



Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha

Recreational Gold Panning in Ireland

Frequently Asked Questions

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minerals
ireland EXPLORATION
& MINING DIVISION

RECREATIONAL GOLD PANNING FAQs

What is recreational gold panning?

Recreational gold panning activities are generally considered to be those that utilise only **hand-held, non-motorized equipment**. Examples of such equipment include a gold pan, shovel, hand-operated suction device, trowel, sieve and small pry tools. The use of any powered or mechanized equipment (e.g. trommels, high-bankers or other concentrators, rocker boxes, suction dredges or vac-pac pumps, earth moving equipment, etc.) is not acceptable, as this could not be reasonably represented as anything other than mining activity which requires a State Mining Lease.

In general, a recreational panner should not operate in the same stream, river or channel for more than two days in any one calendar month. Before commencing their activity, panners should contact the local National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) ranger to ensure that the site they wish to pan is not environmentally sensitive (i.e. likely to be adversely impacted by a single panning event) or legally protected.

A small, portable, manual sluice, no more than 1.2m (or 4 feet) in length, may be used at certain sites, provided that consent for its use has first been obtained from the NPWS and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). The use of more than one sluice at any panning site is not acceptable. Under no circumstances should any sluice be installed permanently within a stream bed.

What permissions do I need to pan for gold in Ireland?

Recreational gold panning (see definition above) is not specifically permitted under the Minerals Development Acts. Searching or exploring for minerals to which those Acts apply normally requires a Prospecting Licence, and extraction requires a State Mining Lease (and other permissions). It is acknowledged, however, that gold panning for purely recreational purposes does occur and is not an activity to which the full rigours of the Acts need apply, so long as it is undertaken by individuals and not for commercial purposes, and with due regard for the environment and relevant legislation. Recreational gold panners should however, receive permission from the following parties:

- All relevant landowners,
- The riparian (river) rights owner (if applicable)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland. It is an offence under the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act, 1959 (Section 173) to disturb certain river beds, banks or shallows).
- NPWS / Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) where the intended activity is within or likely to impact on a protected site.
- The holder of any Prospecting Licence (PL) over the area, where the licence has been issued for minerals including gold. Information on current PL holders can be obtained from <http://www.mineralsireland.ie/Online+Services/Interactive+Maps.htm>)

How do I recognise environmentally sensitive sites?

In the case of environmentally sensitive sites (i.e. those that have been designated Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas or Natural Heritage Areas), or where an activity could impact on such a site (e.g. further downstream), particular care must be taken and the prospective panner should seek advice from the NPWS, and consent, if required, before they start panning. For designated sites, a set of Activities Requiring Consent and Notifiable Actions has been devised. While these activities are not prohibited outright, they are likely to be subject to certain restrictions, and the permission of the NPWS is required

before they can be undertaken (See Section 28 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011).

Anyone who undertakes recreational gold panning will be liable for all damage caused by the activity.

Can I keep any gold that I find?

All gold and silver is the property of the State. However, recognizing that part of the attraction of recreational panning is the potential to find some gold and keep it as a souvenir of the activity, individuals will not be prevented from retaining small quantities of such gold. The Exploration and Mining Division should be informed of the precise location and date of any gold finds which return more than 20 flakes of gold or individual nuggets exceeding two grammes in weight.

Can I sell any gold recovered from panning or fossicking activities?

No. The sale or other disposal of gold recovered from panning or fossicking activities is defined in the Mineral Development Acts 1940 – 1999 as the “working” of minerals. A State Mining Lease issued by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources is required to work minerals such as gold. Further information on how to apply for State Mining Facilities is available in EMD’s ‘Mining in Ireland’ publication that can be downloaded from <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Natural/Exploration+and+Mining+Division/Publications/>.

What are the penalties for the unauthorised working of minerals?

The working of minerals without lawful authority is an offence under Section 74 of the Minerals Development Act 1940. Anyone convicted of an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine or in the discretion of the Court, to imprisonment, or to both.

Want more information?

Please contact the Exploration and Mining Division, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, email emd.info@dcenr.gov.ie, telephone 01 678 2000.

Glossary of terms

Fossicking – the searching for and collection of minerals and fossils for recreational or educational purposes only, without any intention to sell the samples. Only hand tools are permitted for fossicking.

Gold flake – Small, flattened gold grain

Hand tools - gold pan, small shovel, trowel, sieve, small pry tools and hand-operated suction device (with holding capacity of less than 1 litre of sediment).

Nugget – A naturally occurring piece of native gold exceeding two grammes in weight.

Panner – a person who uses a pan to separate gold or other minerals from alluvial material

Panning – A process where rock material or sediment is placed into a pan and gently agitated in water. The process separates high specific gravity minerals (such as gold) from low specific gravity minerals (such as normal sand or quartz).

Riparian Rights: Special rights of people who own land that runs into a water bank (a riparian owner is a person who owns land that runs into a river).

For more information please contact:
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