



FUSSI

Newsletter

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Descending into Thampanna
Cave. Nullarbor WA.

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NULLARBOR DUST AND FIRE

Clare Buswell, Heiko Maurer

Scene One, Friday eve, 16th September: Packing. There were boxes of food, camp stove and gas bottles, cases for bat detectors, camera gear, motor cycle helmets and boxes of caving gear, jerry cans for water and spare fuel and tyres. We had already strapped Michael's bike onto the trailer to see if it would fit. We had planned to use it and a pushbike on the Nullarbor to criss-cross the countryside and search for new caves.



Some of the gear in the shed, ready for loading into the trailer.

Scene Two: Saturday 17th September. Rose at crack of dawn to leisurely breakfast and packing of trailer. Thomas arrived right on time at 7 AM and we packed, packed and packed until 9:30, unfortunately having to leave the motorcycle behind. We started at kilometre reading 265384, and drove, and drove ... but:

First topic of conversation: Where to have a good latte. Bar 9 in Parkside, Adelaide, got the (good choice) jersey. Second topic of conversation: Booze. Dan Murphy's lightened the load on kitty by \$161.32. We finally got to Gepps Cross at 11:30, a windy Pt Wakefield for lunch at 1pm, Pt Augusta at 3:30 and Ceduna at 8:30pm. Had dinner at the Community Hotel and stayed in the

Foreshore Caravan Park (\$110 – Cabin 7). Had a good night's sleep and rose again at 7:30. Fuelled up and made for lunch at Fowlers Bay.

The little township has grown with a caravan park and hotel/motel (rooms for \$150/night). The jetty is 346m long, one of the longest jetties in SA. Fowlers Bay was, until the late 1950s, SA's second deepest port from where all of the Eyre Peninsula wheat and wool crops were exported.

On we went. The Eyre highway comes within 500m of the Bunda cliffs – we took a small detour. The cliffs are 100m high and continually eroding. Note the picture at right: it is not trimmed, the horizon is absolutely flat.

Thence onto Eucla by 5pm. Topped up with fuel at \$1.78/l as it was expensive at the Nullarbor roadhouse, at \$2.10 per litre. We then collected our order of fruit and vegetables, filled up with water – first 50 litres are free, any more is \$1/litre!



The Cliff line of the Great Australian Bight.

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Onto Weebubbie, but missed the left turn at the quarry and continued up the Eucla-Reid road. We eventually got to Weebubbie at 7pm to find two WA cave divers already there. Set up camp amongst the shelter of the trees and ate just before a fierce wind came up, threatening rain. We secured bits of camping gear and awaited the deluge, which never came. The storm apparently tore roofs from houses in Kalgoorlie, so we were lucky. Next morning it was a quick dip in Weebubbie and then more driving! Back to the Eucla-Reid road, turn left onto the Old Coach road to the Chowilla Doline. We were at Abracurrie cave by 1pm, and lunch, after which Heiko cut his hand badly, tripping on the sharp limestone. A few band-aids later and Clare and Thomas went into Abracurrie, surfacing at 5:30pm. Abracurrie remains one of my favourite caves with its flat floor and wonderful high roof. The photographers were out in force.

From Abracurrie we had about 30km of the Old Coach Rd to travel to the highway and given the slow going, (took us one and a half hours) it was decided to camp at Mundrabilla roadhouse. An unpowered site



The deep entrance doline of Weebubbie cave. Thomas is climbing up the doline, middle of photo. Weebubbie has water at the bottom – 100m below the surface.



Thomas and Heiko loading up firewood

cost \$20 and the restaurant meal was good, but 3 beers were \$19.50. Generators and refrigerated trucks kept up a steady night time hum, the showers on the other hand, were very welcome – moist and hot.

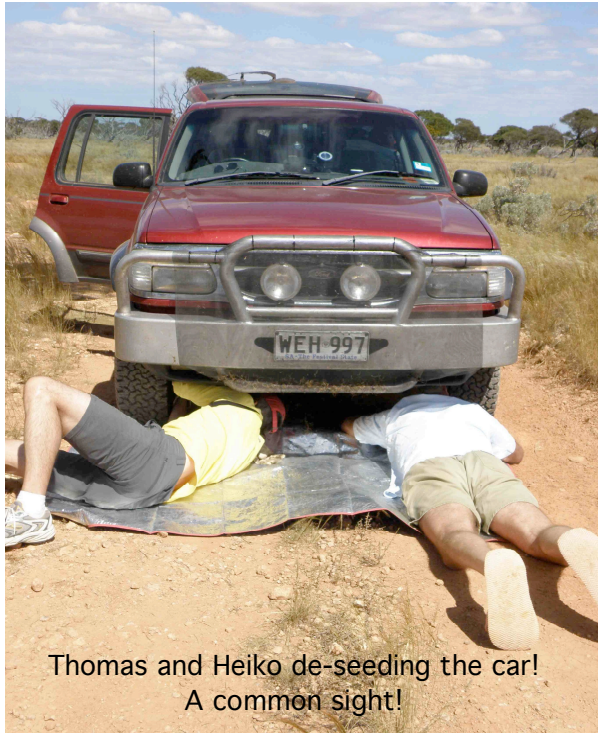
There was, however, a strange sight in the morning. It was people playing golf! It's the Nullarbor Links Golf Course! I suppose it breaks the long journey from Norseman to Ceduna and it is a ball game. The course at Mundrabilla included a ... swamp!

We left the golfers to it and dropped in on Mundrabilla H/S to talk with the owners and find out about the road and fire situation for the next 83 kms of dirt to Old Homestead Cave. The road condition was bad: tall grass(!), boggy clay pans and rough road made driving a chore. Grass caused major problems and required constant removal around exhausts and

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brakes. Our average speed was 17km per hour! The GPS came in handy for a bit of route finding around dams and we picked up wood just before the last two gates at the so-called 'vermin-proof' fence.

We arrived at OHS at 6:30pm to find Ray and Peter a bit downcast, muttering about a busted waterpump on their car. There was gnashing of teeth and towing talk. Settled in for the night – tents, more car talk and dinner.



Thomas and Heiko de-seeding the car!
A common sight!

A leisurely start to the next day (Tuesday) saw the six of us head south by 2:30pm to check on Suckhole (750m West of the M-F road), and some digging following a strong draft from a tiny crack. Suckhole declared a blowhole. Returning via 6N4881, which had two very large blowholes, gushing LOTS of cold air and, after some 'gardening' to allow access, followed by the headfirst descent into one of them, was declared a 7.80m blowhole. Back in camp by 7, tea and chat for a late 12am bed time. At 1am an hour long gust of wind played havoc: Thomas' tent blew down and our "out" fire threatened to turn the Nullarbor into a blackened landscape. Thomas and Heiko were up and at it putting things back under control. Dawn brought a fine, cool, dry day.

Wednesday saw another leisurely morning of tea drinking, bat detector data down loading and other desk work. We eventually got our field work act together and headed north to

a cluster of NXK numbers about 1.4km west of the Mundrabilla-Forest road. Parked and headed west, whence Clare found an undocumented feature. Quickly established the first NXK114 blowhole. While Peter and Ray expertly documented it, we quickly found NXK113 and 131, which were similarly consigned to a literary death. NXK116 was also located, but left for another time as the sun was heading toward western oblivion.

Back at camp by 7:30pm (again) and a veritable feast was cooked (this became the norm), before the evenings talk, reviewing of the day's videos that Ray had taken during the day and fall into sometime around moonrise, (midnight). Hard work.



A typical days work on the Nullarbor

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We had an unexpected visitor at the camp in the form of a young raven. S/he hung around camp and had adopted Ray's car as a look out point. Eagles hunted in the doline of Old Homestead cave some 200m from camp so such a lookout point was a necessity. When not perched on one of the spare tyres on the top of Rays' car he or she decided that pecking at bits of our gear was a good idea! The bird did not stray from the hut and at night slept in the wood heap. We had a theory that it had been pushed here on the strong winds of the storm that came though two or three days previously so was now on its own. The Raven was actually reunited with its parents five days later when they somehow or other found it. In the meantime we all had become quite used to it and even missed its company after it left. But that is a digression

The previous evening we had established Michael's arrival time on the train at Forest, as 11:50am LOCAL time. So: what was local time? Adelaide? Perth? Or a Eucla limbo, in-between time? Well, we asked Michael by using Peter's Sat Fone. The answer came back next morning as Perth time (turns out there are not only the three time zones above, but also 'train' time).

Nothing for it, but to head 39.5km north to Forest. This was reckoned to be 2 and a half hours. It was – the road is that bad. So we arrived in good time after crossing a field of Sturt's Desert Pea and encountering a large lizard. We even managed to be in good time for two \$5.50 showers before the manager (Klaus) picked up the forlorn figure of Michael. (Those in charge of the train were less than certain about letting him alight! I mean Forest is no boom town. Michael remained insistent however, and thus appeared with more gear and food.) After a quick chat to the manager and his wife (a former resident of North Rd, Nairne!) we went for a quick side trip to see a wedge-tailed eagle's nest, chick and 'tasty' carrion. We were then off south, arriving at 4:30pm to find the camp occupants had decamped to Old Homestead Cave at 3pm. And didn't join us until 6:30.

Next day, Saturday, was an epic for Thomas: he was to tow Ray&Peter's Rodeo to the highway and return. At 9:30 they were all packed, ready and rearing to go and were duly escorted out of camp by Heiko on Thomas' bicycle. 82km of rough dirt track lay in front of them. The rest of the crew did a surface walk and located 6N1305, 06,07,08, but failed to find 6N1203. Thomas came back after midnight, tired but relieved that the job had been done. (When we came back down to the Hwy on our return from Madura a week later, we called in to the service station to find that Ray and Peter had spent four days at Mundrabilla service Station waiting for the RAA to collect them. At Eucla, the one and only mechanic between Norseman and Ceduna patched the water pump up enough to get them back to Adelaide!)



Heiko in a small rift (in OHC).

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On Sunday, after an unusually short, leisurely start, we entered Old Homestead, 6N83 at 1:30, Clare and Peter having previously rigged the dug well on Friday. We ferreted around in seemingly endless rockpiles looking for the Officers Mess, until we decided that the way past Yikes and Away was the better option. It was Michael's first Nullarbor cave and he was impressed. Out by 7pm.

Monday we faced the trauma of packing up and moving on. Such prospects required sustained coffee/tea infusions and frequent raiding of the "treats box". We succeeded in packing in under 4 hours and managed to get to the dingo fence by 4pm. We managed to get to Webb's campsite by dusk, set up camp, bat detectors, eat and fall into bed.

Tuesday beckoned with visits to Witches and Purple Gorange Caves. Once again we drove through 3 foot high dry grass with frequent stops to check for build ups of grass seeds around the exhaust and brakes. Michael got his camera working and tied it to the bull-bar so he could get film of the tall grass beating up the car.

Witches Cave proved to be damp! In fact this was noticeable in all the caves we visited. The inflow of water into caves had wiped away any trace of human footprints so we were effectively treading on pristine floors. Care was required and exercised.

Witches' cave showed us its resident colony of bats as well as its decorations. A couple of hours later we emerged with cameras in hand. We then drove off to Purple Gorange and out came the cameras yet again. Like Witches it is a wonderfully decorated cave and we regretted that we turned up a few million years late to witness it at its best. We emerged from Purple Gorange and saw smoke on the distant horizon. We hoped that it would not come in our direction!



Back at camp later that evening, three DOLA fire trucks trundled by, so we had a chat to the fire lighters and, yep, they were trying hard to do reduction burning so hence the smoke we saw. Despite the dry grass, they were having a hard time of it, as the base of the grass was green. Lightning strikes are a major fire threat and the last time the Nullarbor had such a season was in 1974, with major fires occurring the following year. Be warned!

Thampanna Cave

The entry is via a 3m diameter and 6m deep round tube which comes out at the top of a 4m high, 20m diameter chamber which then has some large passages leading further into the cave.

The entrance tube has such a strong draft coming down it or up, it is speculated that birds get sucked into

the hole and can't get back up again. There were several dead Budgerigars at the bottom of the chamber, beneath the entrance hole so maybe that speculation is correct. At any rate Clare threw her hat over the solution tube expecting it to be blown up into the air by a

NULLABOR DUST AND FIRE

couple of metres. It wasn't. Instead it was sucked down into the cave and joined the Budgerigars! Although we spent time hunting for the Drain, we found lots of other things instead. Still we had a good look round, but we needed more time for route finding. We de-rigged and drove the 22km back to camp. Thomas and Clare then went back to Gorange cave for a second photographic work out. In the meantime Heiko and Michael cooked up a storm, which was appreciated by all.

Pack up day arrived again, as we were to move to Mullamulang cave. In a valiant effort to deny reality Thomas and Michael got up early and visited Webbs Cave. They emerged an hour or so later, dirty, satisfied and talking of bats, decoration, and damp floors. It was a fitting start to a day that was to end in a very different manner! We packed up, and drove through more dry tall grass back to the highway. On the tarmac shock set in as we realised that we could go faster than our usual 17km an hour average! Madura offered electricity to charge batteries, hot showers and of course petrol!

After partaking of such luxuries, we departed Madura at 4pm and then went back to the usual off-road drive routine for the 40km to Mullamulang cave. We got to within 10km of our campsite and the car caught alight from the grass that had compacted itself around the



Burnt Grass being pulled from under the car and the front "moustache"

exhaust. We had been diligent about its removal and had de-grassed the car several times between Madura and here. It was unnerving to say the least to see smoke coming from under the bonnet. We could do nothing but pull burning grass out from under the car and throw cups of water where flames appeared. Ten litres of water, (we had 60 litres on board,) and 1st degree burns later it was out. We were very lucky.



Fire fighting equipment for the Nullabor:

Screw drivers, coffee cups, water, rather than foam or bicarb of soda as smothering a fire where the combustible material is compacted may put the flames out but the fire continues to smoulder.

Leather gloves, and protective glasses are also a must.

First aid kit containing an Instant Ice Pack. (Not the sort you put in the freezer.)

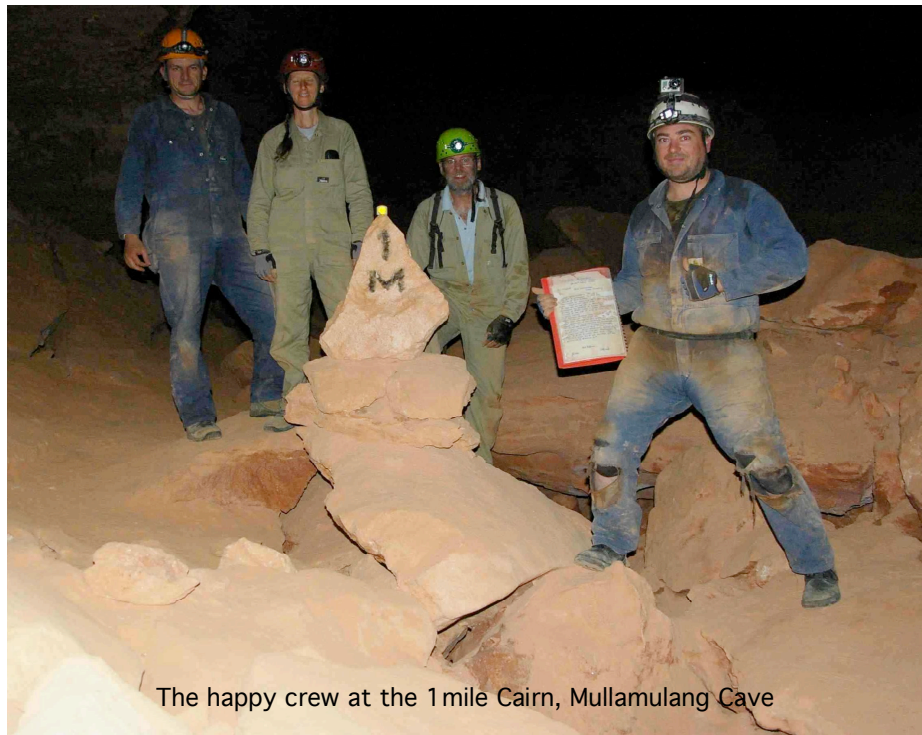
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We then set about yet another de-grassing of the car.

Eventually we figured that it was OK to move on and travel the last ten kilometres to camp. This we did, but stopped often and pulled grass from under the car and around the brakes. We rolled onto the karst pavement at Mullamulang cave at 7.30pm with much relief. It had taken 3 1/2 hours to travel 40km from Madura to Mullamulang, some sort of record! It seemed that the wildlife in the doline was happy to have us as visitors as the owls sang all night and the cave seemed to join in. Indeed so much noise came from the doline that sleep for some was difficult.

The following morning brought yet another 'under the car' viewing. This time to assess the damage. It appeared that the outer casing that carried the electrical wiring to the back of the car had melted, but the insulating tubing on the wires remained undamaged. The car just smelt of smoke. Thomas found a burnt and blackened stick high up in the chassis, about a little finger in thickness and around 4cm long that had caught alight! We decided the best thing to do was to go underground so we did the usual tourist trip into Mullamulang: visit the Easter Extension, and on to the One Mile Cairn. The cave did not disappoint, with bats, beetles, strong wind in the Southerly Bluster, sand dunes, salt crystals, cold clear brackish water and lots of rock piles. Michael and Thomas went as far as the White Lake thinking that the 'rock pile work out' would be the next get fit craze!

We exited to a cool evening having thoroughly enjoyed one of the Nullarbor's most famous caves. The next day we began the long, two day drive home. The first few kilometres of which we averaged 4km before checking the grass build up under the car for any sniff of smoke!



The happy crew at the 1 mile Cairn, Mullamulang Cave

We overnighted in the very pleasant (indeed, recommended – \$90 for a four bed cabin) Penong caravan park – Ceduna being chockers (long weekend, school holidays, oyster tossing or some such).

Notes: We used 600 litres of petrol. Petrol was most expensive at Nullarbor. Water costs, so bring your own all the way from Adelaide. You can catch the Indian-Pacific train and get off at Forest. To do this, you have to be insistent and you can only book it a week before you leave. The train stops to drop off mail to the residents at Forest and this gives you the bargaining loop hole. We recorded 200 hours of bat calls. Injuries: cuts to two people's

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hands due to falls in dolines, first degree burns due to extinguishing the fire under the car. Saw lots of lizards, owls, hawks, a feral cat, budgerigars and a young Raven!

The Nullarbor itself was full of life, and caves were damp from the wet season that the Plain was enjoying. It was a special trip in more ways than one. We will be back next September.

Rigging notes: Take a 30 meter long rope to rig over the climb-down at the lip in Weebubie Cave. There is a second ladder further in going over the second climb-down.

Thampanna Cave requires a selection of long tapes to rig back to any useful rigging points which are 6 -7m from the solution tube. Warning the rock is sharp.

THE BAHAMAS UNDERGROUND

A Divers Forum

Thomas Varga

Every year the Royal Adelaide Hospital Hyperbaric Medicine Unit¹ organises a series of lectures as part of what they call the 'Divers Forum'. This year the speakers were prominent cave diver Brian Kakuk and John Lippmann from Divers Network Alert (DAN) Asia-Pacific². After having a cursory look at Brian Kakuk's main web site, Bahamas Underground³ I decided that this was an opportunity not to be missed and signed up for the mid-week evening event.

Upon arrival I noted that the lecture theatre was already half full, there was a good turn out for the event. Brian Kakuk⁴ was introduced by Ken Smith⁵ (cave diver and designer of the 'pinger' instrument⁶ that has played an important role in cave mapping). Brian quickly took to the stage with dazzling images of underwater caves in the Bahamas and captivating narration. Brian specifically moved to the Bahamas in order to explore and document the vast water-filled underground passages and caverns found there. Due to the area's geographic nature, a large number of caves, caverns and blueholes are filled with amazing formations all in pristine condition. It is difficult to describe the imagery provided, it is best appreciated by having a look at some of the following on-line videos instead:

In the Realm of Fangorn Forest⁷

The Crystal Caves of Abaco⁸

Dan's Cave 2007⁹

NOVA: Extreme Cave Diving¹⁰

Apart from the aesthetic joy ride, Brian and his team are engaged in a wide range of scientific projects. Part of the underwater regions have layers of water low in oxygen content which

¹ <http://www.rah.sa.gov.au/hyperbaric/index.php>

² <http://www.danasiapacific.org/>

³ <http://www.bahamasunderground.com>

⁴ <http://www.bahamasunderground.com/aboutus.html>

⁵ <http://www.cavediving.net.au/index.php/divers/95-ken-smith>

⁶ <http://www.cavedivers.com.au/simple-underwater-radiolocation-system>

⁷ <http://vimeo.com/3528068>

⁸ <http://vimeo.com/10402471>

⁹ <http://vimeo.com/897430>

¹⁰ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/earth/extreme-cave-diving.html>

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has helped to preserve prehistoric bones for palaeontological studies, as well as human artefacts that are important archaeological records. Then there is unique fauna, species of critters that are only found in certain caves. The karst formations also provide an insight into past climate and atmospheric changes. Many of the multi-coloured decorations have vivid red layers in them: layers of red Saharan desert soils blown over the Atlantic Ocean from Africa tens of thousands years ago.

These ongoing, parallel projects allow Brian to justify the need for cave conservation and preservation to the local government. Like everywhere else in the world, these caves are constantly under threat and are in need of protection and stewardship. To facilitate this he has established the Bahamas Caves Research Foundation¹¹ with the aim of furthering exploration, research and understanding of caves and blueholes in the Bahamas region. To date, the possibly most publicized outcome of these efforts were a feature article in the August 2010 edition of National Geographic¹². Brian mentioned that the main, 3 page, center-fold image took 4 days to achieve which shows the difficulty involved – as well the amount of effort they have put in – to showcase this truly exceptional environment.

The first talk was followed by a more sober topic: diving related fatality statistics in the Asia Pacific region in the last 30 years. This was delivered by John Lippmann¹³, the Executive Director of DAN Asia Pacific. (It is worth noting that John received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2007 for "service to scuba diving safety, resuscitation and first aid training, particularly through the establishment of the Divers Alert Network Asia-Pacific".¹⁴

The presentation was not limited to cave diving, it included all recreational diving and commercial diving as well. John explained that they have been looking into highlighting the series of events that leads to fatal outcomes in order to get a better understanding of how such incidents can be avoided. To quote from the Report on Australian Diving Deaths 1999–2002:

"The process of root cause analysis (RCA) can be applied to the investigation of diving fatalities with the aim of improving understanding of the sequence of events associated with such an accident. Categories include trigger, disabling agent, disabling injury and cause of death. Sometimes the disabling injury can be more relevant to the assessment of a diving fatality than the cause of death. An example of this is a situation in which a diver suffers a cerebral arterial gas embolism (CAGE) becomes unconscious in the water and subsequently drowns. The cause of death, in this case drowning, may not provide as good an insight into the accident as the fact that the diver suffered from CAGE."¹⁵

John then presented various statistics from the past 30 years. I do not have the accurate figures so I will refrain from presenting any misinformation. It was obvious however that a lot of the incidents were due to insufficient planning, training and fitness/health state.

¹¹ <http://www.bahamascaves.com/>

¹² <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/08/bahamas-caves/todhunter-text>

¹³ <http://www.danasiapacific.org/main/inside/welcome.php>

¹⁴ http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/honours/honour_roll/search.cfm?aus_award_id=1134076_type=advanced=true

<http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/honours/honour_roll/search.cfm?aus_award_id=1134076&search_type=advanced&showInd=trueoiu>

¹⁵ Report on Australian Diving Deaths 1999–2002. p. 80. Available at:

http://www.danasiapacific.org/main/_pdf/1999_2002%20Aust%20Death%20Report.pdf

THE BAHAMAS UNDERGROUND

While the topic was not heart warming, John managed to deliver it in a casual, relaxed way with the occasional joke thrown in. Following the talks there was food available (with vegetarian options, some sweet and savoury dishes and drinks. This allowed people to mingle and talk to each other and also ask questions from the presenters. I had to leave early but from what I could see there were a lot of discussions going on as I stepped out the door. In the end it was a well organised event (kudos to the Hyperbaric Unit) with professional speakers and engaging topics bringing together like-minded people in a relaxed, enjoyable setup. I am already looking forward to next year's event.

WERNER HERZOG GOES CAVING

Film Review

Clare Buswell

I first read about Herzog's film *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* in the London Review of Books way back in April of this year.¹⁶ The film, as it turned out, was shown at both the Sydney and Melbourne Film festivals later during the year. I despaired of it getting to Adelaide as a general release, and emailed those interstate to go and view it. So when it did show up here in Adelaide an email was sent to cavers around the place as something to go and see. So FUSSI and CEGSA members trundled off to the Nova Cinema, put on the 3D glasses and watched Herzog (director of such films as *Fitzcarraldo*, *Where the Green Ants Dream*, *The Enigma of Casper Hauser*, etc) go caving.

It was the usual first-time caver event, and I am sure that we cave photographers would have done a better job photographically, but that did not matter. What mattered was the cave art drawn 35,000 years ago, the fossil deposits of cave bears, and the human foot prints next to those of a wolf.¹⁷ The art is stunning, leaving you guessing as to what it means as well as admiring the skill of the Palaeolithic artists. In Chauvet Cave they drew bison, lions, bears, horses, deer and rhinoceroses. Some of the animals are drawn on their own, others drawn over each other suggesting a sense of movement and as one panel illustrates, gives the appearance of lions hunting in a pack.

There is also a drawing of the lower half of the female body drawn into the body of an animal, suggesting the link between humans and animals, which is later mythologized into the story of the Centaur. The drawing is partially hidden from view as it is drawn around a stalactite and can't be easily filmed. Herzog resorts to a camera on the end of a stick to film it.

The Curator of Art for the cave told the story of some of the handprints on the cave walls, stating that they know that the same person is responsible for some of them, as the handprints show a finger that is in some way deformed. From this 'finger print' they know that some of the handprints come from a single individual.

The bones of fossils litter some of the floors in the cave and have been carefully protected from those few who have permission to work in the cave. There is a prominent rock with a bear skull placed on it. What this means we can only speculate. Did one of the artists, 35,000 years ago simply pick it up and place it there on their journey in the cave? Or was it placed there to mark a point of significance? Of course we will never know and our speculations will remain just that.

¹⁶ Campbell P., *London Review of Books*. 26 April. 2011. p.16.

¹⁷ The art in the Lascaux Caves is 17,000 years old. The Alsace Cave art can only be seen as replicas in a specially designed gallery, as the cave itself is closed to all public access due to over visitation levels that have seriously damaged the original works.

WERNER HERZOG GOES CAVING

Grotto Chauvet lies about half way between Grenoble and Montpellier, was discovered in 1994 by three speleologists and is named after the leader of the group that found it. It is closed to all public access. You can't go and see these art works as you can those in the Sistine Chapel or view original documents held in an archive. Herzog's film represents the only opportunity that the general public will get to see it. This is what makes the film unique and therefore an opportunity not to be missed. From this perspective, Herzog's triumph may not, in this case, be his film making ability but his ability to negotiate access!

For those of you who did not get to see the film, google 'Chauvet cave art' or check out:
http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/chauvet/chauvet_cave_art.php

WHAT IS ON

Flinders Uni End of Year Break

Tasi	Dec 2-4 th	Trip is full.
End of year get together	Sun 11 th Dec	1pm. Bronya's Place. T-Shirt painting and general get together. BYO plate of food to share, wine, chair and eating implements. BYO T-shirt with NO pockets or logos on it. Paint colour will be black, so don't bring a black T-shirt. There will be a small charge to cover the cost of the paint.
Jan 2012	7 th	ASF Council meeting. Bankstown, Sydney
Jan 2012	TBA	Wet and wild trip. BYO wet suit. Ewan's ponds and others. Thomas co-ordinating.
Feb - May 2012	Joint FUSSI/CEGSA trip.	Date and place TBA.
MARCH 2012		JENOLAN/BUNGONIA Dates TBA Please note vertical skills will be required.

Other Events of Interest.

Bats of Gluepot Reserve.

2-4th Dec. A course on the natural history, survey techniques and identification of the insectivorous bats occurring on Gluepot Reserve. The course runs over 3 days and two nights and will suit all. See: www.riverland.net.au/gluepot