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MEDIA RELEASE

Victorian family finds fossil sea monster in Outback

A Victorian family holidaying in Richmond, Queensland has discovered the 100 million year old fossilised bones of an ichthyosaur, an extinct dolphin-like marine reptile that once swam through Australia's ancient inland sea.

The amazing find, nicknamed 'Wilson', which includes a massive one and a half metre long skull with six centimetre long teeth, debuted on display today at Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond. Kronosaurus Korner's Interpretation Manager and Curator, Dr Timothy Holland remarked, "I have never seen tourists uncover such a beautifully preserved fossil before. It is easily the most complete ichthyosaur skull in our collection and one of the best from Australia."

'Wilson' was discovered by the Wilson family from Wiseleigh, Victoria who visited Richmond in July 2014 to search the local free fossil hunting sites. Seven year old Amber Wilson initially uncovered a large hockey puck-shaped vertebra hidden amongst a pile of rocks. Parents Tony and Lisa and brother Darcy helped discover part of the skull shortly afterwards.

"Money couldn't buy the incredible experience our family got from finding this fossil," said an ecstatic Tony Wilson.

The Wilsons contacted staff and volunteers at Kronosaurus Korner to help unearth the ichthyosaur. Large crowds gathered around the site to witness the excavation process unfold.

"When I removed the surrounding rock and saw that the snout was complete to the very tip, it took my breath away," recalled Kronosaurus Korner volunteer Gary Flewelling.

"I was completely stunned. A professional palaeontologist might search their entire career to find a fossil of this quality. It only took the Wilson family a few hours," said Dr Holland.

A protective coating of plaster, newspaper and hessian was applied to the bones before 'Wilson' was hoisted out of the ground. Nine people were required to lift the estimated 400 kilogram weight of the specimen. Once within the lab at Kronosaurus Korner, additional rock was removed from 'Wilson's' bones using dentist tools and toothbrushes over a four month period.

"When there is a specimen as good as 'Wilson' to work on in the lab, each day is Christmas," stated Mr Flewelling.

The bones of 'Wilson' belong to the ichthyosaur *Platypterygius australis*. This seven metre long marine reptile propelled itself underwater with its powerful tail and changed direction using four broad flippers. The fossilised stomach contents of some *Platypterygius* specimens include the bones of fish, turtles and birds. *Platypterygius* lived 100 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period; at a time when dinosaurs still ruled on land.

Kronosaurus Korner is Australia's premier marine fossil museum, showcasing over 1000 fossils of creatures that once inhabited Australia's ancient inland sea. The museum offers fascinating displays, guided tours, education packages and a variety of fossil hunting adventures.

For further information, interviews or images, please contact Dr Timothy Holland on 07 4741 3665, 0431 152 860 or curator@kronosauruskorner.com.au