

Hints on Fossicking around Inverell



Where to Fossick?

If you have just arrived in an area that is a known gemstone area, such as Inverell or Glen Innes, the first place to inquire is the Tourist Information Centre. Other places worth seeking information from would be local lapidary clubs, gem and mineral retailers who display and sell gems, jewellery shops or outdoor supply shops.

Planning your day

Once you have decided upon the area you wish to fossick in, there are a couple of important points to note.

Make sure you have suitable equipment for the type of fossicking you will be conducting and if you do not have your own, then you can purchase some from our local retailers.

Check that your food and drink supply is adequate for a full days outing, especially during the summer months and that you have adequate water for fossicking in dry areas. Remember to wear suitable clothes, sunscreen and a hat.

Generally, you will need a variety of sieves, a small hand pick, short handled shovel, a couple of plastic buckets and a small plastic lidded container to store the gems you find. A heavy duty pick and long handled shovel should be in your kit, just in case you need to remove overburden or previously washed material.



Spend a little time “specking” over the areas for signs of exposed wash, previously successful diggings, exposed gems due to recent rains and any indication of unworked ground. You will find this “specking” time is usually most rewarding. Once you have decided on an area to dig, then collect and setup your equipment. If the fossicking area you are in is sand heaps, you would mainly be looking for Quartz, so use an 8mm sieve. Use this single sieve by filling it with sand and if dry sieving, shake in a circular motion. By doing it this way you will help prevent the thin narrow crystals from falling through the sieve. Use a second smaller sieve if you wish, but any crystals that fall through the 8mm sieve are usually too small. If you have water on hand then it would be best to wet sieve. Fill the sieve with sand, submerge in the water and shake in a circular motion. Any gems will immediately show up once wet. As with all sieving, remove all clay from wash as the heavy gems such as sapphire, topaz, diamond and gold are often in this clay bed.

Sapphire fossicking - finding ground

If the fossicking area you are in is noted for its sapphire associated gems, then it is necessary to use a combination of smaller sieves and wet sieving is essential. It is best to work new ground in these areas because very little will be over-looked by people when using small sieves. Find a hole or working “face” where someone else has been removing the overburden (top soil). Remove loose soil around the base of the face to get the clean working floor and if the soil looks unworked, then look for a layer of wash or gravel seam. If there are signs of heavy materials, then you are onto an old river bed seam and this is what you are looking for if you are in search of Sapphires.

If a few test sieves show no sign of Sapphires or heavy minerals at that level, this does not mean that Sapphires are not present, you may need to open the hole out wider or dig deeper.



Inverell Visitor Information Centre
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Digging deeper takes you through layers of sediment and it is in some of these layers that the Sapphire has been deposited. So be prepared to work a little, for once you hit a productive layer of wash your efforts will be more than rewarded.

How to sieve

Place sieves one on top of the other and fill top (5mm) sieve with wash, submerge below water and shake in a circular motion with a slight up and down movement to partly suspend the wash in the water whilst turning. This assists with releasing the smaller and finer wash. When satisfied that washing is complete, remove the top sieve and rake through it with your fingers, looking for gems of a “glassy” appearance or stone of interesting colour. Hold the sieve above your head and into the sun; if you see anything shine, inspect it for it may be a gem you have missed.

Next inspect the lower sieve (3mm) and wash again to remove any clay matter. When washed, shake vigorously up and down with the left and then right hand coming out of the water with the wash in the centre of the sieve remaining submerged. Then turn sieve 90 degrees and repeat; this brings the heavy material to the centre. Repeat this process 6 times. On the last time, bring the line of wash into a round pile at the centre and “pat” the sieve up and down on the waters surface to level out the wash. Then take the sieve to a clean, flat area for inspection; flip the sieve over towards you landing it squarely upside-down. If centred correctly, the sapphires will be in the centre and on top. Inspect carefully!
Good Luck!

Please read these notes carefully prior to entering any fossicking area

The following notes are designed to protect the fossicking areas, and to ensure their continued operation.

1. Fossickers must NOT:
 - Use any explosives or power operated equipment.
 - Excavate to a depth of more than 1 metre.
 - Damage or remove any bush rocks.
2. Fossickers are asked to fill holes when leaving the site.
3. Excavation should not be undertaken below normal flow water level to avoid the creation of a head cut which may migrate up through stream.
4. The bed of the watercourse should be left reasonably smooth and free from holes and other obstructions or irregularities which could adversely affect the flow.
5. Fossicking operations including the removal and disposal of material, should be carried out in such a manner so as to minimise sediment and/or erosion of the watercourse or its flood path.
6. Fossicking should not impede or otherwise adversely affect the flow of water in the watercourse.
7. Fossicking should be conducted in such a way that there is no reduction in waterway or diversion of the stream from existing alignment.
8. Fossickers are asked to avoid causing turbidity in the water, as this will cause problems further down stream.
9. Fossicking should be conducted in such a manner to avoid or interference with native vegetation which acts to stabilise banks during large flows and reduce nutrient input. Fossickers should not destroy or injure any tree, sapling, shrub or scrub on any land which is situated within, or within 20 metres of, the bed or bank of the river.
10. Fossicking should have a minimal effect on native vegetation and habitat including fish habitat. Therefore, any logs or other aquatic habitat should not be disturbed.
11. Fossicking areas should be left clean and in a tidy condition and please remove all rubbish.



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**Open everyday except
Christmas Day & Good Friday**
Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm
Sat-Sun 9am - 2pm
(including public holidays)