

Dinosaur Dreaming Update April 2020

by Lesley Kool

Firstly, apologies to all of those who have been wondering why you haven't seen an update for a while. This has been the craziest year that I can remember, which I am sure applies to everyone. We were all geared up for the annual Dinosaur Dreaming dig to our site in the Otways in February when Victoria was hit with the worst fire season in many years. Head researchers Tom Rich and Pat Vickers-Rich made the responsible decision to postpone the dig until May, after the fire season. Of course no-one could have predicted the Covid-19 pandemic that swept the world so quickly and forced most countries into lock-down. Consequently the May dig has also been postponed and at this stage we are unsure when the next dig will go ahead. The good news is that our excavation permit has been extended for a further three years so we still have the time to organise future digs.

However, life has hardly been dull in the palaeontology world along the Bass Coast of Victoria. As some of you know, local geologist Mike Cleeland has been prospecting the Early Cretaceous rocks that outcrop along the south coast of Victoria for more than 30 years. In that time he has made some amazing discoveries, including the holotype jaws of the giant amphibian *Koolasuchus cleelandi*, the first evidence of ceratopsian dinosaurs in Australia – *Serendipaceratops arthurclarkei* and the remains of the largest theropod dinosaur claw in Australia. Mid last year he took on a couple of apprentice prospectors – Melissa and Simona, who very quickly got their respective eyes in and increased the tally of newly exposed bones enormously.

Melissa has eyes like a hawk and can spot the tiniest of bones among the conglomeratic rock. She has single-handedly discovered a number of new fossil localities along the Bass Coast, which have yielded extremely interesting bones, including three ornithopod jaws and some that have yet to be identified.

Simona has also discovered numerous bones including an ornithopod femur and two strange looking long bones that so far defy identification.

The Bass Coast Prep Group, made up of a dozen enthusiastic volunteer preparators was going along quite well until the self-isolation restrictions were announced. We are keeping in touch via emails and social media but the number of bones prepared has slowed down considerably.

However, with Melissa and Simona assisting Mike, until recently, with continued prospecting, the number of bones that arrived on my doorstep had me desperately trying to keep up with identification and preparation.

The frustration caused by the enforced lockdown has prevented the collection of a number of significant specimens found recently by Simona and Melissa, but it is hoped that this situation will not continue for too much longer and we can resume our normal activities.

Just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit our shores a group of Bass Coast locals, together with members of the Bass Coast council, got together to discuss a proposal by Mike Cleeland for the creation of the Bass Coast Dinosaur Discovery Trail, designed for visitors to follow from San Remo in the west to Inverloch in the East ~ a 40kms stretch. Mike is also the Education Officer for the South Gippsland Conservation Society (www.sgcs.org.au), based at the Bunurong Environment Centre and has been conducting dinosaur tours for a number of years, so in a way, the trail will be an extension of the work he has been doing by educating tourists (and locals) about the amazing animals that used to live in this area more than 125 million years ago.

I am currently designing a brochure, which will be the first step in the process of raising the funds to pay for the creation of five (initially) dinosaurs whose remains have been found in this area. They include a large Allosaurid dinosaur, two small ornithopod dinosaurs (*Qantassaurus intrepidus* and *Galleonosaurus dorisae*), *Serendipaceratops arthurclarkei* (a ceratopsian dinosaur) and a non-dinosaur - the giant amphibian *Koolasuchus cleelandi*.

We are also talking to a technology team based at Deakin University to work out how to recreate the dinosaurs digitally so that they can be incorporated into an app that visitors can access via QR code chips embedded in the sculptures.

Ultimately the goal of the project is to increase the public's awareness of the unique environment that existed in the Bass Coast area so many millions of years ago. It was a polar environment with extreme climatic conditions that supported a high diversity of animals including dinosaurs, giant amphibians, mammals, pterosaurs, plesiosaurs and fish. Introducing the public to the dinosaurs is the way to capture their imagination and then lead them further into what else was around at the time.

So as you can see, life has not slowed down during this difficult period and I can't wait for the restrictions to be eased so that the Dinosaur Dreaming team can get back out there, discovering new and exciting animals that lived in this area so long ago.

For those of you who are unaware of the latest dinosaur from Inverloch – *Galleonosaurus dorisae* – you will find an [article on the web site](#), written by palaeontologist Steve Poropat, on this tiny ornithopod dinosaur, which was published in 2019 in a paper by Dr. Matt Herne.

Thank you for your patience and I will endeavour to add more material in the near future.

Stay safe

Lesley Kool – Dinosaur Dreaming dig coordinator.