

The Opal Express

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



Member

Member



Volume #31 Issue #10 October 1999

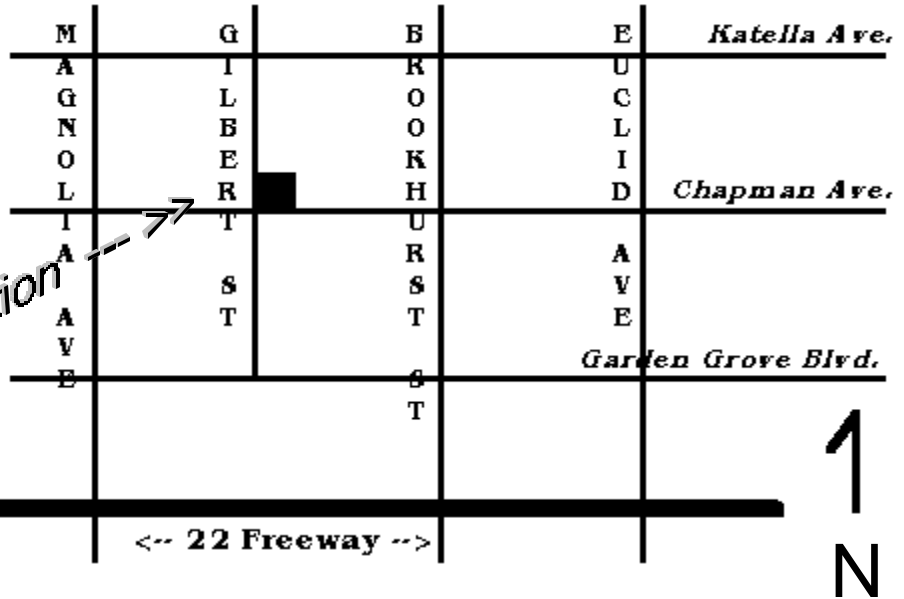


TO:

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



Carol Bova	President	(818) 845-8610	email bova@bovagems.com
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Jim Pisani	Secretary	(562) 948-6374	email vulajim@gte.net
Russ Madsen	Editor	(562) 425-9788	email 76550.1366@compuserve.com

AUSTRALIAN OPAL AT ITS BEST

Part 5

by Barb Whyre

"Empress of Australia" was mined in 1915 from the same patch on Phone Line as "Pride of Australia" by Urwin and Brown. First known as "Kaleidoscope Queen," then "Tartan Queen," this stone measured 3 x 2-3/4 x 2-1/4 inches in the rough. She was shaped out and polished to reveal the glowing patches of red to best advantage, probably weighing 500 carats. Later down at the pub, this, the most colorful black opal from the claim, slipped through the fingers of a local admirer, and fell to the floor, breaking into two pieces.

Two almost matching stones were cut out of one piece, each measuring 2 inches long and weighing 20 carats. Later, Ernie Sherman's daughter designed a beautiful pendant for one. The other piece of "Empress," measuring 1-3/4 x 1-1/2 inches and weighing 50-60 carats, was mounted in a gleaming necklet of brilliants.

Each *Opal Express* presents an account of discovery as researched by Barbara Moritz, Secretary of the Ridge Historical Society in her quest to unravel the history of the black opal fields in New South Wales, Australia. Should you have constructive information, please email: barbeemitz@yahoo.com or write to Box 1, L/Ridge 2834 Australia. ✉

Notes from Lightning Ridge (Part 1)

Greetings all:

Our winter is nearly over now with warm days followed by rain fronts sweeping in from the Bight about once a week. Last night was a doozy and blew down my TV antenna again. It gets me nervous sometimes having grown up in Oklahoma. It is generally not well known, but we do get tornadoes here.

Now for the eternal subject: COOL ROCKS

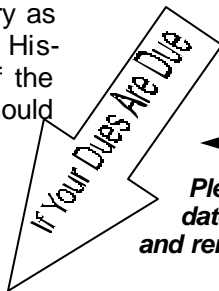
We mine opal by sinking a shaft by 1 meter diameter. Calweld bucket drill up to 70' deep. The presence or lack of an opal level or maybe also some potch or if very lucky some actual colour will have been previously determined by 9" drill. After we drill, we drive horizontally on a grid pattern. IF we find a colour slide, sometimes we chase it, and sometimes we keep driving on the grid.

Mining machinery is very sophisticated now days, and LOTS of dirt can be shifted for a very low price.

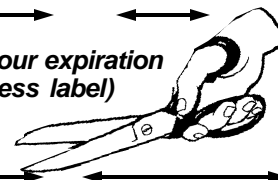
All this talk has given me an itch to go knock down the face of my drive where there is lots of seam potch, and a little colour?

Like to see it? E-mail me and I will send a small jpeg.

Cheers!



Please help us by watching your expiration date (appearing on your address label) and renewing promptly. Thanks!



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)

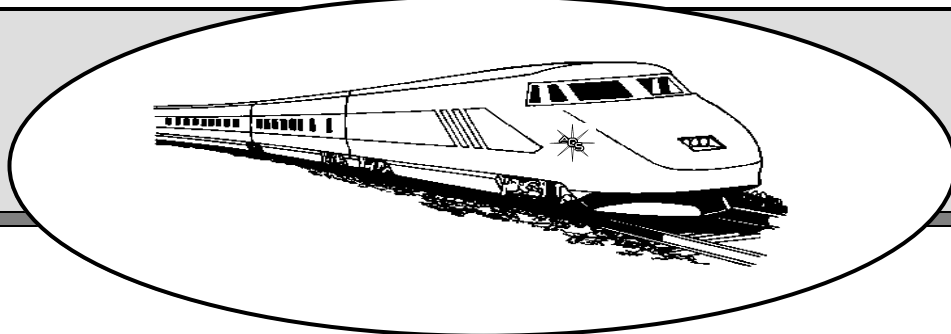
Number of badges ordered _____
(\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

The Opal Express

OCTOBER 2002

Published
monthly
by the
American
Opal
Society

Volume 31, Issue 10



October General Meeting
Clare Gagnon - Guest Speaker

President's Message from Carol Bova

October is a month of excitement! With one of October's birthstones being opal, how could it be otherwise!

We are only days away from our annual **Opal and Gem Show**. It was really great to have so many people sign up to help at the show at last month's meeting. We still have room for more help though, so please call or send us a note or an email if you'd like to participate. Please remind your friends and fellow members of other clubs of our show dates so they can mark their calendars. (**Saturday and Sunday, November 6 & 7!**)

By the time you read this, the American Opal Society will have presented its first program to the Gem and Mineral Council of the Los Angeles Natural History Museum! **Jay Carey** and **Barbara McCondra** were the speakers with slides of their own and slides shared by other Opal Society members. A very exciting event for the AOS.

The AOS website is stretching out to connect us with other opal lovers who are at great distances. You can learn about the American Opal Society, ask for information or sign up as a member, put in a change of address, or browse through the Opal Express archives. If you are online, but haven't gotten there yet, the address is:

<http://www.opalsociety.org>

We will have an exciting program at our October meeting this month too! Our speaker will be **Clare Gagnon**, well known lapidary instructor, faceter, volunteer at the V.A. Hospital, talented jewelry maker, and very special member of the Opal Society. Clare is going to share slides of his recent trip to one of Brazil's most famous gem areas.. Minas Gieras.

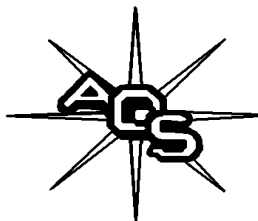
I hope you'll join us at the meeting!
Carol

Mark you calendars

Thursday Oct 14th 7PM

Guest Speaker Clare Gagnon

You won't want to miss Clare Gagnon's presentation and slides from his recent trip to the renowned **Minas Gieras** gem fields of Brazil.



DATES TO REMEMBER

General Meeting
Thurs Oct 14 - 7PM

Director's Mtg
Mon Oct 11 - 7PM
(at the workshop)

Opal & Gem Show
Nov 6th & 7th
Quality Hotel, Anaheim

Work Shop Information...

The NEW LOCATION for the Opal Society workshop is now available! It is the lapidary classroom at Walker Jr High School, 8132 Walker St., La Palma, CA 90623

Directions: (Choice of 3 Freeway approaches)

[1] Exit the 605 at Carson St and proceed east, or
[2] exit the 5 or 91 Fwy at Valley View and proceed south, or

[3] exit the 22/405 Freeways at Valley View and proceed north.

Walker Jr HS is on Walker St north of Lincoln Ave. It is on the east side of Walker between Crescent Ave. and La Palma Ave. Drive to the far back of the school to the Lapidary Arts classroom.

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. ☼

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My brother and I worked hard during the day and really looked forward to the shower or bath in the evening. You mean you have a choice between a shower and a bath? Yes.

The Black Rock has a lot of artesian springs. There is one about six miles down the road right across from Ray's place by the old Wheeler Ranch. Mr. Wheeler had a ranch here in the 30's and tried to make a go of it, but the desert won out. I think he lasted until the early 50's.

Artesian is an Indian word meaning "that which bubbles out of the ground." Most artesian springs are around 90 degrees, which is quite comfortable to bathe in. The other one is about 25 miles up the road by the Soldier Meadows Ranch. It is actually like a swimming pool. The Wheeler Ranch has an old bath tub with a pipe fastened above it so the spring water flows into it. These are our "Desert Baths."

At Joe's we decided that we needed a shower. The water was 49 degrees. Imagine standing in 100 degree temperatures and turning on a shower that is 49 degrees. Instant shock!! Now Commando Joe, and I will call him that for this next scene, had a WW II ambulance that sat behind his shack.

"Why not make a temporary shower out of it?"

"Great idea!"

We put a 50 gallon drum on the roof and painted it black so that it would heat up the ice water before we took a shower. "Black absorbs the sun's rays." Then we put a temporary curtain by the back door where we had the shower head. It worked like a charm.

There was only one drawback. If it was a very sunny hot day, you might turn on the water and almost get scalded. The black drum worked too well! We learned we had to time when to put the water in the drum so it wouldn't get too hot. Oh my, the problems of the desert. All of these baths are in the movie that I made on the Black Rock.

In one of the scenes in the movie Joe almost steps on a rattle snake. We were getting ready to blast on that day and were walking around the area where I had my TV setup. Joe was walking back to the Jeep when he almost stepped on him. Then he pulled out his rifle with the broken stock, and shot the snake. Some people would say poor snake. But on the

Black Rock you have to clear the area where you want to be of rattle snakes. They are territorial and will be there until they are removed. The nearest doctor is in Reno which is about 7 hours away. One day my brother almost stepped on one where we were mining the opal. With so few people here, you can see why there are so many of them.

In another scene in the movie, I show an old stage coach stop and a trail that they took which you can still see to this day. Later, during the 30's the Basque took it over, constructed corrals, and used it as a sheep haven. The Basque had these camps all over the Black Rock. You can always tell where their camps were. There will usually be a bunch of old wine bottles and rusty cans lying about. Also, even after 70 years, the area where the sheep left their manure will turn green with grass every spring.

THE BLACK ROCK DESERT

BEFORE IT WAS DESERT THEN AFTER

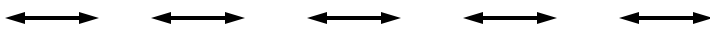
Let us all step back in time and let me give you a little history about this fascinating place. Lake Lahontan was a prehistoric lake which covered a good portion of Nevada about 11,000 years ago. It's surface measured over 8,000 square miles and extended into what is now the Black Rock Desert.

The same theory of how the Indians settled throughout the southwest holds true here in northern Nevada also. They were Asians who crossed the Bering Straight when it was frozen over during the ice age. This particular group settled on the shores of the lake in what is now known as The Black Rock Desert. In the movie that I made on the Black Rock, Ken points out one of the markings on the rock above a natural spring that was made by these early occupants some time during their stay here. This mark was chiseled into the rock by some object that was harder than the rock itself. The mark in the rock meant 'spring'. Ken also found this mark at another location where water was nearby.

The Indians hunted along the lake and also fished in it. Cut-throat trout are still plentiful in waters on the Summit Indian Reservation which is only a short way north of here.

Also, the north end of the Black Rock extends into Virgin Valley and a cave has been discovered known as "The Last Supper Cave." My guess is the reason that it was given this name has to do with the terrific quantity of bones that have been discovered there – both human and animal. It seemed to the

(Continued on page 7)

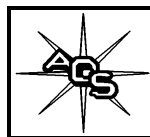


Name Badges...

We would like to extend a special thank you to the several AOS members who have waited so patiently for their badges. They will be in process soon.

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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Editor---Russ Madsen
Please address all inquiries to:
The Opal Express, P.O. Box 382, Anaheim, CA 92815-0382
E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com
(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Lora Heidrich
Dr. John J. Hiller
Richard F. Martin



ITEMIZATION

ITEM: MEMBERSHIP BADGE COORDINATOR – Jay Carey has most kindly agreed to take over processing of membership badges and he will soon have the names/addresses of those who have been so patiently waiting for their badges. Thank you Jay!!!

ITEM: Rockhound auction site online – (here's a web site alternative to eBay) <http://www.auctionwinner.com> This item was received via email August 31, 1999 and reads in part...Please let your members know about this new selling opportunity at your meetings and in your newsletters. Encourage them to register, even if they have nothing to post right now. That way, they'll be sure to get all the information on this important and exciting new website as it's announced.

It's located at <http://www.auctionwinner.com>. Take a look. I think you'll like what you see.

Sincerely, Karen Hemmerle

ITEM: Jim Pisani, AOS secretary and webmaster, writes that the new website is up and running! It is at <http://www.opalsociety.org> or <http://opalsociety.org>.

If you have web access check it out. Jim's done a terrific job for the club!

Oh and Jim, congratulations to you and Rhonda on the arrival of the new yumkin a few weeks ago!!

ITEM: Please see the item to the right which provides an overview of *Anglic Gemcutter*, a monthly magazine "Of, For & About Gemcutters Interests; may our Global Tribe prosper". (503) 632-4826 Ph/FAX/Mess. information; DISCOVER/Visa/MC accepted by telephone/FAX/letter. We are pleased to recognize *Anglic Gemcutter* as a new reciprocal newsletter.

ITEM: Cathy Gaber writes, "I recently acquired a few old copies of The Mineralogist and found this little article published exactly 50 years ago. An ad for Australian opal in the same issue offers cabochons of finest gem opal for \$4.90 to \$50.00."

The 50 year old article Cathy mentions above, "Black Opal Today," appears on Page 5 of this issue.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Club Editor/Administrator,

(extracts below initially appeared in a letter dated 9/22/97)

ANGLIC GEMCUTTER is a brand new publication fashioned in the wake of Jerry Wykoff's *American Gemcutter*; "Of, For & About Lapidary's Interests, Exclusively," for English-speaking, gem-cutting rockhounds around the globe. It is 22 pages —Black & White- of said information every month with a mere handful of advertisers, so the magazine's readership defines the mission statement, not vice versa.

Anglic Gemcutter includes a notebook page for those who collect "Lapidary Projects/Diagrams" and "Current Pricing" information; "A View from the Gemcutter's Widow", by Brenda Ford who knows "Terms"; "Tips"; "What's Happening"; "I Learned" (about gemcutting from that); Member's Classified Ads; Marketing articles; Safety articles; and will —ultimately- include International Lapidary Contests+Certification degrees which can be won by AG members, to be judged by certified, trained judges.

Everything from *American Gemcutter* and more, but bigger. We'll need all the help we can get and —unlike Jerry- I'm a club member and supporter for years, so I don't plan to operate without club's support, as if from a vacuum.

(a <snipped> invitation to share reciprocal newsletters appears here)

If you have no publication, we encourage you and your members to call the number, become readers anyway. Publications with our parallel aims are too few, too far between to ignore.

Thank You,

Rick Ford. Edit.
Anglic Gemcutter
POB 826
Beavercreek, OR 97004
(503)632—4826 Ph/FAX/Mess.

 "exactly
50 years
ago...An ad
for Australian
opal...
offers cabo-
chons of
finest gem
opal for \$4.90
to \$50.00

Safety Report

Scottish Two-Step

By Cathy Gaber

**If your shop is a tangle of cords,
And you step like the dance of the swords,
Your path should be clear,
So you can work without fear,
Making cabs that will earn you awards.**



Opal Working and Polishing

I was working with a few pieces of opal yesterday. I have one piece that's fantastic except for the sand filled pit almost in the middle of it. If I polished it down, I'd have no color left by the time I got rid of the pit. Then I hit on the best possible solution. After polishing, I'm going to drill the pit so the edges are even and set a contrasting stone in there. Since the stone is mostly blue, a faceted quartz or maybe an amethyst would look nice in there.

As for polishing, I've always used cerium oxide for opal. It polishes up very quickly.

Giovanna Fregni
kfletcher@citilink.com ✨
(from Lapidary Digest #235 10/2/99)



(The following historical item first appeared in *The Mineralogist*, October, 1949 – fifty years ago this month)

BLACK OPAL TODAY

Reports coming from Australia during the past few years, and recently, would seem to indicate that the famous black opal of Lightning Ridge, Australia will probably continue scarce, and steadily advance in price. In the early days of Lightning Ridge, in 1908 and for several years afterwards, there were usually 1,000 or more men actively engaged in winning the peerless black gem.

Today, reports indicate, that the total population of Lightning Ridge is only about 200. Of this number, not more than 40 are engaged in opal mining, and some of these are elderly men not physically able to engage in the hard work of shaft sinking. The last "rush" to Lightning Ridge was in 1935. Hence we see that very little new ground is being opened in the search for opal at Lightning Ridge. What little active work is being carried out, is usually in old ground, where drifts are run laterally from old shafts. The chief market for black opal is the United States, but very little is being imported.

With these facts in mind, we can readily account for the enormous increase in the value of black opal during the past decade. Prices will no doubt continue to advance until a fine black opal gem will hold considerable greater value than at present. Discovery of a new and spectacular field would be the only manner in which the price would be reduced. ✨

(from The Mineralogist 10/49)

(special thanks to Cathy Gaber for sending this item along -rgm)

Workshop schedule

Be sure to check here for workshop schedule updates. The dates listed below are those available to the AOS in our NEW WORKSHOP AT WALKER Jr HIGH SCHOOL. The shop can be opened to members on Monday and Wednesday nights. **Please continue to contact Stan McCall by calling him at Gems & Opals (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session.**

October 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						

= Available Workshop dates = General Meeting date

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 fees: effective immediately...
SHOP USAGE FEE IS \$3 PER SESSION.
- 5) 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.

All arrangements, have been made for the trip to Horse Canyon on Nov. 11th -13th. The owner has kindly agreed to allow the group to stay at his campground which is under construction and near Horse Canyon without cost. I believe there to be some tables and water is available, but no hook-ups. The elevation at the site is 4,800 feet and should experience cold nights and cool days at that time of year.

Owing to insurance requirements the following limitations will apply: [1] That only members of the CFMS will be allowed to go into Horse Canyon. Guests may stay in the campground area but will not be allowed into the collecting area. [2] All persons rock hounding will be equipped with and wear (safety glasses or goggles, gloves and sturdy shoes/boots) while collecting/digging. [3] There will be no fires of any kind in Horse Canyon. [4] You will be locked in Horse Canyon from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or until darkness makes the situation unsafe but 5:00 p.m. at the latest. [5] I will set boundaries on the area for collection, which will be explained to you on site. [6] You will be responsible for your own sanitation facilities while in Horse Canyon so bring such facilities as you will require, they will not be provided. The campground has some toilets but I cannot guarantee their use during our stay. [7] We will have pot lucks on Thursday, Veterans Day and Friday, Saturday will be at your option. [8] The owner and his wife will attend these pot lucks as a guest of the CFMS and will be formally thanked on our behalf. It would be fitting though not required to give the owner a small lapidary gift on behalf of your group or individual parties. He is partial to belt buckles also remember his wife. [9] There will be a per capita charge for insurance as of this date the premium for this event is \$209.00 which will be divided amongst the attendees. At this date it looks to be under \$2.00 per person who are rock hounding.

General Information: for those of you who intend to go into Horse Canyon Thursday, the 11th, Veterans Day, will meet me at 9:00 a.m. sharp at the Sand Canyon exit off ramp from the HWY. 58 . I will check you, in collect your insurance fee, verify your CFMS membership and have you sign a waiver form. I will be flying the CFMS LOGO. over my White Toyota Pickup truck. When you are checked in you will place a sticker on your vehicle windshield indicating you have been processed.

For those who will attend on Friday or Saturday I will meet you at Tanganda Road, off of Sand Canyon Road at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Where a similar processing will take place as was done on Thursday. I will provide a map of the Sand Canyon off ramp, the Tanganda Road turnoff and the campground location should you want to arrive early or late.

Facilities are available in Tehachapi for Hotel/Motel rooms and restaurants. Apples and other orchard products are grown in the area as well as antique shops/movies etc. and the Tehachapi rail loop for rail buffs.

George Varney will be our host and has an extensive collection of prime Horse Canyon Agate, which he will part with at reasonable prices. His collection is a must see for Horse Canyon devotees.

As to collecting sites we will visit. We will range up to and past the pinnacles and will visit the fossil site of the Miocene era Horses for which Horse canyon is named. We will also visit a site in Sand Canyon for larger agate specimens of good quality, also the Nellie's Nipple area of the national forest. Insurance is not required for the Sand Canyon sites so guests may collect at these sites.

Collection within Horse Canyon is float for smallish pieces of agate, larger pieces require digging, the creek bottoms should be checked. The best material is high up in the canyon and requires climbing up steep slopes. Other items found there: fossils, petrified palm wood, root, and many types of agate– moss, tube, saganitic, and banded are most sought after and I and George will have samples for you to see before each trip. George and I will attempt to uncover some agate veins for everybody, others can help as well.

Therefore the **tools required** will be digging equipment, small sledges, gads pry bars for those who seriously want larger specimens, rockpicks for surface collection. I cannot describe the exteriors of this material since the worst looking stuff can have the best agate interior.

PS If you have the Family Service Radios bring them they are of great help in locating sites and then vectoring people into great material.

Steve Blocksage CFMS South Field Trips

(from LA Rocks
< Digest > 9/23/99)

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) REFRESHMENTS CHAIR

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

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) HISTORIAN

-this position involves bringing the club history written by John Hall up to the present

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.

(Continued from page 3)

archeologists that the humans just ate the animals - their "Last Supper" - then died. It was excavated in the late 1970's. They found row after row of bones and artifacts dating back to 11,000 years ago. The cave is actually located about one half mile south of the Royal Peacock Mine in the Virgin Valley. Yet in the book it is described as being located in the north end of the Black Rock. From the Black Rock, the Virgin Valley is 50 miles straight north, "as the crow flies."

Harry Wilson, owner of the Royal Peacock mine in the Virgin Valley, took me to his high pasture at 7000 ft. and showed me petroglyphs that the ancient people had carved into the rocks. This area when studied by archeologists was considered the north end of the Black Rock. You can see how the two areas are tied together. We were mining in the north end of the Black Rock. The petroglyphs near the Royal Peacock mine are shown in the Virgin Valley movie.

THE EXPLORERS

The famous explorer John C. Fremont and a party of 25 left The Dalles-(Washington) in 1843 and headed south toward the Black Rock to find a better route for crossing the desert. They were the first non Indians to travel there. When he and his party came to the foot of the Black Rock, he wrote: "Our New Years Eve was rather a gloomy one. The results of our journey began to be very uncertain."

It would seem that confidence in the maps he had been given was weakening. My own theory is that when he saw the Black Rock, he was scared to death. Here are his own words on the crossing of a 40 mile stretch. "We continued down the valley, between a dry looking black ridge on the left and a more snowy and high one on the right. Our road was bad along the bottom, being broken by gullies and impeded by sage, and sandy hills, where there is not a blade of grass, nor does any appear on the mountains. The soil in many places consists of a fine powdery sand that looks like salt. During the day we directed our course towards a huge black rock, at the foot of which a column of smoke indicated hot springs." {What he is talking about is Black Rock Point and Double Hot Springs located nearby. From the opal mine, they are south and across the desert about 6 miles.} "Jan. 2 1843 - We were on the road early, the face of the country was hidden by falling snow. We traveled along the stream. {This is a small creek that runs south just about in the middle of the desert.} In some places the stream was dry, in other places it had ice: the travel being very bad, through fine deep sand, rendered tenacious by a mixture of clay. at the end of the day, we finally reached the hot springs."

Commentary--- Well it's just like I figured it might be. It took them two days to cross the desert. From all the stories I have read, 20 miles a day was good. When all those people perished here in 1849 during the gold rush, I was guessing that it took them two days to cross the desert. This letter confirms it. I hope a little bit of history will help you understand and appreciate this fascinating place that is so full of mystique. ❁

(to be continued next month)

Notes from Lightning Ridge (Part 2)

Hale Sweeney of Lapidary Digest writes...

<<I asked - James - if he would continue describing mining and life in Lightning Ridge. Here is his reply:>>

Hale -

Sure will, time is an issue, but if you are happy with short snip-pets a few times a week, I like to meet new people involved in the opal/lapidary game. I will send you a picture and if you would like more, let me know, as I am giving my little digital camera a workout most days.

I posted a new directory on my site:

www.lightningridgeopal.com/mining with some pics from my mine and an offer to host travelers and tours, as well as giving the finer points of buying and cutting our tricky rough opal from the ridge.

There are many ways to come undone with the rough you see here at the ridge. A requisite for cutters who are buying bulk rough is the ability to cut stones as small as 3 mm. I sold a 6mm stone a few weeks ago for US\$850. So you can see, red on black is highly in demand.

Our opal as finished stones goes from US\$3-3000/ct, most opalholics will be familiar with the price scale-spectrum relationship with blue being the cheapest and red the dearest. Black body of course is the most expensive. We also get a lot of crystal, usually far superior to that found elsewhere. Because black is what all the commercial buyers are chasing, the crystal is in relatively in less demand and the price reflects this.

All you keen diggers here is a wake up call: The only things you need to have a chance to find opal: 1) average good health, 2) a ticket to Lightning Ridge, 3) a good sharp gouging pick, shovel, light, and 4) a tourist visa. What you don't need: Australian citizenship, pots of cash. Of course, if you want to do a little fee digging in my good claim with some proper machinery for a while, you can get a taste that way with full advice on safety, prospecting, cutting, buying, and all aspects of the game in my spare miners camp. It is definitely a possibility.

After completion of the 2 day safety course with the Dept. of Minerals and Energy, you can register a claim or two of your own. Buying a claim is not out of the question. I saw a claim recently with cuttable seam opal in 5 foot runs on both sides of the drive! And there were other big runs in there too. The main thing is to come here and spend some time in an unhurried fashion. Psst! You can buy a residential mining claim with cottage from US\$ 5k with all modern conveniences: solar power, hot water, flush toilet etc. And remember your summer is our winter, so if you live in Arizona, come here for our beautiful winter.

This place is so close to paradise, I am amazed there is any of it left. Once retired American Rockhounds discover it, it will become like Quartzite 1965, except for the fact that we already have a nice town with no flea markets. If Australian hippies knew about the place, we'd be swamped. So you all better have a look while you can still get in on the ground floor.

Gotta run now, more soon.

James Dumar

jdumar@iniaccess.com.au ❁

(from Lapidary Digest #233 9/27/99)

(Look for additional "Notes From Lightning Ridge" in future is-

What's happening???

Calendar of Upcoming Events Dates and Locations of Shows

Oct 9 9AM-5PM Oct 10 9AM-4PM Valley Gems, 9050-1/2 West Avenue J, Lancaster, CA
Oct 9 – 10 9AM-5PM Victor Valley Gem & Min Club, San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 1480 7th,
Oct 9 8AM-5PM Oct 10 8AM-4PM Searles Lake G&M, 13337 Main St, Trona, CA
Oct 16 10AM-6PM Oct 17 10AM-5PM Whittier Gem & Min Soc, 7604 Greenleaf Ave., Whittier, CA
Oct 17 10AM-5PM Woodland Hills Rock Chippers, Canoga Park Community Center, 7248 Owensmouth
Oct 22 - 24 9AM-4:30PM Clark County Nevada, Gem & Mineral Fair, Clark County Museum, 1830 S.
Oct 23 10AM-6PM Oct 24 10AM-5PM El Cajon Valley Gem & Min Society, El Cajon Masonic
Nov 5 – 7 10AM-5PM San Diego Lapidary Society, Al Bahr Shrine, 5440 Kearny Mesa Rd., San Diego, CA
f Nov 6 – 7 AOS Opal & Gem Show, Quality Hotel, 616 Convention Way, Anaheim, CA
Nov 6 – 7 10AM-5PM Kaiser Rock & Gem Club, California Steel Industries, (near Calif Speedway), 9400 Cherry Ave., Fontana, CA
Nov 20 – 21 10AM-5PM Oxnard Gem & Min Society, Performing Arts Center, 800 Hobson Way, Oxnard, CA
Nov 20 – 10AM-6PM Nov 21 10AM-5PM Mineralogical Soc. of Southern California, Pasadena Center, Exhibition Hall, 300 E. Green St., Pasadena, CA
Nov 27 10AM-6PM Nov 28th 10AM-5PM Mojave Desert Gem & Min Club, Community Center, 841 Barstow Rd., Barstow, CA

The McCondra Report

By Barbara McCondra

Character Profile

"Talking Tom"

Skinny and bent, frail and frazzled, ambling along with a list to the side much like the ships he once sailed upon, he walks the town mumbling to himself with an artist's sketchbook under his arm. He needs money to feed himself, his dog, and his gambling habit. The bushy birds that populate the stylized tree branches on his canvasses are multicolored and wonderfully appealing. They are a bargain at seven to ten dollars each. Tom's busy bird pictures are as punctuated with colorful spots as his lengthy non-stop sentences are with words. Stories roll off his tongue without a breath taken to slow them down. Once he has found a buyer or two and bought a small white sack of groceries, he spends the rest of the arvo (afternoon) in the Bowling Club playing the pokies. Occasionally, a small artist's showing of his work is held for a tourist group complete with a nibble tray and wine.

I first met Tom in 1983 when he was living at the Nine Mile before his tin camp burned down. He offered to help me, a lone American Sheila, to connect two shafts with a mining tunnel on Pig's Hill. He and Nine-Mile Kenny took 6 weeks working one hour every couple days to jackhammer out a tunnel for me. The work was slow but done for free with charity in their hearts. Tom Hawke has been sought out by authors and TV crews alike. His unkempt and wild-eyed look makes colorful copy for those in search of genuine "bushies."

In his seventies, his pension provides him lean sustenance and his art buys him few extravagances---- like three meals in one day, a couple of grogs, and a gamble on the pokies. Blinking his eyes like a cockatoo, he accentuates his stories with shakes of the head and great facial awe. He has a way of telling his life's story with genuine surprise about it all in his voice. Life never ceases to amaze him and he is grateful to still be playing his part in it. ☼

(from Outback Report 10/98)



Happy Halloween



Australian Opal Imports

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Casa del Lumbre

Salvador R. Chavez

Freeform Creations

Steve Solovieff

Idaho Opal Mines

Susan Thompson
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In A Flash

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Greg Howell's

Quality Gems

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Land of Wonder

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Opal Traders

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Trade Winds

Barbara Fetta