

# DINOSAUR DREAMING GOES OUTBACK

By Wendy White

Last month, a dozen Dinosaur Dreaming volunteers headed to outback Queensland to assist the [Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History](#) (AAOD) with a project. We can't say much about the project at this stage, but in January we hope to be able to tell you all about it!

AAOD is located near the town of Winton, a short distance (less than two hours' drive – which is a short distance in outback Queensland measures) from Longreach. Their main site is at "[The Jump-Up](#)" (a flat-topped mesa about 11 km before you get to Winton), which is a museum containing the holotypes of sauropod dinosaurs ([Diamantinasaurus matildae](#) and [Savannasaurus elliottorum](#)) and the vicious-looking theropod dinosaur nicknamed Banjo ([Australovenator wintonensis](#)), a preparation lab (which offers tours to everyone) and Dinosaur Canyon, a reconstruction of life in the Cretaceous including life-size bronze reconstructions of some of the dinosaurs found in the region, including those that made their marks at Lark Quarry. Their second site is the [Dinosaur Stampede National Monument at Lark Quarry](#). This is a bit further outside Winton (and in a different direction), but well worth the trip. Hundreds of dinosaur footprints in a very small area. I found myself whispering there – it is sacred place.

The crew travelled to Winton in a variety of planes and automobiles. It is a long way from Melbourne. And driving at night in the Australian outback is not recommended because of the erratic behaviour of the local kangaroos who sometimes seem deliberately to want to be run over.

We stayed in shearers' quarters on a property outside Winton. Some of us put up tents outside the quarters or in the shearers' shed. I had never stayed in shearers' quarters before. They are actually very nice. Lots of smallish rooms, with a big common area for cooking and eating and sitting around with a beer or sharing a bottle of red. Light is provided by a petrol-powered generator, which we turned off around 9:30 pm each night. That sounds pretty early, but after working all day in the hot sun, most of us were pretty grateful to crawl into bed early. Hot water is provided by "Donkey" – a wood-burning contraption with pipes connected to the shower block. The Donkey was also useful for the ritual burning of the old clothes that fall apart each field season. The toilets were a short walk across the area we used as a car park, and came complete with a resident green frog. But there were no spiders in there – Tricky our site manager particularly dislikes spiders and made sure to spray for them regularly.

Most days we got up at dawn and headed to the project site while it was still cool. During the day it got pretty darn hot and dry. I even took up drinking Powerade instead of tea, a "Berry Ice"-flavoured mixture I will be happy to never drink again, but one that did the job. Unlike the Victorian Cretaceous digs, we did not call morning or afternoon tea, but instead called "Smoko". We were usually joined by the grazier on whose property we were working, who appeared on his quad bike or tractor as if he heard us down tools from all the way over in his homestead.

We spent two days of our project not doing any work at all – we needed to spend a day soaking in Lark Quarry (with help from Vicki of [Red Dirt Tours](#)) and a day exploring the Jump-up.

The Queensland outback is full of wildlife – kangaroos and emus and birds of every size and shape from emus and bustards to flocks of pretty green budgies. One afternoon on the way home from

site we stopped to rescue an injured corella, which then spent a couple of days in our pantry eating rolled oats and apple slices.

A number of wonderful locals helped us complete the project – staff from the AOD on their days off and many of the Elliott family who took time off from running their own properties. These locals were a joy to work with, practical, friendly and incredibly generous with time, information, extra pillows or anything else we asked for.



1. The shearers quarters and shower block on property outside Winton, Queensland.  
Photographer: Wendy White



2. The Donkey – the wood burning hot water contraption. Photographer – Wendy White



3. The Dinosaur Dreaming crew at Dinosaur Canyon, Winton. Photographer – Wendy White



4. Mary Walters prepares a saurpoid dinosaur bone in the preparation lab on the Jump Up. Photographer - Wendy White



5. Lisa Nink holds a saurpoid dinosaur toe bone. Photographer – Wendy White



6. Some the Dinosaur Dreaming team admire the Lark Quarry dinosaur trackways. Photographer – Lisa Nink.