



O'Briens Creek Gemfield near Mount Surprise is well known for gem quality topaz and attracts visitors from all over Australia and overseas.

The O'Briens Creek Fossicking Area was established over most of the gemfield in 1995 by the Department of Mines and Energy, with the co-operation of the land holder and the Etheridge Shire Council, to simplify tourist and recreational fossicking.

Access

Mount Surprise is a small township about 200km southwest of Cairns between Mount Garnet and Georgetown on the Gulf Developmental Road. From the township go northwest across the rail line on the Mount Surprise Station road and travel 37km to cross Elizabeth Creek. Follow the direction sign to the Fossicking Area along the road to the left for a further 1.5km, passing "Diggers Rest" on the left about 200m before the main entrance sign. Refer to the map for detail of tracks and signs within the Fossicking Area and note boundary limits.

The gravel road to O'Briens Creek may become impassable in wet weather and care is required on black soil sections. Flooding of creeks and gullies occurs during the wet season. Check local conditions before setting out.

Geology

The rocks in the vicinity of O'Briens Creek are mapped as the Elizabeth Creek Granite of Carboniferous age. The granite is a pink medium-grained, and slightly porphyritic granite containing minor mafic minerals. Topaz and tin were deposited in veins and altered zones derived from late-stage melts and fluids during the cooling of the granite.

These resistant minerals were liberated by erosion and later concentrated in creek alluvium and possibly hillwash. The area has been extensively worked for alluvial tin.

Fossicking

Topaz (aluminium fluorosilicate) and other gemstones are found in alluvial gravels ("wash") which are up to 2m deep, usually in present creeks and gullies. The "wash" consists of sand and gravel with some cobbles and boulders. Colluvial or "hill wash" deposits also have potential to be gem-bearing. Tailings from previous tin mining operations throughout the area offer further potential for gem finds. Other gem materials found in association with the topaz are mainly the quartz varieties rock crystal, citrine and smoky quartz, and the beryl variety, aquamarine. Fragments of cassiterite (tin oxide) are also found.

O'Briens Creek, Tourmaline Gully, Crystal Gully, Swampy Gully, Six Mile Creek, McDonald Creek and Lancewood Creek are the main areas of interest to fossickers (see map). Digging with hand tools and dry sieving are the usual methods used to search for gems. The creeks are dry and water is not usually available on the diggings.

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 BP Roadhouse / Caravan Park at Mount Surprise.

Fossickers Licences may also be obtained from other District Offices throughout the State. Licence holders do not need further permission from the land holder to enter the Fossicking

Area to fossick. **Hand tools only are permitted.**

Several mining claims and two mining leases within the area are excluded from the declared Fossicking Area (see map); **these must not be entered without the permission of the holders.** The corners of each tenure are marked by posts.

Several Residence Areas exist along Elizabeth Creek (see map); these are 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 land holder.

Camping

Camping is **not permitted** in the Fossicking Area. However, the land holder of Mount Surprise Station allows camping nearby, at a site adjacent to Elizabeth Creek with basic toilet and shower facilities, for the payment of a fee. Fossickers intending to camp should contact the land holder's agent at the camping area about 200m south southeast of the Elizabeth Creek crossing. Camping is also not permitted elsewhere on adjoining properties.

You can also stay locally at Mount Surprise Hotel (07) 4062 3118, Mount Surprise Caravan Park (07) 4062 3153 or Bedrock Village Caravan Park (07) 4062 3193.

Code of conduct

To protect the area for the future and to minimise conflict with other visitors, 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.
- Minimise noise from radios, vehicles etc.
- Avoid lighting fires in dry conditions and keep a 2m diameter cleared space around fireplaces.

For further information:
 The Mining Registrar
 Georgetown District Office
 Georgetown Qld 4871
 Telephone (07) 4062 1204
 Facsimile (07) 4062 1260

The Chief Executive Officer
 Etheridge Shire Council
 P O Box 12
 Georgetown Qld 4871
 Telephone (07) 4062 1233
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