

**BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PALAEOANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.**

**(HALFJAARLIKSE NUUSBRIEF VAN DIE PALEANTHROLOGIESE VERENIGING VAN SUIDER AFRIKA.)**

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**Front cover:** The mountain on our cover is Kompasberg, a prominent local beacon close to Nieu Bethesda, a town which has played an important role in the development and evolution of South African palaeontology.

## EDITORIAL

As this publishing cycle of *PalNews* will come to an end at the next biennial meeting of the PSSA, which will be held at Grahamstown in a couple of weeks' time, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the last issue of *PalNews* Volume 15. It is with great fondness that I remember the previous meeting at Grahamstown (which also represented my introduction to the PSSA) and I am truly looking forward to revisit this setting. It will be great to see friends and colleagues again and hear what everyone has been up to (scientifically speaking) over the last 2 years.

We will probably also need to discuss various non-scientific palaeontological issues as there appears to be a slight (positive) 'climate-shift' in the attitude of funding organisations towards palaeontology in South Africa. So bring along your thinking caps (that is th.. not dr..) and bright ideas and see if we can make the most of any possible new opportunities.

Looking back over the last 2 years I must admit experiencing some satisfaction with the way these first electronic issues of *PalNews* turned out. The

only problem with such a sentiment though, is that I can claim none of the credit! As a complete technophobe I depended quite heavily on Ludwig Döhne, whose hard work and string of bright new ideas made a huge contribution to the 'E-*PalNews*'. Thank you Ludwig, your work is greatly appreciated!

We are of course always on the lookout for ideas to help us improve *PalNews* and the new format provides numerous opportunities for that. For this we need the input of the brightest young (and not so young) minds in palaeontology. Norton Hiller has already suggested that we include the abstracts of the PSSA meeting in *PalNews*. While this will not be possible for this issue of *PalNews*, this is exactly the kind of input we like to receive. We will definitely look into adding this (in some form) in the next issue of *PalNews*.

Look forward to see you all in Grahamstown!  
*Johann*

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## NEWS FROM BPI, JOHANNESBURG

On the palaeontological/palaeoanthropological front at Wits there has been much excitement as the Chair in the Institute for Human Evolution (IHE) has been advertised and three applicants have been interviewed. The plan is that the BPI and IHE will work closely together in the future and we look forward to this very positive development taking place. Meanwhile, at the BPI there has been much research activity over the past few months.

**Lucinda Backwell** is currently excavating and studying two Late Pleistocene inland South African sites to better understand early modern human behaviour, site formation processes, and the role of artefacts and bones in calibrating environmental sequences of climate change. The first site, Wonderkrater, studied in collaboration with Zoë Henderson, Louis Scott, Stephan Woodborne, Lyn Wadley and Lloyd Rossouw, is an ancient spring and peat mound locality in Limpopo Province that provides the pollen sequence on which South African vegetation history is based. This geological phenomenon is yielding a rich *in situ* Middle

Stone Age artefact assemblage and an unusual large mammal fauna.

The second site, Heelbo, studied in collaboration with Christine Steininger, James Brink, Lloyd Rossouw, Johann Neveling and Lucy Pereira, is a remarkably dense fossil bone bed eroding out of a donga in the eastern Free State. It is taphonomically interesting because it represents a well-preserved large animal mass death accumulation. Different scenarios are being explored to explain the mode of death and accumulation of the fossil deposit. A long-term actualistic experiment involving an eland carcass compliments the study of sedimentation rates and bone taphonomy in this particular environment. Removal of manganese and iron oxide deposits from the Plio-Pleistocene Coopers D faunal assemblage is ongoing thanks to Steve Pole, PhD candidate in the Chemistry Department at Wits. Preliminary results evidence previously unknown insect modification of the bones, which has led to collaboration with the entomologist Marcus Byrne, and the setting up of numerous actualistic studies concerning insects.



*'Sangoma' Dr Abdala records everything these bones will reveal to him about ancient fossil distributions.*

Lucinda has recently identified and extracted fossil hairs from ancient hyaena coprolites from Gladysvale cave, and will publish her findings in collaboration with Don Brothwell (University of York), Dave Martill (University of Portsmouth) and Lee Berger later this year. She has also identified evidence of cannibalism in Pleistocene deposits at Plovers Lake cave in the Cradle of Humankind and will contribute her findings to the *Journal of Human Evolution* which is dedicating a volume to the site.

Her work on early hominid bone tools with Francesco d'Errico of the French CNRS at the University of Bordeaux is ongoing. They recently presented their results at the *World of Elephants Congress, USA*, *Paleoanthropology Society Meeting, Puerto Rico*, and *African Genesis Conference* held in honour of Phillip Tobias in South Africa. The interferometer provides a new method of analysing the wear patterns on the bone tools, and is also being applied to the quantification of polishing observed on ancient hominin material from East and South Africa. Seasonal collection and analysis of termites in the Cradle of Humankind is ongoing as part of an isotopic study made in collaboration with Nick van der Merwe, UCT.

Still on the subject of palaeoanthropology **Lee Berger** and his team from the USA which also included three MSc students from the BPI **Nonhlanhla Vilakazi**, **Tebogo Mothupi** and **Bonita de Klerk** have recently returned from a National Geographic funded field trip to Palau where they have discovered an interesting occurrence of ancient humans. We look forward to watching this exciting story develop.

For the past six months **Marion Bamford** has been on sabbatical leave and we have had only glimpses of her as she briefly returns to do her laundry before leaving on her next trip abroad. It certainly appears that she is having a most productive time.

**Adam Yates** wrapped up his National Geographic project with the third major dig in the Elliot Formation of the Senekal district in the northern Free State. Matthew Bonnan from Western Illinois University, Johann Neveling and many volunteers joined him for this dig. The results exceeded all expectations and have produced several new dinosaur species, including two new basal sauropodomorphs and large theropod and even a possible stegosaur! Strangely, the almost ubiquitous *Massospondylus*, has not turned up at all at this site. The question is now why are so many previously unknown dinosaurs present at this site?

In other research Adam has written and co-written (with Matt Bonnan) two papers on the National Museum's spectacular complete 'prosauropod' skeleton from the *Euskelosaurus* range-zone, that will be published in an upcoming volume on early

sauropodomorph evolution due out next year. Several other dinosaur papers are also forthcoming including a new species of theropod, and the true identity of *Aliwalia rex*, South Africa's most mysterious dinosaur.

**Fernando Abdala** has been busy with a number of different projects. The paper on *Langbergia*, a new trirachodontid from the Subzone A (with Johann Neveling and Johann Welman), was recently published in the *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*, whereas the publication in the same journal of the description on the oldest cynodont of the world, found in the *Tropidostoma* Assemblage Zone (with Jennifer Botha and Roger Smith) is *in press*. He also expects the publication in the October issue of *Palaios* of a taphonomic note about a faunal aggregation of a cynodont and an owenettid in the *Lystrosaurus* Assemblage Zone (with Juan Cisneros and Roger Smith). Finally, the redescription of the cynodont *Platycraniellus* from the *Lystrosaurus* Assemblage Zone, including a phylogeny of eutheriodonts and the redescription and systematic analysis of the Late Permian Tanzanian cynodont *Parathrinaxodon* (this last with Mathew Allinson) are also in press.

In March **Bruce Rubidge** undertook a collecting trip to the lower Beaufort in the vicinity Somerset East district in order to do some detailed biostratigraphic work. Several fossils were recovered in the process and are being prepared at the moment. While in the Eastern Cape Bruce was joined by Michiel de Kock from the University of Johannesburg to do some paleomag drilling in the lower Beaufort around Klipplaat and we wait with abated breaths as Michiel unravels the story in his laboratory. Bruce spent a few days in the Palaeontology department at Izeko Museum looking at skulls of the biarmoschid *Hipposaurus* for a joint publication by him and Chris Sidor.

**Romala Govender** has successfully completed her PhD degree with a thesis entitled, *Morphological and Functional Analysis of the postcranial anatomy of two dicynodont morphotypes from the Cynognathus Assemblage Zone of South Africa and their taxonomic implications*. And has been awarded a NRF Postdoctoral Fellowship to work at the BPI under the supervision of Bruce Rubidge. Romala intends to undertake a detailed study of the postcranial anatomy of the second big dicynodont postcranial morphotype



"Hey! Jack and Paula! You made it! ... Now, quickly: Keep one hand across your throat and put the other one confidently down on Bruno's head. Stupid dog's going to get Agnes and me into a giant lawsuit one day."

which she has identified from the *Cynognathus* Assemblage Zone (subzone B) from South Africa. This study will also focus on other Triassic dicynodonts, in particular the second species of *Kannemeyeria*, *K.lophorhinus*, and *Dolichuranus* from Namibia.

**Merrill Nicolas** is frantically trying to put her PhD to bed. This has been a huge undertaking to bring together all the databases of tetrapod fossils from the Beaufort Group which are in South African museum collections. She is now at the stage of preparing her final draft and has some interesting results to show at the PSSA meeting.

**Juan Cisneros**, who is currently in Germany working on procolophonids with Ross Damiani, will also be submitting his PhD within the next few months. **Juan** will be back in SA in time for the PSSA meeting and has some exciting research results to share.

**Richard Mason** is also in the final stages of writing up his MSc on the geology and palaeontology of the Ecca-Beaufort contact north of Grahamstown.

Now we all look forward to the Billy and Rose's meeting in Grahamstown!

## **ROGER SMITH @IZIKO SAM, CAPE TOWN**

It has been a while since I reported back so I will keep this short and only include the highlights.

### Permo-Triassic Boundary Project:

Now in the second year of a 5 year NRF and PAST funded research project looking at the palaeoenvironmental and palaeoecological changes that coincide with each wave of vertebrate extinction within the End-Permian Mass Extinction event as well as the sequence and style of recovery of diversity in the earliest Triassic. This work is being done mainly in the southern Karoo in collaboration with Jennifer Botha (National Museum). However the Karoo strata of Niger and Tanzania are also being investigated (as part of a team led by Chris Sidor, Univ. Washington.)

Fossil highlights include a fully-articulated skeleton of the cynodont *Galesaurus* that Annelise has prepared and is now on display in the SAM foyer as an appetiser to the new Stone Bones display. A beautiful skull and anterior skeleton of the cynodont *Platycraniellus*, a curled-up gorgonopsian skeleton related to *Cyonosaurus* with mouth agape, a skull and anterior skeleton of the armoured dwarf pareiasaur



*Nanoparia*- only the 4<sup>th</sup> specimen ever found and the only one with lower jaw and articulated ribs and vertebrae. This is currently being prepared, both dorsal and ventral, by Georgina Farrell.

Tracking Gondwanan Dinosaurs is the working title of a PAST funded project re-investigating the trackway surfaces in the Late Triassic to Early Jurassic Karoo strata of Lesotho. The first trip took place in June 2005 and yielded some interesting results that were presented at Gondwana 12 conference in Mendoza. Working with Chris Sidor and Claudia Marsicano (Univ Buenos Aires) we mapped 3 sites (Moyeni, Leribe and Maphutseng). The main findings so far are concerned with the placing of the Triassic Jurassic boundary- Chirotheriod tracks- classically indicating Triassic strata- are found on the Moyeni surface which lies in the upper Elliot Formation- generally accepted to be Early Jurassic in age. A reinvestigation of stratigraphy and the step cycle of the enigmatic *Pentasauropus* at Leribe suggests that they were made by a thecodont such as *Erythrosuchus* rather than a dicynodont as was previously proposed.

The West Coast Fossil Park excavations over the past year have yielded some interesting new taxa - including several whale vertebrae which visitors can see lying in the bonebed of disarticulated sivathere skeletons. Hippopotamus, penguin and seal elements were also uncovered in this years dig.

Show and tell trips for the Friends of the SA Museum in the Beaufort West area proved very successful and this year was the 14th successive year this has taken place. I also took a group of geology students from Durham University round the peninsula and through the Karoo- up to the PT boundary.

Stone Bones gallery opened last September and the new African Dinosaur exhibit is currently under construction. A mounted skeleton of a juvenile *Jobaria* (ably reassembled by Adam Yates) and skulls of *Charcharodontosaurus* and *Sarchosucus* are the 'wow' exhibits. I would be very interested in anyone who knows of any articulated dinosaur (and related taxa) fossils still in the field so that we may excavate them for the new display.

### Publications

RETALLACK, J.G., METZGER,C.A., GREAVERT., JAHREN, H., **SMITH, RMH**, SHELDON, N.D. (Submitted) Mass extinction on land 9 million years before the End-Permian crisis. Bulletin Geological Society of America

ABDALA,F and **SMITH, R.M.H.** (Submitted) Gondwanan Middle Triassic cynodonts and the Namibian connection. Nature

ABDALA, F. CISNEROS, J.C. and **SMITH R.M.H.** (accepted) Faunal aggregation in the Early Triassic Karoo Basin: earliest evidence of shelter-sharing behaviour among tetrapods? Palaios

BOTHA J., **SMITH R.M.H** (accepted) Terrestrial vertebrate recuperation after the End-Permian extinction in South Africa . Journal of African Earth Sciences

CATUNEANU, O. WOPFNER, H. ERIKSSON, P.G., CAIRNCROSS, B. , RUBIDGE, B.S. , **SMITH, R.M.H.** , HANCOX, P.J. (accepted) The Karoo basins of south-central Africa. Journal of African Earth Sciences- special publication

BOTHA, J, ABDALA, F, **SMITH, R.M.H.** (accepted) The oldest cynodont: new clues on the origin and early diversification of the Cynodontia.

CHRISTIAN A. SIDOR AND **ROGER M.H. SMITH** (Submitted) A second burnetiamorph from the upper Permian Teekloof formation of South Africa Palaeontologia Africana

KENNETH D. ANGIELCZYK, JÖRG FRÖBISCH, & **ROGER M. H. SMITH** (submitted) On the Stratigraphic Range of the Dicynodont Taxon Emydops (Therapsida, Anomodontia) in the Karoo Basin, South Africa. Palaeontologia Africana

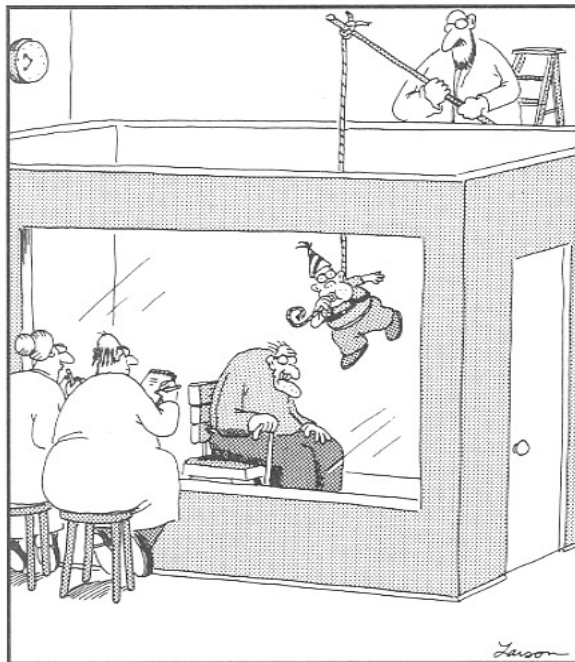
DAMIANI, R, STEYER, S., SIDOR,CA, **SMITH, RMH**, LARSSON, HCE, GADO, B, MAGA, A, IDE,O (submitted) The vertebrate fauna of the Upper Permian of Niger.III. A new primitive temnospondyl. Journal of Vertebrate Palaeontology.

BOTHA, J and **SMITH, R.M.H.** (accepted) *Lystrosaurus* species composition across the Permian/Triassic boundary of South Africa. Lethaia **SMITH, R.M.H.**, RUBIDGE, B.S. and SIDOR C.A. (in proof) A New Burnetiamorph (Therapsida: Biarmosuchia) From The Late Permian Of South Africa: Implications For Trans-Pangaeon Therapsid Migration. Journal Vert Pal

TRUEB, L, ROSS, C and **SMITH, RMH** (2005) A new pipoid anuran from the Late Cretaceous of South

Africa. Journal of Vertebrate Palaeontology 25(3)  
533-547

**SMITH RMH** and **BOTHA, J.** (2005) The recovery of terrestrial vertebrate diversity in South African Karoo basin after the End-Permian extinction. *Comptes Rendus Palevol* (4) 555-568.



At the Crabbiness Research Institute

## NEW ZEALAND NEWS - NORTON HILLER

Warmest greetings from the Land of the Long White Cloud. I was appalled to discover that it is almost four years since I last contributed to PalNews; you remember, back in the days when it was printed on actual paper. At that time I reported that I was still working on brachiopods but had turned my hand to vertebrates, marine reptiles in particular. Well in some respects nothing has changed. I continue to work on brachiopods and have been involved in a number of projects on New Zealand Cenozoic and Recent forms. However, in the most recent project, a review of the Superfamily Kraussinoidea with **Dave MacKinnon** of the University of Canterbury, we have had to look at South African species. This work is to be submitted for a memorial volume to Sir Alwyn Williams, the doyen of brachiopod workers until his death two years ago. It was certainly strange not to have Sir Alwyn present at last year's *International Brachiopod Congress* in Copenhagen.

After that meeting I participated in a field trip to Estonia where I finally got to see the *Obolus* sandstone, about which I had written some years ago, drawing an analogy with the accumulation of

phosphatic-shelled brachiopods along the Namibian coast at the present time.

Our work on Late Cretaceous marine reptiles has slowed down for a bit, awaiting redevelopment of our preparation facilities. However, we still have a few projects in the pipeline and we will get onto them in due course. In the meantime, I have become involved in a project on Paleocene shark teeth and now know more about fossil shark teeth than I ever wanted to know. To help guide us through the complexities of shark tooth identification, my colleague **Al Mannering** and I have enlisted the help of **David Ward** in England. It's great having someone who knows what they are talking about to turn too.

One problem we are struggling with is that the teeth we have collected so far indicate a shark fauna comprising predominantly deep-water forms, yet the stratigraphic unit from which the specimens come is consistently interpreted as a shallow-water deposit. In addition, there appears to be a complete absence of the shallow-water species to be expected in such a deposit. Both brain cells are working overtime on this conundrum.

I had hoped to get to this year's *PSSA Conference* but unfortunately funding was not in place in time. Maybe next time! Anyway, I wish you all a very pleasant and successful meeting and perhaps the editor will consider including the abstracts in the next electronic issue of *PalNews*?  
*Norton Hiller*

#### **Recent Publications**

- BRAND, U., LOGAN, A., HILLER, N. and RICHARDSON, J. 2003 Geochemistry of modern brachiopods: applications and implications for oceanography and paleoceanography. *Chemical Geology*, **198**: 305-334.
- HILLER, N. and MANNERING, A.A. 2004 Elasmosaur (Reptilia: Plesiosauria) skull remains from the Upper Cretaceous of North Canterbury, New Zealand. *Records of the Canterbury Museum*, **18**: 1-7.
- HILLER, N. and MANNERING, A.A. 2005 An unusual new elasmosaurid plesiosaur (Sauropterygia) from the Upper Haumurian (Maastrichtian) of the South Island, New Zealand. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum*, **51**: 27-37.
- HILLER, N., MANNERING, A.A., JONES, C.M. and CRUICKSHANK, A.R.I. 2005 The nature of *Mauisaurus haasti* Hector, 1874 (Reptilia:

Plesiosauria). *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*, **25**: 588-601.

WILSON, G.J., SCHIØLER, P., HILLER, N. AND JONES C.M. 2005 Age and provenance of Cretaceous marine reptiles from the South Island and Chatham Islands, New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Geology & Geophysics*, **48**: 377-387.

MACKINNON, D.I., HILLER, N., LONG, S.L. and MARSHALL, B.A. (submitted) *Neoaemula*, a new genus of platidiid brachiopod, with new observations on species referred to the Recent platidiid brachiopod genus *Amphithyris* Thomson. *Fossils and Strata*

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#### **TRANSVAAL MUSEUM: HUMAN ORIGINS AND PAST ENVIRONMENTS PROGRAMME (HOPE)**

It is with sadness that we report the death of Lawrence Radebe, who was employed by the Transvaal Museum (Northern Flagship Institution) as a palaeontological assistant for almost 10 years. He was based at Kromdraai where he assisted with excavations and preparation. We would like to express our sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Stephany Potze continues to prepare fossils and curate collections. In addition she attends to the needs of our many visitors who work on hominids and other material. We are being kept very busy!

Frank Senegas and Thomas Lehmann, having both completed their PhDs in France, are working at the Transvaal Museum on fossil mammals. Congratulations to Thomas for his third publication in *Nature*.

Francis Thackeray is serving as Acting Director of the Transvaal Museum but manages to find time for research. One paper on hominid molars appeared in the *South African Journal of Science* (101, 488) with Renee Botha and Erick L'Abbe as co-authors. We reported on variability in ratios of mesiodistal and buccolingual diameters in modern *H. sapiens* (males and females separately). We compared our results with specimens that have been attributed to robust australopithecines and early *Homo*. We identified the possibility that at least some specimens attributed to early *Homo*, and some specimens attributed to 'robust' australopithecines, may be conspecific, representing males and females of a single species which we are at present reluctant to

name, recognising that the single species would incorporate specimens previously attributed to *Paranthropus*, *Australopithecus* or *Homo*! A sequel to this paper is in the pipeline, with reference to cranial capacity and body mass.

Francis is travelling to Oxford, London, Paris and Avignon in June. In Paris he will be at the Musee de l'Homme to study the original Cro Magnon 1 cranium, following up on a discovery he made last year. In Avignon he will be with Jose Braga for a conference. Further progress is being made on CT scans of Mrs Ples, with particular interest in the roots of dentition.

Dominique Gommery and Francis are working on evidence that supports the view that Sts 5 (Mrs Ples) was an adolescent male at the time of death, about 2.1 million years ago. Lydie Dupont and Francis have published an article noting that the last recorded occurrence of *A. africanus* coincides with aridification (South African Journal of Science 102, 50).

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## **COUNCIL FOR GEOSCIENCE, PRETORIA**

Paradoxically, the first half of 2006 has been a quiet, but at the same time also an extremely busy time at the CGS. We have yet again been able to get Linda Karny's contract renewed (each time is a miracle), so she is still going at it in our collection, dividing her time between the electronic data base, paper data base, old field data, maps and physical curation in the fossil store.

Other good news is that we have received some funding from DST to conduct cross-country research on the Karoo sequences found in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia. The tricky thing is now to get this multi-faceted project to work. I have thus paid a couple of quick visits to Windhoek and Lobatse during the first few months of this year and was heartened by the great willingness of the scientists there to participate in collaborative projects. Manpower constraints will remain a bit of a headache, but the initial start has been promising. At present I am scouring the literature and drill core data, which is turning into a bit of a slog.

As a result I have not been able to get into the field as often as I would have liked, with most efforts restricted to short day trips. A highlight was when I was able to join Adam Yates, Matt Bonnan, Lucy Perreira and the rest of the Heelbo dinosaur team in the field for a couple of days during March. They have moved on from earlier work, now excavating a second dinosaur locality, while I continued with sedimentological work. We made happy progress for a couple of days until the heavens opened....again (it has happened so many times now that we are seriously considering forming a company and selling our services as rain-generators. Any ideas for a catchy name anyone?) More seriously though, we have been able to garner some useful information which we will present at the upcoming PSSA meeting in Grahamstown.

Fortunately I have patched up any differences with the weather-gods by June when I joined Rose Prevec, Bob Gastaldo and student Sam Reid in the Nieu Bethesda area (a place that can become quite frisky when a heavy coldfront strikes). We were however blessed with mostly sunny (sometimes even balmy) days and were able to continue with our exploratory work which mainly form a continuation of earlier



*The palaeobotanical crew manifests within the 'Owl House'.  
From left to right are Sam, Bob, Johann and Rose.*

studies on the changes in the palaeo-flora across the PT boundary. We have not been entirely unsuccessful in our quest and found some plant remains, while the beautiful exposures at the new Wapadsberg Pass was used to introduce Sam to the wonders of sedimentology and also sweat the taphonomic data.

Now we look forward to PSSA meeting in Grahamstown to report on these and hear what everybody else has been up to. Cheers!

*Johann*

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**NEXT DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS - FRIDAY, THE**

**24<sup>th</sup> of NOVEMBER 2006**

