

Dinosaur gets a bite on the future, 116 million years on

A close relative of the ruthless dinosaur, Velociraptor — villain of the movie 'Jurassic Park' — has turned up as a fossil on Inverloch beach, east of Phillip Island. Not all of him is there, because his shenanigans ended 116 million years ago. But he left a calling card: eight distinctive teeth in the rocks.

Velociraptor and other "raptor" types — called dromaeosaurids — were previously unknown in Australia, except for one tooth unearthed last year at the more famous Dinosaur Cove. The Inverloch find leads the dinosaur hunters, Dr Patricia Vickers-Rich and her husband, Dr Tom Rich, to hope that this new site will yield more material about the dromaeosaurids during hunts planned over the next four years.

Velociraptors and their relatives, standing one metre to three metres tall, were swift predators characterised by an enlarged sickle-shaped toe on the hind foot. This was a vicious slashing implement.

Victoria's first dinosaur bone was found near Inverloch at the turn of the century, on a beach just west of Eagles Nest. This bone was still Victoria's only one until 1978 when Dr Rich and Dr Vickers-Rich began their field work. Dr Rich is curator of



Lahey at Large
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A dromaeosaurid: so ruthless.

vertebrate palaeontology at the Museum of Victoria and Dr Vickers-Rich is a reader in earth sciences at Monash University. The two institutions were joint searchers.

The season now ending was sponsored by 'The Age'. Previously the museum and university have concentrated on exca-

vating Dinosaur Cove, but this year the search near Inverloch was run simultaneously. After only one full season at Inverloch, the searchers have found about 60 isolated bones and 20 teeth of dinosaurs. Many of the bones are still encased in rock, and will be evaluated during the rest of 1994 by Mrs Lesley Kool, of Monash, who had charge of Inverloch's day-to-day operations.

Her counterpart at Dinosaur Cove is Ms Nina Herrmann from the University of Copenhagen, leading a team that followed a rich fossil layer three metres below sea level, at a site that was relentlessly flooded and almost constantly pumped.

This year the yield from the Dinosaur Cove dig has been low. If nothing better is found in the next few days, the searchers will close the site.

By contrast, Inverloch, 300 kilometres to the east, yielded surprises. One of them was the discovery of a femur (thigh bone) and four teeth of hypsilophodontin dinosaurs. This group of bipedal herbivores had large hind legs, small forelegs and long tails. Superficially they resembled a kangaroo. "But they were not much more closely related to them than a shark is to a dolphin," Dr Rich says.

LIFTOUT: Dinosaurs today.