

## Heart of the Nation

Photography Liz Rogers



Eucla 6443

**O**ne hundred and twenty metres under the Nullarbor Plain, Liz Rogers was finning slowly along Warbla Cave when she stopped to take this photo of her three fellow divers. She was struck by the way their exhaled air was pooling in the roof, shimmering like little puddles of mercury.

It's the surreal, beautiful things you see while cave-diving that enthral Rogers, 26, who took up the sport eight years ago. And the joy of weightlessness, too. "It feels like you're flying through space," she says of exploring a flooded cave system's interconnected tunnels and chambers, which can extend for many kilometres.

The team had a special scientific permit to enter Warbla, which was first explored in the early '70s but is now closed to recreational cave-divers in order to preserve the unusual bacteria that colonise its walls. Access was tough: they had to lower all their gear, and themselves, down ropes into the gaping hole in the desert near the Eucla Roadhouse, then swim through a thick guano soup floating in the top few metres of water. But after that, she says, the rewards were great: "It's a dream cave for photography because the walls are pure white and very reflective, and the water is so clear."

Rogers, who lives in Melbourne, works in risk management, advising companies "what might go wrong before it does". It's a good mindset to have in cave-diving, too, which has claimed three lives in the past couple of years in Australia. In Warbla, at least, she had her back covered by two special dive buddies, both veterans of the sport: that's her mum, Cheryl, in the foreground, with dad Peter bringing up the rear (and visiting US diver Forrest Wilson in the yellow helmet). How's that for a family holiday snap? **ROSS BILTON**

For a gallery of Liz Rogers' amazing cave-diving photography, go to [www.theaustralian.com.au/magazine](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/magazine)

