

# Wollumbin Summit track extended closure

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## Extension of Summit track closure

Wollumbin National Park has been closed since March 2020 to comply with COVID-19 rules on public gatherings and physical distancing.

During this closure, a safety audit and inspection identified significant safety issues with the Wollumbin Summit track. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is extending the current closure of Wollumbin National Park in order to address these concerns.

We understand that visitors may be disappointed by this closure however our main priority is to ensure the safety of visitors and staff.

NPWS will now consider the future of the Summit track, in consultation with key community and tourism stakeholders including the Wollumbin Consultative Group, which represents Aboriginal Elders and knowledge holders.

The closure will be reviewed in May 2021.

**Visitors are always advised to check [nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/alerts](https://nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/alerts) before travel.**

## Alternative experiences

The Pinnacle walking track and lookout in Border Ranges National Park offers uninterrupted views over the World Heritage-listed rainforest, the crater escarpment, Wollumbin (Mount Warning) and the Tweed Valley. The Best of All Lookout, accessed via

Cover photo: Wollumbin and the caldera from the Pinnacle lookout, Border Ranges National Park (M. Vanderveer/DPIE)

Queensland's Springbrook National Park, also provides a stunning view of the mountain.

Byrrell Creek walking track is a short walk in Mebbin National Park that takes you through subtropical rainforest and past large ancient fig trees, ideal for birdwatching.

Other alternatives include the Goorgana walking track, Pholis Gap walking track or Protesters Falls in nearby Nightcap National Park.

Check out the *Rainforest hoppin' on the Far North Coast* blog for more options at [blog.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](https://blog.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

Or visit the national parks webpage to discover more at [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au](https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).



Photo: Palm Forest walking track, Border Ranges National Park (Branden Bodman/DPIE)

## Wollumbin Summit track

The 8.8km return Summit track is a very steep and challenging track rising 720m in altitude to the summit at 1096m. It includes a rock scramble section in the final 100m of the ascent which requires a high level of fitness, experience and skill, where climbers use chains to ascend a near vertical exposed rockface.

NPWS has committed significant capital and maintenance funding, resources and effort, to maintain visitor access to the Wollumbin Summit walking track. Despite this, infrastructure is recorded as mostly poor to very poor condition due to the high use, steep terrain, vegetation and impacts of severe storms and very heavy rainfall events.

NPWS and NSW Police have responded to 44 significant visitor safety incidents on the Summit track over the past 10 years, including two deaths. These incidents have involved both heli-evacuations and search and rescue operations. The number of unreported injuries is likely much higher.

### Current safety concerns

A recent structural assessment undertaken by a qualified consulting engineer identified an extreme risk of failure of the chain section near the summit.

The report recommended the track be closed as the risk of further accidents or fatalities from a catastrophic failure is very high and there is no possibility of adequately repairing or maintaining the critical parts.

In addition, a Visitor Safety Risk Assessment of the Wollumbin Summit track undertaken in September 2019 identified other catastrophic or extreme risks including:

- an extreme risk of rock fall, landslide or slope instability causing serious injury or fatality
- delays in emergency response to lost or injured walkers endangering patient survival
- built asset (such as platforms, handrails, pathway) failure causing serious injury or fatality, slips, trips or falls ascending and descending the chain section causing serious injury or fatality.



Photo: The final rock scramble, Wollumbin Summit track (P Wallace)



Photo: Wollumbin from Doon Doon (Viktor Posnov)

### Aboriginal cultural significance

Wollumbin Summit is a sacred place of the highest significance to Bundjalung people and other Aboriginal Nations. Wollumbin, which means 'cloud catcher' to some Aboriginal People, is a traditional place of cultural law, initiation and spiritual education for the people of the Bundjalung Nation. Under Bundjalung law, only certain people can climb the summit.

Wollumbin summit was declared an Aboriginal Place in 2014 to protect these values, and people have been asked to consider not climbing the summit since then.

There is a high level of community acceptance of the significance of Wollumbin Summit and the message not to climb. Of the 858 domestic participants in a recent visitor research survey (DPIE 2019), 49 per cent stated they would not climb Wollumbin summit upon receiving the request not to climb, most of the remaining participants were unsure or needed more information, and only nine percent still wanted to climb Wollumbin.

### Tweed Byron Hinterland Trails project

The \$7.35 million Tweed Byron Hinterland Trails project was initiated to help resolve the safety and cultural risks at Wollumbin National Park by providing alternative experiences in the Tweed Byron region.

Work has commenced on stage one of that project to increase capacity and enhance visitor access and safety at Minyon Falls lookout and nearby day use area.

The project will also deliver a signature multi-day walk from Unicorn Falls in Mount Jerusalem National Park near Uki to Minyon Falls in Nightcap National Park by 2022. Visit [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/tweed-byron-hinterland-trails](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/tweed-byron-hinterland-trails) for more information.

### Keep up to date

Check the national parks website for alerts and updates before travel at [www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/alerts](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/alerts).

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