



Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth

The newsletter of the Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Project

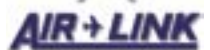
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PRECIOUS COLLECTION GROWS

In little more than a year, Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre has added hundreds of opalised fossils to what is becoming the world's greatest public collection of these rare earth treasures.

Most have been donated under the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, which offers tax incentives to encourage donation of culturally significant items to Australia's public museums and galleries.

Others have been given by people who simply want their fossils to have a safe, permanent home and be available for others to see, study and enjoy.

Opalised fossils have been coming in at an unprecedented rate. LROFC Vice President Elizabeth Smith believes this is because donors know their treasures will stay in Lightning Ridge.

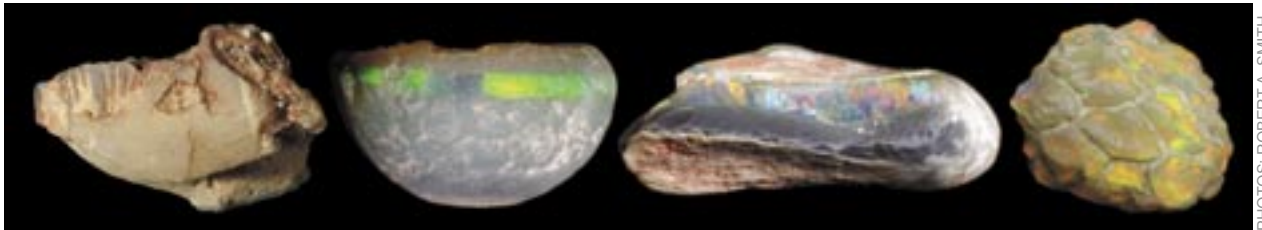
"Some of these pieces were mined years ago," Elizabeth said, "and the owners have decided that this is the right place for these miraculous little things that they discovered and saved and treasured for so long."

Highlights include the backbone of a monotreme mammal; a toothplate from a new species of lungfish; a huge dinosaur foot bone; superb collections of opalised pine cones and mussel shells; and the teeth of dinosaurs, crocodiles, fish, pliosaurus and a pterosaur.

As well as opalised fossils, the Centre has accepted donations of geological specimens, books, scientific papers and artworks that record life on the opal fields.



Recent fossil donations to Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre under the Cultural Gifts Program. Above: turtle tail bone (caudal vertebra). Below, from left: part of the jaw of a hypsilophodontid dinosaur; yabby gastrolith donated by Down to Earth Opals; turtle shell fragment donated by Fire Opals Mining & Trading; gold-orange pine cone.



DINO-MITE DONATION

Potter Lorraine Clayton has created an unforgettable dinosaur moneybox for Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre.

Lorraine is a well-known pottery teacher at Lightning Ridge Arts and Crafts Council and has won many prizes for her hand-built and wheel-thrown pieces. Although she works in a range of styles, it was Lorraine's whimsical animals that inspired a local fan to commission a money box for the Opal and Fossil Centre.

It took 18 months, but the wait was worth it! Standing 75 centimetres high, the dino's bristling teeth and claws are belied by its big happy grin and eyes.

Lorraine has kindly donated her creation to the Centre, where it will help with fundraising and be cherished for years to come.

Can you think of a name for our new dino-mate? If so, let us know!



Lorraine Clayton and the dinosaur she created for the Opal and Fossil Centre.



'The Black Hand' by Doris Wilkinson.

TAPESTRY A TREASURE

LROFC members Doris and Cec Wilkinson have donated a framed 785mm x 515mm woollen tapestry to the Centre's collection, depicting a scene on the historic Three Mile opal field adjacent to the site on which the Opal and Fossil Centre will be built.

Made by Doris in 1985, the tapestry captures the ambience of the Three Mile at the time when the Wilkinsons first visited Lightning Ridge, in 1982. It includes the iconic "Black Hand" fingerpost, known to generations of Lightning Ridge residents and visitors, and still a landmark today.

The tapestry is in fine condition and is a significant original work recording social history and mining methods on the opal fields.

PHOTO: ROBERT A. SMITH

PHOTOS: ROBERT A. SMITH

EVENTS

The first scientific paper about a fossil in LROFC's collection has been submitted for publication.

Ben Kear and Henk Godthelp's paper 'Vertebrate bite marks on an Early Cretaceous unionoid bivalve from Lightning Ridge, New South Wales, Australia,' focuses on an opalised mussel shell containing a series of puncture holes.

After a series of detailed examinations, Ben and Henk were able to show that the holes were made by a vertebrate predator (e.g. a crocodile, plesiosaur or bony fish) rather than by an invertebrate borer or some other cause of damage. They also concluded that the mussel was not killed or swallowed by its attacker, but was buried alive or shortly after its death.

Even a humble mussel fossil can open a whole ancient world if you know what to look for!

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Henk Godthelp once again held the crowd in thrall when he gave his second public talk for Lightning Ridge Opal & Fossil Centre.



Henk's presentation on 17 August was titled 'The Joy of Fossils: What's So Special About Lightning Ridge?' A packed audience was treated to slides of Henk's field work at fossil sites around the world, and to the reasons why the mines of Lightning Ridge and their precious fossils stand proud on the world stage.

Photographs from Australia's first known amber deposit also generated great interest.

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In September, Lightning Ridge District Bowling Club allocated \$5000 to the Opal & Fossil Centre under its Community Development Support Expenditure Program. The Club wrote, "We can see that the Museum will be a major asset to our Town and Community, and the tourist potential will be unmeasurable in the coming years."

ON THE WALLABY TRACK

Paintings of the historic opal fields attracted great interest at 'On the Wallaby Track,' an exhibition of watercolours by accomplished artist Bob Pelchen, held at the Opal and Fossil Centre's display space from August 30 to September 1.

Guests filled the exhibition space on opening night, spilling out into the carpark to enjoy conversation and refreshments.

By the end of the exhibition, more than three-quarters of Bob's Lightning Ridge paintings had sold, several purchased by locals for whom the subject matter had special significance.

Peter Waterford and Tina Gibson were tickled pink to discover a painting of the 1960s mining claim that belonged to Tina's father, Jack Gibson. The first hoist and York hoist in Lightning Ridge remain on this claim, along with other early mining equipment preserved by Peter and Tina.

The exhibition came about after LROFC member Warwick Schofield encountered Bob painting plein air on the opal fields in May 2006. The Opal and Fossil Centre invited Bob to exhibit his works and happily, Bob accepted the invitation.

Exhibition opening night, clockwise from top: Bob with Tina Gibson and Peter Waterford; LROFC Life Member Graeme Anderson; a quiet moment contemplating the paintings; opening night crowd; Bob with the beautiful painting he donated to the Opal and Fossil Centre.

Bob and his wife Caroline were delighted with the response to Bob's paintings. Before returning home to Morwell, Victoria, they donated a beautiful watercolour to the Opal and Fossil Centre and spent time gathering material for more paintings.



HEAVENLY HYPESIES... RHYMES WITH GYPSIES

ELIZABETH SMITH

110 million years ago, hysilophodontids were the most common Australian dinosaurs. Their diversity in Australia is unique and there are many at Lightning Ridge. Some were smaller than magpies, others were among the largest for the group, perhaps 3 metres from nose to tail tip.

Don't be deterred by the name - these were designer-model dinosaurs, they looked fabulous and were probably as lovable as your favourite dog.

How can we tell? Certainly, their bones are not abundant here and so far we can't fully reconstruct any of the Ridge hysies.

But they resemble hysies from overseas sites where near-complete skeletons have been unearthed, and the bones we know speak loud and clear.

A hysie tooth is like a fan on a stalk, with splayed ridge tops forming a blade for shearing off tough leaves and plant parts. As herbivores, hysies probably grazed in herds like today's antelopes and kangaroos and the length

and strength of their hind limb bones indicate that they were very fast and agile.

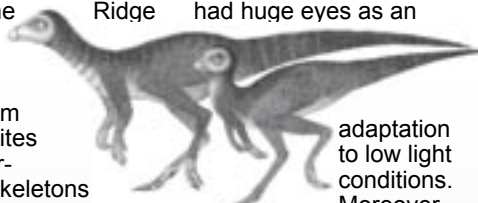
Graceful animals with fine snouts, long necks and tapered tails, the bones of their hands and feet in particular, and especially the claw bases or unguis suggest great delicacy and beauty.

Their ancient habitats here were close to the Antarctic Circle, so they may have had huge eyes as an

adaptation to low light conditions. Moreover their hides

or skins would have been patterned with wonderful stripes and dapples for camouflage among the ferns, cycads and pine trees.

Exquisite by any standard, they were heavenly hysies indeed and simply drop-dead gorgeous.



GRAB A GREAT READ

The glossy 2006 *Australia's Age of Dinosaurs* yearbook is available for \$19.95 from Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre.



This excellent magazine-style publication provides hours of reading and browsing pleasure for anyone interested in fossils, fossil hunting or Australia's ancient past.

The present issue includes an article about Lightning Ridge miners Rob and Debbie Brogan and the opalised theropod dinosaur foot bone they donated to Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre under the Federal Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

Age of Dinosaurs is a not-for-profit organisation based in fossil-rich black soil country near Winton in Queensland, where they run dinosaur digs and are

planning an Australia's Age of Dinosaurs museum.

Contact LROFC (see front page for contact details) to get your copy of this great publication. If you would like us to post you a copy, please add \$5 to your order.

DINO MONEY BOXES AVAILABLE

Due to public demand, we now also have a few wonderful wooden dinosaur money boxes available for purchase.

These brightly-coloured little fellows have been a great hit around the shops of Lightning Ridge, raising several hundred dollars already for the Opal and Fossil Centre Project.

They stand 50cm high and can be supplied either assembled or ready for simple assembly. Kids just love putting coins in the dino's mouth and watching them wriggle down into its tummy. Cost: \$110 plus postage. There are only a few available at the moment, but we can order more.

