



Dry sparks gold rush in North Queensland

CHARLIE PEEL, Townsville Bulletin

September 3, 2015 12:00am

THERE'S gold in the hills around Townsville.

But North Queensland's growing legion of prospectors have been warned to stick to the rules or risk hefty fines.

A rise in the number of fossickers looking to strike it rich has been attributed to shorter grass due to lack of rainfall and improvements in metal detector technology – both of which are yielding results.

But the gold rush has led police to issue a warning to would-be gold diggers to make sure they have a fossicking licence and permission from landowners before setting out.

The issue is particularly pronounced near Ravenswood, southwest of Townsville.

Ravenswood Police Station officer-in-charge Senior Constable Wade Hastie said fossicking without a licence and fossicking on land without permission of the owner could both draw a fine of \$5890.

“A few of the farmers are a bit concerned so we’ve issued a warning,” he said. “But we will be cracking down on it.”

A fossicking licence can be bought online for \$47.90.

Townsville Metal Detecting Club president Trevor Jones urged anyone on the hunt for treasure to do the right thing so that other fossickers did not get a bad reputation.

Mr Jones said between 100 and 150 Minelab GPZ7000 metal detectors, which were released this year and retail at \$10,700, had been sold in North Queensland alone.

“Every time a new machine comes out, there’s a big rise in the quantity and quality of gold found,” he said.

Formed in 1984, the Townsville group is the only club outside Brisbane. It has 120 members and takes field trips to the goldfields around Charters Towers, Georgetown and Forsayth.

“Anyone who wants to come on our trips with us is able to sign up and become a member,” he said.

The hunt can prove lucrative for those prepared to learn the tricks of the trade.

“We have members who find thousands of dollars worth of gold,” Mr Jones said.

“On our last trip to Charters Towers only one member didn’t get anything.

“Some of them find three, four and five ounces of gold.

“At \$1300 an ounce, it’s quite a bit of money.”

For some, striking it rich is just luck.

“My brother-in-law found a 14.5 ounce specimen with 10 ounces of gold with a detector he borrowed for a trip to Forsyth,” Mr Jones said.

