



## Opalton

*During the 1890s there was a huge demand for opals, and Australia has the finest opals in the world. Opal is typically found in ironstone and spinifex-covered ridges in places like Opalton, where miners search in dim shafts up to 10 metres underground for the beautiful gem. In a land of countless mirages, perhaps the most tantalizing of all is the imagined fortune waiting to be unearthed. The search for the opal has sent men mad or made them rich. Others, it has chained poverty, yielding only enough for a meagre bush existence, with a promise of riches that has remained out of reach.*

*Once bustling with up to 600 miners, Opalton is now home to a few stout miners, mullock heaps and empty bottles; a dim echo of the late 1890s. The deposit often called the Femoy Field is one of the largest and most extensively worked fields in Queensland. Opal was first discovered in 1888 by a stockman from Warnambool Downs. No significant opal mining took place until 1893, when some specimens were brought to Fermoy Station and a man named McLennan commenced operations at what was known as "Brilliant Claim". About £800 worth of opal was mined, a small fortune in those days. Other finds were made including "Conway's Claim", discovered in 1895, and a small rush took place. By 1896 there was between 500 and 600 miners at Opalton. Supported by a good season, an abundance of horse-feed and available water, the town flourished. Water however became a major problem and had to be carted 24km, and this combined with a fall in the price of opals, led to the field being abandoned.*

*With the upgrade of roads to the area, miners returned to Opalton in 1961. It continues to produce gem quality opals in boulder, pipe and matrix formations. Many visitors camp at the old Opalton dig during winter and enjoy the isolation, peace and quiet, the wildlife and the frontier atmosphere of the community.*

- **0.0km**
- **Visitor Information Centre**

Set your trip odometer to zero at the town grid on the Winton-Jundah Road. Enjoy your journey.

- **14.5km / 316.7km**
- 22.4648 South 142.9466 East
- **Opalton Turn Off**

Turn left for Opalton.

- **21.3km / 309.9km**
- 22.5247 South 142.9436 East
- **Mulga and Lancewood scrub**

Mulga and Lancewood can form almost impenetrable thickets. They severely hampered early explorers and still limit grazing in outback Australia, extending throughout inland Queensland and the Northern Territory. Keep an eye out for more of this type of scrub on your journey.

- **22.7km / 308.5km**
- 22.5372 South 142.9454 East
- **Old Market Gardens**

Vale Farm on Surprise Creek features ironstone flats with spinifex and originally included 10 blocks of 150 to 200 acres set aside for small crops or orchards. The creek has a small weir.

- **39km / 292.2km**
- 22.6707 South 142.9333 East
- **Mineritchie scrub**

"Where the Mineritchie grows – the opal flows." While this might sound like an old miner's tale, there is a degree of truth in it. Opal typically forms in ironstone hills, and plants such as the Mineritchie are a good indicator of geology, as they are adapted to the typical soils that develop from underlying rock.



- **39.5km / 291.7km**
- 22.6750 South 142.9364 East
- **Logan Falls turn off (2km round trip)**

Logan Falls is a rocky gorge about 20 metres deep. There is a rough track to a waterhole at the bottom of the falls which is well used by kangaroos in the dry. You will also find kangaroo caves, Lancewood, Ghost Gums and spinifex.

- **44km / 287.2km**
- 22.7101 South 142.9321 East
- **Black Soil Plain**

The extensive Wirribi plain is covered with Mitchell and Feathertop grasses.

- **51.5km / 279.7km**
- 22.7641 South 142.8883 East
- **Dingo Fence and Turkey Nest**

The Dingo Fence was once the longest continuous structure on earth. Built to protect sheep properties from dingoes, it stretched 5,500 kilometres from the Great Australian Bight in South Australia across to the Queensland coast. Also visible is the turkey's nest water reservoir, so called because they sit up in the landscape, where they can gravity feed stock troughs.

- **60.5km / 270.7km**
- 22.8338 South 142.8446 East
- **Stock Laneway**

The road crosses a stock laneway between two grids. The laneway is used to move stock with a minimum workforce and to reduce stress on stock caused by mustering.

- **81km / 250.2km**
- 23.0116 South 142.8163 East
- **Parthenium Weed**

This area has some Parthenium Weed, a native grass of North and South America which has the potential to choke out native grasses. It is a declared noxious weed. Please stay on the road.

- **106.5km / 224.7km**
- 23.2068 South 142.8608 East
- **Red Mulga Country**

Called the Red Mulga because the mulga scrub is growing on red country.

- **112.5km / 218.7km**
- 23.2182 South 142.8115 East
- **Gravel Pits**

The council gravel pits beside the road hold water in good seasons and are sometimes fenced off to aid the mustering or trapping of cattle.



- 116km / 215.2km
- 23.2317 South 142.7822 East
- Designated Opal Fossicking Area

Dull on the outside but beautiful inside: try your luck fossicking for opal in the designated area which allows for hand mining only. While many miners allow tourist to “speck” over their dumps, unauthorized entry to anyone else’s claim is considered trespassing. Always get permission before entering an area held under mining tenure.

- 118.5km / 212.7km
- 23.2476 South 142.7707 East
- Opalton

Once a bustling community of 600 people in the mid 1890s, a dim memory of its former heyday survives and a frontier atmosphere prevails here. Fossicking permits and survival rations are available at the store (when operating).

- 122km / 209.2km
- 23.2650 South 142.7543 East
- Limit of Designated Opal Fossicking Area

This marks the limit of the designated fossicking area.

- 126km / 205.2km
- 23.2852 South 142.7583 East
- Termite Mounds

Be on the lookout for termite mounds in this area. Termite mounds are like climate-controlled highrise apartments for termites. In addition to protection from predators, they provide shelter from rain, sunlight, heat and cold, maintain high humidity (up to 90%) and warm temperatures.

In the dry tropics, where earthworms do not survive, termites play an essential role in recycling dried wood, roots and leaves. With the help of microorganisms in their gut, they can digest the cellulose in wood. They are also a source of food for small animals like the Echidna and Numbat.

Termites have been around for 130 to 150 million years and predate other social insects like ants and bees by tens of millions of years. Only about 5% of Australian termite species attack the solid timber from which we build houses and furniture.



- 131.5km / 199.7km
- 23.3394 South 142.7306 East
- Telstra Tower

Until the mid 1980s, telephones in the Winton district were serviced by party lines using aerial wire and poles. These have subsequently been replaced by the broadband microwave frequencies. Like light, microwaves travel in a straight line and all towers are carefully located within line of sight of each other, including allowances for the curvature of the earth and the height of mature vegetation. Due to their remote location, Telstra have pioneered a range of alternate energy sources, and towers in this region are typically solar powered.

- 159.5km / 171.7km
- 23.5034 South 142.5469 East
- Mayneside Homestead Ruins

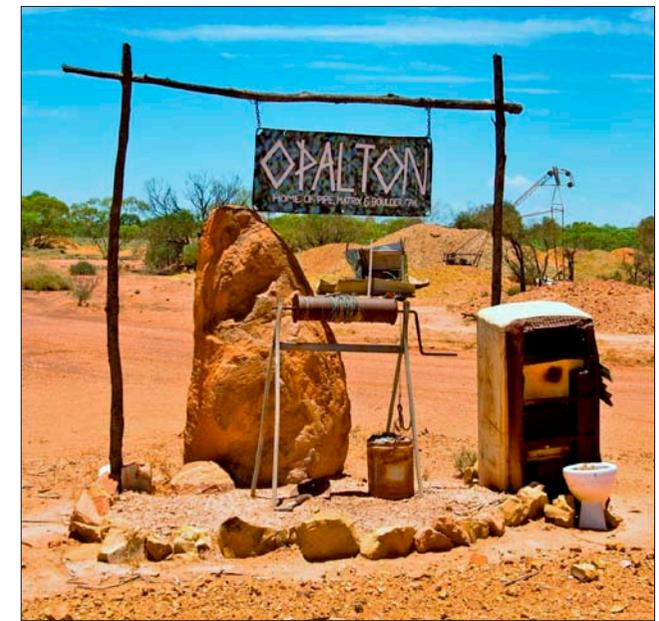
Through the gate and to the left are the remains of the old Mayneside homestead, outbuildings and a small cemetery. Please note: Private Property, no camping.

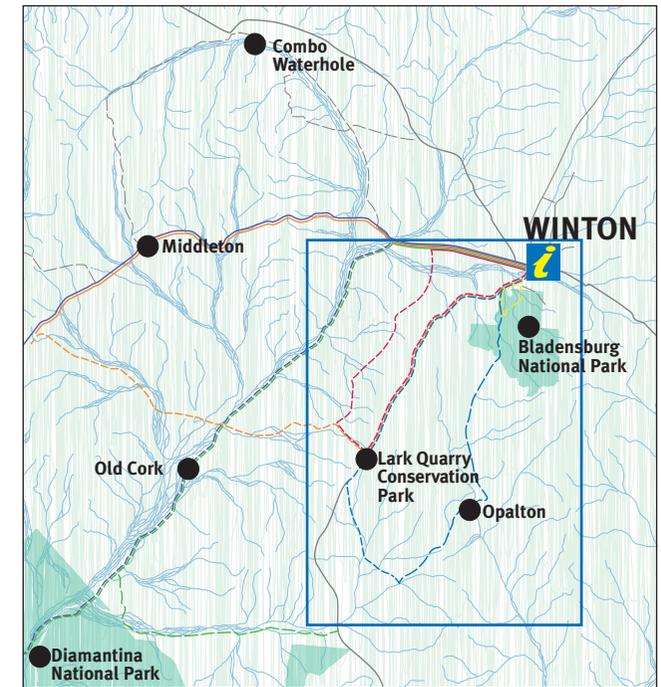
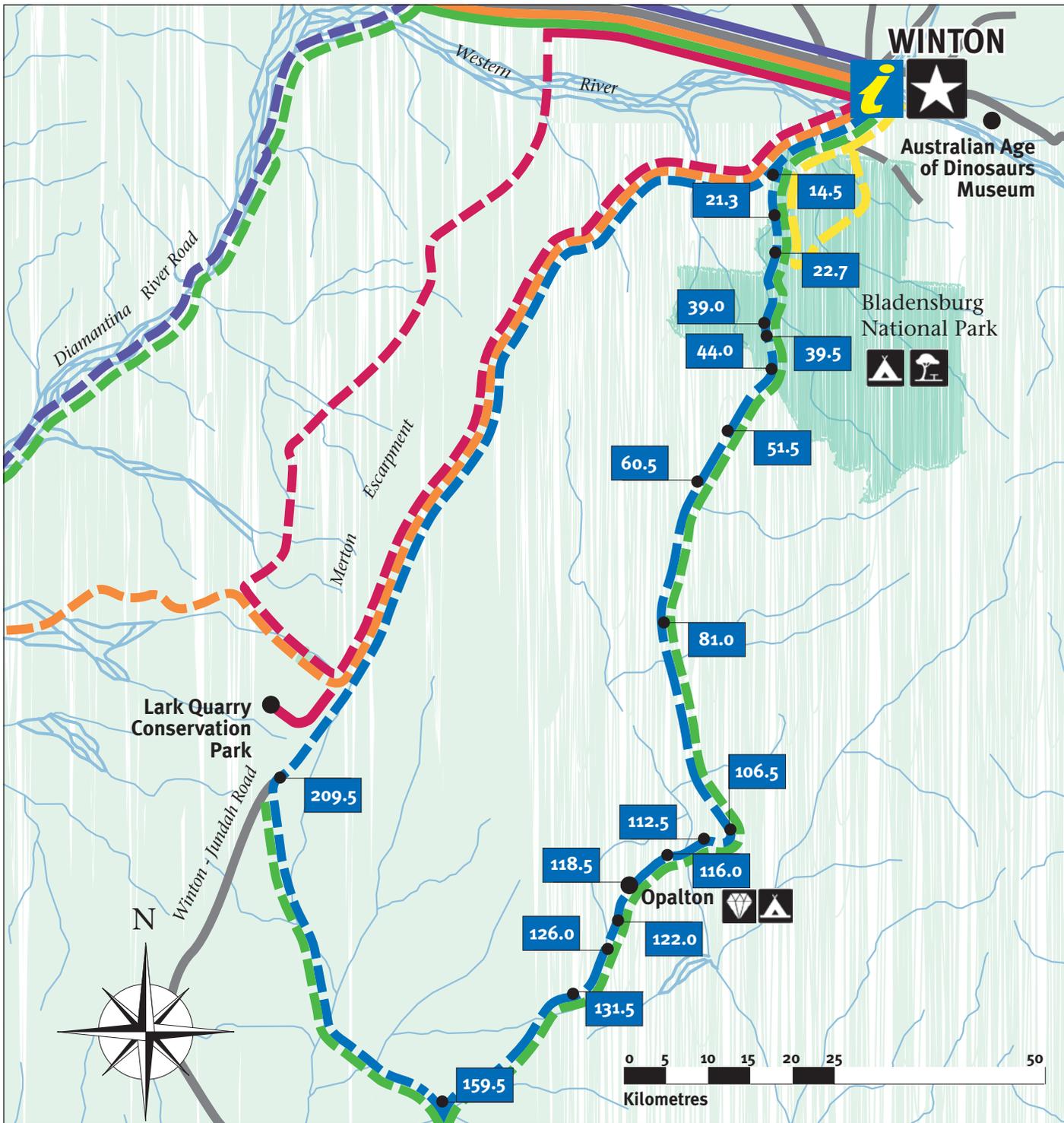
- 209.5m / 122.2km
- 23.1382 South 142.3519 East
- Winton-Jundah Road

Turn right for the 122km return trip to Winton. For additional points of interest on the return trip, refer to ‘The Dinosaur Drive’ and ‘Pioneer’s Trail’ brochures.

- 331.2km
- Winton

Arrive back in Winton.





**Legend**

- Sealed Road
- Gravelled Road
- Dirt Track
- Rivers
- National Park
- All Facilities
- Fuel
- Accommodation
- Food
- Camp Sites
- Rest Area
- Fossicking

**Drive Routes**

- Route of the River Gums
- The Dinosaur Drive
- Try Your Luck
- Pioneer's Trail
- 9 Pillars of Cobb & Co

*All of the walks and drives are clockwise return loops starting from the Winton Visitor Information Centre. Points of interest are listed as kilometres, so set your trip meter to zero as you arrive at the town grid on the Winton/Jundah Road.*