

Cure for the Itch

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Living my childhood dream.

Cave guiding at Naracoorte Cave National Park in South Australia's southeast along the limestone coast, has been a favourite holiday destination of mine since a family holiday when I was a young child. Like many children the idea of going down into the Earth (a cave) was daunting at first, however after becoming mesmerised by the natural beauty I was instantly hooked. Being an avid Jurassic Park fan, the Victoria Fossil cave captivated me and fostered the desire that working with fossils of extinct animals wasn't just something from the movies. Now years later, this once young, captivated child has been able to pass on the passion to the next generation of potential palaeontologists and cave enthusiasts.

Even with Covid restrictions there was always a massive smile under the mask. Photo credit: Jack Parker Visuals

After exploring other potential career avenues such as veterinary nursing; there was still an itch that the veterinary industry wasn't scratching (and no, nothing to do with fleas!). I began to re-evaluate where I wanted to be to find the spark of inspiration, just like my younger self had in the caves all those years ago.

With much deliberation, I finally began a science degree at the University of Adelaide with mid-year entry during 2018, and at the conclusion of 2021 I had completed my Bachelor of Science in Palaeontology and Evolutionary Biology; a feat that had my younger self had previously thought was out of reach. Throughout my studies at university, I had the opportunity to attend multiple

field trips down to the Naracoorte Caves and this was organised due to the amazing and incredibly rich fossil deposits. This has led to its world heritage listing for the exceptional preservation and abundance of Pleistocene (2.58Ma-12Ka) faunal remains. Toward the conclusion of my degree, I was presented with the opportunity to join the site interpreters of Naracoorte which was an exceptional opportunity. So, with bags packed, I temporarily moved over four hours away to Naracoorte for the Christmas period.

Becoming the person, who in my opinion had the best job in the world was an absolute dream come true. Having the opportunity to engage with the extended community, and to share my passion for cave conservation, whilst discovering and sharing the stories of the past in the hope to inspire other adults and the next generation, brings me immense gratification. The enthusiasm of other science communicators, such as Sir David Attenborough and Steve Irwin have inspired my dedication to encourage everyone to become as engaged with the caves and the fossil stories as possible.

This experience has cemented in me that the world of palaeontology and science communication is where I have desired to be and has definitely 'scratched that itch'. While I continue my studies in palaeontology, currently beginning my honours degree, I look forward with much anticipation for the next holiday break where I can engage with future cave and fossil enthusiasts again.



Even with Covid restrictions there was always a massive smile under the mask. Photo credit: Jack Parker Visuals