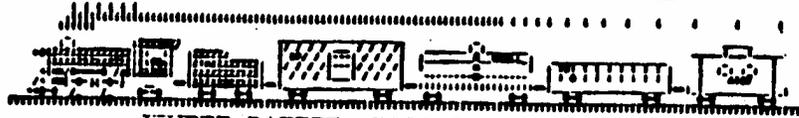




The OPAL EXPRESS

Published monthly by the
American Opal Society...



VOLUME 21
NUMBER 6
JUNE 1989

JEWETT PATTEE, EDITOR

OPALS

Morning and evening,
Midday and night,
Mingling their shades
In varying light.

A palette set out
For painting a scene,
A wizard no doubt,
Mixed that wonderful green.

Does the rainbow begin
In the earth where they lie?
Does the dawn meet the sunset,
Combining their dye?

Some are like moonlight,
Spangled with stars,
A white cloister gate
With gleaming gold bars!

A carnival night,
Streamers and flowers,
Balloons gay and bright,
Confetti in showers!

flames in mosaic,
Sparkling and gay,
Then prim and prosaic
With a pallor of grey.

Like a cherry light
A journey's end,
A fireside bright
And the smile of a friend.

Margaret McEwin

Hi From the Prez! G'day Mates!

The trip down under was uneventful. Was met in Adelaide by Luky Olah, our mentor and guide to the Coober Pedy Opal Fields. Stayed in town for 2 days to buy a car & van for Gary Sturdevant (member #0612) for his 6 month stay as a miner.

The Fairweathers put us up in Adelaide for the 2 days with a key to the door and freedom to come and go. Friends like that are hard to find in the States.

Luky has found a partner for Gary to mine with on a percentage basis. Hope he is set for the next 5 months. If he hits a good deal of Opal, that might turn into years.

On Gary's first day down the shaft, he brought back some Potch and color. Has it soaking in the Caravan to get rid of the opal clay without tumbling it.

Luky has given us the key to his dug-out for the 3 days he's chasing the local politicians all over the Opal Fields showing them the whys and wherefores of the Opal Miners plights and problems. Another good man to know on the Opal Fields.

The dug-out is a Knock out, better than a lot of homes in the States. The desert is alive with green and color from the flowers. The first time in twelve years. Long droughts in between.

Have had the privilege of sitting in on a grading and Parcel selling session with Luky. He sure knows his Opal.

We in the States seldom see some of the beautiful Opal in the top Grade area, as the Chinese buy all that's offered. We get the \$2.00 to \$500.00 an ounce material and never see the \$1000.00 to \$3000.00 ounce rough that is mined here. We are so uneducated to sane of the solid crystals that show 85% to 98% color across the stone, that no one wants to buy it, thinking it will 3ust crack and lose our investment.

If you auld have a Certificate of Field Origin, you might invest in those stones.

I 'ye heard of stones that came out in the '50's & '60's that are still positively beautiful, with no cracks. Fair Dinkum Mates. The noodlers with their big machines, are pitting those back fills on the fields through the black light and getting some small but spectacular stones.

It's enough to give me the Opal Fever and go mining again.

Will show slides of the trip at the '89 Show Seminar. Do come and see us then.

Ta Da,

Dick Koch
Prez

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AUSTRALIA



And from Peter Lewis, our
member in Australia-----

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IT NEVER RAINS - UNLESS POURS* - OLD Australian Bushman's saying:

During the period from Easter through early April the heaviest rains in living memory in the Australian desert have caused havoc to mining industries which operate there, a local Member of the South Australia Parliament, Mr. Peter Lewis, said in a report to us recently.

"Some places have recorded the highest rainfall in 24 hours in the State's history - and they are in the desert! For instance, at one place about 400 miles from Adelaide, (on the opposite side of Lake Torrens to an opal mining town called Andamooka) Motpena, recorded 273 mm (virtually 11 inches in rain) in 24 hours!! That is the heaviest fall on record for a 24 hour period and is almost three times the average rainfall for a year for that place.

In Andamooka, the so-called Andamooka Market Place shopping complex Manager, Mr. Richard Lines, said the town's main street, which was part of an old dry water course, "was awash and that occasionally some of the local residents had been rafting down the street more in fun than out of necessity."

"80% of the opal miners have been adversely effected by this and many of the opal fields are far too wet for opal mining to continue, whether tunneling underground or open cut at Mintabie. This remains to be the case as recently as the beginning of May."

Mr. Lewis, who is not only a Member of Parliament but also the Principal of Arkaba Arts, an Australian firm of opal dealers, said that he had checked the reports with a number of people who were known to him. They indicated that not only were the mines flooded, but over a million dollars of equipment had been lost in the mud - either underground in the mining shafts at places like Coober Pedy (where the mining is commonly undertaken by tunneling) or by complete inundation of some open cut mines at Mintabie. In one instance, a D9 has been submerged in the bottom of an open cut. Some compressors and blowers etc on softer rock material simply sank into the mud as the rain turned the area into a morass.

"The Miners' Association Secretary, Ms Anna Vanajek, has reported that some miners were using metal detectors to try and locate their equipment - drills and jackhammers - which are buried more than a meter deep in mud in some places. When the mud hardens it will be impossible to recover them."

"Whether or not the heavy flooding will cause a shortage of supply and an increase in prices are unknown at this time", Peter said.

"One of the side benefits however, is that the desert area will, be absolutely amazing for tourists in the immediate future."

The following article was taken from OPALHOLICS, a newsletter published by Paul and Bobbi Downing of Majestic Gems and Carvings.

LOOSEN UP YOUR OPAL CUTTING STRAIT JACKET

It is said that we are here to learn and I try to learn every day. Yet sometimes I wonder why I have to learn the same things over again. Probably because I didn't really learn the first time. Take the example of cutting opal. I teach opal cutting at Wild Acres in the North Carolina mountains every August. Each session I start out by explaining to my students that opal is an unusual stone and it need not be cut into standard oval cabs. I go to great lengths to show them that baroque shapes are very attractive and save a lot of beautiful opal. My admonition always is to "let the stone tell you what you want it to be, don't dictate to it." Sound advice and I still stick to it.

But in my class last summer I had a number of students who opened my mind and eyes to the true meaning of my saying. Fred came up with a stone in his hand that he had just faced. In one corner there was beautiful color and a big splash of color covered the rest of the stone. But in the middle of the stone there were black inclusions (called feathers), of potch (non-precious opal) and some grey potch as well. Fred asked me what he should do. I suggested that he saw the piece and make two stones without the feathers. Fred went off happy but about a half hour later he came back with the stone untouched. "You know," he said, "I really like the pattern of this stone the way it is I think I'll keep it in one piece " Well it was his stone so I said okay. About then my wife, Bobbi, came by "Oh what a neat stone," she said. "Look at the pattern. It is like a forest with the sun rising about it." (She always sees scenes in the stones, or the clouds for that matter.) So the forest was saved.

Later Ruth came up with a Lightning Ridge nobbie she was working on. There was some nice color in it but it was quite irregular in outline. Lots of ins and outs. Well, if we sawed the stone each piece would be very small. We decided to work on another stone. The next day Ruth told me she was going to finish the stone in its natural shape because she hated to waste the color. It turned out beautifully.

Several other students had similar experiences. In fact such experiences are quite common as any opal cutter knows. I used to be like Fred and Ruth but I had become accustomed to cutting for jewelry store type jewelry where "imperfections" like feathers, sand spots, and Irregular shapes are not accepted. In short, I had developed a narrow minded attitude toward what made an opal attractive and valuable. After all, in the jewelry store market such "imperfections" are severely penalized. But the jewelry store market has nothing to do with the type of jewelry we wear and love.

My students tried to teach me to shed my strait jacket but they only partially succeeded. It was not until I spent several days recently grading a large parcel of Mintabie potch and color that I finally learned the lesson-or relearned it. Time after time I would pick up a stone to judge its potential and find a wavy pattern or some other unusual characteristic. (I no longer call them imperfections!) Finally, instead of thinking that these unusual characteristics ruined the stone, I began to see the beauty in them. Then I realized what I had been allowing myself to do over the last couple of years. (continued next page.)

That was the start of this article. I now look at the beauty of the whole stone as I did long ago when I first started cutting and I try to incorporate these character makers into it. I have been very pleasantly surprised to learn that a lot of people like these "Character" stones, as Willa B. calls them. This goes to prove the old adage 'By your students you are taught!'"

I now use my admonition in a much broader sense. Opals can be cut with a combination of precious opal and potch showing on the top. They can also be cut from the edge. Some materials are much brighter from the edge but they show lines of color, perhaps mixed with potch. Still they make the most interesting stones.

In some cases the lines of color in the stone do not allow it to be cut on one line without having to make several small stones from the piece of rough. However, it may be possible to cut such stones so that a different line of color shows in each part of the surface. This may require that the top of the stone be finished as a somewhat wavy dome but the result can be quite attractive. For example, one of the Mintabie pieces Bobbi appropriated and wears at the shows is actually three lines of color. Yet nobody can tell and they are surprised when we tell them.

Recently, an opal cutter showed me an opal which he was cutting like you would cut a fire agate. It had several pits in it which he carved away. Then he followed the several lines of color to produce a bright stone with a highly irregular surface like a fire agate. It was a great idea which saved a difficult but attractive opal.

Harold, an opalcoholic who cuts all his stones by hand or with a small Dremel tool showed me a brilliant red stone. It was one of the most beautiful opals I had ever sold. However, he found a pit near the middle of the stone. So instead of sawing the stone in two, he carved out the pit. His sister Dottie, wears a Lightning Ridge ring she ~cut by hand. It has two pits in it but you never see them. After many trials and tribulations to convince the gold designer what she wanted, it was set with gold covering the "beauty marks." Dottie saved the stone and now people grab her hand to look at it without ever seeing any "imperfections," only a beautiful black opal full of color. This, lovely stone was cut by using a Lortone Stroker Kit. I could not have done better!

Another great idea which I have been playing with is faceting the top of an opaque opal. The facets do not cause a reflection of light as they would on a regular transparent stone, but they do something else. The fire color of an opal depends on the angle that the light enters and comes back out of the stone. So the different facets cause the stone to pick up different light. They seem to have more color. I do not use a regular pattern. In fact, since I don't own a faceting machine, I do each facet by hand. It requires a flat lap and a steady hand, but this technique produces an attractive final product. Be careful not to let the edges get too thin or sharp, as they become fragile.

There are many other possibilities for cutting a stone. One that should not be ignored is doublets or triplets. A thin stone is a logical candidate. Usually triplets are cut from clear material so the black from the base stone shows through. This simulates a black opal and the results can be spectacular. However, some stones are completely opaque. Such stones can be saved by adding a base and/or a cap to strengthen them. They are still opaque but now they are usable for jewelry. (Continued next page.)

Finally, a customer recently showed me a faceted opal which showed great color. Upon careful examination I found out that the opal was a thin line at the table. The rest was quartz. Not only was it beautiful, but it was more serviceable than a faceted solid opal.

So, loosen your strait jacket and look at each stone with an open and innovative mind. You will be able to transform and "unfortunate" or "disaster" stone into a thing of beauty.

The information below is about the seminars to be held at the show in November. The application is on the back cover. If you are interested tear it off and send it in with your check or money order.

Seminars will held Saturday and Sunday. Each seminar will cost \$10.00. If all six seminars are taken, total cost will be \$50.00 which will also include admission fee for Sunday.

Topics and the time scheduled for each are as follows:

1. SATURDAY 10:30 AM. ELEMENTS OF JEWELRY DESIGN--Presented by Noel Lamkin, Award winning Designer.
2. SATURDAY 1:00 PM. OPAL MINING IN AUSTRALIA--Presented by Dick Koch, President of American Opal Society, Inc.
3. SATURDAY. 3:30 PM. PURCHASING OPAL ROUGH AND CUT STONES-- Presented by Tim Thomas, Opal Dealer.
4. SUNDAY 10:30 AM. TYPES OF OPAL AND FAMOUS OPALS--Presented by Jewett Pattee, former President of American Opal Society, Inc.
5. SUNDAY 12:00 NOON ORIENTING OPAL FOR COLOR--presented by Brian Franks, Opal Dealer.
6. SUNDAY 2:30 PM EVALUATING AND PRICING CUT OPAL. Education committee of American Opal Society, Inc.

This poem is from STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, by Les Taylor.

The Cave-In

The old generator chugged on, quiet and smooth, in the
shade of a tall nearby tree,
Providing the light for the miner below, so that he'd be
able to see
As he hammered the dirt from the wall's rock hard face,
And thought of the chances he had in the place.

This searching for opal, he thought, is quite tough.
Yet a man never wants to admit, "that's enough",
He just keeps on going, the hope always there
That he'll soon have a fortune, a gemstone quite rare.

He reached for his barrow, away to the right,
Then picked up a shovel, and out went the light!
The "genny" had stopped, he could not reason why,
So he climbed up the shaft, the malfunction to pry.

As he checked on the motor and had a good grumble,
He suddenly heard a quite frightening rumble,
The mine, without warning, had caved in for sure,
And he thought of his end had he been on its floor.

The barrow and shovel are still buried there
And the miner sometimes feels like uttering a prayer
He with gratitude thinks of the "genny" that stopped
A few moments before all that rock he'd have copped.

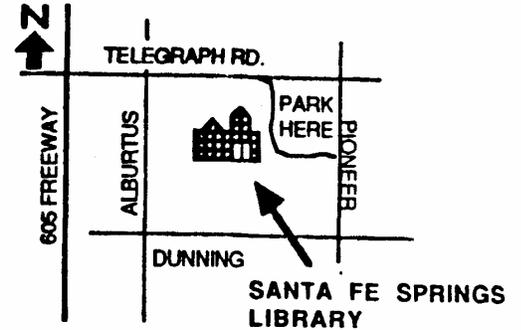
Well, I guess it's like that with us all, more or less,
We grumble and growl, when we ought to confess
That quite often some things, troublesome though they be,
Turn out for our good. as we later can see.

!!!! NEWS FROM THE FOUNDING CHAPTER !!!!

June 1989

American Opal Society
Founding Chapter
P.O. Box 3895
Downey, CA 90242

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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. SANTA FE SPRINGS
See Map. LIBRARY**

From the Prez,

Sorry I missed last month's deadline, but due to recent lay-offs in our company I was sent out of town to work for a week.

Our Chapter meetings these last two months have gone very smoothly. April we had Mr. Larry Bidwell from Glendora Gems. He spoke on Mineralogy. He also brought a large array of rock specimens. Very knowledgeable man.

In May we had Linda Hurr, who gave us a wire-wrapping demo, she brought many samples of her talented work for us to examine. A Big Thank You to both these talented speakers. The workshop now has a new flat-lap and soon to have a new trim-saw. At our recent board meeting we voted to change the workshop hours on the third Tuesday each month to 7:30pm. Our board meeting will be held that day at 6:30pm to 7:430 pm. This will cut down travel time to one trip out that week instead of twice a week, for our long-distance members.

Our June 8th, Chapter meetings speaker has not been confirmed at this moment. We're planning on Mr. Walter Johnson who specializes in was castings and jewelry. Cliff Coen, who is very educated in nutrition, will have a condensed seminar prepared in case Mr. Johnson is unable to attend. IN either case we will receive an A-1 class learning experience from Cliff or Walter.

July is Bingo month. Bring your White Elephants Wrapped. August we may have Father Floyd Jenkins of Loyola University. He specializes in Paleontology, better known at the science of fossils.

So let's see all you members make a big effort to join our chapter meetings and bring your friends.

Its so good to see when our members come out; we pray a speedy recovery to our members who are ill, and good health and happiness to you all. Have a wonderful summer.

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