

26 MAR, 2020

Motorbikes and dinosaurs

Weekender Herald, Adelaide

Motorbikes and dinosaurs

by *Oliver Brown*

A Stirling resident has been awarded a prestigious award by the Adelaide Film Festival and he intends to put its monetary prize toward a documentary film series merging his love of motorcycles with his professional speciality area, palaeontology.

Professor John Long is an internationally recognised palaeontologist currently employed at Flinders University and at the beginning of March, he was announced as the recipient of the annual Jim Bettison and Helen James Award.

The \$50,000 award recognises the life-long achievements of extraordinary Australians whose exemplary work has benefited the wider Australian community.

John's work encompasses a wide range of mediums, including vast contributions to science, specifically evolution, writing and education.

John said it was a great honour to receive the award and he already has a project in mind where the money would be the most useful.

"I'm currently working on a project that, in its draft form, started out as a book but we are now looking at developing into a documentary series," John said.

"It's all about how we look at evolution through the lens of the ongoing development of motorcycles over the years."

While the idea sounds a bit far-fetched, this is a perfect project for John, who maintains that science should be presented in interesting ways.

Whenever he releases a new piece of writing, John ensures it is engaging and

can be understood by a wide audience, including children.

Riding motorcycles since he was 17, he said his upcoming book – which has taken more of a back seat recently – explores two of his life's passions.

"In recent years, I realised that two of the things I was really interested in – evolution

and the history of motorbikes – had parallels," he said.

"As an example, when the dinosaurs got bigger, it was because of an increase in resources available to them.

"If you look at more recent history, you can see the same thing happening with motorbikes for the same reason."

According to John, most of the people he spoke to about this concept became similarly fascinated with the idea.

When he raised it with local documentary maker Julia Deroper

from JDR Productions, however, she thought it could go much further than a book.

Julia, who is based in Carey Gulley, said the nature of John's idea was so unique and interesting, it had potential as a great documentary.

"When I hear a good idea, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm on the lookout for, and John's is certainly unique," Julia said.

"It's hard to imagine how these two completely different ideas come together, but the way that John talks about it makes it so interesting."

Though it is still in early development, Julia believes the series has a good chance of being picked up.

She said its varied subject matter could draw in a lot of different people, making its target audience quite broad.

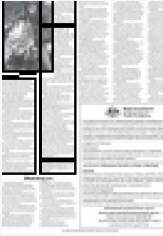
"If you think about the Ewan McGregor motorbike documentary 'Long Way Round', it was really fun to watch," she said. "This series would be similar with viewers watching John riding around the world on a motorbike, but instead looking at the sites where ancient fossils were discovered.

"I could see this potential series being skewed to women who find those sorts of things exciting, while also drawing in kids who are interested in finding out about dinosaurs."

In addition to JDR Productions,

the project is being supported by the South Australian Film Corporation and Essential Media, a production company based in Sydney which has been working side-by-side with Julia on the production.

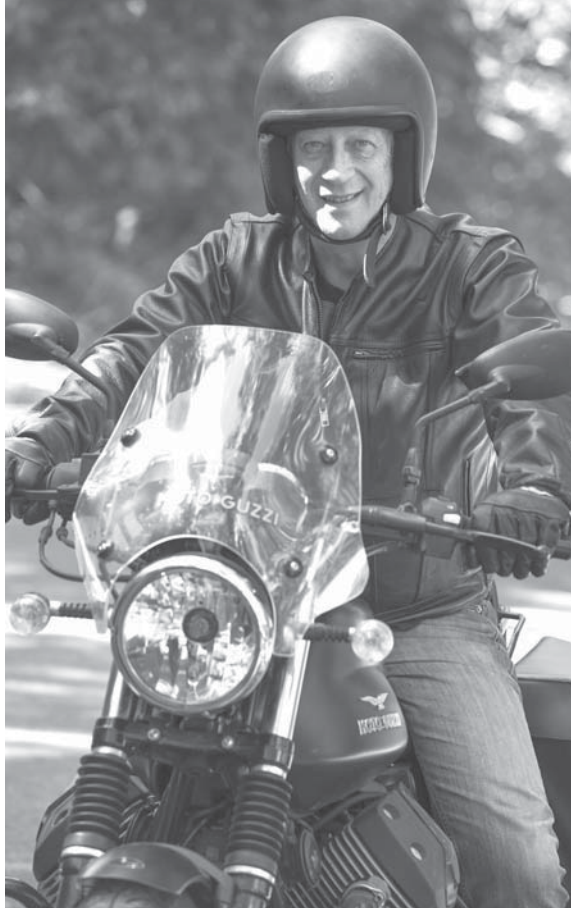
(continued on page 20)



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Professor John Long

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(continued from page 6)

John himself is no stranger to film making, having presented multiple scientific documentaries in the past. However, he said this would be his first experience working in the developmental stages of a documentary, which he has really enjoyed.

“In 2017, I went on a self-funded trip to some of the big motorcycle museums around the world, which has become a big part of the background research for my book and this potential series,” he said. “We also shot some test footage in the Flinders Ranges last year and we’re hoping to get a professional sizzle clip ready to send out by the end of the month.”

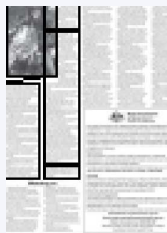
According to Julia, this is standard practice and once complete, the short teaser will be sent around the world to see if any big networks decide to pick it up as a series.

And while multiple broadcast productions

have been put on hold as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, John said there should be little impact on his project in these early stages.

“If it gets picked up by a network, it will take at least a year or two before it gets out of the development phase,” he said. “This is actually the perfect time to properly develop an idea into a series before any kind of production can begin.”

John and Julia named National Geographic, the Discovery Channel and streaming services as potential homes for the planned documentary series.



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Motorcycle enthusiast Professor John Long and partner Heather Robinson