

## Forward

The Department for Energy and Mining (DEM) Opal Fields Program is responsible for tenement administration, regulation and physical inspection of all opal fields in South Australia, and for the development of the Opal Mining Industry through government initiatives, driving best practice and workplace safety.

The Department for Energy and Mining in consultation with the Mining and Quarrying Occupational Health and Safety Committee; have developed this “fossicking for opal information sheet” to provide the general public with a summary of the key hazards and risks associated with entering the opal fields and fossicking for opal.

## Fossicking Definition

Fossicking means the gathering of precious stones (opal) as a recreation, or without the intention to sell the stones or to utilise them for a commercial or industrial purpose.

**Note: Does not include gathering precious stones through disturbance of land by machinery or explosives.**

## Opal Fields are no place for children!



Dangers are everywhere, a child's safety will be placed at risk!

- Open mine shafts / exploration drill holes,
- Unstable ground, undercut shaft edges and deep trenches,
- Explosions,
- Mobile plant and operating machinery, and
- Snakes and insects.



**Falling into a mine shaft, deep trench or open cut pit, can / will sustain serious injuries or death!**

## Personal Protective Equipment and Supplies

It can reach temperatures of up to 50 degrees during summer months, and the following is recommended:

- Apply 50+ rating sunscreen to protect exposed skin from the sun's UV radiation,
- Wear a broadbrim hat, strong lightweight clothing, gloves and enclosed footwear, and
- Wear a P2 Dust mask / respirator when generating dust to prevent possible exposure to respirable crystalline silica.
- Carry enough cool drinking water and fuel for the trip.



**Note: Camping is illegal on South Australian opal fields!**

## Communications

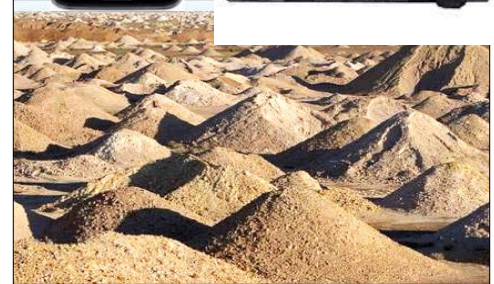
When fossicking alone:

- Tell someone where (location) you are going,
- Have communications (phone, two way radio etc...) to regularly check in, and
- Ensure your contact person knows what to do if you don't check in!



## Accessing Opal Fields - Know your Location!

- Use a GPS, compass, or take pictures of locations or ground markings to ensure you know the right way out of the areas,
- Recommend having a 3m flexible flag (orange) or an amber flashing light to make vehicle visible, and
- Drive slow, look for traffic and drive to conditions,

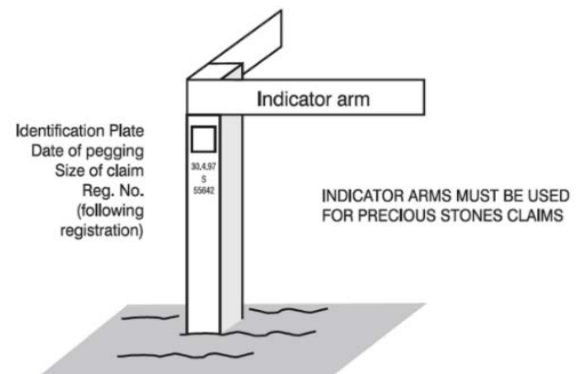


**Note: Mine shafts are everywhere, keep eyes open!**

## Identifying a Registered Claim

A registered claim can be identified by:

- A post on each corner of the claim with a permit number attached to the post.
- Each posts must be at least 70 mm thick and stand at least 0.750 mm above the surface of the ground.
- Posts must be knocked securely into the ground and have indicator arms on the outer sides of the post to show the direction and clearly identify the claim boundary.



It is an offence for fossickers to enter or remain on land comprised in a claim without obtaining the permission of the owner of the claim.

## Dangerous Ground

Dangerous ground is an area of ground (mine shafts, tunnels, open pits, faces etc...) that has been deemed unsafe to access, fossick or mine by the Department for Energy and Mining, because it has either collapsed, or has the potential to collapse.

Dangerous ground can be identified by a "Danger – Unsafe Ground, No Mining Permitted" sign, or by Red Post Markers knocked into the ground.



**Accessing or mining dangerous ground is prohibited without approval from SafeWork SA.**

## Identifying Unsafe Ground

Signs of potentially unsafe ground conditions are, but not limited to:

- Sunken ground, cracked / split ground,
- Open voids, and
- Weathered / eroded shaft edges



## Fossicking

Fossickers are warned against entering old open cut and underground workings as many dangers may exist!

- Fossicking can only take place to a maximum depth of 1 metre,
- All holes must be refilled,
- Unstable ground, stale air and lack of oxygen,
- Unprotected openings and water filled holes,
- Fossicking into sides of excavations may cause a cave in,
- Large stockpiles may collapse unexpectedly if undercut.



**Note: Seek assistance of experienced and competent miners to assist before entering old mines!**

## Caldwell Drill Holes and Exploration holes

Do not stand too close to an edge of a mine shaft! Rains can erode and undercut the ground around the top edge of a mine shaft, whilst still giving the appearance of solid ground.

When weight is placed on the ground around the edge of the shaft, the ground can give away and collapse!



## Hidden Dangers!

Mine shafts can be covered with sheets of corrugated iron or thin metal mesh, spinifex, mullock heap spoil and other materials which can hide the dangers.

Stepping on these areas, can result in the material / ground collapsing, and a person falling down a mine shaft.

It is recommended to:

- Use a thin long steel rod or piece of wood to test the ground in front of you when walking around the base of a heap.
- Listening for metal on metal type sounds when taping / pushing into the material, is a good way to identify these hazards.



Look where you place your feet, and never walk backwards!

## Mullock Heaps

Mullock heaps are mounds of material that have been dug from a mine shaft and underground, and are generally known as waste material, and can be very slippery to climb.

Mine shafts are located at the bases of a heaps. When climbing, a loss of footing could result in a person sliding to the bottom of the heap, into a mine shaft resulting in serious injury or death.

Always climb a heap on the opposite side to a mine shaft opening, and always take a bucket of material from a heap and search through it on stable, safe ground.



## First Aid and Emergencies

Be prepared for minor first aid injuries or emergency situations while fossicking in the opal fields.

Snakes are all too common in these areas, they can be found in shafts and holes, or curled up under a bush or a piece of tin.

The “inland taipan” and the “brown snake” are extremely poisonous and will attack if they feel threatened.

Ensure your first aid kit has a snake bite kit in it and familiarise with the requirements for first aid treatment of a snake bite.



It is recommended at a minimum, that the following is carried in a vehicle at all times whilst in the opal fields:

- A small first aid kit, and snake bite kit, and
- List of emergency contact numbers

## Emergency Contact Numbers

- Ambulance, Fire and Police : 000
- Coober Pedy Mine Rescue / SES - EMERGENCY ONLY : 132 500
- Andamooka SES : 0427 181 752
- Andamooka CFS : 0408 807 943



## Additional Information

For further information on opal mining & locations, go to [www.energymining.sa.gov.au/minerals/mining/opal\\_mining](http://www.energymining.sa.gov.au/minerals/mining/opal_mining) or contact:

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