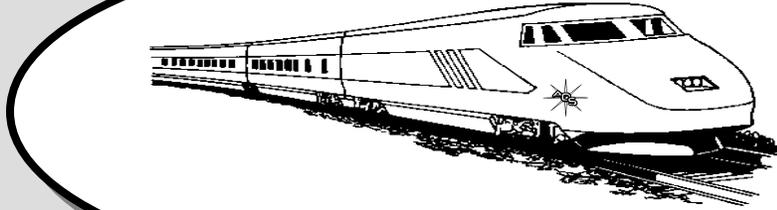


The Opal Express

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The
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Opal
Society



February 2010

Volume 43 Issue 2

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Members Only Website Password

To log onto the website's members only area at:
http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm type: Name:
"member" and Password: "clamshell".

AOS Election This Month

The AOS will hold elections at the February General Meeting. The offices to be voted on will be President and Vice-President.

If you interested in running for office, please submit your name to the board by the February meeting. Current Southern California local members in good standing may run for office. Please attend the meeting to vote. The current members of the Board of Directors are as follows current members of the Board of Directors are as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| President | Jim Lambert |
| Vice-President | Stan McCall |
| Treasurer | LaVerne Christenson |
| Show Chairman | Gene LeVan |
| Newsletter Editor & Webmaster | Jim Pisani |
| CFMS Representative | Fran Todd |
| Member At Large | Dr. Walt Johnson |
| Member At Large | Pete Goetz |
| Member At Large | Jay Carey |

The AOS Boards recommendations are as follows:

2010 Election Ballot

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| President – Pete Goetz | |
| President (Write in Choice) | |
| Vice President – Corey Kuepper | |
| Vice President (Write in Choice) | |

Opal Evaluation Kit Rediscovered

Wes Roth has rediscovered an original AOS Opal Evaluation Kit that was probably created in the 1980's by the Society. Wes found the kit hidden in storage and he believes that it was misplaced in the 1990's while he was president. Wes will mail the kit from his home in Washington State to the AOS in Southern California. Hopefully, we can use this kit as a baseline to produce other kits. Our previous attempt to create a opal brightness baseline was held up by lack of samples of the brightest of opals. Thanks, Wes, for finding it!

Barbara McCondra Night

By Jay Carey

The February 11 meeting will feature a presentation by David Burton on Barbara McCondra, one of our most influential, prestigious, and charismatic members.

Barbara has been opal mining in Lightning Ridge and Yowah for the last 20 years, and has sent us a slide presentation of her opal mining operations in Yowah. It shows how she mines opal and features the most beautiful Yowah nut that I have ever seen which she found on her claim. Most people mine their whole lives, without finding a stone like this, so this month's meeting presents a once in a lifetime opportunity for us to share this experience.

David Burton has been to Barbara's mine and will discuss how this type of mining is done. In addition, David was commissioned by Barbara to cut, polish, and market this Yowah nut. His presentation will consist of the opal mining slides, a discussion of his finalizing and marketing of the stone, and many personal experiences that he has shared with Barbara in mining opal.

Barbara worked on the Alaska pipeline prior to going to Australia, an experience that gave her the name "Eskimo Nell" from her Aussie mates. She has a lifetime of unique mining experiences plus many contributions to the AOS thru her lectures, writings, and show participations. She has always taken the time to prepare a unique show case of her opals for our annual show.

As many of you know, Barbara is suffering from pancreatic cancer, so this presentation offers us a chance to pay special tribute to her, as well as keeping her in our thoughts and prayers.



The Old Woman Meteorite

Currently located at the Desert Discovery Center (formerly the California Desert Information Center) 831 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311, Phone: (760) 252-6060

The Old Woman Meteorite

The Old Woman Meteorite is the second largest meteorite in the United States. It is 38 inches (97 cm) long, 30 inches (76 cm) wide, and 34 inches (56 cm) high. It weighs 6,070 pounds (2,750 kg). It is composed mostly of iron, about 6% nickel, plus small amounts of cobalt, phosphorus, chromium, and sulfur.

In late 1975, three prospectors found the meteorite in the Old Woman Mountains of San Bernardino County, California. Several months later they took Dr. Roy Clarke, Curator of Meteorites for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., to the site. He confirmed that it was a meteorite.

Since the meteorite was on public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the prospectors filed a mining claim on the site. To their disappointment they learned that meteorites were not a locatable mineral as defined by the mining law. Instead, under the provisions of the Antiquities Act, meteorites found on public land were considered objects of scientific interest and therefore should go to the Smithsonian Institution.

Removing the meteorite from its resting place proved difficult because of the rugged terrain, the weight of the meteorite, and the desert's summer heat. It took the assistance of the U.S. Marine Corps to get the job done.

A rigging team from the first Marine Division Support Group climbed to the site and, using equipment lowered to them by helicopter, managed to get a double thickness of cargo net under the meteorite. A helicopter from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 363 easily plucked the three ton meteorite from the mountain. They flew it to where it could be kept in California for a short period so people living in the state in which it was found could have a chance to view it.

The meteorite was placed on display at BLM buildings and museums in El Centro, Riverside, Redlands, Los Angeles, and Barstow. Public interest was intense and it was visited by thousands of people from all over the United States.

In March 1978, the meteorite was sent to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. for study and to be placed on exhibit. A 942 pound (427 kg) section was removed. The section was closely examined to determine its chemical composition, mineral distribution, and rare gas content. These examinations indicated that the Old Woman Meteorite may be rare because of an internal structure that appears to be transitional between two well-known types of metallic meteorites.

According to Dr. Clarke, meteorites are the oldest objects available for scientific study and are thought to be leftovers from the time of the solar system's formation. By studying the Old Woman Meteorite, scientists hope to learn more about the origin of the solar system as well as the environment in which the meteorite was formed and existed for about 4 1/2 billion years.

In September 1980, the Smithsonian Institution sent the meteorite minus 15% of its bulk (the 942 pound {427 kg} section) back to California to be placed on permanent display at the California Desert Information Center in Barstow. Interested people are invited to stop by and have a look at a truly unusual rock.

Origin of Meteorites

Stony materials compose over 92% of meteorites falling to Earth. Iron and nickel make up less than 6%, but are the ones most commonly found. This is because iron meteorites look different from surrounding rock and are more easily recognized. Stony meteorites blend in and resemble rocks on the ground. The remaining 2% are stony-iron composite meteorites.

A chunk of metal or rock tumbling through space is a meteoroid. Upon entering the Earth's atmosphere, it becomes a meteor as it heats to incandescence due to friction caused by the pull of gravity. If the object reaches the ground before it vaporizes, it becomes a meteorite. Most meteors never reach the Earth's surface and appear as a streak of light as they vaporize. The average weight of a meteorite is about .0005 of an ounce, not much larger than a grain of sand.

Most of the meteors you see in the sky are very fine, dust size particles of rock left behind by comets that cross the Earth's path. These particles are responsible for the meteor showers we see periodically throughout the year.

Larger meteors, like the one that became the Old Woman Meteorite, are not remnants of comets. They come from the Asteroid Belt located in an orbit around the Sun between Mars and Jupiter. These meteoroids are probably fragments produced from the collision of asteroids since their composition is similar to materials found in the asteroid belt.

Gravitational influences from Jupiter and Mars can send some of these meteoroids in the direction of the Earth. Earth's gravity can then attract the meteoroid and pull it into our atmosphere. If the meteor is large enough to withstand the heat of friction, it will fall to the ground as a meteorite.

Largest Known Iron Meteorite in the World - The HOBA WEST found near Grootfontein, S.W. Africa -60 metric tons.

Second Largest Iron Meteorite in the World - The AHNIGHTO (THE TENT) - from Greenland - Brought out by Admiral R.E. Perry in 1897 - 33.1 tons.

Largest Iron Meteorite Found in U.S.A. - The WILLAMETTE - From Oregon - Now at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City - 14.2 tons.

Second Largest Iron Meteorite found in the U.S.A. - THE OLD WOMAN - Old Woman Mtns., California - found in 1975 - original weight 6,070 pounds; after removal of sample, 5,128 pounds.

In Meteor Crater near Winslow, AZ - Largest specimen found was approximately 1,000 pounds.

From <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/barstow/meteorite.html>

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Looking for Old Opal Express Newsletters

By Jim Pisani, The Editor

The American Opal Society has a long, rich history, going back to March of 1967 when the Society was founded. For most of these years, the AOS has published monthly its award winning newsletter, the Opal Express. The Opal Express contains a wealth of opal information, opal lore, and Society history. There are articles on jewelry making, stone cutting, mining, field trips, etc., etc.

As the Society newsletter editor, I have undertaken a goal to collect all of the old newsletters going back to the founding of the

Society, digitize them, and publish them in the Members area of our website. <http://opalsociety.org>, for all our members to enjoy.

These old newsletters are in PDF format and can be easily viewed by current members who know the password here: http://opalsociety.org/members_only_1/opal_express/index.htm.

Included in the website is a **Table of Contents** that show what the main topics of each newsletter. Also, the website includes a **Search Engine**, to search for keywords, names, etc. The digitization and indexing of the newsletters is a work-in-progress; there are still a number to be digitized and we also have missing newsletters.

Over the 43 years of the Society's existence, I estimate up to 511 newsletters could have been published. Of these, we are **missing** from our archives up to 82. For some of the months the newsletter was not published, or combined with the previous month,

so the number missing is probably lower. I am not sure if it was published in the 1960's at all.

Table 1 is a list of the missing newsletters from the AOS archives. If any of you members have copies of any of these, or know an older member that might have some, please **contact me**, Jim Pisani, the Editor, at editor@opalsociety.org, or call me at 714-815-4648. Thanks!

Childhood Dreams Bring German Wanderer to Australia

By Sid Astbury, 12/30/2009

Sydney - Joerg Berger was an 11-year-old in Leipzig, Germany, when the adventure film "Storm Boy" put the idea of living in the Australian Outback into his head.

It was 1977, East Germany was still communist, and the only way to see foreign films was by stealth. His father had hidden an antenna in the roof cavity of their house so the family could pick up television stations in the West.

In 2009, Berger is a 43-year-old immigrant living in Coober Pedy in the Australian Outback. He mines for opals some of the year and is a tour guide for most of the rest.

What reminded him of his early devotion to the 1976 Australian film Storm Boy, a heart-warming tale of a boy's love for his pet pelicans, was the death in Adelaide Zoo this year of one of the birds that starred in the film.

The film was based on Colin Thiele's novel of the same name, about a boy who raises three pelican chicks after their mother is shot. While his father forces him to set them free, one bird - Mr Percival - returns. Mr Percival died at the age of 33 in September.

The film captures the reclusive life that the boy and his father live in South Australia's deserted coast.

'I'm living my daddy's dream,' said Berger, recalling that his father was a bit of a recluse like the boy's father in Storm Boy and had always imagined retiring somewhere close to nature where there was lots of space.

Berger has space aplenty, and his massive plot in Coober Pedy has its own water supply. The house, where he lives with his wife and two dogs, is classic Coober Pedy: an underground cavern, scooped out of the rock, the better for the inhabitants to bear the fierce southern hemisphere summer heat, where temperatures can go as high as 52 degrees Celsius.

The Australian Outback suits a technically minded person like Berger, who has built most of his own house. There are vehicles in his yard with which he likes to tinker, and he has developed an auger that can bore through up to 10 metres of rock a day in the search for opals.

'The others, normally, one meter a day is all they can do,' he said.

It's a world away from Leipzig, where, according to Berger, 'You can't look at a landscape without a power line.'

It is as though Coober Pedy has transported him back in time.

'Before, we were close to nature,' he said. 'But in Germany there is no space, not after the industrial revolution.'

In 1989, Berger was among those who escaped East Germany after Hungary opened its borders, creating a passage to Austria. Only months later, the Berlin Wall came down, and East and West Germany were reunified in 1990.

He settled in Cologne and did very well for himself as an engineer. His work took him to most of Europe, the United States and Iran.

'What I earned working in Iran for a few weeks would be enough to keep me going here in Australia for a year,' he said.

But the wanderlust remained. Berger next moved to Scotland and worked in a bank while developing a business plan for a guest house.

It wasn't until 2004 that, after several visits, he decided to act on that boyhood dream and make his life in Australia.

Table 1 - Missing Opal Express Newsletters

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| March 1994 | April 1970 |
| April 1994 | May 1970 |
| January 1993 | June 1970 |
| February 1993 | July 1970 |
| March 1993 | September 1970 |
| April 1993 | October 1970 |
| June 1993 | November 1970 |
| November 1993 | December 1970 |
| August 1991 | January 1969 |
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| October 1991 | March 1969 |
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| June 1981 | November 1969 |
| October 1981 | December 1969 |
| December 1980 | January 1968 |
| December 1979 | February 1968 |
| March 1975 | March 1968 |
| October 1975 | April 1968 |
| January 1972 | May 1968 |
| February 1972 | June 1968 |
| March 1972 | July 1968 |
| May 1972 | August 1968 |
| September 1972 | September 1968 |
| January 1971 | October 1968 |
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'There are 20 German speakers in Coober Pedy,' he said. 'We speak what we call Denglish, because some are Swiss, some are Dutch, and some are Austrian.'

A lot of Berger's work as a tour guide is with German visitors.

'They ask me how I manage to live here,' he said.

Generally, he is delighted to show those from his homeland around his new land.

'They can't believe the desert is green, because they always expected it would be sands like the Sahara,' he said. 'And they like the idea of driving for 460 kilometres and only turning left once and right twice on the trip between Alice Springs and Uluru.'

It is as though he has found his spiritual home. He has a keen interest in Aboriginal culture - perhaps dating all the way back to Storm Boy. In the film, shot in coastal South Australia, the boy is secretly befriended by a local Aborigine called Fingerbone Bill - from whom he gets his moniker Storm Boy.

'The Aborigines in central Australia are shy, not like those from the coast,' Berger said. 'They will not look you in the eye. This is something I have to explain to tourists.'

'You've got more freedom in Australia than in Germany, but if you cross the borders you're in trouble with the authorities.'

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From <http://www.monstersandcritics.com>

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Cool Babies:

Opal Fossils Reveal Icy Birthing Waters in Australian Outback

Exciting opal discoveries near Coober Pedy in South Australia suggest that Australia's ancient inland sea was a birthing ground for swimming reptiles.

120-million-year-old opalized bones of marine (saltwater) reptiles called plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs have been discovered in a dry, dusty place called Moon Plain, 35 kilometres from the opal mining town of Coober Pedy.

Exciting opal discoveries near Coober Pedy in South Australia suggest that Australia's ancient inland sea was a birthing ground for swimming reptiles.

120-million-year-old opalized bones of marine (saltwater) reptiles called plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs have been discovered in a dry, dusty place called Moon Plain, 35 kilometres from the opal mining town of Coober Pedy.

Ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs swam the world's oceans during the time of the dinosaurs. Plesiosaurs had long necks and four flippers; ichthyosaurs (the name means 'fish-lizard') were fast-swimming, dolphin-shaped reptiles - "the fast-swimming pursuit



An artist's impression of a plesiosaur, swimming in an ancient sea.



Opalised plesiosaur teeth. Photographs courtesy Ben Kear, South Australian Museum.

predators of the time," according to Ben Kear, a paleontologist at the South Australian Museum.

Ben is studying the opalized fossils of ancient marine reptiles from Australia. He says the most remarkable thing about the opal fossils from Moon Plain is that 95 per cent of them belong to babies or juveniles. "Baby plesiosaur fossils are very, very rare," says Ben, "and to get them in the numbers we have here to my mind can only mean we are looking at some sort of breeding ground."

Around 120 million years ago, much of the Australian inland was covered by a vast sea, and Australia was much closer to the South Pole than it is today. Ben Kear says the

Australian opal fields give "the first evidence from anywhere in the world where you have these kind of marine reptiles living in environments with icebergs."

Ben thinks the reptiles were migrating into the Coober Pedy area to breed during the relative warmth of the polar summer.

"They are seasonally coming down, migrating as the southern summer comes on and the ice retreats. The water get a bit warmer and like polar waters today, they are full of food - so what better place to have your offspring?"

Mother and baby ichthyosaur fossils have also been found in large numbers at Holzmaden in Germany. Scientists think Holzmaden might also have been a birthing ground for ancient marine reptiles.



Gem opal in fossil bones of the *Adidyman plesiosaur*, an ancient marine reptile found at Andamooka in South Australia. The *Adidyman plesiosaur* is the most complete plesiosaur skeleton found so far in Australia.

(It was once thought that these ichthyosaurs were cannibals, because small ichthyosaur skeletons were found inside those of larger ichthyosaurs. Most reptiles lay eggs, so it was hard for scientists to accept that such early marine reptiles had developed live birth. However, the small skeletons were perfectly shaped - not jumbled up as if half-digested. The truth is, ichthyosaurs did indeed give birth to live young. There are even amazing fossils in which ichthyosaur embryos have been turned to

stone half out of their mother's birth canal.)

The opal fields of South Australia and New South Wales are fossil sites of international significance. The South Australian opal fields reveal amazing information about life in the ancient seas, while Lightning Ridge continues to produce incredible evidence about Australia's early mammals, dinosaurs and creatures of the rivers, land and skies. Australian opal is a spectacular relic from this remarkable lost world.



The opalized fossil shoulder blade (scapula) of a plesiosaur. Not all opal fossils are brightly colored, because they contain non-precious opal called patch.

How to Field Trip

By Steve Duncan

Here, in no particular order, are some thoughts about field trips:

- Most trips are for the weekend, although there are some 1 day trips, and some longer ones
- Most campsites are dry campsites (no facilities, no water etc)
- Campsites are usually accessible by any vehicle
- Some people tent camp, some sleep in their pickups, some sleep in their RVs, and some sleep back in town at the nearest motel
- Sat night there is a potluck and campfire.
- Collecting trips may require high clearance or 4x4 vehicles, if you don't have one we will carpool you with someone
- Your most used tools will be a rock pick and a spray bottle; this is enough for most trips
- When this is not enough you may want sledges, gads, shovels etc.
- I have found that backpacks are the most convenient way to carry rocks, although you will see many other methods being used
- I like shoes with stiff soles (as compared to soft soled running shoes), but the soft soles will work
- Hats are good
- Gloves are good
- Glasses to protect your eyes from flying rock chips are good
- Sun screen and water are good
- Snacks when out collecting are good
- You won't see many critters, and most want nothing more than to be left alone, be careful reaching into holes, under bushes etc.
- Many places have been picked over some that just means that you need to work harder to find good stuff
- Look under bushes, on the side of step hills, etc. Wherever no one looked before.
- Not sure what you are looking for? Ask someone. We will all be glad to help you.
- It never hurts to follow the field trip leader's recommendations about how and where to collect.
- Realize that although finding rocks is certainly the goal, half the fun is in just being out there and spending some time with friends.
- Leave the collecting site cleaner than you found it
- Fill in holes, if that is not possible slope the sides so that a critter that falls in can get out.

- Don't pick up or bother a tortoise, you will literally scare the pee out of them, and with the loss of that liquid they run the risk of dying of dehydration
- Drink lots of water, and pace yourself. It is easy to become dehydrated yourself.
- Don't mess with a rattlesnake
- Do show your rocks to others, at the trucks, at the campsite etc. We do like to look at rocks
- Bring along friends. You do not have to be a Searcher to come on one of our trips
- You will need to sign a waiver
- Once you have found all these cool rocks there is the question of what to do with them. You can certainly have the coolest yard in the neighborhood (or at least the most rocky), but learning to work the rocks will increase your enjoyment of them
- The club workshop is the perfect place to learn how to work with rocks
- When you are out collecting in the desert you may notice the lack of something: noise. Pause for a moment and enjoy it. Take a second to renew your connection with Pachamama (the earth Mother)
- It is nice to find a great rock, but it is really nice to give that rock to a youngster or rockhounding newbie and watch their eyes light up.
- Spending time with your friends is good
- Breaking out of your everyday routine, and getting out of the city is good
- Finding rocks in the parking lot is good
- Finding rocks in the road is good (literally "in" the road)
- Telling stories about the nice rocks you have found is acceptable, telling stories about the great rocks is encouraged
- I find that when I arrive at a site I am not "seeing" the rocks well, but as some time goes by, and my mind slows down, and I find a few examples, all of a sudden it seems like I can see all the good ones
- The driving can be exciting, collecting requires a different pace
- Filed trips are one of the great things the Searchers has to offer you
- You really ought to take advantage of them, we have a lot of fun.

From *The Rock Slab News, Searchers G & M Society, 1-2010.*

Consumers Comfortable With Diamond Alternatives

By Jeff Miller, 1/12/10

MVI Marketing recently asked consumers to weigh in on manmade diamonds versus diamond alternatives. The results of this study showed that consumers were highly aware of the negative issues and challenges that plague the natural diamond mining industry, with a majority of respondents reporting that they have taken actions that may lead them to reduce their purchases of mined diamonds.

Eleven percent of respondents told MVI that they had decided not to buy mined diamond jewelry, while 8 percent decided not to give mined diamond jewelry as a gift. Nearly two in ten respondents have told their families and friends about the negative issues impacting mined diamonds and 16 percent reported that when they look for jewelry, they look for diamond alternatives.

"Clearly, consumers are becoming more aware of the challenges faced in the mining of diamonds," said MVI's chief executive officer (CEO), Marty Hurwitz. "It is only natural for the consumer to consider manmade alternatives if their concerns about those challenges grow."

In answering the question "If you had to choose between a style of jewelry with mined diamonds or a style of jewelry with a created diamond alternative and both stones sizes were of equal size and

brilliance, which would you choose?," the respondents were equally divided. When both styles were the same price, 60 percent chose the mined diamond and 40 percent selected a diamond alternative.

The study's price-comparison questions revealed the increasing likelihood that consumers would purchase diamond alternatives when the price differential between mined diamonds and diamond alternatives grew. Based on their responses to these questions, MVI determined that only 25 percent of those surveyed would not request or purchase diamond alternative jewelry, no matter what the price differences were. This represents a major reduction compared to the results of past studies.

After reviewing descriptions of diamond alternatives from the category's major brands —Apollo, Gemesis, Diamond Nexus, Moissanite and Asha — the respondents were asked about their preferences across a range of criteria and jewelry categories. Both Apollo and Diamond Nexus received favorable rankings from the respondents for the all-important category of engagement rings.

Diamond Nexus topped all other jewelry category and criteria questions as the brand that respondents would be most likely to purchase, as well as the brand offering the best value. MVI concluded that these results might reflect Diamond Nexus' much larger consumer recognition, based on its heavy Internet exposure.

From <http://www.diamonds.net>

CFMS Field Trips South - Ant Hill-February 27

By Shep Koss & Adam Dean

In February the California Federation of Mineralogical Societies Region South Field Trip will be to Ant Hill. This is a favorite of many rockhounds and is a great one-day trip and even children can find a fossil. Identify yourself as an AOS member when you sign in. The Editor

With last year's great turnout of nearly 100 attendees we're doing it again.

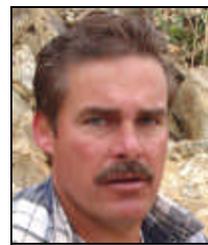
WHERE: Ant Hill, Bakersfield, CA

WHEN: February 27, Saturday at 9 a.m.

MATERIAL: 15 million year old fossils of shark teeth, whale teeth, seal teeth, porpoise teeth, whale bone, etc from Middle Miocene Marine beds.

MEETING SPOT: 9 a.m. North east of Bakersfield on corner of Lake Ming Rd and Alfred Harrell Hwy at the **Chevron station.**

- Alfred Harrell Hwy can be reached by heading east from Bakersfield on Rt. 178 or heading east on Rt. 58 to Comanche Rd then turning north.
- Comanche Rd becomes Alfred Harrell at Rt. 178.
- From here go about two miles to Lake Ming Rd and meeting spot.
- Here we will sign Waivers of Liability, see samples of specimens and receive digging instructions.



Adam Dean

TOOLS: hammer, chisel or screwdriver, 1/4" mesh sifting screen or colander, shovel, bucket, zip lock bags, water spray bottle. Hiking shoes and clothes to get dirty in.

From Meeting Spot: From the meeting spot we will drive about another mile to parking area then hike about 3/4 mile on a uphill slope which gets steep the last 200 yards. The fossil trenches are near the summits of steep hills.

Be advised: This is a known Valley Fever area although rarely a problem especially in winter. Wear masks if concerned. Also snakes and spiders inhabit these hills.

To find fossils requires a combination of sifting debris or prying out chunks of the "wall". These hills will soon undergo housing development so collect while you can.



By Shep Koss

Weather and Roads: Roads are paved until last 300 feet to parking area. Weather is unpredictable although this soil is more rain tolerant. Dress accordingly for temperatures and conditions.

From CFMS Newsletter, 2/2010

If a Meteor Strikes Your House, Is It Yours?

From AP/ February 03, 2010

An out-of-this world rock has become the center of a down-to-earth dispute over who its rightful owner should be.

WASHINGTON -- An out-of-this world rock has become the center of a down-to-earth dispute over who its rightful owner should be.

The tennis ball-sized meteorite plummeted through the roof of a Virginia medical office just after dusk on Jan. 18, the same time that people reported seeing a fireball in the sky. It plunged through the ceiling of an examination room and landed near the spot where a doctor had been sitting a short while earlier.

"I'm the most likely person to be sitting in that place where it hit," Dr. Marc Gallini said. "It just wasn't my time, I guess."

He and fellow practitioner Dr. Frank Ciampi say their first thought was to give the rare find to the Smithsonian Institution, which offered \$5,000 for it. Within days, it was sent to the National Museum of Natural History for safekeeping.

The doctors are worried, though, that their longtime landlords plan to stake their own claim to the space rock; the collectors market for meteorites can be lucrative.

Gallini, who has run his family practice in Lorton, Va., since 1978, said he notified his property owner, Erol Mutlu, of plans to hand the meteorite over to the Smithsonian, which holds the world's largest museum collection of meteorites. Gallini says he got Mutlu's permission. Later in the week, though, Mutlu sent the doctors an e-mail warning that his brother and fellow landlord Deniz Mutlu was going to the Smithsonian to retrieve the rock, Gallini said.

He wouldn't share the email exchange with The Associated Press, but The Washington Post reported that Erol Mutlu wrote that "it's evident that ownership is tied to the landowner."

"The U.S. courts have ruled that a meteorite becomes part of the land where it arrives through 'natural cause' and hence the property of the landowner," the e-mail said.

Deniz Mutlu later appeared to back away from the claim, saying the family was making no such demands and the meteorite is safe for now at the Smithsonian. He added, however, that he didn't know how long it would remain there.

A lawyer representing the landlords would not comment Tuesday.

The doctors hired their own lawyer and demanded the Smithsonian not release the meteorite until the ownership question was resolved. The lawyer plans to ask a court to rule.

"We really want this to end up in the right place," Gallini said. The doctors plan to donate the money from the Smithsonian to Haiti earthquake relief, he said.

The Smithsonian won't comment on ownership and said in a statement that it will "retain possession of the 'Lorton Meteorite' until a legal owner has been established."

The Smithsonian collection includes about 15,000 meteorites, including 738 gathered shortly after they fell from the sky. The Lorton meteorite came from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, curators said.

It has a blackened outer surface from burning through the atmosphere, said Tim McCoy, a mineral sciences curator at the Smithsonian. Inside are flecks of metal and thousands of tiny rocks containing "the primitive stuff left over from the birth of the solar system," he said.

That material allows scientists to look back about 4.6 billion years, McCoy said.

The last meteorite known to strike a building was in New Orleans in 2003, said Linda Welzenbach, the museum's meteorite



*The meteorite that plummeted through the roof of a Virginia doctor's office is drawing meteor hunters from across the country to Washington's Virginia suburbs
Photo/Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, Chip Clark*

collections manager. There were other finds that year in the Chicago area.

Space rocks can fetch thousands of dollars from collectors. Meteorite hunters descended on Washington's Virginia suburbs to look for other remnants of the Lorton meteorite.

One was Steve Arnold, co-star of the new Science Channel TV show, "Meteorite Men." Arnold estimates the Lorton meteorite could bring \$25,000 to \$50,000 on the open market, unless more pieces turn up. But he said Tuesday that none turned up from his search around the doctors' office.

Meteorites have been the subject of legal disputes before. In the early 1900s, the Oregon Supreme Court ruled a 15-ton meteorite belonged to the landowner on whose property it likely landed, not the person who found it.

The doctors' attorney Marvin Miller said Virginia law differs and favors the tenant.

As of Tuesday, the land owners had made no formal demands, but Miller said he would soon ask a court to decide. "That's the fairest way to deal with things for everybody's sake," he said. From <http://www.foxnews.com>

February 2010 Gem & Mineral Shows

From Rock & Gem Magazine

More shows can be found at

<http://www.rockngem.com/showdates.asp>

1-28-QUARTZSITE, AZ: Wholesale and retail show, "Desert Gardens International Gem & Mineral Show"; Desert Gardens RV Park; 1064 Kuehn Rd., south side of 110, along frontage road; 96 daily; free admission; crystals, minerals, rough, polished, jewelry; contact Sharon or Sandy, Desert Gardens RV Park, 1055 Kuhen St., P.O. Box 2818, Quartzsite, AZ 85346, (928) 927-6361; e-mail: info@desertgardensrvpark.net; Web site: www.desertgardensrvpark.net

30-12-TUCSON, AZ: Business to Business Gem Trade Show; Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc.; The Gem Mall, 4475 S. Country Club Rd.; daily 10-6, last day 10-3; contact Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc., P.O. Box 98, Flora, MS 39071-0098, (601) 879-8832; email: info@glwshows.com; Web site: glwshows.com

30-12-TUCSON, AZ: Business to Business Gem Trade Show; Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc.; The Grant Inn, 1365 W. Grant Rd. (I-10 and Grant Rd.); daily 10-6, last day 10-3; contact Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc., P.O. Box 98, Flora, MS 39071-0098, (601) 879-8832; e-mail: info@glwshows.com; Web site: glwshows.com

30-13-TUCSON, AZ: Show, "Arizona Mineral & Fossil Show"; Martin Zinn Expositions; InnSuites Hotel, 475 N. Granada Ave.; Sat. 10-6; free admission; AMFS Treasure Hunt: win prizes for visiting show locations, pre-register online or at the InnSuites Hotel; daily drawings Feb. 1-10, more than 400 vendors in four locations; contact Regina Aumente, P.O. Box 665; Bernalillo, NM 87004, (505) 867-0425; e-mail: mzexpos@aol.com; Web site: www.mzexpos.com

30-13-TUCSON, AZ: Show, "Arizona Mineral and Fossil Show"; Martin Zinn Expositions LLC; The InnSuites Hotel (475 N. Granada), The Mineral & Fossil Marketplace (1333 N. Oracle Rd.), Quality Inn (1025 E. Benson Hwy.), and Ramada Ltd. (665 N. Freeway); 10-6 daily, final day 10-5; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world, Artists' Gallery (InnSuites Hotel); contact Martin Zinn Expositions, P.O. Box 665, Bernalillo, NM 87004-0665, fax (303) 223-3478; e-mail: mzexpos@aol.com; Web site: www.mzexpos.com

4-12-TUCSON, AZ: Business to Business Gem Trade Show; Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc.; Holiday Inn Palo Verde/Holidome, 4550 S. Palo Verde Rd. (I-10 at Palo Verde Rd.); daily 10-6, last day 10-3; contact Gem and Lapidary Wholesalers Inc., P.O. Box 98, Flora, MS 39071-0098, (601) 879-8832; e-mail: info@glwshows.com; Web site: glwshows.com

5-7--ROSEVILLE, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Placer County Fairgrounds, 800 All America City Blvd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

5-8-TUCSON, AZ: 9th annual show, "Westward Look Show 2010"; FineMineralShow; Westward Look Resort, 245 E. Ina Rd.; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-6, Mon. 10-5; more than 25 of the world's top dealers, "Collector Day" Sat., featuring Will Larson's private collection, Sun. evening cocktail hour, mineral art gallery, and artist panel, including Eberhard Equit, Hildegard Konighofer, Susan Robinson and Wendell Wilson; contact Dave Waisman, P.O. Box 8543, Spokane, WA 99203; Web site: www.finemineralshow.com or www.westwardminerals.com

12-21-INDIO, CA: Show, "Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival"; San Gorgonio Mineral & Gem Society; Gem & Mineral Bldg., Bldg. #1, 46-350 Arabia St.; 10-10 daily; adults \$8, seniors \$7, children \$6; contact Bert Grisham, (951) 849-1674; e-mail: bert67@verizon.net

19-21-SANTA BARBARA, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Earl Warren Showgrounds/Exhibit Hall, 3400 Calle Real; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; email: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

20-21-ANTIOCH, CA: 51st annual show, "Treasures of the Earth 2010"; Antioch Lapidary Club; Contra Costa County Fairgrounds; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3, active military with ID and spouse.; contact Ellen Bauer, (925) 458-2539; e-mail: ebauer_lapidary@yahoo.com; Web site: http://antiochlapidaryclub.tripod.com

26-27-NORTHBRIDGE, CA: Show, "GEMboree"; Del Air Rockhounds Club; United Methodist Church, 9650 Reseda Blvd.; Fri. 3-9:30, Sat. 10-5; free admission, children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult; gems, jewelry, beads, Girl and Boy Scout merit badges; contact Julia Marin, 18220 Marilla St., Northridge, CA 91325, (818) 886-7190; e-mail: jomarin@dslextreme.com; Web site: http://delairrockhounds.blogspot.com

26-28-COSTA MESA, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; OC Fair & Event Center/Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

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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

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**Volume #43 Issue #2
February 2010**

Some Topics In This Issue:

- AOS Election This Month
- Opal Evaluation Kit Rediscovered
- Barbara McCondra Night
- The Old Woman Meteorite
- Need Old Opal Express Newsletters
- German wanderer in Australia
- Opal in Australian Outback
- How to Field Trip
- Consumers and Diamond Alternatives
- Meteor Strikes House

Important Dates:

Feb. 2 - Board Meeting

Feb. 11 - General Meeting

AOS Elections

David Burton will give a talk of the mining by Barbara McCondra and her fabulous Yowah nuts opals.

Feb. 27 - CFMS Field Trip to Ant Hill

— GENERAL MEETINGS —

2nd Thursday of the Month
7:00 pm - 9:00 PM

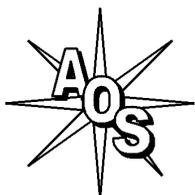
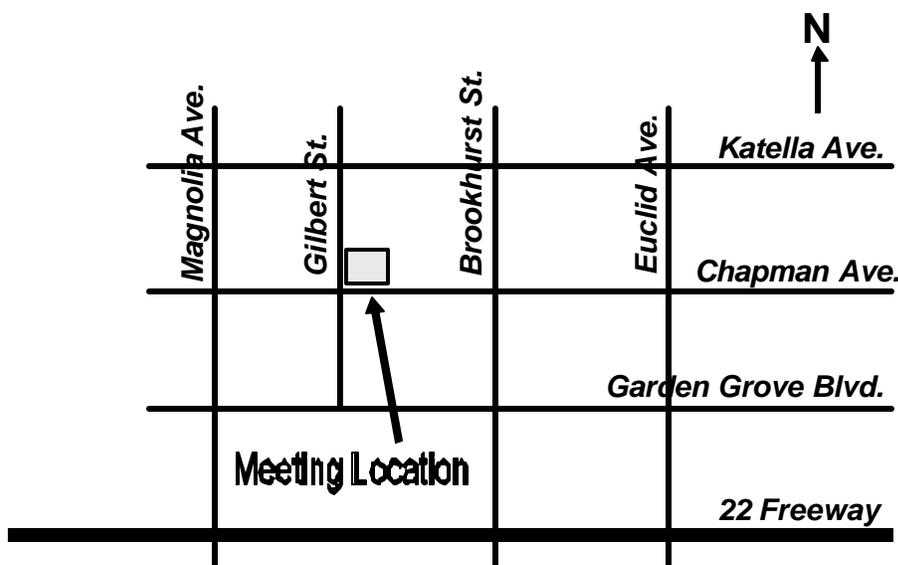
Garden Grove Civic Women's Club
9501 Chapman Ave.
Garden Grove, CA 92841
(NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)

MEETING ACTIVITIES

Opal Cutting, Advice, Guest Speakers,
Slide Shows, Videos, Other Activities

TO:

February 11 Barbara McCondra, Yowah Opal Miner By David Burton



The American Opal Society

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