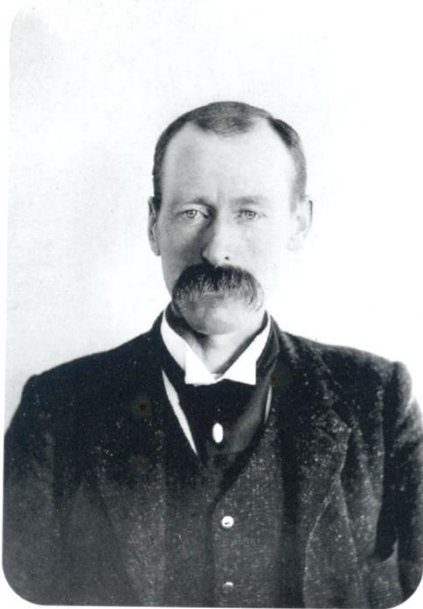


PLOD ESSAY

WILLIAM HAMILTON FERGUSON (1861 –1957)

**Gippsland's Pioneer Field Geologist, Photographer & Dinosaur
Fossil Discoverer**

Compiled by Arnis Heislars



As written by Margret Doring, William's grandniece, W H Ferguson, geologist, surveyor and explorer, was an enthusiastic and skilled photographer. His parents, William and Margaret (nee Hamilton) emigrated from Stirling, Scotland in 1853. William Hamilton Ferguson ('Will') was born in South Melbourne eight years later in 1861. He was the sixth in a family of seven children. After his father's death when Will was 14, his guardian was his half-brother, a lawyer who later became a Customs Officer in Wodonga.

Fig 1. W. H. Ferguson, Courtesy of State Library, Victoria

When Will's mother bought a farm at Talgarno, on the River Murray, he lived there with her. In between learning to be a farmer and whatever other jobs he could find, Will apparently also enjoyed the social life of the district. In addition, still a young man at 27, he was elected to the Council of Towong Shire in 1888.

During this time WH Ferguson developed an interest in geology and educated himself by reading texts in astronomy, surveying, geology and map-making. At the age of 34, he obtained a position with the Victorian Geological Survey as an assistant field geologist. He was sent out, often alone, to carry out field surveys and detailed mapping of huge areas of previously unmapped Victoria. He ranged broadly across Victoria, but some of his Gippsland exploits include: a boat trip down the Snowy River from Deddick to the sea in the 1890s, leading him to recommend that the area of the Snowy from Deddick to the Buchan River should be made a national park; exploration of black and brown coal deposits in Central and South Gippsland; and his 1903 discovery near Inverloch of the first genuine dinosaur bone found in Australia.

Will Ferguson travelled mostly on horseback, followed by a packhorse, and everywhere he went, his big camera, a store of glass plates, his survey gear – chain and theodolite and tripods – all went with him. In 1899 he was mapping the Omeo district when he took the earliest known photograph of people skiing at Mt Hotham. He also travelled to Fiji and New Guinea, collecting geological, biological, and anthropological specimens.

Will still owned the farm at Talgarno. When the Hume Weir was built he understood the benefits but was devastated by the loss of his best and most productive land, and by the losses suffered by his friends and neighbours. In the 1920s he wrote *Doomed Talgarno*, a short history of Talgarno and its families, as a memorial to the land submerged under the waters of the Hume Weir. The loss didn't affect his sense of humour, as his preface to *Doomed Talgarno* shows: "Reader, should you pass through Talgarno, do not drop a tear for our woes, we do not want any more water."

W H Ferguson never married. From 1900 he shared his Melbourne home with his two unmarried sisters and, for a short time, his brother's family, including three small sons. Later, he organised geological and botanical expeditions for his nephews and niece and their schoolmates and university friends. Will Ferguson died in 1957. In his memory, his niece and her husband established the W H Ferguson Agricultural Geology Prize at Melbourne University. W H Ferguson's great-niece Margret Doring eventually inherited his glass plate negatives; she donated some to the State Library of Victoria and some to Museum Victoria. [See below his photograph of the Artisan and more photographs of our area at the end of this essay.]

Reference – Helen Martin, Gippsland History

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1755971574632862/search/?q=William%20Hamilton%20Ferguson>)

The WH Ferguson Memorial Prize

Donated in 1959 by Joan (BAgrSc, 1936) and Neville Haughton to perpetuate the memory of Mrs Haughton's uncle William Hamilton Ferguson, Victorian Government Geologist, who in 1903, mapped the coast around Inverloch and uncovered the first recorded dinosaur fossils in Australia. This prize is awarded to the highest placed Agriculture student in agricultural geology.

Photo Collection (from glass plate negatives)

Gippsland and the Victorian high country by W. H. Ferguson.

<http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo-explore/search?query=lsr30,exact,Gippsland%20and%20the%20Victorian%20high%20country%20by%20W.%20H.%20Ferguson.&vid=MAIN&offset=250>



Barque "Artisan"
ST. Johns N.B.
1100 tons Capt Parry

Wrecked two miles West of Cape Patterson

Wm H. Hale

Wm W. Ferguson's Compliments.

Photo of the Artisan wreck near Cape Paterson by W.H. Ferguson, signed by him, at back of photo & presented to Mr Hollole, an early settler in the Powlett district, Parish of Wonthaggi.
Item held at Wonthaggi & District Historical Society .

SIGNIFICANCE of FERGUSON'S LIFETIME WORK

From report by Danielle Shean, a Monash University Science Student

(per *Dinosaur Dreaming 2003*. field report, Lesley Kool).

After leaving school and educating himself further through textbooks, particularly in geology, mapping and astronomy, William Ferguson (Fig. 1) joined the Victorian Geological Survey (VGS) in 1891. He attained the rank of assistant field geologist in the Survey and was deployed throughout the widely unexplored state of Victoria to carry out field mapping. In his thirty-five year tenure with the VGS he was responsible for the documentation of approximately 60,002 miles of previously unmapped geology (Ferguson, self-written report, 1950).

Ferguson was also responsible for the discovery of fossils such as Silurian marine invertebrates in the Grampians, fish beds near Mansfield and Briagolong, fossils in Moonee Ponds, Lancefield, Wombat Creek, Foster, Inverloch, Eagle's Nest, Daylesford, Lethbridge, Maude and Bacchus Marsh. He reported the discovery of gold in Benalla, Dunolly, Foster, Blakeville, Moliagul, Towong, Wongungarra River, King River and Blackwood. He discovered deposits of black coal, brown coal, oil, opal, pottery clays, copper, antimony and lead. W.H Ferguson also reported glacial conglomerates, sandstones, granites, limestones, soapstones, volcanics, greenstone and dykes to name but a few geological phenomena throughout Victoria (Ferguson, list of published and unpublished reports 1891 - 1926).

Probably his most consequential discovery was of the first genuine dinosaur bone from Australia at *Eagles Nest* on May 7, 1903.

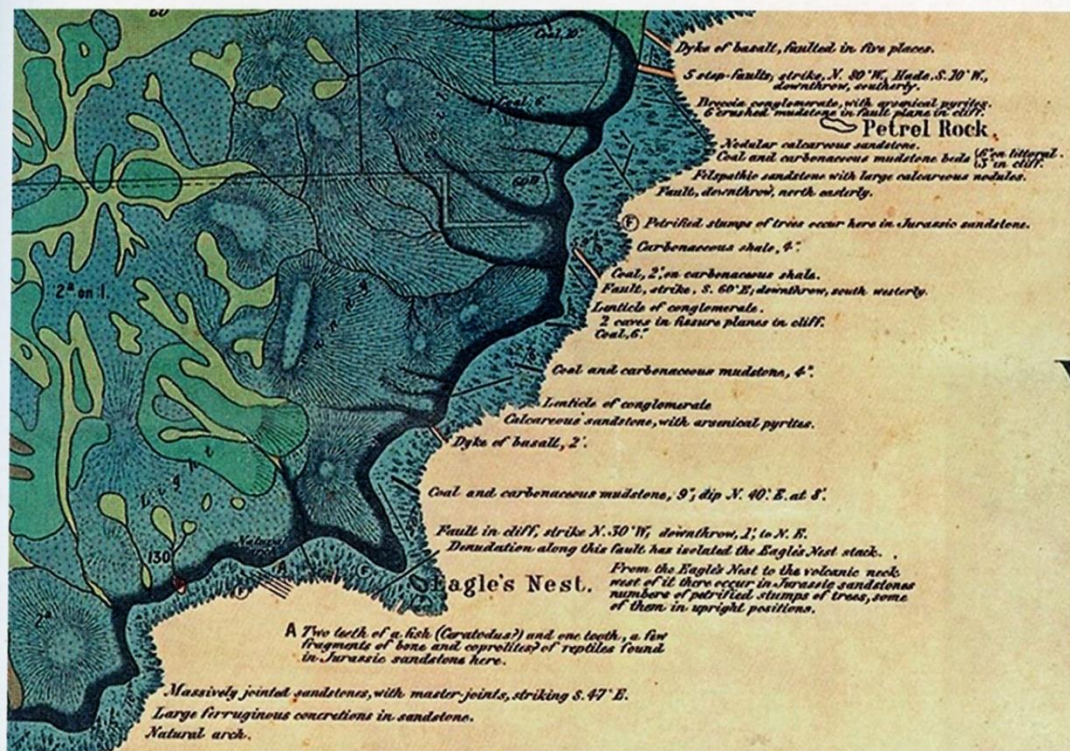
It was during his surveying in the early 1900s that Ferguson developed a new interest – fossils. He found and recorded a significant number of graptolites

in the western parts of Victoria. He also discovered fossil fish near Mansfield and Briagolong, marine sequences in the Grampians and Buchan, 'fossil fruits' in the Foster and Inverloch area, Cambrian fossils in Heathcote, Early Ordovician fossils near Boolarra and Late Ordovician fossils at Lucyvale (Ferguson, 1891 – 1926).

Ferguson found an incomplete portion of a claw from a 'Jurassic' megalosaur. Until now, this has previously been determined to have been discovered in 1906, based upon the information of both the Quarter sheet from Memoirs No. 8 and from the paper dated 1906 'On a Tooth of *Ceratodus* and Dinosaurian Claw from the Lower Jurassic of Victoria, Australia' written by English palaeontologist A.S. Woodward (Dunn, 1907). However, in a list of written works by Ferguson; Ferguson himself lists a title 7/5/1903 '*Inverloch tooth of reptile etc new Ceratodus 1st point West Eagle's Nest*' (Ferguson, list of reports, circa 1910). This is the only specific reference in any of Ferguson's journals for Eagle's Nest, although there are multiple references in his journals for Inverloch. It could be logically assumed that the megalosaur claw may have been mistakenly reported as a 'reptile tooth'.

William Hamilton Ferguson was a man of incredible accomplishment and knowledge. His record of fossil collection is outstanding, as was his knowledge of outback Victoria. His work enabled future generations of geologists to understand the rich geological history of Victoria. If not for his tireless efforts, much of Victoria's geology would never have been recorded or interpreted during his lifetime.

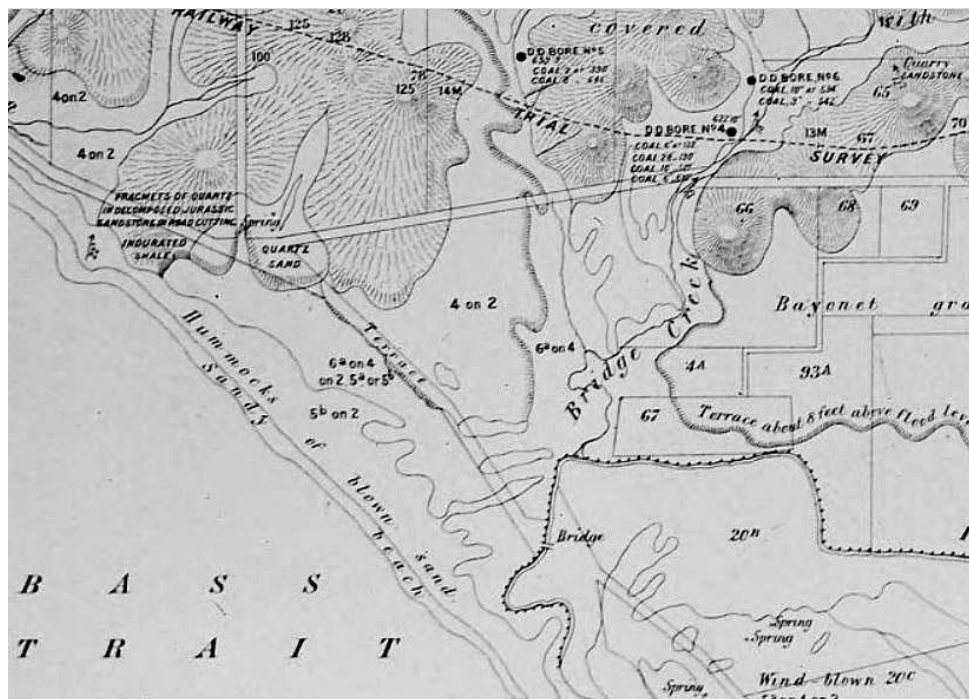
Ferguson's contributions to science and industry, as well as the emerging Victorian society, were considerable and it is appropriate that this unsung hero of the Victorian geology receives the credit he so richly deserves during this 100th anniversary year for Australia's first found dinosaur.



Part of William Ferguson's 1903 map indicating where he found Australia's first dinosaur bone near Eagle's Nest. He marked the spot with the letter 'A', stating that at this spot he found "Two teeth of a fish (*Ceratodus?*) and one tooth, a few fragments of bone and coprolites of reptiles found in Jurassic sandstone here". "*Ceratodus?*" is the scientific name for lungfish and the "tooth" turned out to be a dinosaur claw. At the time that Ferguson worked as a field geologist, it was thought that the rocks in the area were Jurassic in age. They were later re-assigned to the Early Cretaceous, approximately 120 million years old.

Courtesy of the Victoria State Library.

Extract from *Dinosaur Dreaming - Exploring the Bass Coast of Victoria*, Lesley Kool - Editor, 2010



Examples of Photographs by W.H. Ferguson ca. 1890 & after



Archies Creek Main Street



Dairy Farming Gippsland



Loch



Cowes, Phillip Island



Inverloch Jetty



Coal Creek, Korumburra