



Photo: Ovolo Hotel Instagram

NEW PROJECT PROFILE

FOSSIL CORNER, CANOWINDRA

Fish Fossil Corner is the location of the original fish fossil dig site that was originally 'unearthed' in 1955, revealing over 3,000 Devonian fish fossils that lived in the waters of Gondwanaland over 360 million years ago. In 1999, the Age of Fishes Museum was established, which preserves and presents the fossils and their insights into Ancient Australia. David Attenborough, who visited the site in 2013 considers it to be 'one of the most significant fossil sites to be found anywhere in the world.'

There is little doubt that Fish Fossil Corner is a cornerstone from which to share the Wonder of Gondwana and immerse visitors in a journey into Ancient Australia. It would enable the story to move beyond the Museum and back into the landscape from which it was born.

THE WONDER OF GONDWANA
A Journey into Ancient Australia



**DESTINATION
MARKETING
STORE**

CANOWINDRA FOSSIL CORNER



CANOWINDRA

Canowindra is part of the Cabonne Shire, located 290 kms west of Sydney, 270 kms north of Canberra and around 60 kms from the regional centre of Orange. The region competes for the title of 'Australia's Food Basket' with more than half of the businesses in the region being classified as part of the agricultural sector. The area is home to the site of Australia's first gold rush and is famous for ballooning, food and wine. It is part of Destination NSW's [Tour of Caves and Fossils Road Trip](#).

EXISTING EXPERIENCE

The dig site has led to several new discoveries. The Fish were from the Devonian Period and had armour plating, lungs and gills. The presence of a Penta dactyl limb suggests this is a species in the process of evolution. Furthermore, the *Groenlandaspis* species helped prove that the Earth's continents were once joined together because they have also been found in Greenland and Antarctica. It is an inherent part of the story of Gondwana.

All of the fossil specimens are preserved on a single bedding plane, part of an ancient fish community, which had been trapped in a pool of water that dried up, killing the fish. Incoming sediments later buried these fishes quickly and quietly, with minor disturbance to the fish skeletons. The Canowindra site is listed as part of [Australia's National Heritage](#) because of its international scientific importance.

CREATING A SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE

Fish Fossil Corner is a significant site that offers an immediate opportunity to 'tap' into a growing travel trend, which is 'travel to show and share'. To take advantage of it destinations need to cater for a visitor's desire to take away *mementos* and share 'instagramable- moments' that are linked to a destination's experiences.

Fish Fossil Corner, which could be positioned as the landmark of evolution, provides the opportunity to do both. Particularly when David Attenborough's opinion on the historical importance of the site is added into the mix.

The **I amsterdam** sign is a simple example of the latter. It makes it easy to share through social media and the fact that the sign is branding the destination turns *User Generated Content* into *User Generated Branding*, without any additional effort from the participant.

It would not be too difficult to do the same for Fossil Corner. Simple signage highlighting something like **Canowindra - Where Evolution Landed**, could be created fairly easily and inexpensively.

Likewise, with souvenirs that could be purchased from the Age of Fishes gift shop as a memento of the trip. For example, by turning the transformative travel concepts into relevant retail products.

Stage 1:

- Redirect the road that goes past the original fossil site. There was a proposal to do this, submitted to Council in 1998. This proposal should be reconsidered.
- Purchase the land that the original fossil site is on. The land (200 acres with homestead) is currently for sale. If purchased by Cabonne Council it could then be developed along the following steps:
 - » Make the site a national heritage site under the new system as it is only listed under the old system;
 - » Separate the fossil site from the rest of the land, which can then be resold to offset costs and assist fund necessary infrastructure works etc; and
 - » Build a carpark and viewing dome over the main site. Consider opportunities for creating an events space.

Stage 2:

- Creating remarkable content that connects Fossil Corner with the Museum and to the *Wonder of Gondwana* concept should be central to content development. In addition, as for the Age of Fishes Museum, develop and promote retail products that can become genuine, locally-crafted souvenirs and mementos.
- Consider best practice in interpretation and global trends in contemporary design of museums and attractions that can applied to the viewing dome. This might involve integrating new technology, such as augmented or virtual reality to enliven it and create an imagined reality for the visitor. This would strengthen its appeal as an 'Instagrammable site'.
- Linking Fossil Corner with the Age of Fishes Museum through an experiential tour program for the leisure market, including families. This might involve a range of options from workshops based around the current mini-dig tours through to 'behind the scenes' tours with palaeontologists. Offering small group or exclusive tours would be more popular and reinforce the unique and rare offering of this scientifically important site.
- Partnerships and collaboration with institutions such as the Australian Museum and creating special tours for their members. This could include expert guest speakers, such as palaeontologists and visiting experts from places like the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, USA.