



Journal of the
Scientific Expedition Group

Volume 24 Number 2
September 2008



**NOTICE of
Scientific Expedition Group (SEG)
Annual General Meeting (AGM)
Friday 17 October, 2008**
Unley Civic Centre (enter from Oxford Tce)
7:15pm for a 7:30pm start

The guest speaker at the SEG AGM on Friday 17 October will be popular marine mammal expert Dr. Catherine Kemper, from the South Australian Museum, speaking on the following topic:

'Believe it or not – studying dead marine mammals helps their conservation'

Expedition Marqualpie 2008 Underway!
September 13 to 28, 2008

The major SEG expedition for 2008 is currently underway. The expedition is to the Marqualpie region of northern South Australia, approximately 100km north of Innamincka, in Coongie Regional Reserve.

The expedition will provide a great opportunity for people to observe and participate in professionally conducted field survey work with experienced biologists and natural historians. The expedition is being run in partnership with the Department for Environment and Heritage with surveys of vegetation, invertebrates, reptiles, mammals (including bats at night), birds, fungi, and a search for marsupial moles.

The expedition departed on September 13 and returns on September 28. A report of the expedition will be provided in the December issue of SEGments.

*******SEG Calendar 2008*******

September
September 13-28 SEG Expedition Marqualpie 2008
October
October 1-5 Minnowarra Spring Survey
October 3-8 VGRaSP October Trip
October 17 SEG AGM
December
Mid-December December issue of SEGments

**MINNAWARRA BIODIVERSITY PROJECT
Spring Survey 1-5 October, 2008**

The spring survey will be starting soon, coinciding with the school holidays. Mammals, reptiles and birds will be surveyed. All helpers are welcome, including families. It is a great opportunity for young people to become acquainted with bush creatures.

Traps will be opened on Wednesday 1st October 2008, so the first round of the traps will be open the morning of Thursday 2 October. They will be closed again on Sunday 5 October, the day before the public holiday.

Inspection of the traps commences at around 8am each day. This involves going to each of the 8 sites in the scrub by 4 wheel drive and checking the various traps. At each of the sites 6 pitfall traps (sunk permanently into the ground) are opened for 4 days, when a small fence is run along the ground above them. Small mammals and reptiles are caught this way. At each site there are also 15 Elliott traps, small aluminium boxes that snap shut when a small mammal runs in. The bait is a mixture of peanut butter and rolled oats. The animals are weighed, sexed, marked and released. At each end of each line is a cage trap for larger animals. The traps are inspected again around 4 pm. After the final inspection the pit fall traps are closed, and the other traps collected and cleaned up for next time.

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**MINNAWARRA BIODIVERSITY PROJECT
Spring Survey 1-5 October, 2008**

Camping facilities are available, so it is possible to attend for 1 to 4 days.

Subscriptions or small donations (suggested \$10 adults, \$5 students, double for campers) to help cover expenses are welcome.

Extra help to set up on Tuesday 30 September and on Wednesday 1 October would be gratefully received. Contact Richard Willing on 8558 6381 or 0408 807 517 if you can help, or for more information

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**Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges Scientific
Project (VGRaSP) July 11-15 Trip Report**

Written by John Love

Leaders: John Love, Ray Hickman.

Other members: Sarah Jewell, Annabel Geitz, Garry Trethewey.

We left Adelaide early on Friday, travelling independently, Ray with Garry, the other two with John. We met by coincidence at Hawker, where we stopped for fuel and a snack. More food at Copley Bakery. John's party caught up with Garry and Ray as they were rebuilding the road to the entrance to the park where rain had caused a deep wash-out. We set up camp beside the creek near the park boundary at 4pm.

On Saturday morning we went to the enclosure pluviometer where Sarah practiced changing the data logger, then to the water level gauge. We then divided into two parties. This added to the risk of mishap but four of us had previous experience in the area, we knew each other's planned route and we arranged to meet at Wild Ass Waterhole. Sarah, Annabel and Garry did the wallaby walk and changed the Arcoona Bluff data logger. John and Ray went directly south from base camp to a point west of the Arcoona South pluvio then across the ridge that forms the west boundary of the Arcoona South catchment. The southward walk is easy going over open country, but, after having crossed a saddle it was necessary to cross several ridges to reach the pluvio. Having changed the data logger we followed down Arcoona South Creek for about 2km, then headed north-east. This route might be suitable for a party going to Arcoona South on the way back to base. It involves carrying

complete packs all the way but is shorter over-all.

Both parties took longer than anticipated and both arrived at the junction of Wild Ass and Arcoona Creeks at about 3.30 pm. There was a pool about 4m long in Wild Ass Waterhole and water seemed to be trickling from it into a smaller pool. There was no trickling the next morning. We made an early camp on sandy ground a few metres east of Wild Ass Waterhole.

On Sunday we proceeded with day packs to Sambot pluvio and Sambot Waterhole, where there was a small amount of water between the stones at the bottom of the hole. John, having had an unsatisfactory night with leg cramps, stayed behind while the other four went to the Plateau pluvio and returned via the headwaters of Grandfield Creek, where more good water was found. After meeting at Vandenberg camp site we returned to our camp near Wild Ass.



*Trickle of water at Sambot waterhole
Photograph provided by Garry Trethewey*

An hour or so was spent on Monday morning catching and identifying Wild Ass invertebrates in fine, misty rain. The rain stopped about mid-morning. After lunch at base camp, we went to Maynard's Well pluvio and changed the data logger. While John was trying to fit a sun shield on the transmitter modem, the whole box crashed to the ground and some equipment in it was dislodged. Garry reconnected it in what appeared to be the correct way, the box was reinstalled and the attempt at fitting the shield was abandoned. We spent the night in the shearers' quarters, paying Eddie Nicholls the usual \$10 per head.

On Tuesday, after changing the data loggers at North Moolooloo and Pfitzner's Well and having lunch at Copley Bakery, the two cars returned independently to Adelaide, arriving at 8 pm.

over me. After that it was time to go. My favourite animals were the squirrel monkeys. It was awesome fun at the zoo and I will never forget it.



Nominations called for the 2008/09 Committee

Nominations are open for the SEG Committee for 2008/2009. Nominations must be signed by the nominator and the nominee and sent to: SEG Committee, PO Box 501, UNLEY SA 5061. Nominations need to be received by 2 Oct.2008.

The present Committee members will retire and are eligible for re-election. But please note:

- John Love, is retiring as the SEG Committee Secretary
- Linda-Marie McDowell will not continue as the Editor of SEGments.

Please notify SEG if you are interested becoming the Editor of SEGments or wish to be the Secretary.



**SA MUSEUM -
NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK Display
Saturday 16 to Sunday 24 August**

Written by John Love

Once again SEG was invited to participate in the South Australian Museum's celebration of National Science Week, which ran from Saturday 16 to Sunday 24 August.

The SEG display consisted mainly of photographs, our standard brochure and, for the first weekend, digital projections of DVDs made by Trent Porter. The event organiser noticed that the images on the screen were faint because of back lighting, and offered to move us to a darker place in the marquee. However, Graeme Oats provided his DVD viewer for the second weekend, so the projector and screen were not needed.

Demonstrations of how an Elliott trap snaps shut produced some interesting reactions in young children, as did a captive red teddy in a cage trap.

Seven members of the SEG Committee ensured that the display was staffed for the whole of both weekends, and one other person responded to an appeal for help published in the June issue of SEGments. The display, without the high tech, was unstaffed for most of the time on Monday to Friday, when public attendance was low.

Several parents expressed interest in taking their kids to Minnowarra for a day. A few people expressed interest in joining SEG and going on our major expeditions or getting involved in the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges Scientific Project. A teacher, who as a teenager, attended an expedition run by the Australian and New Zealand Schools Exploration Society (the fore-runner of SEG) was particularly interested. He spoke of long-term plans to entice some of his middle-school students to join one of our expeditions under his supervision. If he succeeds, this would take SEG back to its original intention of giving young people a taste of science in an adventurous context.

Diary of a caving & whale watching expedition

Written by Alun Thomas

This is a diary of a trip to the Nullabor Plain in August 1987 to visit caves and to observe whales. There were three leaders and drivers and nine expeditioners travelling in three vehicles.

Day 1: We left Adelaide at about 9:30am. After stops at Pt Wakefield, Port Augusta and Iron Knob we camped at Wudinna Rock (apparently the largest monolithic rock in Australia after Ayres Rock). Light rain fell overnight.

Day 2: We woke up early to climb Mt Wudinna to see the sunrise. It took only 7 minutes to get to the top. Unfortunately cloud was too heavy for good photographs. Light drizzle fell during breakfast and everyone was packed ready to travel at 8:30am but by the time the vehicles were packed it was 9:32am before we left.

We arrived at Ceduna at 12:01pm. We had a short stop there and then on to Clare Bay for a late lunch after getting bogged on the way. We had lunch and then went footprint hunting along the foreshore. There were said to be animal footprints in the sedimentary rock which lined the shore. We walked over the tracks many times before we recognised a muddy footprint (two toed euro type) with not just a depression but pushed up at the sides. There is clear indication of a large kangaroo type creature (Sthenurus?) hopping five steps each about 2m apart plus smaller animals going in the opposite direction. Also possible human footprints but they were less distinct. From our leader's

books it seems that the sediments that the footprints were made in were laid down about 26,000 yrs ago and that the platform was exposed 6 to 10 yrs ago.

We did not finish at Clare Bay until 4:30pm and then we headed off to the west to get as far west as possible before setting up camp. We were not permitted to camp on Yalata land and actually camped about twenty kilometres west of Yalata in mulga scrub. It was a fine evening.

Day 3: The night was cold and we found a thin layer of ice over exposed gear in the morning. The morning was clear with light easterly winds.

We set off west at 9:30am and turned north along a track about ten kilometres before Nullarbor. We saw a small cave about seven kilometres along the track and then became slightly geographically confused before ending up on the right road to Jimmies Cave.

Jimmies Cave has four entrances in an area of a half to one acre and is quite shallow (about 4-6m deep). The cave is mainly interesting for stone formations and cairns set up under some of the entrances. The question is who set them up, why and when? There were also many animal bones, recent and old. We spent one and a half hours underground and had lunch before departing.

We went on to Nullarbor for a drink and fuel stop. We then left Nullarbor at 4pm to go to Wombat Cave, which is about 100km west and about 20-30km north. Wombat Cave is just south of the old highway near Coompana water tank (1km west and 1km south of Coompana water tank).

Wombat Cave is on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain so there were some trees for firewood. We reached a campsite at about 5:45pm and had a brief look at the cave before dark. The cave has two entrances, one a crawl which wombats use and another with a drop of 4-5m. The entrance doline underground is about 20-30metres in diameter and has aboriginal hand stencils on the roof. One hand print has only three and a half fingers and a thumb. There was a cat and a dingo skeleton in the cave. We planned to look in the deeper parts of the cave in the morning.

Day 4: We heard dingos howling to the south of camp at about 6:30am. We got up at about 7am. It was a clear morning but there was an extensive mist to the north. We spent about one hour in the cave. It is deep and dusty.

Wombat cave is a collapse doline with a central cone.

We set off to Eucla at about 10:50am and reached Border Village at about 11:30am where we stopped for fuel and refreshment. We then set off to Abrakurrie Cave which is inland of the escarpment. On the way to Abrakurrie Cave we saw Chowilla Collapse Doline, over 30m deep and 50-70m in diameter. We then followed a line of collapses in a generally southern direction to Abrakurrie Cave.

Abrakurrie Cave has a doline of about 230m long and about 30m wide in a V-shape getting deeper at the south end and a cave entrance under cliffs at that end. The cave goes down a steep rock fall over large boulders to a mainly flat silt floor about 70m below the surface. The main chamber is about 350m long and about 50m wide with a chamber height of about 25-25m high and with domes at each end of 50m high. It is said to be the largest cave chamber in Australia. The floor is almost level silt from numerous floodings although there are several stone piles. We spent a lot of time taking photos of the chamber by leaving a camera shutter open at one end of the chamber and walking down the sides of the chamber setting off a flashlight at intervals. The chamber is so huge that a Dolphin torch was useless to look at the top and sides of the chamber. A brighter torch showed bat colonies on the ceilings. In parts the ceiling is formed from brown limestone which overlies a white limestone of the walls.

We spent about one and three quarters of an hour in the cave and then set off for Madura. This involved travelling down the Hampton Escarpment and out onto the main road at Mundrabilla. We filled up water at tanks on the side of the road at about 5:15pm and then went on to Madura which we reached at 6:25pm. We set up camp in the caravan park neat the bottom end of the park and apparently near the septic outlet judging by the smell. We had dinner and then spent the evening at the bar.

Day 5: We had a fairly late start and set off for Mullamullang Cave at about 9:45am and reached the cave at about 10:30am. We were fitted out with helmets and lights and set off into the cave at about 11am.

Mullamullang Cave has a double doline with a steep entry talus at one end of one of them. The dolines are about 80m x 30m.

The main tunnel is about 5km long with many side branches and underground lakes.

One actually has to climb around huge boulders to get into the cave. It is difficult to see how some stay there, they appear to hang in mid air. The cave floor is at a level of about 60m below ground level and for the first 1km is fairly level. We saw structures referred to as Southerly Buster and Dune but further on numerous collapsed rocks made travel fairly difficult and required climbing over and jumping between rocks. We walked about 4km over ever increasing rock piles until we were at the top of a 70m rock pile with White Lake at the bottom. At that stage we were about 3m from the roof of the cave and had about 60m of rock above us.

White Lake is cold, slightly salty and very clear. It looks about 3m deep but is probably 15- 20m deep. We had lunch and then went for a short swim, very short. The lake is not as cold as Ewen Ponds in the South East of South Australia but is quite cold.

We spent about two and a half hours getting to White Lake, one hour there and about two hours to get back to the entrance. We would have been quicker getting back but one expeditioner sprained an ankle and another was very slow walking from rock to rock. We took photographs at the Dune and up the talus slope and came out of the cave at about 4:30pm.

We drove back to Madura and had a counter meal at the pub. The meal was slow and small. One of the leaders showed slides of cave diving in Australia. It was quite a cold night but not dewy.

Day 6: We set off from Madura at about 10am heading west along the base of the escarpment. We had a look at several ruins and wells before arriving at Burnabbie ruins by lunchtime where we made camp. After lunch we went down to Eyre Bird Observatory over lots of sandhills and limestone ridges.

Eyre Bird Observatory is in an old overland telegraph station and has a museum showing the history of the place. We saw pure white sandhills and the beach and walked along the beach. We saw a New Holland honeyeater and a spiny cheeked honeyeater and were shown a pigmy possum with four young. I got to hold one pigmy possum joey in my hand. We also saw a grey currawong and Major Mitchell

cockatoo drinking at a bird bath. We then went back to camp and had a barbecue for dinner. It was a cold night and the wind from the north-east was quite strong.

Day 7: Some of us were up before sunrise and climbed up to the top of the escarpment and back before breakfast. We set off for Cocklebidy at 9:45am along the base of the escarpment and then up a very bad road to the top of the escarpment. We reached Cocklebidy at about 11am and then went on the Cocklebidy Cave.

Cocklebidy Cave is about 10 km west and 10 km north of Cocklebidy. The cave has a degraded doline 120m long and a talus slope at the north end leads to a large chamber about 360 metres long, 30m high x 50m wide with a large lake. The lake is 180m in length within the main chamber but is said to go a further 4kmbeyond the chamber.

We went underground at about 1pm and carried rafts and swimming gear. It was a very steep and long slope leading to the main chamber. We pumped up the rafts and went boating on the lake. The water was not as cold as White Lake but was still quite cool. We paddled to the end of the main chamber and back. We took lots of photographs and time exposures.

We got quite cold in the cave and came up after two and a half hours. We got very hot climbing out again. We headed back to Madura at 3:45pm. The day was fine and warm but there was a change approaching. We arrived at Madura at about 5pm and had a drink at the pub. Dinner was roast lamb with a gum leaf crushed over it 'mallee roast'.

Day 8: It was windy overnight but the morning was fine and clear. I was ready by 7:30am as instructed but our chief leader did not get up until 8:20am and we were very late getting going. We actually set off at 9:55am. The expeditioner who had sprained her ankle had decided to return to Adelaide by bus because camping out was too difficult. She hoped to catch a bus about lunchtime.

We headed back to Eucla and on to Weebubbe Cave. On the way we stopped at Mundrabilla to fill water containers, looked at the old telegraph station at Eucla and stocked up at the roadhouse and pub. We arrived at the cave at about 1:20pm. We set up camp and then prepared for caving including skindiving.

Weebubbie Cave has a large doline 50m in diameter with a drop of 20m at one side and 50m at the other side. A talus floor leads to a lake at about 90m underground. The surface of the lake is about 150m long and 20m wide. It is very deep at the rear edges and shallower with rock piles in the middle. The total length is about 350m.

Three ladders made it easier to get down the steeper bits of the doline into the cave. We swam and snorkelled and took lots of photographs. We used a raft to paddle to the end of the cave. It appeared to extend a lot further under water. We spent three and three quarter hours underground and came up about 6pm.

Day 9: The day was still cloudy but there had been no rain overnight. Everyone was a bit slow around the fire this morning. Today we went whale watching. We stocked up with food etc at Eucla and then went to Wilsons (Bluff) to look for whales, blowholes and an aboriginal flint quarry. We found them all. After driving along the edge of the cliff for some time we stopped to look for a blowhole, found four, saw a pair of whales and found a quarry all in one area. The blowholes were 8-10m deep but did not seem to go anywhere. The flint quarry had lots of chippings but no good bits. The whales, though, were magnificent.

We first saw a pair of whales, apparently an adult and a calf down towards Merdayerrah sand patch and watched them slowly swim around in circles and flapping flippers on the surface. Soon another pair swam up from the west and joined them and all four swam around together led by the calf, once again rolling and just lifting their tails out of the water. They were a quarter to half a km away but we could hear them blowing out air. Finally we had to leave but just as we were one of the expeditioners ran up and said he had found another blow hole to look at, right on the cliff top.

We stopped at Merdayerrah sand flats and saw another whale just off shore so climbed onto the top of the Nissan to see it. Merdayerrah sand hills are modern sand dunes over a Pleistocene pavement.

We set off to Head of the Bight to camp and see more whales and inscription sites. On the way we stopped at Nullarbor and arrived at the Head of the Bight at 6:30pm. The area is apparently known to the aborigines as Ilgamba. We saw one whale disporting until it

got to dark to see. We made camp at the western end of the sand hills quite near to the sea. It was quite difficult to find firewood. I intend to sleep out even if it rains. It is quite cloudy but we will have to hope that the cloud stay high. Actually the clouds clear by midnight and the night got quite cold.

Day 10: Four whales were sighted from the dunes next to the camp. One small one spent a long time "standing" on its tail and flapping its tail and about 2m of its body out of the water. After packing up we went down to have a look at an inscription on limestone rocks near Twin Rocks. Our leader showed us where he had seen an inscriptions possibly made by Baudin in 1802-3. While going back to camp we saw two sea lions disporting in waves quite close to shore. Apparently there had been no record of them there before.

We set off at 11am and skirted around the Head of the Bight sand hills – very extensive – and then onto the highway to Ceduna. We reached Minnipa at 4:45pm and headed north into the Gawler Ranges and camped at Yanninee Wells.

Day 11: Everyone was urged to pack quickly to enable us to visit Lake Gairdner on the way through the Gawler Ranges. All tents were down by 7:30am and we actually set off at 8:40am after group photographs. We made good time through the ranges and so we went north just before to Mt Ive to Lake Gairdner.

Lake Gairdner was completely dry and hard salt and a vast area. Islands 10-15km away look as if they are floating in the sky. The salt lake makes distances appear quite foreshortened. We set off again and reached Iron Knob by 1:15pm and went on to Port Augusta for lunch. We left Port Augusta at about 3pm and arrived back in Adelaide at about 6:30pm.

Have you got access to an Email address to receive SEGments?

If you currently receive SEGments by Australia Post delivery and you have an email address, and would like to receive your issue of SEGments via email, please advise SEG of your email address.

SEG's email address is : segcomms@telstra.com

Postage is one of SEG's major expenses and one way in reducing our costs is to communicate by email.

Graeme Oats Hon. Treasurer



SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION GROUP - Membership

The Scientific Expedition Group came into being at a public meeting on 21st August 1984.

Membership is open to any persons, family or organisation interested in the following aims:

- * The promotion and running of expeditions of a scientific, cultural and adventurous nature.
- * The furthering of knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.
- * Promotion of the values and philosophy of wilderness.
- * Enabling people to learn the skills required for planning and running expeditions, and to develop sound field techniques.

Members receive regular information on SEG activities and expeditions

Patron: His Excellency Rear-Admiral Kevin Scarce AO CSC RANR, Governor of South Australia

SEG COMMITTEE Office Bearers

President Dr Richard Willing
 Chairman Alun Thomas
 Vice-Chairman John Hayes
 Hon. Secretary John Love
 Hon. Treasurer Graeme Oats

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SEG WEBSITE www.communitywebs.org/scientificexpeditiongroup

SEG EMAIL ADDRESS segcomms@telstra.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS (Including GST)

Working adult member ----- \$20.00
 Pensioner student or unemployed ----- \$10.00
 Family membership ----- \$25.00
 Organisation membership ----- \$25.00

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

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Address

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E-mail

Details of scientific, cultural, and adventuring or other relevant skill or interests you may be prepared to share with the group:

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Applications should be addressed to :

The Hon. Secretary
 Scientific Expedition Group Inc.
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