

The Opal Express

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

Volume #33 Issue #04 April, 2001

Will Not Be
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General Meeting – April 10

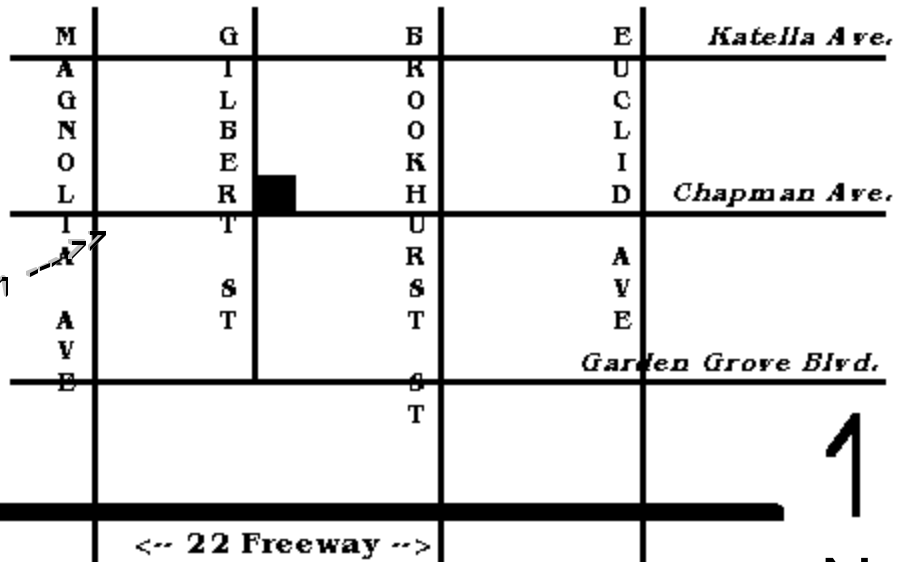


TO:

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 →



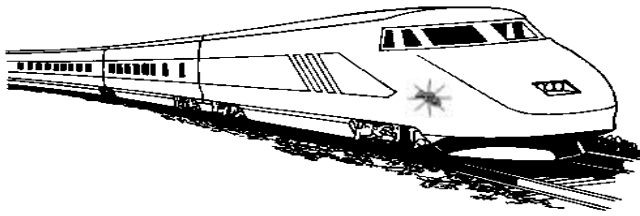
The American Opal Society Contacts:

<http://www.opalsociety.org>

Mike Kowalsky	President	(714) 761-4876	email: mykowalsky@aol.com
Bob Dixon	Vice President	(714) 534-5063	
Bob Olinskas	Treasurer		
Jim Pisani	Webmaster	(562) 797-4986	email: vulajim@gte.net
Carol J. Bova	Editor	(818) 951-1402	email: editor@bovagems.com



The Opal Express



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President's Message

from Mike Kowalsky

This month has had fewer major events compared to late January and February. The latest local event was held in mid-March at Stoddard Wells, which is off of Hwy 15 just north of Victorville, CA.

One of my Tucson finds is going to be delivered to my house very soon. There was a new machine design, exhibited by Ontrack Designs, which featured a flat disk at a 45-degree angle with a water supply across the cutting surface. I plan to bring it in to the next monthly meeting and let members try it. I will bring the flat lap machine in also. We also plan to have a Pixie in for the meeting. I would like members to bring in some rough to try on each of the machines and compare the techniques of cutting with the different types of machines.

We have been asked by the Searchers and the Culver City Gem Club to provide an opal display for the show. We need to have some donations to put into the display cabinets. Please call me, e-mail me or come to the monthly meeting with any donations. We are looking for donations or loans of opal specimens from different locations within North America and South America. We would especially like specimens from the Western US and close to the southern California area.

I would love to see more of you at our next monthly meeting.

APRIL 12 PROGRAM NOTES "DANGER IN THE MINES"

BONITA CHAMBERLIN ON AFGHANISTAN

Billions of years ago, and on the other side of the world, in one of the most geologically dynamic regions of the world, two crustal plates collided, giving rise to the Himalayas. This activity resulted in the vast mineral and gem deposits, spectacular finds, many only located during the past 20 years. It is Afghanistan.

Although a San Diego native, Bonita Chamberlin has lived, worked, and lectured in many countries in Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Middle and Near East. She has spent the past 24 years developing a relationship with the Afghan Ministry of Commerce while living two years in the capitol of Kabul; and since 1983, during the Soviet conflict, with the famed Mujahideen, or Freedom Fighters. Her hard work and persistence has borne fruit.

Working in the Hindu Kush mines of Afghanistan under very primitive conditions, she assists the locals in the establishment of a viable postwar economy through the mining, and marketing of gemstones and minerals. She is also an expert on blasting techniques, as the Afghans have a tendency to use too much dynamite or blasting materiel, destroying the valuable crystals, and many times endangering themselves.

Although Afghanistan has historically been known for its lapis lazuli deposits, significant amounts of tourmaline, kunzite, aquamarine, emerald, ruby, sapphire, spinel and amethyst have also emerged from the embattled nation. Much of the wealth was unknown until the Soviets began bombing, and the bombs exposed the crystals.

Come hear her tale of walking over the Hindu Kush mountains from Pakistan, covering over 500 miles, 6 passes over 14,000 feet, tip-toeing through mine fields, avoiding bandits, dodging bullets and bombs, and the usual challenges of a country with precious little food. Trying to communicate in a country with over 20 languages, and a 5% literacy rate presents an additional challenge.

Bonita is a major international player of more than 30 years, working with diverse cultures, and within various political and economic situations. She holds a doctorate from the Universidad de los Andes in Biological Sciences, and is recognized as a specialist in training people in Lesser Developed Countries.

Join us April 12 to hear the whole story—it's an extraordinary one-shared by an extraordinary woman.

CORRECTION!

Editor's Note:

We received a nice email from Murray Willis pointing out that the Andamooka matrix opal article mentioned by Barbara McCondra last month was written by Michael Ferguson, not Murray Willis. Our sincerest apologies to Mr. Ferguson. If you missed it, the article is at:
<http://www.shed.com/aom/storyfile/matrix.html>

Opal and Weathering Related Research Projects

from David Horton,
Horton Geoscience Consultants Pty Ltd

While Australia produces approximately 95% of the world's precious opal - all from weathered sedimentary rocks, it may come as something of a surprise that the geological processes which govern its formation are poorly under-stood. Most geologists are simply content to say that precious opal is a product of weathering without really understanding the how or why of it.

The opal industry in Australia has changed little in the last century. Almost all opal is mined by individuals, syndicates and small corporations. New deposits are found by the traditional methods of prospecting, trenching or drilling and are almost always found within, or as extensions to, existing opal fields. Rarely is a new opal field found.

Without major industry or government support, there has been little funding available for necessary research and development. As a consequence, opal research has been very fragmented and there have been very few attempts to comprehensively study the Australian industry as a whole. Without good scientifically-based research and development, new fields are unlikely to be found and the industry is unlikely to achieve its maximum potential.

In an attempt to remedy this situation, a collaborative effort was recently instigated by two Brisbane-based organisations, Horton Geoscience Consultants Pty Ltd and the Argon Geochronology Laboratory at the University of Queensland's Department of Earth Sciences. Horton Geo-science is a consultancy which specialises in developing exploration methodologies for various mineral commodities. The Argon Geochronology Laboratory is host to a new state-of the art $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating facility, believed to be the only one in the world dedicated to the study of weathering processes.

Several opal and weathering related projects are in the process of being set up and these are to be funded from a variety of government and non-government sources. Under the supervision of Dr. Paulo Vasconcelos from the Argon Laboratory, it is intended to have two PhD students working on opal-related projects and there will probably be one or two other post-graduate projects as well.

Horton Geoscience intends gaining the support of several State Governments to produce a comprehensive GIS

(Geographical Information System) database over central Australia. Construction of this database is essential, not only for the research effort, but also for anyone wishing to explore for opal. Other projects which are in the planning stages include construction of a geochronology database, field trials of digital elevation model instrumentation, geophysical trials, and basic geological mapping.

Details of the various projects are going to be posted on the Argon Laboratory web page at:
<http://arlab.earthsciences.uq.edu.au> In the meantime, further information can be obtained by contacting David Horton at hgc@uq.net.au

WARM GRETINGS AND GET WELL WISHES TO PHIL PEARL AND JAKE SCHMIDT

Stoddard Wells Tailgate Report

by Carol Bova

The Victorville club's annual tailgate event was almost an Opal Society reunion this year. Among those selling were Wes and Frann Roth, and Bill Horning just up the road from them. Greg and Ginny Howell were midway down the hill, and Bob Dixon, Cliff and Eva Coan were at the foot of the hill near the Searchers encampment. Brad Smith, Fay McDowell, and Gary Mitchell were among the folks stopping by to look at rocks and say hello. I may have missed a few folks, because I only left my space a few times, so please throw nice rocks if I overlooked you or forgot to mention you!

The spirit at Stoddard Wells was frumenty, and folks struck up conversations easily. There were lots of folks with well-behaved dogs, and families with nice kids, and of course, rockhounds who love to talk rocks.

Sales were somewhat down from last year for a number of people I talked to, perhaps a reflection of the stock market situation. Attendance seemed lower too, in spite of, or maybe because of, the wonderful weather. Daytime, not too hot, not too cold at night, not overly windy.., just a perfect desert weekend.

If you haven't gone to the Victorville tailgate, mark your calendar now for next March! You can be sure a lot of AOS folks, and many others too, will be back. I found myself wondering more than once if this is what Quartzsite was like way back when. See you there next year!

(And thanks, Victorville club --you did a great job!)

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**AUSTRALIAN OPAL MINES P.O. Box 345
Magill, South Australia 5072**
Email address: palmine@austopalmines.net.au
website: <http://www.austopalmines.net.au> and
<http://www.shed.com/aom/home.html>

For Immediate Release: April 3, 2001
Contact: Doran Sanchez (909) 697-5220;
E-MAIL: dasanche@ca.blm.gov

BLM Schedules Open House to Discuss Northern Mojave Desert OHV Route Network

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is soliciting public participation in the development of a vehicle access network for the public lands encompassing Red Mountain, the El Paso Mountains, and southeast of the City of Ridgecrest.

An open house will be held May 9, 2001, from 2p.m. to 8p.m. at the Senior Center Building, located at 125 South Warner off Ridgecrest Boulevard in the City of Ridgecrest, CA. BLM staff will be available to discuss the suggested network. The public is invited to "field check" the suggested network and provide their comments to BLM during the 90-days following release of the maps and reports.

BLM has prepared detailed maps and written reports that describe a preliminary access network. Maps and reports will be available on the following dates: (1) Red Mountain, April 3, 2001; (2) El Paso Mountains, April 11, 2001; and (3) southeast of Ridgecrest, April 18, 2001.

Development of a vehicle access network will implement a decision reached by the BLM in 1980 when it completed the California Desert Conservation Area Plan. The plan directed BLM to design and designate such a network on public lands throughout the deserts of southern California. This "route designation process" is now being implemented through the new West Mojave Plan, an interagency wildlife conservation plan currently being developed by a consortium of desert cities, counties and agencies. Based upon the public comments received during the 90-day public review, BLM will develop a modified proposed route network, which will be used as the preferred alternative in the West Mojave Plan.

The Red Mountain, El Paso Mountains, and Ridgecrest areas are three of 21 regions into which the western Mojave desert has been subdivided for purposes of developing a network of vehicle access routes. When completed, the network will provide recreational and other access to public lands while at the same time protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources.

Subregion reports are not a decision documents, nor does the route network suggested by this report constitute a formal proposal by the BLM. The written report provides an overview of the subregion, its current uses, natural and cultural resources and management goals. It describes the effectiveness of the suggested network in meeting those goals. It is a preliminary assessment prepared to assist staff and public as they cooperatively develop a formal proposal for a route network.

Once a proposed network is developed, it will be discussed at public meetings to be held during the late summer and fall of 2001. Following publication of a draft environmental impact statement on the West Mojave Plan late in 2001, additional public hearings will be held. This field review, therefore, is but the first of several opportunities for public involvement in the route designation process.

Comments regarding the proposed route network for Red Mountain, the El Paso Mountains, and the area southeast of the City of Ridgecrest must be received by no later than Tuesday, July 31, 2001. Copies of the report and 1:25,000 scale maps are available upon request from BLM. For more information contact the West Mojave Team at (909) 697-5294.

-BLM-

OPAL DOUBLETS IN LIGHTNING RIDGE

BY RAY ROYSTON

I have been reading questions asked in The Opal Express about the correct way to make opal doublets. The following is what is regarded as best practice by doublet makers in the Lightning Ridge District.

FLAT LAPPING A sharp 600 lap or a worn 260 lap is as fine as the opal and the backing should be ground to. Too fine a finish such as 1200 is a mistake.

GLUE The best quality glue is a 2part epoxy resin with the brand name 'UHU' this is a German product, and is readily available in Australia, so I would imagine it is common in the States.

There are 2 varieties of 'UHU' — 'UHU PLUS' which is a 24 hour setting glue, and 'UHU QUICKSET' which is a 5 minute setting glue. Both are used by professional doublet makers. I prefer the quickset glue because it seems to liquefy better when heated and stones can be cut within an hour.

BACKING There can only be one backing for any decent doublet and that is black opal patch.

HOW TO ASSEMBLE THE DOUBLET After flat lapping the opal and backing, check that the backing piece is large enough for the opal and clean both with alcohol. Be wary of any lint from the alcohol pad remaining on either face.

Have an electric freeman or coffee warmer preheated to around 150 degrees F with a drink coaster or blotting paper on it also heated.

Mix glue on a disposable surface until thoroughly mixed and begin mixing 'Nicrosene' in. Keep adding until glue begins to stiffen. Mixed glue should be quite thick and a brilliant glossy black.

Nicrosene is just a fancy name for photocopier toner.

Coat the backing with this mixture and place opal on top. Do not try to push together at this stage.

Place backing and opal onto heated paper, backing down. As the heat rises through the backing, the glue will slowly liquify and run like water. Use a wooden match to push the pieces together in a circular or figure of eight motion. This will eliminate air bubbles entirely and bring the pieces into close contact.

If using Quickset glue, be as quick as possible and only do a small number of pieces at one time. You will find that the glue runs down onto the paper and also up over the edge of the opal, but this can be ground off later. Some people may wonder about heating opal, but the only stone that will crack is the one that was going to crack later.

OTHER NOTES ON DOUBLETS The best color should always be against the backing, especially if it becomes necessary to cut down thin for brilliance.

If after lapping, you find a sand spot in the opal, do not flat lap until it is gone. Take it out with a diamond burr. You cannot see this once glued to backing.

Try using these methods on reasonably clear synthetic opal. When cut thin, the result is startling.

(Editor's Note: Ray and Kim Royston are opal miners and wholesalers. You can contact them at 76 Brunswick Circuit, Kaleen Canberra, A.C.T. 2617, Australia, Tel (02) 6241 241 7720, email: ray@canmail.com.au)

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OPAL BOOK COLLECTORS

For a list of out of print Opal books -
email me in Australia at hmartin@mullum.com.au

Harry Martin

Special Award to Opal Society Member

Mattie Tikka was the recipient of the Australian Sports Metal Award, awarded this year to only five persons. This award is to recognize persons [whether or not they are Australian Citizens] who have made a contribution to Australian Sports as a current or former participant, or through the provision of support service to sports. The Sports medal was awarded by the Governor General of Australia to commemorate Australian sporting achievement.

On behalf of the Opal Society, I would like to congratulate Mattie Tikka, an Australian Finn from Sydney, and one of our AOS Opal Show dealers and members, for this well-deserved, award. The award was presented by the Governor General of The Commonwealth of Australia, and was signed by Prime Minister John Howard.

Congratulations, Mattie, from the American Opal Society!

Please update your address book!

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

Maybe Later Than You Think

By Cathy Gaber

Anytime you travel or go on a field trip, don't assume you are going to return home on time. Airlines are notorious for canceled and delayed flights, but trains can also be late and cars, trucks, motorcycles and even bicycles can breakdown preventing a timely return. You do not want to be without your medications in situations like this. Factors such how far you are traveling, how reliable is the method of transportation, how remote is the destination or how likely is the weather to cause problems dictate whether having extra medications for one day or several is indicated. Even for what is expected to be a day trip, it is always prudent to take an extra dose of any medication that is taken daily, such as medicines for hypertension, heart disease or diabetes. On a longer trip take at least one extra dose more than you expect to need. If there is any chance that water will not be available for those medications, which need to be taken with water, then make sure you pack water. Likewise, some medicines need to be taken with food, so you need to take appropriate food.

Other medications that might be wise to include are pain killers, such as aspirin, Tylenol or ibuprofen, cold medications, antacids, antibiotic cream, diarrhea 'medicines, and any other medicines, prescription or not, that you might typically use at home. If you are subject to anaphylactic shock, don't forget a bee sting kit, and in some areas, a snakebite kit could come in very handy.

Not having many of these medications available for a day or two might not be life threatening, but others may make a big difference to your health or comfort. The small effort to pack these items will not only bring peace of mind but may possibly save your life.

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Editor – Carol J. Bova
Please address all inquiries
and exchange newsletters to:

The Opal Express c/o
Carol J. Bova
P.O. Box 5388
Glendale, CA 91221-5388
Email: editor@bovagems.com

(Article Deadline is the 15th of the month prior to

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

The workshop at Walker Jr. High is available for the use of AOS members on Wednesday nights.

Please call Stan McCall at Gems & Opals (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session.

WORKSHOP RULES

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 fee is \$3 per session.
 5. To assist us in scheduling, please call Stan or a board member in advance to reserve shop time.
- Thank you!

SHOW DATES

Apr 14-15 Paradise, CA Paradise Gem and Mineral Club Veteran's Memorial Hall, Skyway at Elliott, Hours: 10-5 both days John Hees and Robert Lynk (530) 533-575

Apr 20-22 Henderson, NV Las Vegas Gem Club, 200 Water Street, Henderson, NV, Hours: Fri 12-6 Sat 10-6 sun 10-4, Jerry or Lynne (702) 597-5104 : jrbvegas@aol.com

April 28-29, 2001 Lancaster, CA Antelope Valley and Palmdale Gem and Mineral Clubs, Antelope Valley Fairgrounds Challenger Memorial Hall Hours: 9-5 both days

April 28-29, 2001 Santa Cruz, CA Santa Cruz Mineral & Gem Society Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Center & Church Street Hours: 10-5 both days Eleanor & Hubert Drake (831) 688-8086 e-mail: hmdrekefpacbell.net

May 5-6 2001 Anaheim, CA The Searchers Gem & Mineral society, Inc. Brookhurst Community Center, 2271 W. Crescent Ave. Hours: Sat. 10-7 Sun. 10-4 Connie Van Kampen (714) 993-2827

May 4-5 2001 Bakersfield, CA. Kern County Mineral Society, Kern County Fairgrounds, Hours: 10-5 both days Manuel Fernnaandez (661) 323-0353

May 12-13 2001 Reno, NV Reno Gem and Mineral Society, Reno Livestock - Events Center Exhibit Hall: 1350 N. Wells Ave., Hours: Sat 10-5 Sun 10-4, John Peterson (775) 356-8820

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