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The Great Koala National Park

Long Distance Walking Track

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A concept plan for a world class

Long Distance Walking Track

**within the proposed
Great Koala National Park**

**Prepared by Paula Flack and Jonas Bellchambers
for the Great Koala National Park Steering Committee
February 2019**

Front cover photo: Lyn Orrego

Table of Contents

Overview.....	4
Long Distance Walking Track map.....	6
GKNP Visitor Centre.....	6
Bowraville shop front Visitors Centre.....	7
Track Sections.....	8
Northern sections map.....	8
1 Bongil Bongil Section.....	8
2 Never Never Section.....	9
3 Black Scrub Section.....	11
4 New England Rim Section.....	13
Southern Sections map.....	15
5 New England Wilderness Section.....	15
6 Gumbaynggirr Section.....	18
7 Little Wonder Section.....	20
8 Dunggirr Section.....	21
9 Bowra Section.....	23
Loop Tracks.....	24
Infrastructure.....	25
Other recreational activities in the GKNP.....	25
Benefits of the GKNP Long Distance Walking Track.....	26
Reserve category and management authority.....	26
The Bibbulmun Track - a case study.....	26
The Team.....	27



*New England Wilderness Area viewing west from the Killiekrankie Lookout toward Point Lookout.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*

Overview

The proposed Great Koala National Park (GKNP) Long Distance Walking Track offers a spectacular 217 kilometre world class multiday walk from the Coffs Coast up to the Dorrigo Escarpment and back down to the heritage town of Bowraville, on the NSW mid north coast.

Starting from the proposed GKNP Visitor Centre near Repton, walkers will pass through fertile coastal forests which are home to one of the regions most significant koala populations. The Track then climbs up to the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre through various forest types including Gondwana rainforest and walkers will see tall eucalypts, massive old growth trees and a number of dramatic waterfalls along the way.

From the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre, walkers will travel through the Bellinger River National Park to Darkwood and up to Point Lookout on the edge of the Dorrigo escarpment via the Black Scrub ridgeline and along the rim of the escarpment. Breathtaking views, rainforest creeks and water falls are features of this section.

From Point Lookout the track drops down into the stunning New England Wilderness following the ridgetop track through to the Killiekrankie Lookout, before descending into the Nambucca Valley through forests known to contain koalas. At Little Wonder Creek, walkers will see and smell the wonderfully aromatic and rare ringwood trees also known as aniseed myrtle (*Syzygium anisatum*), which are endemic to only the Nambucca and Bellinger Valleys.

After passing through Dunggirr National Park (Dunggirr means koala in the local Gumbaynggirr language) walkers will once again sight the coast from Kosekai Lookout before dropping down to the sleepy historic town of Bowraville.

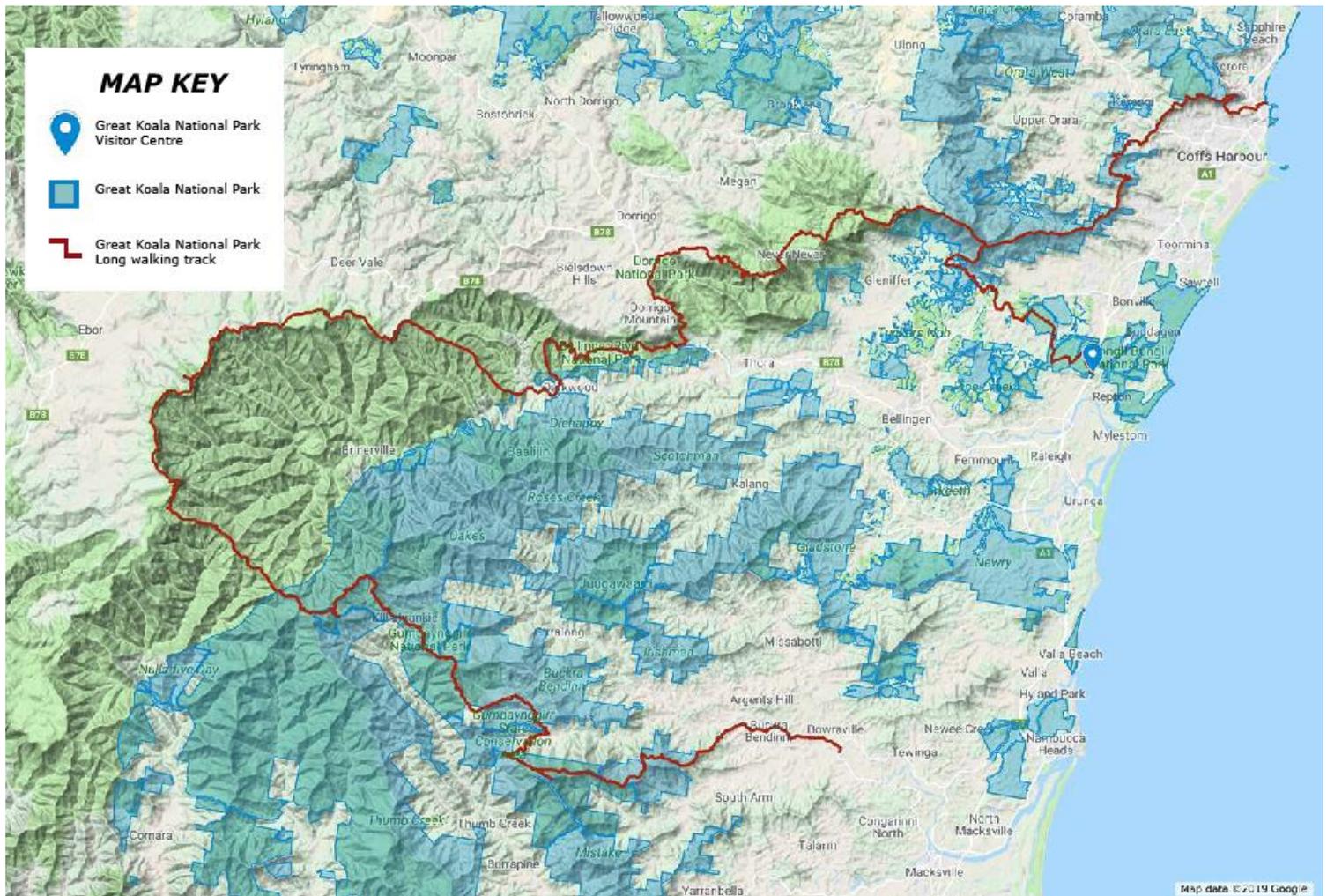
The track climbs approximately 1,400m to its highest point and walkers will notice the changes in plants, animals and climate as they travel through the various altitudes, ecosystems and terrains.

The Long Distance Walking Track is estimated to take 25 days to complete and provides the serious bushwalker with a range of experiences and challenges. It is likely that those undertaking the entire track will require food and possibly water drops at prearranged locations due the tracks remoteness.

The track is described travelling from north to south, but can be walked in either direction. It is divided into nine sections of varying difficulty and length, which are described in more detail within this concept plan. A number of the track sections also offer smaller eg one-hour loop tracks to local features. Sections can be walked separately and walkers not choosing to undertake the entire end-to-end walk can select a section based on their fitness, skills and desired experience.

Importantly, the GKNP Long Distance Track presents a significant international tourist attraction and as such will provide many direct and indirect benefits for regional economies, in particular the tourism sector. Many business opportunities will be generated for tour operators and guides, bushwalking support providers, transport operators, camping suppliers, food and beverage outlets, restaurants, cafes and accommodation providers.

The Track passes through areas rich in Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal cultural heritage. Consultation with Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal organisations, groups and families is already underway. Consideration is also being given to the allocation of an appropriate Gumbaynggirr name for the Long Distance Walking Track.



Great Koala National Park proposed Long Distance Walking Track. Map: Jonas Bellchambers

GKNP Visitor Centre

A gateway visitor centre is proposed for a site adjacent to the Pacific Highway near Repton on the edge of the existing Bongil Bongil National Park. The centre would include a koala hospital, café, carparking, transport connections and potentially a Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal Cultural space.

Visitors will have access to information regarding the GKNP and the various recreational tracks and activities available in the park. The centre will provide the perfect launch point for the Long-Distance Walking Track and various short walking loop tracks within the vicinity. Ideally long-term parking would be available for walkers undertaking multiday walks from the centre.

The proposed centre is located in an area which is known to contain one of the most regionally significant koala populations in north east NSW.



*Fresh koala scats (droppings) found in the vicinity of the proposed GKNP Visitor Centre site.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*

Bowraville GKNP shop front Visitor Centre

The Long-Distance Walking Track finishes at the beautiful heritage ‘Verandah Post’ town of Bowraville in the heart of the Nambucca Valley. This iconic little town’s main street is lined with verandah-shaded footpaths offering visitors a glimpse into its pioneering past.

Bowraville is the gateway town to the southern areas of the GKNP and as such a shop front GKNP Visitor Centre is proposed to provide information on the park and various recreational tracks and activities available. The centre will also provide information regarding local guided tours, accommodation, events and transport connections.

Bowra, as the locals like to call it, belies its sleepy atmosphere with a number of available shops and services including two museums, cafes, boutique shops, supermarket, GP clinic, chemist, mechanic, pub, bakery, golf course, historic picture theatre and performance space, accommodation, clubs and a treasure trove of Aboriginal art and culture.

Bowraville is located 45 minutes from the Coffs Harbour airport, 15 minutes from train stations at Nambucca Heads or Macksville and 20 minutes from the spectacular Nambucca Valley coastline and beaches.



Bowraville High Street

Photo: Calumn Hockey



Northern sections 1- 4 of Long-Distance Walking Track (LDWT) from Visitor Centre at Bongil Bongil to Point Lookout. Note: map also shows a proposed northern link to the LDWT from north of Coffs Harbour

Track Sections

1 Bongil Bongil Section – 24km

Starting from the GKNP Visitor Centre, the track travels through Bongil Bongil National Park, Pine Creek forest, North Bellingen and Bindarri National Park.

This section passes through some of the best known koala habitat in the region and is rich in flora and fauna. As the track climbs over 500m in altitude, walkers will observe a variety of forest types including lowland coastal and mountain rainforest and dry and wet sclerophyll forest.

Highlights include very large eucalypts and some impressive rainforest trees, including the rare endemic ringwood (*Syzygium anisatum*) which grows only in the Bellingen and Nambucca catchments.

There are some attractive views along the way, particularly on Devos Track, but no formal lookouts exist in this section. Some of the short walks proposed for the GKNP Visitor Centre to the west of the highway will form loops off this section of the Long Distance Walking Track.

There is also a proposed linking track connecting this section at Tuckers Knob and linking to the coast north of Coffs Harbour via Sealy's Lookout.

The Bongil Bongil Section will end at a campsite in the vicinity of Marriotts Road with the final location yet to be determined. The campsite will require a shelter, rainwater tank and composting toilet.

*GKNP track planning
volunteers looking for
koalas near Pine
Creek.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*



2 Never Never Section – 42km

This section travels through existing Bindari National Park and Dorrigo National Park using a number of existing tracks and ending at the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre.

Walkers will pass through some of the best locations in the Dorrigo National Park including Coachwood Falls on the Rosewood River, Dibbs Head, the top of Glennifer Falls on the Never Never River and Tuckers Knob.

Massive old growth trees and Gondwana rainforest along with some of the best views around are amongst the highlights of this section.



*The top of the Glennifer Falls Gorge.
Photo: Jonas Bellchambers*

The Never Never Section has three potential camping sites - an existing primitive site at the eastern end of Tuckers Knob, a new camping area on the bluff to the south of Glennifer Falls and an upgrade of the existing campsite at Wild Cattle Creek. Ideally these campsites would each have a simple shelter, rainwater tank and composting toilet.

Water is available at some points in this section, but there is no water available between the Never Never River and Wild Cattle Creek.

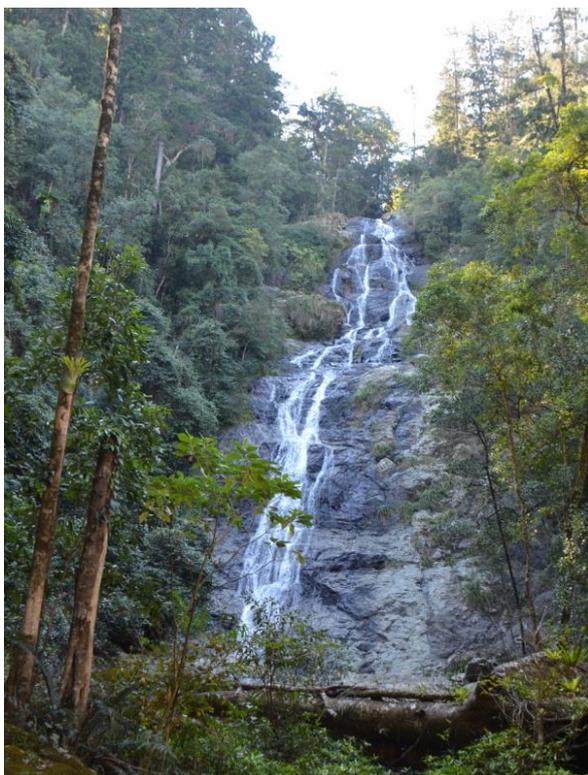
Walkers will pass four lookouts along the way at Dibbs Head, Tuckers Knob, Tuckers Knob 2(the eastern peak) and Lanes Lookouts, each offering spectacular views.



View from Lanes Lookout. Photo: Jonas Bellchambers

3 Black Scrub Section – 38km

From the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre, the track heads down through Dorrigo National Park via the Waterfall Way. This section will require a car shuttle for a few kilometres to a point where walkers can pick up the track heading west into the forests of the Bellinger River National Park and on to a campsite on Tysons Road. This part of the tracks passes the spectacular Water Gum Falls and a campsite is proposed in the vicinity.



*Water Gum Falls.
Photo: Jonas Bellchambers*

From the campsite, the track heads down to Darkwood Road crossing the beautiful Bellinger River twice over bridges. There is an opportunity for accommodation on private property along Darkwood Road with existing Bed and Breakfast businesses operating in the area.

The Track then ascends along the Black Scrub ridgeline. Campsites in this area are yet to be determined but suitable saddles exist for primitive camping. The final ascent of the Black Scrub Ridgeline to the end of this section on the escarpment edge, is steep and challenging passing through thick rainforest that is rocky and viney. It is likely that steps and handrails will be required here.

*Old growth hoop pine near
Water Gum Falls.
Photo: Jonas Bellchambers*



Walkers will enjoy seeing old growth forest, giant eucalypts and some of the largest rosewood trees in the area as they pass through the spectacular country of the Black Scrub Section.

4 New England Rim Section – 32km

From the top of the Black Scrub Ridgeline, walkers will experience a grand walking track along the edge of the New England Wilderness Area. The track follows the watershed between the Bellinger and Clarence River systems taking in magnificent views and the New England Wilderness Area below, as it heads to Point Lookout where the section ends.



Looking North towards Darkie Point from Point Lookout.

Photo: Jonas Bellchambers

The final route of parts of this section is yet to be determined but will remain largely on top of escarpment rim where the terrain is relatively level. In some sensitive areas, board walks may be required. The route will pass Darkies Point which is the site of a massacre of Gumbaynggirr people by early European settlers and as such will require ongoing careful and extensive consultation with local Gumbaynggirr people.

Majors Point offers a natural lookout which may require a platform at some point. Walkers will have an intimate experience of the many and varied forest types, ecosystems and wildlife found along the route.

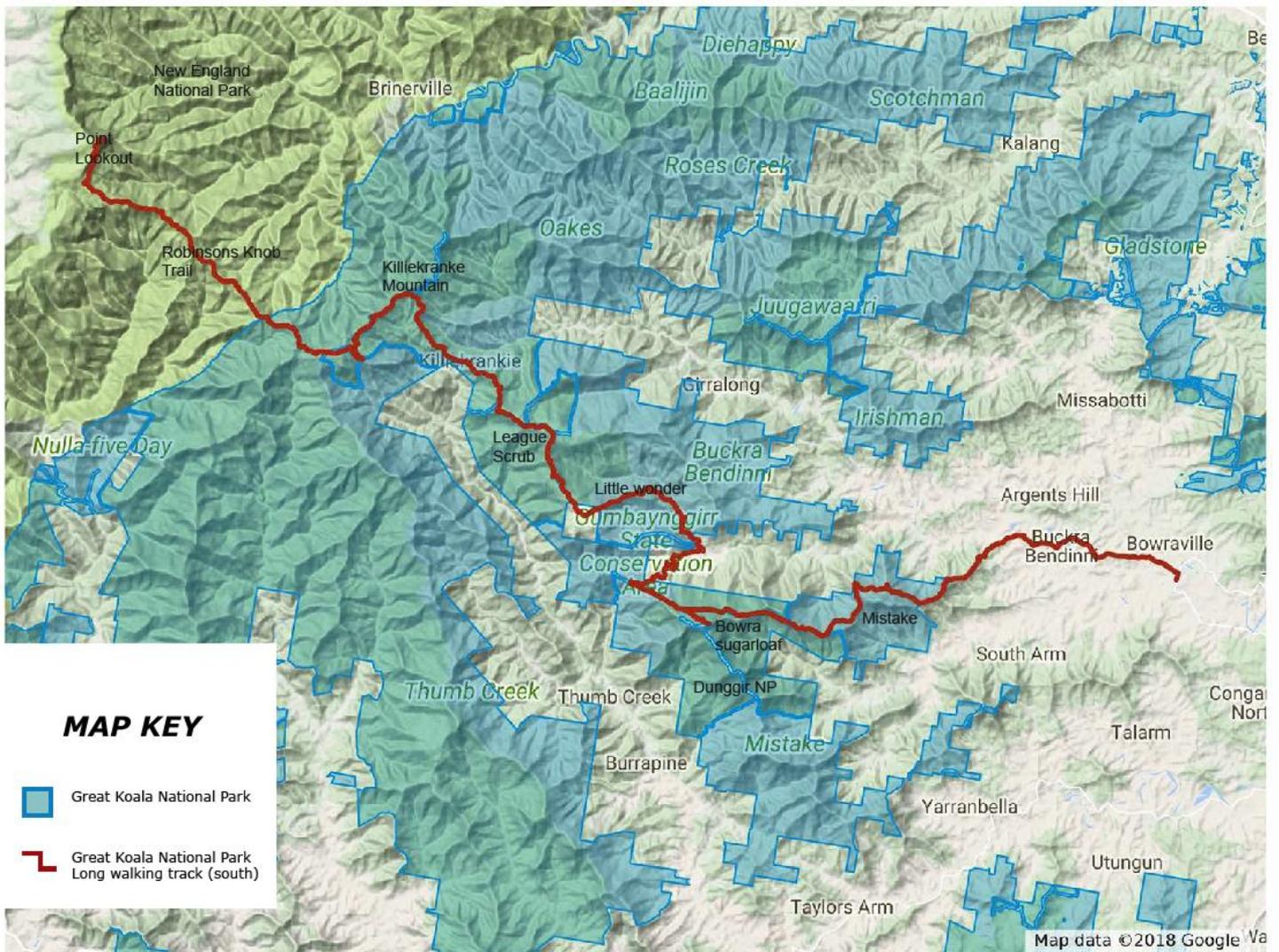


*Arctic beech
west of Barren
Mountain.
Photo: Jonas
Bellchambers*

This is a multi-day section of the track and will require at least two campsites located outside of the dedicated Wilderness Area. These campsites should have shelters, rainwater tanks and composting toilets.



View south west from Barren Mountain looking towards Point Lookout. Photo: Jonas Bellchambers



Southern sections 5-9 of Long Distance Walking Track from Point Lookout to Bowraville.

5 New England Wilderness Section – 22.7km

This section commences from the start of Robinsons Knob Trail at Point Lookout on the Dorrigo Escarpment and follows a ridgeline down into the New England Wilderness. Robinsons Knob Trail from Point Look out to Grass Tree Ridge Trail intersection is an existing wilderness track within New England National Park.

A primitive campsite with no amenities exists on the track at the intersection of Robinsons Knob Trail and Grasstree Ridge Trail. Walkers will continue on, following Robinsons Knob Track to the Comara Trail, Kilprotay Road and Horseshoe Road.

Another potential campsite exists on the Comara Trail close to the intersection with Kilprotay Road and due to the lack of water supply on the ridgetop route through the New England Wilderness it is proposed that a small water tank be installed at this point.



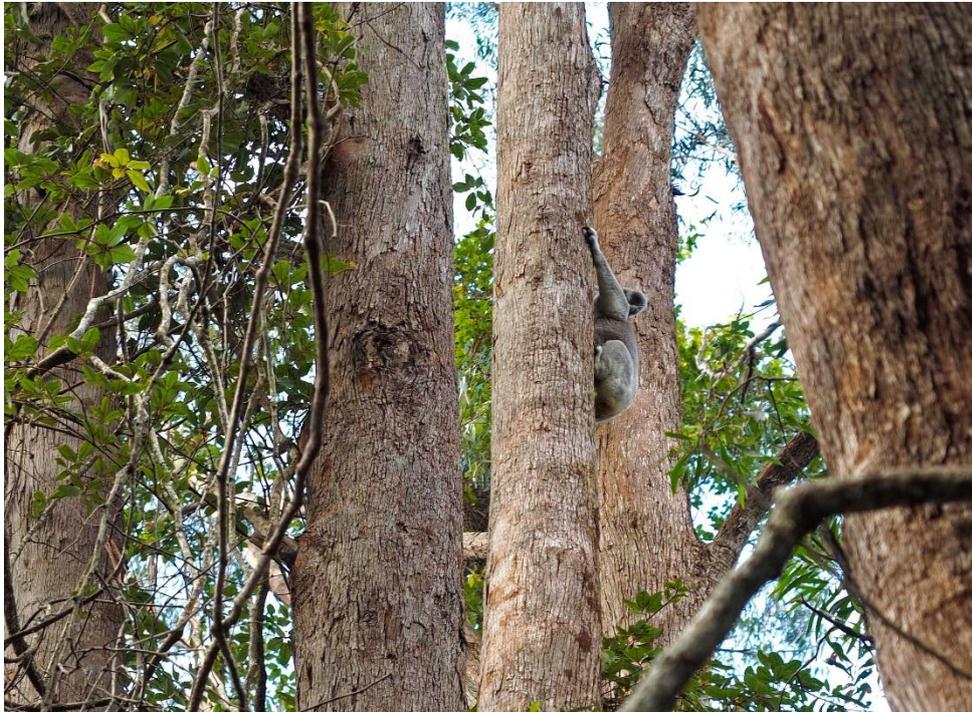
*GKNP volunteers walking the Track in the New England Wilderness section.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*

This section ends at the proposed Killiekrankie campsite on Horseshoe Road close to the commencement of the Killiekrankie Lookout walk. This campsite would require a simple shelter, rainwater tank and composting toilet.



*GKNP volunteers checking the Horseshoe Rd Campsite.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*

Walkers will experience magnificent old growth forests with many threatened fauna and flora records and spectacular view lines from various points along the way. This section also offers a chance of seeing and hearing koalas in the wild along with many old growth dependent forests species such as rare large forest owls and gliders.



Koala sighted on Kilprotay Road (part of the proposed track) near Killiekrankie Mountain.

Photo: Lyn Orrego

Close to the Killiekrankie campsite, walkers will be treated to an awe-inspiring view to the east down into the Nambucca Valley and on a clear day will sight the ocean. A small viewing platform is proposed to facilitate safe viewing from Horseshoe Road.

*View to east
across the
Nambucca
Valley from
Horseshoe
Road near
Killiekrankie
Mountain.
Crooked Top
Mountain in
middle view.
Photo:
Lyn Orrego*



The Killiekrankie Mountain Loop Track from the proposed Killiekrankie campsite would incorporate the existing 1.4km return Killiekrankie Lookout Track to make a 2.5km loop walk.

The track consists of varying grades including easy road walking between the camp and start of the existing lookout track, medium slope track through massive ancient old growth forest, culminating in a strenuous rocky climb up a narrow ridge. The final part of this track includes a metal ladder and ends at the summit lookout platform which looks west over the spectacular New England Wilderness Area. Walkers will be able to observe the amazing wilderness area they have traversed in the previous section of the Long Distance Walking Track.

6 Gumbaynggirr Section – 11.8km

This section of Horseshoe Road is a multi-use part of the track, being part of an existing four-wheel drive route between Bellingen and Bowraville and part of the proposed Horseshoe (horse riding) Trail. Commencing from the Killiekrankie campsite this section travels along Horseshoe Road to the intersection of Horseshoe Road and Mackays Road.

Walkers will enjoy the cool rainforest elements along Horseshoe Road and marvel at the unique area of old growth rainforest on a basalt cap at Leagues Scrub. This special area was recognised by early loggers as so special that it was never logged and was instead dedicated as the Leagues Scrub Flora Reserve and which is now part of Gumbaynggirr National Park.

A short 1km loop walk through Leagues Scrub is proposed here, and given the sensitivity of the ecosystems, it will require careful planning and possibly an elevated boardwalk.

Rainforest birds such as wompoo fruit-dove are likely to be seen and heard in the Leagues Scrub area along with many other rainforest species and knowledgeable walkers may even hear the very rare rufous scrub-bird.



Paying respect to an old growth rainforest giant.

Photo: Lyn Orrego

Leagues Scrub campsite is an existing small primitive camping area known as the Old Forestry Campsite. It is located a few meters from the section end off of Horseshoe Road.

Multiple vantage points exist along Horseshoe Road which offer vistas to the south across the headwaters of Taylors Arm toward the Snowy Range and north across the mountainous headwaters of the Nambucca, Kalang and Bellingen Valleys.

7 Little Wonder Section – 11.5km

The Little Wonder Section commences at the intersection of Horseshoe and Mackays Road. Heading down Mackays Road towards the valley floor, walkers will notice the change in surrounding tree species and ecosystems. Walkers have the option of staying on Mackays Road or turning onto Billygoat Road. As its name suggests, Billy Goat Road is rugged and steep, descending 520m over 5.8km into the lush rainforest of the Little Wonder catchment.



*View into the headwaters of the Little Wonder Catchment.
Photo: Lyn Orrego*

The rare ringwood tree (*Syzygium anisatum*), can be seen on the banks of Little Wonder Creek. This magnificent rainforest species is known to occur only in the Nambucca and Bellinger catchments. Sometimes known as the aniseed tree, it has wonderfully aromatic leaves and an essential oil profile comparable to true aniseed.

The Little Wonder Catchment is an area of Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal cultural significance and ongoing consultation with the Gumbaynggirr traditional owners will be required during the formal planning phase.

The proposed Ringwood Campsite is located adjacent to Mackays Road, not far from the intersection with Springs Road which marks the end the Little Wonder section. Permanent fresh water is available in Little wonder Creek at this small, flat grassed area between the road and creek.



The Ringwood Campsite.

Photo: Lyn Orrego

8 Dunggir Section – 8.9km

The Dunggir section climbs from the Buckra Bendinni valley floor to the Kosekai Lookout west of Bowraville. Springs Road is steep, climbing 310m over 4.4km with one crossing over Buckra Bendinni Creek shortly after the start of the section. This crossing would be unsafe to traverse in times of flood (average once annually). Creek levels rise and drop quickly, with the creek being impassable for approximately 24hrs after flood rains have abated.

Features of this section include rainforest and mixed eucalypt forest known to be used by koalas. Lyrebirds are often heard in this area.

Kosekai Road is also steep and takes walkers through Dunggir National Park where at least 12 threatened fauna species are known to exist including the koala, powerful owl, spagnum frog, wompoo fruit-dove and parma wallaby.

The track travels along the edge of logging compartment 366 in Mistake State Forest a key focus area of the Nambucca Valley Conservation Association's battle to stop logging in core koala habitat.

Mistake State Forest was subject to numerous forest protests and court cases in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1994, local conservation groups formally submitted the Dunggir Conservation Proposal to the NPWS (De Vires and McCauley 1994) with the result that the Dunggir

National Park was gazetted on 1 January 1997 and the resultant protection of critical koala habitat. Dunggirr is the Gumbaynggirr word for koala.

An excellent camping area exists on the side of Kosekai Road behind the lookout and offers plenty of space for the simple shelter, rainwater tank and composting toilet which are proposed for this site.



*Proposed
campsite at
Kosekai
Lookout.
Photo: Lyn
Orrego*

The existing Kosekai lookout perches near the edge of a major drop and offers a spectacular panorama to the east over the Nambucca Valley all the way to the coast more than 30km away. Several peaks are visible from the lookout, including the impressive Mount Yarriabini rising in the distance.

*The impressive view from Kosekai Lookout looking east over South Arm and Bowraville.
Photo:
Lyn Orrego*

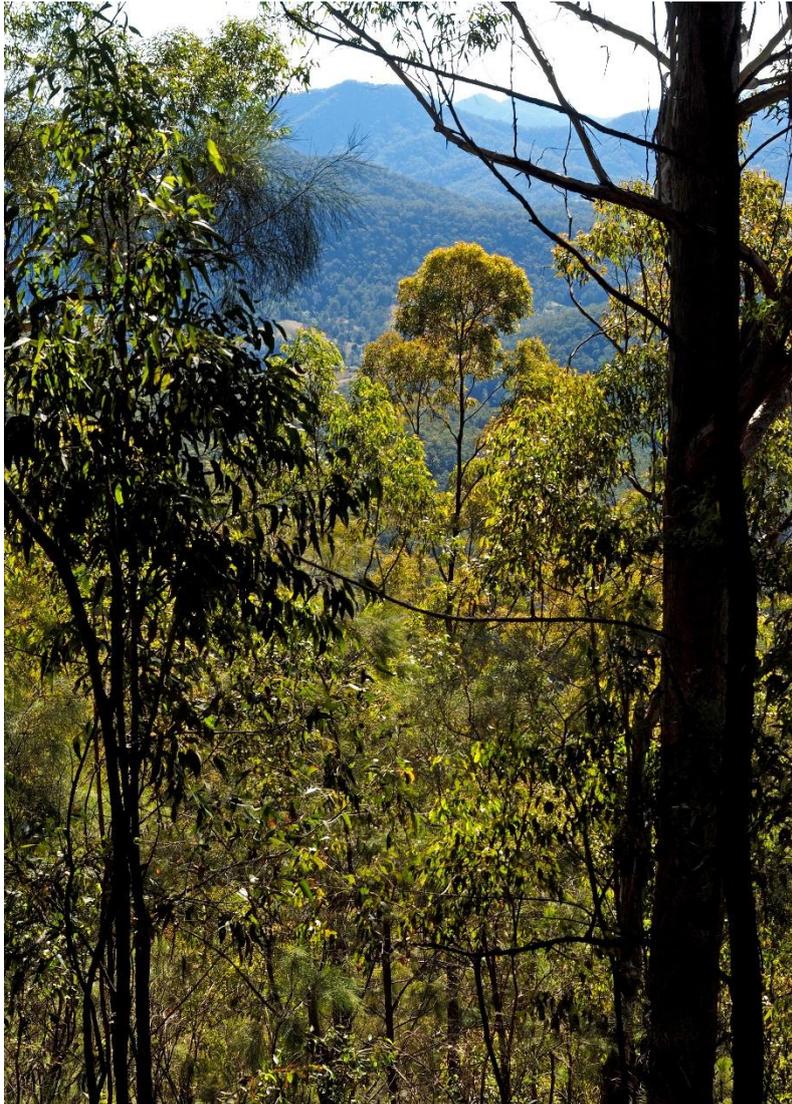


9 Bowra Section – 26.6km

From Kosekai Lookout walkers will take Hanging Rock Road down towards Bowraville. This section will take at least two days. Hanging Rock Road is a fairly steep forest road descending 530m over 17.6 km to the intersection of Upper Buckra Bendinni Road. At this point walkers may wish to be collected by vehicle and taken the last 8.6 km to Bowraville. This option presents an opportunity for local operators such as Farm Stay and Bed and Breakfast businesses to pick up walkers completing the track and take them to their accommodation.

Three good campsite areas exist along Hanging Rock Road one of which is large and flat enough to accommodate a simple shelter, rainwater tank and composting toilet.

Plenty of wildlife can be experienced along this section with the threatened glossy black cockatoo being a regular visitor. Walkers will enjoy glimpses of vistas through the dry eucalypt forest as they descend and may also spy a koala high in the branches of tallowwood or grey gum trees off to the side of the road.



View from Hanging Rock Road.

Photo: Lyn Orrego

Lower Buckra Bendinni Road is a quiet rural gravel and part bitumen road through intermittent forested areas and gentle farmland. The track travels 7 km along Lower Buckra Bendinni Road to the intersection with North Arm Road.

Walkers will then follow North Arm Road 1.6 km to Bowraville. North Arm Road has a good wide verge for a dedicated walking track and a pedestrian bridge over South Creek providing passage to the historical Bowraville High Street.

Loop Tracks

Several loop and connecting tracks are proposed for the GKNP Long Distance Walking Track. Only some have being described briefly in this concept plan. Others are yet to be assessed and considered.

Infrastructure

All of the southern sections of the Long Distance Walking Track follow existing forest roads and trails and will only require minimal work to ensure walker safety and minimize environmental impacts. Most of the northern sections follow existing roads and tracks, however some will require stairs and handrails and many will require upgrading. Some sections are proposed through areas where no track exists and will require careful assessment and establishment eg parts of the New England Rim section.

In identified environmentally sensitive areas boardwalks may be necessary to eliminate soil compaction and damage to vegetation. Main campsites will require simple shelters, rainwater tanks and unisex composting toilets. The whole track will require track indicator signage, site specific interpretive signs, campsite signage and where appropriate Gumbayngirr cultural signage. Walkers will be required to remove all their own litter.

Other recreational activities in the GKNP

Many of the Long Distance Walking Track sections provide access to areas of the GKNP for other nature-based activities such as canyoning, bird watching, artist's field trips, forest bathing, yoga, meditation and photography.



*Canyoning in the GKNP.
Photo: Charlotte Miller*

Benefits of the GKNP Long Distance Walking Track

- Increased regional tourist visitations both domestic and international.
- Employment opportunities for rangers, construction and maintenance workers.
- Employment opportunities in visitor centres.
- Business opportunities for tour guide companies.
- Walker support services eg food and water drops.
- Transport link/shuttle providers.
- Gumbaynggirr Indigenous employment and cultural business opportunities.
- Greater awareness of the values and importance of native forests for carbon storage and capture, climate change mitigation, water yields to downstream users, biodiversity and koala conservation.
- Education opportunities – school trips, orienteering, survival skills.
- Opportunities for healthy outdoor activities and relaxation – bush walking is a recognised physical and mental health activity.
- Accommodation.
- Food and beverage outlets.
- Camping supplies outlets.
- Photography supplies.
- Sports and remedial massage therapists.

Reserve category and management authority

We propose the management authority to be the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). NPWS already has experience in managing walking Tracks in a number of other reserves. All of the forests proposed for protection under the umbrella of the Great Koala National Park would be managed subject to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act).

The Bibbulmun Track – a case study

The Bibbulmun Track is Western Australia's world-class long distance walking track, stretching 1000 kilometres from Kalamunda in the Perth Hills to Albany on the south coast. The track connects over 20 parks throughout the south west of Western Australia.

18 months of data from electronic counters showed that 302,960 visitor days were spent on the Bibbulmun Track, with over half of these being day walks. For two thirds of walkers the track was the main reason they visited an area.

Annual direct expenditure was calculated at \$13.1 million with much of this being spent in regional areas on accommodation, food and services.

In 2014/15 the Bibbulmun Track Foundation undertook a user survey. Due to the survey methodology, Western Australians (93%) were the primary respondents and of those

surveyed 98% said they would recommend the Track to others and 97% intended to walk the Track again. Visitors return to walk another section or complete another end-to-end of the track. Repeat visitations help maintain direct economic benefits to local economies.

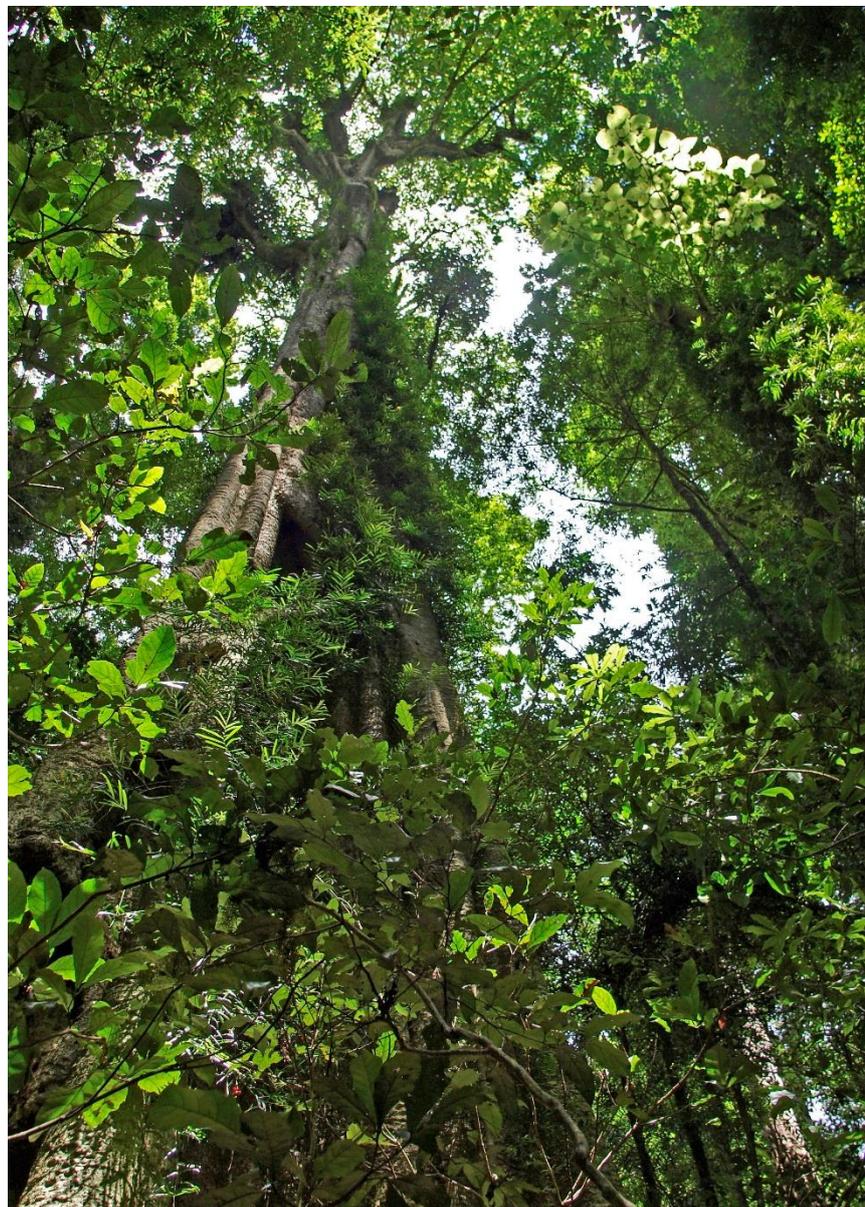
Data from over 4,500 log book entries from a remote campsite between Walpole and Denmark showed that over 16% of walkers were from interstate and 12.5% from overseas. Of these visitors to WA around 30% walked up to four days (from Walpole to Peaceful Bay), 30% walked for one to two weeks, 10% walked for between two and seven weeks, the remaining 20% walked for over seven weeks.

Bibbulmun Track Foundation Annual Report 2016:

https://www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au/media/files/Get_involved/about_the_foundation/AGM_REPORT_2016_web.pdf

*Old growth Stinging tree
Leagues Scrub*

Photo: Lyn Orrego



The GKNP Steering Committee

The GKNP Steering committee is comprised of a number of local people with various backgrounds and skills. Committee members are focused on concept planning and promoting the GKNP under the guidance of the NSW National Parks Association.

The Tracks Team

Considerable community voluntary effort, time and resources have gone into developing this concept plan. GKNP Steering committee members were Jonas Bellchambers, Paula Flack, Lyn Orrego, Caitlin Hockey, Calumn Hockey and Ashley Love. Community volunteers were John Pile (koala spotter extraordinaire) Steve Hensler, Nick Hockey and Julie Hockey.



*Some of the southern tracks crew:
Nick Hockey, Caitlin Hockey, Paula
Flack and Steve Hensler.*

Photo: Lyn Orrego

*Jonas Bellchamber
led the northern tracks crew.
Photo: Charlotte Miller*

