

# White Cliffs Opal Fields, NSW

95 km north of Wilcannia, sealed road.

**"The First and Friendliest"**



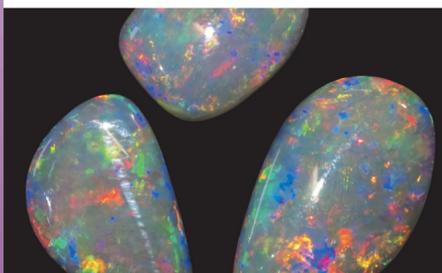
Home  
of the  
world famous  
**OPALISED PINEAPPLE**  
[www.whitecliffsnsw.com.au](http://www.whitecliffsnsw.com.au)

## INTRODUCTION

At first glance White Cliffs is a small outback town, but look a little closer and discover the diversity it has to offer. An amazing little town hidden in the desert just waiting for you to explore the gems within. The first and the most accessible opal mining town right at your backdoor. First there is opal. You can watch and experience the gritty reality of mining or fossick for your own opal. Observe the found treasures being polished into beautiful stones, design your own settings, or shop for gorgeous opal jewellery. White Cliffs is the only place in the world opal pineapples are found along with opalised wood, shells and fossils. Also fascinating to uncover are the underground homes – eerie, beautiful, intriguing, winding into the hillsides with sculptural grace and each bearing the distinctive stamp of its creator.

This is the true outback, both harsh and glorious. Here kangaroos and emus really do wander the streets, eagles soar above, wildlife captivates and wildflowers burst out seasonally. Sunrises are a glorious unfolding, sunsets are extravaganzas, and the night skies are dramatically revealed with no city lights to dim their majesty.

**Stop for a bit and say g'day,  
Explore the sites, enjoy your stay.**



## HISTORY

White Cliffs was the first commercial opal field in Australia. In the 1880's, a group of stockmen stumbled across a scattering of beautiful rocks which turned out to be precious opal. The first mining lease was lodged in 1890, and as word got around the town's population blew out rapidly. The first official census, taken in 1901, revealed a population of 1500. Not everyone wanted to stand up and be counted however, and rumor has it that the true figure was as high as 3000 or even 5000 people. Whatever the true number, it was more than the land could support. Drought and water shortage took their toll and the population declined when World War One began in 1914 and many of the miners left to enlist. Soon there were barely 30 people left in town. It was not until after the Second World War that people were drawn back to the town and the search for the elusive opal. White Cliffs has survived its turbulent past and is now home to a small group of miners who continue to uncover precious opal, including the amazing Opal Pineapples for which White Cliffs is famous. Others live here just because it is a beautiful place to be, and the town's population now stands around 100 to 200 people.



## ATTRACTIONS

There is plenty to see and do in White Cliffs, the longer you stay the more you will discover.

- visit our Opal Showrooms
- fossick for opal on your own or contact Fossickers Den for self-guided tour details
- go along on the famous Underground Mine Tour with Red Earth Opal
- drive the self-guided heritage trail around town and learn about our rugged past
- visit the Underground Motel History and Culture Centre
- take a Picnic and drive out to Peery Lake in the Paroo Darling National Park
- go Underground on a dugout tour with White House Tours
- Linda George Jewellery offers an opal talk and dugout tour
- tee off on our outback golf course
- visit the historic Solar Power Station
- BIRDWATCHING. The Orange Chat visits here in summer, see our website for more information on bird watching
- visit the Aboriginal rock art at Mutawintji
- take a look around Toms Hut
- ride along with White Cliffs Bus Tours to see all the sights



## OPAL PINEAPPLES

Unique to White Cliffs are opalised pineapples. These crystal formations have been developed over many years and many different stages of calcification and are known as pseudomorphs. They are most commonly found around 40 feet underground and there are many theories as to the exact science of how the pineapple has formed. White Cliffs is the only place in the world these opal pineapples can be found. Take time to look through the opal showrooms and learn more about these fascinating opal crystals.....One of mother nature's great wonders.

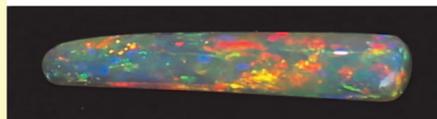


## PASTORALISTS

White Cliffs is surrounded by sheep and cattle stations which have been run by the same families for generations. Battling the harsh outback conditions, most stations are around 100,000 acres in size and run around 5,000 sheep and cattle.

## OPAL FOSSILS

Whilst visiting White Cliffs ponder for a moment and realize that millions of years ago, the ground you are standing on was under the sea. Swimming around here in the Cretaceous period were Plesiosaurs and Ichthyosaurs. The Plesiosaurs were 3 to 12 meters long with long necks and small heads. The Ichthyosaurs were similar in size, but more fish like. An opalised Plesiosaur was mined in the 70's and will soon be on display in White Cliffs.



Other Fossils that have been found here, some opalised, include Crinoids, also called sea lilies, belemnites which are like modern squid, various brachiopods, bivalve shells and gastropods. Along with these unique fossils opalised wood, various plants and cycads are also found. The Artesian Basin has left many unique, strange and beautiful specimens behind for miners to discover.



## PEERY LAKE

Peery Lake is a fresh water ephemeral lake and has been declared an important Ramsar site. Just over an hour's drive from White Cliffs, the lake is laced with aboriginal history and the famous mound springs, Peery Lake picnic area is a peaceful spot to unwind in the outback. When the lake is full take a canoe out and watch the waterbirds flourish, including pink cockatoos, mulga parrots and red-backed kingfishers.



## FOSSICKING

White Cliffs is the only opal field in Australia where you are free to roam and fossick anywhere on the field, avoiding registered claims. Back in the day, opal with red was the only valuable opal and to this day you can still find precious blue green cuttable opals. Should you find a beautiful piece you can get it cut and polished locally in town.



## OPAL MINING TODAY

There are half a dozen full time miners in White Cliffs. Most of these miners are also business owners and limited on their mining hours. This number increases significantly, as hobby miners arrive for the winter months. The majority of mining is conducted on the original and now historical opal field known as the Lunar Landscape. Although the 10 and 20 ft. "levels" have been dug out, there is still opal to be found and mined at the deeper levels of 30



A "Windlass" was one of the first methods of dirt removal from mines. The hand cranked bucket was slow but effective given the resources available at the time.



A "Self-Tipper" is commonly used today as a mechanical method of removing dirt. Manual labour is still required to fill the bucket, but more efficient than the windlass.



A "Blower" is constructed from an old truck which produces a vacuum strong enough to suck large rocks. The quickest and most effective way of dirt removal.



Excavators are primarily used for open cut mining. An expensive but effective way to process the ground.

## UNDERGROUND LIVING

White Cliffs is one of the few places in Australia where most of the town is underground. Based upon what you see arriving into town, you wouldn't think there was a great deal here... that's because the majority of homes and some businesses are buried into the hills. Dugouts range in temperature between 16 – 26 degrees all year round which allows residents to be comfortable when its 0 – 50 degrees outside. The ground in White Cliffs is extremely stable as dugouts are sealed with paint and concrete. Although dugouts began from mining, no mining is now permitted on the hills containing dugouts. You can, however, dig as many rooms as you like up to your boundary.



## FOOD FACILITIES

- WHITE CLIFFS OUTBACK STORE has all your grocery needs, eat in or take away meals. Dinner with the locals Friday nights
- WHITE CLIFFS HOTEL MOTEL offers evening meals and Sunday lunches
- WHITE CLIFFS SPORTING CLUB opens for a roast dinner Sundays, most of the year
- RED EARTH OPAL CAFÉ offers morning and afternoon tea with freshly baked cakes and freshly ground coffee



## FUEL & GAS BOTTLES

- WHITE CLIFFS OUTBACK STORE has fuel facilities along with swap and go gas bottles.
- WHITE CLIFFS HOTEL MOTEL Diesel fuel and Avgas available.

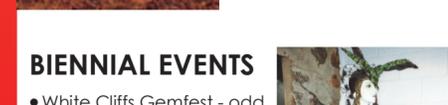
## ACCOMMODATION

- White Cliffs Opal Pioneer Tourist Park.
- White Cliffs Underground Motel, Restaurant and Bar.
- White Cliffs Hotel Motel.



## ANNUAL EVENTS

- Easter Saturday YABBY RACES at the White Cliffs Hotel Motel.
  - Anzac Day Parade and Ceremony - April 25th.
  - Gymkhana and Rodeo - April.
  - Music Festival - May.
- For updates and information please visit our website:



## BIENNIAL EVENTS

- White Cliffs Gemfest - odd years.
  - White Cliffs Underground Art Festival - even years.
- For updates and information please visit our website:  
[www.whitecliffsnsw.com.au](http://www.whitecliffsnsw.com.au)



## SAFETY MESSAGE

Provided by the White Cliffs Miners Association

Tourists, Visitors & Fossickers:

The White Cliffs Miners acknowledge the right to fossick anywhere on the Reserve under the auspices of the mining act of 1992 and no licence is required. However, permission is required from the holder of a claim to fossick on any registered claim.

A registered claim is usually square in shape and 50 x 50 meters in size with a wooden or steel post at each corner. On the NE post is a datum board, which contains the details of the claim holder. There is a vast amount of unregistered ground on the Historic Mining Reserve; but please remember SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT and is the responsibility of the visitor. Children are especially vulnerable and need to be carefully supervised at all times as there are many hidden hazards. Good Luck and enjoy your stay!

### Emergency Phone Numbers:

EMERGENCY	000
HOSPITAL	08 8091 6605
POLICE (Wilcannia)	08 8083 8099
ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR	08 8088 1188
Local Road Condition Info.	08 8091 5155



