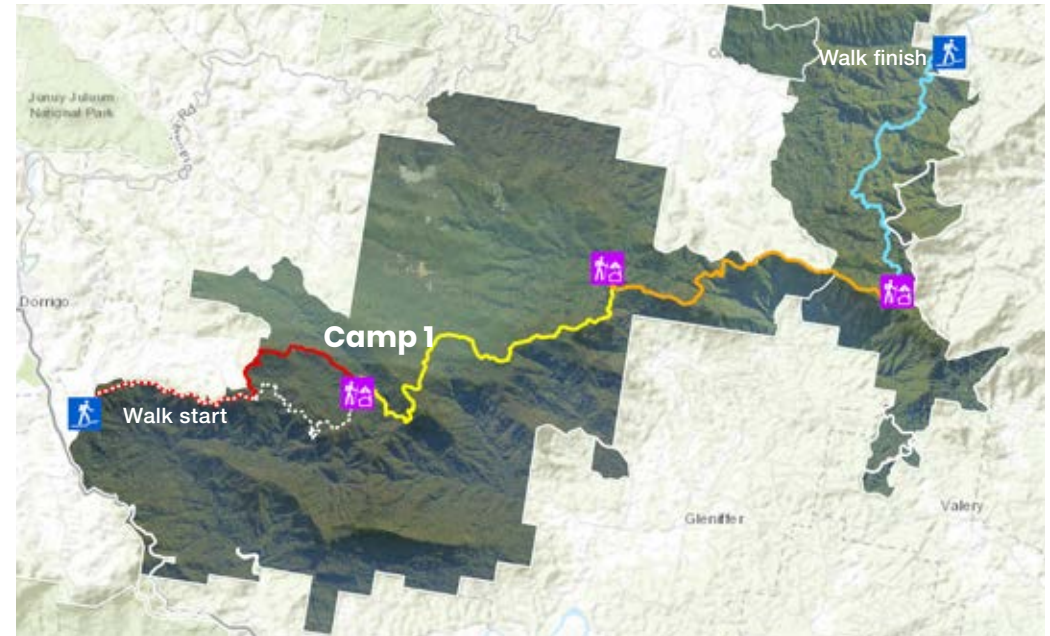


Figure 5.1 Camp 1 - Location

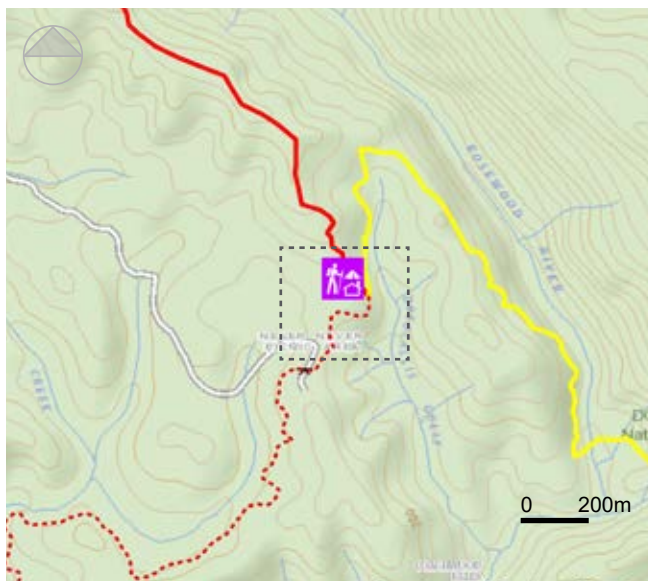


Figure 5.2 Camp 1 - Topographic map



Figure 5.3 Camp 1 - Aerial image

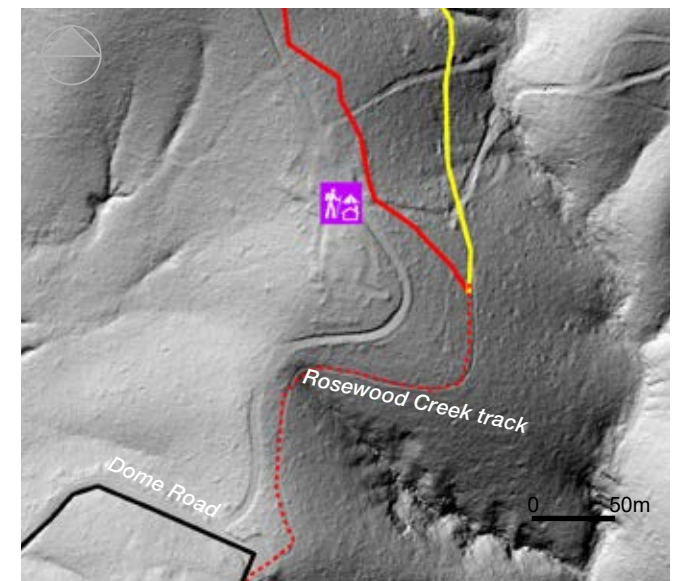


Figure 5.4 Camp 1 - LiDAR image

## Camp 1- Site analysis

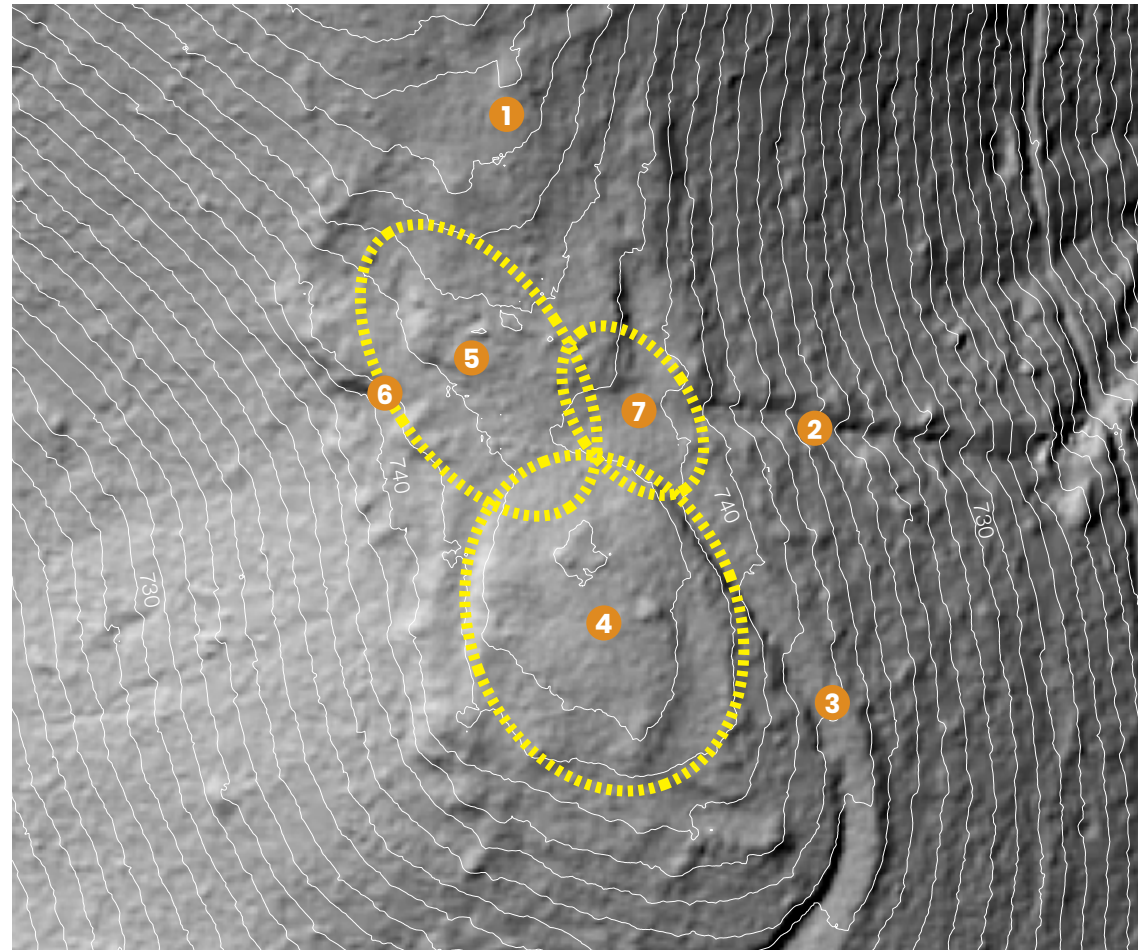


Figure 5.5 Camp 1 - Site analysis

1. Approximate location for Day 1 walking track entry
2. Opportunity to utilise existing track for connection to Rosewood Creek track
3. Old logging road provides access for service vehicles
4. Previously cleared log dump offers level area for camping platforms
5. Minimal slope allows space for additional infrastructure if required
6. Topography offers opportunities for additional outdoor seating and gathering locations
7. Area with vehicle access for maintenance of infrastructure



metres 0 2 4 6 8 10



## Camp 1- Concept



1. Bunk house to accommodate up to 12 hikers
2. Opportunity to offer additional accommodation for 2-day walk option
3. Communal shelter
4. Entry node
5. Toilet/s
6. Camping area
7. Vehicle access track
8. Day 1 walking trail 10.6 km from start
9. Day 2 walking trail 13.4 km to Camp 2



Section A-A



Section B-B







metres 0 2 4 6 8 10

Figure 5.6 Camp 1 - Concept

## Camp 2 – Upper Never Never

Camp 2 is proposed for a site 400 m east of the Whitneys bridge which crosses the upper Never Never River. The camp is situated on a previously disturbed flat ridge where several old logging trails meet to create a suitable sloping area. Whitneys Trail to the north provides good access for construction and ongoing servicing as well as emergency access.

### LEGEND

-  Day 2 proposed walk route
-  Day 3 proposed walk route
-  Management trail
-  Hiker camp proposed

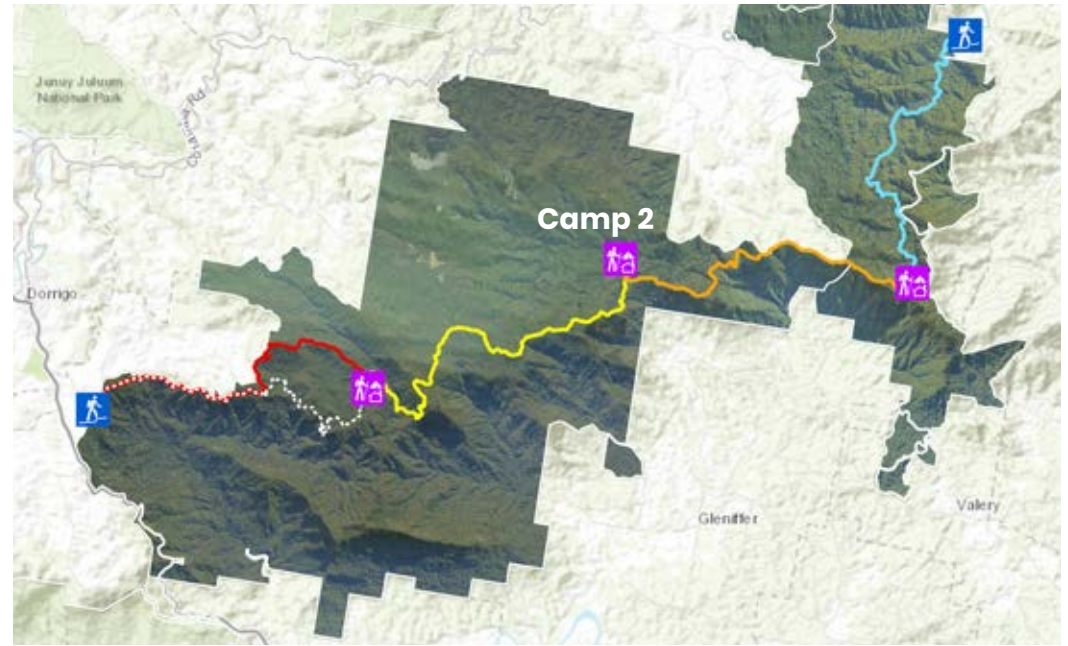


Figure 5.7 Camp 2 - Locality



Figure 5.8 Camp 2 - Topographic map

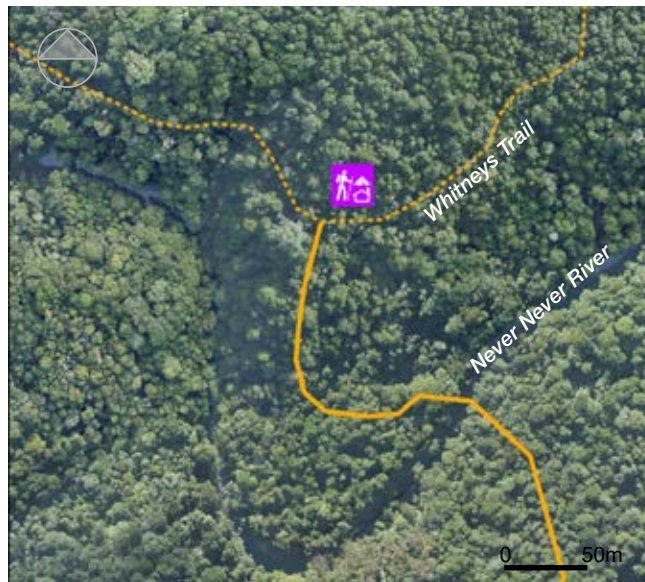


Figure 5.9 Camp 2 - Aerial image

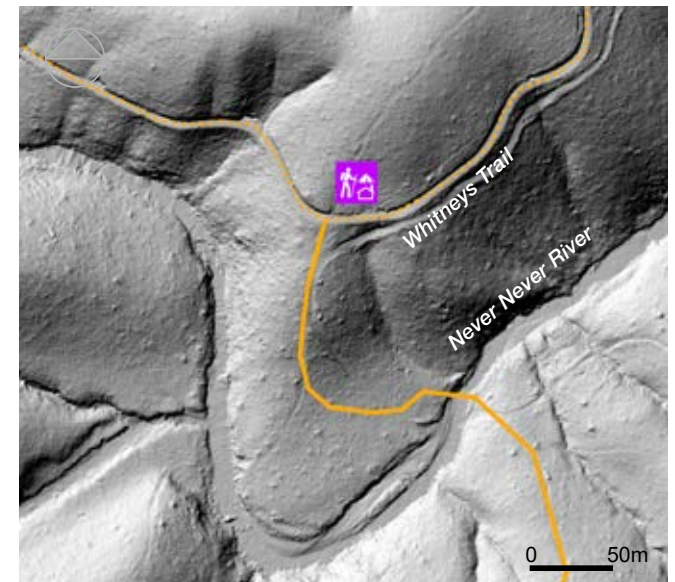


Figure 5.10 Camp 2 - LiDAR image

## Camp 2 - Site analysis

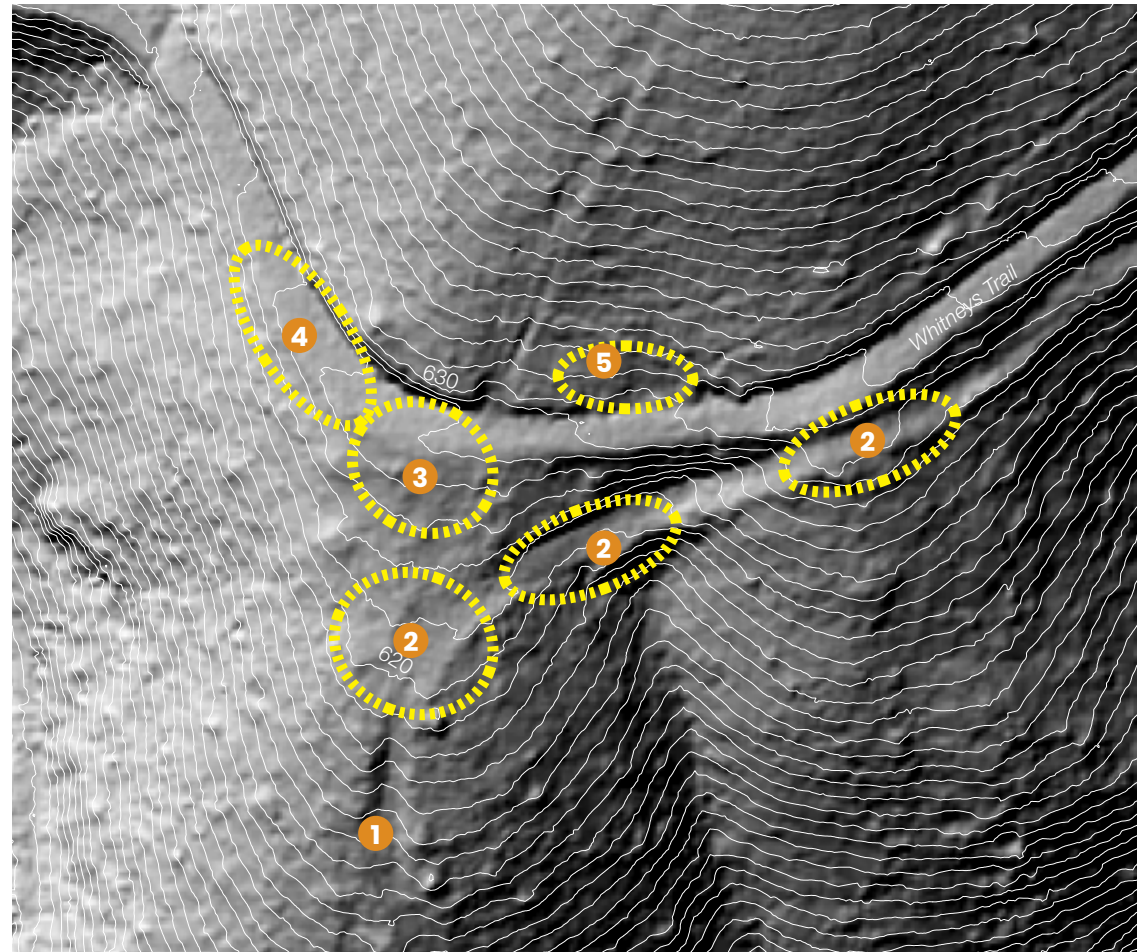


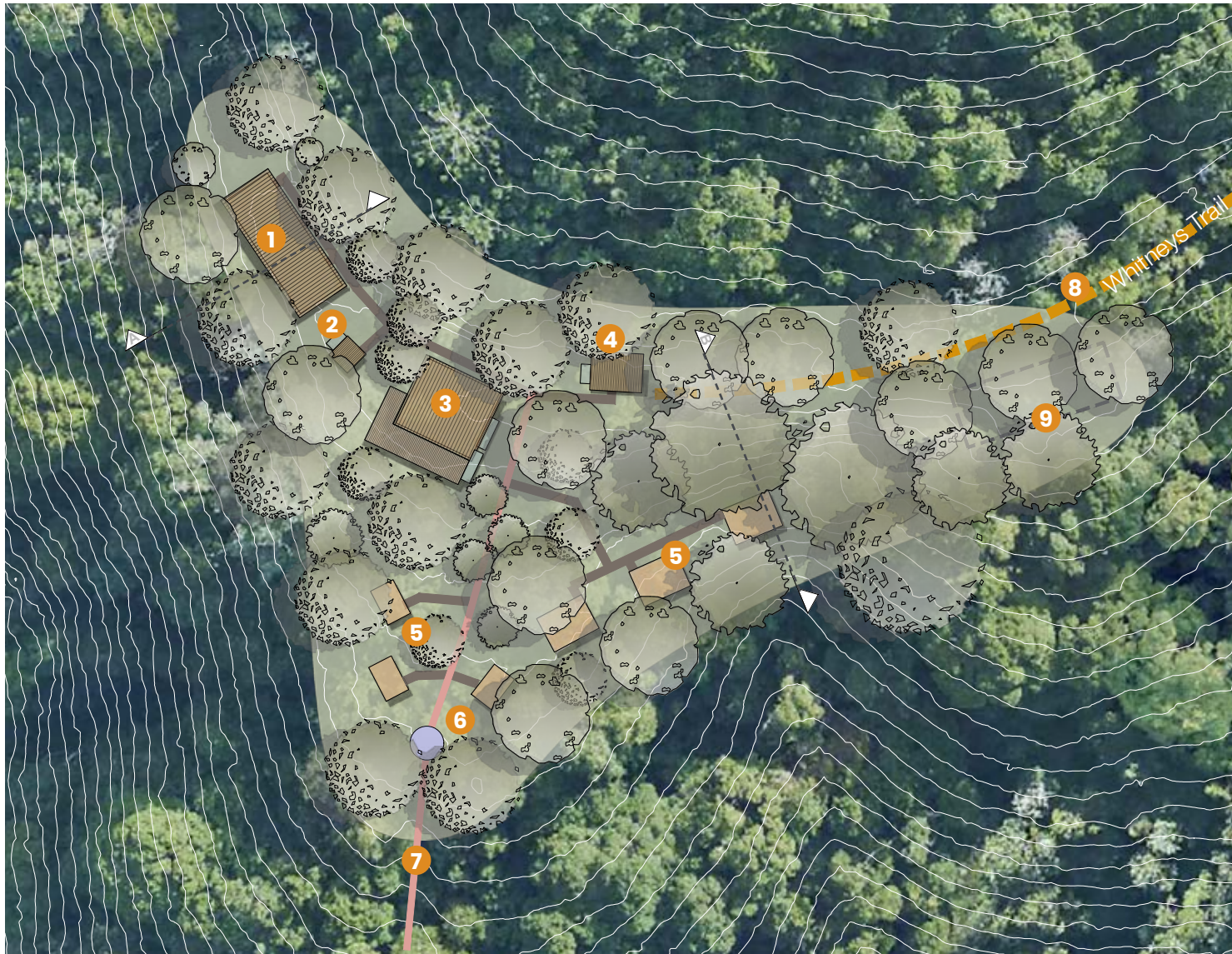
Figure 5.11 Camp 2 - Site analysis

1. Approximately 200 m to Never Never River
2. Possible camping locations on areas which have been previously disturbed and used as logging tracks
3. By utilising the natural features of the site, such as the track, topography and trees, a harmonious blend between the built environment and the surrounding landscape can be created
4. Existing Whitneys Trail provides opportunity for structures so as not to impact on existing vegetation
5. Exiting cut provides a location for services that will require vehicle access for maintenance



metres 0 2 4 6 8 10

## Camp 2 - Concept



1. Bunk house to accommodate up to 12 hikers
2. Shower
3. Communal shelter
4. Toilet
5. Camping area
6. Entry node
7. Walking track entry and exit point
8. Management vehicle access track on Whitney's Trail
9. Optional camping area



Section A-A



Section B-B






metres 0 2 4 6 8 10

Figure 5.12 Camp 2 - Concept

## Camp 3 – Bindarri

Camp 3 is situated 300 m to the north and downslope of Tuckers Knob. The site is located on a ridge at the intersection of old logging roads and has some previous disturbance. The camp can be accessed for construction and ongoing maintenance via Tuckers Knob trail and a section of historic logging road which will require reopening. The location makes Day 3 a reasonable distance and provides the options for hikers to climb Triple Peak as a side trip. Other sites closer to Mount Wondurrihah and Urumbilum Falls also offer camp site options.

### LEGEND

-  Day 3 Proposed walk route
-  Day 4 Proposed walk route
-  Hiker camp proposed

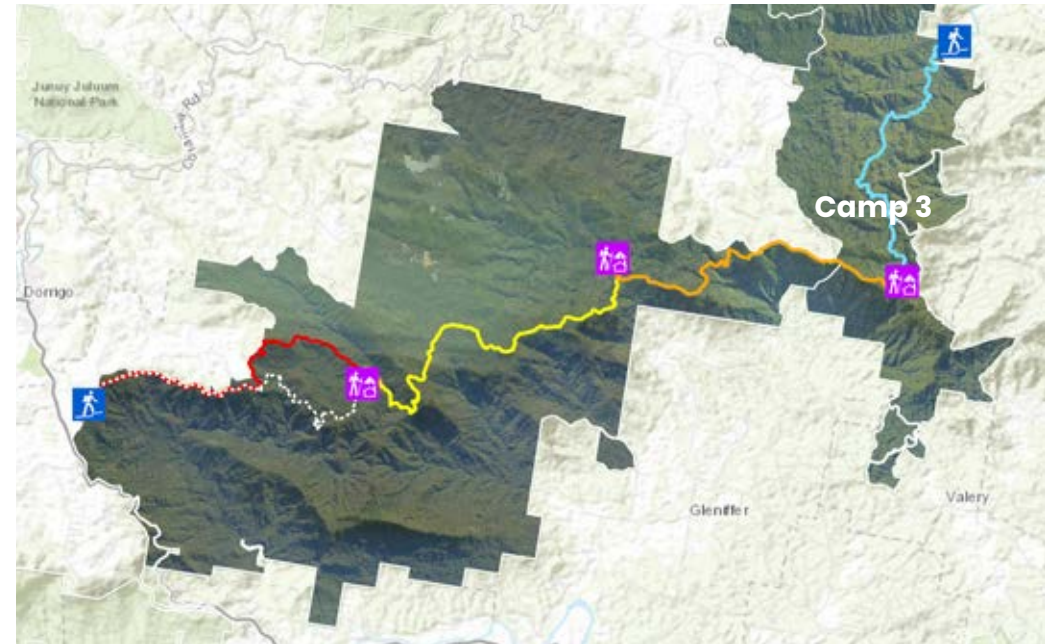


Figure 5.13 Camp 3 – Locality

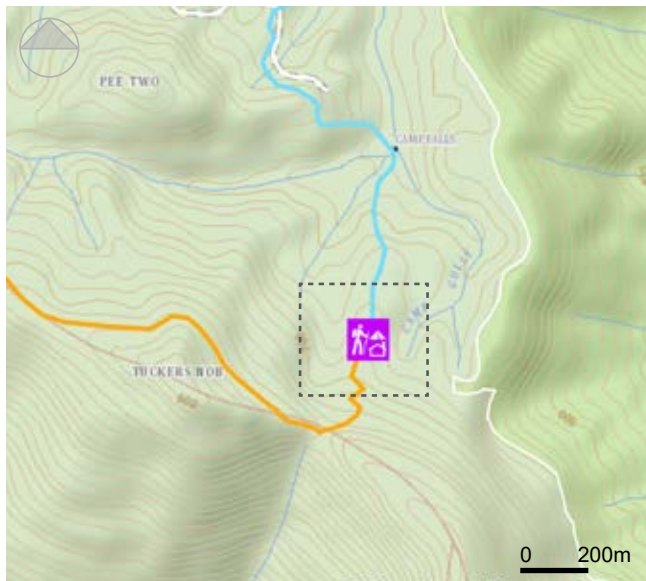


Figure 5.14 Camp 3 – Topographic map



Figure 5.15 Camp 3 – Aerial image

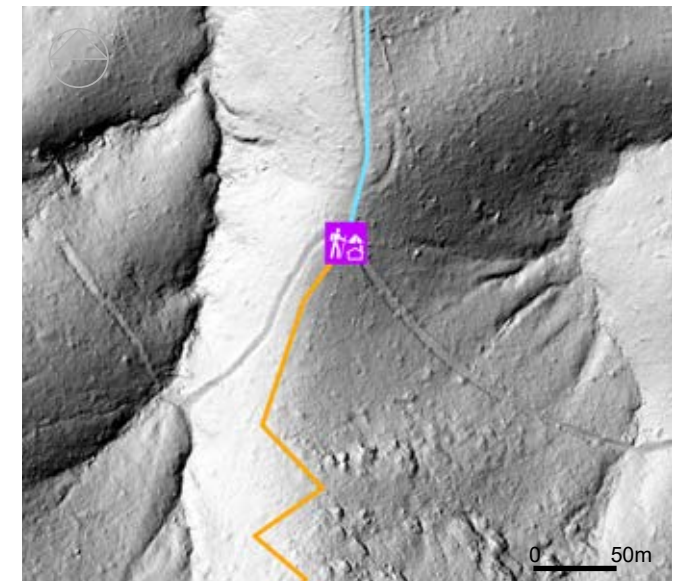


Figure 5.16 Camp 3 – LiDAR image

## Camp 3 - Site analysis

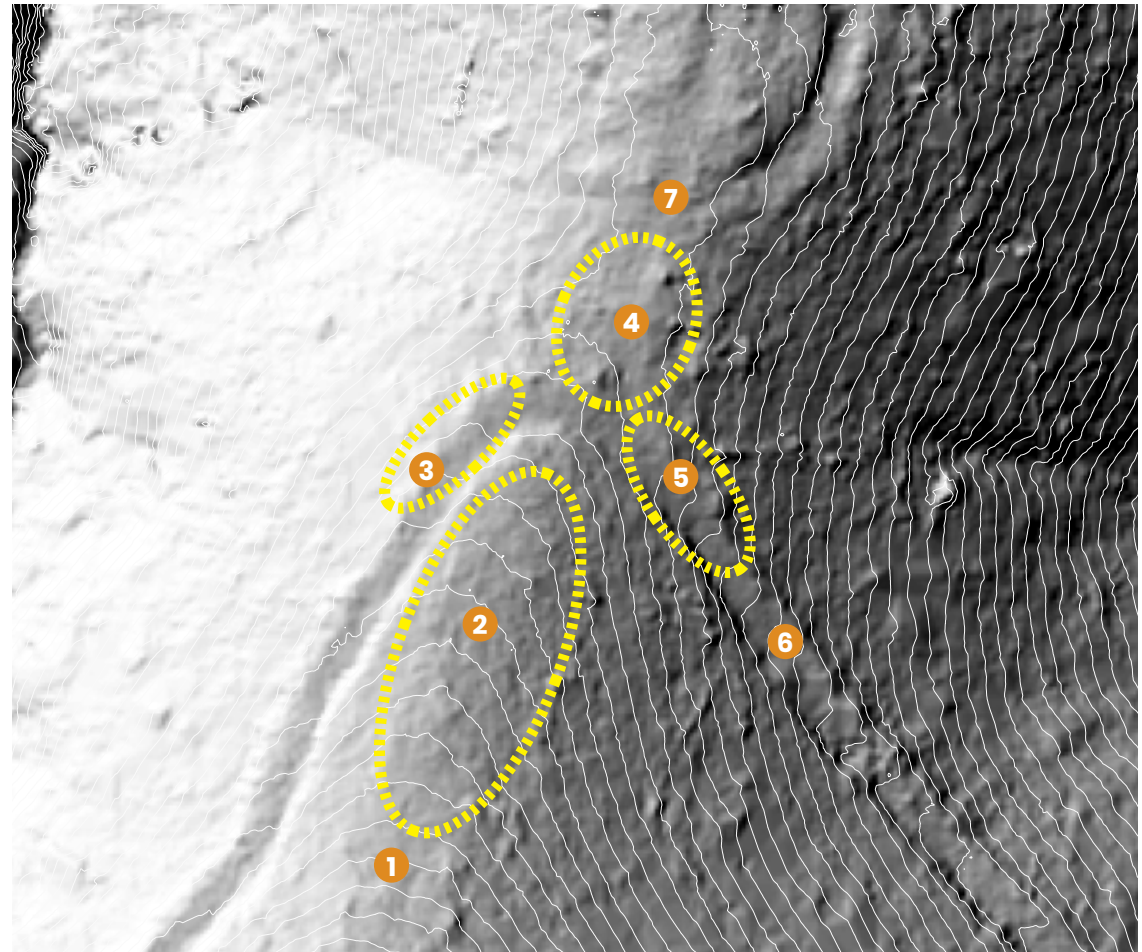


Figure 5.17 Camp 3 - Site analysis

1. Approximate location for Day 3 walking trail entry
2. Slope will require structures to be located along the contours
3. Existing level areas to be utilised to minimise construction materials with slope allowing for views through the canopy
4. Ridgeline has relatively level area which could be used for a larger structure
5. Existing cut provides a location for services that will require vehicle access for maintenance
6. Old logging track provides access for service vehicles
7. Approximate location for Day 4 walking track exit



metres 0 2 4 6 8 10

## Camp 3 - Concept



1. Bunk house to accommodate up to 12 hikers
2. Communal shelter
3. Toilet
4. Camping area
5. Entry and exit node
6. Day 3 walking trail 11 km to Camp 2
7. Day 4 walking trail 11 km to end of track
8. Proposed vehicle access track



Section A-A



Section B-B

Figure 5.18 Camp 3 - Concept



## 6. The walk experience

Crystal Shower Falls walk, Dorrigo National Park





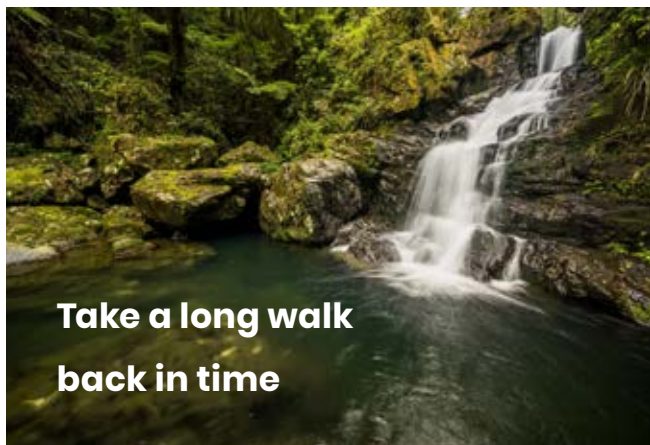
## 6.1 The interpretive journey

Whilst an interpretation strategy is yet to be developed, identifying key themes in the project's design phase will ensure the walk tells a coherent story by integrating the themes into the route designs, rest points, features and infrastructure.

### Overarching theme: ancient refuge

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will be, at its core, an experience which connects people to the unique values of the Great Eastern Escarpment. The overarching theme of an ancient refuge will inform the designs and deliver a coherent and meaningful interpretation story. The subthemes of health and wellbeing, an authentic cultural journey and connections between people, nature and culture will be embedded over the 4-day journey.

The tag line 'take a long walk back in time' reflects both the ancient natural landscape and the Gumbaynggirr cultural connections.



**Take a long walk  
back in time**

Photo: Rosewood Creek waterfall, Dorrigo National Park



Photo: Wonga walk, Dorrigo National Park

### The escarpment as refuge

- Refuge for Gondwanan rainforest: The escarpment has been a place of deep-time refuge for ancient Gondwanan rainforests, escaping the gradual drying of Australia and subsequent Pleistocene ice ages.
- Refuge for Gumbaynggirr People: The escarpment protects pristine waters and abundant natural resources that have provided critical refuge for Gumbaynggirr culture for millennia.
- Refuge for biodiversity: The rugged and inaccessible slopes of the escarpment provided a physical barrier to widespread clearing for pastoral land, providing an enduring refuge for nature.
- Climate refuge: As the Earth's climate continues to warm, the escarpment offers a reliably cool refuge for people seeking thermally buffered nature-connection opportunities.



Photo: Rufous fantail

## Subtheme 1 Health and wellbeing

To recognise and act on the overwhelming evidence that demonstrates a compelling link between meaningful time spent in wild nature (nature connectedness) and a range of tangible human health and wellbeing benefits. The value of these benefits in terms of economic savings to public healthcare and improvements to human productivity is estimated to far exceed that of nature-based tourism.



Photo: Tristana Falls, Dorrigo National Park

## Subtheme 2 An authentic cultural journey

To embed a deep and respectful appreciation for Gumbaynggirr cultural values, knowledge and landscape stewardship perspectives. Hikers will leave with an enduring understanding of how the escarpment has been a peopled environment for tens of thousands of years and continues to represent a deeply cultural landscape.



Photo: Cultural practices, Dorrigo National Park

## Subtheme 3 Connections to nature, culture and each other

To foster opportunities where people can connect in meaningful ways to nature, culture and each other throughout the walking journey. While such connections may arise organically, setting a strong design intention can maximise the most memorable and transformative personal connections.



Photo: Discovery tour, Dorrigo National Park

## 6.2 Nature for wellbeing

The benefits of engaging with nature for human and planetary health are clear. A mass of interdisciplinary scientific evidence shows that natural spaces are vital in maintaining and promoting mental, physical and social health. Critically, a strong connection with nature is shown to be a reliable predictor for pro-conservation behaviour, which is particularly relevant in this time of biodiversity loss and climate disruption.

Nature connectedness refers to how one thinks about, feels and experiences the natural world. The main distinction between nature contact and nature connection is in the noticing: nature connection is promoted through meaningful moments that allow one to absorb multisensory detail, find beauty, feel emotions, and reflect on meaning.

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk has an opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of many who participate. Extended wilderness journeys can benefit from the ‘3-day effect’ – an evidence-backed observation that restorative benefits of nature immersion really ‘kick-in’ after 3 days of ‘being away’, as long as people are also being encouraged to slow down, look up and notice their surrounds.

In designing the walk experience, opportunities will be taken to encourage practices that result in meaningful connections that enhance the ongoing benefits that the walk provides. This may include novel infrastructure to provide pause points to notice, dwell and connect, as well as printed and digital content to encourage connection routines and reflection.

## 6.3 Target markets

NSW Great Walks are being designed to cater for varying levels of fitness and experience with a range of distances, grades and accommodation options on offer to suit a broad range of walkers. The proposed Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will be at the challenging end of this spectrum at 46 km with each day’s walk distance exceeding 10 km and plenty of steep climbs and descents along the way.

Building the track is only the first step in creating a world-class, transformative experience that will make the ‘bucket list’ of domestic and international markets. NPWS has undertaken extensive market research to identify who will be interested and how, in conjunction with tourism industry partners and stakeholders, we can create a world-class walking experience of which the region can be justifiably proud.

The 4 core park visitor market segments which have been identified through NPWS research are summarised on the following page.

### Market research

Market research has identified key insights and market trends for multi-day walks:

- Many people are reluctant to do walks by themselves and are looking for support services, including guides to increase their confidence.
- Largest growth markets are women and people aged 45 years and older.
- Many have been walking internationally... but since COVID-19 there is more interest in local opportunities with a trend towards travellers seeking deeper engagement with the places they visit.
- Many walkers want convenience and ease of planning; an option for someone to do it all – booking the walk, accommodation, transfers and logistics.



Photo: Crystal Shower Falls, Dorrigo National Park

## Market segments

Four key market segments for parks and walks in New South Wales were identified: Adventurers, Escapers, Socialisers and Explorers. Developing detailed personas for each of these segments enables NPWS to test our assumptions about their needs and expectations and map their customer journey from first becoming aware of the walk to completing their experience.

These insights into the customer perspective allow us to explore individual motivations and potential barriers, to help create a seamless, safe and satisfying walk experience. The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will be best suited to the Adventurer and Explorer market segments, whilst Escapers and Socialisers will enjoy day walks.

## 6.4 Arrival, induction and wayfinding

Established transport infrastructure network will provide a variety of opportunities for hikers to travel to the start the walk at the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre. Here, they will receive a detailed face-to-face briefing, stock up on any essential items and commence with a view over their first day's route. After that, wayfinding signage will be important to assist navigation at key points and provide reassurance. It is envisaged that topographic maps and track notes will be made available in both printed and digital form. Directional signage will be kept at a minimum required for safety so as not to be intrusive on the natural environment.

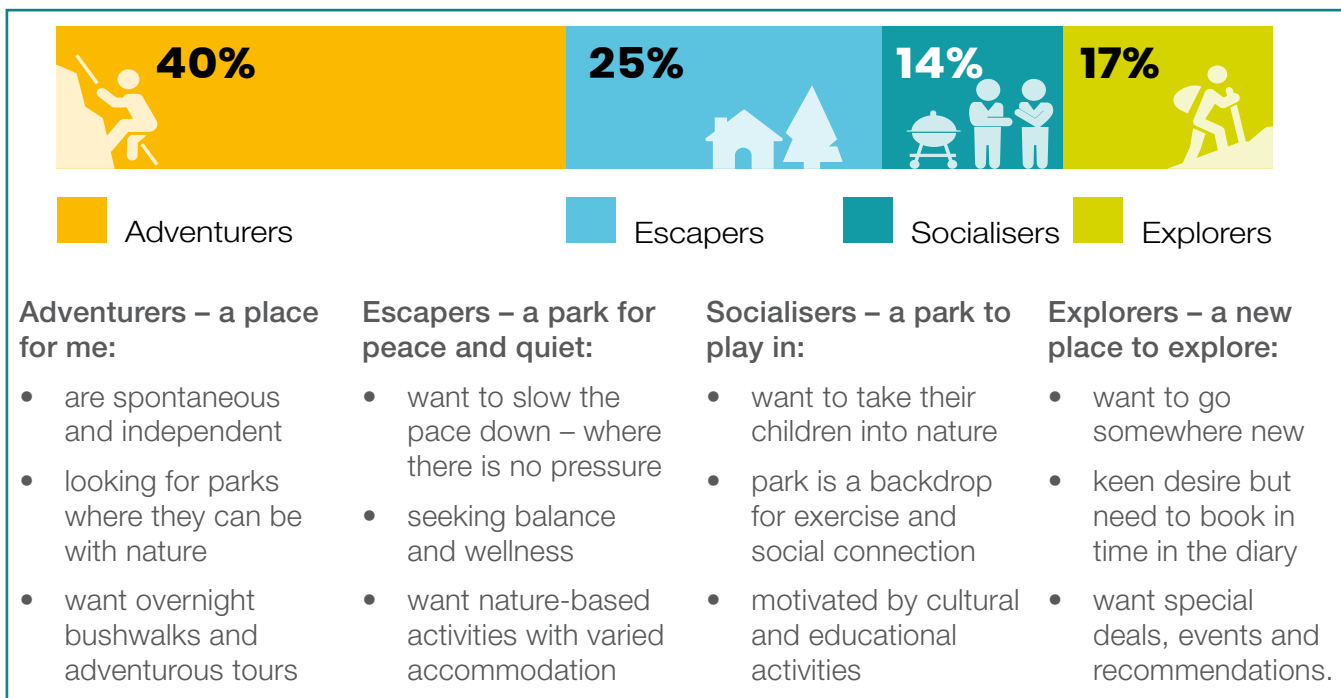


Figure 6.1 Percentage overview of the NPWS visitor market segments for NSW North Coast national parks



Photo: Crystal Shower Falls walk, Dorrigo National Park

A man in a dark puffer jacket and dark pants is walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk. The boardwalk has a dark metal railing with a wooden handrail. The forest is dense with tall trees and green foliage. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day.

## 7. Related precinct upgrades

Walk with the Birds, Dorrigo National Park





## 7.1 Remote camp (Waygarrgala)

The existing remote camp on Wild Cattle Creek adjacent to Slingsbys Trail is proposed to be formalised with a remote toilet and 3 camping platforms.

NPWS intends to name the camp Waygarrgala campground subject to further consultation. This is Gumbaynggirr for 'at the Antarctic beech' after the large multi-stemmed beech tree nearby.

The upgrades will provide an improved camping experience and better manage impacts of increased use. The camp will provide hikers with overnight hiking options, including sections of the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk and Syndicate track.

### LEGEND

-  Day 2 proposed walk route
-  Management trail
-  Existing walking track
-  Hiker tent camp proposed

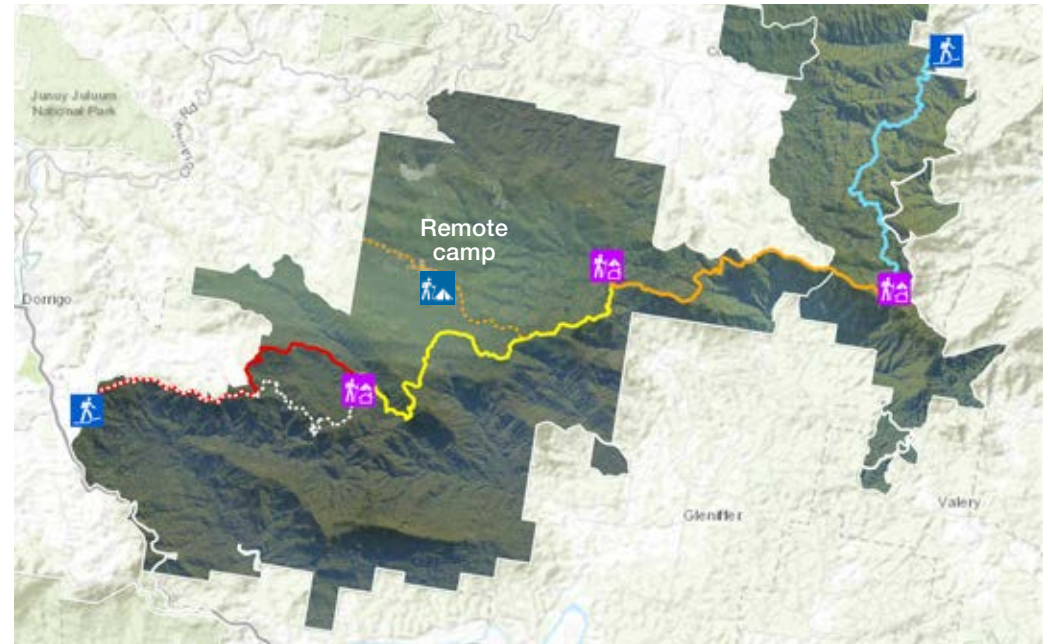


Figure 7.1 Remote camp - Location



Figure 7.2 Remote camp - Topographic map



Figure 7.3 Remote camp - Aerial image

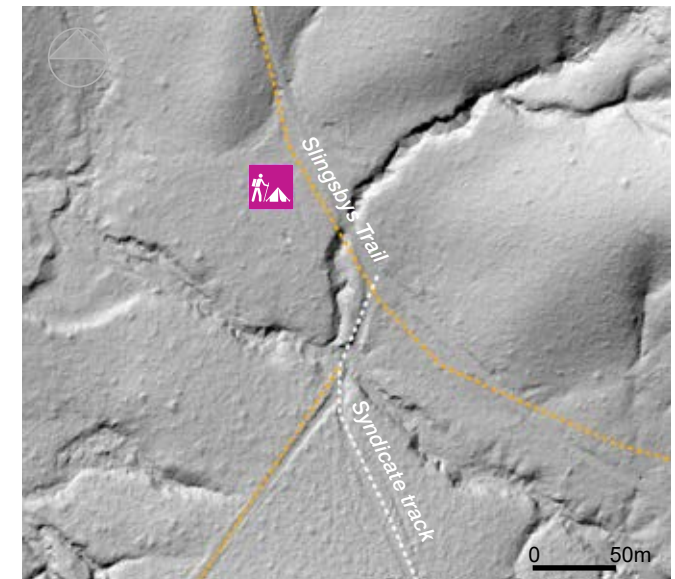
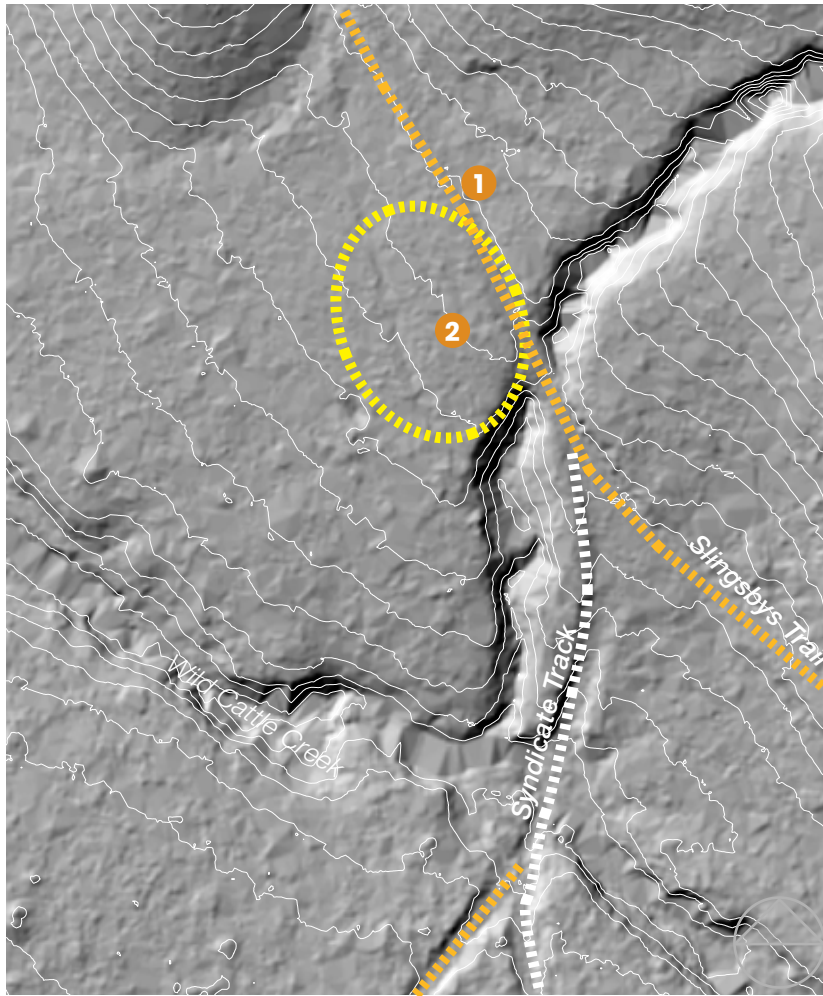


Figure 7.4 Remote camp - LiDAR image

## Remote camp – Site analysis



**Figure 7.5** Remote camp - Site analysis

1. Slingsbys Trail provides access for maintenance vehicles
2. Existing camping locations on relatively level area

## Waygarrgala camp – Concept



**Figure 7.6** Remote camp - Concept

1. Remote fully contained toilet
2. 3 camping platforms (1 double and 2 single)



Photo: NPWS remote toilet



Photo: Remote camp on Slingsbys Trail, Dorrigo National Park

## 7.2 Management trail access

### Dome Road

Dome Road is an all-weather 2WD public road that provides existing visitor access to the Baliiga area (Never Never picnic area) and walking tracks. It will be the main access road from which construction and ongoing operations for Day 1 and Camp 1 and part of Day 2 of the walk will occur. Increasing existing use together with the multi-day walk and other upgrades will see increased traffic which will require upgrades to the road.

Work has commenced on the replacement of 5 old timber bridges and NPWS is working with neighbours and private land owners whose land the road passes through to manage traffic impacts. NPWS is also working with Bellingen Shire Council to help develop longer-term plans for the management of the sections of Dome Road which provide access to the park.



Photo: Public access, Dome Road, Dorrigo National Park

### Slingsbys Trail

Slingsbys Trail is an existing management trail and walking track that provides access to the central part of Dorrigo National Park to Lanes lookout via Killungoondie Plain and Wild Cattle Creek. The trail has a number of historic timber-getting assets associated with the Syndicate tramway. It also provides important access for cultural burning activities at Killungoondie Plain. The trail will be used for construction access to Day 2 of the walk and ongoing maintenance of the existing remote camp which is to have minor upgrades.

The trail will continue to be a key emergency access for fire response and search and rescue operations. The trail will be managed within its existing footprint with some bridge replacements and low-key pavement maintenance in order to protect important ecological and cultural values as well as maintaining its aesthetic appeal for walkers.



Photo: Management trail access, Slingsbys Trail, Dorrigo National Park

### Whitneys Trail

Whitneys Trail is an existing management trail that accesses the upper Never Never River catchment under Mount Moonbil via Brooklana. The trail will be upgraded to the proposed Camp 2 for construction, ongoing management and emergency access. The southern section of track from Whitneys bridge (derelict) on the Never Never River to Lanes lookout has not been trafficable for decades and is a walking route only.

### Urumbilum Road, Tuckers Knob Trail and Bangalore Road

Urumbilum Road provides existing public 4WD access to Urumbilum Falls picnic area. Tuckers Knob Trail then accesses Camp 3 in Bindarri National Park and will provide construction and ongoing management access to this camp and sections of Day 3 and Day 4 of the walk. Bangalore Trail provides access to the mid sections of Day 4 walking route.



Photo: Management trail access, Slingsbys Trail, Dorrigo National Park



### 7.3 Baliiga upgrade

The Baliiga (Never Never) picnic area is to be upgraded, including the provision of overnight tent and vehicle-based camping. A separate precinct plan has been developed for this site.

In summary, the plan proposes a number of upgrades to improve the visitor experience and manage increasing use. These include:

- a small number of designated camping platforms and sites for campervans
- delineating and improving day visitor facilities
- increasing parking capacity
- trailhead and signage improvements.

The excerpt from the Baliiga precinct plan shown in Figure 7.7 on right illustrates the design principles behind the planned upgrade of the visitor use area, including a proposed low-key camping area. Refer to the precinct plan for more details.

The area is proposed to be renamed Baliiga (pronounced ba-lee-ga), which is the Gumbaynggirr name for the rosewood tree found in the area. The Rosewood River is nearby, and the name Never Never is used in several other locations on the Never Never River, which can be confusing for visitors.

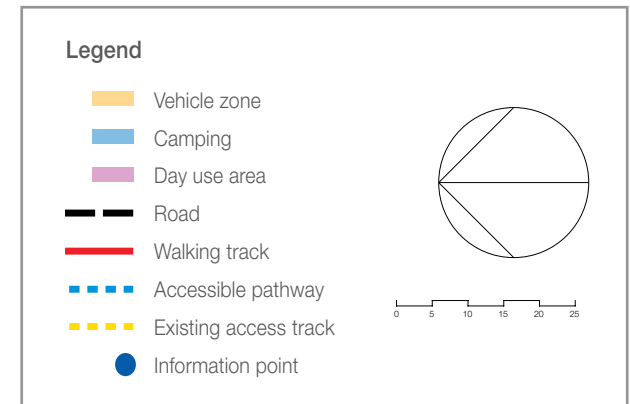
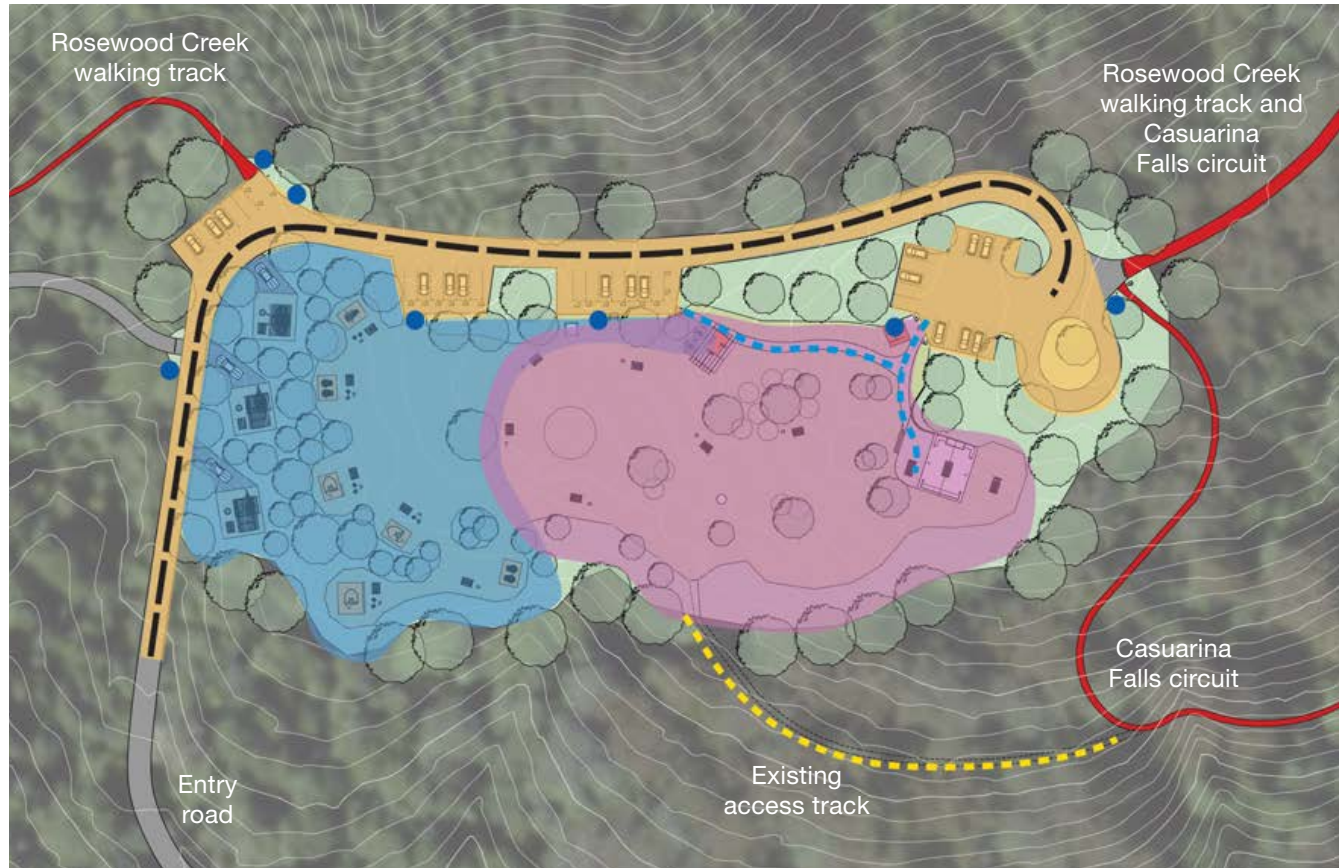


Figure 7.7 Excerpts from Baliiga precinct plan

## 8. Protecting the environment

Blue-speckled forest-skink, Dorrigo National Park

## 8.1 Minimising impacts

Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks are refuges for many unique and significant species, rivers, habitats and vegetation communities, and both tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage values. Balancing the protection of these values whilst providing opportunities for people to explore and appreciate their parks in a sustainable way is a key role of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project proposal will be subject to rigorous environmental and cultural impact assessments to ensure that the proposal does not have impacts that will affect the integrity of the parks' conservation objectives.

A comprehensive environmental impact assessment process called a review of environmental factors is under way. The aim of the review is to determine the overall impact of the project and to ensure that impacts are either avoided or mitigated. Eco Logical Australia, a national environmental consultancy with locally based experts, has been selected to complete this work.

The review includes an Aboriginal cultural assessment report which requires inclusive consultation with everyone that identifies as an interested Aboriginal party, as well as on-ground surveys. Once completed, the review will be placed on public exhibition to enable public feedback on the potential impacts of the project and any conditions imposed.

The natural and cultural values assessment reports and the review will also be referred to the relevant Commonwealth and NSW agencies in light of the parks' world, national and state heritage listings.

Some of the key impact mitigation strategies that will be used in both developing and operating the walk include:

- using existing or previously disturbed areas for the track route and hiker camp sites
- track route location and designs that use the 'avoid first' principle and ensure minimal short- and long-term impacts with a focus on the management of water
- using hand tools and small machinery for the majority of track construction.



Photo: Giant barred frog

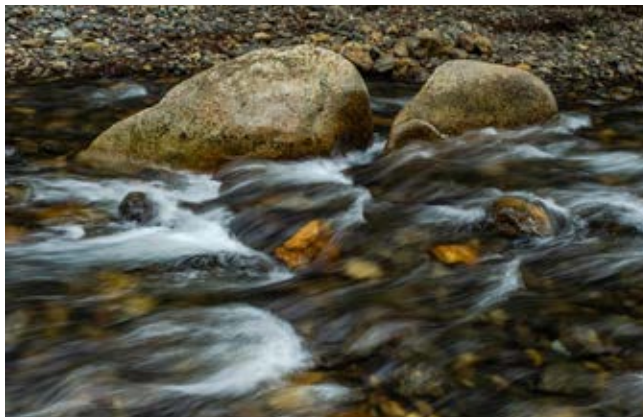


Photo: Never Never River, Dorrigo National Park

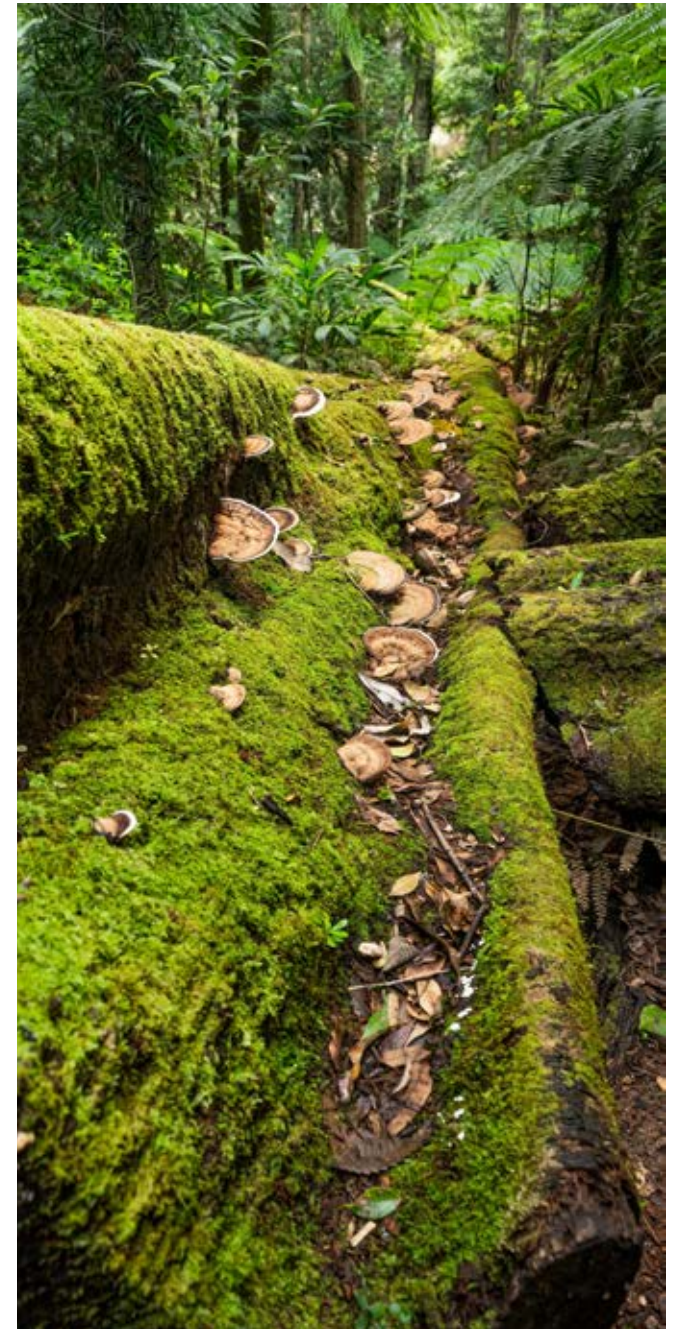


Photo: Mossy log, Dorrigo National Park

## 8.2 Key threats

The key threats posed to the environment through walking track development and operation in this landscape revolve around the risk of the introduction of pathogens, pests, weeds and fire.

Some examples are:

- pathogens on equipment and people that have the potential to impact species and habitats (such as the amphibian chytrid fungus, and the root rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*)
- pest animal species such as foxes through the opening of new trails that provide easier travelling routes
- weeds species through transportation on people and equipment
- unplanned fire from increased numbers of people using the park.

A range of mitigation strategies and approval conditions will be identified during the review of environmental factors.



Photo: Boot cleaning station, Lamington National Park

## Managing risks

Examples of the strategies to address these and other risks include:

- comprehensive environmental management plans for all contractors involved during the construction phase
- education and interpretation of park users including hiker briefings at the start of the walk
- strict hygiene infrastructure and protocols to help reduce the risk of introducing or spreading pathogens and weeds
- construction of appropriate river and creek crossing infrastructure to reduce the need to walk through waterways
- track closures during periods of high fire risk or severe weather events
- capacity limits that are suitable for the environment
- ‘walk it in, walk it out’ principle for hikers to take all rubbish out with them
- management of toilet waste at hiker camps through full capture and removal
- ongoing pest, weed and fire management programs.

As part of the planning and approvals stage, an operational environmental management plan will be developed that will address how the walk will be managed on an ongoing basis and how the issues outlined above are to be addressed.

## 8.3 Sustainable design and use

A key principle of the project and NPWS operations is ensuring that the walk infrastructure takes a total life-cycle approach to sustainability which guides the design, construction, maintenance and end-of-life disposal options of all NPWS facilities and assets.

The use of materials that have a lower embodied energy and use of prefabricated structures or fabrication of components off-site where possible is another key principle.



Photo: Suspension bridge example, Tasmania



Photo: Natural seating example, Grampian Peaks, Victoria

## 9. Operational management



Crystal  
Shower  
Falls  
20 min

Walk directional totem, Dorrigo National Park

## 9.1 Camp servicing and maintenance

All 3 hiker camps are located on management trails with access for NPWS 4WD vehicles, which reduces the need to use helicopters for ongoing maintenance. This greatly reduces the ongoing servicing costs and noise pollution whilst also providing access for emergency service response.

Once operational, the ongoing management of the walk and associated facilities will be managed by the Coffs Coast Area of NPWS. Camp 1 will be serviced from Dorrigo via Dome Road and Camps 2 and 3 are best serviced from Coffs Harbour with access via Brooklana and Dairyville.

Servicing frequency will depend on several factors including track usage and the waste system adopted. It is considered that as a minimum, weekly servicing of the camps will be required.



Photo: Remote walking, Dorrigo National Park

## 9.2 Track maintenance

Aside from reactive maintenance (tree falls, land slip clearing) the current modelling provides for maintenance crews to undertake scheduled maintenance to the length of the track twice per year.

Embedding a track ranger for the walk (see below) will allow preventative maintenance and identify and manage emerging risks. Pest and weed control and monitoring as well as fire risk mitigation works will all be core tasks for NPWS management.

## 9.3 Track ranger model

A track ranger model is being considered for the walk, whereby an NPWS ranger walks the track over several days conducting maintenance, providing interpretation, emergency response, law enforcement and general public interface. The track ranger approach provides the eyes, ears and public contact point which helps address risks, maintenance of facilities and provides a source of knowledge and interpretation that will enhance the visitor experience.

Various models will be considered for a track ranger – the role may be part-time role incorporating other NPWS duties, a dedicated full-time role or seasonal in nature. NPWS campground host volunteers may also be considered during busy holiday periods for walking track sections and monitoring of the camp sites.

## 9.4 Partnership opportunities

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will be managed and operated by NPWS. Hikers will be able to do the walk independently or with a guided licensed commercial tour operator. A range of associated services may be available to support and add value to the multi-day walk experience.

These may include, but not be limited to:

- licensed commercial tour operators offering various levels of assistance to individuals or groups, including pack-free walking and catered walks
- Aboriginal cultural guided tours/walks
- guided day walks
- shuttle bus transport package options
- pre- and post-walk accommodation.

All licences for commercial tourism related services and experiences for the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will be issued via a fair and transparent competitive expression of interest process managed by NPWS. The walk will not have separate commercial or private exclusive use components. The same facilities available to independent walks will be those used by guided walkers.

Pricing is yet to be decided and fees will be determined along with other NPWS Great Walks and benchmarked against other similar walks in Australia. Our aim is to provide an affordable experience with returns that cover ongoing servicing and maintenance work, ensuring the walk is sustainable in the long term.

A photograph of a waterfall in a lush forest. The water flows over several tiers of dark, mossy rocks into a clear, shallow pool. The pool's bottom is covered with smooth, dark stones. Large, weathered logs lean against the rocks on the left side. The surrounding forest is dense with green foliage and trees. A dark teal banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text '10. Developing the master plan'.

## 10. Developing the master plan

Urumbilum Falls, Bindarri National Park

## 10.1 Master plan stages

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk and the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre, both working titles, are the 2 components of the \$56.4 million funding package that comprise the Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project. Each component has a separate planning, design detail and construction timeframe that requires separate master plans. The project is currently forecast to be delivered by the end of 2026.

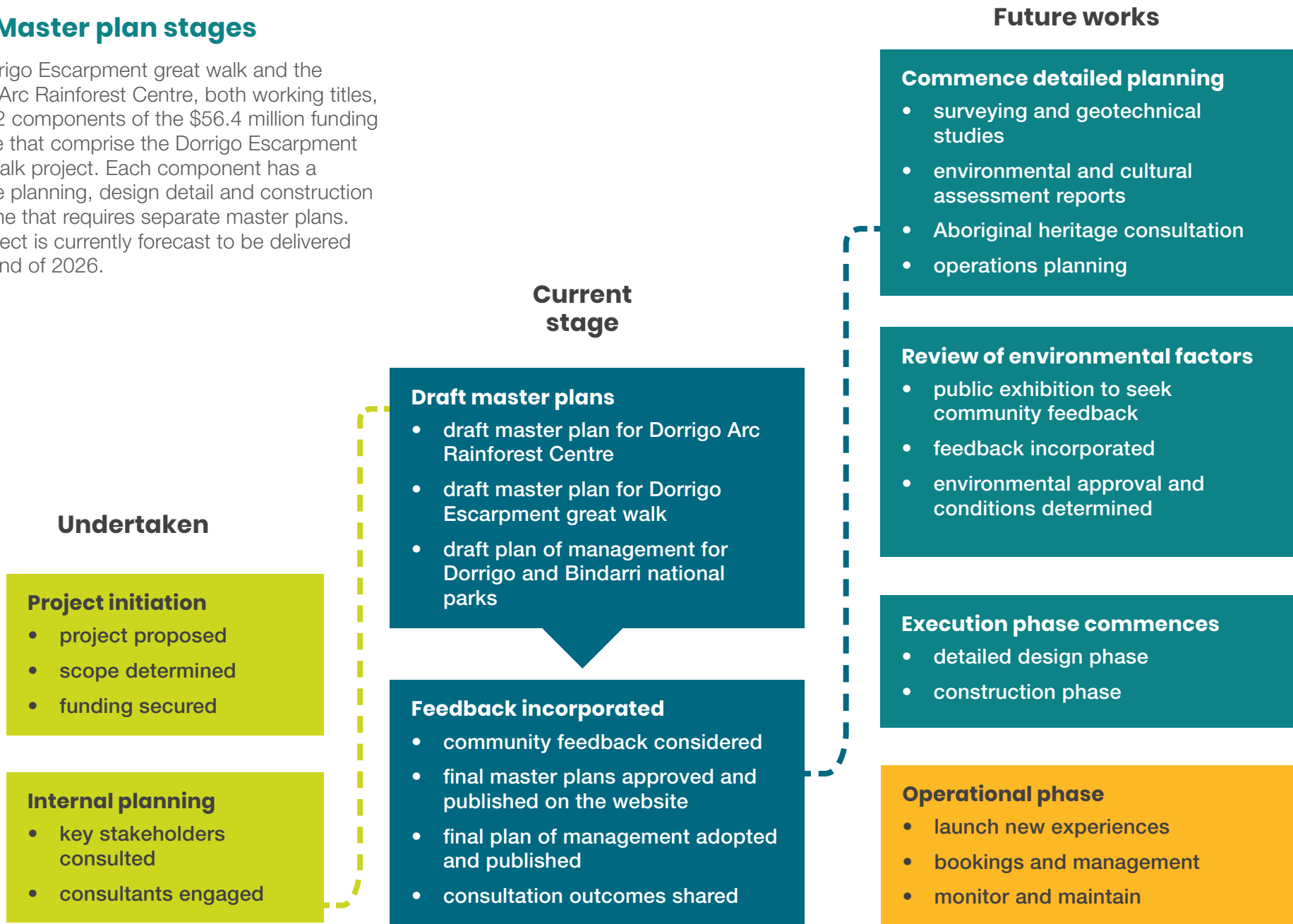


Figure 10.1 Project stages



## 10.2 Financial sustainability and risks

The total cost for the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk is \$25 million and is scheduled to be delivered over 4 years ending in 2026-27. Funding is linked with the development of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre with an overall project budget of \$56.4 million.

Based on demand modelling undertaken for multi-day walks in New South Wales, the Dorrigo Escarpment great walk will create strong interest from international and domestic visitors, with known key attractions for bushwalking on the NSW North Coast being rainforest experiences, waterfalls and lookouts.

The redevelopment of the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre will also become a catalyst to encourage other tourism regional product development and new investment. The proximity to Coffs Harbour Airport, with regular flight connections to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, is a significant advantage to bring robust economic benefits to the region.

It is important that the walking track and campsites are effectively and efficiently managed and maintained once the track becomes operational. Initial costings for ongoing servicing and maintenance works have been undertaken to ensure that the projected hiker numbers and fees provide for an affordable and sustainable experience.

## 10.3 Community involvement in the project

Community input leads to better decisions for our national parks and reserves. Since the project's announcement, NPWS has actively engaged with a range of groups and individuals to inform and refine the concepts presented in this draft master plan.

NPWS established a consultation webpage for the project in June 2022, which received over 20,000 pageviews in the first 12 months. Email updates have been provided to stakeholders and over 1,080 people on the register of interest list.

Positive and ongoing consultation is occurring with the Aboriginal community through recognised Aboriginal land councils and cultural organisations throughout the region.

NPWS will continue to work with the Aboriginal community to help realise the potential cultural, economic and social benefits of the proposals.

Feedback has also been received through around 50 stakeholder briefings and meetings with individuals and groups including NPWS North Coast Regional Advisory Committee, park neighbours, local councils, NSW Government agencies, local community and business groups, bushwalkers and others.

NPWS has also commissioned a range of visitor and market research projects to inform planning for a number of proposed visitor infrastructure projects and great walks. This includes visitor profiling and segmentation, market analysis, demand drivers, choice modelling, product comparisons, population and visitor projections, economic impacts and traffic management.



Photo: Community information forum at Dorrigo Rainforest Centre



Photo: Members of the NPWS North Coast Regional Advisory Committee take part in a field trip on Dome Mountain, Dorrigo National Park

## 10.4 Have your say

The planning work that NPWS is doing at Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks has now resulted in 3 separate opportunities to ‘Have your say’.

The formal public exhibition of this *Dorrigo Escarpment great walk draft master plan* is the main opportunity for community members to comment on the planned visitor infrastructure improvements for the proposed 46-km multi-day walk within Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks.

A separate draft master plan has also been developed for the Dorrigo Arc Rainforest Centre and The Glade precincts to consolidate the centre’s positioning as the leading regional eco-visitor destination on the NSW North Coast.

At the same time, a new plan of management is being developed which sets a high-level strategic approach to the broader management of both Dorrigo and Bindarri national parks and Bindarri State Conservation Area.

Through asking for feedback on these 3 draft plans, we seek to understand the various interests, values, needs and perspectives of the people our decisions affect, and use this knowledge to improve our plans.

The environmental impact assessment reports (review of environmental factors) will also be placed on public exhibition at a later date.



Register your interest to receive project updates and notice of future consultation opportunities at [environment.nsw.gov.au/dorrigo-great-walk](http://environment.nsw.gov.au/dorrigo-great-walk).

A photograph of an ancient forest in Dorrig National Park. The image shows a dense thicket of trees and ferns. In the foreground, a large, moss-covered tree trunk with prominent buttresses dominates the left side. The forest floor is covered with a variety of green ferns and fallen leaves. The background is filled with more trees, creating a sense of depth and a lush, green environment.

## Appendix A – Strategic alignment

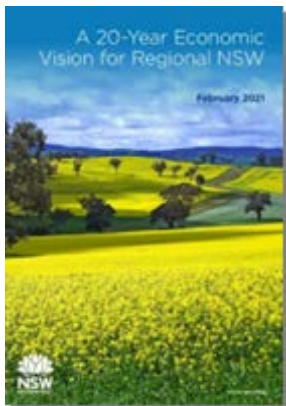
Ancient forests, Dorrig National Park

The Dorrigo Escarpment great walk aligns with key NSW Government visitor economy plans and numerous local, regional, state and national strategies and goals. These are identified in the following table.

Policy / Plan	Objectives	Policy / Plan	Objectives
<p>NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030</p> 	<p>Strategic Pillar 3 – Showcase our Strengths; (4) – Reconnect in Nature: National Parks, Iconic walks</p> <p>Action 3.09 - Grow the eco-wellbeing, ecotourism and volunteer tourism sectors</p>	<p>North Coast Regional Plan 2041</p> 	<p>Goal 1: Liveable, sustainable and resilient. Objective 4: Understand, celebrate and integrate Aboriginal culture</p> <p>Goal 2: Productive and connected. Objective 12: Create a diverse visitor economy</p> <p>Goal 3: Growth Change and Opportunity. Objective 19: Public spaces and green infrastructure support connected and healthy communities</p> <p>Bellingen Shire narrative: More than half of the shire is national park or state forest and managing this unique natural environment appropriately will be key to delivering a sustainable future.</p> <p>Regional priority: Identify opportunities to enhance natural and cultural tourism through..., the world heritage listed national parks...</p>
<p>North Coast Destination Management Plan 2022-2030</p> 	<p>Opportunities: Facilitating growth and investment in nature-based tourism product and experiences to showcase the world-class natural attractions, National and World Heritage Parks...</p>	<p>State-wide Destination Management Plan 2019</p> 	<p>NSW Hero Destinations and Experiences: ‘Hero’ destinations are world-class, iconic and unique.</p> <p>NSW Current ‘Hero’ Destinations and their Experiences for the North Coast: World Heritage-listed Gondwana rainforest; and Green hinterland close to popular beaches.</p> <p>Key performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase overnight tourism expenditure in regional New South Wales</li> <li>• maintain and/or increase New South Wales’s share of Australian overnight tourism spend</li> <li>• increase the number of world-class products and experiences in identified categories</li> </ul>

## Policy / Plan

20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW (Feb 2021 refresh)



## Objectives

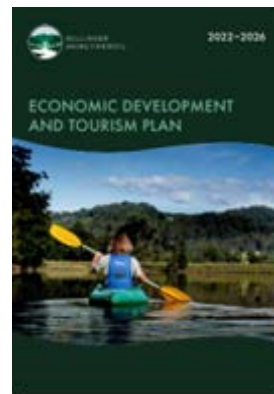
Tourism is identified as one of the engine industries that will drive regional NSW economies over the next 20 years. The Economic Vision for Regional NSW noted that 'Regional NSW's diverse and natural beauty will continue to draw domestic and overseas visitors, with opportunities growing for niche and personalised travel experiences championed by small and medium-sized businesses'.

New investment areas:

- Visitor economy infrastructure: A key focus is to draw in more domestic and international tourists in areas with tourism potential. A wide range of local businesses benefit from tourism. Unlocking areas of significant natural amenity and ecotourism potential will create unique destinations to drive increased visitation and spending in regional New South Wales.
- Core objectives – Future: Investing in new infrastructure to create major ecotourism destinations and capitalise on the rich natural and cultural resources in regional New South Wales through ecologically sustainable tourism.

## Policy / Plan

Bellingen Shire Council Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2022-2026



## Objectives

The Dorrigo Escarpment Great Walk project will be a game-changer for the shire and is estimated to attract an additional 200,000 visitors per year. Many investment opportunities will be created as a result of this new development, for example more younger visitors and families, construction jobs and skills development, Dorrigo town centre master planning, alternative transport routes, and marketing opportunities (summarised).

Goal 3: Inclusive tourism that values the environment;  
Objective 2: New tourism experiences and accommodation options delivered to cater for a broader range of visitors.

BSC Brand Strategy: Defining our spirit of place (2021)

The strategy's aim is to create a destination brand that is 100% the Bellingen Shire, one that defines the essence of our Shire developed through meaningful discussion with the community. Aspects of the brand the community wants to support include:

- celebration of, and connection with, our unique natural environment
- clear and consistent education initiatives and messaging to 'respect our place', aimed at both visitors and locals
- recognition and respect for the unique custodians of this land and their connection to Country
- increase cultural awareness through development of education programs, tours, products and events for both community and tourists
- support and development of sustainably responsible tourism and other businesses

Coffs Coast Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 update



Engines of Growth: The tourism sector is the second-largest employer and is the leading sector in the Coffs Coast's 5-billion-dollar economy, with visitors spending \$649 million in 2021 despite COVID-19 pandemic related movement restrictions. Recent investments in improved transport connectivity and major visitor economy infrastructure upgrades will continue to support further sector growth.

Strategy 1 – Grow the year-round visitor economy by further diversifying offerings and connecting businesses in the sector.

Opportunities: ...meet the existing tourist demand for adventure and ecotourism experiences, including eco-accommodation.

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