

The Opal Express

American Opal Society
 P.O. Box 4875
 Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

Volume #33 Issue #03 March, 2001

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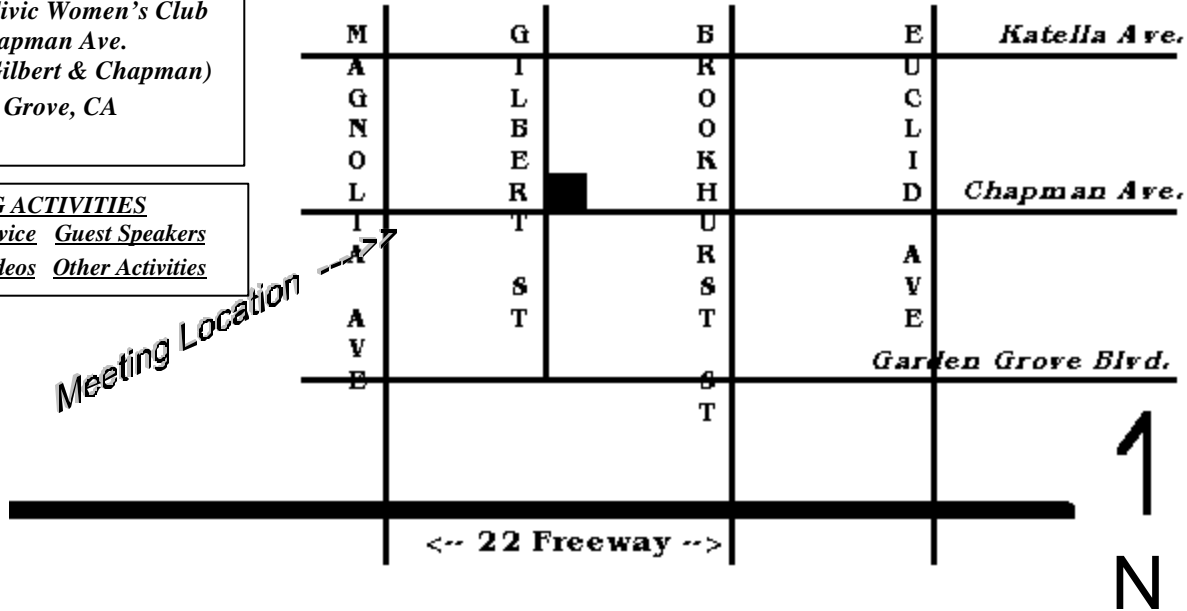
General Meeting – March 8!
 Major Opal Mining Areas of Australia and Opal
 Geology presented by Jay Carey



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

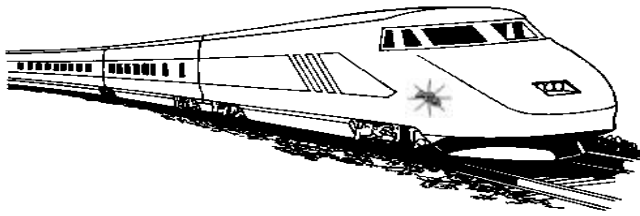
MEETING ACTIVITIES
Opal Cutting Advice Guest Speakers
Slide Shows Videos Other Activities



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The Opal Express



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Published
monthly
by the
American
Opal
Society

Volume 33, Issue 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

President's Message

from Mike Kowalsky

Hi!

The exciting days of January and the Quartzite trip and the February Tucson trip have come to completion. Now I will have time to digest the events we experienced, the people we met, and reflect on how these all can help the American Opal Society continue towards its goals of providing information about opal, opal cutting, opal jewelry design and the status of the world of opal.

Meeting Format Change

One of the improvements I am attempting to make is changing our monthly meeting format. I tried it at the February meeting and it was well received. The idea is to have a brief, but crisp business meeting followed by a speaker. The last part of the monthly meetings will be a hands-on part. I hope to bring several machines into the club to give members hands-on experience with different machines and to see how to cut a particular piece of opal.

I encourage members to bring in pieces of rough opal or partially cut opal so that some of the more experienced cutters can either comment or help the person with a problem piece. Most of the difficulty of cutting opal is in the planning of how to best cut the opal while examining the rough stone.

February Speaker

Our February speaker was Jim Pisani who showed slides, samples of precious opal and opal nodules from his trip to Lead Pipe Springs; an 1890's California opal mine. Jim had written an article describing his trip in the February Opal Express, but to see the slides and hear his descriptions of the area made it close to being there.

March Program

Opal Mining and Formation Presentation

We plan to update the presentation that Jay Carey made to the LA Museum of Natural History, and present that at the March meeting. He will describe the major mining areas of Australia and some of the geology that contributed to the formation of opal. We are looking at updating the factors that contribute to the color and types of colors that are viewed in opals.

Membership Renewals

Jim Pisani has tried an experiment in obtaining renewal applications. He has designed a letter, which he combined with a return addressed envelope as a reminder to renew. It has been very successful.

AOS Opal Show Venue

Now that the Arizona gem shows are past, it's time to concentrate on our new venue for our own annual AOS Opal and Gem Show. We talked to many of the vendors who have been regulars at our show, asked for and received comments on several areas of possible concern. They ranged from the type of lighting, ambience, security, and ease of driving to the location where the stock could be offloaded and loaded close to the show room. We are planning to address these areas and ensure that they are not a problem. We already know that the lighting is acceptable since it is the same lighting used at the Tucson GJX show.

We have started putting together some presentations about opal which I hope to offer to local gem and mineral shows. This will make AOS more known to the local people who are a part of the Southern California Lapidary Arts.

I would like to encourage comments about the way your AOS board is working on problems, and how we are conducting the meetings. I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at the meeting.

Mike Kowalsky

AOS Member Honored

At the January meeting, the Gem, Lapidary and Mineral Society of Washington, DC presented Cathy Gaber with the annual Honorary Lifetime Member Award for 2000. We would like to congratulate Cathy on this well deserved honor.

When we asked about her background, Cathy wrote, "My interest in the hobby was awakened when I received numerous strings of gem beads from India from my husband Bruce in the mid 1980s. Since he did not know what most of them were, I wanted to learn more about them before I too went to India. When I took a bead stringing class, the teacher recommended that I take a class on Gemstones offered in Montgomery County, MD. In February of 1990, I enrolled in the class, which was taught by Louise Taggart, who was 90 years old at that time. After only a month of classes, I was hooked. It was like falling off a cliff. My husband Bruce and I started subscribing to mineral magazines, going to shows and collecting minerals. I also became a volunteer in the Mineral Room at the Smithsonian to feed my ³habit².

We also joined GLMS-DC, and later that same year, we joined the Micromineralogists of the National Capital Area. Over the years, I have been involved with numerous organizations. I joined the Friends of Mineralogy Northwest and the Northwest Micro Mineral Study Group in 1993 while we were on sabbatical in Seattle, then I became a member of SCRIBE. in 1994 and briefly served as the Treasurer in 1997.

In 1995, I discovered the American Opal Society and the GIA Alumni Association, both of which I was delighted to join. In 1999, I became the safety chairman of the AOS. mostly because it was one of the few jobs that needed doing that I could do from 3000 miles away. In 1997, we also became members of the Mineralogical Society of the District of Columbia. When FOM SE was established in 1998, I had to join that too and am currently serving as Vice President. When I earned my certification in Precious Metal Clay last year, I automatically was accepted into the PMC Guild. In 2000, I joined two more organizations. When we became staff members (exhibits chair) of the Rochester Mineralogical Symposium, we were asked to join the Rochester Academy of Science. Then in order to go to the annual meeting of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators this summer in Portugal, I joined GNSI too.

It turned out, much to my surprise, that I like to write, so one of the contributions I have made is to write for the bulletins of most of these organizations. For MNCA, I have written numerous limericks (a couple of them trophy winners), many conference reports and articles (one of which also earned an EFMLS trophy), and a 30-year history (AFMS 3rd place trophy). I have written member profiles (about 60 total) for MNCA, GLMS-DC and GIA. I also do occasional speaker write-ups for GIA. GLMS-DC

is often tortured by my monthly quizzes, and I wrote over 20 video reviews. For MSDC, I abstracted articles from the Rockhounds Internet list for a few years and continue to contribute an article each month. When I was president of the Eastern Federation of Mineralogical and Lapidary Societies in 1996-1997, I wrote monthly columns for the EFMLS News. For the last two years, I have written president's messages for MNCA, one of which earned, a trophy in the 2000 bulletin editors contest. Since 1999, I have written about 16 safety columns for the American Opal Society. Mineral News has published five of my articles (one co-authored with Bruce), and "Slabs for Cabs" appeared in Lapidary Journal in December 1997. My abstract "Brazilian Hematite" was in the Mineralogical Record in March/April, 2000. "Precious Metal Clay" was published in the Australian magazine Metal, Stone and Glass. In 2001, my years as an editor primed my interest in the bulletin editor contest for which I have served as a judge for several years. Wildacres has been another favorite activity. We have attended most of the sessions since September 1990. In addition to taking classes, I have assisted in the cabochon class one session and taught the chain making class three sessions. This fall, I taught Precious Metal Clay for the first time at Wildacres and I will be teaching it both sessions in 2001. Early on, I took the judging class, just to learn how to look at exhibits and to have some idea of what was important about them. This eventually led us to becoming trophy winning mineral exhibitors (pyrites and hematites) and eventually to me becoming a certified judge in 1997. I was elected as a member of the Wildacres Functioning Committee in 1995 and served my last term this fall. In 1996, I assumed the responsibility for arranging speakers and demonstrators for Wildacres sharing time. I taught introduction to mineral id at one session for sharing time and did an evening program on the development of the new hall of the Smithsonian one year. For two years, I also led "federation night" using games such as Jeopardy to educate participants about people and programs in the federation.

The Rochester Mineralogical Symposium, a must-attend annual event, recruited us a few years ago as the Auction Solicitors General to collect donations for the auction from the dealers, and we designed the 25th anniversary t-shirt. This year we became members of the committee and are the Exhibits Chair. I have given several talks about the Smithsonian, Mineral ID and Precious Metal Clay for clubs, and I presented a talk on Brazilian Hematites at Tucson in 2000.

Well done, Cathy! We're proud to have you as a member!

Tucson Trip Report

By Mike Kowalsky

Our Tucson Days visit this year had great weather as we had at Quartzsite. Some wind going out, but none after that. We arrived after the rain from the previous weekend.

During our limited time, and when we were not videotaping, we visited many of the opal dealers and discussed the AOS November show. We had interest from former dealers, recent dealers and some potential new dealers. If our new venue works out, we will have room for more dealers than at the Quality Hotel.

I was not able to find many different types of opal to purchase as I had discovered at Quartzite. I did manage to find a nice opalized shell and some inexpensive boulder opal.

I was very impressed with the presentations by the master craftsman and metal smiths at the seminars that were planned by Tim and Barbara Thomas. I have never seen the quality of work demonstrated by these master designers and craftsman. I felt privileged to witness and videotape the presentations. I would suggest you plan to attend the seminars next year at Tucson because I have never seen such intricate jewelry designs with the use of many precious stones, including opal, by each of the artists.

Jesse Mononguie displayed some partially completed pieces of jewelry that were exceptional masterpieces and demonstrated some of the techniques used to fabricate the intricate parts of the designs. The Chiaroscuro Neck Piece designed and created by Valerie Coulson was a true work of art. She combined opal, sugilite, lapis and turquoise to create a magnificent intarsia design. These artists create the designs, cut and polish all of the precious stones they use and fabricate (not cast) the jewelry in which the stones are held. Keith Berge has created designs of jewelry that recreate lost art from pre-Christian times. His presentation showed how he recreated some of the decorative gold beads he uses as part of his fabricated jewelry.

We were able to videotape Keith Olivas who described how to create inlay jewelry designs. He also provided information on how to select and use opal for the inlay designs. He is able to use bright but small opal stones, which may not be usable in typical opal jewelry.

Ken Kratch had an interesting presentation on valuation, and a black scale, which is used in evaluation of the price of black opal by miners. Barbara Thomas donated cards, which have the black scale that Lightning Ridge miners are using to grade the variations of black to gray of the base color of the opal from the Ridge. We are presenting these cards to AOS members who come to the monthly

meetings. Thank you Barbara for contributing the cards to AOS!

Barbara Thomas had an excellent presentation on the design and making of metal beads. She shared her boulder opal cutting tips, including the design of her protective shields she uses when cutting the very messy ironstone matrix.

Our planned time did not permit us to stay to complete videotaping all of the seminars. I would like to plan to tape all the Opal seminars at the next Tucson Show.

Electrical Safety

from Cathy Gaber

Safety tips from PEPCO, the Potomac Electric Power Company:

- Never force a plug into an outlet if it doesn't fit.
- Use special, heavy-duty extension cords for high wattage appliances such as portable electrical heaters, air conditioners and freezers.
- Don't run electrical cords under rugs or carpets or anywhere they will be walked on or subject to damage.
- If extension cords lack safety closure, cover any unused outlets with electrical tape or with plastic caps to prevent the chance of a child making contact with the live circuit.
- When using outdoor tools and appliances, use only extension cords labeled for outdoor use.
- Discard extension cords with broken wires or damaged insulation; do not splice or tape damaged cords.

New Opal Chat Forum

We received a note from Peter Brusaschi who has shared articles with us from www.opalmine.com that there is a new opal chat forum on the site. Peter writes, "It is being well received by opal lovers and if you think it appropriate, you could let members know of its availability, because the more input there is, the more diversity and interest will be cultivated to the enjoyment of all international opalholics."

UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS BOOK!

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Looking For a Few Good People!

Sometimes, local Southern to support the American know where they can fit in, be considered for a support California members want Opal Society, but don't or are shy about asking to or leadership position.

We have several important openings to fill, involving varying levels of commitment. A society is an interacting group that needs both support and leadership. This is your personal invitation to take a hand in the Society's growth and future!

Hospitality: We need one or two people to purchase and set out refreshments for meetings. Typically, we have soda, canned ice tea, ice, cakes or cookies, including one sugar-free item (coffee is handled by the Women's Club staff). The Hospitality person(s) also replenish our stock of paper goods, sugar, creamer about 23 times a year. All expenses are reimbursed. Shopping is easy and can be done at any local market, even on the way to the meeting. Paper supplies are available in bulk in the mall at the Smart and Final just east of the Garden Grove Civic Women's Club

Librarian: The Librarian assists members in using the unique resources collected by the AOS over many years. The collection includes books, ' tapes, magazines, and article reprints which members may borrow at meetings or long-distance by mail. The Librarian signs materials in and out and files new and returned ones.

Program Chair: The Program Chair contacts speakers and arranges programs for meetings about 10 times per year. The Board of Directors often develop contacts in the course of their activities, and they pass along the information to the Program Chair to make the position easier. AOS members and show dealers, the CFMS book, Podium People, or seeing an interesting exhibit or program at a gem show are all resources for meeting program ideas.

Door Prize Chair: AOS has been fortunate in the generosity of its members, dealers and friends who donate door prizes for our annual show. From time to time, we have member gifts of items to use as door prizes at meetings. The Door Prize Chair solicits and records donations so they can be acknowledged. Other members can be recruited to help in these efforts during the year and at our Annual Show.

SHOW DATES

Mar. 10-11, SAN MARINO, CA - "TOURNAMENT OF GEMS." Pasadena Lapidary Society's 43rd Annual Show. San Marino Masonic Temple, 3130 Huntington Dr. Hours: 10th, 10AM-6PM; 11th, 10AM-5PM. Alex Sergienko, 323-258.. 394,

Mar. 16-18, VICTORVILLE, CA - VICTOR VALLEY GEM & MINERAL CLUB. 25th Annual Tailgate Event.

Exit 1-15 at Stoddard Wells Rd., and go east for 11 miles. Brett Ward, 760-948-1232 Dry camp with porta-potties. Soft drink, coffee bake sale booth. Field trip 9AM Sat 4X4 required!

Mar. 17-18, BULLHEAD CITY, AZ - SILVERY COLORADO RIVER ROCK CLUB. 34th Annual Gem & Mineral Show. Bullhead City Jr High - Gym - Hancock St. near Lakeside. Hours: 17th, 10AM-5PM; 18th, 10AM-4:30pM. Show Chair, Steve Bingman, 520-763-8271.

Mar. 17-18, VALLEJO, CA - "A CENTURY OF MINERALS 2001." Vallejo Gem & Mineral Society. Solano County Fairgrounds - Solano County Bldg., across from Marine World at Hwy. 37 & I-80. Hours: 10AM-5PM daily. L. Mack, 707-6 t~! -3035, e-mail doubled 17~jlmo.com

Mar. 23-25, ALBUQUERQUE, NM - "EXPO 2001". Albuquerque Gem & Mineral Club's 32nd Annual Jewelry, Gem, & Mineral Show. UNM Conference Center, 1634 University NE. Hours: 23rd, 10AM-7PM; 24th, 10AM-6PM; 25th, 10AM-5PM. Paul Hiava, e-mail agatehome@aol.com

Mar. 24-25, SAN DIEGO, CA - ANNUAL "GEM DIEGO" SHOW. San Diego Mineral and Gem Society. Bahr Shrine Auditorium, 5440 Kearny Mesa Rd. (just west of Hwy. 163 at Clairemont Mesa Blvd.) 24th, 10A-6P; 25th, 10A-5PM. Wayne Moorhead or Anne Schafer, 858~586~1637 annes@san.rr.com

Mar. 24-25, ROSE VILLE, CA - "NATURE'S WONDERS" GEM & MINERAL SHOW Roseville Rock Rollers Gem & Mm Soc. Placer Cnty Fairgrnds, 800 All American Blvd 10AM-5PM Elton Dean 916-372-4766 rockrollers@hotmail.com

Apr. 7-8, HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CA - "MAGIC IN ROCKS." 2nd Annual Puente Hills Gem & Mineral Club Show. Steinmetz Park, 1545 S. Stimson Ave. 909-594-6177.

Apr. 7-8, MARIPOSA, CA - FIRST ANNUAL MARIPOSA MINERAL & GEM SHOW. California State Mining and Mineral Museum. Mariposa County Fairgrounds (adjacent to the museum), near Hwy. 40. Call the museum at 209-742-7625.

Apr. 7-8, BORON, CA - BORON ROCK BONANZA. Mojave Mineralogical Society, Inc. Boron High School - MultiPurpose Room. Hours: 7th, 9AM-6PM; 8th, 9AM-4PM.

Apr. 28-29 Desert Roundup, Antelope Valley Gem and Mineral Show Hours: 9AM to 5PM, Challenger Memorial Hall, Antelope Valley Fairgrounds, Lancaster, CA Field trips daily at 9AM. Free Admission Co-Sponsored Antelope Valley and Palmdale Gem & Mineral Clubs dave93560@qnet.com

The McCondra Report

By Barbara McCondra

The two rushes at Grawin/Glengary area near Lightning Ridge are called Mulga and Shields, named after a Geoff Shield that found one of them. The Yowah Opal Festival is the third weekend of July and the Lightning Ridge Opal and Gem Expo is the fourth weekend in July. They are only a 6-hour drive apart and across the New South Wales and Queensland border from each other.

MATRIX OPAL

When speaking the jargon of “opal,” matrix can cause some confusion for the novice. Generally, matrix can be defined as the form of opal where fine lines, rivulets, pools, or sparkles and flashes of precious opal fire intertwine within a host rock. The host rock of Queensland usually is a ferruginous (iron-bearing) sandstone or ironstone with varying percentages of iron in iron oxides. In Lightning Ridge, New South Wales, matrix is a hard sludgy material that is partially silicified like potch (common opal), but full of impurities, and can coat a bar of precious opal. Ridge matrix needs to be removed entirely to make a stable opal stone as the matrix dries out and stresses the opal.

The matrix of Andamooka opal consists of a couple of types. One is highly opalized and silicified making it truly impervious to the treatment process that blackens the matrix in order to enhance the fire within. However, the matrix of this type that has a more porous character lends itself well to carbonization treatments. Just a tad less silicification and it both takes carbonization and polishes well with a smooth surface. Supplies of this type of hard matrix opal have diminished rapidly, increasing the demand for the even more porous Andamooka matrix that needs treatments that both darkens the matrix for opal fire viewing and fills the tiny pores for a glossy polish. Both of these types of opalized matrix are referred to as Andamooka matrix, but the second softer variety used to be called Andamooka concrete opal on the fields. Matrix opal cutter and entrepreneur Emory Liggett points out that softer here means stronger opal as the higher silicification of the other type makes it more brittle than the softer variety.

TREATMENT OF ANDAMOOKA MATRIX OPAL

Many bush sagas exist about how the first treated opal came to be, from spilled sweet coffee and stones

in the smoky fire, to other more rowdy tales. The fact remains that miners are treating the matrix with some form of carbonization process. The porosity level of the matrix is what allows this to take place. Getting carbon ‘into the most minute spaces in the host rock can be accomplished a number of ways, and using smoke is not the preferred method. A popularly accepted method’ used to be cooking Andamooka matrix opal in a crock pot with a sugar solution, then cooking again in sulfuric acid a number of times, and then one last time’ after the stone is cut and polished. This method is most thoroughly explained in “Tops in’ Opals” owner Emory Liggett’s book, “Opal Buyer and Dealer Handbook.” Today, a couple of safer methods involve the use of sugar and water and baking without using acid, whose fumes and obviously dangerous properties always made the acid process a risky bit of business for the novice, the careless, and the hurried. The ovens in the workshops of Andamooka attest to the popularity of this method, although not everyone is willing to share their particular secrets in the treatment and coating of the more porous variety of matrix.

The spectacular flashing colors of opal blink out from treated matrix but the stone is not finished until the surface is polished. The less expensive, more porous grade of matrix will require soaking in Opticon, capping with an optical crystal cap, or coating with assorted resins to achieve the finished shine to the stone. This particular type of matrix, due to its porosity and newer methods of carbonization, allows fuller penetration of the carbonization, making the stone black clear through. Sometimes the grinding on the surface may produce a lighter black body color if the penetration is not deep, requiring a re-carbonizing of the stone.

If all this sounds like a lot of work just look into the depths of this pool of myriad colors called Andamooka matrix treated black opal and let its ethereal dance of spectral light convince you how worth it all it is. Better yet, let others do most of the work for you. Buy a treated slice and cap it or coat it. Voila!

(If you’re online, I have found the most detailed account of Andamooka Matrix written by Murray Willis of Australian Opal Mines. It is excellent, with beautiful color images. I recommend it highly! It’s at: <http://www.shed.com/aom/storyfile/matrix.html>.
Barbara)

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