

## VISITORS GUIDE TO FOSSICKING IN AND AROUND THE MULLOCKS.

*Mullock Hills are the mounds of various sub-soils resulting from opal mining which proliferate across the landscape in and around Andamooka.*



So many visitors are keen to head out onto the fields to fossick the mullock heaps in the quest for opal, but many have little idea of where they can go safely and without encroaching on registered claims.



Claim marker post against a setting sun.  
photo: Matilda MB

It is important that fossickers don't trespass or more importantly take opal from registered claims. Miners invest time and money into their claims and the seemingly barren rocky heaps that are sitting on claims may be the result of a long, hard and expensive labour of love extracting the 'dirt' from the opal bearing level between 4m to 20m beneath the surface.

Therefore they do not take kindly to fossickers 'ratting' through the heaps before they have the chance to put it through a noodler or otherwise. Taking opal from a registered claim is theft which is a criminal offence.

However, most miners are friendly folk who are only too happy to show you around their claim or direct you to an area that is both safe and not a registered claim. When entering the fields be aware of deep shafts and the friable edges of open cuts and stay well clear of machinery.

Claims are identified by marker posts with indicators set at right angles, defining the boundaries. Claims can be as small as 50mx100m or as large as 100mx200m so you will need to sight the 4 corner marker posts to be sure that you are fossicking outside of the boundaries. You may pass through claims when using tracks to access other areas, but for safety reasons you must stay on the tracks and drive cautiously.

Once you have established that you are not on a registered claim, choose heaps that are not 'fines', but which have a rocky composition. These may be brownish or white in appearance as distinct from the red earth of the surface soil. Opals are not easy to spot, so look carefully past the dust. It is a good idea to have a small pot of water with you to drop suspect stones into and when held up into the sunlight, the presence of opal will soon show up.

There is a fossicking heap located at the camping ground where from time to time, lucky visitors find a piece of opal.

If you think you have made a find, take it to one of the local outlets. You will find advice at the Post Office and

Underground Opal Museum, which also hires out fossicking equipment, and also at the Bottle Shop. These outlets can assist or direct you to local cutters and finishers who do excellent work for very reasonable prices. Some are also jewellers who can assist you with setting your stone so that you can wear your personal 'find' with pride.



A local miner giving a visitor some tips on finding opal. Photo: G Rowley

**GOOD LUCK.... & ENJOY!**