

FROZEN IN TIME

You are about to step back in time to a very different world. Right here, around 95 million years ago, a large herd of small two-legged dinosaurs gathered on the banks of a forest lake to drink.

The herd was stalked by a large theropod — 4 tonnes of sharp-clawed, toothy meat-eating dinosaur. The herd panicked, stampeding across the muddy flats.

A record of those few terrifying minutes is cast in more than 3300 fossilised footprints conserved in the Trackways building. It tells us much about that cooler, wetter world, when dinosaurs were still in charge and the mammals' time was yet to come...

TURNING BACK TIME

In the 1960s Winton grazier Glen Seymour showed local expert Peter Knowles what he thought were fossilised bird tracks found at this site. Glen thought Peter was "pulling his leg" when Peter told him they were dinosaur tracks.

Peter Knowles says
"I was amazed when they walked across the gully and lifted up a slab of rock with the absolute certainty that they would find more tracks. I find it wonderful to think that evidence of just a few moments some 95 million years ago could last all this time."

In 1971 scientists from the Queensland Museum and British Museum of Natural History were in the region looking for Cretaceous mammals. Knowing Peter's interest in fossils, they approached him. He couldn't help them with mammals but showed them Lark Quarry and the dinosaur tracks.

At the quarry the scientists traced the sediment layer the tracks were found in across to a second hill farther west. They predicted there would be more tracks at the same level, and sure enough, they were right!

In 1976–7 a team of volunteers led by Queensland Museum and the University of Queensland's palaeontologists spent 18 months removing part of the hill to expose the trackways layer. The site was very remote, the road a mere track, and camping conditions tough.

Once the trackway was cleaned the scientists poured a latex mould to create an accurate record.

Palaeontologist Mary Wade says

"When we first got to the site, every time we took off a layer of rock we didn't know whether we'd find barren sediment from later floods or more footprints. Thankfully, in the right layer, we found thousands of footprints. It's mind-blowing... when you think that 50,000 years is a geological instant what we have here was a few minutes!"

It was soon obvious that the trackways needed protection from the elements and a shelter was built. But water runoff, dust, temperature and humidity fluctuations, wildlife and people continued to damage the trackways.

The new conservation building was erected in 2002.

CONSERVING OUR PAST FOR OUR FUTURE

Lark Quarry Conservation Park and Dinosaur Trackways are jointly managed by Winton Shire Council and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Queensland Museum provides ongoing trackways scientific advice.

Queensland Heritage Trails funded the Lark Quarry redevelopment as a Centenary of Federation project.

FASCINATED BY FOSSILS?

While in Outback Queensland, plan to visit these fossil display sites.

Riversleigh Fossils Interpretive Centre, Mount Isa

Feature fossils from the late Oligocene – Holocene (the last 25–30 million years) found at Australia's richest fossil site at Riversleigh, some 250km north of Mount Isa. Ph: 07 4749 1555

Richmond Marine Fossil Museum

Features early Cretaceous (116–98 million years ago) fossils from land and the great inland seas including Minmi and Kronosaurus. Phone: 07 4741 3429

Hughenden Dinosaur Display

Features fossils from the Cretaceous (150 million years ago) including *Muttaburrasaurus*. Phone: 07 4741 1021



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