



REALISTIC: The Age of Dinosaurs Museum at Winton in Outback Queensland.
PHOTOS: ERLE LEVEY



The rugged grandeur of the Australian Outback is captured with the fiery sunsets.



Travel writers gather at the entrance to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs at Winton.

walked the land in Winton

fossils found in the past two decades in western Queensland.

David outlined the expansion program to us at a dinner under the stars in front of the existing reception and information centre.

At present a visit to the museum includes tours of the information/display centre and the museum/restoration laboratory. There is time in between to appreciate the magnitude of the find as well as the vast expanse and rugged beauty of the surrounding area.

Stage 3 will see the construction of a multi-million dollar working dinosaur museum facility with preparation laboratory,

collection and type room facilities, classrooms, theatres and comprehensive displays.

A dinosaur canyon, incorporating outdoor galleries and life-size bronze dinosaurs, will be scattered throughout the gorge that sits below the site of the future building.

This is the biggest single step the project will take and it includes the development of comprehensive education programs, teacher development courses, overseas study tours and scientific research programs.

As well as the collection, preservation and display of palaeontological artifacts, the museum hosts digs for interested volunteers. These

are held in a 150km radius of Winton. The museum is not a pipe-dream any more for David. Western Queensland is the richest area for finding big dinosaurs.

These are from the late cretaceous when flowering plants were just starting to evolve. They also find marine fossils from the ancient inland sea that stretched from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Lake Eyre.

Once David found that first bone he knew the soil would give up more because it is self-rotating due to the high clay content.

Such is the success of the dinosaur digs the restoration and management laboratory cannot keep up. Three weeks of collection is

enough for a year in the lab.

The excavation work starts with front-end loaders then works down to paint brush, screwdrivers, rakes and spades. The bones are tagged and sealed in protective plaster jackets.

"We always thought about building something here rather than see them go out of the area," David says.

"About three years it became really apparent that Winton represented Australia, not just Winton.

"I realised there was an opportunity not just for Winton but western Queensland.

"This was a real life change. Up until then sheep farming was my life. Now my boys taken farming on and my life is here. "Look at

where it's come and it still keeps growing."

The Age of Dinosaurs started with a shed and a gravel road in that was an election promise of then Federal treasurer Simon Crean. That was added to this month with the Queensland Government promising \$7million to seal the access road.

"The reception centre will remain that, but we have started on the dinosaur canyon," David says. "It will have life-size dinosaurs on display in the wild.

"We have found enough dinosaurs this year to let us keep working on them three to four decades."

Part of the expansion is to take over management of Lark Quarry, about 100km

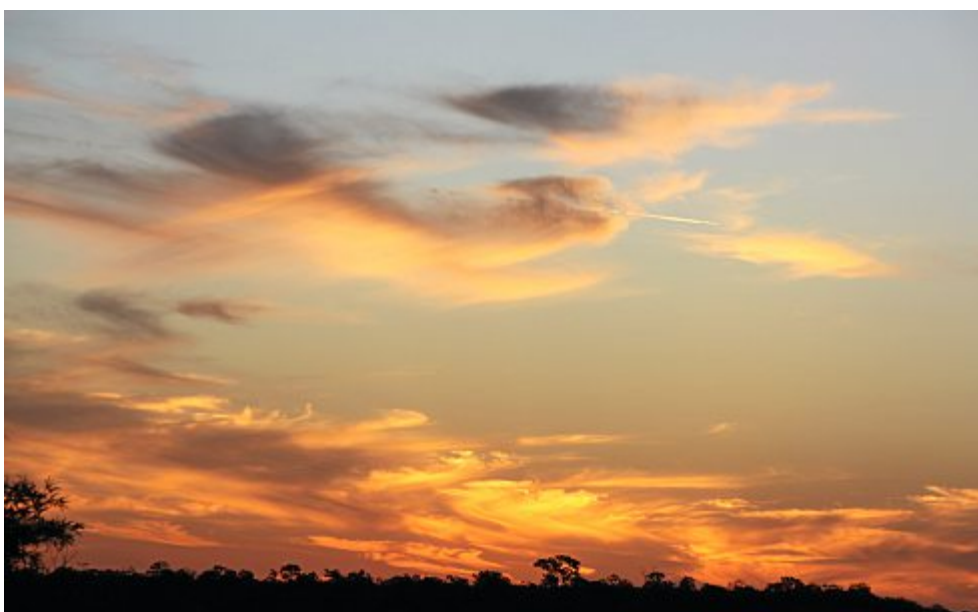
south west of Winton.

Lark Quarry Dinosaur Stampede is a National Heritage Listed Monument, internationally acclaimed as the best example of running dinosaur tracks in the world.

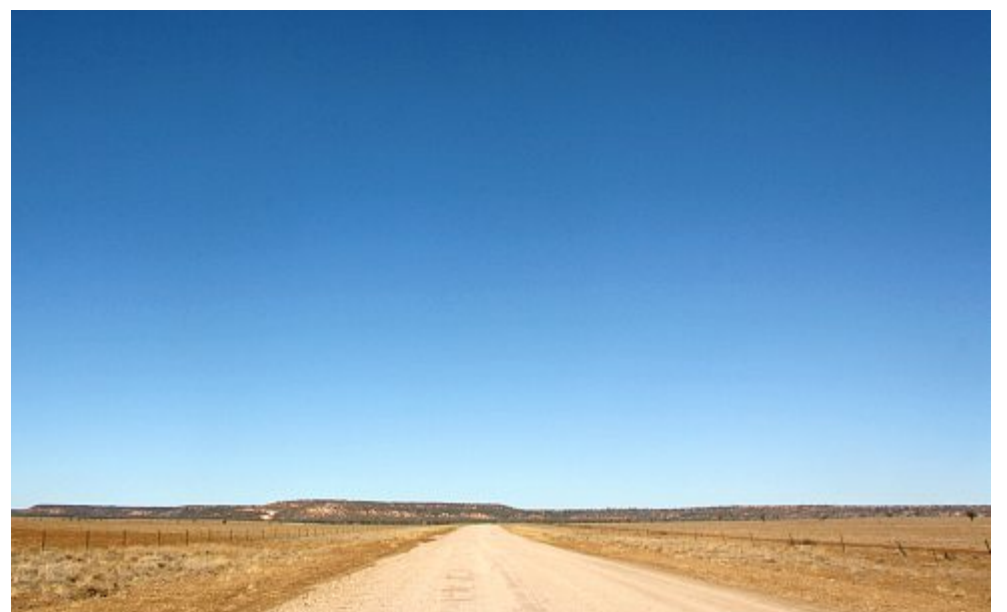
Meanwhile the Age of Dinosaurs Museum features the bones of three of these creatures, as well as the initial find which was a giant sauropod dubbed Elliot.

Banjo is the first known carnivore in Australia while Clancy is a long-necked plant-eating dinosaur and Matilda is thought to have been the largest creature to have walked the earth ... 20-30m long and weighing 30 ton.

"These are older than anything in Europe," David says.



Sunset at the Age of Dinosaurs provides a wonderful time for reflection of the timelessness of Outback Queensland.



Approaching the 7km-long ridge that is home to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs at Winton. The 11km access road has been promised a \$7million upgrade