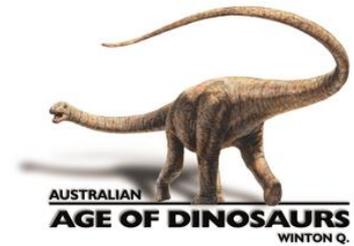


15 April 2017



Queensland's best major tourist attraction expands, again

- Former Governor General of Australia and Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum Patron, the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, has officially opened a new Queensland visitor attraction
- Funded by \$1.3m of private funds and government grants, Dinosaur Canyon is expected to become a catalyst in the development of international tourism
- Life-sized bronze dinosaur exhibits recreate life as it would have been 95 million years ago
- Images and video footage are available and can be accessed by following these links: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ovpl3hpjzbwqwoo/AABmyoqDdmRyeyCM94yoTmW1a?dl=0>

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs (AAOD) Museum today officially opened its latest tour attraction, Dinosaur Canyon. Dinosaur Canyon is located at the site of the future AAOD Museum – a multi-million dollar project that is expected to become a catalyst in the future development of international tourism in western Queensland.

The new attraction consists of a spectacular building perched on the cliff overlooking Dinosaur Canyon and includes 300 metres of elevated concrete pathway throughout the gorge below. Five outdoor dinosaur galleries are positioned along the pathway, which resembles a treetop walk as it winds throughout massive boulders and thick vegetation below the rim of a gorge. The Dinosaur Canyon exhibits recreate life as it would have appeared during the Cretaceous Period including: *Dinosaur Stampede*, *Pterodactylus Family*, *Kunbarrasaurus ieversi*, *Death in the Billabong* and *Valley of the Cycads*.

Background

On 30 May 2015 former Governor General of Australia and Museum Patron the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO launched Stage three of the AAOD Museum of Natural History Project. This third stage, which includes the eventual construction of the AAOD Museum, has been broken up into several construction phases of which Dinosaur Canyon is the first. David Elliott, Executive Chairman of AAOD Ltd, and his family, have project managed construction of the new facilities. "The most important role of the Dinosaur Canyon Project is to interpret the AAOD Museum's fossil discoveries and research," said Mr Elliott. "The Museum has amassed Australia's most comprehensive collection of large dinosaur bones in little more than a decade which, from a scientific point of view, is outstanding. However, from a regional economy point of view, it is imperative that we interpret these discoveries into a popular tourism product," he said.

The \$1.3m construction of Dinosaur Canyon has been made possible through a combination of government funds, private sponsorship and the Museum's contributions from operating funds. Government contributions include matching dollar-for-dollar funds from the Australian Government's Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure Program administered by the Queensland Government's Department of Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games.

Private contributions toward gallery exhibits were provided by the John Villiers Trust, the Wavish Family, Denise O'Boyle, Jim and Maxine Macmillan, and Rex Littlewood. Noble Resources Pty Ltd

and the Winton Shire Council provided funds to build a road to Dinosaur Canyon and purchase an electric shuttle service. "It is a relief to finally get this finished," said Mr Elliott who has been stationed onsite with his wife Judy since March 2016. "Now that we have public infrastructure and a critical mass of attractions at Dinosaur Canyon, it will be relatively easy to add new exhibits and expand our tourist offering over time without such a high monetary outlay," he said. "We've been working non-stop to get this finished and we are finally there. It's almost like, you've gone over the hill to the other side and now you can finally see the big picture of where it is going."

The idea of an Australian natural history museum began following David Elliott's chance discovery of a giant sauropod femur in 1999. Commencing in 2012 the not-for-profit Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum was stationed in a makeshift fossil preparation laboratory in a shed on the Elliott's property until 2009 when it moved to a new, purpose-built science and tourism operation located on a 1,400 hectare mesa 24km south-east of Winton. Mr Elliott admits he "...never dreamed in those early days that it would end up where it is has."

The AAOD Museum includes the most productive Fossil Preparation Laboratory in the Southern Hemisphere, a multi-award winning Reception Centre and fossil Holotype Room and now, from April 2017, Dinosaur Canyon. The Museum has also been actively involved in the scientific publication of its new fossil discoveries including the fossil bones of Australia's most complete Cretaceous sauropod *Diamantinasaurus matildae*, and the new, recently named sauropod *Savannasaurus elliottorum*. Australia's most complete theropod dinosaur *Australovenator wintonensis* was also found by the AAOD Museum and, along with *Diamantinasaurus* and *Savannasaurus*, now resides in the Museum's Holotype Room. The Museum has expanded rapidly in recent years, and was named Queensland's best Major Tourist Attraction in November 2016.

"Dinosaur Canyon is different to anything else out there," said Winton Shire Council Mayor, Butch Lenton. "The galleries throughout Dinosaur Canyon contain life-size bronze reconstructions of dinosaurs that lived in Australia over 95 million years ago. This is an exciting new addition to tourism in Western Queensland and a great drawcard for Winton," said Mayor Lenton.

Visitors begin their journey at Dinosaur Canyon Outpost...

Designed by Cox Rayner Architects (now Cox Architecture), the Outpost building blends into the surrounding environment and features rock-textured walls that appear to rise up from a belt of ironstone ridges. The building has two ambulant toilets, cold drinking water and beautifully crafted concrete seating with display plinths and a school seating area.

...before walking down into the gully at the edge of a billabong, the resting place of a large, dead sauropod.

Macmillan Littlewood Gallery featuring Death in the Billabong exhibit. This exhibit is a glimpse into how dinosaur bones became preserved and the effect of the environment on preservation shortly after death. The sauropod carcass lays scattered amongst footprints of other long-necked dinosaurs and scavengers – this is a great insight into how dinosaur bones are preserved in the Winton Formation.

Turning a corner the tops of several large canopies can be seen above an enclosed valley...

Cretaceous Garden featuring Valley of the Cycads. Looking down into the valley from the pathway visitors will see a collection of giant cycads, relatives to similar Cretaceous species that existed in this area millions of years ago. These trees are the first of several Cretaceous Garden exhibits and are believed to be 700-800 years old.

A short distance on from Valley of the Cycads, a small family of pterosaurs sit precariously atop a giant boulder.

Denise O'Boyle Gallery featuring *Pterodactylus* Family exhibit. These life-sized flying reptiles give an insight into prehistoric Australia's vast array of prehistoric animals aside from dinosaurs.

Walking up a small ramp the terrifying encounter between a large, five-metre long theropod and 24 small dinosaurs has been frozen in time...

Wavish Family Gallery featuring Dinosaur Stampede exhibit. Based on the fossilised footprints preserved at Dinosaur Stampede National Monument (110km south-west of Winton), this exhibit is action-packed and captures a moment of pure prehistoric terror.

At the end of the pathway three armoured dinosaurs relax beneath the shade of a tree.

John Villiers Gallery featuring *Kunbarrasaurus ieverisi* exhibit. This exhibit features three dinosaurs based on the original skeleton of *Kunbarrasaurus* discovered in Richmond in 1989. These models provide an insight into herd animals and the defence mechanisms necessary to live in Australia millions of years ago.

Guided tours of Dinosaur Canyon will begin from the Reception Centre and include return transfers via the Noble Express shuttle. Following a brief tour of the galleries by a Museum guide, visitors will be able to enjoy the views, collect unique dinosaur tracings from each exhibit plaque using the Dinosaur Canyon visitor guide book or sit down and listen to the free audio guide.

As part of today's celebration Dame Quinton Bryce returned to officially open Dinosaur Canyon with other key supporters and contributors. Around 150 people attended from across the region and interstate, to be the first visitors through the attraction and share a celebratory dinner. "This is a great achievement for Queensland and Winton," said Dame Quentin. "It has the potential to become Australia's foremost natural history, education and research facility and will be a fascinating place for future generations to enjoy and cherish."

"People often ask me, where to from here?" said Mr Elliott. "This is only the first phase of Stage three! We still have the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History building to come." Following the completion of Dinosaur Canyon the Museum will begin work on a second phase of preliminary infrastructure and consolidation before embarking on the delivery of its 6,000 square metre, main Museum building. It is expected that, once complete, the Museum will become an international centre of excellence leading in the conservation and research of Australia's dinosaurs. "The AAOD Museum of Natural History will house education, research and tourism facilities, along with world-class dinosaur exhibits, fossils, minerals and interpretations representing the evolution of life in Australia," said Mr Elliott. "It will tell the story of the Australian continent, presenting its 4.5-billion-year geological journey through deep time as a special part of the heritage of all Australians,"

Museum contact:

David Elliott
Field palaeontologist and Executive Chairman
Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum
+61 428 573 056
david.elliott@aaod.com.au
www.australianageofdinosaurs.com