

# BUSHWALKING

in the  
Rainbow Region



Michael Smith





## DAY WALK GRADINGS (used in this book).

**Grade 1 (Easy).** Opportunity for a large number of walkers, including those with reduced walking ability to walk on well marked and even tracks. Tracks are man made and may have a few steps. Should not be steep. Suitable for beginners. Distance should not exceed about 10km.

**Grade 2 (Easy-medium).** Easy walk, mostly on tracks of low gradient. Opportunity to walk easily in natural environments on well marked tracks. Tracks should not be steep. Distance should not exceed about 15km. Suitable for beginners.

**Grade 3 (Medium).** Medium walk with some hilly sections &/or rougher terrain. Opportunity to walk on defined & distinct tracks with some steep sections requiring a moderate level of fitness. Suitable for beginners. Distance should not exceed about 20 km.

**Grade 4 (Medium-Hard).** Steeper, rougher terrain & may have off-track sections (no more than one quarter of the walk), or a longer distance track walk. Opportunity to explore and discover relatively undisturbed natural environments mostly along defined & distinct tracks. Tracks can be steep. There may be short sections of rock scrambling involved. Leaders should have map reading abilities and/or ability to use a compass. Distance depending on circumstances. Not suitable for most beginners.

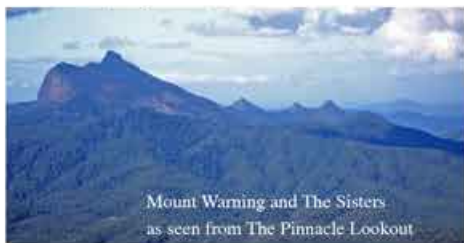
**Grade 5 (Hard).** Off-track or difficult terrain. Opportunity for walkers with advanced outdoor knowledge and skills to find their own way along often indistinct tracks or off track in remote locations. May include steep sections of unmodified surfaces. There may be rock scrambling, creek walking & crossing involved. Distance should not exceed 30 km, but may be short & difficult. Not suitable for beginners.

**Grade 6 (Very hard).** Strenuous off-track

walk or very long distance. Opportunity for highly experienced walkers to explore remote and challenging natural areas without reliance on managed tracks. Terrain may be steep, uneven and no track. There may be rock scrambling, creek walking & crossing involved. Distance covered is unlimited, but may be short & difficult. Only for experienced walkers and not suitable for beginners.

## Dressed for the toughest walk in this book, Sphinx Rock.

(For easier walks omit the gloves and wear lighter clothing).



Before heading out read the safety suggestions on page 45.

## Border Loop Walk

**Time:** 30 minutes.

**Grade 1:** An easy walk on a well-graded, lightly-gravelled track, 1.2 km.

**Map:** Walks in The Border Ranges National Park, page 8 (inset).

**Features:** This short loop walk starts next to an interesting lookout, and passes through a eucalypt forest (watch for koalas), and then through a subtropical rainforest. Bellbirds can be heard above in the forest trees, and there are information signs identifying many of the trees.

**Directions:** Take the side road, off The Lions Road, down to the Border Loop Picnic Area (three kilometres south of the Tick Gate on the Queensland border). The track starts next to the toilet and eventually loops back onto itself.

## The Pinnacle Lookout

**Time:** 10 minutes return.

**Grade 2:** An easy walk on a formed track with some steps, 200m return.

**Map:** Walks in The Border Ranges National Park, page 8.

**Features:** A short walk through the forest to one of the most spectacular lookouts in Australia. 'The Pinnacle' itself is actually below the lookout and not visible. The view is dominated by Mount Warning and the surrounding caldera, see photo page 1. Breath taking.

**Directions:** The walk is well sign posted and starts at a parking area on the Tweed Range Scenic Drive.



View to the south from The Pinnacle Lookout

## Falcorostrum Loop

**Time:** 30 minutes return.

**Grade 2:** An easy walk on a good track, 750m return.

**Map:** Bar Mountain, page 9.

**Features:** This walk celebrates the Falcorostrum Orchids, (look for white and purple blossoms in early spring), which cling to the gnarled trunks and branches of the ancient Antarctic Beech trees found here. Keep a look out also for the 'beech orange', a fungus which grows on the branches of the beech trees. Albert's Lyre bird can sometimes be seen in this cool temperate forest.

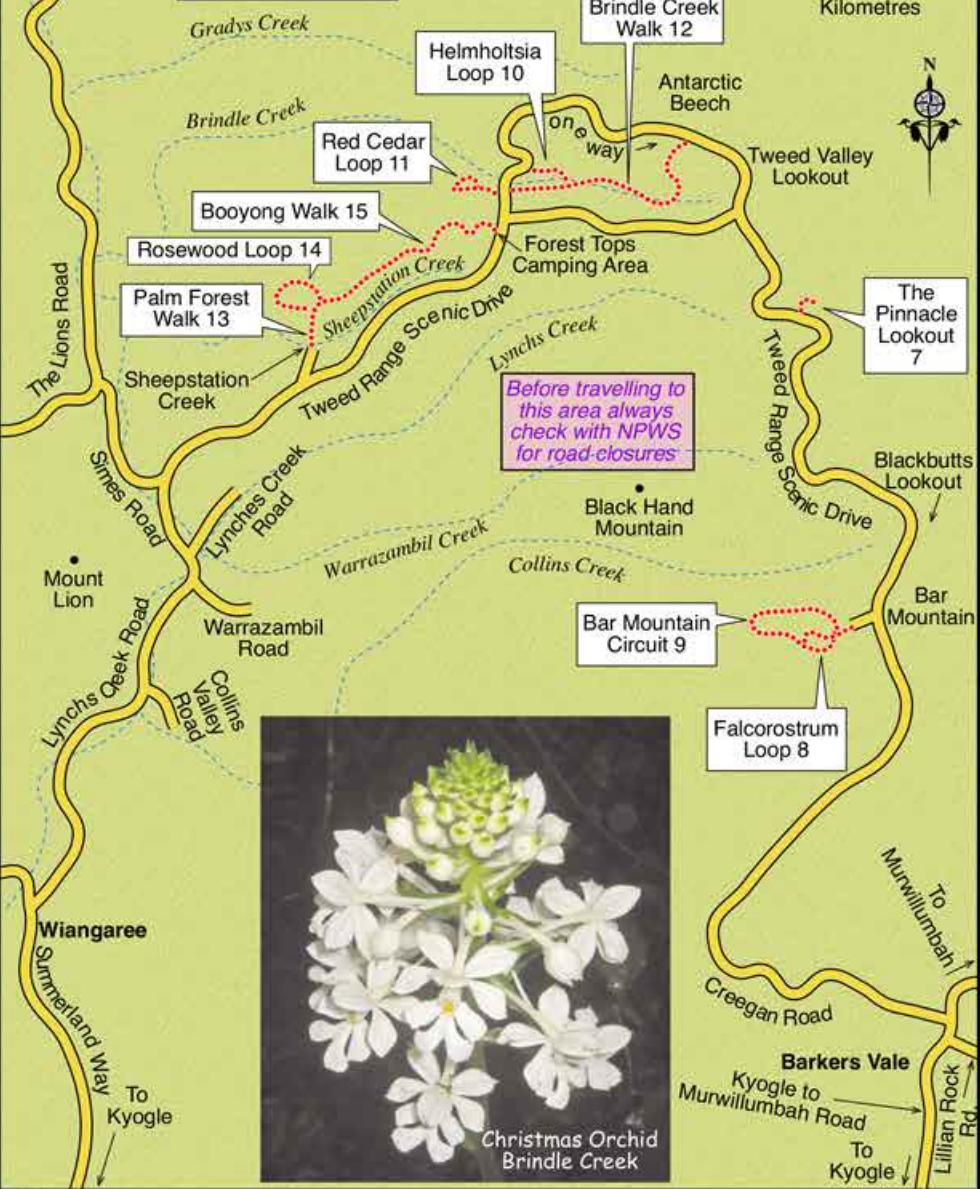
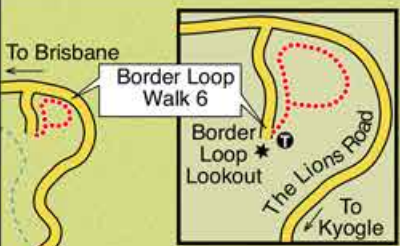
Bar Mountain is the highest point on the caldera (1,140 metres above sea level), and was once a log dump when the area was part of Wiangaree State Forest (until 1983). The forest is often shrouded in fog and mist, and snow occasionally falls.

**Directions:** The walk starts at the Bar Mountain Picnic Area.

# Walks in The Border Ranges National Park

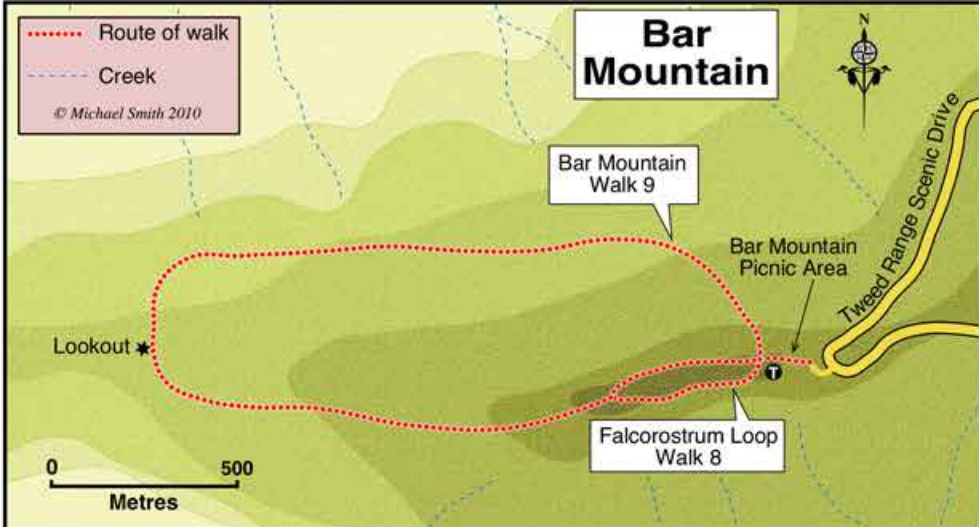
..... Route of walk  
 - - - - - Creek  
 © Michael Smith 2010

0 5  
 Kilometres



Before travelling to this area always check with NPWS for road-closures





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## Bar Mountain Circuit

**Time:** 3 hours return.

**Grade 3:** Medium difficulty. A well marked track that drops 200 metres in elevation to a lookout, 3.5 km return.

**Map:** Bar Mountain, page 9.

**Features:** This walk starts in a cool temperate forest, passes through a warm temperate forest and ends at a lookout in a wet eucalypt forest, before returning to the picnic area. There is a lookout with views west to Mount Lindesay and Mount Barney.

**Directions:** The walk starts at the Bar Mountain Picnic Area and shares the first few hundred metres with the Falcorostrum Loop. After 2 kilometres of downhill walking you will come to the lookout. Return, uphill, on the remainder of the loop.

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## Helmholtzia Loop

**Time:** 30 minutes.

**Grade 2:** Easy, 1.2km return.

**Map:** Brindle Creek, page 10.

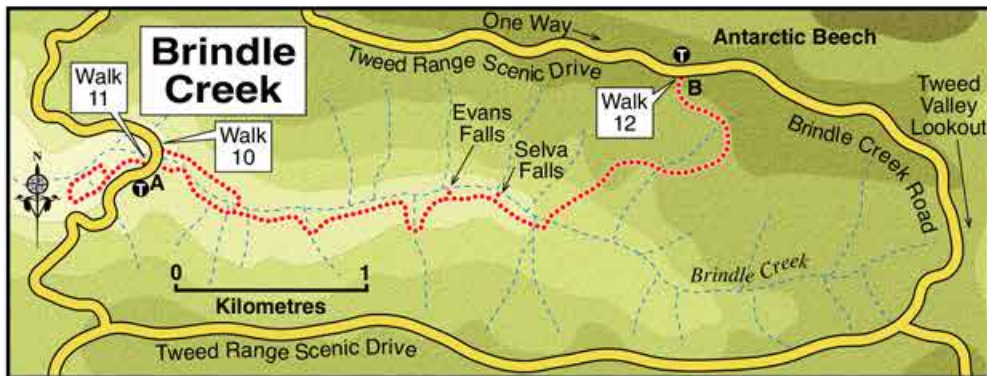
**Features:** If you only have time for one quick rainforest walk in the Border Ranges National

Park then this is the one to do. Expect to see luxuriant rainforest, orchids, Hoop Pine and Antarctic Beech. The *Helmholtzia* Lily, which is a feature of this walk, is only found in the north east of NSW and south east Queensland.

**Directions:** Half of this walk is shared with the much longer Brindle Creek Walk. You are less likely to miss the turnoff if you start on the northern side of Brindle Creek, across the bridge from point A on the map. The track from here follows Brindle Creek upstream. The bank is undercut and dangerous to approach, so keep to the track. After crossing the creek turn right on to the Brindle Creek Walk and continue

on to Brindle Creek Picnic Area, point A on the map.





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## Red Cedar Loop

**Time:** 30 minutes.

**Grade 1:** Easy, 750m return.

**Map:** Brindle Creek, page 10.

**Features:** A walk through an interesting subtropical rainforest, to a 1000 year old Red Cedar tree 48 metres high, that escaped the axe. Board walks have been constructed to protect the habitat of the endangered Fleay's barred frog.

**Directions:** The walk commences up the road a little from the Brindle Creek Picnic Area and runs parallel to Brindle Creek on the southern bank, looping around the Cedar Tree and returning to the picnic area.

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## Brindle Creek

**Time:** 3 hours one way.

**Grade 3:** Easy grades on a well-marked track, 5km one way.

**Map:** Brindle Creek, page 10.

**Features:** Moss-covered, 2000 year old Antarctic Beech trees in an unspoilt rainforest. Waterfalls, lichen, climbers, orchids, fungi, snails, crayfish, bird life, frogs and ferns. This is a big, magnificent walk that will not disappoint.

**Directions:** Choose one of the following alternatives:

You can walk the length (**A to B**), turn around and walk back (10 km, 6 hours). You may be

forced to choose this option if you are unable to organise a vehicle to return you to the start after walking one way. If you choose to walk both ways, start at **A**, that way it will be all downhill on the return trip. It is, of course, possible to return along the road but this far less interesting.

My recommended (short) option is to start at **A**, walk as far as Selva Falls, visiting Evans Falls on the way, turn around, and return to **A**. This eliminates the need for a car-shuffle and you get to see the best part of the walk, 6km, 3.5 hours.

The 'official' walk, is one way, from **B to A**. This is all downhill and you get to see everything. Commence the walk at the Antarctic Beech Picnic Area, **B** on the map. The track starts on the opposite side of the road to the Picnic Area and leads downhill through an Antarctic Beech forest. The track winds through the forest on the southern bank of Brindle Creek. Keep an eye out, on the right, for the short side tracks first to Selva Falls and then to Evans Falls. Don't swim in the creek as it is home to a number of endangered frogs. The track ends at **A**, the Brindle Creek Picnic Area.



**Warrazambil**, from the Bündjalung 'warjam/war-dam for shark in coastal dialects. Also: *Gidabal* for eel, also for spirit being that dwells in water rivers or swamps, (-bil being the plural suffix).

**Wiangaree** Aboriginal 'wongarie' for camping place, pine ridge or a hut.

**Boorabee** is from 'burbi' for koala. It is common for the Aboriginal trilled 'r' to sound to European ears as 'rra' thus making an extra syllable. *Gidabal* and *Yugambeh* 'burbi' for koala.

The story of the **Cat bird djurebil** (increase site) started at a place now called **Jiggi**. A great battle was fought in the dream time where the man who was to become the ancestor of the cat-bird (*Jiggi*) was mortally wounded. He asked to be buried at **Mount Lion**. All the way there the ancestor of the cat-bird called out "jig-giae-jig-giae".

**Jiggi**, after being mortally wounded, was first carried to **Mt. Boorabee** (meaning koala), 6km east of **Kyogle**, but refused to be buried there because it was the *djurebil* for koalas.

**Black Hand Mountain** (*Wathumbil*) at the head of **Warrazambil Creek** was another place that the wounded *Jiggi* was taken, but he refused to be buried there because it was the *djurebil* of **Warrajum** the rainbow serpent.

The ancestors of the *Walungmura* live in **Mount Lion**, the burial place of *Jiggi*, the ancestor of the cat bird. His tomb is a cleared space with stones all around. The cat bird has a call like a cat meowing, or a baby crying.

**Selva and Evans Falls** are said to be named after members of an Army jungle training unit that used this area for training when it was still part of the **Wiangaree State Forest**. The **Antarctic Beech Picnic Area** was formerly a helicopter pad where troops from the **Canungya Jungle Training Camp** were flown in for exercises (until 1973).



## Palm Forest Walk

**Time:** 1 hour.

**Grade 2:** An easy and popular walk, 2 km.

**Map:** Booyong walk, page 12.

**Features:** A walk through subtropical rainforest and drier eucalypt forest, ending at **Brushbox Falls**. Above the falls is a forest of **Bangalow** and **Piccabreen** palms. The track follows the line of an old logging and bullock trail. You can see where early cedar getters carved their names on a moss-covered sandstone rockface.

**Directions:** The walk starts from near the lowest part of **Sheepstation Creek Camping Area**. The route is sign posted and easy to follow. Return along the same route.

## Rosewood Loop Walk

**Time:** 3 hours, starting from **Sheepstation Creek Camping Area**.

**Grade 3:** Medium difficulty with many slopes to walk up and down (100m of elevation), 6 km return.

**Map:** Booyong walk, page 12.

**Features:** This walk is along the same route as the **Palm Forest Walk** and part of the **Booyong Walk**. The loop, a side track, passes through forests of old growth **Rosewood**, **Flooded Gum** and **White Beech**. With more than 23 fruiting varieties of rainforest trees the bird life is prolific. A swim in the creek is possible but the water is always cold.

**Directions:** The walk commences at the **Sheepstation Creek Camping Area** and for the first kilometre follows the same route as the **Booyong** and **Palm Forest** walks. Keep an eye out, on the left, for the turnoff to the **Rosewood Loop**. This is an out-and-back walk, so after completing the loop return along the same route back to the camping area.



# Booyong Walk

0 1  
Kilometres

- Route of walk
- Creek

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Rosewood Loop 14

Palm Forest Walk 13

Sheepstation Creek Camping Area

Booyong Walk 15

Forest Tops Camping Area

Tweed Range Scenic Drive



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## Booyong Walk

**Time:** 5 hours, one way.

**Grade 3:** A medium difficulty walk on a well-marked track involving a long walk down a ridge between two creeks descending 310 metres of elevation, 10.5 km one way.

**Map:** Booyong walk, page 12.

**Features:** A good introduction to the rainforest, featuring the tall, straight and majestic booyong tree, as well as all the fungi and ferns of the forest.

**Directions:** It is best to start this walk from the Forest Tops Camping Area to avoid a long uphill walk. If you are doing this walk one way, you will have to arrange transport at the other end (Sheepstation Creek Camping Area). The track starts at the back of the camping area at Forest Tops and plunges straight into the rainforest. The track runs gradually downhill where it meets with the Rosewood Loop Walk, which is an

optional side trip. From this point on, the walk incorporates the Palm Forest Walk, finishing at Sheepstation Creek Camping Area.

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## Byrrell Creek

**Time:** 30 minutes return.

**Grade 2:** Easy walking on a formed track, some uphill gradients, 900m return.

**Map:** Mebbin, page 13.

**Features:** A quick, rewarding, return walk through subtropical rainforest down to Byrrell Creek. The track passes some huge fig trees.

**Directions:** The walk starts on the southern side of Mebbin Camping Area, near an information board. Follow the track down to the Creek and return along the same route.



## Ironbark Tree Reserve

**Time:** 1.5 hours return.

**Grade 2:** Easy walking on a road through Mebbin National Park, 5km return.

**Map:** Mebbin, page 13.

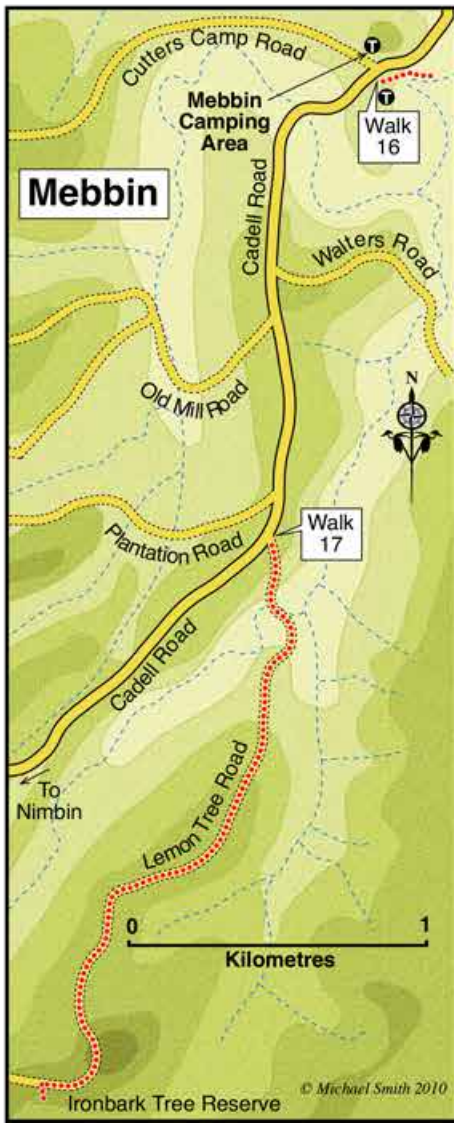
**Features:** A walk down a forest road to the remains of a 400-year-old Ironbark tree. Along the route, beside the road, are plenty of interesting trees, orchids and vines.

**Directions:** The walk starts at the intersection of Cadell Road and Lemon Tree Road. Here you will find a locked gate. Walk 2.5 km down Lemon Tree Road. After a while the gradient is generally uphill. Just past the crest of the hill, where the road finally heads downhill, an old car parking area and a track can be seen on the left. The signpost indicating the short walk to the Giant Ironbark (50 metres) is now missing. Walk down the track to the old tree, which you will find has died. Huge branches have fallen down crushing the information sign and the surrounding fencing. Keep well back because all the branches have not yet fallen. Return to the road and continue on for 200 metres where you can see more large, living, ironbark trees. Return along the same route.

*Byrrill Creek, Aboriginal, probably derived from 'burrul' meaning wallaby.*

*Mebbin is from the Bundjalung word 'mibin' meaning hawk.*

*Cadell was a local forester whose ashes were spread around the Ironbark Tree in 1961.*



## The Lyrebird Lookout

**Time:** 15 minutes return.

**Grade 2:** An easy walk on a good track, 300m return.

**Map:** Mount Warning, page 15.

**Features:** Huge forest trees, interpretative signs and a pleasant creek.

**Directions:** Commence the walk from the Breakfast Creek Picnic Area. Turn right and cross the creek. Follow the steps up to the lookout. Return along the same route.

## Mount Warning

**Time:** 4-5 hours return.

**Grade 4:** A steep walk on a good track. The last few hundred metres are steep and rocky, assisted by a chain (which some people find 'scary'). Start the walk well before noon in the winter months to avoid finishing in the dark. Physically demanding, 8.8 km return.

**Map:** Mount Warning, page 15.

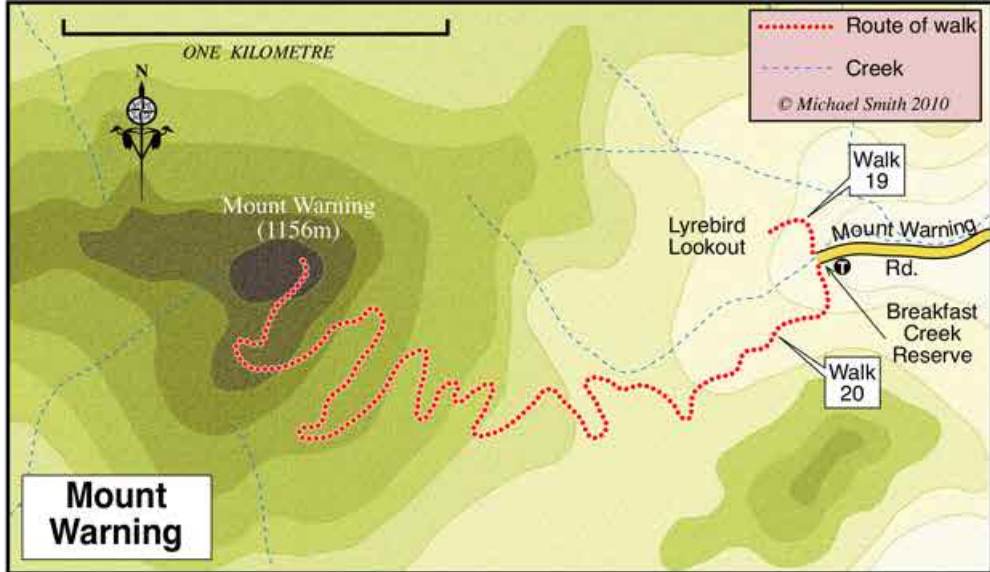
**Features:** Giant subtropical and temperate rainforest trees. Occasional glimpses of The Sisters, The Pinnacle and Clarrie Hall Dam on the way up. There are extensive, 360° views from the summit of Mount Warning, the central plug of an ancient volcano. Pick a clear day with high clouds if you want to enjoy the view. Thousands of people each year climb this mountain in the pre-dawn darkness to

watch the sunrise. Mount Warning is reputed to be the first place on mainland Australia to catch the rays of the sun.

Out of respect for Bundjalung law and culture the Bundjalung ask that you consider choosing not to climb Mount Warning.



One of the many views from the top of Mount Warning



**Mount Warning**

**Directions:** Commence the walk from the Breakfast Creek Picnic Area at the end of Mount Warning Road, off The Murwillumbah Road, north of Uki.

The track leads off to the left and meanders up this very steep mountain. The temperature drops as you ascend. In the summer months you will probably need to drink 2 litres of water, or more. Near the top the walker is faced with a steep pitch up a rocky cliff. A chain 'handrail' on steel poles can be used to negotiate this section. There are a number of lookouts with interpretive signs at the summit.



Coming down from the summit of Mount Warning

**Mount Warning** was named in 1770 by Captain Cook because after passing it, the *Endeavour* was carried perilously close to the rocky shoals of Point Danger.

**Mount Warning** is a sacred place for men only.

The sacred spirit of the place is gungunguddaba the scrub turkey. One legend tells of long ago when the scrub turkey could fly much further than it can today. One turkey flew from Mount Brown after being scared by a much larger bird. The turkey flew all the way to the top of Mount Warning, where he was wounded in the head by a spear from a warrior. At the top of the mountain there is a bend where the spear hit the turkey. That is why the scrub turkey can only fly a short distance before having to rest.

Some say that Mount Warning means 'fighting chief of the mountains'. It also means cloud catcher and weather maker. The mountains, or their ancestral spirits, were warriors, and the

thunder and lightning observed on the mountains were thought to be due to the fights the warriors conducted. Scars on the mountains caused by landslides were considered to be wounds obtained in battle.

Mount Warning is also inhabited by small fairy-like creatures, who care for the trees and look after the mountain. A women's sacred site is near The Three Sisters at the base of Mount Warning

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## Mount Cougal, east peak

**Time:** 4 hours..

**Grade 4:** Moderately-easy walking on a track, which follows the tick-exclusion-fence on the Queensland - NSW border. However the last kilometre to the peak is steeply uphill, finishing with a very steep climb on rocks (moderate exposure) using tree roots for support. Total height gained; 350 metres. Experienced and fit walkers only, 8.5 km return.

**Map:** Mount Cougal, page 17.

**Features:** Views south over the caldera to Mount Warning and the Border Ranges. Views to the north and east over the Curumbin Valley to the sea. Most of the walk is through rainforest. The view from Mount Cougal east peak is dramatic and spectacular.

**Directions:** From Murwillumbah drive north for 10 km along Queensland Road (which becomes Tomewin Road). Turn left onto Garden Of Eden Road (narrow gravel road), and follow it for 2.4 km to a car park opposite a locked gate in the fence. The walk commences here. Climb over the gate and follow the fence west (on the Queensland side) for 4 km. The going is easy except for the first few hundred metres which is steep and overgrown. On approaching Mount Cougal the track steepens to a heart-thumping, steady, climb. The fence ends at a cliff face.

From the end of the fence, as a side trip, you can visit a remarkable cave that goes right through the mountain.

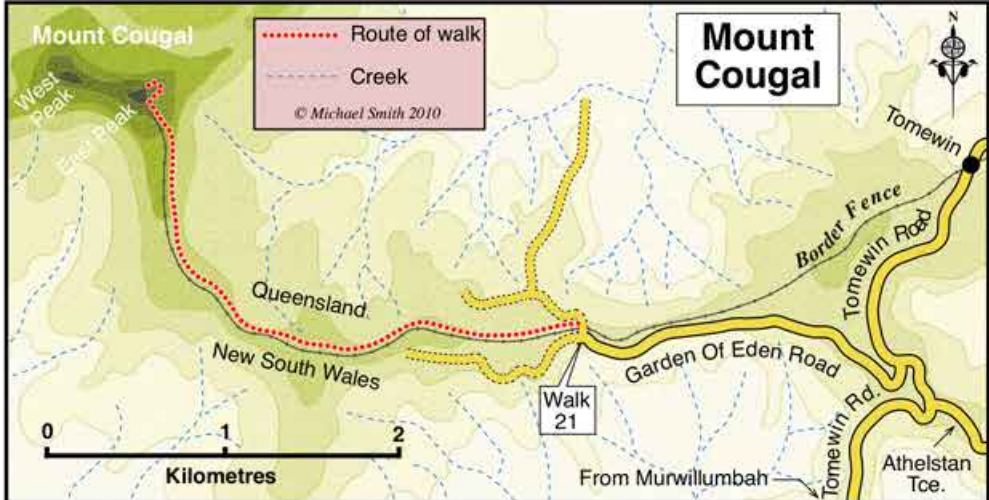
To find the cave continue uphill and slightly to the right for about 40 metres to the base of

a cliff. Look for a crack in the cliff 2 metres high and shoulder width, the mouth of the cave. You can go in about 10 metres before the passage narrows to an almost impossible crawl. Light can be seen at the end of this squeeze, showing that the cave passes right through the mountain. A torch is a big help. After admiring the cave go back down to where you left the track.

From the end of the fence head right for about 50 metres then climb up the rocky face to the summit. There are plenty of tree roots to hold on to, however this is no place for the timid. From the top the views are excellent and the peak of West Cougal can be seen nearby (this peak is climbable, but more difficult, not recommended). Return along the same route. The forest can be dark, so if you commenced this walk after mid-day, carry a torch.



The Cougal Cave



*Coughal* is from the Bundjalung-Yugambah dialect “koggal”, meaning “the place where water falls down”.

There is an **increase site for dingoes** on Mount Widgee. The 2 dingoes, *Burrajahnee* and *Nineroogun*, chased a giant kangaroo from the Lamington Plateau to Beaudesert. The Beaudesert people caught the dingoes and cooked them. When the owners of the dingoes arrived at Beaudesert they recovered the corpses and carried them back to the Lamington Plateau, where they became the stone dogs at the top of Widgee Falls, facing in opposite directions. A version of this story says that the twin peaks of Mount Coughal are the two dingoes.



The last hundred metres, ascending Mount Coughal

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## Walk on Water

**Time:** 30 minutes.

**Grade 1:** Easy, level, walking on bush tracks and elevated timber walkways, 1.1 km. In moist conditions sections of this walk can be slippery due to moss and mould on the path.

**Map:** Walk on Water, page 18.

**Features:** Picnic area, BBQ, Aboriginal Museum, ceremonial bora ring, koalas, ferns, paperbarks, she oaks, mangroves, vines and the novelty of walking over the water and gazing down on feeding fish and cruising stingrays. Mosquitos and midges might be a problem at times.

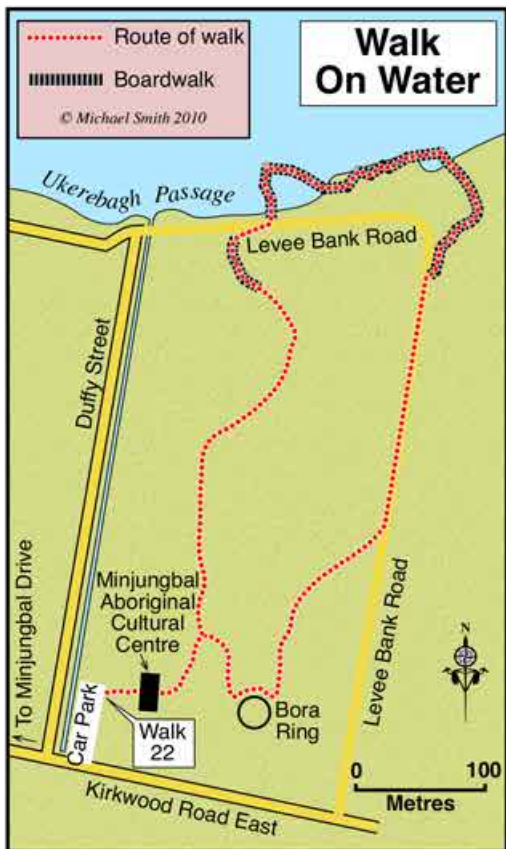
**Directions:** The walk starts at the Minjungbal Aboriginal Cultural Centre car park on the corner of Kirkwood Road East and Duffy Street, South Tweed Heads. Walk through the open part of the building between the museum and the Cultural Centre. The track is well sign posted and has a number of information boards explaining what you will see. Turn right and head for the bora ring. The track continues and meets with the old Levee Bank Road. Towards the end of this straight section, look out for the turn off to the elevated walkway. This section is the highlight of the walk, passing through and over mangroves and the tidal river.

There are seats for contemplation, and viewing platforms. The rest of the walk is through a peaceful forest. Enjoy.

**Minjungbal** are a tribe of the Bundjalung, living on the coast between Byron Bay and Pottsville.

**Tweed** was named by John Oxley in 1823 after the Tweed River which, in part, divides England from Scotland.

**Ukerebagh** is from the Bundjalung-Yugambah dialect chain word 'ugerie' meaning shellfish or pippi.





In the two years that it will take you to complete the 59 walks in this book, expect to see 5 snakes, but not be bitten. You will recognise 200 Stinging Trees without brushing against their leaves. Fifty lawyer vines will detain you for a while. Five ticks might bury into your skin, and ten leeches could dine on your blood, (many more if you don't heed the following advice).

## Snakes

Many Australian snakes are venomous. A bite can kill, or make you very ill. The best protection is to watch where you put your feet. Wear stout shoes and strong clothing in country where there may be snakes. Stomp on the ground as you walk through long grass.



## Stinging Tree

In the rainforest there is a leaf that you must avoid coming into contact with. The big (30 cm across), leaves of the stinging tree, *Dendrocnide* are covered in fine hairs that are sharp, pointed and brittle. When brushed these hairs break and inject a small amount of very powerful and irritating liquid. The pain is instant and feels something like stinging nettles, or boiling water. The fine hairs can cause renewed pain for up to two months after the initial sting. It is important that you learn to recognise the leaves of the Stinging Tree, which are large, heart shaped and a lighter shade of green than most other rain forest species. Even the dead leaves on the ground have these stinging hairs. If stung there is little you can do. A popular cure is the juice from the Cunjevoi, *Alocasia macrorrhizos*, a type of lily that usually grows nearby. Cut the stem low down and squeeze and brush the juice of the Cunjevoi on to the



Don't put your hands in hollow logs or thick grass without looking first. A bite can occur when you tread upon, or touch a retreating or sleeping snake, which then responds to defend itself. Most snake bites occur when people attempt to kill them.

The chance of dying from snakebite is about 2 million to one. Be prepared by carrying two elastic bandages and a mobile phone.

If bitten by a snake, place a broad constrictive bandage over the site of the bite, firmly applied as you would for a sprained ankle, but not so tight that the blood supply is interfered with. The rest of the limb is then bandaged, at the same pressure, and rather than removing clothing it is better to bandage over the top of clothing. The limb is then immobilised using a splint. The wound should not be washed or cleaned, as this will interfere with the venom detection test. Keep the patient as still as possible. Seek medical help. Transport should be brought to the victim, rather than taking the victim to the transport.



sting. Keep this juice away from the mouth, throat and eyes. One method of removing the stinging hairs is to apply sticky tape (or wax), peel it off and discard. You could try 'shaving' the area, or attempt to remove the hairs with a leaf or piece of bark.

This young Stinging Tree is knee high

# Lawyer Vine (Wait-a-While)

For those of you who have not met the 'wait-a-while' vine, *Calamus muelleri*, picture a dozen grasping tendrils, a metre long, lined with reverse-facing sharp hooks to entangle and subdue you. The best strategy is to learn to recognise the plant, and avoid walking into it.

Lawyer vine, like the Stinging Tree, is very common in the rainforest. It looks similar to the Walking Stick Palm. Once you are caught, it is best to pull the tendrils in the direction they grow, to release them. For this, wearing leather gloves is a big help and avoids loss of blood. Some strong, heavy people just wear tough clothing and bulldoze their way

through it. Wearing a hat helps protect the face and hair. Long sleeve shirts and long trousers are almost essential if you walk off track. Even sticking to well maintained tracks is no protection. Lawyer vines grow many metres, eventually crossing the track. Parts of this plant have fine spines that penetrate the skin, then break off. You will need tweezers to remove them.



## Tick

You have an itch. When scratching it you feel that there is something embedded in your skin. There is a red swelling; you have a tick, *Ixodes holomale*. Just pull it out with a pair of tweezers and get on with your life. The red lump will stay hot and itchy for up to 2 weeks. Ticks will sometimes wander over your body for days before attaching. A shower with plenty of soap and shampoo helps wash off the wanderers. It is common for ticks to land on your shirt and wander down inside your shorts, biting you on the waist line. Ticks will attach anywhere on your body, and you may need help to remove them. They are more easily seen on light-coloured clothing. Keep exposed skin to the minimum. Avoid sitting on the ground and brushing past bushes.



Life for the tick starts as one of 3000 eggs laid by the female in January. On hatching, these six legged larval ticks, now the size of a pin head, climb up any available vegetation, hoping to become attached to a passing animal. It is probably a long and fruitless wait for most of them. Those ticks lucky enough to find their first host, dine on its blood for about 4 days, then drop to the ground. This happens around March. On moulting it climbs the vegetation again, this time as an eight-legged nymph in July. If lucky a second time, it will attach to another animal and again drop to the ground after a feast of blood. After shedding its skin, it emerges as an adult and climbs the vegeta-

tion again in October for a last, and for some animals, most deadly meal of blood. The male tick is harmless. Tick bites in humans are rarely fatal. About 20 people died last century in NSW from tick poisoning. The venom of the tick is produced in its salivary glands. It acts as an anticoagulant and contains a neurotoxin. Ticks range in size from minute, to 2cm long for an engorged female. The colour is brown or blue-grey. The newly-hatched tick has six legs, whilst the adult has eight. Eventually the female lays her eggs in a damp place to renew the life cycle.

## Leech

You take your socks off after a walk in the bush and you notice blood.

Your foot and ankle have a number of red circular bites, oozing blood. You have been bitten by leeches. They have sucked your blood and departed. Some might be hiding in your shoe, or still be attached. Much has been



written on the best way to make them let go: fire, salt or Rid. Just pull them off, it makes little difference. The bite may be very itchy and bleed for up to 2 weeks. Leeches will attach anywhere on your body and, most likely, you won't feel a thing. Leeches live in wet places and are most active when the leaves on the ground appear 'shiny wet'. To avoid leeches, don't go into the bush when it is really wet. Cover up bare skin. Check yourself all the time. Don't sit on the ground. Avoid brushing past vegetation. Don't stand still for long. Apply an insect repellent to your skin.

**The most important strategy** is, before you go into the bush, take your socks off and apply a generous coating of Rid, or other insect repellent (the thickened lotion is best), all over your feet from your toes to mid shin, including between the toes. Put your socks and shoes on and don't worry after that. You will see leeches gather on your shoe; they will go through the weave of your socks but not bite. They eventually give up in disgust.



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About the author.



Michael Smith, 47 years of bushwalking.

