



Journal of the Scientific Expedition Group

**SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION GROUP
Annual General Meeting
20th August 2004
Chairman's Report**

This Annual General Meeting is almost exactly 20 years to the day since the inaugural meeting of the group that became to be known as the Scientific Expedition Group (SEG).

Since that time SEG has grown to be a respected group able to carry out sophisticated biodiversity surveys with credible results and to train young people in the pleasures of field science.

Highlights of this year have been the broadening of the Gammon Ranges Scientific Project (GRaSP), the continuing Minnowarra Biodiversity Project, strengthening links with Government Departments and changes in the Committee.

(Chairman's Report continued on page 2)

SEG 2004/ 2005 Calendar

October

- October 1-4 Minnowarra Survey
- October 20-25 GRaSP Trip

November

- November 26 Deadline for December issue of SEGments

December

- Mid December SEGments Vol. 20 No. 3

January

- January 27-31 GRaSP Trip

April

- April Minnowarra Trip (dates TBA)
- March/ April GRaSP Trip (dates TBA)

SEGments is the authorised journal of the SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION GROUP INC. PO Box 501 Unley SA 5061

SEG members attend the 50th Australian Mammal Society Meeting

The 50th meeting of the Australian Mammal Society was held at Tanunda, South Australia from July 5 to 8, 2004. The conference was attended by 130 delegates from Japan, USA, and all over Australia, and included three SEG members.

Researchers gave verbal and poster presentations that reported on current mammalian research. Research topics included population and distribution ecology (in general; of rodents; of marsupials and of pinnipeds), habitat and feeding ecology, physiology, behaviour, pest management, reproduction and genetics. The program also included a Subfossil Symposium and a Mallee Mammal Symposium.

Two SEG members presented new research at the Subfossil Symposium. Matthew McDowell and Graham Medlin co-authored a paper titled "The pre-European fauna of the southern tip of Eyre Peninsula". The results of this research showed that lower Eyre Peninsula was once home to large and small marsupial carnivores, wombats, kangaroos, bettongs, bandicoots, possums and native rodents. However, of the thirty native mammals that once inhabited lower Eyre Peninsula prior to European colonization, twenty are now locally extinct and four are totally extinct.

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Report on 50th Mammal Society Conference cont. from pg. 1

Graham Medlin co-authored another presentation (with Jack Mahoney and Meredith Smith, both of whom are deceased) titled "A new species of large hopping-mouse from cave deposits in the Flinders Ranges and the Davenport Range, South Australia". In this presentation, the distinguishing characteristics and fossil distribution of the new but extinct species were described.

Matthew McDowell also co-authored a second paper, presented by Alex Baynes, titled "The original mammal faunas of the Gibson Desert and Great Victoria Desert IBRA regions". 35 native mammals were recorded from the Gibson Desert (1 monotreme, 22 marsupials, 3 bats, 8 rodents and 1 carnivore) but only 29 native mammals were recorded from the Great Victoria Desert (1 monotreme, 18 marsupials, 1 bat, 8 rodents and 1 carnivore). The Great Victoria Deserts less diverse assemblage of mammals is attributed to the relatively small fossil samples that have been collected and suggests that more and larger fossil collections are needed from that area.

The meeting was completed by a post conference trip to Chambers Gorge in the Flinders Ranges lead by Graham Medlin. Participants hiked around the Chambers Gorge area receiving a guided tour of subfossil sites (many of which have yielded the new species of hopping-mouse Graham described in the Subfossil Symposium), aboriginal sites and generally admiring the breathtaking views. Graham's vast knowledge of the area made the experience truly unique. Those interested in finding out more about Chamber Gorge should consult the "Field Guide to Chamber Gorge, Flinders Ranges" written by Graham Medlin in 1993 and published by the South Australian Museum.

Written by Matthew McDowell



View of Mount Chambers from Lookout Cave
Photographer: Matt McDowell



Looking towards lookout cave from another cave above Chambers Gorge
Photographer: Matt McDowell

Chairman's Report cont. from pg. 1

Committee Membership Changes

You will recall that at the last AGM I took over from Richard Willing as Chairman of the Committee. He had been Chairman for 19 years and has been a hard act to follow. The Vice-Chairman, John Hayes, the Secretary, John Love and the Treasurer, Graeme Oats have ably assisted me. The committee has also been revitalised by the addition of Peter Bailey and Judy Mack. Also Chris Wright has returned from Ireland and is eager to help again. Trent Porter has been tireless in using his organisational skills. Linda-Marie McDowell has been a marvel, taking over from Chris in managing GRASP and editing SEGments.

As was announced at last years AGM the committee has approved Life Membership for two of our long-term supporters, John Love, the Secretary for many years, and Trent Porter, expedition organizer extraordinaire. (note: that the Governor presented certificates of Life Membership later in the evening at the AGM).

Expedition Report

Munyaroo II

As was mentioned at last years AGM there was planned a return trip to Munyaroo to study parts of the park not visited on the earlier expedition. Once again it was to be done in conjunction with the South Australian Museum. Unfortunately, owing to other commitments, the only time Museum staff were available was in April and there was just not enough time for us to organise the expedition and recruit scientific personnel and expeditioners. With some regret the expedition was postponed until later next year.

Future Expeditions

We have been encouraged by positive support from the relevant Government departments following the hugely successful Witjira Expedition and there are good opportunities for future co-operation in biodiversity surveys in parks around the state. National Parks are required to carry out regular biodiversity surveys of parks under their control and they see us as a resource to assist them in doing this. SEG would benefit from the scientific expertise from National Parks and other Government departments in such a partnership.

Projects

Gammon Ranges Scientific Project (GRaSP)

Over the last twelve months four trips have been conducted to the Gammon Ranges with rainfall, stream flow, vegetation, aquatic biology, feral animal and yellow-footed rock wallaby surveys carried out. In addition, Chris Wright has reinstated three pluviometers abandoned by the government in the Leigh Creek basin so that the rainfall data will continue to give a useful transect across the upper Flinders Ranges.

Contact Chris Wright regarding the next GRaSP trip, from October 20 to 25. (For details refer to page 8)

Minnawarra Biodiversity Project (MBP)

The Minnawarra Biodiversity Project, on patches of heritage-listed vegetation, on Richard Willing's property near Myponga has continued with a Spring and an Autumn survey. Richard has recently enlisted the aid of the Green Corps to assist with setting up the trap lines and this has taken some strain off the bones of the aged committee.

Bat netting was done for the first time in Autumn, with one chocolate wattle bat caught. Attempts were made to use the Anabat bat-recording device but the weather was too wet to give any useful results. Even though the weather has been somewhat damp for the surveys this year excellent trapping numbers have been recorded.

The next survey will be from October 1 to 4, which includes the long weekend. (For details refer to page 8).

SEGments

As I mentioned earlier Linda-Marie McDowell, and Matthew McDowell, her husband, have taken over from me in editing SEGments. They have improved the quality of the publication and put some new energy into it. I am sure they will be glad for me to indicate that the life of the publication is its contributions and I encourage you all to submit articles for inclusion.

Future Challenges

SEG faces some challenges over the next few years. In the past our target audience for expeditions has been university students who needed field work experience but more and more it seems that the universities are providing their own expeditions to satisfy that need. As with all volunteer organisations, finding qualified persons both as scientific leaders and as camp leaders has been more difficult. There have been several proposals to direct the Group into a more eco-tourism direction but I am not sure that is the way to go. We are organising Future Directions meetings to face the challenge and define a role for us in this area. Feedback and suggestions from the membership would be most welcome.

The ongoing projects of GRaSP and Minnawarra are strong and healthy and will proceed as usual.

After twenty years the organisation is strong and dynamic with enthusiastic supporters. I have confidence that we will define a role for the future and continue to provide scientific fieldwork experience for young people of all ages.

Alun Thomas
Chairman SEG

Letter from David West
(read by Richard at SEG AGM)

Dear Richard,

It is with great regret that I tender my apologies for the AGM of the Scientific Expedition Group. It is hard to imagine that twenty years (half my life) have passed since the inaugural meeting of the Scientific Expedition Group.

Twenty years ago, after five weeks of wonder on Coffin Bay Peninsula on Expedition "Investigator", my enthusiasm had been captured by the potential for learning and adventure offered by such expeditions.

As the youngest, and by far the most naive, of the members of the 'steering committee' that sought to shape the replacement for the South Australian branch of ANZSES over the period between April and August 1984, even my grand visions for the new organisation were but a fragment of the achievements of SEG since that time

As a young person, I discovered the challenges and lessons that are an inevitable part of scientific expeditions on Expedition "Investigator". This inspired me to make a number of changes of direction in my life. In my time with SEG I participated in Expedition "Freeling Plateau", edited SEGments, and was heavily involved in the establishment and early years of the Gammon Ranges Scientific Project. Despite my minimal involvement in SEG's activities these days, the group of people that constitutes SEG continues to teach me lessons about achievement and commitment that are an inherent part of the expeditions run by the Group.

Congratulations to the Scientific

Expedition Group on the achievements of the past twenty years, and to Warren Bonython and Richard Willing for their unending commitment to the Group.

May the Scientific Expedition Group continue to evolve and grow over the coming twenty years.

Regards David West

Letter from John Waterhouse
(in response to June issue of SEGments celebrating 20 yrs of SEG)

Dear Linda-Marie,

It's often the case that time blurs recollection of particular events. I've just read your short article on the history of GRaSP and thought I'd write and fill in a few gaps for the record.

GRaSP was conceived after Paul Harvey and I were rained out of the Gammon Ranges during a bushwalk with old friend Bob Read and then colleague John Grounds (not long after Expedition Freeling Plateau). I remember looking across at a wet Paul and echoing his thoughts, "How much does it rain up there?"

At the time I was Vice Chairman and pondering with Richard Willing, how to relieve the pressure to keep SEG going with a steady flow of new expedition ideas and, perhaps more difficult, regularly finding people prepared to organise and run them. We realised that a long-term rainfall-measuring project had the potential to provide a "base load" of expeditions, aimed at rotating as many young expeditioners as possible through a valid scientific project without the need for much pre-expedition organisation. We had hoped that this approach would both give SEG a stronger base for other expeditions and accommodate missing some annual expeditions.

Paul Harvey still works for the State Government and I had worked for the Department of Mines, both of us in the water resources area, as we remain in different ways. We were keenly aware of Government funding pressures and decentralisation causing, as we saw it, a winding back of the remote area hydrological monitoring activities that had

been established during, I think, the late 1960s and early 1970s.

We made 2-3 trips to the Plateau over a period of a year or so, trying to find a site that we could judge suitable for pluviometer installation, with respect to exposure to rain and allowing secure fastening to resist animal activities (goats in particular). We also sought a location we thought we might be able to find again. GPS technology was not part of our set up trips!

At about this time, Paul and I also discovered Chris Wright, whom we knew through the Hydrological Society of SA and joint consulting work (with me) on the Leigh Creek township water supply, was keen to get (back) into bushwalking. He participated in several early trips to design and set up the initial project.

A minor correction to your article – we included photo points from the very beginning and also started biological monitoring of waterholes, hoping that the project might eventually become larger in scope. Chris and I carried 6 star pickets to the plateau one mid-summer trip during the inception phase – I will never forget that they weigh 2.5kg each! All the initial equipment was carried in, together with drums of water for emergency use should there be an unusually dry or hot trip.

Richard mentioned in his article that GRaSP was dedicated to one of our Expedition Freeling Plateau leaders, Louise Grandfield, who was tragically killed in a road accident shortly after our return to Adelaide. We placed a small commemorative plaque at the site of the first pluviometer. We were gratified when Louise's parents, NOT bushwalkers, were guided up Arcoona Creek by David Kemp, and came up to the pluviometer site for the official launch. On a lighter note, possibly only David West could have organised cold champagne on the Gammon Plateau for the launch!

I have a photograph of the pluviometer site facing Mount McKinley on my office wall – it was presented to me by Warren on our leaving Adelaide for Perth in 1989, and it provides me with a regular reminder of the delights of working with the sort of people who make SEG possible.

Vandenberg campsite, and a plaque in Arcoona Creek, are both dedicated to John Vandenberg. John was a hydrographer in Crystal Brook and, although emphatically NOT a bushwalker, came willingly to help us set up the initial instrument, which was his state group's spare! John was killed on the road a few years after GRaSP started up, and his daughter was able to attend a small commemoration when our plaque was fixed in place.

We worry about safety when bushwalking, but it is very important to remember the risk of travelling to and from the walk, which may exceed that of the walk itself.

Our initial group always hoped that the project would extend for at least 10 years, and preferably more, to collect a reasonable rainfall record. Thanks to the efforts of various SEG members, and you stalwarts who lead it, GRaSP has succeeded well beyond our initial dreams!

Most of the team who started the project were able to meet on the Plateau for a 10-year celebration, and I was deeply gratified that Warren Bonython was able to accompany us on that occasion. Again David West provided cold champagne! Dry ice is the key.

I congratulate all of those who have made GRaSP's expansion and long life possible, and who have kept the passion in maintaining a long-term commitment of this nature. I'm sure that all of us share the love of the Flinders Ranges that Louise demonstrated in the short time that we knew her.

SEG can be very proud of GRaSP.

Best Wishes
John Waterhouse

GRaSP - the name clarified

In discussions following the AGM the name GRaSP was clarified with the editors of SEGments in response to an article in the June issue. The acronym is GRaSP and is derived from the **G**ammon **R**anges **S**cientific **P**roject, with the letters taken from the highlighted parts of the words in the title. So from now on the acronym GRaSP will be used in SEGments not GRASP.

GRaSP Winter Data Recovery Trip July 21 to 24, 2004

Leaders: Peter Love
Linda-Marie McDowell

Expeditioners: John Love
Trudy O'Connor
Sarah Jewell

Transport: John Love's Toyota Prado

Expedition description:

Wed 21st July

The party of five met early at John and Peter Love's house in Beaumont and were on the road by 0630. The trip to Arcoona creek was uneventful with the usual stops at Hawker, Leigh Creek police station and the Quandong Café in Copley.

We arrived at base camp at around 1600 and promptly organised our gear for the rock wallaby survey. The weather was cool but sunny. All five party members left base camp and arrived at Wallaby Creek at 1630. One live wallaby was sighted and one wallaby carcass was found in a cave on the western side of the creek.

There was plenty of water in the rock pool halfway up and a small pool a short distance upstream from the main pool. A quick look at the Arcoona Saddle pluviometer seemed to indicate that everything there was in order. By the time we dropped down into Evasive Creek it was getting dark so we all kept to the creek for the descent. On the walk back down Arcoona Creek, by which time it was completely dark, poor quality water was found in the pool on the north side of the creek (fish pool) and nearly a foot of good quality water in the pool just upstream from the stream gauge. Back at camp we had dinner (in luxury with chairs and a table – thanks to John) and then went to bed. The night was cold and clear.

Thurs 22nd July

We rose shortly after sunrise. The day was cool and fine with light westerly winds and high cloud increasing throughout the day. After a leisurely breakfast we all set off for the base camp enclosure pluvio where the data loggers were exchanged without any trouble. We carried on to the stream gauge and carried out the data logger exchange there. From here John returned

to base camp with the two retrieved loggers while the rest of the party continued up the creek.

There were small pools at the seeps in Arcoona creek where we turned off to take the short cut to the Arcoona South junction. At the junction the party split again with Peter and Trudy setting out for the Arcoona South pluvio and Linda-Marie and Sarah continuing up Arcoona Creek to the Wild Ass waterhole. Peter and Trudy exchanged the data loggers and made their way directly to Wild Ass waterhole sighting a group of seven adult goats on the way. At the water hole they met up with Linda-Marie and Sarah who were just completing the aquatic biology survey.

After lunch we set out together for Vandenberg camp and arrived there mid afternoon. Leaving most of our gear at camp we continued upstream to Sambot Waterhole. There was less than a foot of water but it contained many small aquatic beasts including a frog. The salinity of the water was tested, the aquatic biology survey completed and the appropriate photos taken. On the way back to Vandenberg camp we exchanged the Sambot pluvio data logger. By the time we returned to camp the sun was setting. We had dinner (not as much luxury as the previous night as we had stones for chairs) and then went to bed. The night was warmer with the cloud increasing further with strengthening westerly winds.

Fri 23rd July

We rose at around sunrise again and packed up camp with the intention of servicing the Plateau pluvio and returning to base camp that afternoon. Again the weather was cool and fine but with stronger westerly winds and increasing cloud at lower altitude. Leaving some of our gear behind we left camp and passed Grandfield Waterhole, where there was plenty of good water, making North Tusk Hill in good time.

From North Tusk we traversed the saddle and carried on to The Plateau pluvio via the 68B and 66B photo points. We exchanged the data loggers and took the human impact photos and returned via a short deviation down the south side of The Plateau (oops, sorry folks) to North Tusk Hill. Here we took the human impact photos and had a scenic lunch. We walked back down to Vandenberg camp and

packed our remaining gear. After checking the water cache we set a good pace on the trip back to base camp and met up with John. One euro was spotted in Arcoona Creek not far from base camp on the return trip. We had dinner (again with the luxury of chairs to rest our weary feet) and went to bed. It rained lightly during the night.

Sat 24th July

We rose early and packed up quickly. The weather was cool and cloudy but fine. We made the Quandong Café in time for morning tea and then moved on to Leigh Creek police station. From there we had another uneventful journey back to Adelaide returning in the late afternoon.

Yellow-Footed Rock Wallaby Report:

- An animal sited in Wallaby Creek
- a carcass in cave, western end of Wallaby Creek

Feral Animal Report:

- Only sighting was on spur around one kilometre north of Arcoona South pluvio – seven adult goats.
- Many dead goats around Woodcutter's Well, presumably the result of shooters in the area.

Surface Water Report:

- Pool on south side of Arcoona Creek upstream from stream gauge – more than a foot deep, good quality.
- "Fish Pool" North side of Arcoona Creek between Wallaby and Evasive Creeks – shallow pool, poor quality
- Wallaby Creek rock pool – more than a foot deep, good quality (also another small pool a short distance upstream)
- Seeps – small pools, poor quality
- Wild Ass Waterhole – much water, fair quality
- Grandfield Waterhole – more than a foot deep, good quality
- Sambot Waterhole – around a foot deep, poor quality

Report written by Peter Love

(Comments about the chairs added in by Linda-Marie McDowell)

Observations about Rainfall in the Gammon Ranges and Flinders Ranges, July 2004

On recent visits to the Gammon Ranges (Arcoona Creek) and Flinders Ranges (Chambers Gorge) in April and July 2004, I noted extremely different conditions relating to the respective lack of and abundance of rainfall in the months that I visited.

On the April GRaSP trip, reported on in the June issue of SEGments, I reported that it was extremely dry and that there was no water in Wild Ass Creek or Sambot waterholes. The animals that we did see, both Euros and even goats looked in very poor condition. The animals had been digging in the seeps in Arcoona Creek for saline water. Woodcutters well was rather polluted with dead animals and the water was muddy and encrusted with a layer of salt around the edges. There was very little birdlife, and even insect and reptile activity was minimal. Grown trees and established shrubs were even dying from the lack of rain. The Gammon Ranges and Flinders Ranges region was showing signs of suffering from an extended period of drought, as was much of South Australia and the interior of the continent.

This was a stark contrast to my July visits to Chambers Gorge and Arcoona Creek where there was evidence of more recent rain and green vegetation was sprouting.

On the trip to Chambers George, for the Australian Mammal Society Conference field trip organised by Graham Medlin (refer to article on page 1 of this issue), I noted how green the vegetation was right up to Hawker and Wilpean Pound.

Once we headed north to Blinman and then east to Chambers Gorge the vegetation was much sparser and considerably drier, but still there was some water in Chambers Gorge. While climbing Mount Chambers and walking along Chambers Gorge we did see kangaroos that still seemed to be in poor condition and several skeletons of kangaroos that had obviously died from thirst or starvation in the shelter of caves and rock overhangs. My conclusion was that the drought had not broken in the Chambers Gorge region of the Flinders Ranges.

However, on the trip to the Gammon Ranges for the July GRaSP trip the following week (refer to previous article in this issue), there was abundant evidence of recent rain on the western side of the Flinders Ranges and in the Gammon Ranges. It was even green at Leigh Creek and Copley.

In Arcoona Creek there was fresh water in many of the waterholes and seeps along Arcoona creek including Wild Ass Creek and Sambot waterholes. A carpet of green sprouting grasses and plants covered all available soil alongside Arcoona Creek. There were very few animals sighted, but the animals that had survived the worst of the drought were starting to recover, as they moved away from us, unlike the animals seen in April who were too weak to escape from our presence.

When we checked the rainfall collected in the drums at each pluviometer rain gauge there was evidence of at least 80 to 100mm of rain between the April and July trips. Graham Blair who provided the rainfall totals from the Gammon Ranges loggers after we returned to Adelaide confirmed this.

Here are the rainfall totals from the Gammon Ranges loggers between April 2004 and July 2004:

- Plateau 106.8mm
- Exclusion 82.4mm
- Sambot 82.44mm
- South Branch 87.4mm
- Arcoona Saddle 84.6mm

**Looking for a bit of adventure?
Join the October GRaSP trip
October 20 to 25, 2004**

Why not join other SEG members in visiting the beautiful and unique Gammon Ranges in the northern Flinders Ranges.

This GRASP trip will involve visits to the newly re-installed pluviometers on stations surrounding the Gammons as well as bushwalking up Arcoona Creek to the Gammon Ranges Plateau.

The scientific work will involve changing data loggers, searching for Yellow Footed Rock Wallabies and other botanical and biological survey work.

For Further details contact Chris Wright, phone 8278 8818.

Hurry Places are limited!

The mean annual rainfall in the Gammon Ranges is 325mm, so the rainfall figures listed above for April to July comprise almost one third of the annual rainfall.

Written by Linda-Marie McDowell

For regular updates on rainfall in the Gammon Ranges and Flinders Ranges check out

http://www.bom.gov.au/cgi-bin/wrap_fwo.pl?IDS60163.html

**Minnawarra Biodiversity Project
October Long Weekend
October 1 to 4, 2004**

To be involved in the spring biodiversity survey at Minnawarra, on Fleurieu Peninsula contact:
Richard Willing
Phone 8558 9453

Kids Corner

The hidden words are taken from the articles in this issue. The words are hidden in all directions. Can you find them all?

R	A	N	G	E	S	A	R	S	E	B	I	Y	X	B
O	J	M	O	Q	E	C	O	L	O	G	Y	I	C	E
D	N	A	R	N	T	M	S	A	T	X	D	F	J	T
E	I	E	G	E	C	E	L	I	T	I	O	L	Q	T
N	S	V	E	L	N	W	L	P	R	T	R	I	P	O
T	N	I	I	A	I	D	A	U	M	O	C	N	A	N
S	N	T	P	M	T	B	F	S	C	A	B	D	N	G
N	I	A	J	V	X	P	N	R	S	V	I	E	W	S
T	J	N	R	A	E	L	I	A	C	E	N	R	O	Y
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W	I	B	O	P	O	S	S	U	M	S	E	N	N	E
D	L	T	R	E	S	E	D	E	M	E	L	O	N	R

Word List

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| JAPAN | TRIP |
| NATIVE | VIEWS |
| EXTINCT | CONFERENCE |
| FOSSIL | MARSUPIALS |
| GIBSON | GORGE |
| BATS | RANGES |
| DESERT | FLINDERS |
| POSSUMS | CHAMBERS |
| BETTONGS | ICE |
| WATER | RAINFALL |
| RODENTS | ECOLOGY |



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: Her Excellency, the Honourable Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, AC, CVO, MBE, Governor of South Australia

COMMITTEE

President Emeritus C. Warren Bonython AO

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SUBSCRIPTIONS (Including GST)

Working adult member - - - - - \$16.50

Pensioner student or unemployed - - - - - \$11.00

Family membership - - - - - \$22.00

Organisation membership - - - - - \$22.00

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Name

Address

.....

Telephone (H) (W)

E-mail

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

.....
.....

Applications should be addressed to :

The Hon. Secretary
Scientific Expedition Group Inc.
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Unley S.A. 5061