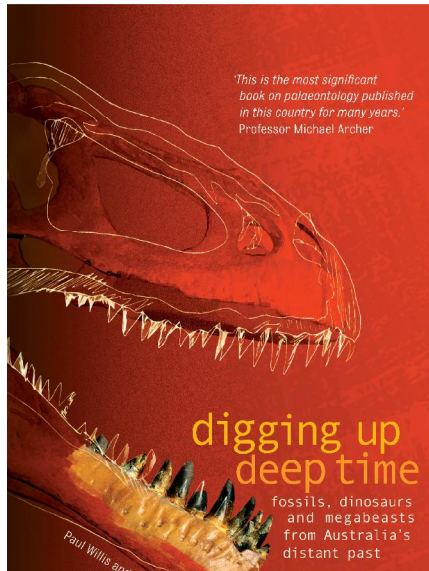


BOOK REVIEW

Paul Willis and Abbie Thomas. *Digging up Deep Time: Fossils, Dinosaurs and Megabeasts from Australia's Distant Past*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2005.



In *Digging Up Deep Time* paleontologist and science reporter Paul Willis, and science writer and fish biologist Abbie Thomas, piece together a grand saga of the rise of life on earth. According to them, 'Australia is something of an Olympic champion when it comes to the fossil record. The fossils here have grabbed a healthy swag of world records; among them are the oldest fossils, the first creatures to use oxygen, the first complex creatures, the first animal footprints, and even the oldest dung!'

Fossils tell an amazingly detailed story of a lost world, of the earth millions of years ago. Each fossil site allows us to peer through a small window into that huge and mysterious landscape. Read a detective story set on Kangaroo Island, where the wedge-shaped wounds on the small *Ogygopsis* were able to be traced to the large predator *Anomalocaris*. Or the sad tale of the fish at Canowindra, crowding together in a shrinking pool as the water dried up; their fossilised remains show thousands and thousands of fish trapped together in the mud, like the proverbial sardines.

Digging Up Deep Time is a trip along the rise of life, stopping off wherever there are clues about how life evolved, from ancient cyanide-eating bacteria to dinosaurs, diprotodons, and today's wildlife. Discover the beginnings of complex life through a dazzling fossil treasure of dinosaurs, megafauna and ancient mammals.

From introductory chapters on fossils, evolution and early life on the planet, the book then focuses on specific locations or themes: the ancient sea on Kangaroo Island, the ancient reef at Gogo Station, fish at Canowindra, fossils in Sydney, Gondwanan dinosaurs, giant mammals at Inverloch, opalised fossils at Lightning Ridge, underwater giants in the Flinders Highway, Dinosaur Cove in Victoria, more dinosaurs at Winton, mammals at Murgon, rainforests at Riversleigh, Alcoota fossil site, megafauna at Wellington Caves.

This book is packed with information, but is immensely readable. It invokes a sense of wonder at the majesty of this planet, its evolutionary processes, and the beauty and complexity of its myriad life forms.