



Agate Creek



The World's Best Source of Quality Agates...

**Written and produced by Mike Long - ardent
rockhound and lover of agate.**

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My trip to the legendary Agate Creek in far North Queensland during May of 2006 was a week long trip during which the weather was fine and cool and some rain had fallen over the area. Parts of the creek itself were still running, albeit it very slightly. Run of mine agate in the creek itself was available although not in the quantities one would pickup ten to twenty years ago. On the slopes and cut-away gullies more agate was found, some of which would ultimately prove very satisfying to cut and polish. I noticed that some runs in the creek were sand only and rubble areas were in the minority, particularly in the down stream sections. I have some theories on rock build up in the creek which I have based on facts gathered over many trips to the area:

- * Agate Creek has not had huge runs in the last 10 to 20 years and many a fossicker has scoured the creek gravels in pursuit of agate,
- * In many parts of the creek the banks are soily and sandy, and if a big wet occurred of which the creek has recently seen few of, only sand and soil is getting carried into the creek, not rock and rubble.
- * Agate is a finite resource - there is still plenty under the ground and in sediments laid down over millions of years, but ever increasing exploitation means less and less is invariably available to the small fossicker. Hand digging is nowadays the only real way to get quality agate, with the occasional prize find still found in the creek itself.
- * Many fossickers who currently travel to the field would concur with the above findings.

There were other visitors to the field during our stay there, some of them there for the digging and some like us happy to scour the creek and surrounding hills.

The two camps were occupied and both provide basic facilities. These camps are shown on the map attached to this web page below. A Government publication is also presented below with valuable information about Agate Creek.

About 30% statistically of all agate collected from Agate Creek is flawless enough for cutting. One's wishes are dashed when a perfect looking agate

Agate Creek south of Forsyth in north Queensland is world renowned for agates of superb colours and patterns. The Agate Creek Fossicking Area was established in 1995 by the Department of Mines and Energy, with the co-operation of landowners and the Etheridge Shire Council, to simplify tourist and recreational fossicking there.

Access

The fossicking area is about 70 km south of Forsyth by a gravel road, which is suitable for conventional vehicles, but may be impassable in the wet season (see map). From the township head southwest towards Gilberton and at 11 km turn right for a further 15 km to the North Head turnoff. Turn left and continue south to the Robertson River; note that the crossing is about 100 m wide in soft sand. The Cave Creek crossing also requires care. After passing the entrance sign to the Fossicking Area turn left after crossing Agate Creek.

History

Very little interest was shown in the deposits up until the early 1940s when limited attempts were made to use the agate in instrument bearings and chalcedony in valve seatings. Considerable interest from amateur collectors developed in the early 1960s and continued through to the late 1970s, when activity slowed somewhat. The Agate Creek Safari Camp was set up in 1980 but is now closed. Visitors continue to make good finds, although not as easily as in the early days. Sporadic small-scale commercial production has also continued over the years, but only two mining claims remained in 1995. No further claims will be granted as the area is now set aside for tourists.

Geology

The fossicking localities occur in the basin-shaped area of Agate Pocket, which is underlain by rocks of the Agate Creek Volcanic Group, a remnant of a volcanic sequence of early Permian age. This was deposited on a basement of granitic rocks of the Robin Hood Granodiorite. Three formations are recognised, the Big Surprise Tuff, Black Soil Andesite and Thunder Egg Rhyolite. Intrusive bodies of much the same age have penetrated the volcanics, including rhyolite and the Connie May Dolerite.

In later Jurassic times the volcanics were covered by sandstones and conglomerates of the Hampstead Sandstone; these have since been stripped off and now remain only as hill cappings on the south-western escarpment bordering the pocket and at the head of Spring and Agate Creeks.

Agate occurs as amygdaloids (filled gas bubbles) in the upper parts of basaltic andesite lava flows (Black Soil Andesite) and thunder eggs occur as spherulites in rhyolitic lava (Thunder Egg Rhyolite) which forms the north-eastern rim of the pocket.

Fossicking

Agate (silicon dioxide SiO₂) is a variety of chalcedony, which is cryptocrystalline quartz. Agates occur as nodules (solid agate), or as geodes (an outer casing of agate with a central cavity lined or filled with clear crystalline quartz, amethyst, smoky quartz or calcite), roughly ellipsoidal or rounded in shape in various sizes but averaging about 50mm. The agate is often multi-coloured and usually banded which can be in straight, curved or irregular patterns. The thunder eggs in the rhyolite may contain infillings of red brown jasper.

Black Soil Creek, Crystal Hill, Bald Hill, Simpsons, Blue Hills and Flanagans are the main areas of interest (see map). Agates can be separated from the decomposed lavas by hand digging. Because the agate is hard and resists weathering, searching down slope colluvial deposits may also be productive as agates are released and transported from the host lavas. The alluvium of black soil and gravel of present day drainages is also worth attention especially after the wet season. The creeks in the area are usually dry but water may be found in Black Rock Waterhole and Banyan Spring.

Requirements

Fossicking for gemstones requires a **Fossickers Licence**, which can be issued for varying periods upon payment of the relevant fee to the Mining Registrar, Georgetown or from the Prospectors Caravan Park, Forsyth. Fossickers Licences may also be obtained from the Cobbold Gorge Camping Village. **Licence holders do not need further permission from the**

landholder to enter the fossicking area to fossick. Hand tools only are permitted.

Two mining claims (MC 30027 and MC 30028) within the area are excluded from the declared fossicking area (see map); **these must not be entered without the permission of the holders.**

Miners Homestead Lease MH 1551 is also excluded from the fossicking area.

To fossick outside the declared fossicking area the licence holder is required to obtain the written permission of the landholder.

Camping

Camping is **not permitted** in the fossicking area but the landholder (Mr David Terry) allows camping nearby, adjacent to Agate Creek outside the fossicking area. Camping is also catered for at the Cobbold Gorge Camping Village about 30 km before the fossicking area. Visitors should contact Cobbold Gorge Camping Village on (07) 4062 5470.

Camping is not permitted elsewhere on Robin Hood station or adjoining properties.

Code of conduct

To protect the area for the future, please:

- Make safe any excavation on leaving.
- Remove all rubbish and dispose of properly.
- To avoid erosion, keep vehicles to established tracks.
- Do not interfere with the vegetation, stock or wildlife.
- Control pets so they do not annoy others, stock or wildlife.
- Avoid lighting fires in dry conditions and keep a 2m diameter cleared space around fireplaces.

For further information:

The Mining Registrar
Court House, Georgetown Qld 4871
Phone (07) 4062 1204
Fax (07) 4062 1260

Etheridge Shire Council
P O Box 12, Georgetown Qld 4871
Phone (07) 4062 1233
Fax (07) 4062 1285

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Small, but striking specimen with a lantern like interior. M Long collection.

A discussion of the main fossicking areas now follows with some pictures of agates from these areas. Agates from the creek can be linked to a particular area based on certain characteristics eg colour, banding, skin type etc but this is sometimes difficult to assess. The first area of discussion is :

Black Soil - this has been one of the most prolific areas in terms of quantity and quality of agate over the years. Some of the fine flawless agates which I have personally collected are shown below and generally display vibrant reds and purples with good swirling and density.



Flawless red and purple with good swirling - M Long collection. 70w*35h*35d



**Flawless pink and white with vivid banding & entry point. M Long collection.
52w*40h*30d**



**Flawless pink, white & blue-grey - cut pair with interesting banding. M
Long collection.**



Flanagans - a good area for collecting adjacent to safari camp and at the end of the road. Much digging has been done here over the years, and much quality agate has been the reward for good specking and digging.



A quality scenic agate from Flanagans area with a grotto like centre - M Long collection. 40w*30h*27d



An unusual specimen with good banding and colour. M Long collection. 50w*50h*65d



A creek specimen with floating centre and small red dots . Interesting to cut deeper. M Long collection. 35w*32h*50d



Flaw free specimen with sardonyx and swirls - prominent colouration. M Long collection.
52w*40h*27d

The **Flanagan's** area produces agates of great variety in both colour and size. Good digging can still be done in this area and much surface material is now gone unfortunately.

The following specimens come from various locations within Agate Creek and all show vivid colouring and banding. From M Long collection.



1 - Grey with floater



2 - Typical Black Soil - great colour & contrast



3 - Striking colours from unknown location.



4 - Flawless Black Soil stone with vivid colouration.



Vibrant stone with good banding - from creek gravels. M Long collection. 50w*32h*45d



This was picked up in the creek and will polish to a worthy specimen. Pronounced red and blue swirling. - From M Long collection.



Beautiful sardonyx and swirl in-fill. From earlier days at Flanagans when these types of stones were abundant, but now rare. From M Long collection.



This pretty stone was dug from ground around Flanagan's deposit in 1996. A flawless stone from M Long collection.

A trip to Agate Creek is on most rock hound's minds and is a must visit. I have travelled up there for the past 15 years and have picked up and dug much quality agate. No doubt much stone is still buried under the ground somewhere. There is no better feeling in picking up your own stone and take it home to cut and find unimaginable colours before your eyes - this is the true adventure. People will be a little disappointed these days at the apparent lack of agate on the field, but if you are prepared to dig, there are rewards to be made. A keen eye will still find good stone in the creek and surrounding hills, but much patience and time is required nowadays.

I would like to be part of an agate interest group, where we can discuss common themes, have a swap arrangement and share common ideas.

I hope that the foregoing has been of interest to those who specialize in agate and other collectable stone. I will be updating my website periodically and hope to do a site on the Collinsville area in the near future.

Final few specimens found throughout the creek - all from M Long collection.





Striking Black Soil specimen with ruin like interior. Unpolished and flawless.



All these from Black Soil area - M Long collection.



Thank you to the Queensland Government and the Etheridge Shire Council for allowing me to reproduce the attached map and creek guide.

For those wishing to contact me or provide comments on this web page please use following email:

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