

# Dinosaurs of darkness see light of day at last



*Lahey at Large*  
**JOHN LAHEY**

Finding an interesting dinosaur bone is better than winning Tatts-lotto, says Lesley Kool, leader of a small party that began searching a beach area east of Eagles Nest, near Inverloch, this week. The area is known as Flat Rocks.

At first glance from the cliffs, Flat Rocks looks like part of a desert. The rocks could be sand ridges. Within those rocks is a window into the extraordinary world of the polar dinosaurs, which spent three months of every year in darkness 100 million years ago.

The site is within a kilometre of where Victoria's first dinosaur bone was found, at the end of last century, by the geologist William Ferguson. Amazingly, it was left undisturbed for nearly 80 years until two young student cousins, John Long and Tim Flannery, searching the beach for fossils in 1978, found a pebble with a bone fragment inside it. It turned out to be the ankle bone of an allosaurid dinosaur, a relative of *Tyrannosaurus Rex*.

Both young men became curators: John Long at the Western Australian Museum and Tim Flannery at the Australian Museum.

The present search party, which will operate for a month, is part of a wider exploration organised by Dr Tom Rich, of the Museum of Victoria, and his wife, Dr Patricia Vickers-Rich, of Monash University. These two are noted for their internationally acclaimed discoveries of polar dinosaur remains at Dinosaur Cove, Cape Otway, in the past decade.

Dr Rich has said that if the precise site at Flat Rocks had been known in 1984, there is no way on earth that he would have been persuaded to organise the arduous underground operation at Dinosaur Cove.

Dinosaur Cove is approached by descending 90 metres on a cliff trail that can be notoriously slippery. It



What better way to enjoy the beach than with bucket and spade. But there is little in the way of child's play for the palaeontology team searching for the bones of polar dinosaurs near Inverloch.

took nearly 10 years to dig out 20 tonnes of fossiliferous rock there, because an extra 600 tonnes of overburden had to be removed from tunnels to reach most of it.

At Flat Rocks, however, the descent is only eight metres, down an easy path and across a stable bridge. Dr Rich estimates the amount of fossiliferous rock there is 40 tonnes, and there is no overburden to remove. You just chip away at rocks. After Dinosaur Cove, this is a palaeontologist's dream.

Leslie Kool, who is research assistant to Dr Vickers-Rich, has made several trips to the area in the past few years. The bone sites stretch from San Remo to Inverloch. One day a big storm swept most of the shore platform at Flat Rocks clean of the sand that usually covers it to a depth of 10 to 20 centimetres. Mrs

Kool's party found about 30 bone fragments exposed. The next tide buried this site, but it was imprinted on their minds and they found it again easily.

When the search resumed on Monday, Mrs Kool and six assistants uncovered 40 bone fragments in a circular area about one metre in radius. Without bothering to move on, they were still finding fragments yesterday. On a good day, they will work for three hours either side of low tide, then take their discoveries away to be catalogued.

The area is within the Bunurong Marine Park and the party is working there under a conservation permit. Mainly they expose bones with mallets and chisels. They use a rock saw when necessary and they have a jack-hammer in reserve.



Lesley Kool's expert eye examines partial remains of creatures past.

Picture: JOH