



New Field School to prepare Australia's most complete ichthyosaur fossil

Hands-on citizen science experience announced by the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History.

- Participants to help prepare Australia's most complete ichthyosaur fossil – a seven-metre *Platypterygius australis* discovered in 2023.
- The Field School will run in January 2026 at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum in Winton, Queensland.
- Fossil preparation to take place in the Southern Hemisphere's most productive Fossil Preparation Laboratory and new Exhibition Development Facility.
- The ichthyosaur will go on public display following completion of the preparation project.

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History in Outback Queensland has announced a rare opportunity for citizen scientists – the chance to help prepare Australia's most complete ichthyosaur fossil.

Discovered in 2023 on Toolebuc Station, near McKinlay, by fossil enthusiast Cassandra (Cass) Prince, the extraordinary seven-metre-long *Platypterygius australis* is estimated to be around 90% complete. The discovery was made when Cass noticed bone fragments weathering from a low ridge on the property. Over the months that followed Cass and her family carefully exposed the fossilised skeleton of the ancient marine reptile, revealing a nearly intact skull, vertebral column, flippers and partial tail fin.

Recognising the scientific importance of the find, the Prince family contacted the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and the specimen was excavated with assistance from Museum Founders David and Judy Elliott. The fossil was later transported to Winton, where it will undergo detailed preparation before being studied and displayed at the Museum.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for anyone who has ever dreamed of working with real fossils," said Education & Astronomy Manager, Grant Salmond, who is co-ordinating the Field School. "Participants will get to work side-by-side with Museum staff as they reveal the bones of an animal that swam the inland sea 100 million years ago. Every day, they'll see new details of this incredible marine predator come to light."

The Sea Monster Field School will run across two sessions: 4–18 January and 18 January–1 February 2026 – offering a two-week immersion in the science and techniques of fossil preparation. Participants will work in the Museum's Fossil Preparation Laboratory and the Exhibition Development Facility, gaining practical experience using specialised tools to clean, stabilise and conserve fossil material.

Accommodation will be provided onsite at the Museum's Maloney Lodge Precinct, located just 100 metres from the Laboratory. Participants will enjoy hearty Outback meals and the camaraderie of living and working alongside the Museum team in the heart of dinosaur country. Two-day trips are

also included: one to a dig and fossicking site operated by Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond and another to the Dinosaur Stampede National Monument at Lark Quarry Conservation Park.

“This project connects people directly to the science of discovery,” said Museum Co-founder David Elliott OAM. “To prepare a fossil that hasn’t been seen in a 100-million-year-old animal is an experience you’ll never forget.”

Applications are open to citizen scientists aged 18 and over until 1 December 2025. No prior experience is required – just curiosity, patience and a passion for Australia’s prehistoric past. Once completed the ichthyosaur will take pride of place in the Museum’s future marine reptile gallery, where it will help reshape our understanding of life in Australia’s ancient inland seas.

Program dates

Group 1: 4–18 January 2025

Group 2: 18 January–1 February 2025

Program packages

King single rooms (shared bathroom) – \$4,000 per person

Queen rooms (private ensuite, twin-share) – \$7,000 per pair

A \$500 non-refundable deposit is required to secure each booking.