

A high-angle photograph of a person rappelling down a dark, circular opening in a rock face. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, blue pants, and a yellow helmet. They are holding a rope that extends from the top left of the frame down to them. The rock surface is textured and shows some signs of weathering. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a technical climbing or rescue operation.

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Front Cover Photo:

Thomas descends into N206,
Thampana Cave.

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THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

The Driving Bit!

Left at 4:15, forgot laptop. Left at 4:30. Pickups Balhannah (ice, esky&battery) & Hahndorf (duffel bag). Got to Richards (Hutt St @ 5:45 – only 30 mins late). Pizza got warmed, Hutt St cellars got raided, Cibo supplied coffee and we were off (pew) by 7:30 and out of the suburbs by 8:00. First re-fool at Pt Wakefield, then Pt Agutter by 11:30pm, at Kimba at 1am. Found digs basic and not cheap. Breakfast and hot shower were good in the moaning. Woke at 7:15 and on the road at 8:30. Fuel top-up at Kyancutta's genial general store.

Battling strong winds, slow caravans, the occasional spit of rain, flash of lightening and snakes (one we deaded, the other was too fast for us.), we sallied forth onto Ceduna sunshine and Bill's Pasta 'n Pizza for coffee and cake (Tira mi su was best). Shade cloth for the car, gloves for Richard and a bag of ice to prep the ice-esity. Back on the road at 1:15 pm.

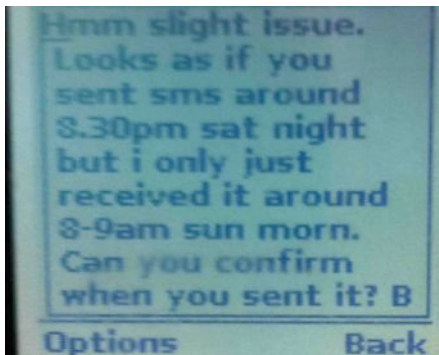
A short fuel top-up (\$1.979/litre unleaded) at Nullarbor roadhouse for the car and ice-cream for its occupants was accompanied by the news of storms in Perth. We were experiencing strong winds. At the border by 6:15, driving into the setting sun, and buffeted by strong winds. The food guards at Boarder village gave us the weather report for the night, (lots of wind no rain, (they wished for rain)) and said we could bring carrots with the green bits chopped off into WA! They became even more talkative when we said we were going north at the border to near Forrest and warned us of the tyre eating rocks on the Nullarbor. We proceeded to Eucla and collected our pre-ordered fruit and vegies. They were as usual, of good quality and well wrapped to survive the next 9 days of camp conditions. Sundown at 6:50 (Ade. time). Drove onto Weebubbie cave campsite, set up camp and collapsed into bed. So this trip we managed to do the two day drive in a day and half a night. It worked.



Camp at Weebubbie Cave

Safety issues.

On all previous FUSSI trips to the Nullarbor we have had at least 2 vehicles and around 6-8 people. The second car acts as a backup. If one blows up you can still reach the hwy or Forrest depending on how far you are from either. This trip with only one car and the 4 of us, required a safety back up plan. So we had hired a Sat phone

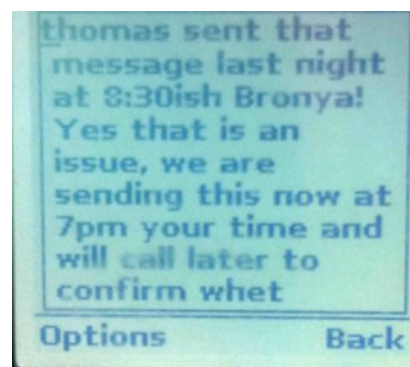


Daily rate was \$25.30 (\$23 + GST). Bond was \$200. Outbound call cost was \$3 per minute. Outbound text was \$1 per text. Inbound calls and text were free. The phone had a national mobile number, i.e. callers and senders were charged at their standard national mobile rate. Our eventual call/text costs came to \$28.16. We booked it for 12 days – total cost, \$303.60.

At Left and Below: Samples of SMS problems.

THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

At Port Wakefield we tested the phone by texting Bronya who was to be our daily safety contact. We had said to her before we left that we would text her every day at 7.30pm. Her instructions were to call up the emergency crowd if she had not heard from us by 8am the following morning. So at Port Wakefield Richard wrestled the Sat phone into submission, texted Bronya on it and we then used our mobiles to call her to ascertain if she had received any Sat phone messages. She had not. More wrangling and we discovered that we had not put her mobile number in correctly! We did get it sorted, but 2 days later, she did not receive our 7.30pm text until an hour past the 8am callout time the following morning. She waited to give the coms a bit of time. Lucky for all concerned that

A screenshot of a text message on a mobile phone. The text is in blue on a white background. It reads: "Camping at Webbs cave for the next two nights. Going into Tampanna tomorrow. Cold evening, send warmth. Cheers, Thomas".

Camping at Webbs cave for the next two nights. Going into Tampanna tomorrow. Cold evening, send warmth. Cheers, Thomas

she did. All in all, the Sat phone and our backup plan worked well. The cost per person was minimal.

Underground Bits:

T,R&H took wet suits and face masks into Weebubbie the following morning. In by 11:30, out by 1:30. We made use of an inflated tyre found in the cave and freedived the lake. Lots of looking at rocks by the free divers. Heiko left them to it and emerged back into daylight and sunshine around midday. Clare, meanwhile packed, drank coffee and did not read the newspaper!

The freedivers arrived back at the surface, quite satisfied with blue water, rocks, depth and the cave in general.

And so onto Abracurrie via the Reid and Old Coach roads. Saw much wildlife: Kangaroos of course, very few lizards, but many, many Wombats, running, jumping and standing still atop their palaces. This was broad daylight, have wombats changed their habits? Towards dusk Clare spotted what she at first thought an eagle, but turned out to be a Busterd. It tried hard to hide, but alas the Nullarbor was coverless, unlike last year's hay crop scenery.

We entered Abracurrie at 2:30 and wandered about, marvelling at the sheer size, calculating the height (unsuccessfully) and taking pictures. Out by 5:30 and down to a place that in 2011 we saw too much of - Mundrabilla Roadhouse. Once again we ended up spending the night with generators and road noise. For a well-earned rest, wash and our own cooked meal (Nepenthe 2011 Sav B.), using the table at the golf course for cooking, it was \$25 well spent. Used Satphone to keep in touch with Adelaide. Eventually got to bed at 11.

Near-crack-of-dawn rise, breakfast, pack (redoing tarp, to keep more dust out of the trailer),



Heiko exiting Old Homestead Cave

Photo: Richard Boyle

watch people play golf, (very odd), fuel top-up and ice-cream treat saw us head off down the welcomingly smooth bitumen to Mundrabilla homestead. Couldn't rouse the farmer, so on to Old Homestead on the Forrest road by 12. As the season is back to normal, so the danger from grass seeds catching fire under cars was minimal, but bushes were tinder dry. We made good progress, Thomas being more familiar with the road, stopping for lunch and to pick up firewood. As we moved further into the treeless section of the road up to Forrest,

THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

Richard thought that we were mad. When we told him that the hut was a garden shed with rain water tanks his idea of sleeping in a European style mountain type hut vanished. Oh!

At Old Homestead hut by 4:45 (just after disturbing a black cat fighting a white hare (or a rabbit the same size as the cat) – the cat scurried off and the hare hobbled away – probably the same cat/kittens we saw last year) and a well-earned rest from the dust, potholes and ruts of the ‘track’. Settled in, cleaned up hut, and promptly made it our own. We finally sat around the place with beer, treats, whiskey, fire and a hearty meal. Smashing sunset, warm evening and no wind. A perfect Nullarbor night.

The next day (Tuesday) was crack-of-dawn stuff. Up by 9am! We got in-cave by 2 with Thomas&Clare rigging. Repeated last year’s effort (without going over Yikes-and-aAway) got out by 6pm. Richard and Thomas spent lots of time trying to relate map and distance, without success. At one stage a group conference ended with: ‘I think we are here’. ‘I agree’ says another, ‘let’s go left’ said someone, ‘let’s go right’ says someone else, whilst a third person states: ‘I want to go up!’ It was an enjoyable couple of hours spent looking around. Richard found the logbook and discovered that the last logbook entry was for a FUSSI trip 25/9/11! So we had visited on the very same day a year apart, and freshly deposited silt near the end of the crawl after the fridgedair revealed no footprints. Perhaps nobody had visited. We placed a bat box in the South doline and headed home. A plentiful dinner (2011 Giesen Sav B.), sleep of the just and back up and at it by 9 the next morning.



Map conference!
Photo: Richard Boyle

Wednesday saw a leisurely morning, eating, drinking endless cups of tea, talking, resting, checking data on the computer and discussing plans to go caving. Actually got into cave by two and to RDFND by our turnaround time of 5pm. The walk out to RDFND just shows how much this cave has to offer, not only in size, but its structure, its fine gypsum hairs, silt floors, cobbled floors, box work, and the odd troglobitic fauna. Last year we saw one cave cricket, *Nullarborensis Rhapsidophoridae* just past the Hairy Wall. I looked for them in the area near the dug well and



Richard admiring “Stals Demise” Thampana.
Photo: T. Varga

around the entrance chamber this year but couldn’t find any, that however, does not mean they were not there. We were out by 7pm, in time to let Bronya know all was OK. Heiko’s Scurion battery pack seems to get 9 hours, (he runs it pretty high). It was so dim he lost the way out after the dug well! It just lasted till he got out of the cave. The bat detector was put out at 7:15pm (to 7am) in North cave doline. We returned to camp too knackered to be bothered with a main meal, so just cheese platter and delicious re-constituted dried fruit with one of Clare’s superb custards. Zema 2008 Cab Sav washed it all down.

THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

Thursday: Heiko's notes read: "More food and treats and talking and quick drive to charge batteries. Thomas and Heiko did morning surface trogs - located several features and star droppers. More lunch and the T,R&C crew went into OH to locate the Officer's Mess. Heiko went in search of NXK380 - found to be tagged as N1998. Cavers out by 6:30 in the eve having derigged the pitch. Curry, Chapattis and dessert - pav, custard, Morello Cherries, with Campbell's Muscat. T&C packed for Friday's run to the Webb campsite. Bat box out at 6:30pm (South cave), back by 7:15am." So it must have been.

Friday saw the inevitable pack up with us on the road by 10:30. Wedgies (young from a distance) kangaroos, wombats and lunch on the way. We knocked on Mundrabilla HS door, but no answer so drove onto Mundrabilla roadhouse by 2:45 for (very welcome) showers, ice-cream and fuel. Thomas improvised a fix for a loose mud flap with cable ties. Got going by 3:50. Forgot Richards knapsack. Got going by 4:00pm. Forgot to get ice (none for sale) for the icebox. Eventually left by 4:10. Again knocked on Mundrabilla HS front door, but



everyone was still out. We drove onto Webbs campsite by 5 and found the cave fenced off. It appears that some (bored, or policy mad driven DEC manager) has seen fit to have fenced off Witches, Thampanna and Webbs caves. The fences do not simply fence off the doline entrances but an area approximately 700m square around each cave. On top of this there are two signs in the entrance of each cave.

On talking later with Colin Campbell he has had an interesting year since we visited. He was paid to put the fences in and now spends considerable time removing entangled camels, and kangaroos from them. Further, DEC in an effort to control bushfires managed to have a burn off that did not quite go out. It reignited, burning a considerable area of his property, destroying water tanks and fencing infrastructure. The fences around the caves beggar belief, as a 3m wide strip of vegetation has been totally removed so that the fences could go in. The removal of such large amounts of native vegetation, provokes the words "environmental vandalism" to spring to mind. In the meantime, Colin is carting water to his stock as rain this year has been negligible.

But we digress. We set up camp, put the Bat Detector out at 6:00pm, retrieved at 6:50am. Leftovers for tea and chocolate, Muscat and (major crisis) last of the whiskey for afters. Slight drizzle at 11pm.

Saturday 29th dawned overcast with sun burning off cloud and sun out by 8:45. Heiko sighted a flock of camels on his morning constitutional. After a hectic morning of breakfast, cups of tea, brunch, elevenses and packing, we got under way by 11:30, and arrived at Thampanna blowhole, which completely failed the 'hat' test, by 1pm. Rigged, and in-cave by 1:30.



The new fence and super hwy

THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

Rapidly found the plughole and negotiated the drain (again evidence of recent water inundation) and got to the railway tunnel, doing photo tagging of the stalls. The floors around and beyond the “Angel” are pristine. So it was boots off and walk in the footprint of the leader to negotiate the railway tunnel. We set ourselves a turnaround time of 5pm and to this end we re-negotiated the drain in 19mins (don’t remember it being that short and easy!?) on the way out.

We collected our sucked-in hat, exited and de-rigged by 6:30. We packed the car and watched a wonderful sunset/moonrise, whilst eating chocolates and drinking beer - a fitting caving finale for FUSSI Nullarbor 2012. We drove slowly back to camp, because of kangaroos and fencing wire on the track. Bat box out at 8:30pm (and retrieved at 7:05am). A quick meal of pesto with the second Giesen, saw us review the trip and ‘bathe’ in its glory.

Sunday dawned cold and with a heavy dew but a crystal clear sky and no wind for once! And so to pack up ... in record time! Got under way by 12:00pm and saw 6ft black coloured slithery thing on way out. Saw dingo and wedgies on escarpment. Finally found Colin Campbell in (Brie & kids were away at school camp), about to cart 19 tonnes of water for his stock – season has turned quite dry.

Other events:

On driving back out to the tarmac, just outside of the Mundrabilla HS gate, we found 4 guys



from England trying to tie the busted front bumper bar onto their car with shoe laces! Thomas helped them glue it back into place with a bunch of cable ties. They were driving from Perth, hoping to make Adelaide in 13 hours: ah! the optimism of the young immigrants. (They probably made it, and we did not see any abandoned bits of bumper bar on the way home.) About 3 mins after the bumper bar issue had resolved itself, a lone pushbike rider appeared. So we waited and met up with Chris Sims from Victor Harbour who was riding his treadley around Australia for charity. We chatted and donated him an apple (we had just finished our supply of Haigh’s chocolates!), which was warmly received and energetically devoured.

Heiko resting in the Drain

Photo: Clare Buswell

For our lunch stop we investigated water tanks on the hwy outside Mundrabilla. It is a good place for lunch: shade, tables and tame Kangaroos and Crows. Water is not fit for drinking unless boiled to death. By the time we got to Yatala the full moon was rising, bright, beautiful and dark red. Made our digs in Penong by 8:30, procured beers, cooked tea and HAD SHOWERS. Slept on soft beds ...



A Bat Detector: L- R, Battery, Microphone/sensor electrics and bottom white box is the recorder. Microphone overhanging the box edge.

Notes:

THIS NULLARBOR LIFE

Cost of the trip was \$2687, of which petrol was \$976, food \$1081, accommodation \$295, and sundry \$335. Cost per person was \$671.75.

We recorded 500 bat calls, mostly from *Chalinolobus morio* and these were all recorded at Webbs Cave. Nothing at all at Old Homestead Cave

Old Homestead hut needs a new broom, the rainwater tank at the loo and the loo door need attention. We did our best to clear the blocked rainwater downpipe at the loo. Hopefully, this will allow for rain to get into it. The tank was dry on our arrival. The hut itself needs renewed bituminised foam which sits between the roof iron and the shed wall/top plate. It helps keep the bugs out and the roof from rattling. Please let South Australian cavers know if you are going out and are intending to fix stuff so we all don't turn up with a couple of hundred metres of foam!

Eucla weather records during period of trip:

Day	21/9	22/9	23/9	24/9	25/9	26/9	27/9	28/9	29/9	30/9	1/10
Max	33.4	20.6	18.3	26.9	36.8	26.2	30.3	17.9	17.7	19.1	25.2
Min	10.2	15.0	7.3	4.0	10.1	9.5	10.0	10.4	10.8	4.4	7.5

This trip report was put together by Clare Buswell and Heiko Maurer.



Walking to the entrance of N206. Thampana Cave. Note the new signs.

Photo: Richard Boyle

NEW BEGINNINGS AT NARACOORTE

Clare Buswell

Sept 8/9th.

This trip was a joint state caving clubs trip. So four FUSSI retro-bates meet up with many CEGSA and Victorian Speleos at Naracoorte Caves for a weekend of caving, taking and more of the same. For Richard, Heiko Thomas and myself we wanted to sort out some food logistics, SRT practice and other Nullarbor related stuff. We did manage to do that over the course of the weekend, but lots of other events of the weekend were to prove a turning point, in particular for SA cavers.

Firstly, on the Saturday morning, Deb Craven-Carden the current manager of the NCNP, in addressing the motley bunch of cavers, reversed nigh on 20-odd years of caver exclusion from the park by inviting cavers to become actively involved with the future development of the area. She warmly accepted that caving is a legitimate recreational activity, and that without it you do not get speleologists. She acknowledged the importance of cavers knowledge and skills and wants us involved. To further this aim, all the SA caving clubs have recently set up a working party to examine ways we can get our caving needs meet and enable Deb to get what she wants achieved. More on this topic in later issues.

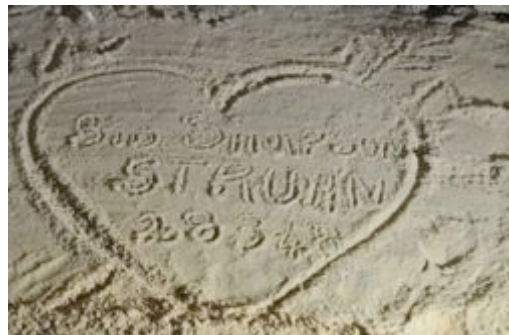
Meanwhile, back over the morning coffee, trips were organised, groups of cavers dispersed to caves around the place, equipment sorted and eventually most of us were underground somewhere around midday.



Sand Cave's Sand Cones. Photo: N. Skinner

Clare, Heiko, Thomas, Ken Grimes, (VSA), and Richard, visited Sand Cave. (The last FUSSI trip into Sand Cave was many, many decades past.) Access was prohibited by the then owner, and since then access has remained next to zero. NCNP purchased the property a couple of years back and they have been doing a management plan for it and working on above surface revegetation. Steve Bourne has done some route marking but the

rubbish that is in the sand cones still remains. He showed us on the map where things were and what land marks to look for. With knowledge and map in hand we rigged the entrance solution tube, abseiled or laddered down the hole and wandered off. The entrance solution tube in Sand is a narrow, twisting one, which bells open at the bottom, leaving you to land on the top of a sand cone. The top of it has been concreted to help secure the gate and maybe stabilize the top to the solution tube. Ken who had been here sometime previously, had a good idea of what the cave offered so we made our way out to the chamber with the signatures written in the sandy floor, stopping on the way to take photos of the sand cones and other decorations.



An example of the signatures in Sand Cave. Photo: N. Skinner

It was a pleasant trip and after about 4 hours we exited, expecting another group to come in after us. This turned out not be, so we left the cave rigged and trundled off home for a late lunch and more talk.

NEW BEGINNINGS AT NARACOORTE

About 5 pm Thomas decided that Richard needed to have some more SRT practice. Richard said that the descent into Sand “was not a Hollywood type abseil” and was wanting to experience such. (I think he needs to move states for that.) So they both visited S102, with Richard noting that the decent and ascent was a great improvement on Sand, but was still not up to Hollywood standards! Picky, picky. He enjoyed himself none the less, and as this was his second SRT work outside of the shed, we decided that he would easily cope with what we were going to do on the Nullarbor.

Sunday dawned and whilst I took more VSA bods down Sand, Richard and Thomas joined Gary Woodcock, Scott Hall and two others for a trip into Victoria Fossil cave. Heiko went to check out and help the Friends of Naracoorte Caves with some work they were doing around Bat cave.

Victoria Fossil cave is the major tourist attraction at Naracoorte. It contains important megafauna fossils, deposited throughout sections of the cave itself. The tourist section is really devoted to the current excavation area, and most of the cave remains off limits to just about everybody else. Gary Woodcock was given the job of completing a survey of the cave by the South Australian Speleo Council, way back in the mid 1990s, so he was chosen as the person to lead trips into it for this weekend. The off-limits section of the cave has been track marked for some of it, contains lots of speleothems and in some section is a bit sporty. Mostly however the aim is to protect any sandy floors, known fossil sites and other research areas. The trip took 3 hours or so and Thomas and Richard returned well satisfied from their adventures.



Floor Speleothems, Victoria Fossil Cave

Photo: N. Skinner

Meanwhile back in Sand Cave, Neville Skinner, Liz Rogers, Ken Murrey, Miles Pierce, myself and a large Pelican case of Liz’s camera gear negotiated the solution tube. We then set about holding Liz’s flash units helping her photograph the sand cones, signatures on the floor and the decorated chamber near the end of the sand cones. It was a short but good trip and Liz’s photos are on her website. (<http://lizrogersphotography.com>). On the way out Neville noticed a large roof rock in the crawl-way near the entrance solution tube that is in danger of falling down. Thomas also noted a large rock in a solution tube that splits off from and runs above and alongside the entrance tube that also needs to be removed before it blocks the entrance completely. There is also an endless supply of rubbish to be removed.

Heiko on the other hand, helped shift a pile of wood from one place to another, with the help of members from VSA, CEGSA and the Friends group. They achieved their goal apparently. About 2.pm we all converged on Alexandra Cave for a free self-guided tour followed by free afternoon tea and scones. This was graciously given, both as recognition and as a thankyou by NCNP for the work down by the Friends, Cavers and the local town council. It was great weekend of catching up with cavers from two states and caving in caves most of us have either never seen or had not visited in decades.

Lets do it all again soon.

A Day in Corra-Lynn

August 26th.

Members on the trip: Clare, Thomas, Edwina and Richard.

The trip went something like this. Arrived at the cave about 10.30 after an early start from Adelaide and picking up the key on route. Clare then showed Thomas, Edwina and Richard the way out to Dreamland. Yep, it is one long crawl on hard rock, followed by a 6m climb up a rope ladder above the current dig. On reaching this it was decided that lunch was in order.

Maps and compass were then out and in use as the area is maze like and good navigation is required. We had a great look around only retreating around 4 pm to the ladder and long crawl back out. Wonderful day of caving in true SA style.

WHAT IS ON

Flinders Uni Semester Ends. General feeling of Gloom. :(
Exams Nov. 12 - 24th

Yearly Break 27th November to 25th Feb. 2013 ☺ Much happiness, joy & CAVING!

Southern Flinders	Oct 26/28 th	Bat Counting and Rock Art.
End of year get together	Sat. 1 st Dec	11 am. Stirling Organic Cafe. RSVP by 29th Nov, to Clare. Bookings are essential. Need transport? Please let us know.
Tasi	Dec 14-17 th	T. Varga co-ordinating. Four days only, fly in-fly out!
Troglalong*	Jan 6 th -11 th	ASF National Conference. NSW. A must go to! Travel, meet new people and go CAVING! www.asfconference.org.au/2013
Glenelg River, Mt Gambier.	Late Feb.	Dates TBA
Naracoorte/LSE	9 -11 March 2013	

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

Bats of Gluepot Reserve.

Nov 30th - 2nd 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

20th ACKMA Cave Management Conference 12 - 18 May, 2013. Waitomo Caves. NZ.

For Details: <http://www.ackma.org/>

16th International Congress of Speleology Brno, Czech Republic July 21 - 28, 2013 For details: <http://www.speleo2013.com/>

* Funding may be available from FUSSI if you attend as the FUSSI Rep. Conditions apply. Email Clare for details.