

Australian crocodile fossil rewrites evolution

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Australian paleontologists announced a new fossil find (figure 1) which they claim overturns previous ideas about crocodile evolution.¹ Announcing their paper to the media, Steve Salisbury from the University of Queensland said,

‘We’ve always assumed that modern crocodylians originated in North America or Europe. But this discovery in Australia of the most primitive member of that group indicates their origin probably took place in Gondwana or perhaps in Australia.’²

This illustrates how ideas about evolution keep changing because the fossil information is so incomplete. One new find in a remote area of

another continent can overturn the neat evolutionary stories that were presented so confidently as fact. Salisbury *et al.* acknowledge as much when they said that the ‘emergence of taxa immediately ancestral to Crocodylia have remained one of the most poorly understood areas of crocodyliform evolution.’³

Ian Duncan, the former mayor of Isisford, a town in far western Queensland, found the first skeleton, less its head, in the mid 1990s. It was named *Isisfordia duncani* after him. Subsequent scientific explorations to the remote site, 700 km from the nearest ocean, uncovered the remaining bones plus the skull in a dried-up creek bed.

The international team of paleontologists claims the fossils represent the world’s ‘most primitive’ modern crocodile, but the term ‘primitive’ is really subjective opinion assuming evolution is fact. It is difficult to imagine what they mean by the term since they show that the fossil is in fact similar to modern crocodylians. This makes sense from a creationist perspective,

since virtually all the fossils are about the same age, buried during the global Flood catastrophe some 4,500 years ago. In that framework the fossil find gives us a better idea about when in this catastrophe these animals were buried.

Salisbury’s team have now recovered the complete skull from the football-sized rock enclosing it. They estimate the skull to be between 95 million and 98 million years old since it was recovered from the Winton Formation, which is interpreted as spanning the transition between Early and Late Cretaceous.³ However, the dates quoted simply reflect personal beliefs about what the researchers think happened in the past, based on their uniformitarian thinking.⁴ That framework of thinking ignores the historical fact of the global catastrophe of Noah’s Flood. When we take the Flood account seriously, it is a simple matter to develop a different interpretation for these fossils consistent with creation and biblical history.

At 95 to 98 million years, the

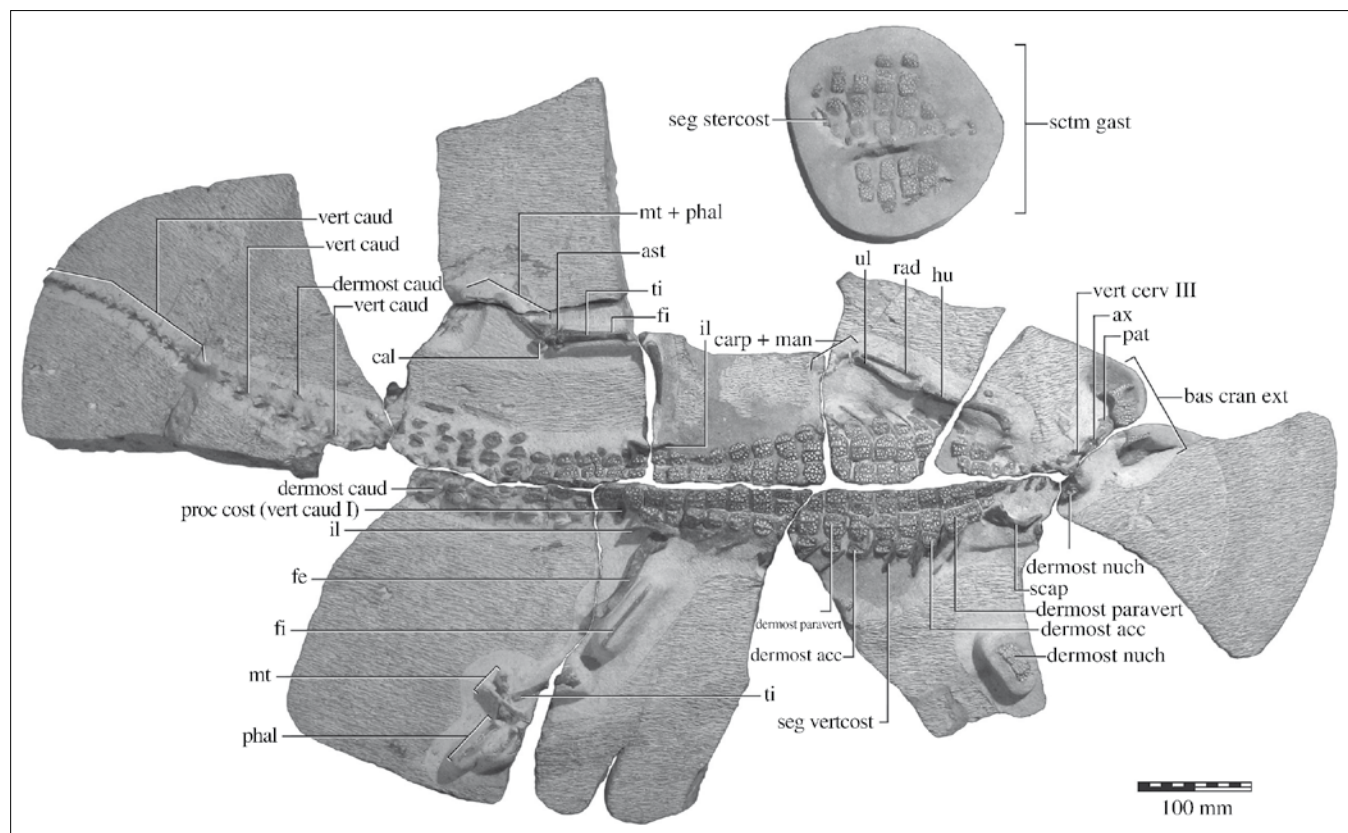


Figure 1. Skeleton of crocodile *Isisfordia duncani* fossilized within in pieces of sandstone. (From Salisbury *et al.*⁹).

researchers say that *Isisfordia* predates modern crocodiles by about 20 million years. This is another example of how the so-called fossil ranges keep expanding as more fossils are discovered. As the ranges extend, evolutionary progression becomes more and more blurred. This trend means the data fits better with the creationist framework of thinking where the fossil order represents the sequence of burial during the year-long Flood.

Isisfordia was smaller than the American alligator and had a flatter and longer snout. It was only a metre long and weighed around three or four kilograms. There is considerable professional incentive (and it is common practice) for paleontologists to give their fossil finds new species names, but how could anyone know that the Queensland crocodile was indeed a different species (reproductively isolated) from the ones found in North America or Europe? We can't do breeding experiments with fossils. The small variations in skeletal shape are no more than variation within the same biblical kind, the same sort of variation seen today in dogs and bears—and cats such as lions and tigers, which can interbreed and are all descended from the one group.

The new fossil crocodile discovery shows that even within an evolutionary frame of reference, evolution must have been stationary for 100 million of these assumed years. Evolutionists call the problem 'stasis', but stasis is not a problem for biblical creation—it predicts it.

From a biblical perspective, the floodwaters were still rising on the earth when these animals perished.⁵ They were still rising because animal trackways are present throughout the strata in western Queensland. At Lark Quarry near Winton they all tend to run in the same direction, suggesting they were all fleeing from the same disaster.⁶ Trackways would not be expected after the floodwaters peaked because all the terrestrial animals would have perished by that time.

The Winton Formation has been interpreted within uniformitarian thinking as a lacustrine (lake) and low-energy

fluvial (river) depositional environment.⁷ However, the new crocodile fossil is 'an almost complete, fully articulated skeleton'. It is clear that the sediment deposition rate must have been rapid if an animal of the size described were to be preserved so well, without rotting or being scavenged. Volcanoclastic sedimentation³ was also occurring at the time, pointing to catastrophic watery deposition consistent with the biblical Flood. Uniformitarians have a time problem: where do they fit millions of years into all those catastrophically deposited sediments?

Fossils from the Winton Formation throughout Queensland include sauropod dinosaurs, lungfish, armoured dinosaurs, turtles, possible mammals, freshwater shellfish, plants, wood, spores and pollen.^{3,8} In other words, the material buried includes terrestrial, amphibian and marine animals and plants. So the catastrophe affected the land, the coast and the ocean.

Although this new crocodile fossil has been described and announced in evolutionary terms, it actually supports the biblical account of Earth history.

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A new Neandertal/modern human fossil hybrid?

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A team of anthropologists claims to have discovered the remnants of a supposedly '30,000 year old' Neandertal/modern human fossil hybrid. Fossil fragments of a skull, upper and lower jaw, and shoulder blade seem to reveal a blending of Neandertal and modern human features. Study author Erik Trinkaus of Washington University said, 'At least in Europe, the populations blended.'¹ This is exciting news for young-earth creationists! This discovery further enhances the circumstantial evidence for Neandertals being fully human beings.

What was discovered?

The skeletal remains were initially discovered in a Romanian cave in the 1950s. Because they looked superficially very much like modern humans, they were filed away. That is until Trinkaus and his colleagues decided to reopen the case and take a closer look. Their study compared the fragments with those of modern humans in Africa and Europe. Surprisingly (at least to progressive creationists and other long-agers who try to relegate the Neandertals to a less-than-human status), the Romanian fragments showed a mosaic of Neandertal and modern human characteristics. For example, the skull had an occipital bun at the back of the skull, and muscle attachment scars were present at the back of the jaw. These characteristics, in particular, are very Neandertal-like. In addition, upper jaw, lower jaw and shoulder blade fragments appeared to reveal a blending of features. This evidence of interbreeding shows that the two groups 'saw each other as socially appropriate mates', Trinkaus said.

This would not be the first Neandertal/modern human skeletal mosaic ever discovered. In 1998, Trinkaus and his team unearthed the Lagar Velho I