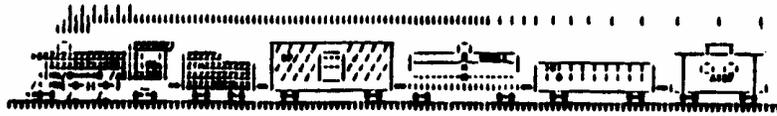




The OPAL EXPRESS

Published monthly by the
American Opal Society...



VOLUME 20
NUMBER 5
MAY 1988

OPAL BIRTHSTONE FOR MAY IS GREEN CRYSTAL OPAL.. alternate is Cats-eye Idaho Opal Triplet.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE---Spring is here! Now the beautiful warm days and cool evenings make for dreams of getting out of doors and off to vacations worth remembering for a lifetime!

With daydreams of beautiful opals dancing in our heads, we Opalophiles tend to think of far-away Australia; with our hot summer approaching, their winter is coming on with cooler weather making the trip to down-under land more enjoyable. Often in the gem and mineral magazines, you will find individuals who offer to lead a safari to the opal diggings of Coober Pedy, Lightning Ridge, etc. I've talked to many people who have returned from this type of vacation and seem to have enjoyed it greatly.

For those who wish to stay in the States, we have lots of digging for you. In an alpine-like setting, nestles ~the small town of Spencer, Idaho. At the Spencer Opal Mine's store you can park your trailer or motor home or rent a cabin for a few days, or all summer if you wish. IN the evenings, Doyle will demonstrate triplet-making while Claudia will show you the beautiful triplet stones and jewelry that are made form the opal found there. Next morning, you can grab your digging gear and hop aboard their free bus for a trip up to the mine, where you can spend the day digging and enjoying a spectacular view from the 6000' elevation.

Virgin Valley, Nevada has two main mines that allow digging for a fee. You can camp free at the old CCC camp or drive on into the Royal Peacock Mine where they have spaces with full hookups.

At the Royal Peacock you can do bank digging or noodle about on the dumps; The other mine is Rainbow Ridge where you can dig in the tailings and in trailer loads of material brought from one of the other sites. From either mine you can recover very beautiful opal. Due to its tendency to crack and craze, opal from this area is mainly specimen material. It's very beautiful in a bottle or vial; besides how much opal can you wear? The opal in this area is mostly opalized wood with specimens of pine cones and even camel's teeth have been found.

If you are really rugged, you can prospect the Black Rock Desert area of Nevada. It is rough desert with only dirt roads and because the best road in crosses a large dry lake (not always dry) it is mostly accessible in the summer month's.

California has it's opal mines too! In the Red Rock Canyon area north of Mohave. This is desert area and digging is usually limited to October through May because of the heat. There is camping at the Nowak Fire Opal mine. Bring your own food, water, wood and tools.

Dorothea and I have visited all these sites except the Black Rock Desert area and can recommend each one as enjoyable and exciting to dig in. So throw your digging tools in the back of your vehicle and take off for an enjoyable spring or summer vacation and spend next winter cutting the results of your mining ventures!



MINING OPAL IN THE U S

You don't always have to go "underground" to find opal. Here in the U S we mostly have bank digging or noodling on the tailings. For you Opalphiles who want to stay closer to home this summer here are a few facts and figures.

Spencer Opal Mines, Spencer, Idaho--located 65 miles north of Idaho Falls on I15. Open Memorial Day Weekend to October 1st. Mine open 3 days per week- Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Shop open 7 days a week May 15th-Oct. 1. Send stamp for free brochure to: Spencer Opal Mines, HCR 62-Box 113, Spencer, Idaho 83446. Phone 208-374-5476.

Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine, Virgin Valley, Nevada. Digging here is in tailings that are brought out from the mine and dumped. According to the owners new material is dozed out several times a week and you have very good chances of finding good opal. Digging fees are \$33 per day, children half-priced. Open Memorial Day Weekend and close October 16th. Mine is open every day except Tuesdays and Thursdays. Hours are 8 am-4 pm. There is a small shop at the mine with opal and jewelry for sale. For information and maps write:
Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine, Box 97, Denio, Nevada 89404. Phone 702-941-0270.

Royal Peacock Opal Mines--Open May 15th through October 15th(Weather permitting.) Rock Shop hours 8 am-6 pm. Fees: Bank digging \$35 per day each, Tailing digging, \$15 per day. Mining hours 8 am-4 pm. Trailer spaces, full hook-ups, \$8.00 per day, other campers .& tents, \$1.50 per day. One furnished trailer, \$25.00 per day (reservations required.) Free public camping (at CCC camp) 8 miles away. Tools can be rented. Opal can be purchased at the shop or by mail. For information write Royal Peacock Opal Mines, P O Box 55, Denio, Nevada 89404. Phone 702-941-0374. (We received a letter from Harry Wilson of Virgin Valley saying that they had been asked to put a display of opal in the Nevada State Capital Building and that during the last session of the Nevada State Legislature, Virgin Valley Black Fire Opal was officially named the state's Precious Gem Stone. I'M sorry we received the letter to late to include in the March Newsletter so that those of you in the area could have viewed the display. Thank you Harry for sending us the information.

We don't have any information on the Black Rock Desert mining claims.

Opal, precious and otherwise is also found in Oregon, Louisiana and Arizona. Another Nevada location is the Little Jo Opal Mine.

Last, but not least is the Nowak Fire Opal Mine located in the upper reaches of Red Rock Canyon, 25 miles north of Mohave, California. Digging rates are \$2.00 per day; you may camp at the mine. It is dry desert camping, bring your own water. For information call 213-899-5744.

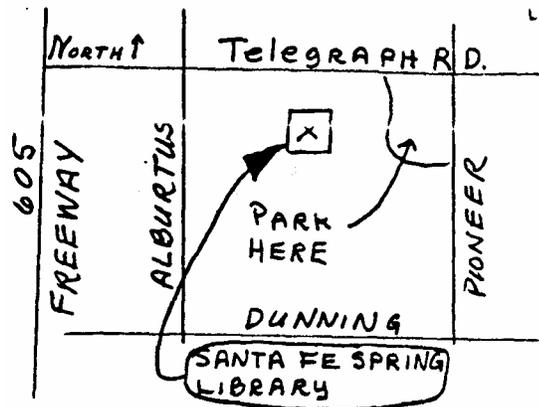
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General Meetings held on the 2nd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Santa Fe Springs Library, 11700 Telegraph Rd., Santa Fe Springs. See Map.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE The lure of a talk by well-known carver, Vince Jarrell, was enough to make a lot of members brave a bad rainstorm. They were well rewarded by not only the talk, but cake & pie baked by Sue Umberson. Thanks, Vince, and Thanks, Sue for your efforts.

Great expectations for our participation fun at the Sept. Opal Show were presented by Hal Brees, who will be keeping us up to date on this important event. The May 12th meeting is going to be a challenge. Bring a problem rough opal or two of yours and find out the best way to orient it. That's Right: A real hands-on work/learn session. We will have 3 machines set up with 3 opal cutting experts led by Dick Koch, who will analyze your own stone and assist you in turning your sow's ear into a silk purse. Bring your problem to Expert Dick Koch who wants to remind us that the definition of EXPERT is: EX is an unknown exponential and sPert is a drop of water under pressure!

Vince Jarrell is quietly compelling in his enthusiasm to share his carving pleasure with others. He certainly made this writer want to run right home and get started carving: His underlying message was:
DON'T BE AFRAID TO START:

He recommends using clay as a real basic beginning, and to hone your powers of observation on any object.

Vince says if you can do a cameo, you can do anything, especially if as a beginner, you avoid certain fibrous stones such as tiger-eye, and be careful about not chipping edges.

He tipped us off to the advantages of collet style handpieces (they run the mandrel shaft truer) and handpieces with bearings (they run cooler than ones with bushings) . He also explained the blessings of heatless mizzy wheels and diamond type equipment.

He had a new "mighty" but compact scroll saw machine to show us.

He wound up his talk with an encouraging invitation to any budding carver to join him at Edith's house (213-698-3985) on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday. See you there, Vince -- you conVINCED me!

Remember -- May 12th is the next fun and information-filled meeting.

We'll find out more about future plans, learn how to orient that problem opal, and discuss the upcoming PICNIC! BE THERE!

The AOS Appraisal Kit

The above discussion is helpful in assessing the market value of cut opal but it lacks something. It does not tell you when a grey base becomes a semi-black. Or when a multicolor becomes red multicolor. Or how to consistently assess the intensity of fire. (In fact, when I go to buy rough or cut stories I always take some sample stones for comparison to make sure I do not over assess intensity, a trick I learned from longtime opal dealer Bill Maison some years ago.)

Until recently, there was little help available in answering these questions. Unlike diamonds, where color sets are common and a SI means the same everywhere, one person's intense fire was another person's dull fire. One person's black was another person's light grey. "Gem quality" often was used for the best a person had and one person's gem was another's dog.

I would not want to suggest that a standard has now been set and that valuing cut opal is now simple, but a major step has been taken toward that goal. The American Opal Society has produced an Opal Appraisal Kit. The AOS Kit is the most significant contribution ever to valuing cut opal. It consists of 15 cut opals arranged into three rows. The first row represents base colors; from white to semi-black to crystal. The second row represents the basic fire color combinations. The third row represents intensity of fire. It is this set of standard stones that allows consistent valuation. Also included with the Kit are eight pages of instructions on how to use the Kit (from which the AOS position on the various factors listed above was deduced), and a supply of Evaluation Forms. I should add that my kit has an absolutely gorgeous stone in the lower right corner and several others anyone would be proud to own.

The Kit was produced after careful work by knowledgeable members of the American Opal Society. It represents their collective Judgment on what affects the market value of opal and by how much. This combined effort generated a master set of 15 opals. Each Kit is prepared against this master. This is no easy task as each opal is unique. An inspection of several Kits at the Royal Crest booth in Tucson showed that the job had been done very well. Each Kit is numbered and the buyer is registered with the AOS. I have every confidence that my Kit (No. 206) is as close as possible to the master and to other Kits.

The use of these three sets of stones is fairly easy. First, base color is determined by placing the stone to be valued face up on the Kit's first line and comparing the base color to each of the five stories. I have explained the Kit at shows and club meetings, and people having little experience with opals can successfully find the right base color within seconds on their first stone. It is absolutely amazing how well and simply it works. A value of 1 to 5 is given depending upon what base color is found. (See illustration)

AMERICAN OPAL SOCIETY - EVALUATION FORM

CATEGORY	VALUE RATING					APPRAISED VALUE RATING
	1	2	3	4	5	
BASE COLOR	JELLY OR WHITE	GRAY	SEMI-BLACK	NEAR CRYSTAL	CRYSTAL CLEAR	1
FIRE COLOR	RED GREEN	GREEN	BLUE GREEN	MULTI-COLOR	RED MULTI-COLOR	5
INTENSITY	VERY LOW	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	VERY HIGH	3
APPRAISAL VALUE RATING TOTAL						9

APPEAL FACTOR	MARKET RATING				APPRAISED APPEAL RATING
	0.5 - 1	2 - 4	5 - 10	10 - 20	
	POOR	MODERATE	HIGH	VERY HIGH	4

CARAT PRICE						
VALUE RATING	X	APPEAL RATING	X	WEIGHT (CARAT)	=	TOTAL PRICE
9		4		1.6		\$57.60

Next fire color is determined. The stone is moved across the second line of opals until the correct color combination is found and the appropriate value recorded. There is some interpretation necessary here, especially in the multi-color category. Multicolor can mean orange/green or blue/green with some red or various other color combinations, but only one such color combination can, be represented in the Kit stone. The most common difficulty people at my talks had was distinguishing between red/green and multi-color. Still most got it right the first time and learned quickly if they didn't.

Third, the intensity is determined. This is where many people are quickly educated. That 'bright' stone they brought pales in comparison to the stone in the lower right. They move to the left and find it matches the low intensity stone.

The "appraised value rating total" is the sum of the values found by this three step process.

Suppose that a stone were white base (value 1 on first line), red multicolor (value 5 on second line), and of medium intensity (value 3 on line three). It's appraised value rating total would be (1 + 5 + 3

= 9) . The higher the total number, the better the stone. This is simple to determine using the Kit. I have every confidence that someone could call me up, tell me that they had such a stone, and I would know fairly well what it looked like. The Kit's set of stones provides a common standard not available anywhere else.

But we are not through appraising this stone. The Kit requires that the user assess an "Appeal Factor". As the instructions put it..."next we proceed to the most subjective of the rating categories - Appeal Factor." The Kit lists a number of general categories (see illustration). The instructions discuss most of the factors which affect the Appeal Rating. But the discussion is much more general than the one presented above. The instructions also note that a High rating is reserved for stones of 4 or 5 intensity which are well cut high dome full color. Very High is reserved for a very few stone (less than 1%) The instructions state that black opal is so scarce and commands such a high price it cannot be included in the Kit. AOS recommends that if you come across a coal black base color with intense fire color, you should contact an expert or the AOS to obtain a value. To be a true black a stone must have this black background color. It is amazing how many stones are represented as black that don't even meet the semi-black criteria of the AOS.

Suppose the mythical white based stone rated 9 in the Appraised Value Rating was a nice well cut 8 x 10 oval with a fairly high dome and a flashfire pattern. It would make an attractive ring stone showing color from all directions. The most we can give it for Appeal according to the AOS Kit is 4 since 5 or more is reserved for stones of higher intensity.

The total wholesale per carat price of the cut stone would be $9 \times 4 = \$36/\text{carat}$. If the stone weighs 1.6 carats, the total wholesale price is $9 \times 4 \times 1.6 = \57.60 . The Kit notes that retail prices are 2 to 3 times this price depending upon the individual circumstances. These are 1985 prices and, as market conditions change, they would have to be adjusted accordingly. I have found the Kit to be quite accurate in, most standard oval stones. And I have found that hobby cutters can use it successfully. It is a wonderful new tool in valuing opal.

Obtaining a Final Value

How might one proceed in valuing a cut opal? I suggest you use the AOS Kit to determine base color, fire color, and intensity. Since no other system has the set of standard stones the AOS Kit has, no other system can produce consistent -evaluations among stones or between appraisers. No other system, including the discussion produced above, can stand alone as an evaluation tool • There is simply no substitute for the AOS Kit. Next, color pattern can be determined from the very extensive and fully illustrated discussion in Barrie O'Leary's book. Nowhere else will you find so many fine illustrations of different

fire patterns. Finally, the other factors which influence the Appeal Factor in the AOS Kit can be assessed using the discussion presented here. Assess the Appeal Factor on the AOS Evaluation Form accordingly. This combination should allow anyone to produce relatively accurate and consistent estimates of wholesale market value of cut opals.

There are a lot of factors which affect the value of opal. Judgment still plays an important and unavoidable role in determining market value. While the ADS system is not perfect, it is far superior to the 'seat of the pants' Judgments that have been the norm until now. We now have a system which can be relied upon.

The AOS Kit is available through Majestic Gems & Carvings at \$700.00 (Dealer discount available). Barrie O'Leary's outstanding book, A Field Guide To Australian Opals is available thru us at \$15.25 postpaid.

DEAR JEWETT, ETC., ETC., LIGHTNING RIDGE, APRIL 8, 1988

here IS MY CHEQUE FOR \$175. FOR A SINGLE TABLE FOR THE FORTH-COMING SHOW IN SEPTEMBER. I HOPE TO RETURN TO CALIFORNIA IN LATE JULY OR EARLY AUGUST... IF NO SNAGS DEVELOP TO MAKE ME RETURN EARLIER.

BEING BACK HERE FOR SOM~E WEEKS, IT WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE. NOT ONLY HAS THE PRICE OF OPALS SOARED, REGARDLESS WHERE THE OPAL COMES FROM IN OZ, BUT PRICES FOR EVERYTHING HAS GONE UP IN TANDEM. THE GOVERNEMNET SAYS THAT INFLATION IS ONLY 6.2%, BUT I SEE SO MANY THINGS THAT HAVE JUMPED FROM 40 to 200 %. IT JUST DOESNT MAKE SENSE THAT THESE G'MENT FIGURES CAN BE EVEN CLOSE. RENTS IN SYDNEY ARE AS THO ITS NOW BEVERLY HILLS. I CANT BELIEVE WHAT I SEE. OF COURSE MINING COSTS HAVE RISEN IN KIND, AND MINING GEAR ALONG WITH IT. I'VE ALWAYS EXPECTED OPAL PRICE RISES TO OCCUR EACH TIME I RETURN, BUT NOTHING LIKE WHAT I AM NOW EXPERIENCING.

THE MAIN FIELDS NOW SEEM TO BE MEHI, NORTH OF US, WYOMING NOT TOO FAR AND PART OF THE RIDGE, THEN THE HUGE FIELD OF THE SHEEPYARD... MOST OF WHAT I'VE SEEN IS GRAY, AND I DONT WANT A BAR OF IT IF I CAN HELP IT. I KNOW THERE IS A BIT OF TOP BLACK AROUND, BUT HAVE SEEN ONLY A FEW SO FAR. WHEN I'M TOLD WHAT IS WANTED FOR THE GRAY MATERIAL, IT BLOWS MY MIND. WHAT PUZZLES ME, IS THAT ITS SOLD AS BLACK OPAL IN MANY AREAS, WHICH IS DEAD WRONG. ALL THE OLD TIMERS I KNOW HERE AGREE WITH ME. WE WERE IN DROUGHT CONDITIONS, BUT THEN THE DAY BEFORE THE EASTER HOLIDAYS, WE WERE INUNDATED WITH 6 DAYS OF RAIN, WHICH RUINED THE HOLIDAY FOR ALL THE VISITORS THAT CAME HERE, AND IT'S USUALLY THE BIGGEST TOURIST TIME OF THE YEAR. THEY HAD THE GOAT RACES, AS THE HEAVENS SUDDENLY STOPPED POURING DOWN FOR MOST OF THAT DAY, BUT OUR, POWER WAS OFF FOR over 10 HOURS. THE HORSE AND MOTOR BIKE RACES HAD TO BE CALLED OFF. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE TOURISTS TO GO OUT TO THE FIELDS UNLESS THEY HAD 4-WHEEL DRIVES. ROADS FROM BRISBANE WERE COMPLETELY CUT DUE TO THE SAME RAINS, AS IT WAS WIDESPREAD, AND LIKE ANYWHERE, THERE IS GOOD WITH THE GRIEF. AT LEAST THE DROUGHT IS OVER IN MANY PARTS.

I HOPE THIS FINDS YOU AND FAMILY IN GOOD NICK AND ALLS WELL, AND PLEASE GIVE MY REGARDS TO DICK KOCH AND ROSS STAMBLER SHOULD YOU SEE THEM. WITH SINCEREST BEST WISHES,

Phil Pearl

P.S. Sydney and the gold coast in Queensland look like Tokyo will all the Japanese tourists, and they expect 25% more tourists next year. They buy opals like mad and prices don't phase them. Opal Shops are mushrooming like mad catering to them.



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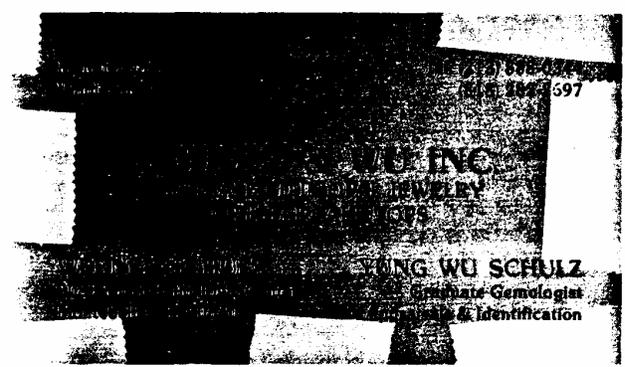


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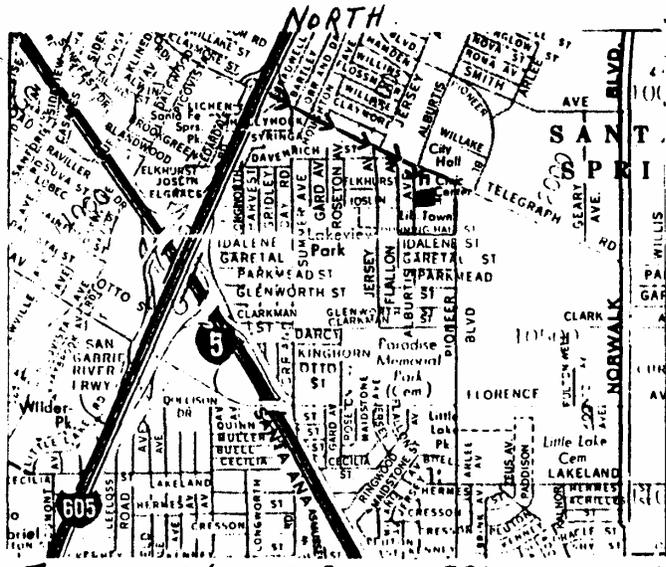
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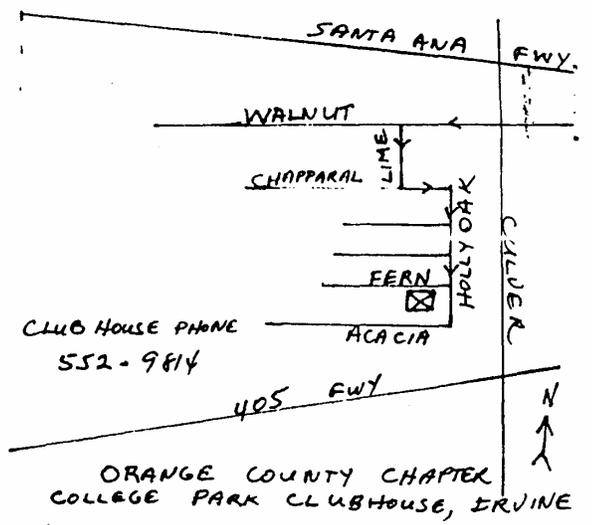
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