



Media release

Minister for Innovation and Tourism Industry Development and Minister for the Commonwealth Games

The Honourable Kate Jones

Giant dinosaur tracks discovery focuses global attention on Winton

The Palaszczuk Government has today applauded a team of palaeontologists who have discovered a series of well-preserved dinosaur tracks on a property near Winton in central west Queensland.

Tourism Industry Development Minister Kate Jones congratulated the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum on the excavation of their new find.

Ms Jones said the discovery, hailed by palaeontologists as the best-preserved sauropod trackway in Australia, is a first for Queensland and will play a significant role in boosting visitor numbers to the Queensland outback.

"This is an amazing discovery and a great way to kick off the Year of Outback Tourism," she said.

"These tracks will create international exposure for Winton which will have a significant impact on the outback tourism economy.

"We know the people of Winton are doing it tough at the moment. But discoveries like this will boost the tourism industry and help the outback economy recover from the recent monsoon.

"Outback Queensland has been the site of some of the world's most significant dinosaur discoveries – this is an experience visitors can only get here in the Sunshine State.

"That's why we're working with experts and the local tourism industry to make the most of our unique natural history."

Ms Jones said the tracks, which are preserved in a rock shelf at the bottom of a small creek, extend 55 metres and cover an area equivalent to the size of two basketball courts.

"Footprints on the trackway include 20 tracks made by a single large sauropod dinosaur, footprints made by small ornithopod dinosaurs and chicken-sized theropod dinosaurs and the trampled tracks of other sauropods including at least one sub-adult," she said.

"The sauropod footprints are exceptionally well-preserved – the impression of a giant thumb claw is clearly visible on most of the fore feet and, in some, the impressions of individual toes can be identified.

"Each of the animal's hind footprints is nearly one metre long."

Australian vertebrate palaeontologist Dr Stephen Poropat of Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne is leading the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum's research team.

Dr Poropat said that having three major dinosaur groups – sauropods, ornithopods and theropods – represented on the same trackway surface was incredibly rare.

"The small ornithopod and theropod footprints were clearly made by very similar (if not identical) trackmakers to those preserved at Dinosaur Stampede National Monument, which is located about 100km south of this site," he said.

According to Dr Poropat the longest sequence of sauropod footprints can be followed continuously for more than 40 metres and would have comprised nearly two dozen fore and hind footprint sets when complete.

"These footprints are the best of their kind in Australia and their shape can be distinguished from all known sauropod footprints worldwide," he said.

Dr Poropat said that many of the footprints were surrounded by concentric mud cracks that were propagated through the once-moist sediment by the weight of the sauropod's footfalls.

"That these fine details are so well preserved after 95 million years is remarkable," he said.

Dr Poropat said the sauropod footprints cannot be assigned to any particular sauropod species despite the fact that there are three different sauropods known from the Winton Formation and that at least one had a thumb claw.

"All we can say with confidence at this point is that these footprints were made by titanosauriform sauropods," he said.

Executive Chairman of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum David Elliott led the excavation in April 2018 with the support of volunteers and museum staff.

Mr Elliott said the newly exposed trackway was extremely fragile and its removal from the creek bed was a high priority for the museum.

Relocation of the trackway began in September 2018 and the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum has now removed 25 per cent of the total area including all the fragile footprints that were in danger of being destroyed.

"This is a very slow and painstaking process," Mr Elliott said.

"The total weight of the trackway is in the vicinity of 500 tonnes and we are transporting it back to the Museum, one two-tonne trailer load at a time."

Relocation of the trackway is expected to continue through to the end of winter 2019.

"The state government has long-standing ties with the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and has previously funded other museum projects," Mr Elliott said.

"Through this previous investment we have been able to attract overnight visitors to the region, encourage international tourists and provide easy access to researchers and scientists."

A scientific analysis of the trackway has been submitted for peer review by Dr Poropat and his colleagues and Mr Elliott is hoping that the attraction, named *March of the Titanosaurs*, will be open to the public from May 2020.

"Very few museums in the world can boast a multi-sequence sauropod trackway as one of their in-house exhibitions, much less one 55m long with the footprints of all three major groups of Dinosauria represented," he said.

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Note: Images and video footage are available and can be accessed by following this link: dropbox.com/sh/d6tu8jzd92n99ni/AAAtVTr2DidOTb6hJmRr-h_Va?dl=0 (external site) (<https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com>)

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