

# ***Ausktribosphenos nyktos***

## The Inverloch Mammal

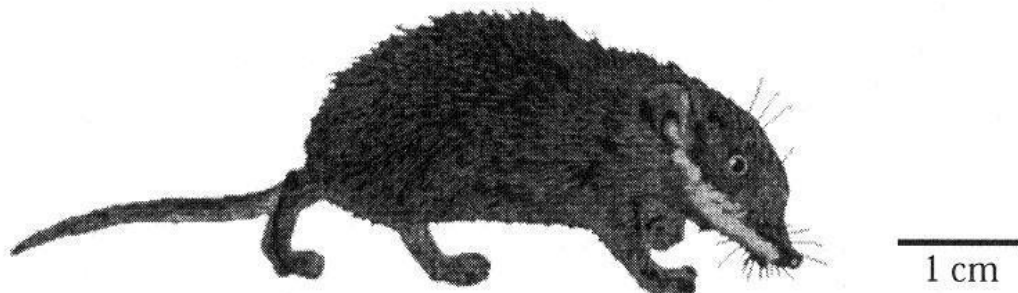
The most longed-for fossil from the Dinosaur Dreaming dig site was finally discovered in March 1997. The lower jaw of a mammal was found by Nicola Barton (now Sanderson), a Dinosaur Dreaming volunteer from England. This little mammal has since been named *Ausktribosphenos nyktos* (Ossk-try-bow-sfeen-oss nick-tose). This means “the Southern Cretaceous Tribosphenic Mammal of the Night”. The term “tribosphenic” refers to three cusps on the molar teeth and “the night” refers to the long polar winters.

The jaw is only 16 millimetres long, about the diameter of a 10 cent coin. It has four teeth – three molars and the last premolar. The teeth closely resemble those of placental mammals – a group including rats, rabbits, cats, dogs and us!

When this tiny jaw was found in 1997, we didn’t know if this would be the only evidence of this enigmatic group of mammals, but as Dr. Tom Rich said “The first one is the hardest to find”. Once we were aware that there were tiny mammals preserved at the site, we changed our excavation technique and began breaking the rock even smaller – to the size of a sugar cube. The result was outstanding. In the 13 years since the first jaw was found, we have recovered more than 40 tiny mammal jaws. They are not all *A. nyktos*; some belong to more ancient groups of mammals, which we will talk about in coming months.



*Ausktribosphenos nyktos* jaw. Photographer: S. Morton, Monash University.



*Ausktribosphenos nyktos*  
(The first Inverloch mammal)

Reconstruction of *A. nyktos* by D. Gelt, Monash University.