

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SYDNEY UNIVERSITY SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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N.S.W. 2006

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Edited by Ron Murray

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Volume 8, Number 9

March, 1969

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

MARCH	22	FIELD DAY (Palm Beach-Avalon)	
APRIL	EASTER (4-7)	BENDITHERA	Rick Crowle
	"	" COOLEMAN	44-7415
	"	"	Ron Murray
	10	<u>ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING</u>	649-8620
		Top Floor, Geography Building	7.30 p.m.
	19-20	Jenolan (Collecting insects)	Glenn Hunt
			929-8675
	19-20	BUNGONIA	Rick Crowle
			44-7415
MAY	1	<u>GENERAL MEETING</u>	
		Top Floor, Geography Building	7.30 p.m.
	3-4	COLONG	Ron Murray
			649-8620
	17-18	CLIEFDEN (Surveying)	Denis Ward
			644-2497
JUNE	5	<u>GENERAL MEETING</u> -top floor, Geography Building	
			7.30 p.m.
	14-15-16	Bendithera	Ron Murray
			649-8620

ORIENTATION WEEK

SUSS history was made during Orientation Week this year when seventy-eight (78) new prospective members were signed up. Thanks are due to Zygmunt Szramka, Lois Seddon, and Jim Seabrook, without whose help in manning the SUSS stall this could not have been achieved.

FRESHERS' TRIP

Thanks are also due to Ludwig Muenzenrieder, who gave sterling service in arranging transport for the Freshers' Trip to Timor.

LAST MEETING

-The meeting supported the Committee decision to establish the Barbara Dew Memorial Lecture.

-The President, John Dunkley, resigned his position as President because of his coming overseas trip, and an election was held. Ted Anderson was elected as SUSS'S new President.

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/ The nineteenth Annual General Meeting of the S /
/ Sydney University Speleological Society will /
/ be held on Thursday, April 10, at 7.30 p.m. /
/ The location will be the top floor of the /
/ Geography Building, opposite Manning. Please /
/ come along and vote. /
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As this is my last newsletter before the A.G.M. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people who assisted me in the production of it during the past year, and especially John Dunkley, Denis Ward and Chris Fieldhouse.

-R.J.M.

Annual Freshers TripTIMOR15 - 16 March

About 50 members and prospective members attended the traditional freshers trip, this year to Timor for the first time: Also in the area were at least a couple of dozen unidentified cavers, making the place look as densely populated as Bungonia.

In traditional style, Saturday began with ceremonial installation of ladders and ropes 50' or so up a large tree, by courtesy of Rick Crowle. Paul Jackson organized a demonstration of basic knots and most new members had some practice at ropework and ladder climbing. Groups of about 6 or 8 then split up to the various caves. A few parties had trouble locating caves up the hill from the camp. Later in the afternoon a party drove up the Isis River to visit Glen Dhu (Woolshed) cCave, located on Glen Dhu property, an impressive complex of large chambers on several levels, which quite likely could accommodate all the other Timor caves together.

Saturday night entertainment included lusty singsonging by nameless people, subdued singing by other innominates, accordion and guitar playing, ham radioing, war games etc. After all that, only a few people felt inclined to go caving on Sunday. Most left quite early, some to return with varying degrees of success via Barrington or Gloucester Tops.

Postscript : a note for prospectives

We wouldn't want to give the impression that Freshers Trips are typical of most SUSS trips. They are an introduction to the variety of experiences you might expect on a caving trip, with a definite bias to the social side, for obvious reasons as there is no opportunity for serious caving on such a trip. And we wouldn't want to give the impression that all, or even a majority of our trips, are designed to make great advances in exploration or surveying or other serious work. They aren't and they don't. There is ample room for the scientist and sloth alike in our ranks.

So if you enjoyed the trip to Timor, and/or the Field Day and sloth trip to Palm Beach the following weekend, there must be a niche in SUSS for you. If you didn't find what you expected, perhaps you had better come on another trip anyway, one designed for you particular interests. See the programme on front page or come to the next meeting.

New light on man's earliest art

Two Spanish potholers, exploring a cave near Ribadasella on the northern coast of Spain in April last year, stumbled on an amazing display of paleolithic art. Nothing comparable in splendour has been found since the spectacular prehistoric cave-paintings at Lascaux were discovered in 1940.

By ADAM HOPKINS

23 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat., March 8, 1969 23

FOR A MOMENT the darkness is absolute. It presses on the eyes like velvet. Three hundred feet below the ground there is nothing to hear except a confused rushing of subterranean waters. Then a torch snaps on, plays over the rock walls of the chamber and comes to rest on a great horse drawn in faded violet and black. Fuzzy, at ease, almost mundane in its verisimilitude. So far below daylight, the effect is awesome.

Now we turn on our helmet lamps again, and talk breaks out in the harsh, emphatic accents of Northern Spain. Through moving beams of light we see a wide expanse of rock which looks at first merely a jumbled mass of line and colour. Then slowly, as the eyes focus, it begins to reveal itself — horns, hooves, nostrils; fragments of deer, reindeer, more horses; animal piled on painted animal to make a paleolithic bestiary.

For 15,000 years these paintings have been lost. Today we are among the first modern men to see them and the first foreigners to make the arduous descent

hand over fist by mounting a ladder and roped around the waist.

A team of speleologists has been assembled to guide us down the steep and slippery chimney and now, muddy from head to foot and somewhat breathless, we have at last reached the chamber already described by some Spanish experts as one of the great monuments of European pre-history.

The possible importance of the cave—near Ribadasella in the high and rainy province of Asturias—became known only last month when Professor Magin Berenguer, of the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts, presented a preliminary study of the paintings, comparing them to those at Altamira and Lascaux.

Since last April, when a group of local potholers made the find, Professor Berenguer has been down a score of times to photograph, sketch and analyse. "Every time I go down I am filled with emotion," he says.

For the youthful group who made the discovery during an ordinary potholing expedition the first view of the great wall was overwhelming. The cave is large and rambling, with a river, sudden vertiginous descents, tortuous galleries. During their exploration the potholers stumbled on a cluster of painted symbols. In excitement, they began a methodical search of the walls. Next day they found the animals.

Elias Ramon, of Oviedo, aged 20, takes up the story: "Quick, quick," one of the boys called

out. We ran. That day we were three hours just looking at the wall. We didn't want to do anything else." In a mounting fever they began to make out the shapes of 30 or so paintings, some of them a full two yards long.

But to the uninitiated visitor, expecting to see perhaps the clarity and magnificence of another Lascaux, the first sight of the Ribadasella paintings could be a shock. Only two, a fine horse's head in black outline on the roof and the well-fed horse near it, exist in anything like comparable form.

On the main wall at Ribadasella some details are clear enough. There is a breathtaking reindeer's head, stretched attentively forward, but much of the huge beast's body is lost. Several horses can be made out.

Much of Professor Berenguer's work has been simply to contemplate the wall in an effort to see what is there. The maddening paleolithic custom of making paintings on top of one another has been honoured by observance in Ribadasella. But

as the professor traces out lines with his torch, animals at first almost invisible spring surprisingly to life.

Perhaps the most hauntingly beautiful of all is a deer, upside down with its nose pointing towards the ground. The buck follows a contour in the rock, the plummeting head is tenderly sketched in black.

The rest can just be made out with the eye of faith. And the effect of this lovely ruined painting is almost tragic.

The colours — mostly red, black and violet—are on the whole darker than in other caves. One interesting point is the abundance of reindeer. At Altamira—miles away—there

bison is the most important animal. So it seems probable that despite marked similarities of style, the two caves were painted under different climatic conditions and far apart in time. Ribadasella with its reindeer would appear to be the earlier.

But the dating of cave art is a rich field for academic argument. On stylistic grounds Professor Berenguer asserts that most of the work at Ribadasella is of the late Solutrean and earlier Magdalenian periods. This means that it is probably between 15,000 and 20,000 years old. Excavation may throw further light on the question.

Certainly, Ribadasella, with its codplex jumble of paintings, would seem to support the com-

monly held theory that for stone age man the virtue of paintings lay in the act of creation rather than in contemplating the finished work. Some of the paintings are on low overhangs and can only be seen by a man lying flat on his back. Most scholars believe that the painting of animals was a form of sympathetic magic to do with hunting. At Ribadasella, the site of the painting conforms to the magic theory, being far inside the cave in a part that would certainly not have been used for domestic purposes.

During our trip to the cave, Dr Miguel Angel Garcia Guinea, director of the Museum of Pre-history at Santander, spent absorbed hours pottering in nooks and crannies. His reward was to discover a delicate engraved goat and a lively profile of a horse. "With good lighting and patience, Ribadasella will be a mine of paleolithic engraving," he said. "Undoubtedly this

is one of the greatest caves of pre-history."

But of all the unexplained phenomena in the cave, perhaps the most intriguing is the group of painted signs first found by the potholers. From the main hall, an uneven gallery winds more than a quarter of a mile. Towards its end a small shaft slopes upward. Here, in an alcove, are four paintings, each the size of a soup bowl and to all appearances symbolic representations of the female sexual organ. One is complete with pubic hair, another with lines to indicate the inside of the thighs. On a free-standing rock not far away there is another sign of distinctly phallic shape.

If this sombre setting, hung about with stalactites and overlooked by eye-shaped apertures in the roof, was indeed the site of magical fertility rites, then it is time we started to think again about those stock cartoons of randy cavemen.

Magic...



in red, black and violet

Students in the cave age

By PATRICIA
CONNOR

THE DISCOVERY of a rich gallery of paleolithic cave art is of major significance to archeologists. The find at Ribadasella will, happily, support existing theories about the origin and development of cave art, by substantiating ideas based on slim evidence. For in archeology sweeping theories, particularly concerning such early periods, are often necessarily founded on single examples, and any discoveries to confirm beliefs are of tremendous importance.

Paleolithic cave art, in the form of painting and engraving, seems to have originated exclusively in South-West France and Northern Spain. Possibly man's first inspiration to mark cave walls were the claw scratchings of bears, which he copied with parallel furrows called "macaroni" marks found in many early sites. Other primitive carvings of female reproductive organs, animals and patches of colour have been found at La Vache in France dating back to 27,000 B.C.

Over the next 15,000 years cave art developed from these scratchings, through handprints, to monochrome two-dimensional outlined animals. And finally to the elaborate naturalistic, multi-coloured beasts of the so-called middle Magdalenian period, to which the climax of Altamira's art belongs. A carbon-14 date for Altamira of about 13,500 B.C. has been established. The art of Ribadasella fits well into the scheme, belonging to a stage of mid-development, about 17,000 B.C.

It is generally agreed that caves were decorated for ritual or magic purposes. The information they provide is invaluable, concerning the beliefs of the paleolithic hunters, and the type of beasts, on which man's life depended, roaming southern Europe in the wake of the retreating ice. They show, too, that the technological skill of Stone Age man was such that he could make brushes and good paints, could kindle a torch and rekindle it quickly in the dark. And evidence that art "schools" existed, where students learnt to carve and draw on scraps of stone, and then became travelling artists, indicates that society was indeed more sophisticated than generally believed.

from

Sydney Morning
Herald

8/3/69

Husband and wife rescued from cave

A woman with a fractured pelvis and her husband with a broken arm and probable fractured skull spent seven hours in a Tasmanian cave before being rescued early yesterday.

Forestry experts and police struggled through dense rain forest to make the rescue at Maydena, 50 miles from Hobart.

Mr and Mrs Michael White, of Maydena, are recovering in the Royal Hobart Hospital.

A hospital spokesman said their conditions were satisfactory.

from

"The Australian"

8/3/69

NEW BOOK

Carsos de Cuba (Cuban Karst) : A.N. Jimenez, V. Panos, O. Stelcl.
Serie Espeleologica y Carsologica No. 2. Academia de Ciencias
de Cuba, Habana, 1968.

SUSS has possibly the only collection in Australia of books on caving in Cuba. The collection includes an extensive treatise on the geography of Cuba by the first-named author, who is Professor of Geography at Havana University and an exchange correspondent of SUSS. This latest arrival is mentioned here not because it is of much interest to cavers here, but may be a useful reference and key to Cuban karst types for any serious worker who reads this newsletter. The other authors are apparently known for their work on karst in Central Europe.

Six types of karst in Cuba are differentiated and described, each with several subtypes, the main criteria being morphological and tectonic factors. Limestone, mostly quite young (not older than Cretaceous), outcrops over some 90% of the whole island. Not all of this is caverniferous, but caves are quite common throughout the island (c.f. Fidel Castro who, because of his early attachment to caves before the revolution, is now patron of the local speleo. society). A good deal of the non-caverniferous limestone is very recently emerged from the sea, and there are vast Miocene and Quaternary deposits at shallow depths offshore. Inland, some deposits are intruded or interstratified with Cretaceous volcanics. A wide variety of both tropical and temperate karst features are found, such as dolines, poljes, mogotes, lapies, tower karst, cockpit karst and aligned karst. There is a key map to the karst features of the island, quite a few good photographs and an extensive bibliography.

n.b. The above inadequate review is based on a very inadequate browse through the Spanish text and may have a few inaccuracies in interpretation in it.

ODDS AND ENDS

In Sydney last week - Dick ("Mad Dog") Heffernan, fresh from cruises in Antarctic waters on which he met John Hinwood, sometime (about 1960) President of S.U.S.S. Flushed with the feel of real money for the first time, Dick has apparently gone to New Zealand for some climbing.