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Western opal fields

The opal fields extend in a north-westerly direction from the New South Wales border at Hungerford stretching west of Cunnamulla, Quilpie, Longreach and Winton to Kynuna, a distance of about 1000km.

The best time to visit is April–September. Summer should be avoided due to the high temperatures and possible heavy rains that can make road access impossible in some areas. Always check road conditions before travelling and carry emergency supplies.

Old workings in the area pose a safety hazard. Be careful around old shafts, avoid the loose edges to open shafts and supervise children at all times. Never enter shafts—unstable ground, bad air, and snakes and spiders are some of the hazards that may be present.

A [fossicking licence](http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/licences-permits/) (<http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/licences-permits/>) is required in all areas. Fossicking is not permitted on any mining leases and claims in these areas without the permission of the holders.

If you have any questions about fossicking, contact the local mining registrar.

Contacts

Contact one of our [mining offices](http://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/our-department/contact-us/mines-lodgement-offices) (<http://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/our-department/contact-us/mines-lodgement-offices>) for any fossicking enquiry.

Fossicking rules and licences

A [fossicking licence](http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/licences-permits/) (<http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/licences-permits/>) is required in Queensland. Make sure you follow the [fossicking rules](#) (

<http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/rules/>) and observe the basic principles of safe fossicking. (<http://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/activities/fossicking/rules/safety/>)

Yowah fossicking area

The Yowah opal field, which includes the nearby area known as Black Gate, is the southernmost opal mining centre of western Queensland; it is popular with tourists and fossickers as it has easy access from main roads and has shops, fuel, telephone, a caravan park and permanent bore water supply. A small local population increases significantly during the winter season.

Access

Yowah is about 160km west of Cunnamulla. Travelling towards Thargomindah, turn off to the right about 18km west of Eulo onto the Yowah/Toompine road and travel 48km via Alroy homestead to the Yowah–Quilpie turn-off. Continue a further 23km to Yowah; this last 23 km is unsealed.

From Quilpie, drive 110km through Toompine to the Eulo/Yowah turn-off. Turn left and follow this mainly unsealed road for about 56km to the Yowah turn-off, and then continue the further 23km as above.

Map

- [Yowah fossicking area map \(PDF, 374KB\)](#)

Facilities

Camping is prohibited. There is accommodation available in the town of Yowah.

Fossicking notes

A feature of the Yowah field is the occurrence of precious opal in siliceous ironstone nodules generally referred to as Yowah Nuts. These nuts range from about 5mm to 200mm across, have a spherical or ellipsoidal shape, and show alternate concentric rings or bands of light- and dark-brown siliceous ironstone. There is sometimes a kernel of precious opal, which is the main source of the gem.

The nuts are found in layers (150–600mm in thickness) at depths up to 20m in a ferruginous sandstone, and are commonly associated with mudstone fragments or clay pellets.

The main layer is located near the contact between the sandstone and underlying

mudstone/claystone, but scattered nodules, and in some cases a second band, may occur above.

The lateral continuity of the nut bands is somewhat difficult to predict owing to the irregular bedding of the strata, as well as the lack of any detailed mapping. In some shafts, the nut band was not encountered, but the sandstone at its contact with the mudstone was found to be more ferruginous and cemented by partial opalisation into a hard band, which also contained opal in the form of seams and pipes.

The eastern part of the fossicking area has always been popular with tourists as a place to speck or noodle fragments of opal or ironstone matrix from the surface or shallow depth. In this area the main nut band appears to have been exposed at the surface, so that a layer of loose rubble of broken ironstone nut fragments covers the surface to a depth of about 600mm. Spotting chips of opal or fragments of matrix while digging through this material is relatively easy with a bit of practice.

Special conditions

Several mining claims and mining leases are currently within the fossicking area and are shown on the [Yowah fossicking map](#); these must not be entered without the permission of the holders.

Contacts

Contact one of our [mining offices](#) for any fossicking enquiry.

Fossicking rules and licences

A [fossicking licence](#) is required in Queensland. Make sure you follow the [fossicking rules](#) and observe the basic [principles of safe fossicking](#).

Toompine designated fossicking lands

The Toompine Field is located between Quilpie and Yowah. Mining for opal has been carried out extensively in these areas since the 1890s using underground and open-cut methods. At Duck Creek and Sheep Station Creek, mining activity is now limited to small-scale hand mining on mining claims. Some machine mining has previously been undertaken on mining

leases and a few leases remain current.

Access

The Duck Creek workings are located adjacent to Tirga Station and are situated on a low flat-lying drainage divide between Duck Creek draining to the north-east and tributaries of Yowah Creek draining to the south. The workings are about 62km by road from Toompine (see map for details).

Sheep Station Creek and Emu Creek workings are just to the south at the head of Sheep Station Creek, a tributary of Yowah Creek.

Map

- [Duck Creek and Sheep Station Creek designated fossicking lands map \(PDF, 343KB\)](#)

Facilities

Camping is allowed for a maximum period of 3 months. [Camping permits](#) can be obtained from our regional offices or fossicking licence agents.

There are no facilities and due to the remoteness of the area visitors should carry adequate supplies of food, water and fuel. Top-up bore water may be available from a tap provided by the landholder at the large steel gate 3.5km north of the entrance sign.

Fossicking notes

While much of the opal-bearing ground occurs at depths beyond fossickers, the spoil dumps of the old workings offer the best chance of a find. Specking fragments of opal or ironstone matrix from the ground's surface is always a possibility.

Special conditions

Commercial mining activities still occur in the area and a number of mining tenures are current. Do not enter these mining tenures without the written permission of the holders.

Contacts

Contact one of our [mining offices](#) for any fossicking enquiry.

Fossicking rules and licences

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Opalton designated fossicking land

The Opalton Field, also called the Fermoy Field, was one of the largest and most extensively worked opal deposits in Queensland. Mining activity on the field is mostly limited to small-scale hand mining but some larger operations using heavy machinery are present in the surrounding area.

Access

The Opalton Field is located about 124km south-west of Winton. From Winton, take the Jundah Road (mostly unsealed) and travel 15km, turn left and travel a further 109km (unsealed road) past Weona Homestead to Opalton.

Visitors are requested not to call at Weona.

Map

- [Opalton fossicking land map \(PDF, 344KB\)](#)

Facilities

The Opalton community has established a bush camping park with shade shelters, water, toilets and showers adjacent to the area. A small fee applies. There is a shop with limited supplies.

Camping is also allowed in the Opalton designated fossicking land for a maximum period of 3 months. [Camping permits](#) can be obtained for the payment of a small fee from the same outlets as for licences.

Fossicking notes

The Opalton area is popular with tourists as a place to speck or noodle fragments of opal or ironstone matrix from the surface or from the spoil dumps of old workings. However, known areas of shallow ground, such as the old Brilliant Claim area, may offer the more serious fossicker a chance to dig and find that outstanding gem.

Special conditions

Commercial mining activities still occur in the designated fossicking land and numerous mining claims and a mining lease (ML6032) are current (see map). Do not enter these mining tenures without the written permission of the holders. Pegs mark the corners of each tenure.

Contacts

Contact one of our [mining offices](#) for any fossicking enquiry.

Fossicking rules and licences

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