



FOSSILS OPEN DAY AT MT. ETNA

– Dianne Vavryn

An Open Fossils Day was organized by *Cement Australia* and the Queensland Museum and held at the mine site on Mount Etna, Central Queensland, on 19 August 2006 from 9.00am until 1.00pm

It is difficult to know how many visitors attended, but it appeared to be thousands, which included many families with children, and schoolteachers.

The Central Queensland Speleological Society (COSS) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) had displays along side each other in the smaller of the two marquees.



Scott Hocknull presenting a paper.

COSS had photos, an information board, and caving equipment – including a manikin done up in overalls with rope – and other caving equipment on display. They had a good turn up of helpers, including Nick White and John Dunkley, who were visiting the area.

QPWS had items to give away such as posters, brochures, information on bats and local parks, animal coloring in sheets, water bottles and shopping bags in a range of bright colours.

Priscilla Stevens-Guiney, Ranger-in-charge of the Mount Etna Caves National Park and I manned the QPWS display and gave out the above items. It was heart warming to see the number of children collecting information for projects they were planning, or their schoolwork generally. A number of schoolteachers also collected information to use in the classroom. One teacher invited QPWS to give a talk on bats to her grade one and two class a few weeks later. By 1.00pm everything we had to give away was gone. Apart from the items to give away we were able to let visitors know what facilities are available on the Mount Etna Caves National Park and answer the many inquiries.

The display of *Cement Australia* had generic site specific history information boards, a kid's activity book, brochures and stickers. St Johns Ambulance provided a first aid service, the sunscreen being supplied by *Cement Australia*.

Participants in a fossil dig.



The Caves Lions Club provided food and drinks. Wet sieve for fossils, moulding and casting was provided by the Queensland Museum.

It was a very family orientated day with eight supervised fossil digs and four dinosaur hunts for the children.

On the fossil digs the children were given a small plastic bag for their fossils. After each dig – lasting approximately fifteen minutes – the children would take their finds to a table in the large marquee for identification by research team members.

The dinosaur hunt consisted of twenty-five plastic dinosaurs hidden in a specified area. Each dinosaur was numbered and whoever found the lucky number was awarded with the one and only Roboraptor. Smaller prizes were awarded to the other numbers such as posters and books.



A view of the fossil display, which included several broken speleothems.

There were educational Posters on display in the large marquee which complemented the presentations that were given at intervals during the day.

Scott Hocknull, Assistant Curator, Geosciences, Queensland Museum presented two papers.

His first was *The Mount Etna Menagerie*. Uncover the amazing fossils discovered at Mount Etna, including the discovery of giant possums, tree kangaroos and Megafauna.

This second was *The Rainforest Fossil Record*. Australia has a record of rainforests at least twenty-five million years in the making. Find out about our long rainforest record and how the new discoveries at Mt. Etna fit into this impressive record.

The other presentations included:

Gilbert Price, Research Scientist, Queensland University of Technology – *Australia's Megafauna*. Learn about Australia's amazing Megafauna and it's extinction.

Linda Deer, PhD Student, Queensland University of Technology – *Caves*. Unearth the fascinating world of caves and caving, how they form and what scientists can tell from them.

Sandrine Martinez, PhD Student, Queensland University of Technology – *Bats*. Learn about the fossil bats found at Mount Etna including the rare Ghost Bat.

Dr. Gregg Webb, Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology – *Ancient Reefs and Limestone*. Ancient reefs formed hundred of millions years ago throughout Australia, some as big as today's Great Barrier Reef. Learn about the long history of reefs, how they have changed through time and produced a huge wealth of lime for the mining industry.

Priscilla and I had numerous visitors remark to us what a great day they had and wanted to know if there were going to be more in the future. We relayed those remarks to the organizers.

It was a very educational day and those attending would have gained much valuable information covering the many subjects relating to Caves and both present and past fauna and flora.

The organizers of the day, *Cement Australia* and the Queensland Museum did a superb job and QPWS were grateful to have had the opportunity to participate.



Priscilla Stevens-Guiney (left) and Dianne Vavryn in the OPWS marquee.

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