

# The Opal Express

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



Member

Member



Volume #32 Issue #01 January 2000

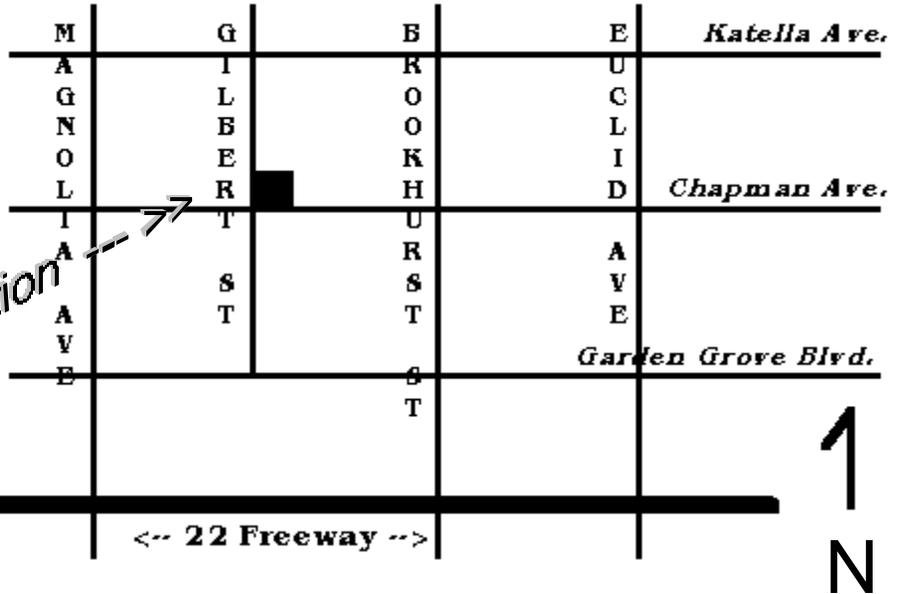
**General meeting Thursday  
 January 13 7PM**

TO:

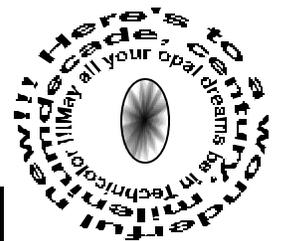
**GENERAL MEETINGS —**  
 2nd Thursday 7:00-9:00 PM  
 Garden Grove Civic Women's Club  
 9501 Chapman Ave.  
 (NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)  
 Garden Grove, CA

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

*Meeting Location* →



**Happy New Year**  
**ONE AND ALL**



**American Opal Society Officers**

Carol Bova	President	(818) 845-8610	email bova@bovagems.com
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In 1926 there was a rush to the Grawin Opalfield, southwest of Lightning Ridge via Cumborah. In October of that year, the local miner/reporter, John Landers, reported a "small exodus" to the area and said that 6 out of 8 miners had bottomed on opal at a 25 - 50 foot level! Some fine opal was being found, especially by Denis, Stevens, and Huggard, who were mining either side of Landers.

Two large black stones - the bigger measuring 4x1/2x3 1/2 inches with color traceable over nearly 2/3 of the stone, and the smaller weighing 320 carats partially faced, were of exceptional beauty. Landers compared the quality of these two stones with those found in Phone Line patch by Urwin and Brown about 10 years prior.

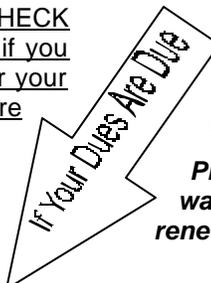
The magnificence of the smaller black opal qualified her to be known as the "Grawin Queen," the best opal yet procured from the field. Holding her in whatever light, half the face was a standing pattern immovable, and the other half, changing with every movement to the deepest red and then into the brightest orange. It is reported that Ernie Sherman bought her for 150 pounds in 1930.

The Grawin rush ran right to the late 1920's and the community grew closest to becoming a real village. Such opal mining fever was not known there again until the original Carter's Rush and Millionaire's Gully of recent times!

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 early history of the black opalfields in New South Wales, Australia. Should you have constructive information, please email: barbeemitz@yahoo.com or write to Box 1, L/Ridge 2834.

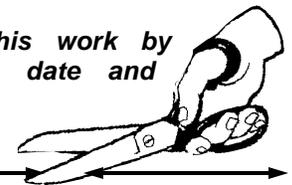
**Are Your Dues Due Now?** PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. If your dues are due now you will receive two additional issues of the newsletter. Please note



however that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

Please help us make this work by watching your expiration date and renewing promptly. Thanks!



## DUES RENEWAL FORM

(membership renewal form rev. 1/1/98) d:\ameropal\news\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)

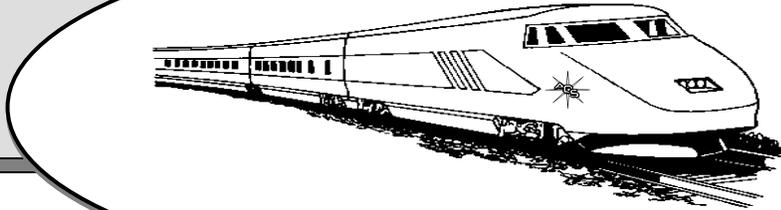
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

# The Opal Express

OPAL EXPRESS

Published monthly  
by the  
American  
Opal  
Society

Volume 32, Issue 1



## President's Message from Carol Bova

Happy New Year!

January is such a great time for taking stock of our lives, dreaming dreams and making plans. The American Opal Society is a vibrant growing organization, and the board of directors acts on the members' behalf to review, plan and dream for AOS. It always helps to have your input into the process, so if you have ideas for programs or field trips, share your thoughts with any of the officers or board members.

Thank you to all of our show volunteers, dealers, customers and those who shared their wonderful opals for our club display at the November Opal and Gem Show. We especially thank the family of Harriette Breitman for the opportunity to display her wonderful work in a memorial display.

If we have omitted anyone's name from the various lists, please do let us know so we can correct the omission. Several of the folks who help compile this info have been under the weather with the recent round of flu and other winter ailments. While we try our darndest to get these things right, it seems Mr. Murphy keeps his law active by letting us glitch from time to time. We definitely want to give credit where credit is due, so don't fret and feel neglected if your name or a friend's name isn't listed... let us know.

If you have any thoughts or suggestions for the 2000 show, it's also time to let us know now. It takes a long time to put all the pieces together to make a show happen.

Communication is an essential component of a show, or of any organization at all. *The Opal Ex-*

*press*, and our American Opal Society website at <http://www.opalsociety.org> are our official communications with the world. Your input to us is just as important because we rely on your feedback to help direct our future planning. Let us hear from you, and hope to see a big crowd at the January meeting!

With all best wishes to you and yours for the coming year,

Carol

**PS If your address label says 01-2000 after your name, it's time to use the renewal form in the Opal Express and send in your dues for 2000! We don't send separate billings. Thank you!**



### DATES TO REMEMBER

General Mtg  
Thurs Jan 13  
7 PM

Director's Mtg  
Monday Jan 10  
7 PM

### 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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# OPAL MINING ADVENTURES – Virgin Valley Nevada

Part 2

By Bob Halahan

I have given you the history of the three C's and how the opal was formed. Now I will give you a little history of the major Virgin Valley mines.

Opal was first discovered in Virgin Valley by a cowboy riding on horseback in 1906. At that time, Mrs. Lockheed, mother of the Lockheed brothers who started Lockheed Aircraft and Bendix Brake, was a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. She was assigned to cover the earthquake that shook the city that year. In 1908 she was sent out to cover the discovery of opal in Virgin Valley. She never looked back. She was hooked and would spend her entire life dedicated to the mining of this precious stone. The Roebing opal was found at the Rainbow Mine shortly before she took over in 1919. It was bought by Colonel Roebing and donated to the Smithsonian Institute shortly after that.

I remember years ago watching the movie "Vera Cruz" with Burt Lancaster and Gary Cooper. Burt kept calling Gary a Colonel and said aren't all the people down south Colonels. In those days it was very prestigious to be called a Colonel. I have often wondered if Roebing just took on this Colonel title to make himself look important.

Getting back to the story, the Roebing was a beautiful black opal that weighed almost a full pound. It is still at the Smithsonian today. At that time it was valued at around one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. By today's standards, that would be probably over a half million dollars.

Mrs. Lockheed convinced a wealthy woman from Santa Barbara named Mrs. Hammond – then owner of the Rainbow mine – to finance her in the mining and managing of the mine. I have a complete story of her years at the mine written by her grandson who lived there with her. That's another story, also a long one. In the Virgin Valley movie, there is a lot of good information about the Rainbow Mine told by Keith Hodson, present day owner of the mine.

Mrs. Lockheed mined all over the valley and left old newspapers in the mines that she worked. That was her "calling card." These newspapers were later found by the present owners in the tunnels that she had dug. She was quite a gal. The Australians knew of her exploits and simply called her "The Opal Queen." A name that stuck and is used to describe her even today. She left her mark in the valley and she will always be remembered by that name. She died bed-ridden in 1948. She was still trying to get back to her beloved Virgin Valley right up to the time of her death. She will always be



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. ❁

## January Meeting – Opal Video by Bob Halahan Thursday January 13th 7 PM

Throughout these wonderful tales of American opal mining in Nevada, Bob Halahan mentions "movies." It turns out he has chronicled his mining adventures with some fine video footage. We are pleased to note Bob has given the AOS a set of tapes which include several of his presentations. And yes, there are movies, darn good ones too! **We will enjoy one of Bob's movies at our January meeting so mark your calendars for Thursday January 13th and plan to see what opal mining is really like in Nevada!** ❁

remembered as "the woman" who took on a man's job and helped make Virgin Valley what it is today. She was truly an "Opal Queen."

I spent 9 years mining opal at the Rainbow Ridge and Royal Peacock opal mines. They are pay-to-dig mines open to the public each year through the summer months. The Rainbow Ridge mine has always been a mine where you pay to dig in the tailings. The Royal Peacock is a mine where you can dig in the virgin clay and mine opals just like the old days. The tools that are used are a pick and shovel and an ice pick to extract the opals when they are found.

The Virgin Valley and Australia are the only places in the world that produce the famous "Black Opal." I have seen and dug a lot of beautiful opals that were taken out of Virgin Valley in my nine years there. I have also met many beautiful people who go there to mine this unique stone.

A gold prospector once said that it is not the finding of the gold that is important, it is the search. I will add to that it is not the finding of the opal that is important, it is the beautiful people that you meet along the way that makes life worth living. After all the digging is done, all that you have left that is important is the time and experiences that you shared with the people who were there.

People should always be more important than earthly pursuits. So never let greed enter your heart for earthly things will pass away. How you have treated your fellow man is more important than all the riches in the world. ❁

(to be continued next month)



**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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The American Opal Society.

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Editor---Russ Madsen

Please address all inquiries to:

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E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com

(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

# ITEMIZATION

**ITEM:** A special thanks to all the 1999 Opal Show dealers:

A total of 22 dealers presented this year.

Amore Gems	Idaho Opal Mines
Australian Opal & Gem Importers	KP Custom Designs
Bova Gems	Opalcutter
Casa de Lumbre	Opalos Mexicanos
Clamshell	Opals by Tibara
Desert Gems	Outback Gems
Freeform Creations	Ridge Water Ltd.
Greg Howell's	SK International
Quality Gems	Tikka Opals
Land of Wonder	Tradewinds
Lapidary Int'l	Vajda Group Int'l
Lasco Diamond Products	

**ITEM:** Thanks also to all the AOS members who generously gave of their weekend to help make the show another spectacular display of opal, jewelry, tools, and other fine examples of the lapidary and jewelry arts:

*Carol Bova, Annette Bryant, Jay Carey (recipient of this year's Life Membership honorarium), Bob Dixon, Allen Farquer, Clare Gagnon, Pete Goetz, Mike Kowalsky, Corey Kuepper, Russ Madsen, Brian Maxon, Stan McCall, Fay McDowell, Bob Olinskas, Louise Oleson, Jim Pisani, Wes and Frann Roth, Pam Strong, Murray Schiff, Hisako Schlatter, Curtis and Travis Trace.*

All the members of the board of directors deserve mention for their ongoing efforts and preparations before the weekend of the Opal Show.

Thank you also to our Opal Symposium speakers:

Dr. Walter Johnson – Jewelry Treasures in the Attic  
Barbara McCondra  
Cliff Coan  
Tim Thomas

And while last here, certainly not least, thank you again to the many folks from the AOS and several other clubs who kindly gave of their time to demonstrate their various jewelry and lapidary skills throughout the weekend of the Show. ❁

**ITEM:** *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. Editor Rick Ford, mAGi@bctonline.com ❁

**ITEM:** From *The Nugget*, bulletin of the Culver City Rock & Mineral Club comes the following about field trip information.

—*Congratulations to our own Brad Smith on the success of LA-Rocks, the e-mail group he created for rockhounds. Virtually every Southern California rock club bulletin received by your Editor has mentioned Brad and LA-Rocks.*

Brad is also a member of AOS and we would like to add our voice of appreciation for Brad's efforts. The focus of the LA-Rocks email list is rockhound field trips. If you have email and internet access set your browser to <http://www.egroups/group/la-rocks> and you will be able to learn about many club trips in good time to join the fun.

**ITEM: Equipment needed for carving – And a Simple Starter Project.** Once you know how to cut cabs, you are ready for carving. Very little machinery is needed. Let's follow through on a simple design. You have cut a large oval cab and wish to carve a zigzag line, a thunder bolt symbol, diagonally across the top. This groove will have 2 zigs and 1 zag at a 45 degree angle.

First, you need an old motor, either 1725 or 3450 RPM, plus a 1/4 inch Jacob's chuck like the one on your electric drill. An adapter is used on the 1/2 inch motor shaft and the chuck is screwed onto it. These adapters can be obtained at jewelry supply stores. This is all you need in the way of machinery.

A V shaped groove looks best for this design. So you will need a V shaped diamond tool, not a tapered wheel, but a straight wheel with a V shaped cutting edge. A 1/4 inch or 3/8 inch wheel will work best. First, scribe the zigzag line with an aluminum pencil, then lightly trace the line with the diamond tool. This will leave a shallow groove. Be careful where the long zig meets the 45 degree zag. Once you have a light groove, then go back and run the line again, making it deeper each time. The outer ends of the two long lines can be made wider by rocking the tool against the sidewalls.

Make your grooves as neat as possible, but don't strain, the next step will clean up the line. Use the knife edge Cratex wheels to sand down the walls and edges. These wheels are abrasives mixed with a rubber substance and work exceptionally well with the quartzes. Pick the medium grade if you buy only one grit. They are made in four different grit sizes. The groove will be smooth and nicely frosted when you finish.

Next, go to a V shaped wood wheel the same size as your diamond tool. These are easy to make using any hard wood available: maple for instance. Saw out a 1/8 inch slab and cut 1/2 inch circles from these thin slabs. You will mount these wheels on the same 1/8 inch mandrels you are using with the Cratex wheels, so drill a center hole that fits the attaching screw of the mandrel. Then, with a very sharp file, shape the wood wheel to a knife edge; keep the wheel straight and taper the cutting edge. Make several of these. You will use them.

Use diamond compound on the wood wheels. The cheapest way to go is to buy a one carat vial of 600 grit diamond powder and mix it with 2 level tablespoons of Vaseline. This is your sanding compound. Apply it sparingly, you don't need much. Go back and forth over the groove with the wood wheel until you have a very delicate frosting. Be especially

(Continued on page 6)

# The McCondra Report

By Barbara McCondra

## “THONG IT”

Yowah nut opal says, “I love you Mother Earth”. What better way to carry that sentiment about your neck for all to share than to hang it on a leather thong? The earthy and magical look of Yowah nut opal speaks to the world of Nature's magic and Man's appreciation. Mankind cares so much that there are those who seek her secret treasure deep below the surface of an ancient land in Outback Australia. Living so close to the land, suffering the hardships of faraway desert climes, the opal miner trades blood, sweat, and tears to bring to you the love poetry that a Yowah nut opal is. The simple, stark life of an opal field is best represented by a simple leather Thong. So ‘Thong It’ and say, “I love you Gaia” with a Yowah nut. ✨

(from Outback Report 1/98)



## Shop Hints & Tips

Want to keep scratches off your flat silver while working on it? Common transparent contact paper is the answer. Place it on each side of the silver sheet for protection. It accepts and holds an India ink pen line and will not pull loose when you are sawing through it and the silver. ✨

(Michigan Lapidary Society via PVGMS Tumbler 12/99)

To use your silver or gold scrap, take an old straw broom, wet it thoroughly, and pour your melted scrap down among the straws. The result will be a beautiful broom-straw pendant. If you like nuggets of silver or gold, take some more scrap and a small pan. Place some rock salt in the bottom, pour your melted scrap over the salt, and as the salt melts there will be indentations similar to natural nuggets. ✨

(Cabber Gabber 1/89 via PVGMS Tumbler 12/99)

Working with silver? Don't try to hard solder any item that has traces of lead solder on the metal. The lead will oxidize and eat holes in the metal ... and don't mix lead with your silver or gold scrap. ✨

(Chips and Facets 7/95 via PVGMS Tumbler 12/99)

## 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.**

## January 2000

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

Please see calendar above 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.

## Notes From Lightning Ridge

Hi Hale and friends,

Today I remain on subject: cutting at the Ridge. 95% of commercial opal cut here is oval and cut with diamond abrasives on large diameter shaft accurate twin 8" head machines.

Polishing is on felt or chrome suede leather, and cerium oxide on laps (50,000# cerium oxide) is the polish of choice.

For boulder matrix, people use tin oxide or something soft to avoid undercutting the opal at polish stage.

You can always tell a Ridge cut stone because we dome the backs. We do this because most of our stone goes to Japan; they demand an open back setting. There is a little more weight loss like this, but the setting becomes much easier as will become evident below. A variety of cabochon variations are cut here, but this slightly domed back is our hallmark.

The latest talk at our last opal expo was free forms. There are a lot of younger people in the industry now, and our traditional market base is swinging away from Japan and to North America. Thus our style of cutting is starting to be influenced by this. I must hasten to add that top gem material has usually been cut free form in the past. It is strange but true that carving style has only been widely adopted in the past 3-4 years. While it is the norm for Queensland boulder, here it was formerly put over the saw to get 100% convex face for ovals.

A simple open back setting for opal: measure, cut, and hard solder metal bezel sheet stock as for a box back setting. Fit resultant oval ring onto a round mandrel. Note inside diameter. Wind .7-1.2mm round wire to this id. Cut and fit this wire bearing or seat to fit snugly inside the bezel; sweat solder using minimal medium solder. Stretch the round seat to oval from the id using round pliers; voila the stone seat. If you are working in gold, this is very conservative of material.

Once you make this style of stone and seat, you will never use anything else. Stones do not rock in the seat when setting, no fillers or backing are required and if the bezel edge is a little higher, the additional protection is welcome with opal and other soft stones. This is a very secure setting.

Hope the foregoing is of interest to your members, regards to all, james dumar

[jdumar@iniaccess.net.au](mailto:jdumar@iniaccess.net.au)  
[www.lightningridgeopal.com](http://www.lightningridgeopal.com) ☼

(from Lapidary Digest #237 10/8/99)



## Dictionaries and Opal – through the years...

(submitted 12/27/99 by John Hall – AOS member # 0029)

**(1946-Appleton Century Dictionary)** Opal, *n.* A mineral, an amorphous form of silica, found in many varieties and colors (often milky white), certain of which have a peculiar iridescence and are valued as gems... - opalesce, *v.i.* To exhibit a play of colors like that of an opal...

**(1951 G & C Merriam Dictionary)** Opal, *n.* (L. opalus, fr Gr. opalios, fr. Skr. Upala, a stone, precious stone), *Mineral.* An amorphous form of silica, softer and lighter than quartz. H 5.5 – 6.5. The *precious, or noble opal*, esteemed as a gem, is iridescent; the *common opal* has

Equipment needed for carving – And a Simple Starter Project

*(Continued from page 4)*

careful with the edges. I actually like to use a second wood wheel with 1200 grit diamond powder, just to make doubly sure that I have a perfect surface.

Now you are ready to polish. There are two methods for polishing. Cerium oxide on a felt buff is the preferable one for the quartzes, but it is very difficult to reach the bottom of those grooves with a felt buff. Use either a rock hard knife edge or the sharp edge of a small straight wheel. The other method is a wood wheel with 50000 grit diamond. If you go this route, you should use the 1200 grit diamond to complete the sanding stage. Then, after finishing with the 50000 grit diamond, it is nice to conclude a quartz piece by working it against the felt buff wherever you can. Cerium, for some reason, puts a brighter glitter on quartz than anything else.

While you are working on this carving, especially with the Cratex wheels, you will probably slip a few times, leaving bird tracks on the surface of the cab. The only way to remove these marks is to resand with 600 grit and then repolish. For this reason, I like to process the cab through the 600 sanding stage, then carve it, and then polish everything. That method avoids any duplication.

So now you have a beautiful cab with the lightening bolt symbol carved across the surface. They say such a stone will give you the speed of Mercury and the power of Zeus.

Good Luck!

Henry Hunt ☼

-----  
(Note: Books on carving:

American Lapidary: Designing the Carved Gemstone--Hunt, H.  
Lapidary Carving for Creative Jewelry--Hunt, Henry  
Fundamentals of Gemstone Carving--Kennedy, Gordon S. et al  
Creative Lapidary, The--Long, Frank W.  
Lapidary Carving : Design and Technique--Long, Frank W.  
Gemstone Carving--Nie, Arthur  
How to Make and Use Gem Carving Tools --Pond, F. W.  
Carving Shells and Cameos --Richie, Carson I. A.  
Ivory Carving--Richie, Carson I. A.  
Scrimshaw--Richie, Carson I. A.  
Soft Stone Carving--Richie, Carson I. A.  
Gemstone Carving--Walter, Martin  
Handbook of Gemstone Carving--Wertz, Ed & Leola

Some may be sculptural books. hale)

(from Lapidary Digest #177 11/18/98)



a milky or resinous appearance, the *black opal* combines iridescence with a deep-black background.

**(1958-Webster's New World Dictionary – Pocket Edition)**

Opal, *n.* Silica of various colors that reflects light in a play of colors, some types are semiprecious .

**(1975 Doubleday & Co Dictionary)** Opal, *n.* A colored translucent silica, softer and less dense than quartz, valued as a gemstone. – opalesce *v.i.* To exhibit an iridescent play of colors as in an opal. ☼

**(1994 American Heritage Dictionary on CD-ROM)** Opal *n.* A translucent mineral of hydrated silica, often used as a gem. ☼

## Safety Report by Cathy Gaber

### Rock and Roll - Is Your Vehicle Ready?

You're ready for your field trip, you have your tools, safety equipment, water, etc. packed and you've made plans for what to do with the great minerals or rough you will find. Have you given any thought to getting your vehicle ready for the trip too?

Nothing replaces regular maintenance as one of the best safeguards to a car or truck's continued reliable service, but before a trip, there are a number of things that should be specifically checked. Tires should be examined for bald spots and appropriate air pressure. A simple gauge that can be kept in the glove compartment is an easy way to test the latter. Car fluids should also be checked. Be sure the oil, radiator fluid, battery water and window wash fluid are at the proper levels, and don't forget gas! It might also be a wise idea to carry extra containers of all of these fluids, especially if you will be any distance from "civilization". It doesn't hurt to clean the battery contacts, and if there is any doubt about the battery's condition, replace it.

To be really prepared, there are a number of useful items to pack in your vehicle. Jumper cables, a tire patch kit, a flash-

light, flares, matches, a shovel and kitty litter (to be used to increase traction) are all practical things to have. A real spare tire is definitely preferable to a "toy" temporary tire which will not hold up over long distances or rough terrain. None of these things will do you any good though if you do not know how to use them. Learn to change a tire or patch one, know how to use jumper cables and how to replace your vehicle fluids. A seldom needed item, a winch, could be a real life saver if you do any off road driving especially in wet, boggy terrain.

Another potential hazard to watch for especially in rough terrain is your vehicle's clearance capabilities. A low clearance family sedan, especially weighted down with a few hundred pounds of freshly collected rock, runs the danger of bottoming out, possibly damaging the suspension or puncturing the oil pan. When in doubt, don't put you or your vehicle at risk.

For your own comfort, food, water and a blanket are also sensible additions. For peace of mind, you should also have your insurance provider's and roadside service's phone numbers handy. Last but not least, use your seatbelt.

There is nothing worse than a field trip gone unnecessarily bad by negligent vehicle preparation. It only takes a few minutes to give your car or truck the best possible chance to carry you safely and comfortably to and from your destination. ☼



### Advertisement

# Black Opal Rough

**Lightning Ridge black opal at field prices. Check price list with many pictures on fast server at <http://www.opalrough.com>  
Email: [opal@tpg.com.au](mailto:opal@tpg.com.au) Visa, Mastercard and cheques accepted.**

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**Special Offer: Trader Opal Rough: 1 kilo mixed blue green and the odd multicolour nobbies, mixed sizes on black or grey base for US\$280 plus \$15 airmail postage. Opal can be returned if not satisfied.**

**Keith Rigby Opals PO Box 58 Gladesville 2111 NSW Australia  
Phone (61) 2 9816 3221 Fax (61) 2 98177883 Field Buyer – Field Prices  
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# CCC Camp Restored in Virgin Valley

(This article was printed in ANGLIC GEMCUTTER in April of 1998; please be aware, facilities and particulars of opal digging in the Virgin Valley may have changed since the time this article was written. Check locally for current conditions. -rgm)



No immaculate concepts here, just hard work and the necessary wrestling with government agencies. One belt tightening measure of the U.S. Fed. – resulting in our temporary hiatus of deficit spending - didn't shrink the Belt Way's waistline so much as reel in the line at Fish and Wildlife.

Since before WW II, there's been a free, rustic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) facility at a branch in the trail 30 miles west of Denio, NV, a mere fork in the road itself on the border with Oregon. Hot springs were channeled into a bath house shower and naturally heated swimming pond around which primitive camp sites were placed, complete with outhouses. No phone, electricity, water or septic facilities exist to maintain, (except at the modern F & W facilities 1/4 mile closer to Hwy. 140). Campers are asked to pack out any garbage they pack in, so maintenance expenses, prorated across 1/2 century, were nil.

As for roads, well, one trip down the goat trails which provide access to the various opal mines dotting the area and you'll know these haven't crippled the U.S. economy! When it comes to "primitive," these roads make the CCC campground seem like Club Med.

No huge drains here on the Fed's budget, if you discount staff required to report "no infrastructure investments this year." Since "one rule fits all" prevails, the free campground was closed which HAD to require more spending in that year than in the prior decade.

FRIENDS OF THE VIRGIN VALLEY (VV) CAMPGROUND was begun to keep the facility open. After years of paperwork required to start a 5 year pilot program - the first in the nation - they obtained permission and permits to improve and maintain the existing facilities entirely funded and provided by volunteers.

The facilities are still primitive, improvements, modest: a cement floor and extra shower head in the bath house, plus a changing area; restoration of the rock wall of the swimming pond – naturally maintained at 89° - as well as a new ladder and some steps; outside fire pits; picnic tables await more donations.

A Camp Host – during summers – facility has been established, with electricity, so two septic systems were installed besides a well from a 600' artesian source independent of the pond water – for drinking, etc.

Camping is free, open to the public on a first come, first serve basis. The camp covers about 15 acres although no RV dump station facilities for septic exist.

Humboldt County, NV, agreed to contribute several thousand dollars per year after it came to their attention it's a designated county park! (Not to mention, one of the few non-

gambling tourist attractions.)

Which brings us to the lapidary interest, if you haven't guessed: this is Opalhollic' s fee-digging paradise! This information was gathered at the Quartzite booth of Bonanza Opal Mine which will open to public fee-digging this coming Memorial Day, 5/30/98, for the first time ever at \$40/person/day 8:00-4:30 PM except Tues. & Wed. It's great to announce any expansion in this ever-shrinking arena often due to various government agency interventions.

Bonanza claims were purchased from Hodson's, who also own and operate yet another fee-dig site, Rainbow Ridge. Bonanza operations will be located about half way up the Valley near another claim operated on a fee-dig basis, Wilson's Peacock Mine. Wilson's allows – for a higher fee – digging out of the wall of their mine, in designated areas where the overburden has been removed; digging reviewed/ revised daily to minimize the dangers of tunneling which inevitably arise when one follows a productive layer. All else – in all VV locations- is "noodling" from piles of material moved from the wall to weathering areas so the hard – and most perilous - work is already done.

Beware if you're not already bitten by the Opal bug! Most of these operations cease after Labor Day 9/7/98. ✪

**MORE NEW FACILITIES AT EST. OPAL MINE!**

About sixty miles of dirt/gravel road south of VV-CCC is another type of opal mine. Unlike the VV opal deposits – replacements after organic matter (usually wood), from what was an ancient lake formed long ago in a volcanic caldera, Black Rock Desert has hard rock deposits, vesicles in foamy lava, or basaltic rock. Both deposits have as showy an opal as is found on the planet...

...Berchtold's Royal Rainbow Fire Opal mine "is 50 miles north of Gerlach"; a gentle suggestion, the roads are better from the southerly direction. At 4300', the mine is well above the playa floor so it is cooler for working. By day, there's wild horses, by night coyotes... and no telephones!

They've added a solar powered shower – for heat – available to primitive or RV campers on "plenty of level ground" with "unlimited good water" and the only full time shade – from fruit trees! — for miles around, all at no charge! Open to the public from 4/1 through 10/15/98, mining fees are \$40/person/8hr. day – \$25 for half days – no weight limit. This oasis is also a hard rock – hard work – mine! Bring gloves, pry bars, chisels, hammers, sledges and eye protection (not to forget a hat and sun block!).

Precious opal is found in 1' - 6' boulders of black basalt, like gemmy bubbles in solidified, foamy rock! Many gems are shades of butter scotch to chocolate; much is crystal clear, so the attached, black backing – which polishes well – is handy for display or jewelry purposes. Their play of fire encompasses all the rainbow.

Gerlach has 3 cafes and bars, a Texaco petrol station and trailer park with full hookups but the only grocery provisioner is 5 paved miles further south in Empire, NV. ✪

(from Anglic Gemcutter 4/98)

Since before WW II, there's been a free, rustic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) facility at a branch in the trail 30 miles west of Denio...  
(...near the opal mines of the Virgin Valley, Nevada)

### New Club Insurance Obtained

CFMS, Inc. Insurance Program for 1999-2000

#### Here are some highlights:

The new insurance coverage is through the Federal Insurance Company, a member of the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies. Chubb has one of the best reputations in the insurance industry and has an A.M. Best rating of A++.

Your broker is Patt Wilson McDaniel with McDaniel Insurance Services, a brokerage firm specializing in insurance for nonprofit organizations and professionals.

#### Terms of Liability

The limits of liability coverage are as follows:

- \$2,000,000: General Aggregate (annual limit)
- \$2,000,000: Products and Completed Operations Aggregate
- \$1,000,000: Personal and Advertising injury
- \$1,000,000: each occurrence, Fire and Legal Liability included
- \$300,000: Liquor Liability
- \$1,000,000: Non-owned auto and hired auto

Fidelity bond included at \$10,000 limit and Blanket Additional Insurance is included.

#### Who is insured?

The California Federation of Mineralogical Societies, Inc. and all member clubs, their executive officers, directors, and volunteers with respect to their liability for the activities of the insured club or activities on its behalf, at the option of the insured. All clubs are listed on the policy. A club must maintain its membership with good standing and the individual club insurance is non-cancelable.

#### What activities are covered?

The Federation and its member clubs have General Liability coverage for all normal operations as described to the company. We have described to the company that most clubs have monthly meetings and workshops. Some clubs have monthly field trips. Some have annual shows (2-3 days). There are two annual statewide meetings with 150-200 in attendance. An annual 3day show held in conjunction with one of the meetings draws public attendance of 6-8,000.

#### Accident Insurance

Your organization does not currently have accident coverage. This coverage can provide some payment in the case of a member injury. The General Liability is not intended to act as an accident policy for members. Accident coverage, however, is available and highly recommended.

### AFMS Show for year 2000 – Moab, Utah

Y2k AFMS Show - Moab Utah, October 12 – 15, 2000.

### CFMS Show for year 2000 – Riverside, CA

Y2k CFMS Show - Riverside, CA August 4 – 6, 2000.

(CFMS Newsletter 11/99 via Breccia 11/99)

## Discovery of the Hauser Geode Beds

By Joel F. Hauser, Redlands, CA

**I started collecting** in the Black Hills (Chocolate Mountains, Chuckawallas, or Little Mules, take your pick) back in 1935. At that time it was quite a feat to find the turnoff to Wiley's Well, and a miracle if one could cross the sand and washes between the highway and the well without getting stuck. The wind would frequently obliterate the road by blowing sand over the single tracks across the dunes.

**I was born in Blythe in 1915.** My father went there in 1909 and drove a freight wagon from Blythe to Glamis, the nearest railroad point, 60 miles away. When I developed an interest in rocks, particularly agate nodules, my dad urged me to hunt along the Blythe-Niland road. He frequently had been over the area and had noticed nodules here and there. I bought a Model A Ford for \$37.50 and started looking. After gathering material from several beds near the roads, it became necessary to get farther and farther into the hills. It meant literally beating roads across the desert, moving rocks, dodging steep washes and pushing the car across the worst spots.

**General system for scouting an area** was to drive as far as it seemed possible to drive, then hike over the hills exploring for new agate beds. When I found a new bed I would then have to figure how to build a road somewhere near it. It often was necessary to drive 10 miles to find a way across some of the big washes.

**Most of the agate nodule beds I found did not** supply too many fine agates, so a premium was placed upon being first into an area. It became a sort of game. I would beat a road a few miles farther back into the hills. The next time I went down there, the road would be pretty well defined because so many other rockhounds had been over it.

**No one seriously considered digging in the early days.** When the surface material was all gathered in, it meant moving on to new areas. In 1937, I decided to go completely around the Black Hills and try to work the area from the back. One day, while skirting the hills, the Hauser beds were discovered.

**Three of us were in the party and had stopped to camp** for the night at the edge of the wash which drains the canyon holding the Hauser beds. It was still daylight after supper, and we scouted around a little. Some nodules were found lying in the volcanic ash at the edge of the wash. A few scratches in the ash, with a pick, uncovered more nodules. We dug until dark and found an unbelievable quantity.

**Next day we dug out so many geodes we couldn't haul them all home.** Here indeed was the mother lode for Black Hills agate nodules and geodes. Rockhounds are still digging out all they want, 10 years later.

**I never did finish skirting the Black Hills.** The rush to the Hauser bed started soon after my brother Howard and I met Dr. Warren Fox and Sam Payson on the way back to the diggings. We camped together and drove on into the beds next day. Sam and Dr. Fox spread the word, and the rush was on.

(extracted from DESERT MAGAZINE May 1947, pg 29;  
via Pegmatite 12/99)