

Fascinating Fossils – *Diprotodon*

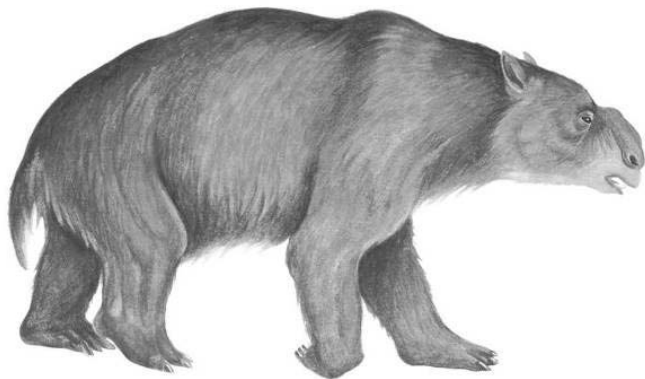


Illustration: *Diprotodon*.
Anne Musser, Australian Museum.

Diprotodon was a giant Australian animal and the largest marsupial that ever lived! Like many marsupials, *Diprotodon* protected its young inside a pouch.

Diprotodons lived in Australia during the last two million years and were extinct by about 30,000 years ago. Although they no-longer wander through our woodlands and grasslands, their fossils have been found in many parts of Australia.

Let's look at some *Diprotodon* fossils and find out more.

Aim

To find out which modern-day Australian animal is most closely related to the extinct *Diprotodon* by comparing the skeletons of a *Diprotodon*, a wombat and a Tasmanian Devil.

Method

1. Look at the photos of *Diprotodon* and the large life-sized replica of a *Diprotodon* skull.
2. Unpack the *Diprotodon* fossils from the box and look at them carefully.
3. Use the specimens and the Photo inventory card to label the skeleton below to show where each fossil is found.

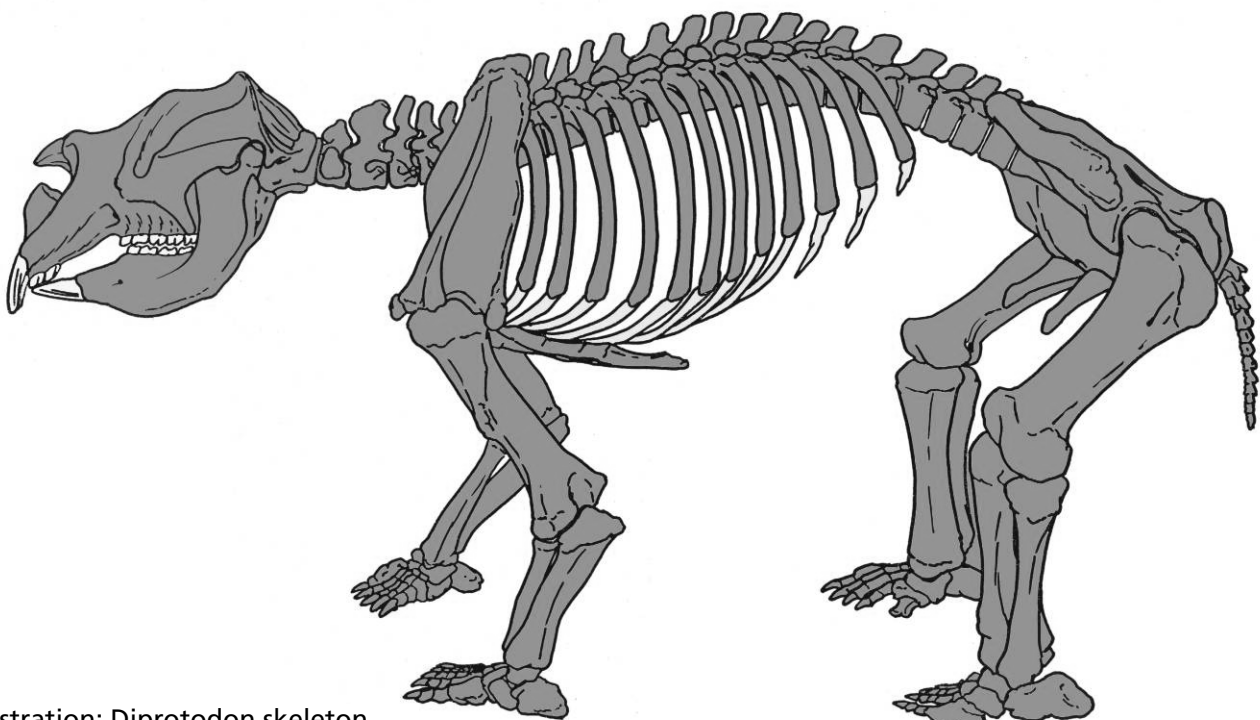


Illustration: *Diprotodon* skeleton.
Anne Musser, Australian Museum.

4. Write a description of each fossil and then draw a line to match it with its function.

Fossil	Description
rib	
back foot	
tooth	
vertebra	
pouch bones	

Function
used for chewing plants
supports the weight of the pouch
holds the weight of the animal
protects the spinal cord, helps support the body
helps protect the heart and lungs

5. Read information Card A and Card B and also examine the skulls of the modern-day wombat and Tasmanian Devil.

6. Use the skulls, specimens and cards to compare the wombat, Tasmanian Devil and *Diprotodon* then complete the table below.

Results

	Tasmanian Devil	<i>Diprotodon</i>	Wombat
upper incisors (front teeth) – number and size in upper jaw			
lower incisors (front teeth) – number and size in lower jaw			
canines (just behind the incisors) – present or absent			
toes on back foot – number and size			
top of skull – flat or bumpy or has a raised crest			

Conclusion

7. Using your results, which modern-day animal do you think is a close relative of the *Diprotodon*? Give reasons for your answer.
