

Tooth with a long history

To the naked eye it appeared to be only a tiny wedge of brownish rock in the surrounding grey sandstone.

But Lesley Kool, research assistant at Monash University's Department of Earth Science, was peering at this discolored stain through a powerful magnifying glass.

"Definitely half of the crown tooth of a small meat eating dinosaur," she declared.

"That's very exciting." Peering through the lens suddenly the brown stain sprang into life. A series of ridges, the unmistakable tooth shape in gleaming brown material.

A tooth with a history 120 million years old!

The owner of this tooth used it to devour the small vegetarian dinosaurs that grazed on the ferns, cycads and ginkos that grew near this ancient river.

It's in this ancient river bed, the remains of which are embedded in rock run-

By Fiona Maud

ning in a narrow channel from the cliff face to the rock foreshore, that Inverloch's dinosaur dig is taking place at Flat Rocks.

Jigsaw pieces of the past are revealed in scraps and splinters of bone and tortoise shell and bits of tooth.

Not for these dinosaur hunters the luxury enjoyed by their Russian and American counterparts, of pulling massive bones, skulls, even intact skeletons of the great predatory monsters out of the earth.

Lesley Kool admitted that those hunters wouldn't bother with the scattered litter that she and her dedicated band are painstakingly searching for in the rocks.

To the untrained eye, it looks exactly like searching

for a needle in a haystack.

But every particle of bone or tooth only whets the appetite of this dedicated crew.

"They're coming out so thick and fast it's hard to keep up with them," Lesley said.

The dig began last Monday, and by Friday over 100 bones had been catalogued.

Some can be identified immediately.

Others will have to wait until Lesley sits down in her workroom at Monash University and slowly chips the rock away from the bone, a process which can take up to a week.

So just how successful the dig over the next two weeks has been, won't be known until much later in the year.

Meanwhile the dinosaur crew is spurred on by the hope that with the next chip



Inverloch rocks yield treasures in the form of scraps and fragments of bone and shells 120 million years old to the trained eyes of staff from Monash University's Department of Earth Sciences and the Museum of Victoria. The team is conducting a dinosaur dig on a beach close to Inverloch during February.

of a hammer an intact skull will be revealed in the rock.

If it is an adult skull featuring large optic cavities, it may help to prove the theory suggested by finds at Victoria's other dinosaur dig, at Dinosaur Cove in the Otways.

Gondwana occupied a position much closer to the South Pole, and its dinosaurs developed large eyes to enable them to continue to hunt through the months of Antarctic darkness.

But this is still a theory, said Lesley.

A skull find at Flat Rocks could make it scientific fact.

Local find

At the weekend an Inverloch backyard revealed a very rewarding find.

An Inverloch resident brought a rock with a strange piece in it to the dig for identification.

It was a large piece of tortoise shell, belonging to a short necked creature, now extinct, which inhabited the area.

"Anyone who has an interesting piece of rock at

home is very welcome to bring it down to the dig at Flat Rocks for identification," said research assistant, Mike Cleeland of Phillip Island.

The dinosaur hunters have been overwhelmed by enthusiastic offers of assistance from the public, keen to learn all they can about a past so ancient it carries a legendary aura.

Because of the fragility and scattered nature of the bones, the Inverloch dig has to be restricted to experienced workers only.

However interested people are invited to help out at two open days to be held during February.

There will be a fossil hunt on February 12, meeting at the Eagle's Nest car park at 5 p.m., at low tide.

A second fossil hunt will start on the beach opposite the Kilcunda township on February 20, starting at 12 p.m.

Palaentologists will show how to prospect on the surface of the rock.

Any bones found will be removed and taken to the museum, and a cast or copy made and given to the lucky finder.