

Q&A

Vehicle magnetism



SCOTT PEARSON

Question: Recently we were travelling in the Flinders Ranges in SA and came across Magnetic Hill near Orroroo. When we put our car in neutral, with the ignition and brakes off, it went by itself to the top of the hill and stopped. We tried it again with the car facing downhill (above). It went backwards up the hill. How is this possible?

Diane Clark, Silvan, Vic.

Answer: Your question, Diane, put some of the geophysicists we contacted in a spin. They couldn't believe a place with such strong remnant magnetism had for so long escaped the scientific literature. But senior geologist at SANTOS Ltd, Nick Lemon, who's worked in the Flinders for the past 19 years, set us straight. "It's a trick of the topography that fools everyone," he said. "There's an artificial horizon shift when you come around the corner. You imagine that you're going uphill, when actually you've rolled downhill. Basically it's a trick the locals use to get people to stay in the area a bit longer."

Retracing the Northwest Patrol

AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY-SPONSORED PROJECT

A group of four Aussie adventurers is retracing the route of the first successful traverse of New Guinea by Australians Charles Karius and Ivan Champion in 1928. The Northwest Patrol, as it came to be known, crossed the island at its widest part. Tim Jarvis, Ben Kozel, Max Dewdney and Chris Korte will commemorate the 75th anniversary through an expedition on foot and by

canoe. The team will also trek to the headwaters of the Alice (Ok Tedi) River to assess the Ok Tedi mine's impacts on the Alice and Fly rivers. Expedition leader Tim, who achieved the fastest unsupported trek to the South Pole (47 days) with Peter Treseder in 1999, works as an environmental scientist looking at the impacts of farming and mining in the Murray-Darling Basin. Ben is featured in *Rowing to the end of the world*, on page 38.

Ground-breaking research

AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY-SPONSORED PROJECT

Southern Tasmania's wet eucalypt forests contain the world's tallest flowering plants but, until now, no research has been carried out in the canopy. Thanks to a grant from our Society, the University of Tasmania's Yoav Bar-Ness will combine adventure with science when he climbs into treetops reaching 70 m high to map the arboreal environment. "Protesters have lived in the trees, activists have lit them up

for Christmas, foresters have topped them but nobody has explored the varied habitats in these organisms," said Yoav (pictured below photographing volunteer Gene Miller).

Yoav aims to map, photograph and study the habitats that are essential for animals such as the common brushtail and little pygmy-possum, at least eight bat species, birds such as the grey goshawk and countless invertebrates.



YOAV BAR-NESS