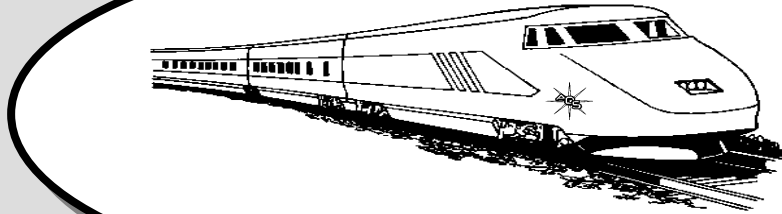


# The Opal Express

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## August Speaker: Justin Zzyzx on So. Cal. Collecting

Justin Zzyzx will give a talk on Southern California, Mineral Collecting Mecca.

Justin is the owner of the Zzyzx Gallery of Natural Science in Los Angeles, CA (<http://www.zzyzgallery.com>). He also owns and manages <http://www.the-vug.com>, the largest mineralogical database online, and founded <http://www.fakeminerals.com>, and Rockhounding Videos (<http://www.rockhoundingvideos.com>)

Justin Zzyzx has worked for over a decade within the greater mineral, rock, & gem collecting community. As 2003 show chair for the [Culver City Rock and Mineral Club](#), he raised the highest amount ever (to date) for their annual "Fiesta of Gems" and for the following 2 consecutive years ran the annual gem show for the [Mineralogical Society of Southern California \(MSSC\)](#). This event was held over a 3 day period at the Long Beach Convention Center, and sported over 60 vendors, and 45 educational displays. Justin was also board of directors for the MSSC for 2 years. Currently he gives lectures and leads public field trips for many of the local Southern California mineral clubs and organizations. Through direct contact and hands on education, he is able to promote a greater understanding of the vast mineral resources within, not only California, but the American Southwest.

He is the co-owner and Director of Public Relations for the 2nd most visited mineralogical website online, [The-Vug.com](#); in addition to several other rock related blogs and websites. Most noted is his work on [FakeMinerals.com](#), a website devoted to exposing scams and frauds within the  
*The Opal Express* *The American Opal Society*

commercial mineral industry. Summer of 2008, Justin gained attention both nationally and abroad when he helped to uncover diamond fraud taking place at the [Crater of Diamonds State Park](#) in Murfreesboro, Arkansas. During the summer of 2010 he was instrumental in the grass roots movement that lead to the defeat of the highly controversial, and shamefully inaccurate, California State Senate Bill 624.



In 2008, Justin began publishing The-Vug.com Quarterly Magazine, a free, color trade magazine, targeting the international, amateur, mineral collecting public.

This magazine features guides, articles, and stories relating to all aspects of mineral, rock & gem collecting, but primarily focuses on providing scientifically accurate information, written in language that can be understood, even by a novice to the hobby. Now entering its 4th year in publication, The-Vug Quarterly, as it is affectionately known by its readers, distributes over 4,500 hard copies per issue, covering 36 states, 6 countries, and boasts thousands of additional downloads a month via [the free .pdf archive](#). In February of 2011 Justin was named Gallery Cordinator for the Downtown Los Angeles Artwalk.

## Bench Tips by Brad Smith

More BenchTips by Brad Smith are at Face Book or at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BenchTips>

MAGNETIC HOLDER FOR FILES An easy way to keep all your files organized at the bench is to use a magnetic tool strip. They're not expensive and help keep a lot of small tools from cluttering the bench top. I got a couple of them from Harbor Freight for about \$5 each. See <http://www.harborfreight.com/18-inch-magnetic-holder-65489.html>. Only regret was putting some of my small drills on the magnets. The drills got a little magnetized and now stick together when I carry them in a bottle in my tool box.

## OpalSociety Group on the Internet

The American Opal Society has an on-line e-Group called "OpalSociety". If is for members to communicate on club activities and as a discussion forum for all things opal. It is located at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OpalSociety/>.

All members are invited to join and by clicking on the button "Join This Group" on the web page to join.

## 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: "opallover".

## Paperless Newsletter

Want to see color photos in your copy of the newsletter? Sign up for electronic delivery of the newsletter, and enjoy an added bonus by saving the club postage cost and a reduced membership fee! Also, you are saving paper. Simply contact Jim Pisani at [editor@opalsociety.org](mailto:editor@opalsociety.org).

## Continuing with Chapters 9 & 10 of the book From Rags to Riches & Disasters

*By Peter Greisl*

### Chapter 9 – New Beginnings

I drove down to the Post Office and saw Schultz, He remembered me when I came down with Chris, he said, "What can I do for you?" I am sure he expecting Postal business, and I replied, "Have you still got the mining equipment you advertised at the co-op notice board?" He said "yes I do," to which I replied, "What condition is the Motor winch in?" "It is in excellent working condition very good motor, and I also replaced the winch cable with 100 feet of new cable" he replied. "Mr. Schultz

I would like to purchase this equipment, small problem, I do not have any facilities to get the gear home nor to my Claim, can you recommend someone with a Ute or Trailer who could help me?" I said. He came back with, "First of all call me Peter, I think I can get the gear to your place." That's great, I belief you are a Commonwealth Agent like most Post offices?" I blurted out, and handed him my Bank Passbook, He made the necessary deductions handed me back the book and then he wrote out a bill of sale for the equipment. He said, "There are other Items with it I have not mentioned in the Ad, like a Wind Shute, Mast with guy wires for the winch, 4 halve shafts for the Winch guys support, Sledge Hammer, couple shovels, Pegs for the ladder support etc." He continued, if there is problems with the motor you come and see me a do have a spare one, but as I said you will have no problems with it."

He told me he will bring to my Shack on Saturday afternoon, I told him I will be waiting for him.

I thanked him and went across to the Co-Op and ask if I could see Johnny, he came out and I told him that everything was all right with Chris and I have a spare room out the back of our shack but we have to do a bit of work on it and if he can come to the Village on Saturday morning 8 am and we get stuck in to it and make his room livable. He was very excited and great full, I told him about Frank the Swede and filled him in what is happening. He told me that he can start until the guy comes back from his vacation from Adelaide. I told Johnny that is no problem, and I see him on Saturday.

Well the rest of the day, I took Chris and Beatrix out and we went to Stuarts Creek which she did enjoy, and Beatrix was in her element by collecting wild flowers. We had a lovely time the three of us and we put everything what is happening out of our mind and just enjoy this afternoon together.

I told Chris what has happened with Schultz etc., gave her back the Bank book to put it away. She said to me, "Darling what are our chances of making any money or just surviving. I replied,

"Sweetheart no one can answer this, all I can say is if Klaus and Ludwig are right then one of our chances are to put in an Open Cut on this claim and to do that it cost money, so I hope that working with Frank for a while and then with Johnny that we find enough to feed us and save money to put in an open Cut." I continued, "When Herman comes with the money I want this to be our Safety valve when we have to leave the fields and have to start somewhere else again." To what she replied, "I gave up on that, otherwise we would have heard from them by now." I retorted "if that's the case and he has taken our money etc.," I will find him somehow and so help him God."

There was a knock on the door and Stella was there and asked if we would like to come across for a cup of coffee and some cake. We agreed and said we will be over in a couple of minutes.

We went across and Steve was there and also his offsider Stavros was his name, I did not like him from the word go, he looked very shifty. Well that did not enhance the confidence in Steve's offer to work with him if I needed to.

Steve showed me the results from today's work and he had some nice large pieces of rock and stone with a lot of Opal on it and running through it. I said, "Nice Stuff Steve, Congratulations." He replied, "It's just junk, Stavros put it the bucket we clean up all tomorrow."

Stavros said, "I must go Steve I see you tomorrow," Steve pulled out of his pocket a wad of money and handed Stavros a few bills, which he took said goodbye to us and left. Steve asked how I am doing and I told him about my purchase of the equipment he said it was a good deal. He is through with Shaft sinking and underground mining, he prefers open Cut. I said I would like to but first I am not too experienced and then it takes some money which I do not have. Chris and Stella were talking about the past where we came from and where she came from etc., all superficial communication, but she is a very nice lady and kind hearted.

After about an hour later we thanked them for the hospitality, and commented on that lovely cake, which was very nice and we left.

Beatrix was very tired by then and she wanted to go to bed without dinner. We let her go and we had some lovely Hungarian goulash Chris prepared with lamb, and settled down with a cup of coffee and day dreamed what we will do when we strike it big. With this comfortable feeling we went to bed and fell asleep very quickly.

The next morning which was Saturday, right on the dot at 8 am Johnny knocked on the door he found the place because he could see the car parked right beside it.

I ask him to come in and he introduce himself to Chris, and she asked him if he had breakfast, he sort looked shyly at me and was going to refuse, I said hey no problem its nothing fancy just a couple of chops with eggs and toast.

He accepted and thanked Chris; I said jokingly, "Well there is a chance for you to sample Chris's culinary expertise." He just replied, "I am not fussy I eat anything."

After a scrumptious breakfast we went across to Jack Dutton's Building material Salvage dump. We foraged around and low and behold there were a couple louver windows just like the ones which were in our shack, we grabbed them and some timber and metal flushing. Then we went to Jacks Storage where he kept the tools etc., took everything we needed and we went back to the Shack and started our Job.

Johnny was very handy with Tools and not lazy, we measured, cut fitted, hammered, nailed and within 3 hours we had the windows in all flushed and working with the help of a little oil put on the mechanism.

He said, "Jack had some old furniture, in his Storage Shed, so we went and took a single bed, mattress and a small cupboard, I will tell Jack when he comes home of what I took. The Lino on the floor was quite ok; we gave Johnny a Kerosene Lamp.

I told Chris if she could just put her finishing touches to it. To which she agreed.

I ask Johnny if he has to go back to work, he replied no, so I said we go and I show him the Claim, so he gets an idea of what we are in for.

So we went and arrived at the site and Johnny said if I got some light down there I told him there a couple Carbide Lamps at the bottom, He went down and I followed him, we lit the lamps and I pointed out to him where I found on piece and then where Ludwig dug out from the pillar the few chips.

Johnny was quite impressed with what he saw and he said, "There has to be some stuff around here somewhere, and I go with the German fellows about the pillar."

"That's what I am afraid of," I replied. I said to Johnny, "Let's head back I expect someone to come and bring me something."

So we climbed out and headed back for Dutton Village. Upon arrival, Jack Dutton drove up at the same time and I shouted out to him, "Jack if you got a minute I like to show you what we did with your Shack," He got out and came over and he said hello to Chris and we walked around to Annex. He commented, "Nice job, it has to be worth another 2 quid's and smiled, and said not to you, to the next tenant."

"Actually I got something for you which you can put in, a small table and chair I have a roll of new lino in my office come over and get it and put it down," I thanked him for it we walked over with him picked up the chair and the table and lino.

Took all the gear back and put it down on the floor cut it to fit. Put in the chair and table,

Chris had put nice new linen on the bed with a couple blankets, also a nice cloth for the cupboard and lovely curtains for the windows, she brought a table cloth and put a fruit bowl on the table and it finishes this room perfect, Johnny said "This room is nicer than the one I am staying in now."

Chris added to his comment, "Johnny there is no room service you eat dinner with us." But if you like to be alone which we respect you always can take the coffee back to your room, as I told Peter, I am happy to have you here and love to provide meals for you, but you do your own washing of clothes." Johnny retorted with gratitude in saying "I would not have it any other way, and as soon as we get some opal and I receive some money I will pay for half of the rent and food etc."

So with that out the way, I asked him if he has transport, He declined so I ask him how did get up here, he said he knows the Scots Fellow across from us and he gave him a lift. I said "you tell me when you want to leave and I take back."

Chris has just made us a cup of coffee as a Land Rover towing a trailer pulled up, and Peter Schultz got out of the Car. Greeted him and thanked him for bringing the gear, I moved the Car from the side of the shack, and we started putting first the pipes and the ladders there then we carried the winch, which was a heavy bugger, then the mast and all the rest of the equipment. Once we unloaded I ask peter if I can offer him a cup of coffee which he did accept. And we exchanged niceties and I steered the conversation to Opal etc., I said, "Peter you are also a Opal Buyer, can I get from you a honest professional opinion about some stuff I found," He said, "sure show me." I got the jar of chips and also the stone Ludwig sliced out of the potch for me. Peter looked at it very closely and said, "this stone as it is you should get anywhere between 80 and 120 quid for it. The Jar of chips without any hesitation I would pay 50 Quid for it." Chris looked dumb founded and said, "Quid?" Peter said I am sorry, I should have said 160 to 240 Dollars and 100 Dollars for the Chips."

Then he added this material is top quality Crystal Opal I am sure it comes from Tee Tree Hill." "I have seen a lot opal of this quality and most of it came from there, Am I right that's where it came from?" I acknowledged and said yes we have some strong traces going in to a 5 foot pillar. He said well the answer is a Cut. I replied, "Unfortunately Peter what you did see in the Bankbook that was it." So I got an arrangement with Frank the Swede, he is looking at the claim and see if he can blast a few feet out for me on a share basis to start a tunnel where I found lot of potch but no colour." Peter

replied, "Frank is a good gelignite man you tell him what you want and he will produce if physically possible."

Well Good Luck, any times you have some stuff you want to sell don't forget me."

He got into his Rover and left.

Chris said, "I did not realize that you got all this equipment," Johnny said well now we are in business, I wish I could finish earlier," I said, "Hey hold your horses, You know I have Frank coming," So I said well If you want we can all go down to Gus and celebrate with a couple of drinks," He said, "yes that's fine but let me buy the first round as it was payday." I said, "You should be able to save a few dollars,"

He replied, "Actually I am sending half of my wages home to my mum as she is really struggling being on her own with a couple of my brothers still living at home and they do not have any jobs."

Beatrix took to him immediately and was always next to him, and he did not mind actually he lifted her up on his lap and she did not mind she was very contented which I was pleased to see knowing we should not have any problems with him being around.

We drove down to Gus, Johnny ordered three beers and we drank to our success and future.

At about 9 o'clock we left Gus and drove home and Johnny went back to his room at the co-op.

At home I ask Chris what she thinks of Johnny, "He seems to be a nice guy and I feel comfortable around him, let's hope you guys get on all right." She replied.

I said "Darling heat some water I want a shower and go to bed, and I have to speak with you about our Car." "What's wrong with our car?" she replied, "Nothing yet but it is not suitable for what I am doing within a few month it will be a wreck."

"I will call down to Laszlo Vargas, he is the town mechanic, welder, etc. and he has some used Ute's for sale," and maybe I can work something out with him, as we need such a transport particular with all the gear to take around I cannot rely always on other people to help me."

Chris replied; "Please don't get you self in a mess we cannot get out of it."

"What I have in mind is to ask if he can give me 12 month to pay for it and I will give him a bill of sale over the Mining Gear, depends on the value of the Ute if he has any." I said."

We went to bed with a calm mind and were satisfied with today's results.

The next morning I did a quick inventory of my wallet and was pleased.

I still had \$ 600.00 left from the \$ 800.00 I had when I picked up Chris from Sydney, she never did ask me for any money for shopping at the co-op etc., so I did ask her what money she was using on the trip for food and here at the co-op etc., she replied, "Well you know I always saved some money from the shopping in Sydney and managed to put away about \$ 600.00 and that's the money I am using, so the money you have you use for running the mining and rent etc. I look after the shopping with my money."

"As I said before to you, you always amaze me." I kissed her and said "I let you know what the outcome is, and when I get back we can drive down to White Dam to see Klaus and Ludwig."

## Chapter 10 - The New Car and Opal Chips

I went down to see Laszlo at his workshop which was right behind the Opal restaurant.

Laszlo was there working on a winch, he stopped and introduced himself to me and returned these gesture and he ask me what he can do for me, I told him who I was and what I am doing here etc. and I asked him if he had any utes for sale. He replied, "Yes I have a couple," and walked to the back of his workshop and there were two utes one was a red and white old Dodge 6 cylinder long stroke side valve motor it was about 1950 which made it just on 20 years old, the body was in quite good condition and so was the tray on the back. He said, "It runs really well," He started it up and it started

straight away. The other one was a 1964 Holden EH in much better condition, which was out of my league.

I ask how much he wants for the Dodge, "He replied," Only \$800.00," I said to him." "Laszlo, can we do a deal?" He said what kind of deal?" I explained my situation and told him about Herman coming with some money any day and I would like to give him a Bill of Sale over the VW as Insurance that I will pay of the \$ 800.00 within a period of 6 month, and if I get something out of the claim I will pay him sooner. I continued in telling him my predicament in moving mining gear. He understood that it is an impossibility with my car.

So he said, "I know what it's like, I was in a similar position when I came to the field few years ago and someone helped me also, so you keep your Bill of Sale and if you cannot pay me within the six month I just get the car back, is that fair enough?"

I could not believe my ears, so I said," I give you \$ 100.00 that won't kill me or send me broke, "He took it and we shook hands and he gave me the Key and said "good luck with you claim." I said one more favor if I may ask, can you please run over with me to Dutton Village as I cannot drive 2 Cars." He said give me 10 minutes and I run it for you."

I watched him finish this welding job, and he said lets go.

We arrived at the Village and he parked the Ute right in front of our shack , and he got into the VW and I took him back to his workshop. I thanked him again, and he just replied "Good Luck."

When I arrived back home Chris was standing outside and just said," What is this Monstrosity?" I explained to her the deal I struck with Laszlo and she could see the sense in it. I told her to get ready we are going to White Dam to see Ludwig and Klaus.

We drove down to the co-op and filled up the Ute and we went to White Dam. It was a little noisy but quite nice to drive. As we arrived Klaus and Ludwig were sitting outside their Shack and drinking a Beer.

Klaus asked me if I had looked through the rubble he washed for me the other day, I told him I had not it is still in the buckets, as there was quite some activity lately. He commented on the Ute and said They were going to buy it at one stage but then had their Land rover fixed, Ludwig said Laszlo is a good Mechanic and can help with most equipment breakdown and he got all the equipment to do most jobs.

I noticed that they had a nice big Broomwade Compressor; I asked them if anything was wrong with it, Klaus just commented they brought it back to do a service on it.

I told them I purchased all the mining gear and it is at home, so now I can get it to the claim with the Ute, all I have to find out how to erect the winch, set up the Steel ladders and get the Pipes underground to be able to push the buckets and I am set.

They said I need at least three people to set up the winch with its guy wires and two to lift the winch on to the Mast and adjust the height of it for clearance of the bucket from the shaft.

I said, "No I am not going to ask you guys for help, you have helped me enough already and I cannot impose on you for that. Ludwig said," You make sure you have all the gear at the shaft on Monday and we drop in and help you put it up, make sure Frank will be there we need a big strong fellow." "You guys are amazing," I retorted, and Klaus replied, " You will find you can get lots of help from people here on the field but one thing you will not get and that is to borrow money."

Klaus brought out a couple of Beers for Chris and me; we drank and cheered each other to our success.

We left and on the way home, I said to Chris "You prepare some dinner and I will look through the buckets to see if anything useful is in them."

I started looking through the rubble by placing it in a plastic wash bowl with water and was sitting in the sun so the sunlight was directly on the bowl, I swirled it a bit around to see if I can see some colour, which I actually did there were a few pieces which did have green and blue flashes, I put them to one side and continued and I managed to recovered a 250 gram Nescafe Jar full, I continued and

managed to find in the next bowl some pieces with stronger colours of green orange and dark blue, the pieces were very small actually just chips and by the time I finished three of the bowls I had another Nescafe Jar with small but very colourful pieces, all of these would have to be cleaned up with a grinder which obviously I did not have. I never ever had I been so excited my first result, I had no Idea what the value would have been if anything but I was so pleased that I have actually found some Opal, there was a great amount of colourless potch, but I kept everything. I just finished in time when Chris served dinner, I quickly rinsed all the opal in the Jars and filled them with clean water and they looked great, I was so excited that I blurted out to Chris, "Look at that," and she stammered. "Wow, that's great, well done Darling,

So we have these two Jars with opal and the little container with the nice chips plus the nice stone which Ludwig cut out for us, it has to be worth something."

I said," I am sure it is worth something but I have no idea and we have to somehow clean them." Chris said," See Steve he has a generator and I've seen in the room where he keeps his buckets a Grinder or what you call it, ask him if you could use it and we pay him whatever he wants for Electricity from his generator." I replied that's a brilliant Idea, I will see him and ask him if I can do it on Saturday."

We were both so excited and Beatrix made the comment "Daddy you found some more stones like you promised." "Yes darling I did, and let's hope there will be many more."

We had dinner and just sat outside for a while and were just dreaming what we do when we strike it real big.

I said "Darling do you think you be able to help me load the Ute with all this gear,"

I try she replied, just as we started, the Scotsman form opposite us just arrived home and he saw Chris struggling in helping me he came across and said "let go, I got it," and he helped me load the Ute with all the gear. I thanked him and then we formerly introduced ourselves and he did also, we exchanged a few words and he said good night and went inside his hut.

We had a bucket shower and went to bed, I again was wide awake looking forward to tomorrow to meet up with Frank and start properly mining, with equipment.

Finally serenity overcame me and I drifted off in a deep sleep.

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## **Opal: Australia's Troubled Gemstone**

*February 24, 2011. By Naomi Levin*

For decades opals have had a bad rap. Too many of the poor quality stones have been inlaid into poorly constructed kitsch tourist jewellery. Naomi Levin reports.

Couple this with a mining crisis, which sees opal miners attracted to the more lucrative coal industry for a stable wage, and it would be fair to say Australia's national gem needs a bit of help.

Unlike other gemstones, an opal's challenge begins when it is still in the ground. Opals only occur in specific geological conditions in sedimentary environments around the Great Australian Basin. To laymen, this means most opal is far, far inland in NSW, Queensland and South Australia – hundreds of kilometres from the closest cities. Being an opal miner is, according to those in the know, a tough and lonely existence.

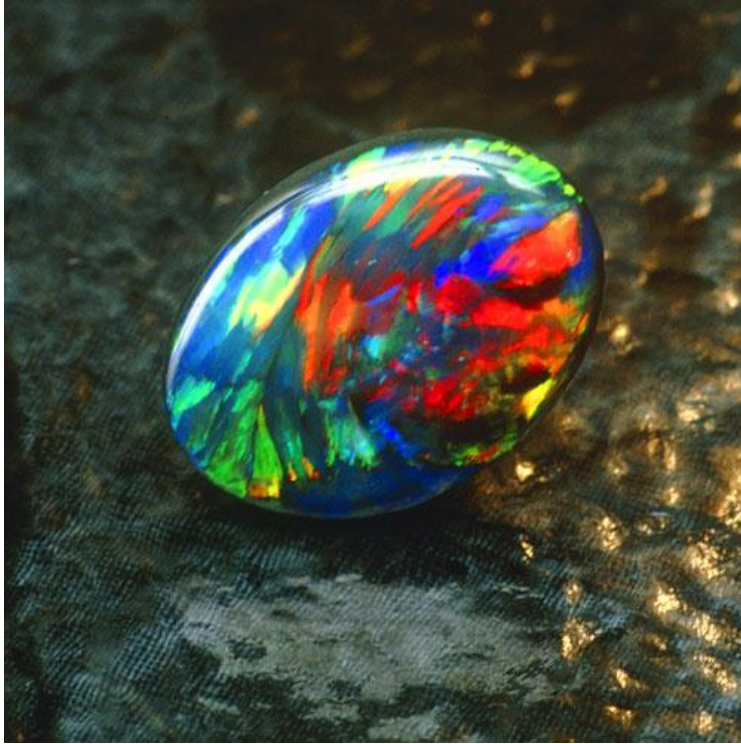
Maxine O'Brien, who is manager of the Lightning Ridge Miners' Association in the region that is home to some of the most spectacular black opal, says government regulations add to the pressures on opal miners, as has a 30 per cent drop in the field price of opal. This has resulted in lower output and fewer discoveries of new seams. "There are substantially less miners compared with five years ago and state government in NSW and Queensland are actively making life difficult for small miners through increased prices and regulation," she says.

Miners are not going down without a fight though, she explains. "Opal miners are lobbying hard and will have new areas opened up

for exploration, which should result in increased production within the next five years.”

Opal, like all stones, varies greatly in quality. Today, the larger stones, O’Brien says, are moving well. In the past five years, the top end – “larger stones of good to excellent quality” – has remained stable. The same cannot be said for the less expensive opal.

Allan Cheng, director at Opals Australia, estimates 70 per cent of Australia’s opals are exported – that figure includes those bought in Australia by international tourists.



An 'Exceptional' gem opal

“Traditional export markets for opals include the USA, Europe, in particular the UK and German and Asian regions spearheaded by Japan,” he says. “The Chinese market obviously has huge potential going forward.”

Once opal reaches the jeweller there are a number of different paths it can take. The most well-known, and possibly most maligned in the wider jewellery industry, is the low-end tourist market. But it is the design-focused, higher end that is being cultivated.

Much of the hostility toward opal in Australia is aimed at the tourist sector and its use of poor quality doublets and triplets, boring designs and shoddy craftsmanship.

Doreen Wallman, from Spectrum Gems in Sydney’s Strand Arcade, has been in the industry for decades – since her family started mining the gem in Queensland – and has seen the industry from other sides too, having been involved in the wholesaling and export of opal, and now the retail and manufacture side. Her shop stocks a range of price points – all the way up to bespoke pieces – and relies significantly on the tourist market, these days mostly Americans, Brits and Germans.

It is with a sense of regret that Wallman speaks about much of the industry’s focus on tourists. “It’s never been promoted properly,” she says of opal, adding, “Diamonds are the thing every young [Australian] woman dreams of.”

As well as, in some people’s opinion, tarnishing opal’s reputation, the problem with relying on the tourist sector is when the visitors stop coming, so too do the sales. With the bleak financial situation in America and Europe, coupled with a very strong Australian dollar, the flow of international tourists has dropped – something Wallman has noticed.

Opal Australia’s Cheng is partially relying on an economic bounce back to get the industry back on track. “The economic recovery of the key markets for opal will no doubt be closely monitored by the industry as a whole,” he says.

However, many see the future of opal as being in drastically increased domestic consumption. “We need more education by industry bodies,” Wallman says. “Most Australians have only seen the white opal their granny wore.”

Two other opal specialists interviewed for this story spoke of an identical refrain: customers walking into their store and asking in disbelief whether the magnificent stone in front of them is really an opal.

Ian McArthur, known to all as Mac, is an opal guru from Bellingen in New South Wales. He specialises in Queensland ironstone matrix, a stone where the opal veins and layers are virtually inseparable from their dark ironstone hosts. “The best way to market opal is to educate the Australian market so they speak on the stone’s behalf,” he says.

“I educate people every day.” The day before our conversation, he taught a couple of backpackers about the beauty and rarity of opal. They ended up buying \$600 worth of opal – “That was probably all the money they had,” he laughs.

It is also a familiar situation to Kingsley Wallman, co-owner of Venerari in Sydney and the son of Spectrum Gem’s Doreen Wallman. Kingsley Wallman has been selling design-focused, high-end jewellery for six years. He started out trying to “reinvent the opal”, but has diversified into other coloured gems. “Opal is still our largest-selling gemstone,” he says. “But there is still a perception that opal is a product for tourists only.”

Venerari uses only the best quality black and boulder opal, eschews doublets and triplets and creates designs that showcase the opal in the best possible light. And it sells. “We do make big opal engagement rings,” the former lawyer turned gemmologist says. “I wouldn’t have believed it myself six or seven years ago.”

Opal is softer than other stones – 5.5 to 6.5 on Mohs hardness scale, compared with a diamond’s 10 – and requires a skillful jeweller to set it. This though, should not deter buyers, who, as with pearls, can maintain their opals with a little care to avoid scratches. Black, boulder opal is slightly harder than the white variety; it is also more sought after in cutting-edge design.

However, it concerns Kingsley Wallman that local designers are not matching these incredible stones with cutting-edge settings to attract local buyers.

“There is still an unrealised opportunity,” he says. “A perception that opal is a second-class citizen, but people are getting the wrong story. It’s not so much about the stone, as about the design and service.”

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

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## Mica

The mica group of sheet silicate (phyllosilicate) minerals includes several closely related materials having highly perfect basal cleavage. All are monoclinic with a tendency towards pseudo-hexagonal crystals and are similar in chemical composition.

The highly perfect cleavage, which is the most prominent characteristic of mica, is explained by the hexagonal sheet-like arrangement of its atoms.

The word “mica” is thought to be derived from the Latin word micare, meaning “to glitter”, in reference to the brilliant appearance of this mineral (especially when in small scales).



The British Geological Survey reports that as of 2005, India had the largest deposits of mica in world. China was the top producer of mica with almost a third of the global share, closely followed by the USA, South Korea and Canada. Large Deposits of Sheet Mica were mined in New England from the 19th Century to the 1960s. Large mines existed in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Maine.

Mica is widely distributed and occurs in igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary regimes. Large crystals of mica used for various applications are typically mined from granitic pegmatites.

Until the 19th century, large crystals of mica were quite rare and expensive as a result of the limited supply in Europe. However, its price dramatically dropped when large reserves were found and mined in Africa and South America during the early 1800s. The largest sheet of mica ever mined in the world came from a mine in Denholm, Quebec, Canada.

Scrap and flake mica is produced all over the world. Flake mica comes from several sources: the metamorphic rock called schist as a by-product of processing feldspar and kaolin resources, from placer deposits, and from pegmatites. Sheet mica is considerably less abundant than flake and scrap mica.

Sheet mica is occasionally recovered from mining scrap and flake mica. The most important sources of sheet mica are pegmatite deposits.

#### **Did you know???**

Because mica is resistant to heat it is used instead of glass in windows for stoves and kerosene heaters. It is also used to separate electrical conductors in cables that are designed to have a fire-resistance rating in order to provide circuit integrity.

From <http://www.rockhoundkids.com/rk-newsletter.html> April 2009 edition

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### **Hunting for Lost Diamonds**

*By Rob Kalb*

Great treasures were looted during World War II. ROE KALB reports that many people still search today for the hidden and lost treasures looted by the Nazi's.

Before World War II, Germany was a known trading zone in Europe, taking a big part in the European jewellery trading. During the war, German Nazis looted gold, diamond, art and treasures from the territories they occupied and the people they victimized, later to be looted themselves by Russians at the end of war.

In the last months of the war, some of the Third Reich's secret archives were hurriedly transported from Berlin to the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia, Moravia, Southern Germany and Austria.

In April, 1945, the chief cashier of the main branch of Berlin's Reichsbank (back then it was the central bank), Georg Netzeband, was entrusted with 164 jute sacks containing 730 bars of gold.

He was to take the treasure to an abandoned potash mine near the town of Merkers in Thuringia, central Germany, where it was assumed that the treasures would be safer than in Berlin.

In addition, diamonds, gems and jewelry were added to the shipment. The amount or value of the diamonds is unknown, but historians assume the diamonds were worth at least several million Euro in today's terms.

Colonel Franz Pfeiffer, commander of the Alpine division, had been tipped-off about the gold by friends in Berlin. When Netzeband arrived in the mountains, Pfeiffer seized the valuable cargo. Among the diamonds and jewellery were special pieces with fancy shapes, and which were thought to be quite large.

Under the cover of darkness Pfeiffer dispatched a mule train to an isolated forester's house at Einsiedl, high above Lake Walchen near the Austrian border, but it was not long before he realized that too many people knew about the hiding place. Villagers had spotted the trucks and the mules.

The gold ingots were too bulky and heavy to be carried further through the mountains so they were left in place, while the rest of the

treasure such as cash money in US currencies, was speared among the soldiers.

Austrian authorities are now considering a 99-year ban on a search for Nazi treasure at the bottom of a lake in a bid to protect wildlife. The ban will include diving expeditions at the Toplitz Lake where treasure seekers have tried for decades to find Nazi treasure.

Over the years, many treasure hunters and divers searched the lake looking for the dumped diamond and gold as Allied forces swept through Europe at the end of World War Two.

Josef Muzik, a Czech treasure hunter, spent thirteen years clearing rubble from underground tunnels and investing all his money into the effort. He says that now he's come as close as ever to uncovering the treasure he believes lies hidden near the village of Stechovice in Czech Republic.

The story of "The Treasure of Stechovice" that was hidden by the Nazis at several locations in the valley of the Vltava River in Central Bohemia has excited treasure hunters since the end of the Second World War.

Some believe the Nazis buried priceless war booty in specially-created tunnels near the village of Hradistko near Stechovice. It is believed to include gold, diamonds, jewellery and pieces of art, as well as secret files and scientific documents.

Some people even believe the Nazis hid the famous "Amber Room" looted from Russia in 1941 in the tunnels. However, to-date Josef Muzik's team has found nothing.

*Roë Kalb is the editor of the [Israel Diamond Institute Blog](http://www.israeldiamondinstitute.com)*

*First published December 2009*

*From <http://www.jewellermagazine.com>*

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### **Telling Lapis Lazuli from Sodalite**

If you want to know whether you have sodalite, lapis or imitation lapis look for pyrite inclusions. Lapis-Lazuli will have pyrite inclusions. Sodalite does not have pyrite inclusions. In imitation Lapis the inclusions are golden flakes not pyrite crystals.

Lazurite is the mineral name of the gem and ornamental stone Lapis-Lazuli. Lapis Lazuli is a

gemstone with a rich blue color. It has a hardness of 5-5-1/2, is composed of sodium aluminum silicate with some sulphur. Most of the properties of lazurite are similar to those of sodalite, but the association of pyrite with lazurite determines the identification.

Sodalite is composed of sodium aluminum silicate with chlorides . It is 5-1/2 to 6 on the

hardness scale and the color is usually blue but may tend toward white, grey, yellow or red. It is associated with other feldspathoids, so called because they resemble feldspars but are of a slightly different compositing.

When working Lapis to a polish it requires fine sanding to prevent pyrite inclusions from

protruding. Leather may be used with chrome oxide for polishing. Sodalite, on the other hand polishes perfectly on felt with cerium oxide, after a fine job of sanding.

A drop of Hydrochloric acid is good for testing lapis-lazuli. A drop of it on the blue stone creates an odor of hydrogen sulfide. On the white areas of the stone it usually effervesces because the white is usually calcite. This test will distinguish Lapis from Sodalite.

This report was inspired by an article from Tulip City Conglomerate via the Roseville Rollin' Rocks Via the Grant County Rolling Stones Gem & Mineral Society The Beacon Jim

*From MOROKS NEWSLETTER JUNE 2011*

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### **Jet**

*By Mary Sue Bucher*

In the year 1861, Prince Albert, husband to Her Royal Majesty Queen Victoria of England, died of typhoid fever. For the remainder of her life, which numbered forty years, she remained in mourning and dressed only in black. Back then, mourning attire included beads fashioned from jet - a strange but beautiful gemstone which is a form of Lignite ... coal. Jet is a fossil mineraloid, sometimes called Black Amber, Agstein, Scorpion Stone, and Witch's Amber.



Most jet originated in the Jurassic period, approximately 182 million years ago from the remains of Araucaria conifer trees whose living relatives we call Mon-key Puzzle trees. It's lightweight, has a distinctive "coal" smell to it, is known to be flammable, and like amber, it takes on a static charge when rubbed. It is soft, with a Mohs hardness of 2-4 and is known to polish to a luster resembling black velvet.

Victorian mourning jewelry has a distinct "look" to it; the beads are, of course, black and are usually faceted. Long ropes of these faceted jet beads were common, and they remained popular well into the 1920s when they were adopted by young "Flappers" to wear with their short, straight dresses.

After jet beads became popular, there were, of course, imitators such as Ebonite, also called Vulcanite (hardened rubber). Unlike jet, Vulcanite was molded rather than cut and if heated, smelled like rubber instead of coal. It also bleached out with age to an olive-brown color.

"French Jet, Paris Jet, or Faux Jet," is glass, and is the most common imitator of jet; it's easy to distinguish from real jet as its heavy and has a cold feel to it. Bakelite is a type of vintage plastic that was sometime tinted black to resemble jet. Bakelite, in its own right, has become valuable. About ten years ago, a friend asked me to pick up a Bakelite bracelet for her at an antique show. Turns out most of the good ones that I saw were being offered for around five hundred dollars and needless to say, she didn't get her bracelet.

Jet has been imitated by Bog Oak, a type of black wood found in Irish peat bogs, and jewelry makers have also used Cannel Coal, Shale, Horn, and a few things that aren't around anymore. Then, of course, there's onyx, or black chalcedony, obsidian, schorl, coral, and tone that's been dyed. Queen Victoria could afford the real thing, and the only jewelry allowed at court during the mourning period was real jet - preferably, mined from Whitby England, which is known to have the finest jet in the world. Whitby is also a source of Ammonite fossils.

An old legend tells of St. Hilda of Whitby who hundreds of years ago was credited with turning a plague of snakes into stone. They do some beautiful jet carvings in Whitby and that's not all they've carved. As proof of St. Hilda's miracle, local artisans carve snake's heads on the ammonite fossils and sell them as a cottage industry. The coat of arms of Whitby is adorned with three of these "Snake Stones."

*From SFGMS Mineralog, 8/10, via Moroks, 8/11*

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**August 2011 Gem & Mineral Shows**

Most shows can be found at <http://rockngem.com/showdates/>

**5-7—HILLSBORO, OREGON:** Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; Washington County Fairgrounds, 873 NE 34th Ave.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; jewelry, gems, beads, crystals, silver, rocks, minerals; adults \$7 weekend pass, children 11 and under free; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com)

**5-7—MELBOURNE, FLORIDA:** Show; Frank Cox Productions; Melbourne Auditorium, 625 E. Hibiscus Blvd.; Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; gems, jewelry, beads; contact Frank Cox Productions, 755 S. Palm Ave. #203, *The Opal Express*

*The American Opal Society*

Sarasota, FL 34236, (941) 954-0202; e-mail: [frankcox@comcast.net](mailto:frankcox@comcast.net); Web site: [www.frankcoxproductions.com](http://www.frankcoxproductions.com)

**5-7—NIPOMO, CALIFORNIA:** Annual show; Orcutt Mineral Society; St. Joseph's Church Recreation Hall, 298 S. Thompson Ave.; Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; Treasure Chest Drawing Sun.; contact Gloria Dana, 426 Calisto Ln., Nipomo, CA 93444, (805) 929-6429; e-mail: [info@omsinc.org](mailto:info@omsinc.org); Web site: [www.omsinc.org](http://www.omsinc.org)

**5-7—NORTH BEND, OREGON:** Annual show; Far West Lapidary & Gem Club; North Bend Community Center, 2222 N. Broadway; Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$1, children under 14 free; demonstrations, wheel of fortune, silent auctions, kids' treasure pool, dealers, rough rock, findings, beads, lapidary equipment, finished jewelry, slabs, carvings, gemstones, mineral specimens; contact Don Innes, 54416 Arago-Fishtrap Rd., Myrtle Point, OR 97458, (541) 396-5722; e-mail: [donin11@hughes.net](mailto:donin11@hughes.net)

**6-7—HILLSBORO, OREGON:** Annual show; Rice Northwest Museum of Rocks and Minerals; 26385 NW Groveland Dr.; Sat. 9-6, Sun. 9-4; adults \$7, seniors (60+) \$6, students (5-17) \$5, children 4 and under free; demonstrations, geode cracking, thunder egg cutting, faceting, gold panning, dealers, jewelry, petrified wood, fossils, crystals, minerals; contact Linda Kepford, (503) 647-2418; e-mail: [info@ricenorthwestmuseum.org](mailto:info@ricenorthwestmuseum.org); Web site: [www.ricenorthwestmuseum.org](http://www.ricenorthwestmuseum.org)

**6-7—ORANGEVALE, CALIFORNIA:** Annual show, "Treasure Trove of Gems"; Gimp & Balsach Inc.; Orangevale Community Center, 6826 Hazel Ave.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$4 (weekend pass \$6), children 12 and under free with adult; more than 20 dealers, exhibitors, demonstrators, kids' activities, family activities, gold panning, displays, earth science presentations, educational opportunities, grand prize drawing, hourly drawings; contact John Moulder, 1911 Douglas Blvd. #85-150, Roseville, CA 95661, (916) 290-3193; e-mail: [gbcorp@surewest.net](mailto:gbcorp@surewest.net); Web site: [www.TreasureTroveofGems.com](http://www.TreasureTroveofGems.com)

**6-7—SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA:** Annual show; San Francisco Gem & Mineral Society; Presidio Golden Gate Club, 135 Fisher Loop; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$7, seniors and students \$6, children under 12 free with adult; exhibits, dealers, gemstones, fossils, minerals, crystals, beads, lapidary equipment, lectures, demonstrations, jade carving, chain maille weaving, wax carving, Etruscan chain forming, silver clay modeling, door prizes; contact Carleen Mont-Eton, 4134 Judah St., San Francisco, CA 94122, (415) 564-4230; e-mail: [publicity@show.sfgms.org](mailto:publicity@show.sfgms.org); Web site: [www.sfgms.org](http://www.sfgms.org)

**12-14—SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA:** Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center, 1896 Camino del Rio S; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; jewelry, gems, beads, crystals, silver, rocks, minerals; adults \$7 weekend pass, children 11 and under free; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com)

**13-14—EDMONDS, WASHINGTON:** Annual show; Maplewood Rock & Gem Club; MRGC clubhouse, 8802 196th St. SW; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; more than 20 dealers, rough rock, jewelry, minerals, fossils, free rocks for kids; contact Susan Cooper, 1526 192nd St. SE, #A2, Bothell, WA 98012, (206) 650-5971; e-mail: [duckansas@hotmail.com](mailto:duckansas@hotmail.com); Web site: [maplewoodrockclub.com](http://maplewoodrockclub.com)

**13-14—WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA:** Show, "Contra Costa Crystal Fair"; Pacific Crystal Guild; Civic Park Community Center, 1375 Civic Dr.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; adults \$6, ages 12 and under free; 30 dealers, minerals, gems, crystals, beads, metaphysical healing tools; contact Jerry Tomlinson, P.O. Box 1371, Sausalito, CA 94966, (415) 383-7837; e-mail: [jerry@crystalfair.com](mailto:jerry@crystalfair.com); Web site: [www.crystalfair.com](http://www.crystalfair.com)

**19-21—LAKE GEORGE, COLORADO:** Retail show; Lake George Gem & Mineral Club; US Hwy. 24, next to Post Office; Fri. 9-6, Sat. 9-6, Sun. 9-5; free admission; contact John Rakowski, PO Box 171, Lake George, CO 80827, (719) 748-3861; e-mail: [President@LGGMClub.org](mailto:President@LGGMClub.org); Web site: [www.LGGMClub.org](http://www.LGGMClub.org)

**19-21—SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA:** Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center, 6151 H St.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; jewelry, gems, beads, crystals, silver, rocks, minerals; adults \$7 weekend pass, children 11 and under free; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com)

**20—SHELTON, WASHINGTON:** Tailgate rock sale and swap; Shelton Rock & Mineral Society; Shelton Soccer Park, 2202 E. Johns Prairie Rd.; Sat. 9-5; free admission; tailgaters \$15 pre-registration, \$20 on-site registration; contact Richard Buchholz, (360) 427-2497; e-mail: [giggpig@aol.com](mailto:giggpig@aol.com)

**26-28—COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA:** Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; OC Fair & Event Center, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$7 weekend pass, children 11 and under free; jewelry, gems, beads, crystals, silver, rocks, minerals; 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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 Thank you,  
 The Editor

# The Opal Express

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

Volume #44 Issue #8  
August 2011

TO:

## Some Topics In This Issue:

- Bench Tips by Brad Smith
- From Rags to Riches & Disasters Ch. 9 & 10
- Opal: Australia's Troubled Gemstone
- Mica
- Hunting for Lost Diamonds
- Telling Lapis Lazuli from Sodalite
- Jet

## Important Dates:

August 11 - Board Meeting

## August 11 - General Meeting:

Justin Zzyzx will give a talk on Southern California, Mineral Collecting Mecca. Justin is the owner of the Zzyzx Gallery of Natural Science in Los Angeles, CA (<http://www.zzyzxgallery.com>).

### — GENERAL MEETINGS —

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

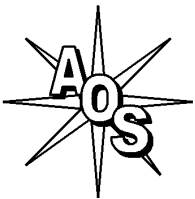
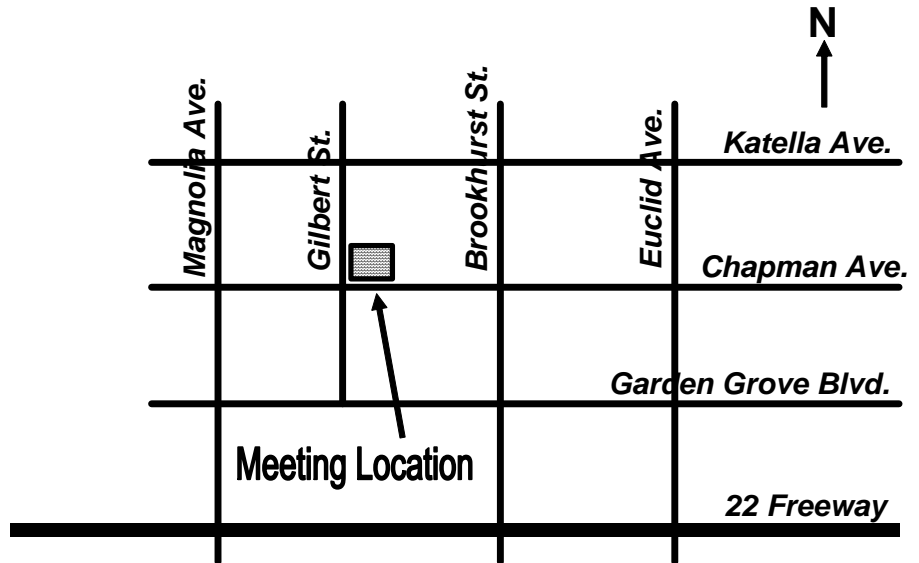
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Garden Grove, CA 92841  
(NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)

### MEETING ACTIVITIES

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

# August 11th

## Justin Zzyzx will give a talk on Southern California, Mineral Collecting Mecca



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