

CROWD FUNDING: A WAY to BRING an IDEA to LIFE

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Leading up to the 2013 bid for Australia to host the upcoming 17th International Congress of Speleology (ICS), one of the benefits raised was that we could obtain AusAID funding to support students from Australia's neighbouring countries to attend the event, and so increase speleological efforts in those countries.

The Australian bid was successful, Australia's overseas aid budget greatly diminished, the congress organising committee were all up to their eyeballs in their efforts, but I thought that this idea from 2013 warranted some action.

Crowd-fund I decided, and set out to raise \$6000 for two scholarships to the congress for people from Oceania and South-East Asia. Very busy, I kept putting the idea off, but by late September I realised that the Christmas season, and related charity events, would be ramping up in November. Act soon, or I would miss the opportunity.

There's a suite of online crowd-funding organisations and my first deliberation was selecting which one to use. I settled on **Chuffed**, which I had never heard of before I started on this venture. With Chuffed, an Australian-based site, you got to keep all donations whether you reach your target or not, transaction fees were not deducted from the donation and the site only accepts crowd-funding for social causes.

Getting started was easy. Chuffed has easy to follow templates to put your project in words, some simple needs, supplying evidence of who you are and banking details, and the 'Scholarships to International Congress' project was launched on 25 September. There was a Chuffed support person available by phone or email to assist me throughout the project and, once the project was approved, I was offered a Skype meeting with the Chuffed CEO to discuss my marketing and promotional strategies. I took up this opportunity, learnt a lot from it and it sparked me with confidence.

The money didn't flow in; it trickled in and very slowly. Many of the crowd-funding efforts that I've seen raise their funds readily. Prominent people like Bob Brown and campaigns for species on the brink of extinction draw in money quickly. Not so my efforts and I honestly didn't think we would get there. I spent part of each day, or at night after nursing work, beating out emails and Facebook messages asking everyone I could think of if they might make a donation. One friend, who I have not seen for 15 years or more, responded that he has tightened his donation giving to just a few select charities, but he admired my persistence so sent \$50. Most of the donations were between \$50 and \$100, averaging close to the \$80 that the CEO of Chuffed had advised me I would get. Generally, the donors were from cave-associated contacts or my 'personal networks' but there were about six donors who are totally unknown to me.

I had chosen a 40-day campaign (there's nothing to be gained by dragging things out, people will either donate now or not at all) and it was about day 26 when things started picking up and I started to think that we might get to \$4000 if we were lucky. Once there was a swing in the momentum from some large and very generous donations, the money literally started rolling in. I could hardly believe it when I realised that we were getting close to \$5000 and then, two nights before the campaign was to close, we were close to \$6000. We made it, with time to spare, the final tally being \$6205.

Having successfully raised the money, I now felt the weight of responsibility to all the generous people who had donated. I

had to get the word out regarding the scholarships to ensure that we had a good selection of applicants to choose from and there are not a lot of ready to access speleological networks in the target countries. I Googled and emailed any relevant contacts I could find in Oceania or South-East Asia: university websites, land management authorities, tourism agencies, conservation groups, newspaper email addresses. ACKMA and ASF colleagues sent me their contacts.

Wanting to ensure that the recipients spoke English, part of the application process was that applicants had to provide an outline of a 20-minute presentation that they would give, in English, at the ICS if selected.

The applications were slow to arrive, but by the closing date of 28 February, I had 10 applications, the number that I was hoping for. There was one from Thailand, five from Indonesia (thanks to the efforts of Steve Bourne in encouraging applications), four from the Philippines and one from Papua New Guinea. I stood aside while two senior ACKMA figures pondered the applications and contacted referees. Then I had the pain of telling eight applicants that their efforts were unsuccessful and the joy of writing to the two successful applicants. They continue to express their gratitude at the opportunity provided to them.

If you have an idea you want to implement, crowd-funding is an option; but you do need to work hard. You need to be able to ask people to donate their money. It won't arrive otherwise.

In recent weeks, it has been my privilege to communicate with the successful applicants re making their travel arrangements. From my limited knowledge of them, I am sure that they are very suitable scholarship recipients. Please read about their karst studies and conservation projects below.

Ms Roxanne Tsang is a post-graduate student in the Anthropology and Sociology Strand, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Papua New Guinea, PNG.



Roxanne Tsang travelling to the field work site in New Britain .

Photo: Dr Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy.

Below is an excerpt from Ms Tsang's scholarship application:

I am currently engaged as a volunteer with the Nakanai Caves Cultural Heritage Project, an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project which is a collaboration between Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. (Sydney, Australia), James Cook University (Cairns, Australia), Australian National University (Canberra, Australia), University of Sydney (Sydney, Australia), University of Papua New Guinea (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG)) and the PNG conservation NGO 'Partners with Melanesians'.

This project aims to document and integrate the natural and cultural values of the Nakanai Caves in East New Britain Province, PNG. The Nakanai Karst area is currently on the PNG World Heritage Tentative List as part of the Sublime Karsts nomination. This project will contribute to an understanding of the cultural values should the area proceed to a cultural landscape nomination to the World Heritage List. The methodology incorporates community knowledge with archaeological and anthropological evidence to link natural and cultural values and define the landscape from local perspectives. Local input into the research is prioritised. This involves interviewing the locals on their perspectives of these cave and karst areas. This is the component of the project in which I am directly involved.

The documentation of the cultural values of Nakanai area is the first of its kind. However, we are fortunate to have access to reports from the cave expeditions by various Australians, French, British and French-Swiss cavers since early 1970s – 2012 (e.g. French caver, Jean-Paul Sounier) who discovered some of these caves and karsts and was able to map them.

Mr Isma Dwi Kurniawan is a post-graduate student at the Faculty of Biology, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia.

Below is an excerpt from Mr Kurniawan's scholarship application:

*My research focus is biospeleology. I have been involved in several cave and karst management and/or conservation activities in Indonesia. When I was an undergraduate student, I was a member of biospeleology student group in my university (Biospeleology Studien Gruppen, Yogyakarta State University (BSG UNY)) and participated in cave exploration with a research focus on cave biota in Menoreh and Gunungsewu karst area (Central Java). My first research on biospeleology is *The Diversity of Zooplankton in The Underground River of Jlamprong Cave, Gunungsewu Karst Area, Yogyakarta*. I have published this research in *The ASEAN Academic Society International Conference (AASIC), Hat Yai Thailand in 2012*. My undergraduate thesis was also on biospeleology with a cave conservation topic entitled *The Implementation of Edu-Ecotourism to conserve the ecosystem of Jlamprong Cave in Gunungsewu Karst Area, Yogyakarta*. I have presented this research in *The Society for Conservation Biology Conference (SCB) Asia Section 2014 in Melaka, Malaysia*. Several months ago, I joined a karst expedition sponsored by Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA) in Sangkulirang-Mangkalihat karst area (East Borneo). I was a member of the biospeleology team in this program and we developed a cave biota inventory. I am currently studying the impacts of human activities on cave ecology for my master thesis, focusing on show caves in Gunungsewu karst area (Central Java).*

I am a member of the Indonesian Speleological Society (ISS), which in turn is a member of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA). I'm part of Cave Biology and Conservation Division in the ISS. The Indonesian Speleological Society is a nonprofit organization working in the field of speleology in Indonesia. This organization engages all Indonesian professional researcher, academist, practitioner, student, and also local society focusing on cave and karst issues to work together and actively implement their knowledge for karst and cave management and/or conservation. We (ISS) in collaboration with several institutions and organizations have had conducted workshops, seminars, and projects focusing on karst and cave management and/or conservation in Indonesia. I am currently participating in a project of cave conservation and restoration in Gunungsewu karst area together with my colleagues in the ISS.

In closing, my sincere thanks to everyone who supported this effort, either by their donation or personal encouragement and support. We look forward to welcoming Roxanne and Isma to Australia for the ICS in July.



Isma Dwi Kurniawan.
Photo: Andi Joko Purnomo (BSG UNY)