

SWIPER'S GULLY TOPAZ LOCALITY

Gem quality topaz occurs on part of the Passchendaele State Forest, near the small township of Amiens, northwest of Stanthorpe. The occurrence of gemstones and tin ore were first reported in the early 1850s in the area later called Stanthorpe. Since the tin mining days, interest by mainly amateur fossickers has remained as a variety of gemstones are found throughout the district. Selected areas were set aside from commercial mining in late 1985 as Departmental Area 164D (now Restricted Area RA164). A small area within State Forest 263 known as Swiper's Gully was included to protect it from mining.

In late 1995 in accordance with the *Fossicking Act 1994*, a "general permission" was given to the Mining Registrar, Brisbane for fossicking at the topaz locality by holders of Fossickers Licences issued by the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (NRM&E). The "general permission" is subject to specific conditions and all fossickers must comply with these.

Access

The Swiper's Gully fossicking site is located on Passchendaele State Forest near the small settlement of Amiens about 13km northwest of Stanthorpe. From Amiens head west along the Goldfields Road for about 0.7km and turn left into Pine Forest Road (see direction sign to Swiper's Gully). Travel south for 1.4km, turn left, then almost immediately right and keep travelling south until the 'T' junction is reached (about

1.3km). Turn right and travel a further 0.6km. Swiper's Gully fossicking site is located on the right. Signs indicating "Fossicking Permitted" have been erected at the site.

Geology

The rocks in the Passchendaele State Forest area are mainly granitic and have been mapped as the Stanthorpe Granite of Early to Middle Triassic age and the Ruby Creek Granite of Middle Triassic age. These igneous intrusives are part of the New England Batholith. The granites are either coarse-grained or medium to coarse-grained rocks, and constituent minerals mainly comprise pink K-feldspar, white plagioclase, quartz and biotite. Cassiterite (tin oxide SnO_2) occurs throughout the granites in quartz-greisen veins and topaz is commonly found associated with the tin. Other gem varieties originated in similar veins or in pegmatite zones or veins. These resistant minerals were liberated by erosion and later concentrated in alluvial deposits in the creeks and gullies and possibly in hillwash deposits.

Fossicking

Topaz (aluminium fluorosilicate $\text{Al}_2(\text{F,OH})_2\text{SiO}_4$) and other gemstones and minerals are found in shallow alluvial gravels (wash) in Swiper's Gully. The "wash" consists mainly of silt, sand and gravel fractions. Adjacent colluvial deposits (hillwash) may also have some potential as being gem-bearing. Tailings from previous mining operations in the area (now rehabilitated) offer further potential for gem finds.

The topaz is commonly colourless but pale blue; yellow and green (rare) have been found. Generally the stones are waterworn but crystals with well-developed faces are not uncommon. Other gemstones found include mainly quartz varieties rock crystal (clear) and smoky quartz along with rare garnet and zircon. Fragments of cassiterite (tin oxide) are also found.

The main area of interest to fossickers is Swiper's Gully. The boundary of the area is temporarily marked out using bright colour paint on pegs, shield blazes and trees. The boundary will be permanently marked using survey pegs painted white at intervals of about 30m. As the original area was considered too small an adjoining area previously mined for tin has been included. Digging is permitted with hand tools only and dry sieving the soil and sub-soil (wash) to a maximum 50cm depth is the usual method used to search for gems. Water is not usually available in the area so supplies need to be brought in if wet sieving methods are to be employed.

Requirements

Fossicking for gemstones requires a Fossickers Licence, which can be issued for varying periods upon payment of the relevant fee to a Mining Registrar at NRM&E Regional and District Offices (Mines) or from agents at various locations throughout the State (see NRM&E web site for locations and contact details).

A permit to traverse State Forest 263 for fossicking purposes is needed also from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

An application for a Permit to Traverse a State Forest or Forest Reserve must first be obtained by contacting the QPWS at Toowoomba (see contact details below).

*Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
158 Hume Street
(PO Box 731)
Toowoomba Qld 4350*

*Telephone (07) 4639 8363
Facsimile (07) 4639 4524*

The completed application should be returned by either post or fax or delivered to QPWS Toowoomba. The permit can then be issued.

At this locality, licensees must comply with the conditions of the “general permission” for entry and fossicking at all times.

Conditions of “general permission”.

- a permit to traverse the State Forest must be obtained from QPWS, Toowoomba
- all fossickers visiting this site must hold a current Fossickers Licence and have a valid permit to traverse attached
- any motor vehicle (including any car, truck, motorcycle, bus etc) used to enter and be on the State Forest must have current vehicle registration
- any person driving a motor vehicle on State Forest must hold a current Drivers Licence applicable to the vehicle type and valid in Queensland

- the use of a motor vehicle on the State Forest is restricted to formed roads and tracks only
- fires are **not permitted** and should not be lit under any circumstances on the State Forest
- camping is **not permitted** on the State Forest
- any excavation must not exceed dimensions of 2m x 1m and a depth of 0.5m
- all excavations must be backfilled and contoured to the surrounding land surface
- all rubbish must be removed from the State Forest (take it out when you leave and dispose of properly)
- visitors must not interfere with any forest products on the State Forest
- fossickers must not fossick within 2m of any improvement (including fences) on the State Forest
- visitors should leave any gate on the State Forest as found
- visitor must not cause or allow any plants, seeds etc to be taken on the State Forest
- visitors must not cause or allow any animal (except a dog on a lead or leash) to enter or remain on the State Forest
- visitors must comply with any directions contained or given by a sign or notice erected on the State Forest
- visitors must comply with any direction given by an officer from NRM&E, QPWS or DPI Forestry.
- a permit to traverse a State Forest may be cancelled by notice in writing by an officer from QPWS
- visitors must report any accidents involving injury or damage to persons, livestock or property on the State Forest

- a permit to traverse a State Forest is not transferable

NRM&E has the right to terminate the permission for non-compliance with conditions and the licence holder must leave the land immediately.

Camping

Camping is not permitted on the State Forest.

Code of conduct

In addition to the conditions of the “general permission” a person fossicking under a Fossickers Licence must comply with the requirements of the Fossicking Act and Regulation to maintain safety, hygiene and a high standard of behaviour during their visit.

For further information:

*The Mining Registrar
Brisbane District Office
Podium 2, Ground Floor
Cnr Main and Vulture Streets
Woolloongabba Qld 4102*

*(PO Box 1475)
Coorparoo Qld 4151*

*Telephone (07) 3238 3733
Facsimile (07) 3405 5346
Website: www.nrm.qld.gov.au*

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Locality Map

