



NEWSLETTER

Cave Exploration Group

South Australia

C/O SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM NORTH TERRACE ADELAIDE

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A Massive Breakdown or a Growing Awareness

When a growing proportion of the nation's youth, in fact the nation's population, loudly proclaims its defection from what may be best formed Western urban life; when even the most traditional and conservative factions of our society now initiate a perpetual discern of our nation's credibility; when the youngest and one of the most advanced nations in the modern world cannot keep its water and air clean - then we must consider no less than a spiritual crisis inevitable. No more is this our dilemma than it is that of the rest of the world, but why is it so? Because we choose to turn a blind eye, brand those who recognise the situation and publicize it as alarmists and radicals, and quite plainly refuse to recognise the effluence and affluence that we create.

Perhaps this, my last editorial for the year if not my last editorial, appears off-centre in the journal of a caving society but I do not think it is. Take a look about you tomorrow morning. You won't see caves, chances are, but you will see Australia whether you are looking at the outdated and insufficient Central Business District of down-town Rundle Street, the suburban sprawl which hideously masks the Adelaide Plain or perhaps a more aesthetic scene - you are looking at Australia. And you are not only looking at Australia but at the world in its entirety, for Australia is an integral part of this world and cannot exist without it. Why then are there not more people actively concerned over the state of our environment and the future of our country?

Andrew Hacker, a professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University describes our present-day Western civilization as "a loose aggregation of private persons who give higher priority to personal pleasures than to collective endeavours". Hacker was particularly concerned with the sociological aspects of human pollution but, let's face it, conservation is a sociological problem as much as it is an ecological one. At a recent seminar on conservation of the environment I was most disappointed to see that only one other CEGSA member besides myself could find the time to attend. Could I once again put the question "why is it so?"

Can we leave the problems and support of the conservation movement to others? Perhaps if we walk round the Naracoorte Caves Reserve or the Flinders Ranges we can contrive to persuade ourselves that 'the place doesn't really look too bad. Things might iron themselves out if we let them alone'. Although a recognised conservative, Hacker looked on such shortcomings in public response with foreboding and gloom. I foresee the rest of this century as at dangerous time, during which we will continue in our accustomed ways. We will claim to want new styles of leadership, overlooking our own inability to serve as followers in any but the most marginal of ways. I will expect to enjoy myself as a consumer and a private person. But once we walk out of our own doors we suffer increasing discomforts. In part these will consist of physical inconveniences such as congested highways and airports, silent telephones and absence of electricity, a polluted atmosphere and a brutalized landscape. But the greater irritant will be from fellow citizens of classes, races, ages and sexes different from our own, whose demands for new rights and expanded recognition will threaten our own security and self-esteem.

Perhaps Hacker is a pessimist and a prophet of gloom. It would be purposeless to discuss that here. But we must remember that, as members of a caving society, we have the unique opportunity to witness caves throughout the State being extensively used as rubbish dumps - an 'out-of-sight-out-of-mind' philosophy so clearly related to the type of society that Hacker describes. And are we just interested in seeing our caves clean as the incredibly poor attendance at the meeting I mentioned suggests? If so then our current perplexities do leave us so narrowly limited in the options available and perhaps Hacker's prognosis is closer to a realistic perception than I am willing to accept.

I've dwelled to some extent on Andrew Hacker, his prophesies and his opinions and I've made some comparisons between our local environment and the American one which he is directly concerned with, but, probably, the most efficient way of dissecting the problem is to look for the roots that led to the evolution of this, our present-day environment. Certain of the better-known reformists, such as Edgar Friedenberg who is professor of Sociology at the State University of New York, attributes many of our perplexities to our chauvinistic capitalistic society and in particular to the education system and the interaction between them. It is undoubtedly true that schools today serve no other purpose than to perpetuate an otherwise failing society. The escalation of purposeless educational requirements or the devaluation of educational qualifications is bitterly evident in this country today. A bachelors degree qualifies you to do little more than to train others to gain the same qualifications while the prospects of any other sort of career, after gaining the much coveted Ph.D are far from encouraging. The very structure of our universities today discourages people from studying a particular subject merely because they are interested in that subject and not really in being called a B-something.

You may feel that now I have completely abandoned the initial subject of this somewhat drawn-out editorial. However, it was by no accident that I touched on the need for educational reform in our present society, nor was it an accident that I chose to refer to certain American, as opposed to Australian, examples throughout much of the context. I feel that the main roots of the environmental problem confronting us today are sociological, or more specifically, sociological sophistication, and that America serves as a somewhat more developed and therefore a better example. As already stated, I feel that education merely perpetuates this society and at pre-tertiary levels environmental and biological sciences which are most important take a poor second place.

How can people be expected to appreciate nature, to care about their country's natural resources when they are completely overlooked below tertiary level.

I mentioned before that somewhat of a spiritual crisis was inevitable and the crisis is spiritual indeed, but its root lies in the palpable failure of our vaunted capitalist system which so blindly follows America and adheres to this already failing society. The News of Monday November 22 tells of a negro youth aged fifteen who awaits the electric chair and another Spanish youth sentenced to fifty years gaol. His crime - he sold five dollars worth of marihuana to a friend. And yet this is the country that our government (?) continues to follow, support and allow to exploit our natural resources — our natural resources! Surely this is the worst kind of moral pollution imaginable. Is our country facing a massive breakdown? Is there a growing awareness? The future rests in our hands. For too long we have left it to people who have continually let us down. 'We claim to want new styles of leadership, overlooking our own inability to serve as followers in any but the most marginal of ways.' Don't let this description fit us.

If you haven't tired of reading this already I should like to finish this attempt at analysing the root of our pollution problem, of which a remedy I feel sure, will be found by quoting from another American historian. This man, although generally considered a leftist and a Marxist, is a little more optimistic about the future than his conservative counterpart, Andrew Hacker. Eugene D. Genovese, chairman of the Department of History at the University of Rochester writes - 'The decline and fall of the Roman Empire took 400 years or so; in the interim a great civilization slipped further and further into decadence, degradation and despair. Perhaps a benevolent God will grant our civilization as much time, but no-one should count on it. If we fail to generate a political movement of national reconstruction, this century may witness the end of the existing order in this country and we may never be able to quench the flames of destruction engulfing the earth.

Trevor H. Haddock.

EDITORS NOTE: A considerable amount of literature is available on the topic which has briefly been discussed here. Genovese, Hacker and Friedenberg have all made contributions to this literature and are recommended reading. It also may prove interesting if at one meeting, instead of the usual address, a brief seminar is arranged to discuss the points of the origins and development of pollution and conservation in Australia and throughout the world.

GENERAL

The Notice of Motion for alteration of the Constitution tabled in the proceeding newsletters 1971, No. 3, and concerning Section 5, sub-section (b) and Section 4, sub-section (b), was presented to a General Meeting of the Cave Exploration Group of South Australia on 24/11/71. The motion failed to raise the necessary majority required by the Constitution and. was subsequently rejected.

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Two papers on research into bio-speleology in the Naracoorte area are currently available in two South Australian journals. These both concern mammal remains found in caves at Naracoorte. Abstracts are presented below.

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SMALL FOSSIL VERTEBRATES from VICTORIA CAVE, NARACOORTE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA. I. POTOROINAE (MACROPODIDAE), PETAURIDAE AND BURRAMYIDAE (MARSUPIALIA) by Meredith J. Smith. Trans. Roy. Soc. Sth Aust. Vol. 95, Part 4. 30 November, 1971.

Abundant fossil remains of marsupials and rodents have been found in a silty deposit in Victoria Cave, near Naracoorte, South Australia. The presence of large extinct herbivores in the assemblage suggests that the deposit may be of Pleistocene age. This paper describes remains of Potorous apicalis, P. platyops, Bettongia gaimardi and B. penicillata (Macropodidae, Potoroinae), Pseudocheirus peregrinus and Petaurus breviceps (Petauridae) and Cercartetus nanus (Burramyidae). Extensions of the previously known ranges of P. apicalis, P. platyops and B. gaimardi are noted. Potorous morgani Finlayson, 1938 is shown to be a synonym of P. platyops (Gould, 1844). – Author's abstract.

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SOME MAMMAL REMAINS from CAVES in the NARACOORTE AREA by T.H. Maddock. South Australian Naturalist, Vol. 46, No.2, December, 1971.

Mammal remains from three caves in the Naracoorte dune have been identified and a comparison made with an earlier report (Tidemann, 1967). Eight species of native mammals including one species of bat have been identified and four species of introduced mammals were also found. – T.H.M.

The Ernest Maddock Memorial Fauna Park was officially opened on the last weekend of November this year at the Naracoorte Caves Reserve. The park was officially opened by the Deputy Premier, Mr. Cottran and the Deputy Director of the Tourist Bureau, Mr. Correll and there was an excellent attendance present. Mention was made by both gentlemen of the work done by the Cave Exploration Group at the Reserve and in the Victoria Fossil Cave. It was pleasing to see such recognition given for this most worthwhile project undertaken by the Group.

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AN ECOLOGICAL STUDY of the CAVERNICOLOUS FAUNA of the NULLARBOR PLAIN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA by Aola M. Richards. J. Zool. London. 1971. 164, 1-60. (Summary).

The Nullarbor Plain is a low plateau of Tertiary limestone in southern Australia. Its caves may be classified, as deep or shallow. They occur in the inland open shrub steppe zone, and the coastal mingled arid scrub and semi-arid mallee zone. Comparison is made between surface, doline and cave climate in both regions, and the significance of the special climatic conditions on the fauna is discussed. Although the caves appear extremely dry, relative humidity is fairly high. Animal burrows have a microclimate intermediate between caves and surface. Plants on the surface are xerophytes, and many are halophytes; but in the dolines they are less salt tolerant and require water and more sheltered conditions. Many vertebrates use the caves as temporary shelters, while others may be trapped in them accidentally. Nineteen species are recorded - eight mammal, eight birds and three reptiles.

Arthropods are the principal inhabitants of the caves. Ninety-five species belonging to seventeen orders and fifty-eight families are recorded from forty-seven caves, and their distribution is given. Of these 25% are accidentals, 17% troglloxenes, 52% trogllophiles and 6% troglobites. About 80% are identified to genus and species. Within the caves four biotopes are examined - the Parietal Association, the Guano Association, the Dark Zone and the Liquid Medium. The species are grouped into several associations within the first three biotopes - on walls, on floor, under stones around carcasses, amongst guano and decaying vegetation. No macroscopic species have been found in the underground lakes. Only one arthropod species is definitely associated with the deep, as opposed to the shallow caves. About 69% of the species are predators or saprophages; the rest are coprophages, necrophages or ectoparasites. Saprophages or coprophages comprise the greatest number of individuals in population. Food preferences are listed for a number of arthropods, and a generalized food web has been constructed. Some species travel considerable distances throughout the caves, and a number of Dark Zone species are recorded from the entrance talus slope, in the dolines or on the surface. About 59% of the species are known only from a single cave, but 29% are widely distributed across the plain. Subterranean migration may also occur. The cave arthropods may be divided into two groups, one much older geologically than the other. It is suggested that specific climatic conditions have been required for the colonization of the caves, and these are considered in relation to current information on the Quaternary climate of the Nullarbor. Much recent colonization has been by species from Eastern Australia. - Author's Abstract.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR. It is unfortunate that this last number of our newsletter for this year is not of the size of former numbers. However, this was unavoidable as contributions were non-existent over the last quarter. I wish to thank all those who have contributed to the newsletter throughout this year.

PROGRAMME

The Committee feels it advisable to point out that the somewhat briefness of this programme is not because of a lack of trips but rather because the Annual General Meeting has divided this quarter making half of it the responsibility of the new committee. It is therefore not known at this stage exactly what trips are planned over the next quarterly period.

Further information on coming trips will be made available as it comes to hand and notification will probably be given at coming General Meetings. Many of the dates given here must be considered as tentative until confirmation is given.

FEBRUARY

7-8	Naracoorte	P. Chappell (Trip leader)
11	Committee Meeting	45 Marlborough St, Brighton
25	Annual General Meeting	Museum Lecture Rooms

MARCH

8	Committee Meeting	to be arranged
22	General Meeting	Museum Lecture Rooms
31-3 April	Naracoorte Trip	T. Maddock (Probable leader)

APRIL

12	Committee Meeting	to be arranged
26	General Meeting	Museum Lecture Rooms

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