

The Yowah opal field which includes the nearby area known as Black Gate is the southern-most opal mining centre of western Queensland; it is popular with tourists and fossickers as it has easy access from main roads and has shops, fuel, telephone, caravan park, and a permanent bore water supply. A small local population increases significantly during the winter season.

The Yowah Fossicking Area has been established by the Department of Mines and Energy with the co-operation of the Council of the Shire of Paroo and the landholder to provide for tourist and recreational fossicking.

Access

Yowah is about 160km west of Cunnamulla. Travelling towards Thargomindah, turn off to the right about 18km west of Eulo onto the Yowah / Toompine road and travel 48km via Alroy homestead to the Yowah-Quilpie turnoff. Continue a further 23km to Yowah; this last 23 km is unsealed.

From Quilpie, drive 110km through Toompine to the Eulo / Yowah turnoff. Turn left and follow this mainly unsealed road for about 56km to the Yowah turnoff, and then continue the further 23km as above.

Opal at Yowah

A feature of the Yowah field is the occurrence of precious opal in siliceous ironstone nodules generally referred to as "Yowah Nuts". These nuts range from about 5mm to 200mm across, have a spherical or ellipsoidal shape, and show alternate concentric rings or bands of light and dark brown siliceous ironstone. There is sometimes a kernel of precious opal which is the main source of the gem.

The nuts are found in layers (150 to 600mm in thickness) at depths up to 20m in a ferruginous sandstone, and are commonly associated with mudstone fragments or clay pellets. The main layer is located near the contact between the sandstone and underlying mudstone / claystone, but scattered nodules, and in some cases a second band, may occur above.

The lateral continuity of the nut bands is somewhat difficult to predict owing to the irregular bedding of the strata, as well as the lack of any detailed

mapping. In some shafts, the nut band was not encountered, but the sandstone at its contact with the mudstone was found to be more ferruginous and cemented by partial opalisation into a hard band, which also contained opal in the form of seams and pipes.

Fossicking for the opal

The eastern part of the Fossicking Area has always been popular with tourists as a place to "speck" or "noodle" fragments of opal or ironstone matrix from the surface or shallow depth. In this area the main nut band appears to have been exposed at the surface, so that a layer of loose rubble of broken ironstone nut fragments covers the surface to a depth of about 600mm. Spotting chips of opal or fragments of matrix while digging through this material is relatively easy with a bit of practice.

Fragments may also occur on the spoil heaps of shafts from the old mining activities.

Requirements

To fossick you need to be the holder of a Fossicker's Licence. Individual, family, club, educational institution and commercial tour operators' licences can be obtained for this area or the whole of the State for periods between one and twelve months, with fees varying accordingly.

Licences can be obtained from Departmental offices (including that at Quilpie), the Paroo Shire Council, Cunnamulla or selected local businesses.

Hand tools only are permitted.

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

Camping

Camping is prohibited in the Yowah Fossicking Area.

A camping / caravan park is situated in the town of Yowah.

Precautions

The best time to visit the opal fields is April - September.

Summer is best avoided due to the high temperatures and possible heavy rains making road access impossible in some areas. Road conditions should be checked with the RACQ or local police. Emergency supplies including food, water, first aid kit and vehicle spares should be carried when travelling in remote areas.

Code of Conduct

To protect the area for the future and minimise conflict with other visitors, please:

- Make safe any excavation on leaving.
- Please remove all rubbish and dispose of properly.
- To avoid erosion, keep vehicles to the established tracks.
- Do not interfere with the vegetation or wildlife. Shooting is prohibited.
- Control pets so they do not annoy others or the 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:

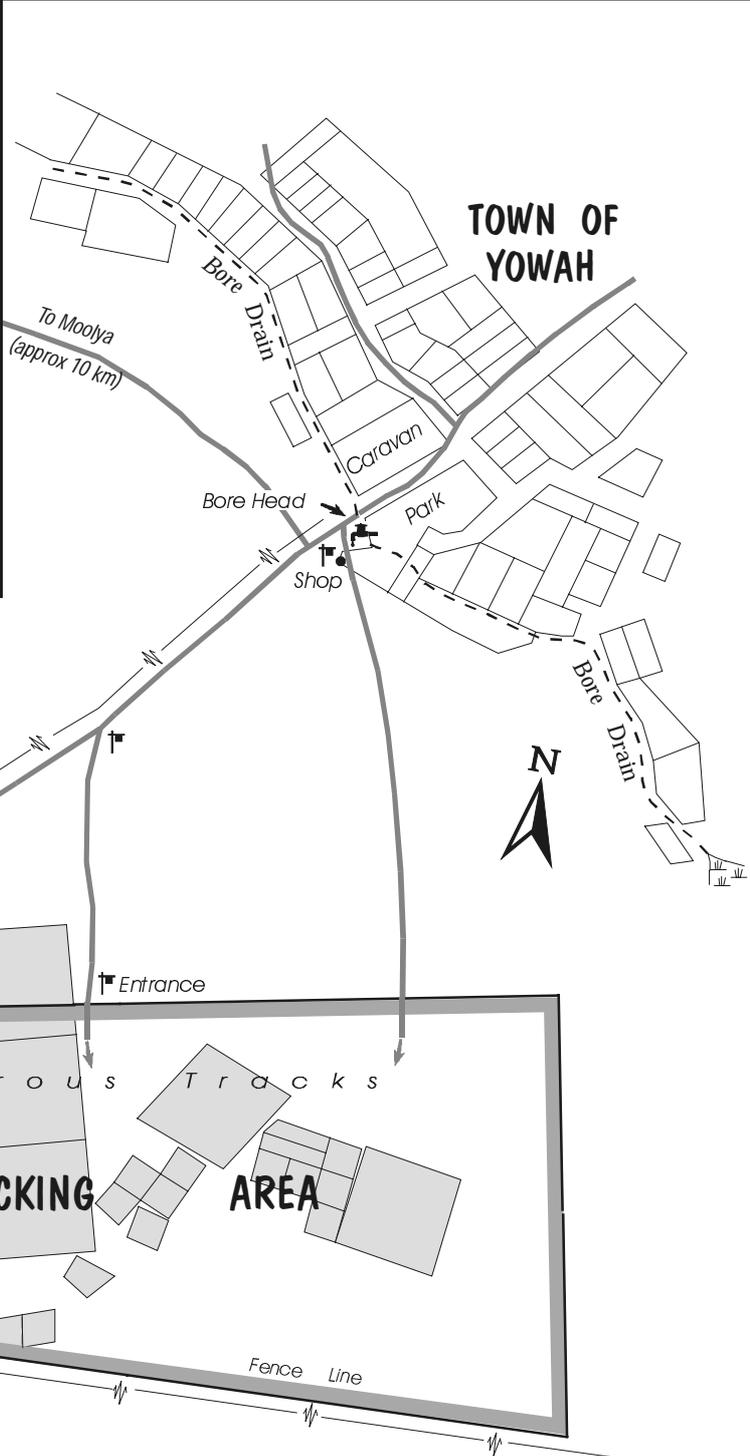
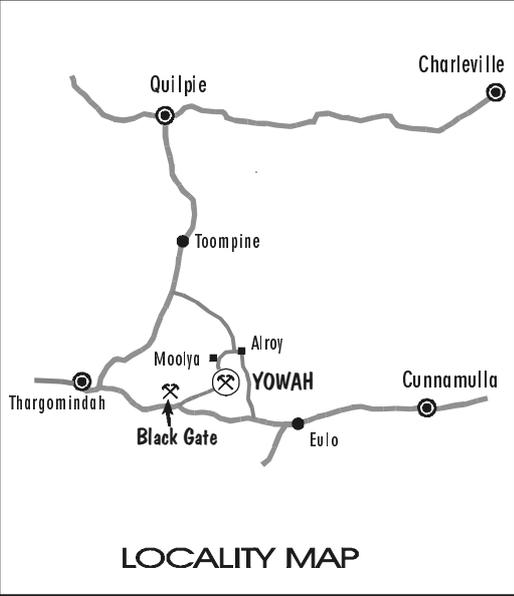
*The Mining Registrar
Quilpie Mining District
Court House
Buln Buln Street
PO Box 29
Quilpie Qld 4480*

*Telephone: (07) 4656 1266
Fax: (07) 4656 1442*

*The Chief Executive Officer
Paroo Shire Council
PO Box 75
Cunnamulla Qld 4490*

*Telephone: (07) 4655 1777
Fax: (07) 4655 1647
yowah1.doc Apr 2001*

YOWAH FOSSICKING AREA



LEGEND

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fossicking Area Boundary Existing Mining Leases/Claims as at 1.9.93 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track Direction Sign Power Line
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0 200m

SCALE