

EXPLORING CHAMBERS GORGE WITH GRAHAM MEDLIN 4-9TH SEPTEMBER 2017

Expedition leaders: Tim Tolley, Jaye and Ray Bessell

Chambers Gorge is one of the most spectacular and beautiful gorges in the Flinders Ranges and South Australia. The area is rich in historical and scientific interest, including world-renowned Aboriginal rock art.

A highlight of this Waterhouse Club trip was the discovery of a large quantity of previously unrecorded rat amber, left there over the eons by desert rats. More on this later.

Honorary South Australian Museum scientist Graham Medlin attended as lead scientist. Graham is an expert on the region. In 2016 he was awarded the Geographical Society Medal for Animal Science for his three decades of study of small mammal sub fossils.

Graham was keen to revisit the area and to explore it again, and so a fully catered camping trip was organised. Early September was selected to visit when it was not expected to be too hot or too cold and the weather turned out to be perfect.

Our camp caterers set up a well organised and easy to access campsite, provided good facilities and plenty of excellent food. Most mornings started at a leisurely 9am. Expeditioners had the opportunity to join in the organised trips or just hang around the campsite for the day, as there were plenty of things to enjoy in such a pleasant area. The area is very beautiful with a unique Flinders Rangers ambience

The expedition program included two days of hiking and two days of short walks, driving and discovering.



Expeditioners hiked to the summits of Mt Chambers and Goat Hill, both challenging hikes for some, visited the significant Aboriginal art area in the Gorge, and explored old mine sites. Graham and expeditioner Trevor Ireland helped to make sense of the complex and ancient geological forms and Carol Ireland interpreted the key botanical features along the way.

One evening the manager of Wertaloona Station visited the camp and answered many interesting questions on the management and operations of the property.

Expeditioners were excited to find traces of regionally extinct mammals, as well as scats, owl pellets, skulls, and archaeocyaths (the fossils of extinct marine sponges from 350 million years ago).

Another highlight was the hike to the top of Goat Hill which provided the brave hikers an amazing bird's eye view of spectacular Waterfall Gorge.

An exciting find

While exploring a cave, expeditioners discovered an important cache of Sticknest Rat 'amber', of a quantity and quality previously unknown to scientists. Rat amber is crystallized rat urine, and while it does not sound as glamorous as fossilised tree resin, the amber and the droppings trapped in it provide scientists with a window into the environmental conditions over thousands of years. This was an extraordinary and important find, referred to in Graham Medlin's scientific report, attached.



Stick Nest Rat Nest: Rat "Amber"

Acknowledgments

Graham Medlin provided invaluable leadership, guiding the group and explaining the many features. As well expeditioners Trevor and Carol Ireland were a great source of geological and botanical information.

Expedition Leaders Tim Tolley, Jaye and Ray Bessell put in the weeks of work to ensure that the expedition would be the success that it turned out to be. And special recognition to the three expeditioners who discovered the amazing cave full of stick nest rat amber until then unknown to science.



Mt Chambers conquered!