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## PROJECT PROFILE

# AGE OF FISHES MUSEUM

The **Age of Fishes Museum** in Canowindra is one of only two fish fossil museums in the world and is a National Heritage site due to its international scientific significance. The Museum houses a huge collection of Devonian fish fossils found in the Canowindra area and tells the story of events that occurred over 360 million years ago. In 2018, the Museum was awarded a gold medal in the Specialised Tourism Services category at the Country and Outback Regional Tourism Awards.

David Attenborough, who visited the Museum in 2013 considers it to be *'one of the most significant fossil sites to be found anywhere in the world.'*

**THE WONDER OF GONDWANA**  
*A Journey into Ancient Australia*



**DESTINATION  
MARKETING  
STORE**



# AGE OF FISHES MUSEUM



Photo: Melissa Chambers

## EXISTING EXPERIENCE

The Age of Fishes Museum was opened in 1999 and is a hub for information, education and scientific research. More than 10,000 people visit the Museum each year from universities, schools, clubs and organisations throughout Australia.

The fossils were accidentally found in 1955 when the Council were grading a road 11km from Canowindra. A local beekeeper notified the Australian Museum of the find and in 1993 Dr Ritchie (with the help of Rotary and a council excavator) unearthed 80 tonnes of rock slab containing over 3,000 fish fossils. The dig site has led to several new discoveries and tells the story of events that occurred over 360 million years.

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 - more commonly known as the **Missing Link**. Furthermore, the *Groenlandaspis* species helped prove that the 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.

## 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](#).

## CREATING A SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE

To elevate and evolve the Age of Fishes Museum, there are a number of important strategies:

- Creating remarkable content that brings the story of the ancient fish to life in an engaging way. This would build awareness of the Museum and encourage more people to visit. Short videos for distribution through digital and online channels are very important. Connecting the Museum more strongly to the *Wonder of Gondwana* concept should be central to content development.
- Consider best practice in interpretation and global trends in contemporary design of museums and attractions. This might involve integrating new technology, such as augmented or virtual reality to enliven the exhibits and create an imagined reality for the visitor. Current plans for re-development of the Museum should be developed in collaboration with experts in visitor-centric design and interpretation.
- Consider strengthening the 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 could be strengthened through linking with other institutions along the Tour of Caves and Fossils touring route as well as with commercial partners such as Gondwana Dreaming tours. In particular, participating in multi-site activations as well as more immersive or experiential itineraries that involve the Museum as a core activity.