



MEDIA RELEASE

20th December 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“RIVERSLEIGH FOSSIL TRAIL” UNVEILED IN NEW CAIRNS TOURISM DISPLAY

A prehistoric giant wombat the size of a mini bus, Diprotodon, a tree climbing crocodile, Mekosuchus, an armour plated giant land turtle, Meiolania, a giant ferocious duck, Thunder Bird, and a meat eating sabre-toothed kangaroo, Fangaroo, are the latest fossilised display items on show at the Cairns Aquarium within a newly created, twenty five metre long, sub-terranean cave journey experience called the Riversleigh Fossil Trail.

The Riversleigh Fossil Trail is part of a brand new \$500,000 exhibition which gives visitors a sneak-peak into North Queensland’s little known “third” World Heritage listed site, the Riversleigh Mammal Fossil site.

The life-sized megafauna fossils have been meticulously recreated to represent the now extinct animals that lived in north-west Queensland’s tropical rainforest region between 25 and 50 million years ago.

The immersive and life-like cave system comes complete with limestone walls, fossilised remains and stalactites while providing a context for the region’s rich fossil and geological history, dating back over 25 million years ago.

Cairns Aquarium CEO, Daniel Leipnik is thrilled to open the new attraction.

“The project has been in development for several years and was made possible through specialised artisans and craftspeople with technical input from palaeontologists, biologists and designers”.

“We are so delighted to have been able to create this wonderful display. It provides our visitors with a brand new, immersive experience that doesn’t currently exist anywhere in Australia”.

“The attraction enables visitors to see, interact with and get up close to fossilised examples of megafauna from North west Queensland while providing an enhanced education and awareness of a part of Australia which many visitors never get to see due to the remoteness of the Riversleigh Fossil site itself”.

“The attraction builds on the many interactive and educational displays at the Cairns Aquarium which are there to provide a meaningful and accessible way for the general public to understand and engage in science.”

“Unearthing the ancestors of today’s Australian key animal groups ignites the imagination of kids and adults alike. Seeing their skeletal structures helps us appreciate what these species may have looked like millions of years ago.”

Tourism Minister Andrew Powell said this new and exciting exhibition offers an accessible and interactive tourist attraction for those keen to learn more about Riversleigh’s ancient landscape, one of the top 10 fossil sites in the world.



“Queensland’s fossils are as unique as our natural landscapes and biodiversity. This attraction offers visitors with an unmatched opportunity to learn about our prehistoric animals (and how big they used to be!), and immerse themselves in our rich history while enjoying the rest of Cairns Aquarium.

“The Queensland Government funded \$200,000 towards building this immersive new exhibit, to boost tourism opportunities in the Cairns region.

“Unlocking the tourism potential of Queensland is a key focus of our 20-year tourism plan, which is currently open for public consultation, and this is an excellent example of what we can offer the world.”

The inspiration to create the Riversleigh Fossil Trail was due to a field trip to the Gulf Savannah region by the Cairns Aquarium’s CEO and management team in 2019.

“We were overwhelmed by the incredible landscapes of north Queensland’s Gulf Country, a 186,000 kilometre area west of Cairns comprised of tropical grasslands, limestone hills, seasonal river systems and ancient geological wonders such as Cobbold Gorge, Undara lava tubes, Copperfield Gorge and the Riversleigh fossil site, located near the Northern Territory border.”

“The whole area is a journey back in time. With so few people making the trek out there, we felt that it was valuable to bring an example of what the area looks like, complete with a sample of the fossil record, so our visitors can experience one of Australia’s most important fossil sites for themselves.”

With over two million visitors since opening 7 years ago, the Cairns Aquarium has become a billboard for the region’s natural ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain. The new Riversleigh Fossil Trail at the Cairns Aquarium is sure to be a hit as Cairns braces for an onslaught of visitors heading to Tropical North Queensland for the upcoming Christmas and New year school holiday period.

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About the Cairns Aquarium

The Cairns Aquarium is a major tourism attraction which provides visitors with a guaranteed experience and interaction with fish and aquatic animals from the Great Barrier Reef and surrounding Wet Tropics ecosystems. The world class indoor attraction is located at 5 Florence Street on the corners of Abbott, Florence and Lake Street in Cairns. The award-winning attraction is only a block or two walk from all of Cairns major hotels and city attractions and just 7 minutes’ drive from the Airport.

The two level, 7,800 square metre facility houses over 16,000 endemic fish and aquatic organisms housed in an immersive and life-like journey. Visitors enjoy a 2-hour interactive experience through 11 Tropical North Queensland eco-systems including: The Great Barrier Reef, Tropical Rainforest, Forest Floor, Rivers Systems, Creeks & Streams, Coastal Zones, Mangroves, Gulf Savanna, Ribbon Reef, and the Coral Sea. In addition to the 71 live exhibits, the Cairns Aquarium’s research arm conducts vital research and bio-technology development of Northern Australia fisheries and crustacean species.



Some of the notable attractions include a 400,000 litre flooded waterways and billabongs exhibit with giant barramundi and freshwater whiptail rays, a 10 metre tall, 300,000 litre Outer reef exhibit with over 1000 brightly coloured marine fish, and a 1.8 million litre Coral Sea oceanarium filled with ocean going predatory fish such as sharks, rays, grouper, trevally and snapper. Make sure you look out for some of the world's deadliest marine creatures on display in the "Dangers of the Reef" zone.

The Cairns Aquarium provides an educational and enjoyable experience of the regions marine's life prior to a trip to the Great Barrier Reef or a perfect follow up to see the reef creatures you may have missed. The Cairns Aquarium is suited to all ages, cognitive levels and mobility types. The building is air conditioned, open 365 days a year and fun for the whole family.

For more information, please visit www.cairnsaquarium.com.au

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY FOR MEDIA

WHAT: Unveiling and opening of the new "Riversleigh Fossil Trail"

WHERE: Cairns Aquarium

5 Florence Street, Cairns City

WHEN: 9:30 -10:30 am, Friday 20th December 2024

WHO: Presentation to camera and walkthrough by CEO and Assistant Tourism Minister Bree James.

For more information, please contact:

Cairns Aquarium

Daniel Leipnik, CEO

Email: dleipnik@cairnsaquarium.com.au

Cairns Aquarium

Kellie Knight

sales@cairnsaquarium.com.au