

The Opal Express

American Opal Society
 P.O. Box 382
 Anaheim, CA 92815-0382



Member

Member



Volume #31 Issue #03 March 1999

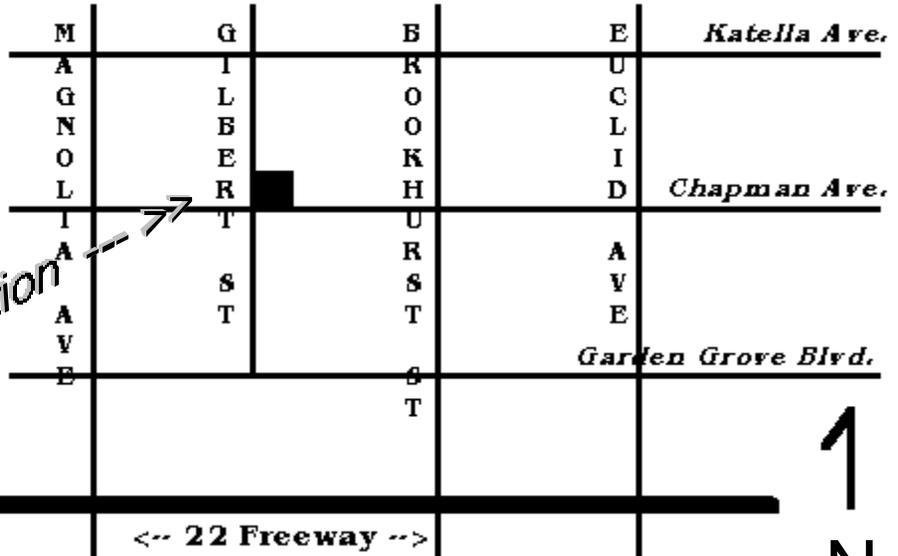


TO:

GENERAL MEETINGS —
 2nd Thursday 7:00-9:00 PM
 Garden Grove Civic Women's Club
 9501 Chapman Ave.
 (NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)
 Garden Grove, CA

MEETING ACTIVITIES
 Opal Cutting Advice Guest Speakers
 Slide Shows Videos Other Activities

Meeting Location →



American Opal Society Officers

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BLM TALK AT HOLTVILLE Nov. 27, 1998

A special meeting between BLM and rockhound interests was held at 3 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 27th, 1998, the day after Thanksgiving, in the meeting hall in Holt Park.

Jim Strain, CFMS Public Lands Advisory Chair, introduced Isabella Burns, AFMS President-elect and 3-year member of the California District Advisory Council. Izzy described the Advisory Council, which was set up in 1946, consists of 15 people, and provides input to BLM on public land use concerns. Izzy represents Recreation; other Council members come from interested Counties, Cities, other recreation groups, Wildlife and Game, mining, gas line interests, and environmental groups. The Council tries to put practical ideas into work, and provides input to BLM on usage fees, roads, and other topics.

BLM representative Dick Crowe talked for an hour about BLM's mandate, wildlife recovery programs, wilderness areas, wildlife facts and fact collecting, the Endangered Species Act, the planning process and proposed plans for the Colorado and Mojave Deserts. Afterwards, Dick and John Kaylish, BLM/Riverside, Chief of District Rangers, answered questions from the audience for another hour.

BLM has a mandate to work with the people. Part of that is arranging talks with various interests to hear their concerns, part is seeking input from groups like the Advisory Council, another part is allowing public review of plans. There must be some give and take, however: there is almost always some difference between what the people desire and what the existing land laws require.

BLM must follow environmental law, too. For example, the desert tortoise was listed as an endangered species in 1990. BLM had four years to create a plan to provide for its recovery. This "plan" is really a set of "strong recommendations". All

(cont. on Page 7)

Are Your Dues Due Now? PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS
If your label shows the current month/year your dues are **DUE**

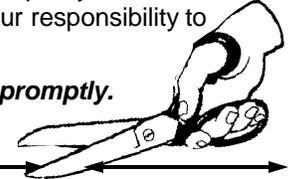
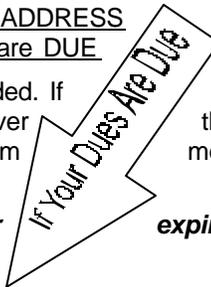
LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed. **NOW.** If the date is older, your dues are **overdue.**

Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. If additional issues of the newsletter. Please note however not received you will be **AUTOMATICALLY** dropped from assure your dues are current.

your dues are due now you will receive two that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to

Please help us make this work by watching your Thanks!

expiration date and renewing promptly.



DUES RENEWAL FORM

(membership renewal form rev. 1/1/98) d:\ameropal\news\tr\forms\dues_due.pub



American Opal Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 382
Anaheim, CA 92815-0382

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!!

Make check or money order payable to: American Opal Society, Inc.
Please mail payment and renewal form to the club address at left.

DUES RENEWAL RATES (select one)**

- 1) LOCAL AREA member \$26.00**
(addresses in Los Angeles, Orange, & Riverside counties)
- 2) CALIFORNIA & USA \$20.00**
(all addresses outside local area counties)
- 3) FOREIGN \$30.00**
(all addresses outside USA)

**** \$5 SENIOR DISCOUNT = Age 65 or over <deduct \$5.00 from above>**

DEALER LIST: Yes, include my name/address on a list provided to Opal Dealers selling at the most recent Opal Show.

(if yes, please sign or initial here) _____ date _____

without your signature here you will not be included in the dealer info list

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER: Yes, include my name and/or address and/or phone information in a published AOS membership directory...

[Please circle any of these —> **NAME/ ADDRESS/ PHONE** if you prefer a partial listing.]

(if yes please sign or initial here) _____ date _____

without your signature here you will not be included in the member roster

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT #: or PO BOX: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE U.S.) _____

TELEPHONE: Home (_____) _____ : Business (_____) _____

FAX (_____) _____

Please indicate any name or mailing address changes

NAME BADGE ORDER FORM: (OPTIONAL)

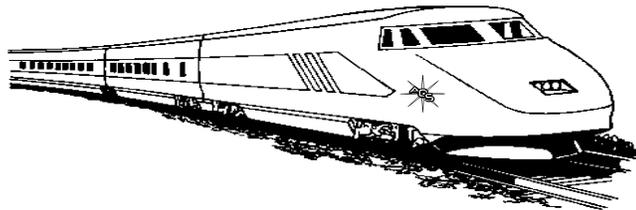
Number of badges ordered _____
(\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

The Opal Express

AMERICAN
OPAL SOCIETY

Published
monthly
by the
American
Opal
Society

Volume 31, Issue 03



MARCH / APRIL GUEST SPEAKER Cliff Coan
Two talks on REAL WORLD OPAL CUTTING

President's Message from Carol Bova

The American Opal Society is blessed with a number of very dedicated and very talented members who are willing to share their time and expertise and just plain hard work. To each and every one of you, thank you! If you've been too shy to step forward before and get more involved, maybe now's the time to relax a bit, and get to know us a little better.

The programs we've just had, and the ones coming up are really great, and there are some faces we've missed seeing at meetings recently. Tucson, Quartzite and the flu have kept some of our members away, and we know everybody is busier than they want to be!!

So make a note on your calendar now, and come on out to the March meeting. We will have an update for you on the Workshop status at the March meeting.

I personally had a great time at the two programs Mike Kowalsky did in January and February. He certainly makes you wish you had been on his trip around Australia! The photos and slides were wonderful, and I have a new appreciation of Coober Pedy after seeing Mike's view of it. Thank you, Mr. Vice President!

The American Opal Society will have information and membership forms at the Victorville club's Stoddard Wells Tailgate event this month. If you're going, be sure to stop by and say hello to the AOS members who will be there. If you'd like to help with the AOS table, give anyone on the Board of Directors a call! Don't forget, from the L.A. area, take the 15 north halfway to Barstow, and take the SECOND Stoddard Wells (Bear Mountain) exit, and head east. The paved road turns into a dirt one, and just keep on going until you see the crowd of RV's, trucks and cars on the right. March 19, 20, 21

Hope to see you at the March meeting, and at Stoddard Wells too!

Carol

Professional opal cutter, Cliff Coan, will be our guest speaker for March and April. Cliff has been cutting opal seriously for 26 years. He was an active member of the AOS in the early years of the club (1973-75) and again in the late 1980's. His background includes 7 years of cutting calibrated opals for manufacturing jewelers in Los Angeles and southern California. And he continues to cut opal professionally today. He has given many talks on opal cutting and **Cliff promises his presentations will be REAL WORLD cutting lessons—no BS!** Cliff indicates the first of his two talks will lay the ground work and prepare members for the second talk which will be almost entirely devoted to particular cutting techniques as they apply to the many varieties of opal found the world over. You won't want to miss these fine talks, folks! ✨



Work Shop Information...

The Opal Society workshop is located in a light industrial complex in Fullerton. The address is Unit #9, 651 N. State College Blvd.

Directions: exit the 91 Fwy onto State College Blvd. and go north. Proceed through the intersection of Orangethorpe continuing a short distance further on State College. Go over the railroad tracks and turn left into the complex on the west side of the street. If you go over the second RR crossing turn around. Proceed behind the front row of businesses and make your first right. Then follow the road around to the left. The workshop has a large "9" over the door.

Only AOS members may use the equipment and workshop. You will be required to sign a release form as well.

Workshop Schedule on Page 5 shows dates/times and appointment instructions. ✨

DATES TO REMEMBER

General Mtg
March 11 7PM

Directors Mtg
March 8 7PM

Annual Opal & Gem
Show
November 6 & 7

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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CHATOYANT OPAL

Abstract by Barr L. Doty (BLD), ISA, GG

Cat's-eye opal from Tanzania. Gems & Gemology, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 138-140.

Associates of Hussain Rezayee, an independent Los Angeles gem dealer, have been mining a rare variety of opal rough in Tanzania since 1995. These phenomenal opals are obtained from weathered nodules found in a field near Kasula. However, a recent report states that the easily worked surface deposits are now nearly depleted. To date, about 30,000 carats have been fashioned into cabochons. This represents approximately 1% of the total material collected.

Mr. Rezayee sorts the stones into 18 color categories - hues of yellow, orange, and brown. He recently presented several parcels of cat's-eye opals to the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) for their review. Following is a brief description of GIA's observations (additional comments by BLD):

- Bodycolor evenly distributed throughout the stones.
- Well-defined cat's-eyes. (BLD): Chatoyancy (cat's-eyes) and asterism (stars) are rare phenomena in opal.
- Translucent to semi-translucent in appearance.
- DR (doubly refractive). (BLD): The optic character of opal (species), other than found in the rare, phenomenal varieties, is SR (singly refractive).
- RI (refractive index) '1.44 (spot reading). (BLD): 1.45 is most common for opal - but
- may range from 1.37 to 2.23.
- SG (specific gravity) = 2.03 to 2.11. (BLD): 2.15 is most common for opal - but may range from 1.25 to 2.23.

Microscopic examination of five test stones, selected as representative of the range of colors, revealed the following:

- Yellow stone: Red-brown staining along fracture lines - resembling dendrites.
- Red-brown needle-like and brown breadcrumb-like inclusions.
- Patches of "clouds", sometimes elongated transverse to the chatoyant band.
- Distinct acicular (pointed needle) inclusions - parallel to the overall mass of much finer needles that cause the chatoyancy.
- Iron-stained crazing - indicative that the crazing existed prior to cutting. This suggests the opals were relatively stable at the time they were mined.

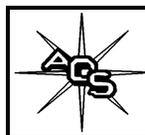
Silicon dioxide was the major element identified in these stones when they were tested for chemical composition. This is, of course, classificational for opal. Additional testing disclosed trace amounts of iron, calcium, zinc, and manganese to be present as well. ✿



Name Badges...

Price per badge is \$5 which includes the badge itself and engraving of up to two lines of text: one line for your first and last name and, if you wish, a second line for nickname or if applicable, your opal related business name. These engraving options give members flexibility to include many types of identification.

Please allow 3 to 4 weeks for completion of engraving. ✿



PLEASE NOTE!!! The American Opal Society assumes no responsibility for injury or damage due to accidents or carelessness. Members and guests assume all risks during club activities.

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E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com
(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

#1188 Jacqui Blovett
 #1190 Margaret Kovacs &
 #1191 Steve Koncz
 #1189 Ruth M. Madsen
 #1187 Leigh R. Miller



Membership Roster Changes/Additions

New Listing – Jacqui Blovett	P.O. Box 186, Cabazon, CA 92230-0186	(909) 849-4112	Member # 1188	Dues Expire 2000/02
New Listing – Margaret Kovacs & Steve Koncz	2 Tanawha Tourist Drive, Tanawha, QLD 4556, Australia	61-75-445-5066	Member # 1190/91	Dues Expire 2000-02
New Listing – Leigh Miller	1856 Bougainvillea Dr., Minden, NV 89423	(775) 783-9434	Member # 1187	Dues Expire 2000-02
Changes – Harold Andersen	13721 El Dorado Dr. #20-B		Member # 0616	Dues Expire 2000-01
Changes – Dion P. Devaris		(301) 460-1163	Member # 1013	Dues Expire 2000-01
Changes – Clare J Gagnon	13383 El Dorado Dr. #202-C, Seal Beach, CA 90740-3524	(562) 594-3928	Member # 1186	Dues Expire n/a LIFE
Changes – Corey Kuepper		email rockhwnd@aol.com	Member # 1027	Dues Expire 2000-01
Changes – James E Wilburn	6351 Piney River Rd., Dickson, TN 37055	(615) 729-3740	Member # 1088	Dues Expire 2000-01

ITEMIZATION

ITEM: The **Northwest Opal Association**, based in Washington, celebrates their 20th anniversary in March of 1999. Congratulations to our fellow opalholics up north!

ITEM: Two donations for the AOS Opal Show were overlooked. One item was Australian opal postage stamps donated by Cathy Gaber: the board of directors is still working to resolve this. The other was a piece of Mintabie crystal blue-base rough, 4.2 grams provided by Broken Wagon Ranch Crafts, proprietor Alfred A Hagedorn. Thank you both for the donations and your patience.

ITEM: Desert Travelers Take Note

(A condensed article by *Diana Marcum*, of the Los Angeles Times, and published on December 27th, 1998)

Many mom and pop gasoline stations, unable to afford federal safety standards on underground storage tanks that went into effect last week, have stopped pumping gas. That's not a big problem in urban areas where another station is often around the corner. But in Southern California's desert regions, the new longer distances between gas stops are stranding motorists on empty.

For example, there is no fuel service for the 100 miles on Interstate 10 between Indio and Blythe. Another stretch is 70 miles between Brawley and Indio. These are only two examples of many areas that now have gas stations that can only offer snacks because they can't afford the cost of upgrading old or installing new tanks at a cost of \$123,000 or more.

CHP's officer Webb offers the following advice. "Don't let the fuel gauge get down to a quarter of a tank. Fill up completely before driving through remote areas. Don't rely on the next little town because you may be out of luck."

(by verne Cliffe – The Rockhounder 2/99)

...in Southern California's desert regions, the new longer distances between gas stops are stranding motorists on empty.



RESURFACING DIAMOND BELTS

By Steve Newstrom <vsmithy@mci2000.com>

I am wondering if there are any adventurous souls out there who have been wondering what to do with perfectly good used diamond sanding belts with the diamond abrasives worn off. I hate throwing anything away so I have tried to fix these belts with epoxy and diamond powder.

MATERIALS

The following discussion is for a 6"x1-1/2" diamond sanding belt. The first thing you need is a used belt in relatively good physical condition - no holes or delaminations. I have been using Raytech True Circle Bands (TC's) because they are smooth, have relatively long life and are inexpensive. And they are easy to resurface.

The second thing you need is a good epoxy. I have been using Hughes Associates Epoxy 220. It seems to hold up well under use and securely bonds the diamonds to the belt.

The third thing is a used diamond grinding wheel, to place the belt on, as a jig, when resurfacing.

PROCEDURES

I mix about a teaspoon to a teaspoon and one half of the epoxy together in a small container. I then mix in 5 carats, of the same diamond powder grit that was on the belt originally, with the epoxy in the small container. Mix it in good. You have plenty of time because this epoxy takes about 1 hour to set up.

I place the used belt on the used diamond wheel. Secondly, place the diamond wheel on a dowel over two piles of books so the wheel will turn freely and nothing will touch the surface of the belt. Begin applying the epoxy diamond mixture on the belt with a screwdriver tip, popsicle stick or

(Continued on page 5)

Resurfacing Belts (cont.)

(Continued from page 4)

maybe a stiff flux brush (haven't tried the flux brush but it sounds like it should work). Apply it as uniformly as possible over the belt...it doesn't seem like it goes on very well, but after a while the epoxy begins to flow over the belt and it smoothes out with time. That is also why you need to have the wheel over the dowel...to turn the wheel every couple of minutes to keep the epoxy from dripping down and forming thick spots. Keep turning that wheel. The epoxy box says if you have a heat lamp on it, it should only take 30 minutes to harden but I don't have a heat lamp and have not tried that.

READY TO USE

I usually let the belts cure for a couple of days before putting them on the grinder. The resurfaced belts with 5 carats of diamond powder on them seem to last longer and cut faster than the original TC's. The only downside here is that they aren't as smooth as the original belts and now it seems we have exceeded the life of the belting material in the belts and they eventually will come apart.

Be sure to use eye protection!!

Has anyone else tried this and had luck with a different technique, using different epoxy, different types of belts, or different amounts of abrasives? Has anyone had any bad experiences when trying to resurface belts? Thanks in advance for any discussion on belt resurfacing. By the way Kingsley North has been my source for the diamond abrasives (their prices for diamond abrasives are very competitive) as well as the epoxy 220. ☼



LAMBINA OR BUST

By Steve Newstrom

High temperatures, lack of water, lack of fuel and no electricity supply have all but deserted Lambina during the Australian summer of 1998/1999 (December through March). Lambina is a wild west mining camp in every sense of the word (except it's in Australia). But the seeds of civilization have been planted here. Plumbing is being laid for a central water system. Personal electrical generators have to be turned off by 10:00 p.m. for general peace and quiet. A township plan has been organized with areas designated for residential districts and areas designated for business districts.

A lot of opal has come out of Lambina this year with several fortunes being made by lucky miners. It has been said that a lot of this opal has come out of shallow open cuts between ten and fifteen feet deep.

A quote often heard in opal fields is "the only person to know how much opal I've found, besides me, is God, and He's not talking."

Mining should resume, full force, with the return of cool weather in March of 1999. ☼

(from The Village Smithy Opal Newsletter, Vol.. II Winter 1999)

Workshop schedule

Be sure to check here for workshop schedule updates. The dates listed below are those available to the AOS in our time share agreement with the Searchers. The shop is presently being opened to members on Wednesday nights but... **Please continue to contact Stan McCall by calling him at Lapidary Intl. (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session.**

March 1999

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

WORKSHOP RULES

These rules are effective October 1, 1997. Please see newsletter for monthly shop schedule.

- 1) Shop may only be used by AOS members.
- 2) Shop users must sign liability waiver.
- 3) Shop users must sign in. Shop supervisor will maintain sign-in list and collect usage fees.
- 4) Shop usage will be in sessions on scheduled days as noted below:
 - Session #1 10AM - 2PM
 - Session #2 2PM - 6PM
 - Session #3 6PM - 9PM
- 5) Shop usage fees: effective immediately...
SHOP USAGE FEE IS \$3 PER SESSION.
- 6) To assist us in scheduling, shop sessions need to be reserved in advance. Please contact Stan McCall or any member of the board of directors to reserve shop time.

What's

Calendar of Upcoming Events Dates and Locations of Shows

Mar 6 10AM-6PM Mar 7 10AM-5PM Monrovia Rockhounds Masonic Temple 204 W. Foothill Blvd. Monrovia, CA
Mar 6 – 7 9AM-5PM Ventura Gem & Min Soc.
Mar 13 10AM-6PM Mar 14 10AM-5PM Pasadena Lapidary Soc. San Marino Masonic Temple, 3130
Mar 20 10AM-6PM Mar 21 10AM-5PM Santa Clara Valley G&M Soc. Santa Clara Co. Fairgrounds. 344 Tully Rd., San Jose, CA
Mar 27 10AM-6PM Mar 28 10AM-5PM San Diego Min & Gem Soc. Al Bahr Shrine 5440 Kearny Mesa, San Diego, CA
Mar 27 10AM-6PM Mar 28 10AM-5PM South Bay Lapidary & Min Soc. Torrance Rec. Cntr. 3341
Mar 27 10AM-6PM Mar 28 10AM-5PM North Orange County Gem & Min La Habra Club House, 200 W. Greenwood, La Habra, CA
Mar 27 9AM-6PM Mar 28 9AM-4PM Mojave Min Society Boron High School Multipurpose Rm,
April 10 10AM-5PM April 11 10AM-4PM Paradise Gem & Mineral Club Veterans Memorial Hall, Elliott
April 16 12PM-6PM April 17 10AM-6PM April 18 10AM-4:30PM Las Vegas Gem Club, Henderson
April 24-25 9AM-5PM Antelope Valley & Palmdale Gem & Min Clubs Antelope Valley Fairgrounds, Challenger Memorial Hall, Lancaster, CA

The McCondra Report

by Barbara McCondra

A Character Profile

Gelignite Jack

I arrived in Andamooka to hear a sad tale, a fantastic tale of a man by the name of Gelignite Jack who had just passed away quietly and quickly, a gentle way to go for a man who played with explosives. Jack had a habit, a few bad habits actually but the one that made him a legend in Andamooka was his predilection to playing with gelignite.

He was arrested for something or other and was flown out by plane to jail but the plane returned quickly because he had sticks of jelly (dynamite!) in his pocket.

Sunday morning in Andamooka is sleepy indeed and nothing is open til ten. However, The Billabong Restaurant in the Andamooka Opal Hotel offered us free cuppa when we accidentally wandered in an open door that should have been locked. A man called Stefan sat down for a cuppa too. The barman cleaning up from the night before had told me to help myself to a free cup of coffee. (Usually you had to pay but there were no waitresses about) I was laughingly bragging about this free cuppa to Stefan until I found out that HE was the OWNER and the cat was out of the bag about my free cuppa. It was Stefan who told me of Gelignite Jack. It turns out Stefan is a legend in his own right, as he was the miner that found the opalized plesiosaur skeleton and sold it to the Adelaide Museum. When I left the hotel he called out, "Barbara, anytime you come in you can have a free cup of coffee." And he bellowed out with his big bass laughter. ☼



DULL SLAB SAW BLADE?

By Dick Rathjen

After years of dealing with apparently inferior blades in my slab saw, I found out that it was not the fault of the blade at all. Years ago when we bought the slab saw, it was set up to run the blade at about 1175 rpm. It turns out that this was much too slow for the newer blades. I replaced the drive pulleys so that the blade is now turning at 3450 rpm. The saw now cuts through even the toughest agate with no trouble at all. If you have been having trouble keeping your slab saw blade cutting properly, check the speed of the blade and run it according to the manufacturer's recommendations. It makes a big difference. ☼

(from Stoney Statements 7/94 via Rockhound Notes 6/98)



What is Quicksand?

Quicksand is sand saturated with water, plus having pressure of water exerted from below. This pressure tends to suspend the grains of sand, making them practically frictionless; therefore they will not support weight. However, objects "float" in quicksand with one seventh more buoyancy than they do in plain water, so if you're caught in the stuff, lie on your back and carefully swim out. ☼

(from The Calgary Lap. Journal 3/98 via Rockhound Notes 6/98)

Guard with jealous attention the public liberty.
Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel.
-Patrick

HELP WANTED

PLEASE READ – YOUR CLUB NEEDS YOU

The positions listed below are presently open and we are seeking volunteers to fill them. Please see what you can do for your club!

1) PROGRAM CHAIR

-this position involves making contact with and scheduling guest speakers and preparing a short article for the newsletter describing upcoming events.

2) MEMBERSHIP BADGE COORDINATOR

-this position involves taking blank badges to the engraver and mailing finished badges when ready.

3) REFRESHMENTS CHAIR

-arrange for or bring refreshments to monthly meetings. Costs are reimbursed by the club.

4) DATABASE MANAGER (filled – Thank You Frann!)

5) DOOR PRIZE CHAIR

-this is a new position and will involve arranging for door prizes donated by members which may be raffled or given away to those in attendance at monthly meetings.

6) WOODWORKER / CARPENTER

-this position will involve construction of new show cases for club opal displays to be shown at a variety of locations primarily other club shows.

7) Safety Chair

-this position involves preparing a short newsletter article regarding safe practices as a club member during workshop activities, field trips, club meetings etc.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE, if you are skilled in any of the above we NEED your help. If you are not skilled and have a big heart – volunteer anyway, we'll figure something out! A number of people have been doing significantly more than their fair share of the work to the benefit of all members of the club. Let's see if we can even that burden out a bit.

TO VOLUNTEER: Please contact any board member at meetings or by phone, or email.



“Diamond Jubilee of Gems”
CFMS 60th Annual  Show & Convention
June 18, 19, 20, 1999

Do you have any plans for the middle of June in 1999? A suggestion and an invitation to the 60th Annual Show and Convention of the California Federation of Mineralogical Societies is tendered by the hosts, the Mother Lode Mineral Society.

FOR APPLICATIONS FOR ADVANCED REGISTRATION FORM REGARDING
RV CAMPING, ACCOMMODATIONS, MAPS, BANQUET AND EDITORS' BREAKFAST
& MEETING: CONTACT YOUR FEDERATION DIRECTOR or
Bill Meadows, 308 San Juan Dr., Modesto, CA 95354 (209) 848-2709

BLM TALK – Holtville (cont. from Page 1)

affected agencies, in this case, BLM, the Parks, and the Military, had to adjust their individual resource management plans and send them back "upstairs" for a "report card".

New BLM wilderness areas were put in place by the U.S. Congress via the 1994 Desert Protection Act. Note: BLM did not establish these wilderness areas, they just have all the joy of enforcing and putting signs around them! Dick admitted **there was no rhyme or reason for the pattern of wilderness restrictions in southern California they were not based on habitat!** Sadly, these areas and their usage can only be modified by Congress. California public lands are 25% parks, 25% wilderness, 50% still open.

The NECO (Northeast Colorado Desert) plan is for the region north of Yuma, south of Needles, west of Blythe and east of Desert Center. [The NEMO plan covers the Mojave Desert.] The NECO plan took four years to create, from 1994 to 1998, was a BLM staff-developed concept, and was formed by amending 1980 plan. It must provide for recovery of 56 different plant and animal species on the Endangered Species List, not just the desert tortoise. But let's look at the tortoise as an example.

Tortoise facts: The tortoise population was "counted" in the 1970s. Lines were drawn at wide intervals across county maps, biologists walked those lines, counting actual tortoises, burrows, scat, and estimated tortoise numbers. Then they used statistics to interpolate data between those lines. Estimates show 70% to 80% of those tortoises gone in the last 10 years. Some died from shell necrosis, cause unknown. Tortoise shells now contain heavy metals; how they got there is unknown. Maybe nonnative wild mustard [plants] takes up these toxins and tortoises eat it. Only the southern tortoise population is affected; the northern population is still OK. Ravens are known to prey on baby tortoises; as many as 200 were found at the base of a raven nest. To help allow the tortoise population to recover, road closures are mentioned. [Hmm. We have old, bad data - consider one tortoise per acre without laughing, no consideration of effects of 10-year drought on weakening tortoise resistance to disease, and new guesstimates.]

Road facts: Before 1994, BLM did not have an inventory of all roads on public lands. "Roads" get continuous travel, are not necessarily graded, and a few washes or wash segments are considered to be roads. BLM has now driven them all with a GPS recorder. Some tortoises are killed in the NEMO region along paved roads; few have been found in the NECO region. No tortoise has ever been found dead on an unpaved road. No study of the effects of vehicles or their pollution on tortoises (or anything else in the region) has ever been done. Dick expected that no additional roads would be closed in the NECO area and that there should be at least one route remaining into each favorite collecting area.

Some closures, posting lower speed limits, perhaps requiring special use permits, patrolling roads, and public education.

Milestones: Plan concept released June 1998. Complete administrative draft due April 1999. Release of draft plan and EIS for 90-day public review in June 1999. Public meetings set for El Centro, Blythe, Palm Springs, Riverside, El Cajon, San Diego. Complete plan due April 2000.

Opinion: Close no road before its time! Do scientific studies first! - Anne Schafer (from Pegmatite 1/99 via Rockhound Notes 2/99)

Swap Meet Opal Question

By Russ Madsen

Following is an excerpt from email received from an inquisitive friend regarding an opal ring offered for sale at a swap meet last winter. He posed some good questions.

Hi Russ...

I wanted your opinion on some opals I saw at a swap meet. It was a ring with 4-5 oval milky white stones each about the size of a Tic Tac candy. They had a very good blue color "flash" for opals and the lady said it was an antique and the stones were probably from the Victorian era? She was asking \$285.00 What would be a reasonable price and do you have access to this stuff at a better price if I want to get some as gifts for Christmas??

The outside of the stones appeared unpolished or a little rough. Should I be wary of counterfeit or fake opals?

I checked stores and Opals are not common these days. Except I see some very blue "thin" opals mounted or molded to make it thicker. These look more like blue died shell material more than the typical opals. Personally, I don't care for them.

That ring you saw may have been a "keeper". No telling without seeing it though and there are several considerations as to value.

The **background color of the stone** as it "faces" is considered very important. This means the color of the body of the stone, irrespective of color play, when the stone is viewed "face-on". Black is most rare and best sets off the color play. Therefore black stones are most valuable, everything else being equal (which is never the case). Water clear stones are next most valuable as the color play seems to magically float within or upon the opal. Lastly are stones which grade from clear into translucent, milky, white, or gray.

Next consideration is the **intensity of the color play**. This is usually measured in some sense against "test" stones and is sometimes judged on a scale of one to five, with five being "mirror" bright where the color play is so intense nearly all the light striking the stone is returned to the viewer's eyes. Top intensity is exceedingly rare. I have 5 stones in my collection which rate above a four. However these are faulted for a variety of other reasons.

Finally, the colors of the color play are accounted. If only one or two colors are seen (you talked about seeing only blue for example) the value is reduced (all things being equal). If 5 or more colors are seen the value is raised significantly. If a bright RED color play is seen this is a top stone.

A black opal showing "**red on black**" with a deep charcoal black body color and high level of brightness (4+) is THE prize of the opal world and will sell on the opal fields today for prices reaching \$20,000 PER CARAT! A white opal [almost the only stones you will see in "normal" jewelry stores etc] displaying only a single color and modest brightness will be valued as low as \$10 per carat, and perhaps as high as \$100 per carat.

As for where to shop...typically, NOT jewelry stores. Either they don't care for opal in which case all you can get will be average stones or they love opal and they will have nice stones but prices will be quite high.

In my opinion, THE place to buy opal is the American Opal Society **Opal & Gem Show**, traditionally the first weekend in November. Here is a room full of opal and dealers, buyers are well served because one can go from one dealer to another and bargain for comparable stones. The choices for the opal lover include many examples of finished jewelry and loose cut stones as well as beautiful uncut "rough" opal.

Also there is a consideration of natural opal versus **assembled stones called doublets or triplets**. These are produced when a thin slice of genuine opal is glued with epoxy between or on top of supporting materials (frequently quartz for a top cover and black basalt for a backing). While far less expensive than solid opals they can be dramatic in appearance but have such a small amount of opal you are really paying mostly for the labor of assembly. Here opals of good brightness, showing multicolor with red, can be had for peanuts compared to solid opal of equal qualities.

Two caveats: while they are made with care and strong epoxies, no glue is timeless and after some years such stones may experience yellowing of the glue or separation of the "sandwich". On the plus side, a quartz cap is much more resistant to wear and tear than natural opal as opal ranges from hardness 5.5 to 6.5 while quartz is a solid 7. The hardness scale is nearly logarithmic by the way, with a quartz cap at 7 being in effect 10 times as hard as a natural opal at 6.

To address your questions directly with the above background in mind...

>> lady said it was an antique and the stones were probably from the Victorian era? She was asking \$285.00 What would be a reasonable price and do you have access to this stuff at a better price if I want to get some as gifts for Christmas??

The outside of the stones appeared unpolished or a little rough. Should I be wary of counterfeit or fake opals? <<

The price of opal varies so much that it's impossible to say whether the price was good bad or indifferent. A very UNreliable rule of thumb is that gold is usually used to set the more valuable opals, silver for middle grade but nice stones, and manufactured settings for "dime store" opals where the stones are cut to calibrated sizes and slammed into uniform settings by the hundreds or thousands. It is this type of opal jewelry one usually finds at jewelry stores who don't handle opal as a specialty. Nothing wrong with it, just that it's "run of the mill" ho-hum stuff. When you've seen a couple stones from the collection of a top opalholer/dealer such as David Burton at Lapidary International you'll immediately know the difference.

Christmas gifts: if you can wait until January to do some buying, one of the world's largest gem & mineral shows takes place in Quartzite, AZ and Tucson, AZ. Dealers selling every type of gem and rock come from all over the world to sell. The show has several venues and runs from mid January to mid February.

If the stones appeared unpolished in the ring you saw, it's likely they were worn and/or scratched. I have been quite

(Continued on page 9)

A black opal showing "red on black" with a deep... black body color and high level of brightness...is THE prize of the opal world

Swap Meet Opal (cont.)

(Continued from page 8)

successful in repolishing such stones still in their settings. I cannot say it is always possible, some are too small or thin: i.e. not enough material left to be able to remove a thin layer during polishing.

Consideration of size. If 4 - 5 stones were in the ring they must have been small, and with respect to opal valuation, size matters. Taking all things again to be equal a bigger opal is more valuable.

If you are interested in greatest flexibility in your opal gifts, may I suggest buying loose stones you then take to a jewelry store and commission custom settings. Many jewelers and jewelry stores will do this. One caveat: it is important to employ proper methods to set opals.

As far as **fake opals** go...yes there are some out there. With one exception they look fake too. There's a product called Gilson synthetic opal. It's described specifically as synthetic because it purports to contain the same constituents as natural opal but is man made. It can range from very fake looking to so natural as to be almost undetectable. Usually very bright color play is seen. The only way to deal with this is to ask the seller if the opal is genuine and try to judge their honesty in answering. This is a fine example of the value of having a trusted relationship with a dealer when buying opal.

A final note about price – **appeal factor**. Because opal is so unusual and varied there are no set prices except for the lowest end of the scale. Once you depart from the "commercial" grade stones and move into gemmy ones the appeal of a particular opal weighs more heavily than almost any other consideration. Note this goes two ways. If it appeals to you as BUYER you will be willing to buy it. If it appeals to the SELLER you may find you have to pay extra to "bribe" them into parting with their pet beauty. Be aware that all opal sellers know this and are watching to see if you are attracted to a particular stone. If you feign only moderate interest you may be able to get a better price. Furthermore, always bargain. Many dealers use what is called keystone pricing. This means the price has been set to "retail", a figure which may be as much as 2 to 3 times more than they are willing to take if you dicker. This is true on all gems including opal.

Your best weapon as a buyer is knowledge. Knowledge of the local market as well as the above other factors. It is known for instance that in some markets, blue color play might as well be a paperweight and green is favored. Likewise, I'm a dead ringer for a sucker because I love purple color play. Most dealers consider it to be quite low in value. To this day, I haven't figured out how to get them to give it to me. They see that look in my eye and I'm a goner. They know instantly I am a "very" willing buyer.

I highly recommend doing some homework and comparison shopping. Be careful to assess your personal preferences and decide what type of opal APPEALS to you. This, in the end, is the most important consideration of all. ✿

Once you depart from the "commercial" grade stones...the appeal of a particular opal weighs more heavily than almost any other consideration

Gold Bugs?

Can bacteria grow gold nuggets?

Apparently they can – according to some scientists. For decades scientists have wrestled with the puzzle of how placer gold occurs. It is the flakes and nuggets that lie mixed with river sand and gravel in gold-rich country.

According to USGE research chemist John Watterson, the *Bacillus cereus* actually crystallizes gold out of the surrounding water. It surrounds itself with an 8 or 12-sided gold indefinitely-long after the original bacteria are dead. The scientist believes these "bugnuggets" form in the river gravel rather than washing down from solid deposits. Placer gold crystals have flat unscratched crystal places that support this theory. Water transport would result in crystal rounding and scratching.

Watterson believes acid generated by nature through fungi and microorganisms release soil minerals, including gold, into the water. Then, as the water cascades down rivers and streams, bacteria accumulate it. *Bacillus cereus* may also use the gold as a "time capsule" to survive over long periods of time. ✿

(condensed from Drywasher's Gazette via The Conglomerate 1/99)

Did You Know?

Surprisingly enough, oysters do not hold an exclusive "patent" on the process of making pearls. Even coconuts make them!

Although pearls which grow in coconuts are much rarer than those from oysters, they are composed of the same kind of material and are also quite valuable. In oysters, of course, a pearl is formed when a grain of sand or other foreign matter works its way into the mantle inside the shell and provides stimulus for the formation of a lustrous gem. The pearl is made of the same material as the shell.

The coconut pearl is grown in the interior of the coco palm fruit, apparently as a result of an abnormality of the nut itself in that it has no pores in the shell. Normally there are three of these pores, though only one is open.

When an unusual coconut such as this occurs, the embryo inside, being unable to escape, may instead develop into a pearl in much the same way that conventional pearls form. These abnormal coconuts occur rarely-so seldom, in fact, that formerly all poreless or "blind" coconuts are said to have been appropriated by the rulers in the coconut growing regions as being theirs by royal right. They still bring high prices in the orient.

One active coconut and copra trader in the South Pacific Islands reported he had come into possession of only four or five coconut pearls in 15 years. The unusual formations are very beautiful, and this, combined with their rarity, cause them to be held in high esteem. ✿

(from The Cowtown Cutter 10/98 via The Conglomerate 1/99)



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