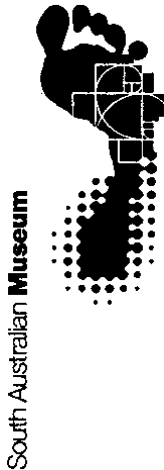


# 2012 PALAEOLOGY WEEK

at the South Australian Museum

## Saturday 24 March to Sunday 1 April



### Introduction

Palaeontology Week, initiated in 2003 in partnership with Naracoorte Caves, created a showcase platform for our respective roles in the interpretation and presentation of the State's natural heritage. It has since evolved, largely due to committed sponsorship support, into a dynamic conduit which stimulates a greater awareness and understanding of the State's unique fossil record – and our shared need to preserve/profile South Australia's fossil heritage through educational and public programs.

Palaeontology Week also facilitates exposure to the museum's significant research/activity in this field, the depth of our collections and the regional partnerships we enjoy across the State particularly with the world heritage Naracoorte Caves, Coober Pedy Retail Business and Tourism Association and Umoona Opal Mine and Museum (first permanent offsite display of museum fossil collection material), the Goyder Council and Burra (also hosting a permanent offsite display of Museum fossil material) and across the Flinders Ranges.

It has afforded spotlight profile on the diversity of research throughout Australia, internationally significant discoveries and collaborative research. Courtesy of our many national and international guests over the years, the museum has introduced visitors to the extraordinary world of earth sciences, particularly of course that of Palaeontology.

Palaeontology Week has illustrated exponential growth across each of the ensuing years and we were delighted to share the milestone Tenth Anniversary event with so many return guests, presenters, visitors and sponsors.

*"Palaeontology is one of the most fundamental sciences – it is the science of life. It allows us to understand the origins evolution and adaptation of all living things. It provides the data to refine our timescale for the age of the Earth"*

Professor Suzanne Miller Director South Australian Museum

### **Special Guests-International**

Dr Philip Currie: Professor, Canada Research Chair of Biological Sciences  
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Dr Diego Garcia-Bellido: Department of Palaeontology, Institute of  
Economic Geology, Spanish Research Council (CSIC),  
Madrid

Dr John Long Vice President Research and Collections, Natural History  
Museum of Los Angeles County, California USA

### **Special Guests - National**

Dr Erich Fitzgerald: Harold Mitchell Fellow and Vertebrate Palaeontology,  
Museum Victoria; Research Associate, Smithsonian  
Institution, USA

Dr Scott Hocknull: Vertebrate Palaeontologist, Senior Curator, Queensland  
Museum

Dr Anne Musser: Honorary Research Associate Australian Museum,  
Sydney; Palaeontologist Jenolan Caves, NSW

Dr John Paterson: Senior Lecturer Palaeontology and Head of Earth  
Sciences, School of Environmental and Rural Science,  
University of New England, Armidale, NSW

Mr Andrew Plant: Dinosaur illustrator, Science Communicator and Artist  
in Residence

Dr Elizabeth Smith: Research Associate Australian Museum, Sydney

Professor Kate Trinajstić: QE11 Research Fellow, WA Organic and Isotope  
Geochemistry Centre, Department of Chemistry, Curtin  
University, WA

Professor Rod Wells: Associate Professor-School of Biological Sciences,  
Flinders University (retired); Honorary Researcher,  
South Australian Museum (retired)

Dr Paul Willis: Director, Royal Institution of Australia, Adelaide

Dr Adam Yates: Senior Curator Earth Sciences, Museum of Central  
Australia, Alice Springs

### **Program Content**

The Tenth Anniversary Palaeontology Week had a comprehensively diverse program catering for all age groups. Amongst the many many highlights and key events were:

#### TEN sessions - **Ten minutes to Engage using Narrative**

Speakers each had 10 minutes to engage the audience around selected broad topics using props, images, power points. A large visible timer monitored the airtime with audience counting down the final ten seconds.

#### The Palaeo Lounge

Following each TEN talk presenters moved into this informal area giving visitors the opportunity for Q&A related to the talk(s) they had just heard as well as small group informal conversation with the presenters.

#### Behind-the-scenes research (Owl Pellets)

An engaging all day "science at work" area within the Palaeo Hub exemplifying the diversity of research undertaken by and at the museum.

Behind-the-scenes (Fossil Preparation)

Another dynamic aspect of research which proved immensely popular with all ages!



Discovery Desk

The invitation to explore, discover and identify with a bank of microscopes, Information boards and a selection of natural science objects was another highly engaging aspect of the program.



Art Workshops

Science through the eyes of an artist or should that be artistic interpretation by a scientist?? Both dinosaur illustrator (Andrew Plant) and palaeontologist (Anne Musser) provided a series of fully subscribed workshops, individually and collaboratively.



### Dig Pits

Three timelines to explore .....what a hive of activity across the nine days attracting all ages from "junior palaeos" to middle year students and adults all keen to experience that "Eureka" moment of discovery!



And of course the "Palaeo Hub", the special exhibition gallery on the ground floor of the museum as the designated centralised space for visitors with exhibitions, displays, talks, the Palaeo lounge, dig pits and the Palaeo studio for drawing classes. A variety of people (wearing ASK ME badges) were rostered to assist visitors with general enquiries and engage them in conversation.

We again invited SA fossil regions/tourism operators to setup informative displays sic, "take your own fossil discovery trail around the State". Face to Face with Science midweek student workshops (supported by Santos) enabling daily circuits with age and curriculum specific engagement from R to Y12. Middle and senior years were all afforded the opportunity to meet and chat with international and national guests to further enhance their visit.

Bringing Back The Dead was the title for our midweek Y10-Y12 student forum hosted by the RiAus. The panel of Dr Phil Currie, Dr John Long and Dr Diego Garcia-Bellido was joined by moderator Dr Paul Willis (Director, RiAus) and a live audience of 80+ students from Murray Bridge High School who were joined on line by classes from Whyalla, Mount Gambier and Port Lincoln with some lively debate and questions.

### Twilight Palaeo

Co-presented by Flinders University this 5-8:30pm free access for 12-16 year olds and parents/carers again provided a unique opportunity to meet PhD candidates, recent graduates, young practitioners, young faces of palaeo as well as our guest palaeontologists, geologists and scientists. Small groups circulating around a 10 minute x 10 station roster facilitated personalised dialogue regarding careers, tertiary study and even placement. It again proved a successful inclusion in the program and our thanks to geologists from Heathgate, Beach and Santos, John Mignone from DMITRE and the Flinders University "team" for joining us on the night.

We hosted a free screening of "Jurassic Park" on our North Terrace Forecourt introduced by Dr Phil Currie (on whom Dr Grant in the movie was based). Part of the Adelaide City Council's summer "Splash" program.

Other well supported activities were:

#### Under 5's Day

Just under 2200 visitors to the museum with an amazingly long queue waiting for our 10am opening that day! Fossil preparation, story time, live performances, gallery walks, drawing, fossil ID.....what a wonderful day.

#### We Will Rock You

Supported by Flinders University this was our closing day for the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program. Fossil rocks, ancient rocks, rock stories, rock stars, rock music – we brought the event to a truly rocking close!!! More than 2800 people (many of whom had visited on other days throughout the program) joined us for this final eventful day concluding with performances on the North Terrace lawns.

#### Offsite

Working in liaison with fossil regions/venues, we were delighted to have delivered/supported a raft of school workshops and Palaeo Twilight activities around the State. Thank you for your support to Coober Pedy Retail Business and Tourism Association together with Desert Cave Hotel and Umoona Opal Mine and Museum; Goyder Council, Tourism working group, National Trust and Burra Visitor Centre; Rawnsley Park Station, Flinders Ranges; and Naracoorte Caves.

We also thank DMITRE for providing special tours/access to their amazing Core Library facility in Glenside.

*"A big congrats to you all at SAM and the regions for organising such a huge week. Although I only got to spend the first half down there it was great as always to be a part of your event. Let there be more to come. "They had to run, run, run, they had to hit top speed, they had to run run run.....it was a dinosaur stampede"! These may well have been "Professor Flint's" words but Palaeo Week was truly a "stampede" of visitors!*  
Dr. Scott Hocknull, Vertebrate Palaeontologist, Senior Curator, Queensland Museum

#### **Visitation**

A total of 27 344 visitors throughout Palaeontology Week across the full program, on and off site with 25 944 of these on site at the museum. 6109 visitors on the opening weekend was an excellent start – and we closed with 5685 across the final weekend. Supported by exit surveys/ anecdotal information/unprompted feed-back the indication is that visitors were well informed and specifically attended for the event. Many familiar faces, many of whom have been attending since the inaugural event and the visitation reflected regional traffic (Riverland, Yorke Peninsula, mid North, Port Pirie/Port Augusta and the south-east).

## **Audience**

The demographics for activities on site at the Museum reflected a standard approximated split of 56% from South Australia, 25% interstate and 19% international. Informal data capture, exit surveys and competition entry forms reflects:

- Highest proportion of visitors drawn from the outer Metropolitan area with a noticeable representation from postcodes within 100km of the GPO
- Primary weighting of family groups
- Principal age groups 33-44; 12-15; 44-55 and of course Under 10's
- Tertiary students and young adults (18-24) were selective in their chosen activity weighted to TEN Sessions, Sprigg Lecture and more formal presentations but with a noticeable growth in this age grouping midweek
- Repeat visitations –with unsolicited positive feedback – from attendees of previous Palaeontology Weeks

*Palaeontology Week 2012 was another fantastic event for the S A Museum to organise yet again to raise general public awareness about palaeontology and science in general. It has been my third time participating in this event since 2004 and I thoroughly enjoyed the schedule and meeting up with all my good palaeo mates in Australia again. Few museums ever take the trouble to roll out such grand schedules for a week long program with so many profile talks featuring international speakers and events catering for all age groups on just about every day. Plus the regional presence tops it all off as being a statewide event. It was fun to participate and fulfilling to see the enthusiasm by all groups who came along, from the primary school groups through to year 11-12s at the RiAus event, and the special public talks in the evenings. The event also cements how strong and vibrant the science of Palaeontology the South Australian Museum and around Adelaide in general, emerging as true leaders in the field for the nation. As I mentioned in my Sprigg lecture, some museums are seeing palaeontology leading their economic recovery out of the GFC. The Natural History Museum certainly is, as after opening 2 new palaeontology galleries in 2010-11 we have seen attendance double and shop sales increase by over 84%, and membership at an all time record high. An investment in palaeontological research, which can later underpin great galleries or traveling exhibits and public programs makes great sense in this world where the general public crave information about new fossil finds. I'm writing all this up as an opinion piece for a forthcoming issue of Cosmos magazine (June-July issue with a special feature on Evolution) emphasizing how the 'new palaeontology' which is truly cross-disciplinary and cutting edge, will always provide jobs for new and enthusiastic students and win grants and high public visibility for its institutions.*

*Your staff's success with their Emu Bay excavations and scoring the December Cover of Nature is a great example of this. I echo all my colleagues sentiments in expressing a big 'thank you' again for sustaining this great event and flying the flag high for science. We all need do this as often as we can in exciting and novel ways.*

*Palaeontology Week is the epitome of just this and I'm happy to support it in any way for future efforts.*

John A. Long Vice President, Research and Collections, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, California USA

Such a high level of unprompted positive feedback throughout the week from all visitor groups complimenting the museum (and program sponsors) for making science –and Palaeontology – so accessible, exciting and engaging

## **Sponsors**

The success of our Tenth Anniversary Palaeontology Week, as with all previous events, was made possible through the support and involvement of our many sponsors and partners. Our appreciative thanks to you all for your commitment and enthusiasm (and invaluable access to your communication channels).

Key Sponsors        Heathgate Resources  
                             Flinders University  
                             DMITRE

Support Sponsors   Santos Limited  
                             Beach Energy  
                             Coober Pedy Retail Business and Tourism  
   Association

And appreciative thanks to

Sealink Travel Group  
RiAus  
Department of Education and Children's Services  
Crumpler  
Haigh's Chocolates  
Bundaleer Wines  
SA Brewing  
Adelaide City Council

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Naracoorte Caves  
Goyder Council-Burra  
Burra Visitor Centre  
National Trust – Burra  
Desert Cave Hotel. Coober Pedy  
Umoona Opal Mine and Museum, Coober Pedy  
Rawnsley Park Station, Flinders Ranges

Thank you to everyone who supported, participated in, contributed to and assisted in the delivery of a diverse exciting and engaging program across a highly successful **2012 Palaeontology Week**.

2012 is a year full of tenth anniversary celebrations at the museum across "Out of the Glass Case" regional roadshow program, the Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize and of course Palaeontology Week. We look forward to continuing to share this exciting year with you.



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*Palaeontology is one of the most fundamental sciences. It is the science of life. It allows us to understand the origins, evolution and adaptation of all living things. It provides the data to define our timescale for the age of Earth. Palaeontology Week is the opportunity to engage our visitors in the wonder of fossils (and the natural world around them) and to explore together the mysteries of an ancient timeline"*  
Prof Suzanne Miller Director South Australian Museum



April 2011