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PO Box 3300, South Brisbane 4101, Australia
Phone 06 7 3840 7555
Fax 06 7 3846 1226
Email qmlib@qm.qld.gov.au
Website www.qm.qld.gov.au

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IN MEMORIUM

Richard ‘Dinosaur Dick’ Suter (1935–2013)



Fig. 1. Dick Suter (sitting) with Tom and Sharon Hurley showing the plesiosaur skeleton that Dick had prepared.

Richard (Dinosaur Dick) Suter was born in December 1935 in Melbourne but first arrived in Boulia, Western Queensland in 1953. He loved the country, the flora & fauna, the people and the rest of his life he was either associated with the place, or lived there.

Interviewed by the ABC journalist, Leonie Lyons, in 2008 he said: *“I spent about 26 years in the district before I cleared off down to Sydney to get away from the heat and the flies... and then started coming back out here in 1984 for my health.”*

He, and his brothers, John and Bill spent a large portion of their lives in many different but complimentary pursuits around Boulia. Dick had many career changes and he worked on many local stations, undertook contract fencing, was a land owner and sheep farmer,

semi-professional fisherman, museum curator and fossil discoverer.

Dick had contact with the Queensland Museum (QM) from the early 1960’s; but it was his brother, John, who got him interested in fossil hunting. He was also fully aware that the fossil faunas of the Toolebuc Formation in Western Queensland had hardly been touched. Dick and John made a significant collection with the intention that it be put on display in Boulia but the local council, at that time, could not supply a venue for it. As a result, for several years, the collection was on display in John’s shed in Sydney. It was donated to the South Australian Museum in 2007.

Dick also continued to collect, and this new collection, ‘Boulia Collection’ went on display

at the town's Stone House museum in 1998. At the same time, Dick met Tom and Sharon Hurley who realised that John and Dick had hit upon a successful prospecting strategy for finding large vertebrate fossils. Early collectors had assumed, incorrectly, that what was lying on the surface was all that was to be found. Dick discovered that further digging may reveal additional parts of the skeleton still encased in limestone, more deeply buried in the soil. Tom and Sharon also brought new ideas, quad bikes, GPS's, and mechanised digging which resulted in new and significant discoveries in the Boulia region.

Some of the fossils that were found and donated or were named after the team, include *Bouliachelys suteri*, (Suter's Boulia turtle). Two large cartilaginous fish, a 3 m swordfish like fish (*Australopachycormus hurleyi* Kear 2007). Another new species, found by Dick, is currently being studied by Dr Alan Bartholomai as this is being written. Isopod crustaceans (*Brunnaega tomhurleyi* Wilson & Kear 2011) were also described from a fossil fish skull. Other fossils sent to QM and other museums include 2 other swordfish specimens, a shark skull complete with skin, teeth and vertebrae, a chimaeroid tooth plate, what looks like sardines in a layer 10 deep, an ankylosaur dinosaur and two pterosaur bones. In the 'Boulia collection' at the Stone House Museum are 2 relatively complete ichthyosaur skulls, 2 large plesiosaurs, sharks, fish, ammonites, a kronosaur, vertebrae of a sauropod dinosaur, trees, shells and more. While not all were found by Dick he did help facilitate the discovery and collection of fossils from the district.

Dick volunteered his time at the museum and became the long-term curator until his untimely end in June 2013, aged 77 years. The 'Boulia collection' was gifted to QM and is now part of the state collection. Dick didn't just volunteer at the museum, he spent many hours weeding the burrs from the median strip of Boulia's main street and other public areas and involved himself in many community projects. He was passionate about the local community, supporting local events and the flying doctor.

He received multiple Volunteer and Australia Day awards. In 2007 he was recognised for his contribution in the Queensland Tidy Towns Awards with the Queensland Outstanding Individual award.

Dick was a true and reliable friend. He stood for fairness, honesty and respect. He valued friendship and had a good sense of humour. In the past 15 years, Dick became famous as 'Dinosaur Dick' but not just for his fossil exploits. He shared yarns with the tourists at the Stone House Museum on a wide variety of subjects. Stories included growing up with a dad who was a circus lion tamer, of fishing, fighting, fencing, fossils, shooting, horses, motorbikes, sheep, feral pigs and cats. Dick with his stories was certainly one of the museum's attractions and a well-known mining identity described him as "*the most interesting man he had ever met and his main form of propulsion was his mouth!*" Dick will be remembered perhaps, most of all, for his story telling, and the African proverb "*that when an old man dies, a library burns down*" seems particularly appropriate. If he wasn't a legend from all of his exploits then the chance discovery of a truly unbelievable plesiosaur in May 2012 and preparing it in just 9 months on his own certainly qualifies him (Fig. 1.).

Dinosaur Dick described his fossil collecting years as the best years of his life. What a lucky man that his best years were at the end of a long and full life.

Names created to honour Dick Suter

Fossil sea turtle

Bouliachelys suteri Kear & Lee 2006

Author citations for Honorifics

Kear, B.P. & Lee, M.S. 2006. A primitive protostegid from Australia and early sea turtle evolution. *Biology Letters* 2:116-119

Tom & Sharon Hurley

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