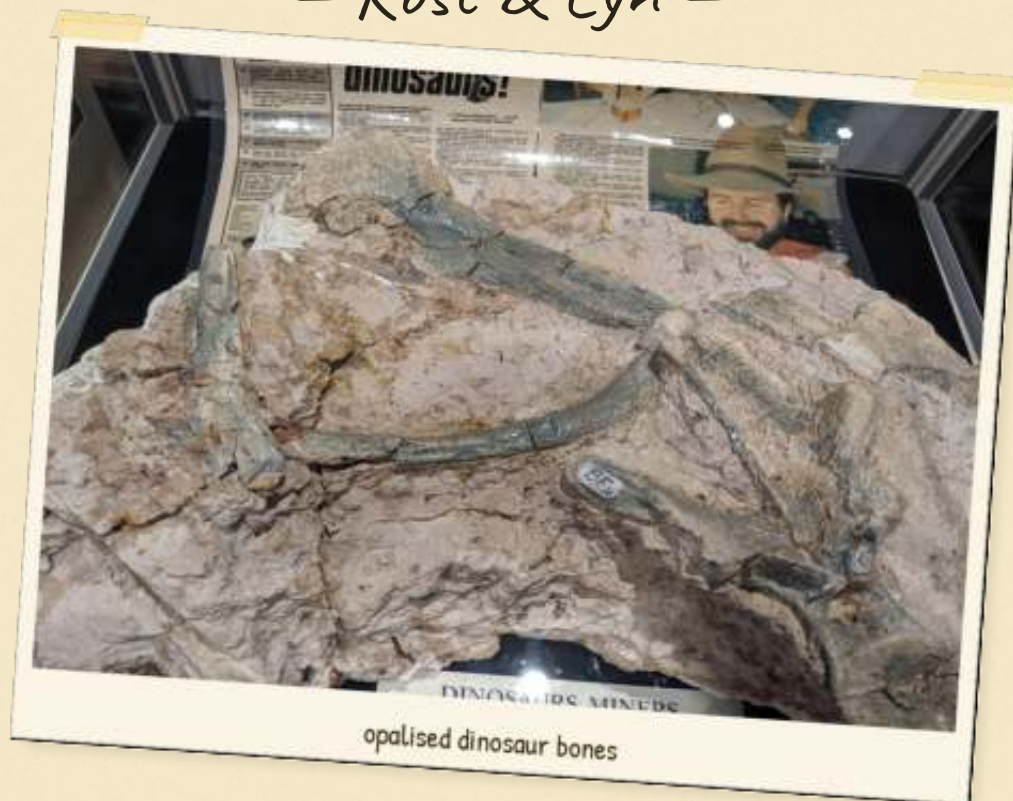


Diary of a Dinosaur Hunter

A road-trip diary from the opal fields · Lightning Ridge & Grawin

— Rose & Lyn —



The trip that became a children's book.

DINOPAL

rosesiva.com · Book 4 in the Dino series

Before we start...

This is a true story. Two friends, a 4WD, a mud-map, and a rumour about dinosaur bones turned to opal in the middle of Australia's opal fields.

It's messy and it's honest — Rose's diary is the one on a mission. Lyn's is the one keeping the receipts and rolling her eyes.

The trip you're about to read really happened. What came out the other side of it was a children's chapter book called DINOPAL — the fourth in Rose's dinosaur series for readers aged 6-12.

So — put the kettle on. Turn the page. Let's go to Lightning Ridge.

Rose's Diary

DAY 1 · UP ON THE MOUNTAIN

*It must have been first mentioned at a friend's place on the mountain.
Probably over a glass of wine if I remember correctly...*

"Did you know there are opalised dinosaur bones?"

"You're making that up — seriously? — have another glass..."

"No, fair dinkum. It was in the last magazine from the Age of Dinosaurs. The pictures look amazing."

"Where?"

"Somewhere near Lightning Ridge. In opal country."

The conversation moved on from dinosaurs to opals, and who went opal hunting. One person knew someone who actually had an opal mine in a place called Grawin. Wherever that was...

Lyn's Diary THAT SAME WEEK

Rose always has an adventurous streak. That's how she got interested in dinosaurs.

"So how would you feel about a road trip to check out opalised dino bones?" she casually mentioned one day.

"I quite like opals," I responded. "But I don't think they would suit a dinosaur..."

She didn't get the joke.

But I could get over that. And Rose's road trips were always an adventure.

"Sure, I would love to go on an adventure and try and find opals."

Rose's Diary

PLANNING · A FEW WEEKS LATER

Why does it always take ages to organise a trip away? Got to get time off, know roughly where I am going, and why I am going there...

Turns out those friends I was talking to did actually know someone with an opal mine not far out of Lightning Ridge. He has a house that he uses when he's there, which isn't often — he's busy doing other things. Happy for other people to stay there if they need a place.

Might be useful — there isn't a lot of accommodation in the opal fields...

A reason to go, an offer of accommodation, and a friend to travel with. What could possibly go wrong?

Lyn's Diary ARRIVING AT THE RIDGE

Lightning Ridge is a long way west.

A very long way from the coast.

*Love the entry sign to the town —
'POPULATION ?'. Pretty apt.*

*Booked us into a camp area just
outside town with basic cabins and
a communal kitchen. When we
checked in I read the sign on the
kitchen wall — 'Go and sit next to
someone you don't know. It'll
probably turn out to be your
cousin's neighbour's best friend...'*

Small town.



Rose's Diary

INFO CENTRE · FIRST MORNING

Lyn is great at finding places to stay. Basic cabin with a communal kitchen — you get to talk to people and find out all the gossip. Found out where to buy food, what's important to see at the Ridge, and when the local info centre opens. That will be the first stop tomorrow, after breakfast.

At the info centre we found out where to check out opal mines, who to talk to, and what to see in town. Over coffee I organised a plan of attack. We are thinking we need at least three days in 'The Ridge'. Easy going lot, these Lightning Ridge locals.

They suggested the person I should talk to about dinosaur bones is a lady called Jenny — a local opal miner and a dinosaur expert. I rang her number and left a message.

Lyn's Diary 'ENLIGHTENING RIDGE'

Some of the Ridge locals do seem to be a bit 'alternative'.

We stopped at 'Enlightening Ridge' — a random assortment of everything from a massive sculpture made from plastic milk crates to an area where you can glue a stone onto an old tree trunk. For a donation you can make a wish that the owner assures us will come true.



milk-crate giant, Enlightening Ridge

Fascinating character with a chaotic assortment of bits of machinery. Said it would help us be 'enlightened'.

I think he might have spent too long in the sun!

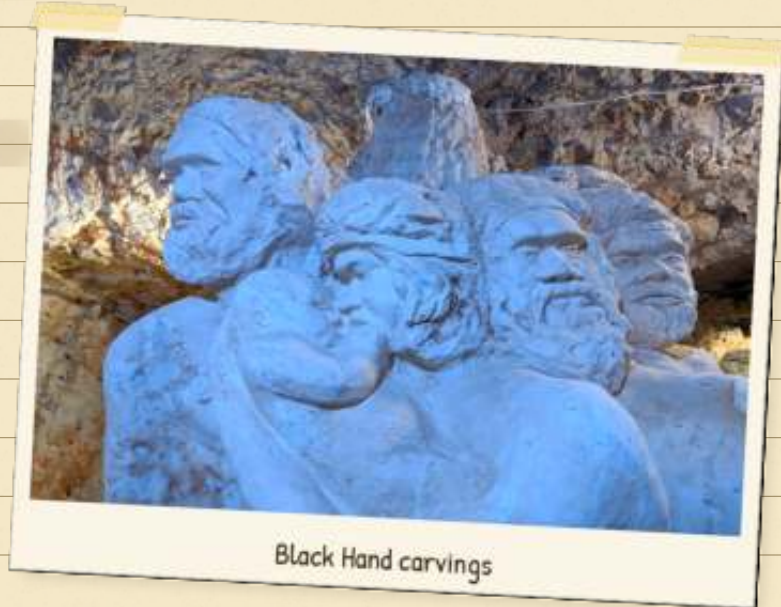
Rose's Diary

BLACK HAND OPAL MINE · AFTERNOON

Jenny called back.

She's out of town for a couple of days but is keen to meet with me.

She knows about opalised dinosaur bones, and has some she can show me!



Plenty to see at the Ridge while we wait. Went to Black Hand Opal Mine — what an experience. The original miner carved a lot of figures into the rock on the sides of his mine. Full-size statues of everything from historic characters to wild animals. Current owners have opened it up as a tourist attraction.

Black Hand wasn't really about opals — it was about carving on the mine walls. The miner must have given up on opals and just done what he liked best, and was VERY GOOD at it.

I asked the guides — mostly opal miners moonlighting as tour guides — about opalised dinosaur bones. After denying they had ever heard of them, they quickly changed the subject. So we talked about permits and how not everybody obeys the rules. Funny that.

Lyn's Diary

KANGAROO HILL · MARIE'S PLACE

Rose's contact Jenny won't be here for a couple of days so we can explore some more. Saw a sign pointing to Kangaroo Hill: 'Educational, Interesting & Informative.' So we had to go.

Marie, the owner, met us outside a collection of ramshackle corrugated iron buildings and told us her story. Her husband was a TV repair man in Adelaide but fancied he could make more money finding opals — so he got a mining lease on Kangaroo Hill.



'I came too, otherwise I would have never seen him. I got a lease just over there, and we were living in a tent. In the morning he would go that way to his mine and I would go that way to mine.'

They knocked up a 'house' of scrap and corrugated iron and became a fixture. When they stopped mining they were only able to stay on the land if they were still running a business, so they opened a tourist business inviting visitors to be Educated, Interested and Informed.

And we sure were. She has hundreds of stories and kept us going all afternoon.

Rose's Diary THE ROCK CASTLE

Kangaroo Hill was an education.
But my goodness Marie was
cagey about talking about opals.
They must have made a good
enough living — they had
travelled overseas several times.
Very cagey business, opal
mining.



castle made of volcanic rock

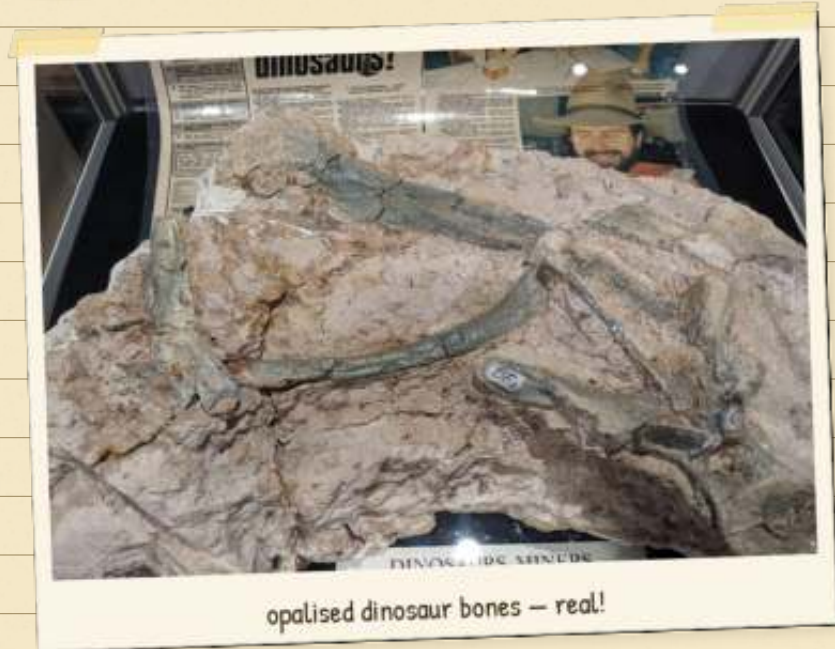
After lunch we explored a castle made of rock — lots of volcanic rock at Lightning Ridge. The builder had spent far too much time in the sun, and had a collection of junk and interesting signs that I can only describe as 'original'. And perhaps 'authentic'.

Worth a look — and far more entertaining than spending time in the few high-value opal retail outlets in town.

Rose's Diary

MEETING JENNY · THE MUSEUM

I was right. Jenny was amazing. Yes — there are opalised dinosaur bones right here in Lightning Ridge.



We went into the small museum, just the two of us. Jenny has a background in palaeontology and she is also an opal miner. She said she is aware of miners finding dinosaur bones with opals embedded, and she showed me some amazing examples in the little museum.

The problem is: you can sell opals, but it is illegal to sell dinosaur bones in Australia. So it's better for a miner to break the bones apart to get the opals out. However a dinosaur bone containing opal is worth BIG money outside Australia.

Jenny started offering a drop-in advice service: bring me something you suspect may be a dinosaur bone and I will try to ID it. Her plan was to encourage donations to the museum. But some of that written ID was ending up on the black market as 'proof', so she stopped writing anything down — verbal identifications only.

Lyn's Diary

ROSE COMES BACK ECSTATIC

Rose came back absolutely ecstatic. She has seen opalised bones, and they came from an area called Sheepyards, not far from Grawin. That's where we are heading tomorrow.

I met the local author — Gan. Another Lightning Ridge character. He convinced me to buy his book.

Rose's Diary

GRAWIN · FINDING STEVE'S PLACE

Rang Steve to ask if we could sleep at his house in Grawin. No problem — but he's not there. He's rung his mate Ian who lives close by. Ian has a key to let us in.

Rang Ian. He'll meet us tomorrow under the Telstra tower. Apparently there are no street signs or gazetted roads, so we can't go directly to Steve's.

Just kept following bush tracks till I could see the Telstra tower. Rang Ian and he was there in a few minutes in his 4WD ute. Followed his vehicle through several tracks and pulled up to a locked farm gate. Ian unlocked the gate and we walked up the short overgrown driveway to the back door.

The back door was locked, but Ian had a key. A cloud of dust rose as he pushed the door open. 'Steve wasn't great at housework,' Ian said. That was an understatement — inches of dust over everything, blown in through the cracks in the walls and around the windows.

'Better shake out the pillows and mattresses before you bed down. Get rid of the scorpions.'

Lyn and I looked at each other. Ian must have seen the look on our faces, because after a few moments he offered us the option to stay at his house instead.

Lyn's Diary

PLAN B: IAN'S HOUSE

What a mess. I couldn't believe it. Was about to suggest to Rose we go back to The Ridge when Ian offered us a bed at his place. Anything would be better than this.

Plan B: Ian's place. Plan C: back to the Ridge.

Ian's turned out to be a lot better. He had been a builder in a former life, and his house was a proper house — sealed from the dust (and scorpions) and had bedrooms. His kids come up occasionally and stay, so they expect a reasonable standard of accommodation. Better than Steve's.

Rose and I are sharing a bedroom. The door shuts and there are no scorpions. We agreed if either of us feels uneasy about anything, we'll bail and head back to LR.

Lyn's Diary PUB IN THE SCRUB

First stop today: 'The Pub in the Scrub'. A couple of shipping containers and a generator. Interesting group of characters. Stories — most of them probably not true.



a local at the Pub in the Scrub

Apparently in the earlier days it wasn't licensed as a pub. The cops would occasionally come out from Walgett. It would take them a couple of hours to get to Grawin, so long before they got here the 'publican' would go to the container / cool store and write people's names on the boxes of booze.

'Nah, we don't sell liquor. We just provide a place for local folks to keep their booze cool. Look for yourself — all the boxes are labelled with the owners' names.'

Yeah, right.

Rose's Diary

SHEEPYARDS · ANOTHER DEAD END

Ian wanted to know where we had been and who we had talked to. Especially wanted to know what they said and if anyone had found any opals. Seems to be a common thread — nobody is admitting anything, and everyone wants to know.

Sheepyards next. This is where the opalised fossil Jenny showed me was found. Hopefully we can find out more there.



Hot Pies \$1.90 — and a magpie

Another pub, more stories. Apparently feral goats are a real problem. Someone has herded some into holding pens and they get trucked out to an abattoir somewhere. Sheepyards had pies for sale — I bet the beef pies are actually goat pies.

Another wild goose (or wild goat) chase. Nobody knows anything. Nobody is finding anything. Nothing to see here. Nothing to tell Ian when we got back.

Rose's Diary

LAST DAY · THE ART GALLERY SIGN

Last day at Grawin. One more track to explore. A few random places marked on my mud map. Nothing to get excited about.

After non-productive stops at several places, Lyn spotted a sign saying 'Art Gallery'. So we stopped.



James — barefoot in his gallery

A man with the biggest, dirtiest bare feet I have ever seen invited us in. There were several arm chairs in his 'gallery' which he invited us to sit in (no scorpions) and he asked us what we were doing in the opal fields. So I told him about my quest — opalised dinosaur bones.

He left and came back with a jar full of bits, and fished out a piece of potch opal — IN THE SHAPE OF A DINOSAUR'S TOOTH. Said he had found it in the rubbish that had been through his agitator (a huge mixer where they sort dirt to try and find any opal). Any serrations on the edges had been ground off, but it absolutely looked like a tooth.

Lyn's Diary THE TOOTH

Rose has an opalised
dinosaur tooth.

xxx

(That's three kisses, in
case you're
wondering.)



Rose's Diary THE WAY HOME

What a trip.

Now I have seen it. Opalised dinosaur bones are REAL. And, thanks to James,
I HAVE ONE.

Selling and stealing happens. (It's called ratting.)

Opal mining can be dangerous and fascinating and it attracts a lot of
different characters.

I HAVE ENOUGH TO WRITE A BOOK.

Footnote –

SOME YEARS LATER...

Rose used the notes from this trip to write *DINOPAL* — a children's chapter book for readers aged 6–12, about a young girl who discovers opalised dinosaur fossils in the Australian outback.

The opalised tooth James gave her sits on the desk where she wrote it.

DINOPAL is the fourth book in Rose's dinosaur adventure series. The children who read it will never look at an opal — or a dinosaur — the same way again.



Rose's Dinosaur Series

SIX ADVENTURE CHAPTER BOOKS · AGES 6-12

DINOTHAW Antarctica · book 1

Dinosaurs & Dragons book 2

Dinosaurs Fight to Survive book 3

> *DINOPAL* the story you just read · book 4

DINOBOONE book 5

DINOCROC book 6

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Thank you for reading —

Rose x