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Australian Story – Monday February 12, 8pm, ABC and ABC iview LONG JOURNEY HOME

Introduced by Stan Grant.

I saw in the distance a protruding white bone at the surface - Dr Jim Bowler, geologist

We certainly went wow, look how complete it is - Dr Colin Groves, anthropologist

It's still hurting me to think my ancestors were dug out of the ground... and taken to Canberra – Roy Kennedy, Ngayampaa elder

As a scientist working now in direct contact with those sensitive areas of Aboriginal history I had a responsibility to adjust my thinking... so that involved a change in attitude on my part – Dr Jim Bowler, geologist



When Jim Bowler saw a human skeleton emerging from the sandhills of the Willandra Lakes in 1974, he had no idea his chance discovery would radically rewrite Australian history.

Once a team of scientists had excavated the bones, they were amazed: they had uncovered a near intact skeleton in the dunes, covered in red ochre and in astonishing condition.

It was the holy grail of anthropological prehistory – evidence of human occupation more ancient than they could imagine.

The bones were swiftly removed and transported to Canberra and a fraught debate ensued when the traditional owners heard what had happened.

Taking the bones away and taking them to the city is taking that person away from their spirit - Mary Pappin, a Mutthi Mutthi elder.

‘Mungo Man’ as he came to be called, was eventually dated at over 42,000 years old.

It’s nearly impossible... to get our heads around a date like 42,000 years. It is as good to the human imagination as eternity - writer Thomas Keneally.

Jim Bowler’s life and career have been dominated by the shadow of Mungo Man and his heartfelt obligation to see the remains returned to their traditional owners.

From his discovery and removal in the 1970s to his triumphant homecoming, the incredible story of Mungo Man is a must-watch for all Australians.

He is the founding Australian story – writer Thomas Keneally

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