



## **NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.**

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*"Fights for fairer access to land in NSW and represents the interests of prospectors and fossickers"*

### **Submission to Hill End Historic Site draft plan.**

The NSW and ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc (NAPFA) was formed to improve recreational fossicking access to public land on behalf of all prospectors and fossickers in NSW.

NAPFA is actively involved in educating the public to the importance that prospectors have played in the past to building our great nation and lifestyle by the discovery of mineral resources.

Hill End is of particular importance due to the history and living heritage value of 160 years of continuous and ongoing gold extraction by prospectors, miners and fossickers.

#### **Brief**

Our submission focuses on the many positives that recreational fossicking can bring to the Hill End historic area while still meeting the desired outcomes of NPWS.

Recent changes to the NPWS state policy allow recreational fossicking activities to be included in management plans.

Now is a perfect opportunity for NPWS to harness the enormous potential to attract both recreational fossickers and the public that are interested in geo tourism.

Both fossickers, and visitors traditionally are interested in following in the footsteps of the pioneering prospectors and at a recreational level to participate and enjoy the romance of the history of gold discovery.

Hill End has a unique position in the number of unique attributes that could make it a preferred destination for tourists and recreational fossickers.

## Response to the draft plan

NAPFA are disappointed that despite previous representations and submissions since 2012, the contribution by fossickers has not been recognised, and little has been done to accommodate recreational fossicking.

Frequent visits by NAPFA and fossicking clubs (up to 80 people per time) and numerous recreational fossickers that all up account for over 1000 visitors annually (potentially 10% of the total) is not mentioned in the plan. Fossicking or fossickers is not even included in the definitions in the glossary, yet other day tourist groups are now targeted as preferential.

This is despite the payment of camping and tour fees, participation by recreational fossickers and fossicking groups in the many other activities in the areas managed by NPWS, and interaction with the parks staff that make it obvious the contribution by fossickers.

The visitors that the plan provides for are mainly the short stay visitors who come, look around, and go away again.

However, the much greater numbers are the long stay visitors who visit for recreational fossicking, return to participate in fossicking and contribute to other activities over and over again. The plan virtually excludes fossickers, being a major source of visitation and income to the area.

Apart from the upgrading of the Glendora campground many years ago (benefitting many types of visitors) there has been no other commitment to fossicking by NPWS management.

The plan does not correctly assess the economic benefits of recreational fossickers to Hill End.

References in the plan to fossicking are negative.

Recreational fossicking is lawful and permitted on the Common, however the plan implies these activities *"has resulted in significant ground disturbance in places and the illegal collection of relics"*.

NAPFA dispute these comments and note that almost all ground disturbance, and most definitely all permanent or long-term disturbance has been made by historical prospectors and mining activity, not modern-day recreational fossickers.

NAPFA sees these comments and other negative references to the Common (which is not in NPWS authority) as being outside the focus of the plan, not in the public interest, having no benefit to the management of the Hill End historic area, and a justification for a view against recreational fossicking at Hill End in general.

Resistance to the Plan does exist within the fossicking community and other groups, as the presence of NPWS is so dominant at Hill End there is a risk to all other land users and activities that restrictive attitudes and policies may have a tendency to extend into areas where there is no authority, but it becomes assumed through some kind of broad "management of the area" interest.

A good example is the statement *"Fragmented ownership presents some challenges for effective management"* about the Common at Tambaroora. This is seen by some as

justification for NPWS to ultimately take control of this land, and an unwillingness to accept any concurrent land use or other activities.

The Common at Tambaroora is the only area to use pans and sluices with easy access for the young and disabled and is a major drawcard that benefits Hill End. It is the only easily accessible area for Tourist's to "Pan like the Old Timers did". Most visitors would be unable or unwilling to trek down the Bridle Track, a significant undertaking, to pan or sluice for gold.

Previous draft plans had positive suggestions for the inclusion of recreational fossicking activities, including to designate suitable areas for fossicking that do not conflict with areas of cultural and/or archaeological heritage significance.

If NPWS loses faith with the needs of modern-day recreational fossickers it will betray the very basis of the historical economic and social fabric that created and sustained Hill End in the past. Support for fossicking helps to keep alive those golden roots of the Hill End past.

Our position is that we support moves to make Hill End a more viable community for the long term and we see ourselves and fossicking as part of the solution – not the problem.

From a tourism point, the Hill End area potential is largely untapped.

NPWS will seriously reduce visitation and its campsite earnings at Hill End if the negative view of fossicking continues.

## **Recommendations**

NAPFA recommend NPWS to investigate and harness the Geotourism potential for Hill End.

By including fossicking activities at Hill End and promoting and working with other land managers such as the Common Trust to promote and maintain fossicking, the benefits to Hill End could be second to none in NSW.

Unlike cultural tourists who might drop into Hill End on their way somewhere else (and never come back again) fossickers go to Hill End all year around, and especially in the cooler winter months when it is too cold for others. As Geo-Tourists, fossickers are also repeat visitors who will go back year after year and come from interstate with Hill End as a destination.

Hill End has a living heritage value of 160 years of continuous and ongoing gold extraction by prospectors, miners and fossickers at Hill End. The activity is not 'frozen in time' but continues to evolve along with the mining landscape and Hill End community.

The significant contribution of fossickers to the ongoing economic sustainability of the Hill End community and the exceptionally low level of environmental impact of modern fossicking techniques (metal detecting, panning and sluicing) must be recognised.

NAPFA encourage NPWS to consider metal detecting as an allowable activity in the vast disturbed historical mining areas. The great popularity of detecting as a recreation and activity for people to explore and visit the bush, is greatly underestimated as a powerful visitor attraction.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the NPWS and the local community stands to financially benefit by actually promoting and catering for recreational fossickers in probably the largest historical gold mining areas in NSW, and potentially one of the most accessible and interesting ones in Australia. It would be a pity to close off this access to the Australians who would most be able to appreciate it, and who presently contribute to the local businesses, and to the NPWS.

NAPFA recommend NPWS to revisit the recommendations of the 2014 GSPC 3 Inquiry into Tourism in Local Communities and its recommendations for the promotion of Geotourism including fossicking by NPWS.

NAPFA recommend NPWS to view recent Victorian initiatives published in “GOLD PROSPECTING IN THE VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS” that showcase the history of the goldfields, observation-based tourism as well as hands on fossicking, that has been commended and widely supported. It can be found at: <https://www.goldfieldsguide.com.au/blog/22/gold-prospecting-in-the-victorian-goldfields>

Hill End has the unique opportunity that the Holtermann Nugget – the world’s largest single piece of gold - was found at Hill End in 1872! There is several initiatives, including a replica that could be a major drawcard.

NAPFA have attached a link to the Minelab electronics survey of economic and social contribution study of recreational prospecting in Australia. This survey was commissioned by Minelab Electronics and was conducted by BDO is the most comprehensive to date.

NAPFA recommend NPWS view the survey at: [Minelab Survey](#)

NAPFA offer to support the fossicking and Geotourism initiatives at Hill End and are available for contact at any time.

Regards,

*S Ashcroft*

**Sean Ashcroft**



**NAPFA President**