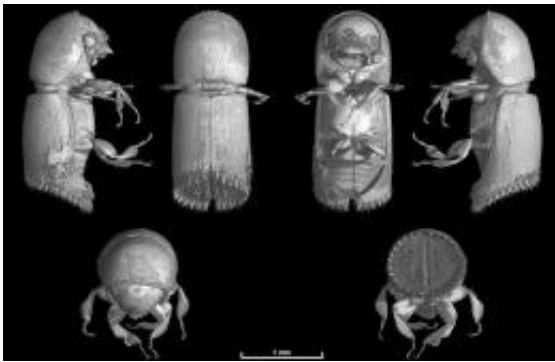


Australian amber is treasure trove of ancient life

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Beetle found in amber

(PhysOrg.com) -- A study led by University of New South Wales scientists has confirmed the discovery of Australia's most northerly fossil site - deposits of the precious mineral amber that contain a treasure trove of trapped animal and plant remains and even bubbles of air from millions of years ago.

The [amber](#) was found during a hazardous expedition last September to remote beaches on eastern Cape York, in far north Queensland, where the researchers braved crocodiles and sharks to find the source of amber pieces first seen washed up on nearby beaches in 2003 by alert beachcombers Beth Norris and Dale Wicks.

The amber itself is of many colours, from greens, reds and yellows to an

almost psychedelic blue, says lead investigator Dr Suzanne Hand, of the UNSW School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences (BEES). Its age is still uncertain but it has formed over millions of years from what was once tree resin in ancient rainforests.

"More importantly, many of the pieces we've looked at have inclusions of beautifully preserved plant and animal remains that were trapped in the resin before it hardened," Dr Hand says.

"There's a strange new species of beetle that looks like something from a science-fiction movie, a millipede, two species of ants, butterflies, spiders, many different kinds of flies, wasps, pseudo-scorpions, termites and even a tuft of hair from what I suspect is an ancient marsupial.

"This is a fabulous find. Not only are these are the most significant amounts of amber ever found in Australia but they occur where Australia and [New Guinea](#) were once joined by a land bridge and until now we had almost no information about what was living there at the time. Now we can study some of the actual animals."

Team members have taken more than 100 opaque pieces of the Cape York amber to Grenoble for analysis at the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility. "We knew they had inclusions but we were amazed at the variety of things that emerged on the screen," says Hand. The facility was able to use those scanned images to make almost perfect three-dimensional giant models of some of the creatures, including the strange beetle and a prehistoric spider.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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