



CENTRAL QUEENSLAND GEMFIELDS

# BIG BESSIE FOSSICKING AREA

*Big Bessie* is one of five Fossicking Areas on the central Queensland sapphire fields which were set aside in 1985 for recreational and tourist fossicking. Such fossicking is also possible on another six areas of Designated Fossicking Land, but on those certain commercial mining tenures are also allowed. Another brochure describes the general background to the field.

*Big Bessie* comprises 33ha of semi-cleared bushland extending north from Retreat Creek and surrounding the southern end of a Rifle Range Reserve. Although it is small and has been extensively worked in the past, and it remains popular because of its proximity to Sapphire township and its shallow wash.

## Access and roads

Turn off the Capricorn Highway at Anakie, and take the sealed road for 10km to Sapphire. From there take the unsealed road to the west for 2km to the signposted entrance of *Big Bessie* on its eastern boundary. Minor tracks lead north to the 'Big Bessie' diggings and to the south to the 'Little Bessie' diggings. The main track continues to skirt the Rifle Range Reserve to the south, and then branches left to *Graves Hill* and right beside the Rifle range to *Reward Designated Fossicking Land* (4wd only). Whilst roads are unformed they are suitable for conventional vehicles except in wet weather. **Note that the Rifle Range Reserve and MHP leases to the north of the area must not be entered by fossickers.**

Water needs to be carried as there is no local supply.

## Requirements

Fossicking requires a Fossickers Licence under the Fossicking Act 1994. Individual, family, club, educational organisation and

commercial tour operator licences can be obtained for this area or for the whole of the State for periods between one and twelve months, with fees varying accordingly. They can be obtained from the Mining Registrar at Emerald, selected local businesses, or the Department's other offices throughout the State. Hand tools only are permitted.

## Camping

Camping is allowed for a maximum period of 3 months. A camping permit is required, which can be obtained for the payment of a small fee from the Emerald, Rockhampton, Mackay and Brisbane offices of the Department or the local businesses that issue the Fossickers Licences. No facilities exist in the area.

## Sapphire occurrence

Sapphire-bearing wash covers most of the area and is generally less than 500mm from the surface. In most places a shallow covering of top soil is easily removed and digging and sifting are relatively easy.

West of the Rifle Range shallow wash consisting of pebbles and boulders in a red-brown soil extends to a depth of 500mm. In places it is overlain by 300mm of chocolate soil. Several pits to 5m diameter have been dug, but sapphires are apparently sparse and not of good quality.

In the 'Little Bessie' section, shallow surface wash containing white quartz fragments and billy cobbles in a reddish to chocolate sandy soil overlies basement schist and limestone. In places it is very clayey and sticky when wet. The area has been extensively worked and some parts have been scraped to basement by machinery; the white quartz

fragments are probably scraped from veins in the underlying schists.

Very little virgin ground is left in this area, and it has little further potential except for sifting through the disturbed ground.

In the 'Big Bessie' section, surface wash to 300mm deep ranges from pebbles to boulders of billy and silicified pebbly sandstone, and lies on a basement of schist and limestone. Much of this area also has been worked, but there are patches of virgin ground which are likely to contain sapphires.

## Code of Conduct

- Use only safe working practices. Holes deeper than 2m or undermined overhangs **are not permitted**.
- Workings should be left in a safe, tidy condition so as not to endanger other persons or stock.
- Dismantle any structures upon vacating a campsite.
- Remove all rubbish** and bury human waste at least 20cm deep.
- Do not interfere with any vegetation, stock or wildlife. Shooting is prohibited.
- Minimise inconvenience to others by limiting noise and control pets at all times.
- Be careful with campfires, particularly in dry times. Clear a 2m space around them.

## For further information:

*The Mining Registrar  
Clerana Centre  
29-31 Clermont Street  
Emerald Qld 4720  
Telephone (07) 4982 4011  
Fax. (07) 4982 4230  
bigbess.doc 96*

