

The Opal Express

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



**Volume #38 Issue #8
August 2005**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Report from CFMS State Show
- Eagle Creek Precious Opal, NW BC
- Travels in Aust with Frank Gross Pt 2
- An intro to Flintknapping
- Bob Gullage on Opal Retailing
- The California Poppy: An Indicator of Copper

Important Info:

Board Meeting
August 9th

General Meeting
August 11th

Lecture: David Kramer – One of the foremost jewelers in the USA discusses his opal cutting & dopping techniques.

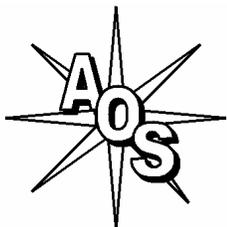
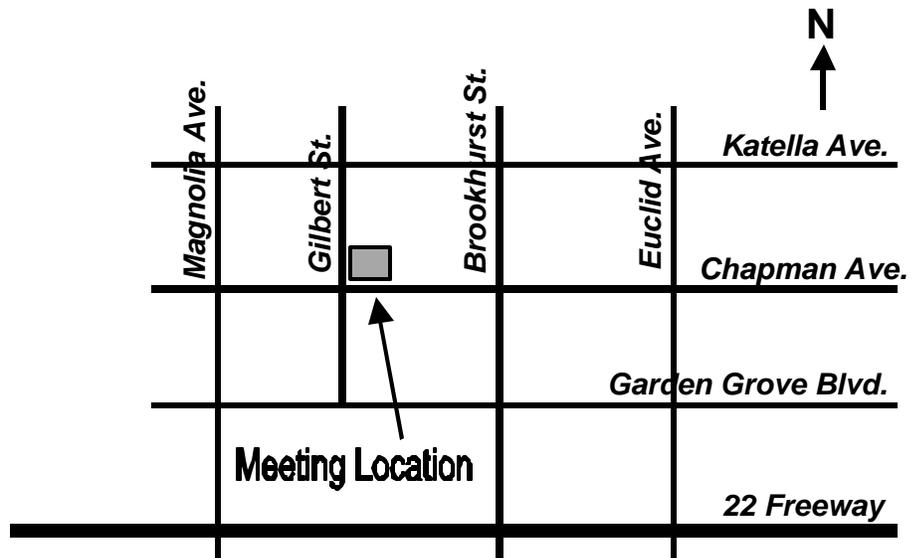
— GENERAL MEETINGS —

2nd Thursday of the Month
7:00 pm - 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

August 11th Lecture: David Kramer on Cutting & Dopping Opal



The American Opal Society

<http://OpalSociety.org>

Walt Johnson
Eugene LeVan
Russ Madsen
Fran Todd
Jim Pisani

President
Vice President
Treasurer
Opal Show Chairman
Editor & Webmaster

(714) 533-1287
(562) 621-1805
(562) 884-2254
(310) 721-5614
(562) 797-5239

email: donnawalt@msn.com
email: fineblackopal@sprynet.com
email: chairman2rgm@cs.com
email: toddle@aol.com
email: webmaster@opalsociety.org

American Opal Society Membership Renewal

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP		DUES / FEES	AMOUNT PAID
<u>DUES:</u> <u>SELECT ONE</u>	All <u>US</u> Addresses including Alaska and Hawaii	\$25	
	<u>International Members</u> = All addresses <u>outside</u> of US Addresses	\$35	
<u>ADDITIONAL BADGES</u> = \$5.00 each (First Badge <u>free</u> when joining)		\$5	
<u>ONE TIME INITIATION FEE</u> = All <u>New</u> members		\$10	
<u>SENIOR DISCOUNT</u> = Age 65 or over deduct \$5		-\$5	
TOTAL PAID – DUES, less Senior Discount plus Badge plus Initiation Fee (if Applicable)			

Please make check or money order payable to “**American Opal Society**”. Mail payment and application to:

American Opal Society; PO BOX 4875; Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

An optional, quicker method of payment is via the **Internet** using **PayPal.com**. To pay, just log onto your PayPal account and “Send Money” to the AOS account, **webmaster@opalsociety.org**. There is no transfer charge!

NAME			
BUSINESS NAME			
ADDRESS		APT # or PO BOX	
CITY		STATE	
ZIP or POSTAL CODE		COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE USA)	
PHONE - Home ()	PHONE - Business ()	FAX ()	
E-MAIL			
WEBSITE			
OCCUPATION		HOBBIES AND INTERESTS	

NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:
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.

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER and NEWSLETTER MAILING: The AOS publishes a membership directory once per year in its Newsletter, the *Opal Express*. Your name will be included. Please check what additional personal information that you want listed for other members. If it is different from the information above, please note that on the application.

Address Phone E-mail Website E-Mail the Opal Express Newsletter instead of Postal Mail

Include my name & address on a list provided to the Dealers selling at our Annual Opal & Gem Show.

Please sign here: _____ Date _____

The Opal Express is published monthly by
The American Opal Society.

Copyright 2005. All rights reserved.

Non-Commercial Reprint Permission Granted Unless Otherwise Reserved.

Editor-Jim Pisani

Please address all inquiries and exchange newsletters to:

The Opal Express C/O

Jim Pisani

P.O. Box 4875

Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

E-mail: webmaster@opalsociety.org

Are Your Dues Due Now?

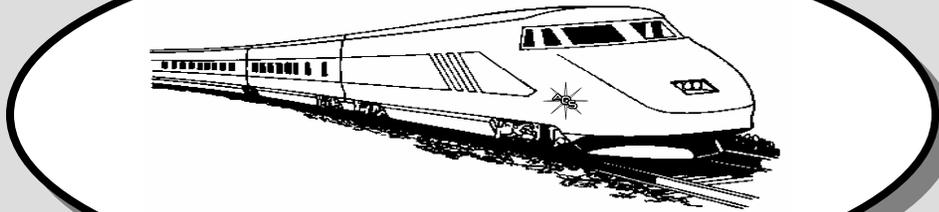
PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are **DUE NOW**. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

A 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.

Thank you,
The Editor

The Opal Express

Published
monthly by
The
American
Opal
Society



August 2005

Volume 38 Issue 8

Table of Contents:

Vice President's Message - <i>By Eugene LeVan</i>	3
August Speaker - David Kramer – Dopping Opal	3
Members Only Website Password	3
Report from CFMS State Show	3
Bob Gullage on Opal Retailing	4
Eagle Creek Precious Opal, NW BC, Canada	5
The Adventures of Frank Gross in Aussie Land – Part 2	6
Flaked Out	8
The California Poppy: An Indicator of Copper	8
August 2005 Gem & Mineral Shows	8

Vice President's Message - *By Eugene LeVan*

Keep coming and learn more from the great opal and gem speakers. Last month we had **Robert Gullage** a certified gemologist and opal jeweler. His presentation was very enlightening to all of us. If you missed last months meeting, come this month and learn from the members more about opal and gems.

From e-mails in Australia our members have traveled Lightning Ridge and other sites for the last 60 days, come and hear the story's from their adventures at our meeting.

We are working on the workshop for cutting stones, I hope to push on getting this project going so all members can benefit from the equipment and training from other members that have opal cutting skills more on this subject next month.

August Speaker - David Kramer – Dopping Opal

We are looking forward to hearing our August guest speaker, opal expert and jeweler David Kramer. David will discuss dopping techniques he has developed for particular situations involving certain types of opal. Examples will include special methods David has developed for dopping boulder opal for inlay and a comparison of dopping with wax versus dopping with glue. We will also have a Genie on hand for demonstrations of related cutting techniques

After a tour in the US Air Force during the Vietnam war, David learned metalsmithing and during the 1970's studied with master silversmith, native American Mr. Jack Galbo. Thereafter David added goldsmithing and stone cutting to his jewelry making repertoire.

During the 1980's he was enchanted by the Queen of Gems and has not looked back since. He learned opal evaluation, cutting and polishing techniques and is now recognized as one of America's opal experts.

David uses 14k gold for all his jewelry and all pieces contain precious Australian opal which he cuts and polishes himself. Each jewelry piece is uniquely designed and crafted to enhance the individual beauty of each opal. Be sure to mark you calendar for this opportunity to learn from one of the foremost opal jewelers in America.

Members Only Website Password

Name: "member" and Password: "grawin".

Report from CFMS State Show

Roseville Rockhounds, June 10, 11 & 12, 2005

By Fran Todd, AOS Representative

The cell rang. "We are in civilization again!! There is a Starbucks, a Trader Joe's and an AM/PM station all on the same corner!" Pancha was so excited. As much as she liked being by herself in the wilderness, at this point in time she wanted to be in civilization. Dotty Beachler (Long Beach Mineral Society) and I still had to navigate Sacramento before getting into Roseville. At least I knew Pancha had arrived safely. She is, after all, part of the family.

Roseville Rock Rollers had invited the gem and mineral societies in the State of California for a weekend of good company, business and rocking. It was held at the Placer County Fair Grounds. Quaint and cozy compared to Los Angeles. There was plenty of room for motor homes and campers. Many friends were there, and there were many more to make.

The show was opened by the presiding president of the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies (AFMS). He said that he was impressed by the quality and variety of the vendors and exhibit cases. There was a new tidbit of info regarding the now famous gold nugget, "The Golden Bear". Recent information stated that the nugget was found by a local resident in Placer County! To get the show open, everyone popped party poppers. Pancha was bored by this point and was glad to have the show open for shopping.

Friday was the day that the CFMS representatives had to shop and listen to lectures. Dotty and I attended one about the healing power of stones, not what I had expected, but was interesting. Three outstanding cases were there: a case of mushrooms, intarsia penguins and new tongue and cheek mineral finds. Of course there were good deals on opal, sunstones and beads. Two opal vendors, one from Mexico had outrageous Mexican Opals, the other had really nice boulder opal. One vendor had mine run benitoite matrix; he had a lot less of it after the lecture on benitoite... Congratulations are in order for the Roseville people. They had local television there both Friday and Saturday. The crowd had lots of people asking beginner type questions. Each morning, people were lined up prior to the opening.

Friday evening is the "Cracker Barrel get together. It was more like a dessert bar. No crackers or barrels again this year. Since there was not a major controversy Pancha left early, said she had friends to visit. Dotty and I went back to the motel for an early night.

Saturday is an all day meeting for the CFMS representatives. The agenda consists of all of the committee chairs reporting. There was some valuable information discussed. Some of the reports were

similar to every other meeting: A new club in the Kern County area, three clubs were in competition for the best club report/book, insurance is still a major problem, etc., etc., etc. (Quoting Anna 's King of Siam) Because of the meetings for the Club Representatives on Saturday and Sunday, we missed an excellent field trip to the 16 to 1 Gold Mine. One of the last still working gold mines, visitors toured the mine with flashlights and learned first hand how difficult hard rock mining is.

Saturday evening was a wonderful banquet. Good food, good company and nice awards. The room had been decorated as a mine entrance. Every one was greeted by an old miner. Festive sticks of dynamite adorned the table. As we found out later, they had been salted with more party poppers.

Although there was not a particular issue with regards to opal, there was not much opal. However, there were some lovely pieces of opal, some at an excellent price. Opal, as a gem stone, had very little presence among the vendors, or in the exhibit cases. All of the Opal Society's members know how spectacular this gem can be, yet opal has an exposure that seems small in proportion.

Dotty went to the Sunday Editor's Breakfast. Pancha wished us a safe trip home. She had found another a very old boyfriend and was off for another good time. I got the car filled up, a huge cup of coffee and a light breakfast. Sneaking into the fairgrounds early gave me the chance to linger and watch as the vendors prepared their booths for the day. It's nice to watch other people wake up slowly on a Sunday morning.

+++++

Bob Gullage on Opal Retailing **- From the Other Side of the Counter**

By Russ Madsen

Bob Gullage was our guest speaker at AOS July general meeting. Bob is a GIA certified gemologist in the business of selling opal and jewelry from a retail jewelry store - Gems & Opals in Anaheim on Beach Blvd. Bob brings 24 years of experience in the trade and notes the most important element of success is meeting people. Relationships.

Opal inspires passion. Bob pointed out no one has ever walked into his store and said, "My name is Bill and I am an emerald-aholic." **Opal's bad luck reputation.** Dealing with the public's mistaken bad luck notion of opal Bob offers a sympathetic comment to potential clients, "If you don't have opal it's your bad luck."

Some business people don't like to deal in opal because it can be broken and by its nature there is not much margin for error in creating jewelry settings. Much of opal's character in this regard should be understood as risk management. The staff of jewelers and goldsmiths at Bob's store have expertise with opal. Proper handling of opal is the key.

Re-cutting The Dragon's Tear. Talking about this beautiful opal, the Dragon's Tear, Bob noted that when David Burton bought the stone it was set in an estate jewelry piece. David bought the piece, removed the opal, re-cut to its red color play and reset it in a wonderful new setting befitting its superior quality. With his skill as an opal cutter, David Burton was able to manage the risk inherent in re-cutting the Dragon's Tear. (The story of this marvelous opal has appeared before in these pages and has been pictured in a variety of publications including Fred Ward's "Opals", The Opal Express (3/96), and an article in Rock & Gem.)

On the subject of publications, Bob pointed out any opal which is published in a book will have increased demand and a higher value due to such publicity.

Customer support. Bob's advice to potential opal clients - ask any dealer what guarantee they will provide if a stone should break or be damaged during the setting process or after the sale. In other words find out in advance about customer support.

It is usually possible to re-polish a scratched stone without removing it from its setting. An opal may be removed and re-cut if it has been chipped. The jeweler must be skilled and careful because opal is soft compared to diamond and can be fairly easily cracked during the setting process. Here Bob commented on the advantages of Daniel Toledo's technique of back-setting as opal as described in these pages last month.

A standard bezel setting looks great and protects the edge and to some extent the top of an opal but it is difficult to remove the stone later. There is also the risk of hammering the bezel into place and damaging the stone at the outset.

What about selling loose versus set opals? By the same token, what about a customer who brings in a finished opal to be set? Selling loose opal makes it possible to personalize the finished jewelry. Very desirable.

The process of designing a setting. At Gems & Opals they prepare a design drawing for free. Other dealers often charge for this service. Changes to the design can then be made before the wax is created. Using a CAD machine the wax is carved to the final drawing. Finally, additional changes may be made and the wax cut again if necessary.

Another strategy they employ to achieve customer satisfaction is to have on hand an inventory both of loose stones and finished jewelry. They are able to offer alternatives and variety if a customer sees a stone but doesn't like its setting or visa versa.

Modern competition. When someone shows Bob a stone purchased on Home Shopping Network he responds by saying, "Let me show you a range of opals." People are able to figure out quickly the stones for sale on such programs are generally low grade.

A broad range of opal is available on the internet. Sometimes a person will buy a parcel consisting of a quantity of loose opals on the internet planning to profit by mounting them in manufactured settings. The problem which often arises is that such a person fails to include labor cost in their calculations. On occasion these same folks believe they can make a profit by reselling to wholesalers. Bob states if, as a wholesaler, you can't compete with the internet you should get out of the business. He indicated he has never been cheated by the public, only by those in the business.

Here Bob again stressed the importance of arrangements and relationships. As an example he noted he always buys parcels from Rod Griffin (long time members will recall Rod was a guest speaker at an AOS meeting some 6 or 7 years ago). Rod is a long time Australian opal miner and dealer. Bob pointed out when a dealer like Rod first arrives they need money. If they know you are a committed willing buyer who can be counted on to make a purchase, you will get first shot at their latest parcels.

Relationships. The gemstone business runs on "memos". For example a note (memo) might simply read "I will pay \$10,000.00 for xyz emerald." The trade relies on word of mouth and reputation. One must always pay up on memos to keep ones reputation.

Various opal market factors. The Japanese moved out of the opal market when the yen-dollar ratio fell. Appeal factor can be a pitfall to pricing - what if the owner/seller *loves* an opal? The price may end up based on their internal, heartfelt but unrealistic expectations.

Bob notes he can price most white base and crystal based on lots of experience. Top unique stones on the other hand are most likely sold by the pricing espoused by Rod Griffin. Quoting Rod, "You ask what you dare and you take what you get."

If a stone is mounted, especially bezel set with a closed back, ask is it a doublet? This will have a major impact on the opal's value.

While there are really no objective valuations for our elusive queen of gems, Bob uses The Guide as a guide.

Weight cannot be used exclusively as carat multiplier. What if the stone has been cut thick for extra mass or has an area with little or no color play? What if the color play is directional?

Taking into account all the above (and more), the evaluation decision is based on how the stone appears face-on. Bob suggests everyone educate themselves. Find comparison stones.

Security in the jewelry business. At gem shows. Thieves know about all the big shows. About five years ago, David Burton was followed by two men. It was Stan McCall who first noticed their presence in the parking lot. Once David realized what was happening he drove to the Irvine Police Station and the men drove away. While nothing untoward happened, the risk was great because David was carrying a significant value of someone else's colored stone inventory.

At the store. Never be alone in the store. Ever. Lock up if there is only one person for any reason. To your advantage, thieves don't know what you are going to do. Be low key. Let a dangerous thief have what they are demanding, don't risk harm or worse.

Bob described how he got into the business. His first step was to go to every gem and mineral show. He began to figure out who the local dealers were and established relationships.

Established in business, Bob soon found success was not about the money; success comes from making people happy. Relationships.

Replacement cost. For a valuable opal, Bob advises buyers be sure to get a written document of valuation and/or appraisal. This document should define what it will cost to replace the opal and setting. There are various appraisal prices assigned to gem stones. The one that's important is not retail, nor wholesale, but what a trained expert states is replacement cost. The highest possible appraisal (retail) may make an owner feel good but is a bad idea because insurance cost of a gemstone is based on the stated, appraised, *value*. Practically speaking therefore, this should be replacement cost. There is a problem with appraisal of top, world class stones because they are unique and cannot be replaced.

Here Daniel Toledo shared that one of his clients submitted a claim with an appraisal **and** certificate of authenticity for a stolen piece. Relying on the certificate of authenticity, the insurance company paid the appraisal's stated replacement value in money because the stolen setting and opal were unique.

Bob pointed out it is bad form to provide a low appraisal (presumably for lower insurance rates). Aside from the obvious issue with insurance company premiums there is a risk the client might later insist any difference between a limited insurance payout and replacement cost be made up by the appraiser.

Bob mentioned his usual fee for a typical appraisal is \$45.00.

Investing in gemstones/opals. Bob's advice was one word... **DON'T.** Buy opals and other gemstones because they make you happy. Bob noted only world class stones have any chance of increasing in value. Gemstones are all too risky and all the lower grades are too easily available. There is also the problem of simulants and synthetics. Recently, even manufactured diamonds have become undistinguishable from natural stones.

For shipping opal, Bob stated he always uses the US Postal Service and sends valuable packages registered and insured.

What about black opal? Bob notes truly black opal is very rare. Most rare within this group is black opal with red color play. Valuation is basically as described above but with an important additional consideration. One must ask how pleasing is the color play? This is really a question of rarity and in the case of black opal it can control the price.

In conclusion, Bob offered <<http://www.sedaopals.com>> as a suggested website for opal lovers to see examples of a range of quality black and semi-black opal.

Our thanks to Bob Gullage of Gems & Opals for all the good advice to buyers and for the perspective from the other side of the retail sales counter.

+++++

Eagle Creek Precious Opal, NW BC, Canada

By Randy Lord

The noble dream of rockhounds everywhere is to explore and find beautiful rocks and minerals and in northwest British Columbia (BC) there is a special place where that dream can come true. On a pristine ridge close to Burns Lake there is a rockhound preserve where anyone with some serious effort may find precious opal. The town nearby has established a marvelous campground at the trailhead and as a tribute to the prospector who found it and the fine group that made this possible here is the story of Eagle Creek Opal Beds with an ending that will inspire you to visit.

A local prospector named John Shelford was exploring a creekbed near the town of Burns Lake in the early 80's when he spotted a boulder flashing red, green and blue fire. A piece of basalt with fiery precious opal lay beside the creek. Climbing upslope he spotted more opal and agate float then a horizon with lots of agate and common opal. Claims were staked and after several seasons of assessment the property was donated to the town of Burns Lake as a Staking Reserve and Recreation Area. The Village of Burns Lake, the Chamber of Commerce and the BC Ministry of Forests all cooperated in forming a "rockhounding park" for us to enjoy!

My first visit to the Eagle Creek Opal Beds was in 1985. At the Burns Lake Information booth there were copies of a map to the site showing road access and a trail. Driving south of town on Highway 35 towards Francois Lake, we crossed the bridge then went 1 kilometer to the aptly named Eagle Creek Road. About 7 km up a logging road was a rough, recently cut parking lot. The route was well marked and after arriving midday we decided to hike up. The Opal Bed trail has a little elevation gain (60 meters) and steep sections over its 2 km length but there were many blueberry and huckleberry patches and beautiful forest vistas. Near the top we found numerous places with common opal and agate in situ but failed to find any precious opal. The visit was short but the place was a welcome relief from highway travel.

Burns Lake is the center of many excellent rockhounding sites. The entire area is underlain by the Eocene aged Ootsa volcanic group, a series of volcanic flows formed over 40 million years ago. As meteoric waters dissolved and transported minerals through the formations, open spaces including gas bubbles, cracks and vesicles filled with precipitating material including calcite, zeolites, agate and opal. At the Eagle Creek Opal Beds common opal and agate are widespread however precious opal with its play of fire is rare.

Last summer (2004) was a cooker in the NW of BC and arriving in Burns Lake after a long drive I stopped at the public beach in town and had a nice swim off the community dock. The day had been a scorcher and the cool water was a welcome relief. Driving south over the bridge towards the Francois Lake ferry we drove the kilometer to Eagle Creek road (there is a Fairgrounds sign as well) and turned right. The road climbs to the right past a few residences then turns into a logging road with a difference. At every critical junction there is an Opal Bed sign! Follow them and exercise proper caution for BC logging roads. Drive with your lights on, listen for noise and look for any dust clouds approaching. In late July 2004 there was no nearby logging activity but given the pinebeetle catastrophe that can change.

After passing several cutblocks and junctions, the gravel road gets a little steeper then finally drops into the campsite. At the Eagle Creek Opal Beds trailhead the Burns Lake Chamber of Commerce, partnered with some local groups, established a marvelous 8 site campground. There are tent sites, picnic tables, firepits and a clean outhouse. After several visits I have seen no garbage or vandalism. There are no ranches, highways or railroads in earshot. I have found it a quiet, clean and free campsite and highly commend the volunteers who maintain it. There is a natural spring at a wide spot in the road (on the RHS of the road half way in) where some small diameter piping is evident. Stock up on the excellent water as the campsite is dry. Several other well marked trails are nearby and an excellent brochure with maps is published by the Lakes Forest

District, Box 269 Burns Lake BC V0J 1E0. Last summer (2004) was very hot and dry so please use extra caution in having any type of fire. BC is fortunate to have this and other rockhound sites like the Fraser River jade preserve and Smither's Driftwood Canyon fossils to enjoy.

Arriving at the campsite after our swim I was fortunate to meet up with good friends who had just come down from the Opal Beds. While daylight lasted I had the good fortune to see what can be found there and here is that story from prospector Bruce Holden.

Having heard there was precious opal at the Burns Lake opal beds we (four of us) decided to have a look late July 2004. We started from the campsite on the well marked trail. When we got to the spot marked for opal digging we saw only a few lightly dug areas. Most of the ground is covered in overburden and appeared unexplored. I looked into the dug up areas and found common opal and agate in each site. Down slope towards the creek we found some nice common opal and spent awhile extracting some choice pieces. When we got to the top again there was a flat area above the trail that had been lightly dug into so I poked around and lo and behold started to find a grey basalt with small vesicles of precious opal! The opal base colour was clear to yellowish with red and green fire showing.

As it was getting late and we were going to meet up with Randy we decided to head back down the trail to the campsite. With satisfaction I took a felt marker and wrote Eagle Creek Opal 2004 on a nice specimen to add to my collection from precious opal locations. I now had proof that it is possible to find some if one is persistent. The Opal Beds look very untouched compared to all the other opal localities I have visited. I am curious about what will emerge in the future. Please don't make a mess as this is a great gift from the people of Burns Lake. If possible, spend some time in the area and avail yourselves of their hospitality and services and lets keep the Chamber of Commerce encouraged.

+++++

The Adventures of Frank Gross in Aussie Land – Part 2

This is the second part of a continuing series of entertaining commentaries via e-mail by member Frank Gross on his travels in Australia. Frank, an ex-patriot Aussie living in Southern California, is back visiting old friends and neighborhoods and will be taking an expedition to the opal fields of Lightning Ridge. The Editor

July 12th, 2005 - Frank Gross

G'Day All,

I forgot to send this email to Jim last time. I am resending with Jim included this time but I have added some more material.

I finally got your email, Gene, off the *Opal Express*. Now I can include you when I send my email back to the states :)

We have had perfect winter days here for the past three or four days. Clear blue skies all day and cold nights. Luckily, in the caravan I am staying in, there is a blower, heater which keeps the whole place warm no matter what the temperature outside. Today, Friday, it is overcast and threatening rain again. We have had a few sprinkles that lasted perhaps a minute. No real rain so far.

My friend Yani (from Indonesia) had a DVT (deep vein thrombosis which lodged in her lung) and had to spend 6 days in the hospital taking blood thinning medications. She is now back home and doing AOK. I have been running her back and forth to the doctors and hospitals for continuing blood testing. Prognosis looks good.

I am preparing for my trip to Lightning Ridge which takes place in about a week and a half. It will be there that I organize the packages of rough for all you opal hungry people: Gene, Jim, Steve, Jim, and of course myself. I have been in contact with Peter and Vicki of "Down to Earth Opals" and they have said that they should be able to scrape together enough opal rough to please us all.

I had a scare with the car I have bought a Holden Camiera. It was leaking a little oil on the driveway of my friends Yani and Nobby. Nobby suggested I take it in and have it checked out. I did and my mechanic jacked up the front end and scooted under on one of those trolleys. As he poked and looked around he started saying "Oh No!... Oh No!..." This really made me feel GREAT. My wallet was seemingly becoming much thinner by the second. Then he emerged from under the car with a smile on his face. He said there was a screw loose on a gasket and he had just tightened it. Everything should be AOK from now on. No charge. That rascal! Mechanics should not be allowed to do that to people. :)

The weekend had rain again here. I was ready to get up on Sunday at 5 am to prepare to drive to Dapto for the weekly GIANT markets they hold there. However all I could hear was rain, and heavy rain at that, coming down on the metal of the caravan I was in. Hard Cheese for me - no Dapto Markets that day. I went back to sleep and didn't rise until about 9 am. I told myself that if it was raining cats and dogs outside I might as well sleep in... and I did.

I stopped in a take away fish and chips shop and ordered \$2 worth of hot chips (french fries in America) and had a \$2 Spring Roll thrown in to boot. What I received was mountainous. The chips were cut FAT, not string-like like you get at McDonalds and they had been fried just right. They were a golden colour and had Chicken Salt sprinkled on them. When you bit into one of these chips it was like you were biting into some creamy desert, not a potato. The spring roll was something I hadn't had for over a year on my last trip to Australia. The Roll was about an inch and a half in diameter and was about 6 inches long and again fried just right. Inside the roll was cabbage and chicken with perhaps a bit of carrot. I truly enjoyed this lunch. The total cost was \$AUD 4 or \$USD 3. I thought to myself that there is no where in Los Angeles that I could get anything similar to what I was eating.

It is just about a week now until I take off on my Lightning Ridge trek. I am counting the days.

More later.

Frank Gross, in Australia

July 18th, 2005 - Canberra Exploits

Hi Everybody,

I had a fine weekend of July 16th to 17th. I packed up my car with a minimum of travel goods and drove to the National Capital - Canberra. Canberra is known as a cold old place in the winter and it didn't disappoint me. I had the heater on in the car all the time. However, you know me, I like the cold - at least when I am out of the car. The air was brisk when Chris and I arrived at the first recycle centre at the suburb of Mitchell. This recycle centre was located inside a huge aluminum paneled shed. It was bigger than any Ralphs market in California. Inside was the discards of hundreds of thousands of people who live in the capital. This place was a heaven for the collector who likes to find a bargain. My friend Chris almost immediately found a laptop computer which he could have bought for \$5. However, I pointed out that the lid to the computer was broken at the hinge. He didn't buy it. I, myself, found a neat book written by one of the Goon of the Goon Show. Not Peter Sellers or The fat one, Harry Seacombe, but THE OTHER ONE. :) Just wish I could remember his name as I write this. I also found a nice little microscope which was complete in every way. They wanted \$1 for the book but wanted \$2 for the microscope. I bought the book but put back the scope (I would have bought it for \$1, but not \$2 - just call me Titus Wadd).

After that we traveled to the Mugga tip which is out of Canberra a little. However, this recycle centre was even BETTER than the Mitchell one. This place has TWO large sheds. One contains a medley of discards but the second contains the CHOICE QUALITY discards. This second large shed was full of people looking for a bargain. I found my bargain a set of drawer knobs in the shape of

yellow fin tuna fish. They are coloured beautifully and will make an exciting addition to some fisherman's cabinets when he sees these things at my market stalls in Los Angeles.

After this we headed off to old friends of mine, Bob and Jenny McCombe. Bob taught with me for a couple of years at Nowra High School teaching math. After that he changed jobs, in 1974 and became an actuary with the Bureau of Statistics in Canberra. Jenny also taught (Social Studies) at Nowra High and continued teaching when she and Bob moved to Canberra. Now she is CEO of one of the YMCAs in Canberra. It was great to see them again. We had a fine cordon bleu dinner which Jenny just whipped up. She is an XLNT cook.

In the morning it was saying goodbye for another year and then off to the Jamison Markets. The markets were smaller than they were a couple of years ago. I didn't buy much except a bag of organically grown potatoes for \$AUD 2 (\$USD 1.33). After that it was off to mount Stromlo Observatory Comple. On January 18th, 2003 great bushfires swept through Canberra destroying many hundreds of homes and destroying most of the Mt. Stromlo observatory complex. I think a total of 10 large telescopes were burnt to the ground including the Oddie 9" refracting telescope, a 3.5 meter long brass telescope installed on the mount in 1910. I, with the Shoalhaven Astronomers had used this telescope many times over the years. I had my ticket to use the telescope personally. It was sad to see this piece of history burnt. Well, the dome was burnt to its rock foundations but the telescope was seared but I have found out that it is going to be repaired. Perhaps the Oddie will rise again! The rest of the complex is still showing its many scars but rebuilding is going on.

After Mt. Stromlo it was a leisurely 3 hour drive back to Nowra and a dinner of yoghurt and a mandarin.

Two days and counting before I travel to Lightning Ridge and opal country.

Best wishes to you all,
Frank Gross, in Australia

July 18, 2005 - Off to Lightning Ridge Tomorrow

G'Day all. just writing to tell you all that I am leaving for Lightning Ridge and Grawin TOMORROW, July 19th at 6 AM. I will be driving the Great Inland Highway and probably reach Gilgandra by about 4:30 PM, barring bad luck. The weather now is clear, cool, and bright.

After a night in a overnight van it will be off again by 9 AM to go into the REAL outback to a place called Berrinina (I probably haven't spelt this correctly) and then Grawin to check out this GIANT potch pile and perhaps get a few more contacts for opal there. We plan to camp out at Grawin overnight.

The next day it will be off to Lightning Ridge for a five day stay. Hopefully we will be doing a two day, one night hike out into the unmined areas looking for colour on the ground. I will be using a GPS to keep track of our location on a geological map I'll pick up at the Lands Dept at the Ridge.

Of course I will get the packages of rough off to all you opal hungry people: Steve, Jim L., Jim P., and Eugene.

Wish me luck.

Next email will be from Lightning Ridge.

I'll check out the Crocodile Caravan Park now and then for Mike Kowalsky. Chris and I will be camping not 300 yards away from where Mike will be staying. Our caravan park has a pub, Mike's doesn't - but then it is only 300 meters away. :)

Best wishes,

Frank Gross, in Nowra, New South Wales, Australia

July 25th, 2005 - Greeting from Lightning Ridge

Hello All,

I arrived in Lightning Ridge on Friday 23 July and everything is AOK. I first went and stayed a night at Grawin and Glengarry which is about 70 kilometers west of the Ridge. My friend, Chris, and I stayed at the Glengarry Hilton for \$AUD 16 per night which included a shower and breakfast the next morning. First there was work to do... I asked at the pub at the Hilton where that GIANT opal discard dump was and if it was possible to noodle there. The publican said "Sure, why not?" just follow that dirt road for about 3 kilometers. In the car we jumped and bounced along the corrugated dirt road for 2 kilometers and ... then.... there it was the prize we sought! It was HUGE, and it was white. The pile of opal dirt WAS as big as a football field but it was also about 20 feet high. It was a bit of a job to climb to the top of it but we managed. We noodled around a bit but it was getting dark so we had to stop and get back to the Hilton. Back at the Hilton the publican showed us how to take a shower. First, she said, you get this bucket and fill it from that tank over there, then you get this second bucket of water and take it to the chef who will heat it up for you. Then take those buckets of hot water and cold water and going to that little corrugated iron shed over there and dump both buckets of water in the bag hanging from the ceiling. The bag will automatically mix the hot and cold water and begin to drip water below it. That's your shower head! Well, I didn't take a shower lets say. The toilets at the Hilton are pretty good for pit toilets. The outhouses have been built over the Caldwell drilled entrance to an old discarded opal mine. The pit which you drop your load is about 50 feet deep. There is running water to wash your hands which is fed by a large water tank located about 10 feet from the outhouse. There is one light bulb in each toilet - male and female - for night use. Why, you can even plug your electric razor into an electrical socket.

The accommodation is pretty good. There are about 6 separate bunk bed cubicles, each holding 4 beds. There is good light and flow through ventilation. Each cubicle has a large electric fan for summer use.

The breakfast in the morning was heralded by the publican - "Hey, you guys... You want anything to eat?" I said Too Right! We walked over to the pub, which is part of the Hilton and was showed a variety of breakfast goodies: Dry cereal, bread, jam, butter, coffee and tea and a three quarter used box of UHT skim milk. Breakfast was GREAT. There was a jug to boil water and a toaster for making toast. We had a leisurely meal. When we were finished we wanted to give the key to our bunk house back to the publican but she was no where to be found. In fact upon checking out the entire grounds of the Hilton (which is fairly big), knocking on doors, etc, we found there was no one there. We decided to get back to that GIANT pile and deliver the key we returned later in the afternoon.

We found nothing on the pile - well, I take that back - I found a bit of potch and a lot of crumbling mud stone. The story is that some noodler found a \$20K stone there just the other week. On our way back to the pub we came upon another pile almost as large as the first. We found a few noodlers there. I said G'Day as I passed and one of them sort of grunted back at me - He was too mesmerized by his work to look up. I decided that digging down into the piles of mudstone was too much work. I reasoned that when it rained the water would run off the sides of this giant pile taking some of the dirt with it revealing the rocks below. I was correct where the water had run off had revealed opal. I did find a little colour (two small bits) but a lot of just dark potch chips.

It was time to get to Lightning Ridge so we drove back to the pub and delivered the key to the publican and then drove the 70 km to the Ridge. The road to Grawin/Glengarry is mostly sealed with a 5 km section which is good dirt road that will be sealed soon. On our way back we happened upon a herd of emus. They were pretty neat. Don't worry I have lots of pictures and video to show of all this.

We got to the Ridge about 3 pm and then had a big hassle with the campsite I had booked two months earlier. The campsite was

located on ground so hard I couldn't pound the tent stakes in. Luckily we were moved to a nice grassy area which was OK and the next night we were moved to a powered site. Powered so we could use the electric heater at night. Well, it turned out that we didn't need the heater at all. In 2003 it got cold every night and you woke up with a half inch of ice on your windshield. In 2004 it was cold at night but there was no ice on your windshield at all. Now in 2005 the nights are cold but not that cold. Today, the 25th, the outside temperature is fairly warm. I would estimate it to be 75 degrees.

I met Mike Kowalsky a couple of days ago. I happened upon him and his friends Tim and Barbara coming into the Lightning Ridge Bowling Club as we were going out to a dinner party as guests of Vicki and Peter Drackett just down the road. We met up with him the next day at his hotel room and he had a guest. "Hi Frank", Mike said, "I would like you to meet a friend of mine - Len Cram." Well I nearly browned my trousers. Well Len is a very congenial guy and we talked for an hour about our favourite subject. Len got a phone call from his wife who proceeded to blow him up about being out with the car. Len had to hurriedly leave, but not until we took a few photos together. Mike went fossicking with Len the next day whilst Chris and I noodled around piles here and there.

I have spoken to Vicki and Peter about the opal and they are in the process of putting together a package. She says she wants to do us right and get us good stuff - not rubbish. I hope you can all wait a little longer.

Anyhow, I'll let you know more later.

Best wishes, everyone.

Frank Gross, in Lightning Ridge

This has been a Gross Production (2005)

+++++

Flaked Out

An Introduction to Flint-Knapping

By Bob Miller

Somewhere lost in the sands of antiquity, the first flint tool lies buried and forgotten. My guess is that it sleeps somewhere east of Eden in Mesopotamia, likely fashioned by the hands of Adam. Of course, I don't really know and neither does any other living human. The bond between mankind and flint is very old and deep indeed. Likely, it is some vestige of this friendship that reappears today as the urge to rock-hound.

Flint-knapping (from the German ("Knappen" meaning "to nibble") is doubtless one of the most basic and ancient of industries. Without the very sharp and durable edges produced by fracturing flint even the working of wood becomes next to impossible. If you doubt this, go into the woods without knife, ax, or saw and try to fell a useable sapling. Catching a cooperative beaver is about your only option here. Along with fire, flint was survival for millennia, and many of those fires were kindled using a flint spark.

In everyone's genealogy there were flint-knappers. It may be many generations ago for some or only a few as in this writer's own Cherokee and Choctaw ancestors. Their skills were undoubtedly adequate or we would not be here today.

Until the recent development of fused diamond plating on a tungsten matrix blade, obsidian (as in "Apache Tears") produced the sharpest known edges, far superior even to the best surgical steel scalpels. Obsidian fractures at the molecular level producing edges that may be only a molecule or two thick. The Maya Indians of southern Mexico were in fact successfully performing brain surgery (trepanning) centuries before Columbus landed, using obsidian tools.

The knap-ability of flint owes to its crypto-crystalline structure (its crystals are microscopic or non-existent). It is much like glass being about 95% quartz (silicon). When struck a sharp blow with a hard object it will fracture into a "Hertzian cone" (conchoidally). Perhaps the easiest illustration of this phenomenon is to shoot a

piece of thick glass with a B-B-gun. The characteristic product of this collision is a smoothly rippled Hertzian cone. This is the basis of flint working by percussion.

Flint-knapping is the art of vectoring blows from a "billet" to remove flakes from the core in a manner predictable enough to eventually shape a blade. This process is called "core reduction". Once a blow is struck it cannot be recalled. For better or worse the record of that blow is "written in stone".

Knapping is a lot like playing billiards. Due to inconsistency or defects (inclusions) in the flint it can more resemble playing pool on a wavy table with a tree limb and glass eggs. There are times I feel that I am actually matching wits with a piece of flint, as in three-dimensional chess! Many Indians believed that everything, even inanimate objects like rocks had a spirit and were somehow "alive". Perhaps they were right.

There is, of course, a lot more to knapping, like pressure flaking, heat-treating flint to improve its "lithic" qualities, "hands on" experiencing of just how sharp flint really is, weeping over the halves of an exceptional, almost complete blade, and of course losing one's mind.

One thing is certain, if you pursue knapping with any degree of persistence, you will recognize that its ancient practitioners were not a bunch of dumb savages banging rocks together. Instead, that is what we modern hobbyists are! They did it to survive—we do it ... For fun???!!!

Bob Miller is a member of the Deming Gem & Mineral Society.
From the from Rock Chips, March 2004.

+++++

The California Poppy: An Indicator of Copper

Don O'Donnell, Lake Havasu Gem Club

Plants have been used by prospectors searching for minerals since the Middle Ages. Some plants favor soils that contain or have an abundance of a particular element. Many prospectors use the desert trumpet as a gold indicator, even though it has not proven to be a true gold indicator. Plants of the mustard family excel in absorbing uranium and may be of use to the geobotanical prospector who is searching for uranium minerals.

The California poppy is a known indicator of copper, as it requires copper to exist. Some copper compounds are soluble in water, so the presence of poppies does not necessarily indicate that there are copper minerals in the immediate area. Roadside occurrences of poppies should be ignored because of the presence of various contaminants from the passing cars and trucks.

The presence of poppies in the open desert is much more meaningful. Near the San Manuel Mine, north of Tucson, poppies grow in profusion on the ground known to be mineralized with copper. At a fault, which places mineralized ground against non-mineralized ground, the poppies terminate abruptly, and the fault line can be traced by the poppies. Often, dumps at copper mines are completely covered by poppies.

Since gold, silver and other metals are frequently associated with copper, the presence of the California poppy can be a clue to the possible presence of valuable metal deposits. For the rockhound, many of the primary and secondary copper minerals are of interest. They include chalcocite, turquoise, malachite and many more.

Ref. California Mining Journal, Edgar B. Heylum Ph.D.; Richard Pearl, Clackamette Gem, April 1994

From Northwest Newsletter, Dec. 1994 via the Flatiron Facets 5/03

+++++

August 2005 Gem & Mineral Shows

5-7 — COSTA MESA, CA: Gem Faire; Orange County Fairgrounds/Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; gem show; contact Gem Faire, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

6-7 — COOS BAY, OR: Show; Farwest Lapidary & Gem Society; Boys & Girls Club, Tennis Center, 34th St.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; displays, exhibits, jewelry demonstrations, kids' activities, silent auction, door prizes, dealers selling faceted and rough gems, minerals, gold, silver, crystals, beads, mountings, tools, jewelry, gifts; contact Duane Davis, (541) 267-0190, or Carolyn DeMetz, (541) 267-5008; e-mail: cz_demetz@earthlink.net.

6-7 — SAN FRANCISCO, CA: Show, "The Best" San Francisco Gem & Mineral Society; San Francisco County Fair Bldg., 9th Ave. and Lincoln Way; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$5, children under 12 free with adult; contact Ellen Nott, (415) 564-4230; e-mail: Jeweltrain@aol.com.

12-14 — SANTA BARBARA, CA: Gem Faire; Earl Warren Showgrounds/Exhibit Hall, 3400 Calle Real; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; gem show; contact Gem Faire, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

13-14 — LAKEVIEW, OR: Show; Tall Man Rock Chippers; Fairgrounds, Hwy. 140; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; free admission; dealers, displays, field trips, silent auction, door prizes; contact Tall Man Rock Chippers, P.O. Box 563, Lakeview, OR 97630.

13-14 — WALNUT CREEK, CA: Show; Crystal Fair; Civic Dr. at Broadway; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; contact Jerry Tomlinson, (415) 383-7837; e-mail: sfxtl@earthlink.net, Web site: www.crystalfair.com.

19-21 — LAKE GEORGE, CO: Show; Lake George Gem & Mineral Club; U.S. Hwy. 24; free admission; minerals, fossils, local specimens, jewelry, lapidary, field trips; contact Richard Parsons, (303) 838-8859; e-mail: tazaminerals@att.net.

19-21 — SACRAMENTO, CA: Show; Gem Faire; Scottish Rite Center, 6151 H St.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; gem show; contact Gem Faire, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

19-21 — ST. LOUIS, MO: AFMS/MFMS convention and show; Greater St. Louis Association of Earth Science Clubs; Greensfelder Recreation Complex, Queeny Park, 550 Weidman Rd.; Fri. 10-8, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 11-5; contact Robert Morse, 135 Knox St., Troy, MO 63379-1343; e-mail: rrocode@nothnbut.net.

26-28 — SAN DIEGO, CA: Show; Gem Faire; Scottish Rite Center, 1895 Camino del Rio S.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; gem show; contact Gem Faire, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

26-28 — SAN DIEGO, CA: Show; Gem Faire; Sheraton Hotel Mission Valley, 2nd floor, 1433 Camino del Rio S.; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

Custom Design • Precious / Semi-Precious Gem Stones
Wholesale Gem Supplier • Certified Gemologist on Premises

BURTON'S GEMS & OPALS

LAPIDARY INTERNATIONAL

ROBERT G. GULLAGE
Certified Gemologist

1228 S. Beach Blvd.
Anaheim, CA 92804
(714) 827-5080
(714) 827-2248 fax

Tuesday - Saturday (10:00 - 6:00)
Sunday (11:00 - 5:00)
(Monday by appt. only)
E-mail: gemsandopals@earthlink.net

Australian Opal Imports

"Specializing in the Finest"
Black Opal from Lightning Ridge
Rough and Fine finished stones

Gene and Loretta LeVan

Phone: (562) 621-1805, FAX: (562) 621-1806
<http://www.australianopalimports.com>
fineblackopal@sprynet.com
2201 East Willow St. D338, Long Beach, CA 90755

J & J GEMSTONES

Yucca Valley Calif.

South Australian Opal
Andamooka Rainbow & Matrix
Coober Pedy

Joyce & Hugh
(760) 365-3722



DAVID'S CREATIVE JEWELERS

DIAMOND & OPAL SPECIALIST

Certified Appraisals

353 North Coast Hwy
Laguna Beach CA 92651
(949) 494-4849
Fax (949) 497-0237
creativejeweler1@netscape.net

David & Bonnie Burton
Wednesday - Sunday
12:00-9:00

Dolphin Jewelry

Custom Creative Gem Cutting

Stan M. McCall

Lapidary and Jewelry Artist

Custom Jewelry Designs & Repairs
Gemstone Cutting & Repolishing
Diamonds, Opals, Colored Stones

(714) 220-9282

6029 Orange Ave. Cypress, CA 90630

<http://home.earthlink.net/~custom-creative/>

custom-creative@earthlink.net

Tuesday-Saturday 10am-3pm. Appointments Also Available

ROD GRIFFIN

Australian Opal

Email: rod-griffin-opal@bigpond.com

8 Cedar Lane

Yowah S.W.Q. Australia 4490

Ph 011-61-746554107 - Mob. 0414 554 112

Fax: 011-61-746554187

or

P.O. BOX 1183

STANTON CA 90680

USA Phone: 714 393 1259

**True Blue Opals Pty Ltd (AUST)
Lightning Opals (USA Agent)**

Australia Contacts

Ph: 61 755 949612
Fax: 61 755 949760
Mobile: 61 419785454

USA Contacts

Ph: 520 360 5255
Fax: 520 299 2357
Cell: 817 235 6578

Email: salopals@aol.com / lightningopals@aol.com

Specializing in:

**Lightning Ridge Black Opal Rough and Cut
Opalized Fossils
Inlay Crystal**

We also carry:

**Queensland Boulder Opal
Koroit/Yowah Opal
White Opal - rough and cut
Silver / Gold Jewelry
Doublets / Triplets**

Wholesalers of Australian Opals

opalauctions.com

New Opal Auction Site for Fellow Lovers!

Direct Source for Black and Boulder Opal and Lapidary

Established Opalhollic Business for Over 12 Years

Large Range at Wholesale Price from Rough, Solids, Triplets and Doublets

Free Registration and Chance to Win Valuable Opals Every Month

No listing or Commission fees, Thousands of items already on Internet

Free monthly prize, Competitions, Jewellery items also.

After Christmas pay only 5% selling fee after you sell