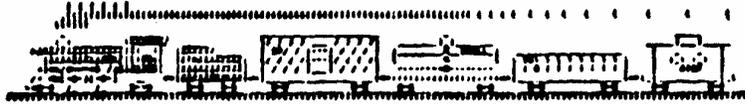




THE OPAL EXPRESS



Volume 19, No. 2
February 1987

REPORT ON THE OPAL FIELDS OF AUSTRALIA By Gemworld International, Inc.
Publishers of "The Guide" --

Nice opal of light crystal color came out of Crystal Gully from in and around old diggings but in small parcels.

Mintabie is producing some nice black opal rough from old diggings. In Coober Pedy there is a new opal rush; it is an extension between old fields. This area has four levels. The first is around 18 feet deep, the last around 76 to 78 feet.

Other fields are showing little production, as the miners are unwilling to invest in new fields.

Rough opal should increase 5 to 6 percent per parcel of rough. Top black opal is up 10 percent. There is no more coming out of the ground. Top crystal is up 10 to 15 percent. There is a shortage of this type at the present.

More news from the opal fields from Opalholics, published by Paul and Bobbi Downing. Production for Mintabie in 1985 was \$33.4 million compared to \$29.6 million in 1984. Andamooka production declined 30% in 1985.

The new field in Coober Pedy is called Zorba Extension, the extent of the find is not known. Opal from the old Zorba field was not very stable so there is a question about the stability of this new find.

A new find is reported in Mintabie which is mostly crystal and white, very similar to Coober Pedy.

I'Anson was guest speaker at the founding chapter's January meeting. She is in from Australia as a representative of Australian Opal Hines Co. She gave a delightful talk on her life and work in the Down under continent, giving many anecdotes of her farm in the outback. She presented for show and purchase many beautiful very good quality opals. Some of the opals for purchase included some nice triplets which she declared were made by a new process that did not use quartz for the cap or the traditional patch or basalt for a backing, but a synthetic. By this method they were for the first time able to use gem quality opal in their triplets.

I asked her what synthetic was used. She either could not or would not name it. Remembering the use of clear plastic caps on the New Zealand Paua Shell and some Mexican opal mosaic I asked her if it was plastic. She said yes. Later on she changed it back to synthetic.

I explained that synthetic meant a man-made stone the same as the natural, such as synthetic quartz or synthetic spinel. She promised to call Australia the next day and give me an answer. She never did. It is simply not true that Australians have only by this process been able to put gem quality opal in their triplets. They have been doing so in their finest triplets for as long as I have been associated with opal, using quartz for the cap and usually potch opal for the backing.

I think now is the time for an editorial from your society president.

First, I want to make it very clear to all, the dealers and sellers of opal and the purchasers that the American Opal Society stands for honesty and integrity in the selling and representing opal and any opal synthetics, substitutes or imitations. In the last few years there has been a tremendous upsurge in consumer demand for honesty in selling of gemstones. There have been several T.V. exposures of dishonest or deceptive practices in the jewelry industry. The Jewelers Vigilance Committee is now committed to enforcing the ethical guidelines they have had on their books for years. Anyone in any of their sponsored shows who continues to practice deception after the first warning will never be allowed to sell them again.

I had published in the last few months in serial form an article on gemstone treatment by Modern Jeweler so our members can be made aware of the extent men today are heating, irradiating and plasticizing also synthesizing almost all gemstone material. Opal is a gemstone and is not escaping this current tinkering. There are now laws being formulated in several states requiring full disclosure of all treatments to any colored stone. How many of you who are custom jewelers or gemstone sellers can give your customers a certified statement of the radiation count on the topaz you sell or have set in jewelry? This is one of the proposed laws. I have been to many gem shows and seen turquoise for sale, which in the majority has been dyed and plasticized but nothing is said of such treatment.

Slocum stone is a very pretty man-made material somewhat opal-like in its appearance. The manufacturer makes no claim that it is opal or imitation opal, however, at gem shows I have seen it advertised as man-made opal and as slocum opal. It is neither. Incidentally, the word "stone" in slocum stone is wrong. Stone designates a natural substance found by man, not manufactured.

I have seen opal triplets advertised in shows as black opal triplets. Because a triplet has a black backing does not make it a black opal triplet. Only if the opal is cut from authentic black opal would it be a black opal triplet. At the many thousands of dollars per carat good black opal sells for, who would willingly cut it up for very much less expensive triplets?

I am going to ask, the board of directors to set up an ethics committee and request that anyone selling at our annual show conduct themselves in an ethical manner so everyone who comes to our show knows here is where they can depend on the opals they purchase to be what they expected them to be.

I am writing this for those who deal in and sell opal. The great majority of them are thoroughly honest and wish only to compete with other honest merchants and for the customer who has a right to an honest deal.

I want to make it very clear that I am in no way talking about what the price is on any opal or jewelry. The Society does not interfere in any way with what the opal seller or jeweler considers a fair price to the customer. We do want honesty in representation. Call it what it is, if it is imitation, fine, as long as it's called imitation. We will not get involved in what the price is.

-- Jewett Pattee --

WANTED

Opal cutting & polishing machines, used. Preferably diamond 4 wheel or 6" wheels. Contact: La Jeana at 213-452-6863.

NOTICE: All articles submitted for publication in The Opal Express MUST be in the editor's hands by the 25th of each month for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Send all correspondence to:

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SETTING YOUR OPAL

Reprinted with permission of Paul Downing.

A nice looking lady with a very beautiful faceted Blue Topaz and diamond ring visited our booth last weekend. "I love opal", she said, "but I can't wear it. It's so fragile that I keep breaking the stone. After I broke the opal in this ring three times, I had it replaced with this topaz". I tried to explain to her that the setting was the problem, not the opal, but she remained unconvinced. She walked away still loving opal but certain that it was too fragile for her to wear.

I cannot tell you how many times at each show this story is repeated. Most commercially set opals that you see in jewelry stores are set improperly. They frequently break or the stones are lost, giving opal a bad name. The problem is that these opals are set in four prong findings designed for faceted stones like diamonds. Opals are not diamonds. They have a different character and toughness and must be treated differently. I am not going to tell you that an opal will never break if set properly, but after I developed the setting technique I am going to tell you about, I have never had a piece returned because the stone broke. And that includes a number of men's rings set with solid opals. In fact, both Bobbi and I wear opal rings constantly. We have never broken, chipped or lost a stone.

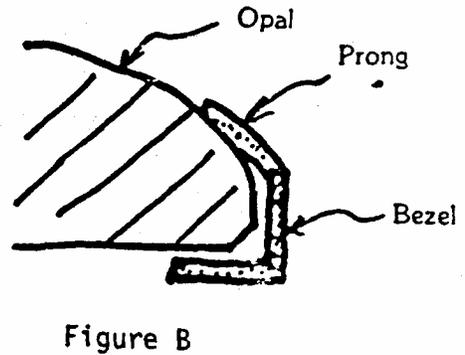
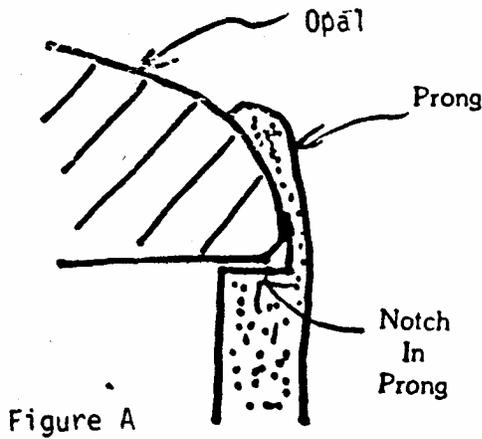
The most fragile part of a cut opal is the bottom edge. This is what needs to be protected. Opal does not have a crystal structure. Instead it is a solidified silica gel (a lot of little balls closely packed together) which produce a conchoidal fracture. Simply, it is a lot like glass. If you place a piece of glass between a pair of tin snips and squeeze, the glass will fracture in one neat line all the way across in the direction the tin snips are pointing. An opal will do the very same thing. In fact, miners use tile nippers to break away unwanted potch and dirt from the precious opal they find. Now visualize a single prong in a four prong facet stone setting. (See figure A.) In setting a stone, the upper part of the prong is cut away and a seat made for the stone to set on from the lower part of the prong. When the top of the prong is brought down on the stone, it acts just like those tin snips. If the opal does not crack in the setting process (it often does as any jewelry bench worker will tell you), it is ripe for breaking later. In effect the tin snips have been applied but with not quite enough pressure to break the stone. All that is needed is a slight additional pressure in the right spot and the opal cracks.

The solution is to surround the entire edge of the opal with metal. (See figure B.). In the system I developed I do the side and bottom using simple bezel 'wire in my wax design. The bottom of the wax bezel wire can be shaped to provide complete support for the stone. The thin edge of the opal is also protected from the side by the bezel. I make the bezel high enough to cover the bottom third (approximately) of the stone. I then put prongs on top of the bezel. The side of the bezel prevents the prong from pinching the bottom of the opal.

When casting is complete, I remove enough metal from the inside of the bezel to allow the opal to sit evenly on the metal with a little room on the sides. The prongs are flattened where they will lay on the opal. Next I put a little 330 epoxy in the bezel. The epoxy serves several functions. It provides a lubricant to allow the stone to adjust as the prongs are put down. It provides a cushion between the opal and the metal. This allows for some difference in expansion between metal and

opal as temperatures change. And it makes sure that the stone does not drop out of the setting even if the prongs break. The prongs are bent down on the opal carefully, but the bezel is not turned. This leaves a little space between the bottom of the prong and the opal. There is not tin snip like pressure, thus much less chance of breakage.

Small opals (5x7 or smaller) are a particular problem, especially if they are thin. I use a complete solid back on these to help support them. However, this creates a problem. The gold from the back shines through any but the white base stones, ruining the color of the stones. I solve this problem by darkening the gold with Chemblac before putting epoxy on the setting. A carefully designed setting will protect your opal. You will be able to wear it anywhere and enjoy the compliments.



SOUTHWEST ROCKWRANGLERS

PRESENTS 24th ANNUAL GEM SHOW

March 28, Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

March 29, Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Manhattan Beach Armory / 3601 Bell

FREE ADMISSION — FREE PARKING
FREE DOOR PRIZES — HOME COOKING FOOD

OUT OF STATE DEALERS
DEMONSTRATORS

PRIZES

GRAND AWARD 100 DOLLARS



SHOW BIZ — 1987

The news this month is that there is no news. I have been working on the latest AOS budget and have some preliminary figures but since these have not been approved by the board yet, I can not divulge the new table rental price. The contracts also have been revamped and everyone who has sent in a table reservation form will be receiving a contract by the end of February.

One major change that was approved by the board last year but not implemented until this year is the requirement of paying for all the tables in full at the time that the signed contract is returned to us. I did have problems collecting unpaid balances last year and after some investigation, discovered that we were almost the only show that allowed partial payments. This collection problem was a major part of our financial woes in the latter part of 1986. I realize that it may be somewhat of a burden to some of our dealers and I regret having to implement this kind of restriction but the American Opal Society is a business (non-profit as it is) and we have financial obligations that must also be met. We hope to improve things this year.

If anyone has any suggestions concerning the way the show was orchestrated last year, please send them to me at the AOS headquarters address.

-- Andy Guerrette --

NOTICE NOTICE NOTICE NOTICE

**The American Opal Society,
Inc. has moved. Our new making
address is:**

**P.O. Box 92257
Long Beach, CA 9Z809-2257**

**Please send all future
correspondence to our new
P.O. Box.**

CHAPTER NEWS

Board Meeting

The American Opal Society
"Founding Chapter"

January 22, 1987

The meeting was called to order by our new president, Harold Umberson, at 7:30 in his home. A lengthy discussion on liability insurance which we know is very expensive even if attainable. It was suggested to enclose (with the membership form) a special form that each person sign stating "NO FAULT" while attending any opal functions. A motion was made to have Rocky consult his lawyer to prepare this for us.

Our new checking and savings accounts will be opened by Joan Goodsir (treasurer). The necessary signatures have been obtained.

A thank you note has been sent to Heather I'annson for her program 'at our January meeting.

Rocky extended an invitation to all to attend the "South West Rock Wranglers Show". Anyone who would like to set up a display at the 24th Annual Gem Show on March 28-29 in Manhattan Beach Armory or need more information, call Ed Rockafellor at (213)679-0863. Free tickets will be available at the next meeting.

The payment for the opal workshop shall be worded "re-imbusement/expenses".

Joe stated that we need, desperately, new diamond wheels and a saw blade. Harold (president) tabled this until our financial accounts are established. Then we shall purchase items needed.

We are looking for another meeting place on the main floor (NO STAIRS). Then maybe we shall see more of our good friends again that just don't like that HIGH a HIKE. More about this later.

RAFFLE - If everyone could bring just ONE opal or one of anything (but we do like opals) it certainly would help our situation.\$

New board members:	Sue Umberson and Nancy Means.
New Committee:	RAFFLE-DRAWING: Edith Ostrander
	REFRESHMENTS: Bobbie, Joe, Edith and Nancy
	PROGRAM: Harold
	GUEST BOOK: Della Judd, Edna Moothart

Board meeting to be held at Harold Umberson's each month. Meeting adjourned at 9:45 to follow with delicious refreshments thanks to Sue and Harold. See you next meeting, Thursday, February 12, 1987, 7:30.

Respectfully submitted, Bobbie Gledhill (secretary)

DIRECTORY OF OFFICERS

Jewett Pattee, President, 213-425-2426
Dick Koch, 1st VP, 213-927-4372
Bill Judd, 213-923-4643
Noel Lamkin, 714-529-8031
Dorothea Pattee, Sec., 213-425-2426

Ross Stambler, 213-693-6898
Torn Parker, 213-693-2823
Andy Guerrette, 714-734-7484
Brian Franks, 714-857-2743
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American Opal Society

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