



Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth

The newsletter of the Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Project



New acquisitions: some of the opalised fossils donated to LROFC under the Cultural Gifts Program this year. From left to right: pliosaur tooth, pine cone, theropod dinosaur tooth, yabby button, snail shell, dinosaur foot bone, pippi shell.

PHOTOS: ROBERT SMITH

LROFC Incorporated

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THANKS

to our supporters:

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*and others who help
in so many ways.*

WANT MORE INFO ON TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS?

*Save our national treasures,
keep them in Lightning Ridge
and get a tax break to say thanks!*

To find out about the Cultural Gifts Program and donating fossils, opal, heritage items or money in return for tax incentives, contact us on 02 6829 1667 for obligation-free information.

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM STEPS OUT BACK

Assistant Director of the Australian Museum, Janet Carding, visited Lightning Ridge for a whirlwind tour on October 24 at the invitation of Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre.

The Australian Museum has a highly significant collection of fossils from Lightning Ridge. With Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre set to become Australia's premier facility for the collection, research and display of opal gemstones and fossils, dialogue is underway between the institutions.

Links between Lightning Ridge and the Australian Museum go back decades. Fossils from the Ridge first entered the museum's collections some 90 years ago and museum staff have visited Lightning Ridge often since. 'Myrtle,' a head and neck model of the dinosaur *Muttaborrasaurus*, was created by sculptor Alan Groves for a Lightning Ridge diorama in the Australian Museum's 'Australia's Lost Kingdoms' exhibition in 2000.

Myrtle now resides in LROFC's Morilla Street,



Myrtle the Muttaborrasaurus, a gift from the Australian Museum.



Janet Carding (right), Assistant Director of The Australian Museum, visiting the Walk-in-Mine with LROFC steering committee members George Mulder and Elizabeth Smith.

Lightning Ridge, display and project office.

The Australian Museum is now considering proposals from LROFC as to how the museums can work together for the benefit of both institutions, their precious collections, research programs and the visiting public.

WELCOME TO AIR LINK

Regional airline Air Link has joined the Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre team as LROFC's travel partner for 2006.

For 12 years, Air Link has provided the only regular commercial air service to Lightning Ridge, offering a daily service between the Ridge and Dubbo and now also flights from Dubbo to Sydney.

Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre is delighted to welcome Air Link as its travel partner. We encourage you to support the regional airline that is supporting us.



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Highlights of current LROFC project activities

Architects Glenn Murcutt and Wendy Lewin are near completing designs for the LROFC building. "We're very, very excited," Glenn said. A meeting will be called in Lightning Ridge in early 2006 to present the plans and seek feedback. Members will be invited to attend.

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Donations of opalised fossils, opal and other items are coming in regularly; already, some 400 opalised fossils have been received. Particular thanks go to donors Steve Turner, Rob and Debbie Brogan, Clytie Smith and Joe Walker. Inquiries are treated confidentially and donors may choose public recognition or ongoing confidentiality.

*

Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre is selecting a patron. Members will be sent voting forms; all interested persons are invited to proffer their suggestions.



Transfixed: fascinated movie-goers at LROFC's film night on 27 October at Lightning Ridge Bowling Club. See 'Events', over.

EVENTS

LROFC Incorporated held its 2005 Annual General Meeting on October 11, followed by a supper for members.

The elections resulted in only one change on the executive committee: welcome to new committee member Michael Taylor, who replaces George Mulder. George is still on the project steering committee... you can't keep a good Mulder down!

LROFC is now officially a recipient institution for the Cultural Gifts Program. On 24-25 October, the Committee on Taxation Incentives for the Arts endorsed LROFC's Collection Policy and noted that LROFC had approval as a Public Museum for the purposes of the Income Tax Assessment Act.



Morrie, Ross and dino at film night.

The Opal and Fossil Centre's third free film night, held on 27 October, was fantastic. Over 140 people came to watch films about the Ridge from 1925, 1966 and 2003 and to hear about the petrified log featured in our last newsletter.

Twenty new members joined up (welcome!) and the dino money boxes made their public debut, swallowing coins for LROFC's building fund. Thanks to Lightning Ridge Historical Society for the videos, to Lightning Ridge Bowling Club for supper and to our wonderful audience for being there!

Thank you for your support in 2005. 2006: is going to be exciting...we hope you have a wonderful year.

"Just a bit of doggerel"

"It's just a bit of doggerel," is how David Schoeffel (aka 'Shovel') describes his collection of Lightning Ridge-inspired poems, donated to Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre this month.

Shovel's poems, written between 2003 and 2005, paint a colourful word-portrait of life on the Ridge opal fields. We look forward to bringing them to an adoring public in 2006.



Shovel recites.

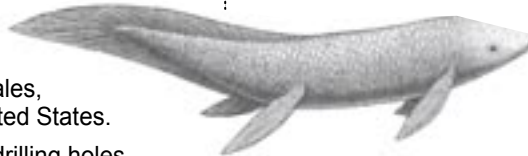
PROFILE: LROFC'S MEMBERS

At the end of 2005 there are 247 members of Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Incorporated. They're a great bunch of people, with an incredible range of skills.

The majority of our members live in Lightning Ridge or the surrounding opal fields, but we also have members from across New South Wales, interstate and as far away as the United States.

We've had offers of everything from drilling holes, making clay pavers, boilermaking, building, folding newsletters, taking photos, occupational health and safety, solar energy options and help with computers, to cooking curries, selling postcards, sharing ideas from other museums, help setting up our research laboratory and opal cutting teaching facilities, dinosaur models and donations of opal, fossils, mining and heritage items.

And to everyone who just signs up and pays their \$10: thank you - you make a difference - you show that what we're doing is important.



OLD MUSH GRINDERS - THE LIGHTNING RIDGE LUNGFISH

ELIZABETH SMITH

Lungfish evolved over 400 million years ago, and were once regarded as the evolutionary jumping between fish and amphibians. Nowadays, scientists place them in an evolutionary backwater, disconnected from the mainstream event that drove air-breathing vertebrates onto the land. In other words, during fish evolution, the swim bladder developed

indicates large permanent water bodies - very big rivers and lakes.

Each lungfish has four toothplates, two uppers and two lowers. Some opal miners call the toothplates 'animal paws' but the strong ridges are not tooth crowns or individual teeth - the grinding surface lies flat in the jaws and the ridges face outwards.

Although the toothplates are ossified (bony), the lungfish skeleton is cartilaginous - just old gristle - so other lungfish elements are extremely rare at the Ridge. The toothplates are distinctive



Toothplates in a lungfish lower jaw, seen from above.

twice into a respiratory organ. It was a group of fishes known as crossopterygians whose descendants clambered out of the sea, and the lungfish were left behind in the backwaters.

Amazingly, that's where you'll find them today, in the rivers of southeast Queensland, alive and slowly paddling, still grinding up soft water plants and detritus with their weird toothplates.

Even more amazing, the modern lungfish *Neoceratodus forsteri* is exactly the same species that lived 100 million years ago at Lightning Ridge.

There are two further types of fossil lungfish here: *Ceratodus wollastoni*, named after the famous opal buyer and adventurer Tully Wollaston; and another much larger and rarer *Ceratodus* species that was up to two metres long, a real monster. Lungfish have been restricted to freshwater habitats for 340 million years, and the size of the Ridge toothplates

with a very fine grainy texture on the grinding surface and regular, coral-like spongy internal structure. Once you recognize this texture, you'll find scraps of toothplates all over the opal fields.



Many really beautiful opalised toothplates are held in local collections, but well-preserved, complete specimens are rare. So treasure your old mush grinders, for they can tell many stories.

MIGRATION MEMORIES

Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre, Lightning Ridge Historical Society and the Ridge's Transcultural Community Council are assisting Dr Mary Hutchison of the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, with an exhibition project about Australian migration histories. The National Museum of Australia is also a major partner in the project.



Six people from the Lightning Ridge area will tell stories about how migration has impacted on their lives. The exhibition will be displayed in the Ridge in 2006 and may appear at the National Museum in 2007. Work from the project may also be incorporated into the Opal and Fossil Centre.

Mary Hutchison (right) with Jennifer Colless and her home-made opal cutting machine. Jennifer's grandfather A.J.B. 'Pappa' Francis, who migrated to Australia from Germany, was a highly-regarded opal buyer. Jennifer grew up at Francis' Store on the corner of Opal and Morilla Streets, Lightning Ridge, in the 1940s.

★ ★ ★ WANTED ★ ★ ★

With LROFC membership growing strongly, we need a membership secretary to help maintain records and organise mailouts.

This voluntary position requires a commitment of a few hours each month, from a well-organised person with computer skills.

WANTED: film, video, photos or sound recordings of Lightning

Ridge, Glengarry, Grawin, Sheeppark etc.

LROFC's film nights have been a hit and we want to keep them going.

If you have something we could show at a community film night or add to the Opal and Fossil Centre's displays or archives, please contact us. We can turn photos into slide shows or even arrange to transfer old film to video.

WANTED: person/s to liaise with local schools and preschools.

We need someone to liaise with local schools and start developing LROFC-related activities and programs for children. Support will be provided. Please contact us if you are interested or would like more information.

Do you have something that is part of our opal field or town heritage?

Old or interesting mining or cutting equipment, home-made gadgets, relics of camp life, photos or souvenirs from times past?

Why not immortalise them in the Opal & Fossil Centre?

If you can help with a 'Wanted' item, please speak with any LROFC committee member, call Jenni Brammall on 02 6829 1667, or email opalfossil@wj.com.au