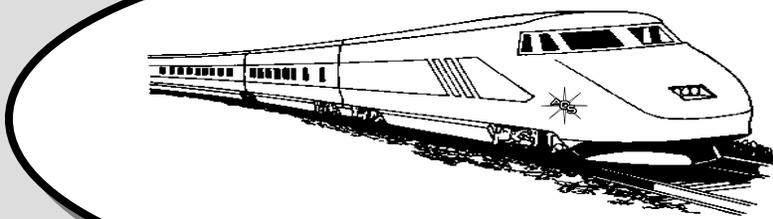


# The Opal Express

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## President's Message

*By Gene LeVan*

### Opals-Opals-Opals-Opals

Yes, this membership really is hooked on opals. When you get this bug, you find the most amazing stones on earth; can be in any form from rough to the best finished gem. The fun at our meetings each month is a show and tell about opals and what the membership does with these beautiful stones. Ask a member to show you an opal in the rough state and then in a finished state. Find out how to do this work yourself, this is the fun part. Enjoy the July meeting, see you there!

## Members Only Website Password

To log onto the website's members only area at: [http://opalsociety.org/aos\\_members\\_only\\_area.htm](http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm) type: Name: "member" and Password: "tecopabeds".

## Opal Society Workshop

The American Opal Society's workshop is open at Ball Jr. High School every Monday from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. The school is located at 1500 W. Ball Road in Anaheim. This is between Euclid Ave. and Harbor Blvd. If you are traveling east on Ball Rd. the parking lot entrance you need to use is just before the railroad tracks. If you are traveling west, the lot is just after the railroad tracks. Room 37 is in the center of the campus.

## July Lecture – Barbara McCondra on Yowah and Koroit Opal

Barbara McCondra will give a slide presentation on Yowah and Koroit Opal for the July 13<sup>th</sup> General Meeting.

Barbara is a mother, grandmother, adventurer, ex-Arctic pipeline worker, opal miner, opal dealer, free-lance writer and lecturer. Barbara has spent 23 years of her life in the "Bush" of the Australian Outback. She has lived and mined in the Lightning

Ridge, Yowah, and Koroit opal mining areas and has a great wealth of experience and lore that she will share with us.

Barbara has been a long time member of the Opal Society. She is usually a dealer at our Annual Opal & Gem Show. She will, of course, have some of her extraordinary opal for sale at the end of her presentation. Don't miss it!

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*The Red Cosmos after being rubbed when first found*

## Famous Opals - The Red Cosmos

It often happens that great stones are not always found by the original claim holder. There are many stories where the second or third owner has found a great stone in the patch. The discovery of "Red Cosmos" is one of them. It all happened on 9 July 1988 at one of the new Carter's rushes. The area had originally been discovered in 1970 by Art Carter, an enterprising American businessman, who had fallen in love with opal. Although not related, two miners by the name of Baker bought the claim after the original owners believed there was none of the patch left they had been working on.

Little more than half the claim had been worked when they took it over, and except for a long slide that the original owners had driven through and found nothing, no interest had been taken in it. With their experience, they worked parallel along the slide for 15 ft, getting opal almost all the way and wondering how the original owners could have possibly missed it. They had been digging out opal for days, when one morning an incredible gem fell out of the wall at their feet. They were astonished by the size and brightness of the stone, even before they had picked it up.

It was the thickness of the colour bar that attracted their attention and on close examination they found that it was also naturally jointed. There was another piece, but where was it? Looking up, they saw the other piece looking at them in the wall where they had been working, still embedded in the slide. It looked so beautiful sitting there in its natural state they said that they wished they'd had camera to record it.

The excitement was too much, even for experienced miners like them, and they called it a day. They had found a once in a lifetime gem. Up in the daylight the colours almost mesmerized them and they were little better when they first brought the two pieces to me to be photographed. They wanted a record of the gems in the rough as they had come out of the ground, and after cutting, they came back on two occasions to have them photographed.

I must admit that at first I didn't share their optimism as to both of the stones cutting so clean, with so little loss, although I never



*The Red Cosmos after finishing*

said as much. I didn't want to dampen their spirits. Had I done so I would have been proved wrong. They cut two beautiful clean stones. The grey scum that often covers the top of such gems lifted as clean as a whistle, exposing broad red ribbon like patterns flowing across the large stone and to a lesser extent, smaller ones across the other piece. The final weight of both pieces was 725 carats and they were bought by a well known German dealer for an undisclosed sum.

*From "A Journey with Colour; A History of Lightning Ridge Opal, 1873-2003" By Len Cram.*

Also from Seda Opals at <http://www.opalauctions.com/famous-opals.php>. Seda Opals has a piece of this opal for sale in investments opals on Opal Auctions! Click [here](#) for further information!

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## Field Trip Report:

### Trip to Opal Canyon

*By Frank Gross*

Here is a short piece on the further exploits of team Frank Gross and Dave Fairchild - Class of '65.

I talked myself into taking a weekend trip out to the high desert to check out Opal Canyon. As I packed the car I made sure I took along all the necessities that might be needed: Fold up cots, sleeping bag, new 8 x 8 foot dome tent, ice cooler cooled with a block of ice inside a plastic gallon water container, food enough for two days, camp stove, charcoal briquette BBQ, charcoal lighter, fold up chairs, extra blankets, pillow and an extra gallon of water. I picked up my friend, Dave Fairchild at his place and we left for the desert at 5:45 AM.

The freeway out to Mojave was running free and I was surprised when not an hour and a half later (60 MPH all the way) we were in beautiful downtown Mojave. I stopped at the local Jack in the Box and got a couple of 99 cent burgers. The temperature at 7:30 AM was about 80 degrees - not too bad as it was dry heat. When we got in the car to do the last leg of the trip to opal Canyon the car wouldn't start. I had left the headlights on for over 40 minutes. My heart skipped a beat. I could see the headlines: "Los

*Angelinos found Skeletonized in Car outside Jack in the Box".* I thought if I turned off the headlight and let the battery rest it might gain enough power to turn over the engine. After a 40 minute wait I found that I was correct and we were off.

Let me tell you that the road (Highway 14) that you have to take to get to Opal Canyon passes through Red Rock Canyon. I wish we had time to linger there as the rock formations and colour there are magnificent. There were lots of people passing me in their big gas guzzling SUVs pulling trail bikes, ATVs and dune buggies. They all left me in their dust and I was doing 60. They were all going to a large area just south of Red Rock Canyon set aside for them. Dave and I continued the last 10 miles to our turnoff to Opal Canyon.

The last 7 miles to the Canyon were especially interesting. The dirt road which is NOT kept up by the Parks Department was heavily corrugated with corrugations being two foot high in many places for hundreds of feet. Then there was the 4 inch dust/sand mixture that you had to drive through for at least 3 miles and then the steep inclines covered in large scattered rocks, ancient rain cut ravines and slippery declines. I had my car in first the whole way. Go fast and you'll break your car and that is a fact. My front wheel drive Tercel was a plus in negotiating these tracks. It took us 40 minutes to negotiate the last 7 miles of dirt.

Opal Canyon is indeed a unique place to visit. It is a steep walled canyon about half a mile long with basalt showing a darker colour than the usual sage brush colour at the far end. We were at a height of about 4500 feet. The heat was starting to bear down on me. I think at 10 AM the temperature was 90 and rising.

Without too much trouble you can find opal here though. Dave took off and roamed over the top of a nearby hill and I didn't see him for about two hours. I thought a rattlesnake may have got him. I was getting prepared to go look for him when he suddenly showed up. He had found a little beauty of a blue opal in a piece of lava. I didn't find much as I was cowering from the sun and heat inside the car for most of the time. An alternate name for Opal Canyon would be "Hell Hole". I think the temperature got up to 110 for about four hours in the afternoon and I was in it with no where to go. However, remember this is DRY HEAT, it only felt like 105. If we had come here, say, near the beginning of April I think there would have been little if no day heat. Lunch consisted of freshly made egg sandwiches and dinner barbecued chicken fillets and baked beans. I think I drank a gallon of ice water during the day. There are plenty of places to camp but the heat affected me so much I didn't bother to set up the tent and we slept in the car with the front seat backs lowered as much as possible. It was a bit uncomfortable but adequate.

We were greatly relieved when Russ Madsen and wife and Stan McCall and wife pulled into our camping area around 5 to 6 PM. They picked the correct time to arrive to beat the heat. They were fully equipped with outhouse toilet, teardrop trailer and tents (which were actually set up). Dave and I were envious at their equipment and were actually thinking of an assault to take over their out house toilet at one time. However, we succumbed to sleeping in the car after we consumed a bottle of Tyrrells, Chardonnay '02 (from the Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia) which I obtained from the 99 Cent Only Store in Lawndale, California the day before.

For all you rock hounds I would NOT recommend going in the summer, or even early summer but leave it to the months of March/April or September/October.

We didn't see any snakes or scorpions but saw lots of ants, a few hawks, a crow or two, and a quail family (I think). Dave saw a horned toad.

We left the Canyon Sunday morning about 8 AM after saying goodbyes to Stan and Russ and families and were in Palmdale to fill up with gas about an hour and a half later. The road house we stopped at on Avenue M was staffed by a girl who I would say is a senior in high school. One patron announced that she saw a mouse scurrying about in back of the counter. All of a sudden it looked like the staff girl might faint. She nearly jumped up on the counter. About

2 minutes later people in front of the counter said the mouse was over by the front door. The girl behind the counter started to turn red again. Then one lady calmly walked over to the door opened it with her foot, grabbed the mouse in her hand and threw it gently out the door. I saw the mouse at this time and it was a baby about half an inch in size. When I went out to check it out it had scurried off into the scrub.

We were back in Lawndale about a hour and 15 minutes later. The car was a bit dirtier but still in fine shape. I calculated my mileage on the trip to be a bit over 32 miles per gallon. Eat your heart out all you SUV owners.

I'll be back... to Opal Canyon, that is!

This has been a **Gross** Production (2006)

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## **A Rockhound in Iraq Rock Hunting in an Iraqi Combat Zone (Rockhounding at its Extreme) PART 5 of 5 - Final Report**

*By Yonis E. Lone Eagle*

**December 2005** - Howdy fellow Rockhounds and Happy Rockhound Holidays. I hope everyone had a very happy and pleasant Halloween and Thanksgiving. I'm now reporting to y'all from the Good Ol' USA and Texas soil. Yes, my year long deployment in Iraq is over and I'm finally back home with my wife and son.

Our replacement unit, the 47th Combat Support Hospital out of Fort Lewis, Washington, finally showed up and replaced our unit, the 228th in November. After the transition ceremony, it sure was strange having so much time off. When your use to working 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week and some on Sundays, and then to have all your time off... We got a chance to mail all our extra stuff home and I got to ship only 2/3rds of my rocks back to the U.S. Some of my larger ones I had to leave behind. Sixty-six pounds for \$300 bucks, expensive, but it was the only way I could get them back.

After we mailed and shipped out all our stuff, we sure did watch a lot of movies while we were waiting for our flight down to Kuwait... Lots of time to de-stress. We arrived in Kuwait the day before Thanksgiving for some R&R and then flew out very early Sunday morning and after a brief stop-over in Shannon Ireland, arrived back in San Antonio Sunday afternoon. It was such a wondrous site to see my lovely wife and son again, and knowing that I would not have to leave them again for a very long time.

It's been a little strange readjusting to a peacetime atmosphere. It feels great to breath in fresh and clean hill country air again instead of dirty, dusty, polluted desert air; to walk bare foot in cool green grass instead of dirt, rocks and sand in combat boots; to hear the voices and laughter of children instead of noisy generators, gun fire, explosions, and helicopters & planes constantly flying over.

It's probably hard to imagine that what we take for granted here in the states is lost in a combat zone. You don't realize what you have until you have left the peacefulness behind and entered a world of day-to-day life and death. While in Iraq, I missed my wife and son the most. And they are the reason I went to Iraq, to help make life safer for them and their future...

The men and women of our Armed Forces have sacrificed so much for our freedom and way of life, and it's so ironic that so many people here in the states take their freedom for granted now-a-days. The extreme sacrifices that our military forces have gone through under some of the worse conditions imaginable. While over 2100 US Troops have died since the start of the war, over 32,000 Iraqis have died, most of them innocent women and children. The bottom line is that if we were not over in Iraq fighting Terrorism, those terrorist would be over here in the US. And instead of the thousands of Iraqis dying, thousands of Americans would be dying. Captured terrorist have told us this.

Even though I could not answer everyone, I want to thank everyone for their support and e-mails while I was deployed over in Iraq. I just hope everyone will continue supporting all the other troops until all of them finally come home once and for all. As for as all those rocks and fossils I brought back... I will be putting a case together and if everything works out with my new job, I'll be bringing them to the 2006 RMFMS show for everyone to see. I'll be looking forward to seeing everyone at the local meeting in the coming year.

Until then... This is Sgt. Yonis "Rock Pockets" Lone Eagle signing off. I wish everyone a very Happy and Safe Merry Christmas and New Year. From The Cochise County Rock, Monthly Newsletter of the Sunsites Gem & Mineral Club, [www.cochisecountyrock.org](http://www.cochisecountyrock.org)  
MARCH 2005

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## **Opal Mines of Nevada**

*By Ruth A. Nichols, Elko, Nevada*

*Reprinted from the October 1979 issue of the Lapidary Journal by express permission of the author, Ruth A. Nichols, and the Lapidary Journal Inc.*

This year for our opal-hounding trip we decided to visit all of the Nevada Opal Mines that are open for public mining. The trip brought back pleasant memories and we started reminiscing about how we had become "opalholics." Actually, we went through stages that led to this condition. The first faint stirrings of desire to see if we could actually find the opal were soon followed by careful planning and the selection of a mine. After arriving at the mine site and finding that *first* flash of fire, our adrenalin began to flow and the desire quickened until we were happily "hooked." Back home again but hardly satisfied, we immediately began to plan our next trip to an opal mine, perhaps this time to find a big fiery gem.

It happened to me on our third trip, in June 1978, to the "Royal Peacock" Mine in Virgin Valley. We named the beauty "The Black Princess." It is two and a half inches high, four inches in circumference, and weighs 205 carats. It has a jet black core and brilliant flashes of fire throughout in all colors of the rainbow with shades of red, blue and greens predominating. Needless to say, the "Black Princess" is now a specimen in a glass display bottle filled with heavy mineral oil and placed where it is visible at all times. Whenever we go on any trip we carry it with us and always have a chance to show it off.

We have done our mining at the "Royal Peacock" in Virgin Valley, but, as I have stated, this year we decided to tour opal mines that are open to the public. On July 1st we had our pickup and twenty-foot self-contained travel trailer all hooked up and ready to go. Of course, we had checked and double checked to make sure we had all of our mining equipment and supplies. Sunday morning we were on our way to the "Starfire" Mine near Gabbs.

**Starfire Mine.** The Starfire Mine is located thirteen miles north of Gabbs on Highway 23, or 18 miles south of Middlegate (junction of Highways 50 and 23). There is approximately six miles of dirt road from the turnoff to the mine site. There is no water available but plenty of parking space at the mine. The Starfire is owned by Leonard (Bud) and Hanna Lambright and they can be contacted at 1714 Shoffner Lane, Fallon, Nevada, phone (702) 867-2581.

We pulled up to the mine site and were warmly greeted by Mr. Lambright, a very friendly man, who really knows his opal. We introduced ourselves and he informed us right then, "Call me Bud." Well, Bud helped us find a good smooth location for the trailer and even helped us set it up. As it was rather late we didn't do any mining that day. Early the next morning Bud was yelling at us "Let's get going, you can't find any opal in the trailer." We invited him in for a cup of coffee and a lot of conversation, mostly about opal. Not content to tell us the best locations to dig, and what type of rock to look for, Bud, in fact, went with us and helped us dig.

The opal at the Starfire is blue-based with broad flash fire of red, green, blue, gold and lavender; truly a beautiful gemstone. The "Starfire" opal shows no sign of cracking or crazing. The hardness is 5½ to 6½ with a low water content. You can dig on the seams that run vertically or on the dumps. There are four workable dumps here and the pieces we dug out ranged from one-half to one inch in thickness with colors throughout. The types of rock formations are basalt, clay, and rhyolite. The mine is approximately 5,200 feet

Jo Mine. We took the Soldiers Meadow Road, which is mostly gravel and a little crooked. Our suggestion is, during the real dry months, (check at the service station) take the desert road. It is hard packed sand, straight, flat, and smooth, and, as you can see on the attached map, it comes into the Soldiers Road. It is approximately one mile from the main road to the Little Jo Mine site. This road is narrow and has a little steep bank the last quarter of a mile. If you get stuck, like we did, just honk your horn and Ray comes down and helps you up the rest of the way. There is plenty of flat space to set up your trailer a short distance from Ray's home. After introductions all around, Ray helped us set up our trailer then he invited us to his house for a cold drink and some relaxation. Both Ray and Marjorie are splendid hosts, and within a few minutes you feel as if you have known them for a long time.

We discussed the mining operation and obtained the information we needed about rock formations and the best spots to look for the fiery little rock. The Little Jo Mine is 4,500 feet above sea level and consists of three claims, two patented and one in the process. The flashy opal from this mine is found in basalt that is hard to burst open, but in spite of this we brought home some really good opal filled with all the colors of the rainbow. Incidentally, Ray found one opal which was featured on the cover of the October 1974 issue of this magazine. It is a potato shaped specimen, weighs 1744 carats, measures 103.5 mm. in length, 63.5 mm. wide, 35 to 52.5 mm. thick and, naturally, is called the "Duffield Opal." In that issue it was stated that the mine was closed but Ray retired from the Highway in 1977 and is now living at the mine the year around and it is open to the public. Now you know one of the biggest reasons why we were anxious to visit the Little Jo.

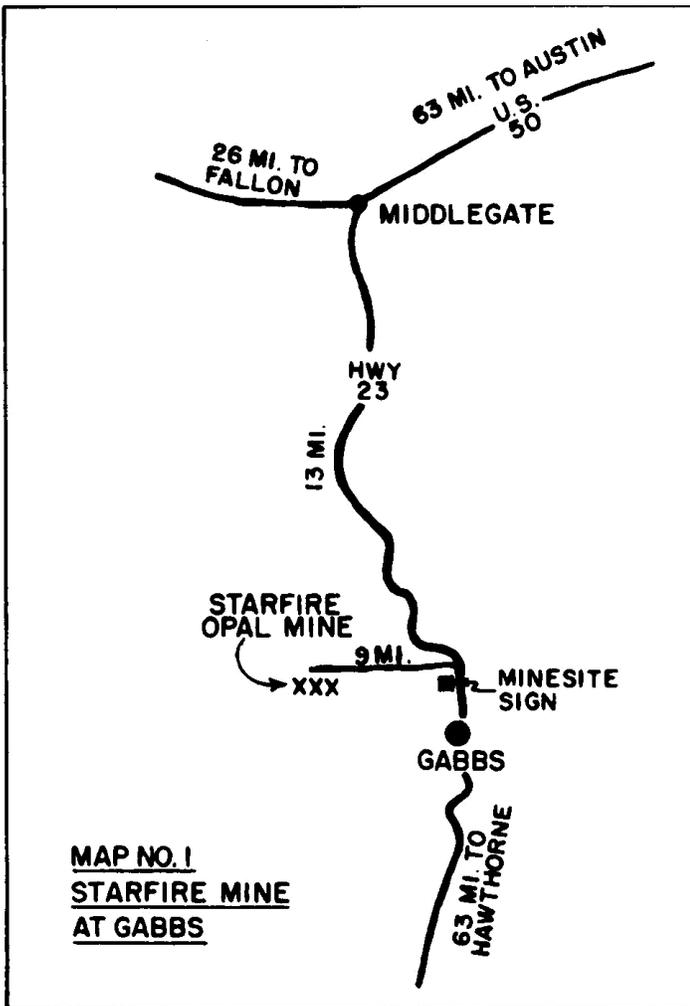
There was still plenty of daylight left after visiting with Ray and Marjorie, so we took advantage of the time to just look around the digging sites, accompanied by the owners. They were most anxious to show off their claims and I don't blame them. I would like to own one like it. After a late dinner we retired for the night and looked forward to the next morning when we would have our chance to find what we came for — *fire opal*.

The next morning we were up bright and early and were greeted by a clear blue sky and sunshine. We ate a hurried breakfast, packed our "tools of the trade" and headed out to the digging areas which are only about 75 to 100 yards from the campsite. It wasn't long before I started digging while my husband was taking photographs and talking to Ray. As most rockhounds know, if you find a good specimen of whatever you are looking for right off the bat, your interest and expectations rapidly increase. The first rock I found was full of pockets with opal in each pore or hole. True, they were not of the size that Ray had found but any person with acute "opalholitis" would have been more than thrilled and excited.

As the day progressed I got so involved in digging that I forgot about lunch until my husband came over to where I was digging and said, "I'm hungry." Well, it was time for a break anyway, so I traded my mining tools for cooking utensils and prepared lunch. Earlier in the day my husband had been busy with his camera and talking opal with Ray but when he saw what I had dug, he put away his camera and picked up his tools and rock bag. It wasn't long before he was knee deep in basalt trying to outdo my morning.

Having been rockhounds for about six years I think the really fun time of the day is "sorting time." That is when you return to camp, dump your find on the table, and sort. Like all rock-hounds we had picked up a lot of "leaverite." However, when we returned home and really had the time to resort our buckets of basalt, we were amazed and very happy with what we had overlooked the first time.

We wanted to stay another day but, as usual, we had other mines to visit. Early the next morning we had coffee with Ray and Marjorie and headed for Virgin Valley but with a promise that we would be back before the summer was over. Because of the current gasoline shortage Ray has decreased his digging fee to \$2.00 a day. However, there is no gas shortage in Gerlach right now, and



above sea level and consists of 18 claims. Bud calls it his "Opal Farm." The digging season runs from May 15th through September 30th and has been open seven days a week but Bud plans on closing the mine on Monday and Tuesdays, except on long weekends. If you plan a trip to the Starfire it would be a good idea to contact Bud before leaving.

At the time we were there we had good luck (with Bud's help) and came away completely satisfied. I wanted to stay another day but our schedule would not permit it. Besides the pretty opal, we enjoyed the wonderful scenery and the quiet. After a full day of digging, along with the stillness of the night, you have no problem dropping off to sleep. The next morning we reluctantly broke camp, had a final cup of coffee with Bud, and took off for our next stop, the "Little Jo" Mine near Gerlach.

**Little Jo.** From Gabbs we headed north on Highway 23 to the junction of U.S. 50 to Fernley, turned north at the junction onto Highway 34, under Interstate 80, remaining on Highway 34, through Wadsworth, Nixon, and on to Gerlach. If you need supplies such as food and water, you should purchase them prior to Wadsworth. However, in Gerlach there is a gas station.

Now that you are headed north out of Gerlach don't make the mistake that we did. There are two roads from Gerlach to the Little

Ray hopes the savings from the collection fee will help pay for the gas. We heartily recommend Little Jo as a must on your next opal trip. For more information please contact Ray Duffield, Little Jo Opal Mine, P.O. Box 203, Gerlach, Nevada 89412.

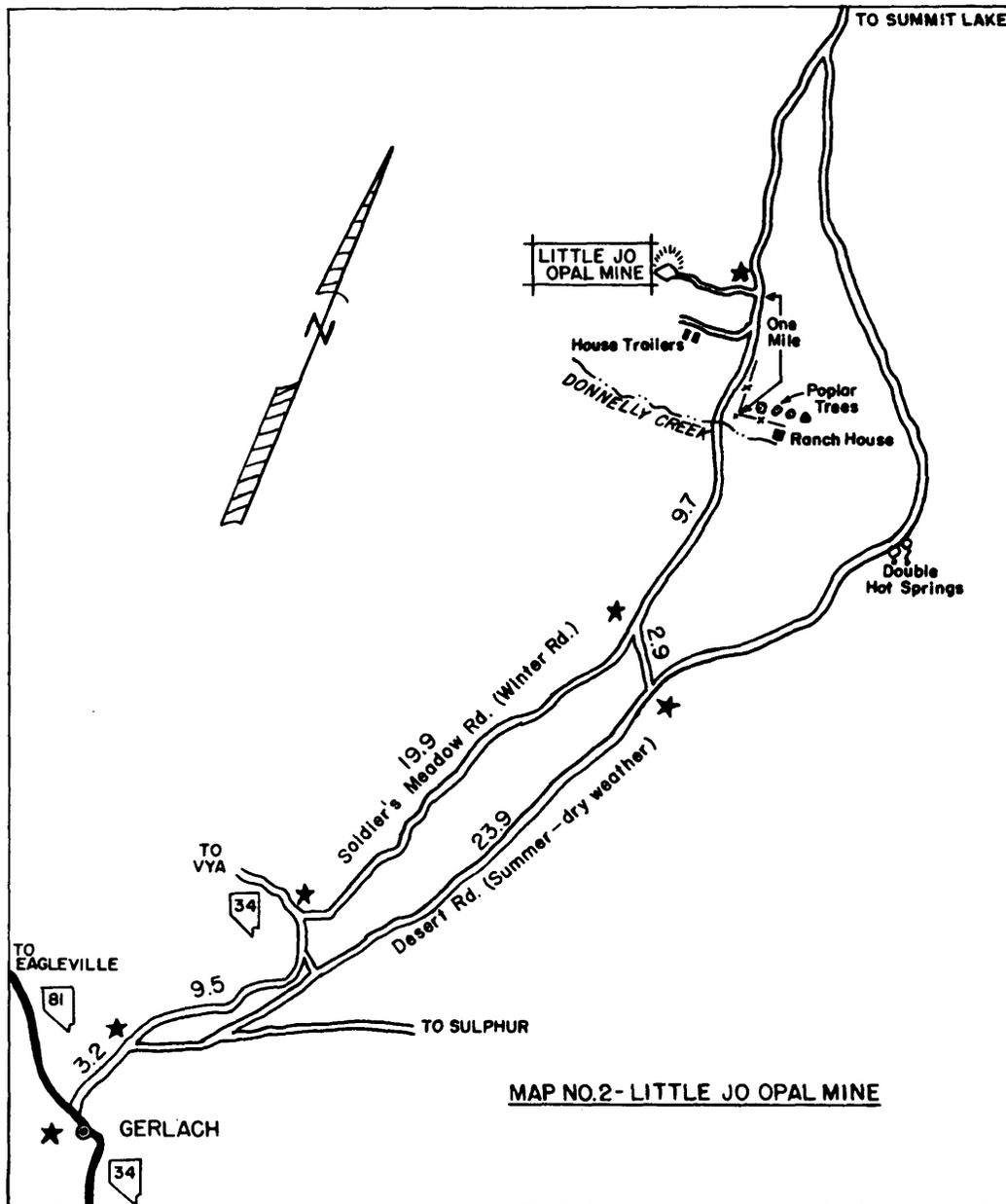
**Royal Peacock Mine.** The Royal Peacock Mine is in Virgin Valley which runs north and south. The turnoff to Virgin Valley is 25 miles west of Denio Junction on Highway 140. At Denio Junction you can obtain gas, some groceries, and there is a fine restaurant. The mine is owned by Joy and Harry Wilson. There are electric

escorted to the digging sites. After you get to the top of the hill you can walk to all three locations and look for fire as you go along. Our best find, of course, was at Mine No. 2 where I found the "Black Princess." There are two ways to find your fire opal: you can dig with a pick and shovel or work the dumps. One of the dumps slopes down about 300 feet and is about 200 yards long. We found good fire by just starting at the top and working or crawling our way down to the bottom, all the time spraying water on the volcanic sand and brushing it around with our hands. It doesn't take long to fill a pill

bottle with fiery chips and branches or you may be lucky and find a pine cone. Down at the bottom of the slope we occasionally found larger pieces as they have a tendency to roll down the dump. Since our last visit Harry has moved a lot of ore at Mine No. 1 and we found some choice pieces at that location. Surface opal at the Royal Peacock sometimes has a tendency to craze so it should be thoroughly dried before working it up into either a triplet or cabochon. We found that most of the "opalholics" are not digging for profit but just to have some opal in their collection, or perhaps have some made up into jewelry. We have met a lot of people who have lapidary equipment and also do silversmithing.

For information about the Royal Peacock Mine, which, incidentally, is open to the public the year around, contact Joy Wilson, Virgin Valley Ranch, Denio, Nevada 89404, phone (702) 941-0374.

**Rainbow Ridge.** In Virgin Valley the other mine that is open to the public is the Rainbow Ridge owned by Keith and Agnes Hodson. Some of the opal that has been found here is the finest available. This mine was discovered and has been actively worked since 1911. The fifteen million year old beaches are made up of montmarillinite belonite type of clay. The site is worked as an open pit mine. The 6.5 pound precious "Hodson" opal is one of the largest opals found to date. It measures 4½ by 5½ by 9½ inches and is valued at \$100,000. This opal is preserved intact by the family. Also, in 1919 this mine produced the "Roebing Opal" which is a true black opal, weighs 18 ounces, has outstanding fire and is



MAP NO. 2- LITTLE JO OPAL MINE

hookups, a plentiful supply of water, and excellent camping facilities at the rock shop below the mines.

While we were setting up our trailer another trailer pulled in and naturally, after introductions, we started talking opal and as this was our fourth trip to the Royal Peacock we were able to tell the new arrivals about the digging areas, Mines 1, 2 and 3. Yes, I also got a chance to show them the "Black Princess" and tell them how I found it.

After registering at the rock shop, Joy or a member of the family explains and shows you samples of opal and the petrified material in which the opal is found. The first time we were at the mine we didn't take the time to listen as we were too anxious to start digging, so our efforts did not really pay off. After the explanations you will be

displayed at the Smithsonian Institution. How lucky can you get?

Keith and Agnes love opal and it is a pleasure talking to them as they are recognized nationally as experts on the fiery precious gem. The Rainbow Ridge Mine is open to the public from Memorial Day until September 15th. You had better get up early to start digging as the gate is opened at 8 a.m. and closed and locked at 10 a.m. However, you are told where the key is so you can leave anytime you want but we stayed until dusk. There are plenty of tailings and dumps. You can dig the banks where it is a little harder work but sometimes that is where the big ones hide.

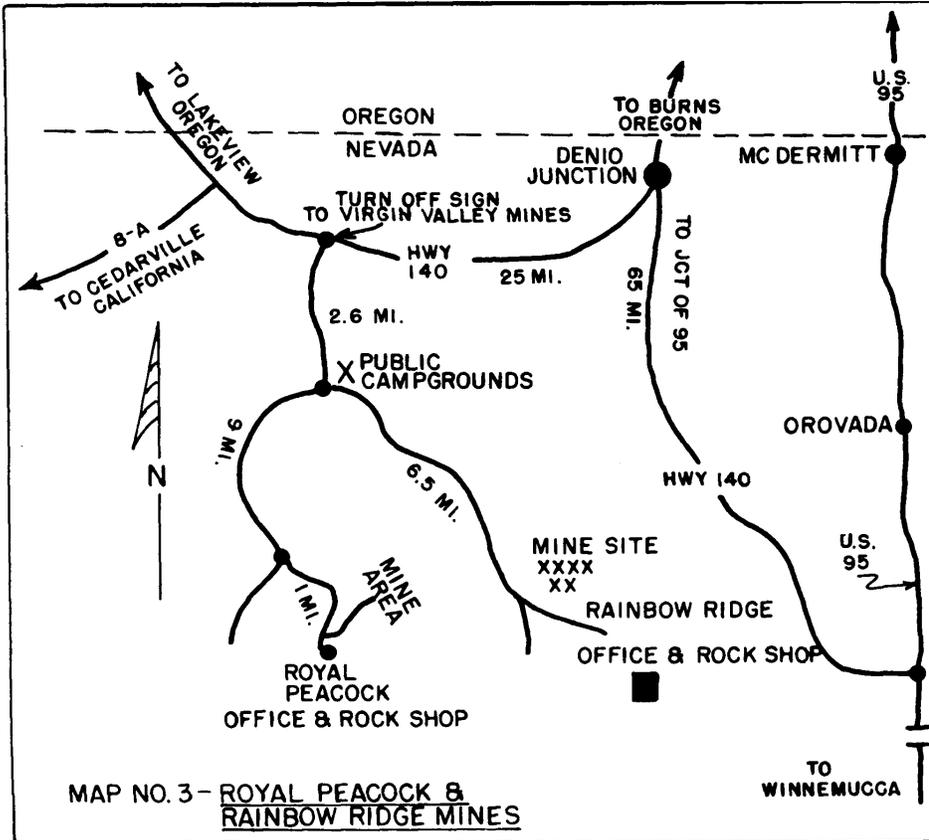
We found it very difficult to leave Keith and his wife as they are so knowledgeable and love to tell stories of what others have found on their diggings. This, of course, only increased our desire to start

what we came for, "digging for fire opal." Before we went to dig we visited the office and rock shop. Their display of beautiful opal in triplets, solids, and cabochons just makes you more anxious to get over to the dumps. After thanking our hosts for their hospitality we finally went to the diggings and had a field day. We found some really good fire.

My husband preferred to work the banks but I found a spot that someone had started exploring so I sat there and dug. I discovered that he had stopped his labor just about six inches too soon because

beautiful jewelry from both gold and silver. They come to the Valley early in the season and stay through Labor Day. They are both seasonal rockhounds and have a map of the U. S. posted in their trailer showing all of the trips they have taken and, believe me, they have covered a lot of the country. They are well versed on just about every type of rock that rockhounds look for.

We spent the balance of the day just resting and relaxing. The next morning we again loaded our pickup and trailer, said our goodbyes to Vern, Helen, Joy and Harry, and left for what would be



our last stop on this trip, the Firestone Mine, but with the knowledge that Virgin Valley is really opal country.

**Firestone Mine.** We left Virgin Valley and headed for Denio Junction on Highway 140 where we filled our tanks, obtained a few groceries and had breakfast. This is a stopping off place for rockhounds. There is even a landing strip for light aircraft. We took Route 140 and headed east to Route 95. This is a long trip (65 miles) but the road is all hard top and very straight with little scenery. At the Junction of 140 and 95 we turned north and went to McDermitt which is a town located on the Nevada-Oregon border. We visited a rock shop and asked directions to the Firestone Mine. We were told to go back the way we had come to the Paradise Valley turnoff which is 51 miles south. However, about 14 miles south of McDermitt is a sign pointing left to Hinkley Summit and Paradise Valley but we continued south the 51 miles to the second turnoff. The first 18 miles east is paved and we made good time. When we arrived at Paradise Valley we found a post office and one bar in which we made inquiries about the Firestone Mine and, much to our surprise, found that it had been abandoned in 1975. However, we had come this far so decided to continue on and at least see what the mine looked like, which was a bad mistake. For the first three miles the road was fairly good but, all of a sudden, we started

I found some large pieces of good fire. We had a sandwich then went back to the digging and didn't leave until the sun had dropped out of sight and, after all, you do need the sunlight to help you. We loaded our day's work in the truck, opened the gate (relocking it), and went back to our base camp at the Royal Peacock perfectly happy and content with our day's findings. You cannot take a trailer to the Rainbow Ridge Mine as there are no facilities available. However, there is a Forest Service Campground on the main road, just before the Y, which has plenty of spaces plus a hot springs pool.

When you go opal mining be sure to put the Rainbow Ridge Mine on your itinerary as you won't be disappointed. For further information about this mine contact Hodson's Gem Shop, 7116 First Avenue, Scottsdale, Arizona 85251, phone (602) 945-2262.

**Black Beauty.** At the Royal Peacock campground we met a charming couple, Vernon and Helen Rath, who own a private opal mine. This mine is not open to the public but when they saw what a bad case of "opalholitis" we had they invited us to visit them at the mine. Naturally we jumped at the chance because any new location is exciting and we had seen some of the mine run ore they had brought down. They gave us directions to the mine so later we drove up, not intending to do any opal hunting but just look at the mine. They insisted on us looking for opals with them which proved to be very exciting. This is when we really hit "pay dirt" and now we know why this particular mine was not open to the public.

The opal is found in opalized wood which is whitish in color and they have found quite a few fire opal pine cones. Vern and Helen have a small cat (bulldozer) on the site and they work the claim just when they want to. Helen works with lapidary equipment and makes

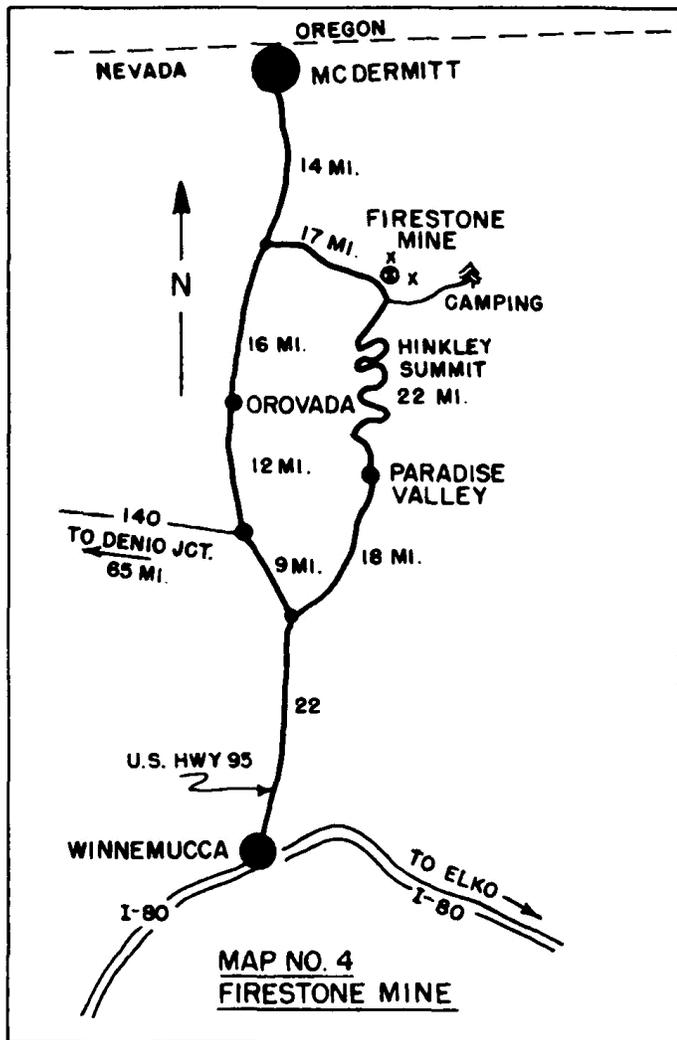
climbing and, believe me, when I said "climbing" that is exactly the word for it. There are 18 or more miles of the steepest, crookedest road we have ever traveled. The road was a series of twisted S's and, at one point, we were climbing at a 45 degree angle with 30 gallons of water in our trailer plus about 500 pounds of rock in the pickup and we don't have a four wheel drive. It took us nearly two hours to cover the 18 miles to Hinkley Summit and arrive at the Forest Service Campground. My husband had the accelerator floorboarded all the way and made the comment, "You know, we just might burn our brakes up when we start down." Anyway it didn't take us long to set up camp, have supper and hit the sack.

The next morning we located the Firestone Mine and, believe me, the trip wasn't worth it. It didn't take long to see why it was given up. All that was left between two steep cliffs was a big hole in the ground, a long ago abandoned claim post, and a broken deadwood fence. The rock formation is rhyolite and so hard you really had to beat it with a heavy sledge hammer to break the rock open. Oh sure, there are traces of opal but not worth even picking it up. After we did our "prospecting" we went back to the camp.

While we had been gone some other campers had moved into the campground and my husband walked over and visited with them. They were surprised to learn that we had come up the hard way with only a conventional drive. Their rigs were all four wheel drives. They told him about the road down to Highway 95 which was the first turnoff 14 miles south of McDermitt. We didn't waste anytime getting packed and start down the easy way. It was a good road, less curves, shorter, but, best of all, not steep.

We went into Winnemucca and stopped at the KOA Trailer Park. After hot showers and a good dinner we were ready for the sack and did we sleep! However, in our dreams, we drove up and down that crooked road all night. The next morning we ate breakfast and headed home on Interstate 80 East. We were rather discouraged about our trip to the Firestone but elated over the opal we had found at the other locations.

**Summary.** We had a lot of fun, covered over 1500 miles, met a lot of nice people, and visited some of the finest opal mines in



Nevada. Of course, there are many more producing opal mines in this state but most of the private claims are wanted by their owners to be just that, PRIVATE.

Now for you rockhounds who are considering opal hunting as your next venture I will try to give you some advice and council. Like all rockhounds, you know or should be aware of DON'T TRESPASS signs. Obtain permission from the owner of the property and be sure to close the gates that you open. After reaching your location ask about open fire regulations and clean up your campsite before leaving. In other words, "You packed it in so you can pack it out." DON'T LITTER!

Plan the trip well in advance of your departure. Make a list of items you will need besides your food, medical supplies, road maps, and we suggest at least one of the many publications that show where you can rockhound. We use both *Western Gem Hunters Atlas* and *Nevada-Utah Gem Atlas*, published by Cy Johnson and Son of Susanville, California, and obtainable at most of the rock shops.

For opal mining your present equipment is probably adequate but for the benefit of those who are just starting, you will need a rock pick, rock chisel, small garden rake and trowel, small and large

containers, and most of all, plenty of water and a squirt bottle. We made a small shaker screen 12 by 16 inches with 1 by 3 inch boards and heavy quarter-inch screen. This piece of equipment comes in really handy when working the dumps.

Don't get the idea that you are going to an opal mine and will just start picking up the fire ore. If opal could be found that easily it would not be able to command the present price. Opal mining takes a lot of looking and, most of all, a lot of patience. When looking for opal be sure the sun is shining over your shoulder. This way you have the benefit of spotting the fire. Do not wear sunglasses as you will be unable to see the play of fire. We have been looking for opal for three years, not to become opal dealers, but just for fun. After coming home from a trip, we're eager to begin working the best pieces into jewelry and adding to our personal rock collection.

In closing, I hope this article will be of benefit to you and wish you the best of luck and lots of patience.

*Editor's Note: Since this was published, the following opal mines from the above article are still known to be operational for fee digging:*

**Royal Peacock Mine**

Walter Wilson, PO Box 165, Denio, NV 89404, (775) 941-0374 email: [maestes@frontiernet.net](mailto:maestes@frontiernet.net), <http://www.royalpeacock.com>.

**Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine**

Glen Hodson, P.O. Box 97, Denio, Nevada 89404, (775) 941-0270 <http://www.nevadaopal.com>, email: [glen@nevadaopal.com](mailto:glen@nevadaopal.com)

The current status of the **Little Jo, Starfire, Firestone, Black Beauty**, is unknown. If anyone has information on these mines, please contact the editor at [editor@opalsociety.org](mailto:editor@opalsociety.org). The current road conditions, property status, etc., of these mines and maps is unknown. Go at your own risk if you attempt to find these mines. You should get current information of these areas and mines before you attempt any trip to them.

**April 2006 Gem & Mineral Shows**

**1-2—CULVER CITY, CA:** Culver City Rock & Mineral Club presents 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Fiesta of Gems; Veterans Memorial Complex at Overland & Culver, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; free parking; dealers, exhibits, jewelry, repair, prizes, fossils, tools, special display; [CulverCityRocks.org](http://CulverCityRocks.org), (310)391-8429.

**7-9—DURANGO, CO:** Show; Four Corners Gem & Mineral Club; La Plata County Fairgrounds, 2500 Main Ave.; Fri. 11-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; kids' day Fri., demonstrations, workshops, new jewelry supplies and equipment, dealer, raffle, door prizes, educational and fluorescent displays; free admission; contact Scott Kadera, P.O. Box 955, Durango, CO 81302, (970) 385-8993; e-mail: [info@durangorocks.org](mailto:info@durangorocks.org); Web site: [www.durangorocks.org](http://www.durangorocks.org).

**14-16—LONGVIEW, WA:** Northwest Federation show; Southwest WA Mineralogical Society, Mt. Hood Rock Club; Cowlitz County Expo Center, 430 WA St.; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; trip to Mount St. Helens Volcano Center Sat., local rockhounding, silent and oral auctions, dealers, demonstrators, kids' corner, raffle; contact Tanya Sonner (SWMS), (360) 785-3909; e-mail: [twofossils@toledotel.com](mailto:twofossils@toledotel.com); or Dick Parks (MHRC), (360) 892-3716; e-mail: [packrats2@att.net](mailto:packrats2@att.net); Web site: [www.nfms2006show.org](http://www.nfms2006show.org).

**26-30—FRANKLIN, NC:** 41st annual show, "Macon County Gemboree"; Gem & Mineral Society of Franklin; Macon County Community Bldg., U.S. Hwy. 441S; Wed. 10-6, Thu. 10-6, Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 12-5; adults \$2, children under 12 free; contact Linda Harbuck, 425 Porter St., Franklin, NC 28734, (800) 336-7829; e-mail: [facc@franklin-chamber.com](mailto:facc@franklin-chamber.com); Web site: [www.franklin-chamber.com](http://www.franklin-chamber.com).

**28-30—SANTA CLARA, CA:** Show; Gem Faire; Santa Clara Convention Center, 5001 Great America Pkwy.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com).

**29-30—SANTA MONICA, CA:** Show; Bead Faire; Barker Hangar, 3021 Airport Ave.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com).



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Please address all inquiries and exchange newsletters to:

The Opal Express C/O

Jim Pisani

P.O. Box 4875

Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

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Thank you,  
The Editor

# The Opal Express

American Opal Society  
P.O. Box 4875  
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**Volume #39 Issue #07  
July 2006**

TO:

**Some Topics In This Issue:**

- Famous Opals - The Red Cosmos
- Trip to Opal Canyon
- A Rockhound in Iraq
- Opal Mines of Nevada

**Important Info:**

**Board Meeting  
July 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**General Meeting  
July 13<sup>th</sup>**

Barbara McCondra, famous opal miner and dealer, will give a slide presentation on Yowah and Koroit opal.

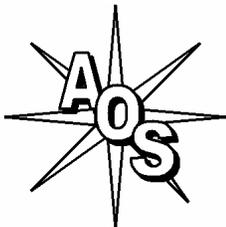
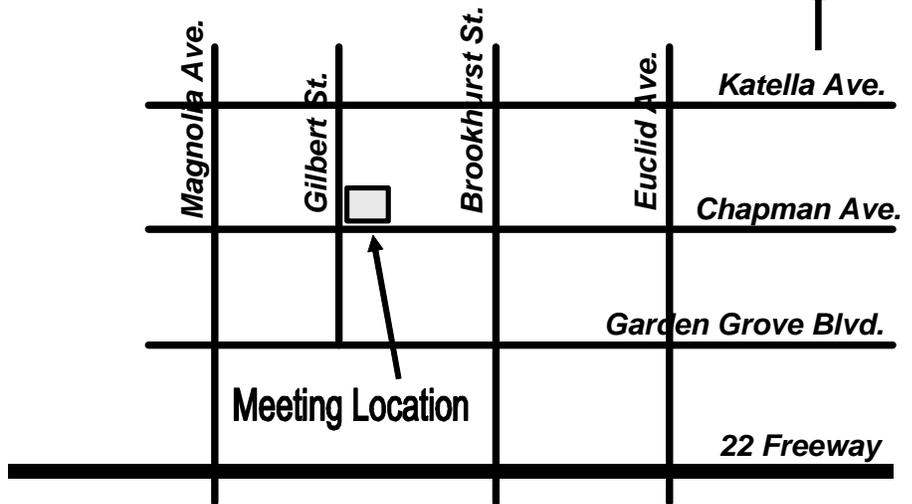
# July 13th Barbara McCondra on Yowah and Koroit Opal

**— 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



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