

Fossicking/DIY Trips



This month was supposed to find us on a club trip to Muttama, NSW. According to Peter, the Illawarra Lapidary Club has been going there since the mid-1970s. Apparently, the club was told about the site when a lapidary club from “down south” thought they had dug all the crystals out, little did they know that there were still plenty of crystals left for us to keep going back for many years to come! From Wollongong, it takes less than four hours to get there and the site is about 40 minutes from Cootamundra. This month we would have found beautiful, clear crystals after digging big,



Canola Fields

deep holes. But, as we know, we couldn't quite do that, so we'll have to relive the experience through past photos from our members. Once again, I would like to **thank everyone** who sent through their Muttama trip photos, there were so many I couldn't use them all, but they were all very, very much appreciated!

Muttama is one of those trips that don't take all day to get there! It's quite a nice drive, especially if it's at the time the Canola fields are covered in yellow! It was on my photography “bucket list” to get some Canola Field photos, so even better!

There are a few places to stay at for this trip. If you just want to fossick and not bring a caravan/camper/tent along with you, there's accommodation in the town of Cootamundra. If you have your own caravan/camper/tent, you can stay at the caravan park in Cootamundra and travel out each day or if it's ok with the landowner, you can *rough* camp (no water, toilets etc) on the private property and 4wd it to the fossicking location, which is on the other side of a big hill. If you do stay on site, you will need to bring “the kitchen sink”, there is no water, so you will need to bring enough for drinking, cooking and cleaning for the amount of time we are there. There are also no toilets, so make sure you are equipped for that too.

Usually when we go to Muttama, the land looks pretty yellow and brown, this makes going up and down the steep hills not too much of a hassle (depending on your vehicle), last year however, was a bit different. Paterson's Curse was out in its full, beautiful glory! The property owner had never seen anything quite like it. It was such a beautiful site to see, a hillside covered in a gorgeous, purple, noxious weed.

Unfortunately, the noxious weed had covered all of the paddocks, the problem this caused was a) if you have hayfever and you have forgotten your tablets, you are in for a weekend of not breathing properly, brain fog and sneezing, lots of sneezing. If you don't have hayfever, carry on, nothing wrong here, unless, b) you have to drive over the Paterson's Curse, it is very, very slippery. So slippery in fact, that during our “recon day”, one of our members had a minor slide backwards down the hill and had to be “winch started” up the hill, which he was able to successfully get up. We took a different way the next day when the rest of the group turned up. When it was time to leave, you could most certainly notice that you had ~~escaped~~ left *Paterson's Curse territory*, the sinuses cleared, the brain fog lifted and the hills were no longer alive with the sound of my sneezing!



Paterson's Curse - 2020

When you're fossicking at Muttama for the first time, you may think, like myself, that it's exciting to spec for tiny little crystals you can see flashing in the sunlight on the surface, and it is, until you realise that holes are being dug and that there are bigger and better crystals waiting for you! If they are what you are after, then you might be interested in the below photo of tools.



Tools you might want to bring with you when you are fossicking at Muttama include a chook scratcher, geology pick or similar, a shovel, a pinch bar, a brush and some newspaper. If you read the July newsletter, you'll notice they are the same tools you would use to collect Drusy at Tambar, except, if you really feeling like tooling up to make a big hole, I would also bring a

big crowbar and pick. Gaiters, knee pads and masks (for the dust) are highly recommended to bring also!

Not that I need to remind anyone, because everyone already does it, but please keep in mind, that after using these tools and making a big hole, you will also have to fill in your hole, no matter where you go fossicking. Not filling in your hole every time, gives fossickers a bad reputation, and we aren't invited back to good fossicking sites after that.

Below, we have a crystal plate that Dave and I found at the bottom of a hole. The left is how it came out of the ground and the one photo on the right is the same crystal half cleaned. First it was soaked and cleaned, now it needs an acid bath to *hopefully* remove the staining. You can also see in the photo on the right, that a rather significant looking crystal (top right) came off during the cleaning process. You never really know what a crystal will be like until you clean it. For some, that will be in about 20 years haha (I bet some of you are nodding 🤔).



Crystal plate just out of the ground



Crystal plate in the process of being cleaned.



Suzy and Don's freshly dug crystals



A very promising looking rock with crystals from Suzy and Don, one can only imagine what will be revealed when the dirt is washed off!

Up on the hill we found a spot to dig and then spent most of the day, except for lunch, heads down in a hole. However, one day after lunch Keith got a surprise when he found a snake in his hole. – Peter/Keith



Fossicking on the hill around 2010 -- much digging



An amazing 10cm crystal from Muttama



Beautiful, clean crystals from Carol n Bob



Muttama crystal cluster 22cm long – WOW Peter!

Even though you are using some ground breaking tools to dig a hole like the one below, you need to be very careful when you get down to the “nitty gritty” of things, if you are too rough and not paying close attention, you might damage some of the crystals that begin to poke out of your hole. Below we have some crystals just starting to show, this is where some delicate fossicking is required. These photos were taken 20 years apart.



Crystals in situ - 2000



Crystals in situ - 2020



I hope there are crystals at the bottom of that hole!

The first time I went to Muttama I specc'd a nice crystal on top of the hill, it was full of lovely fractures which gave a rainbow spectrum of colours when the light hits it at the right angle. Ever since I have been searching for the source of the rainbow crystals, but I have been back three times now and still haven't found it. Last trip I dug a hole slightly downhill from where I found the first crystal and found several more rainbow crystals but they were all floaters. The nicest crystal point I had made into a silver necklace. It is about 5cm long and very sparkly bling, the picture doesn't do it justice.
- Dron

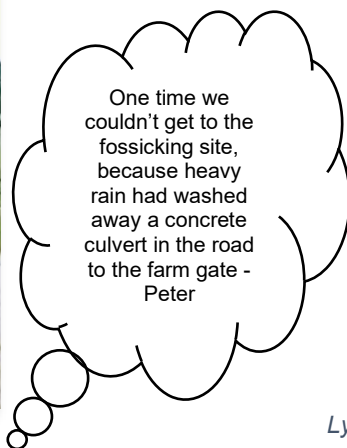
On the way to Muttama, members Neil and Lotte were involved in an accident with an overtaking car driven by a pregnant lady. The ambulance was called and Keith, who had been following with Len, ended up as the ambulance driver because the lone paramedic had to attend to the lady in the back of the vehicle
-Peter/Keith



A beautiful crystal that Dron found, that has been turned into a beautiful pendant.



*The water kept rising, the camp kept moving!
Flood Waters of Muttama - 1990*



Lynne doing her weight lifting exercises - 1993



Looks like a winner! - 1990



Lynne in a tiny pothole – but look at the amount of crystal sitting around it that has come out of the pothole! - 1993



Leni digging a very big hole - 1995



Keith and Terry - Happy campers - 1993



Peter in a hole, again! - 1993



Camping - 1995



Vic, Keith, John L and Noel, looking a bit dusty - 1997



Bob and his Mo, digging for crystals - 1997



Carol, Barbara and Ann - 1998



Noel, crystal hunting - Muttama 2012



Ann, crystal hunting - Muttama 2012

On one occasion, Keith and Peter had to help the farmer catch some sheep before they could go up the hill to the fossicking site.
-Peter



Rose and Greg working hard - 2013



Don by his hole - 2018



Suzy ready to start digging - 2018



A joint effort by Betty and Tony - 2018



Dron busy digging - 2019



Dave just getting started on his hole - 2019



Rom disappearing down the hole - 2019



*John's hole was big enough to hang his leg over the edge!
- 2020*

...another time the weather was so bad we stayed in Cootamundra, and the tree behind our cabin was blown over
-Peter/Keith



Greg getting down and dirty! - 2020



Rose on her way to find some birthday crystals - 2020



Barry and Carol - mother and son duo digging for crystals - 2020



Rom and Dave, waiting for crystals to grow - 2020



Ken armed with a big pick, no crystal is safe! - 2020



President Chris, surrounded by tools, ready to find a haul of Crystals - 2020

It's always fun fossicking at Muttama! We are very lucky and thankful that the property owner allows us to fossick there every year, let's hope for many more years and crystals to come!

(Just an FYI, there is actually a Paterson's Curse honey, Dave bought some much to my horror, he says it tastes like toffee, I say...I'll take his word for it 🤔😬)