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MEDIA RELEASE

Canadian volunteers unearth ancient sabre-toothed fish

After almost a decade of dinosaur hunting in outback Queensland, Canadian fossil enthusiast Gary and Barb Flewelling are still making exciting discoveries. Their most recent find, a completely new species of ancient 'lizardfish', has astounded scientists with its monstrous smile.

Gary and Barb Flewelling have been holidaying in the remote town of Richmond in northwestern Queensland for the last nine years. The change in scenery from the picturesque maritime village of Pictou in Nova Scotia to the dusty Australian outback is for one reason only – ancient bones! “I can’t think of anywhere else in the world, to my mind, where you get access to such fantastic fossils,” explained Gary.

During Gary and Barb’s time volunteering at the museum, they have been involved in digging up some amazing ancient treasures. This has include spectacular finds such as huge sauropod dinosaurs, massive ammonites, and baby ichthyosaurs. “However our most recent discovery caught us by surprise, we weren’t expecting to recover something completely new to science” said Barb.

“We were out at a fossil hunting site on the outskirts of town,” Gary recalls. “Barb, Patrick, and I were carefully flipping slabs of rock when suddenly we noticed a bony fish tail poking out of the shale. Cautiously removing the surrounding rock, we managed to reveal a near-complete body and perfect skull”.

Rodney Berrell, a PhD candidate at Curtin University in Western Australia studying prehistoric fish from the Early Cretaceous Period has said about the specimen, “It’s definitely something new and very complete, likely the best preserved of its kind in Australia.

The knife-like teeth in the mouth of this animal gave palaeontologists a clue as to its identity. They resemble modern sabretooth and daggertooth fish, which both belong to an advanced group called ‘lizardfish’ (Aulopiformes). “The appearance of this fish is the stuff of nightmares, I’d hate to come face to face with it while I was snorkelling” stated Barb.

“Previous to this find, we had only isolated bones that hinted to this animal’s existence. For this reason, other scientists had just lumped this species with similar North American fish. Now, however, we’re certain this thing is something unique and new to Australia,” remarked Dr Patrick Smith, curator of the local fossil museum.

This incredible discovery is now on display in Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond, Queensland.

For further information, interviews and images please contact Dr Patrick Smith on W: 07 4741 3665 / M: 0422 533 823 or E: curator@kronosauruskorner.com.au . Alternatively contact Gary Flewelling on M: 0458 315 045 or E: flew@sentex.net .