

The Opal Express
 American Opal Society
 P.O. Box 382
 Anaheim, CA 92815-0382



Member

Member



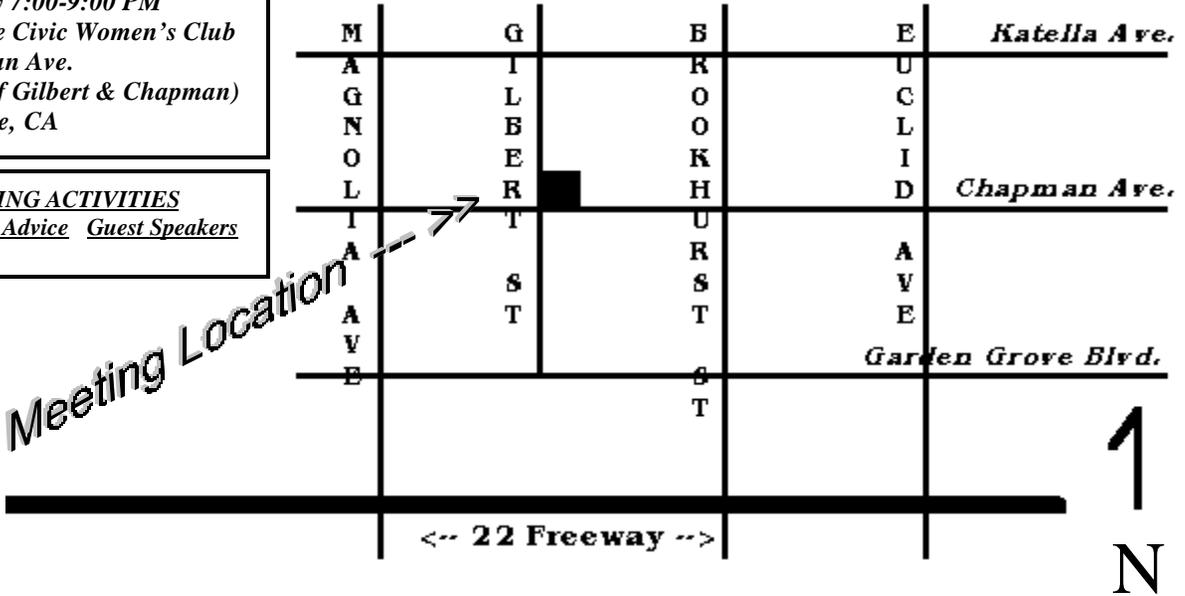
Volume #30 Issue #03 March 1998



TO:

GENERAL MEETINGS —
 2nd Thursday 7:00-9:00 PM
 Garden Grove Civic Women's Club
 9501 Chapman Ave.
 (NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)
 Garden Grove, CA

MEETING ACTIVITIES
 Opal Cutting Advice Guest Speakers



American Opal Society Officers

Wes Roth	President	(714) 897-2984	email wesroth@earthlink.net
Carol Bova	Vice Pres.	(818) 845-8610	email bova@bovagems.com
Mike Kowalsky	Treasurer	(714) 761-4876	email mykowalsky@aol.com
Pete Goetz	Secretary	(714) 666-2084	email mpg1022@aol.com

DUES POLICY REVISED - effective 1/1/98

Henceforth, memberships begin in the month a person joins the Opal Society. This simplifies the fee structure and will reduce questions and errors in dues payments.

Three (3) Dues Rates are for families and **are now based on your county of residence.**

Rate #1 (\$26): *Local area* = members who reside in Los Angeles, Orange, or Riverside counties.

Rate #2 (\$20): *California & USA* = all US addresses other than local counties.

Rate #3 (\$30): *Foreign* = all memberships outside USA.

SENIOR DISCOUNT: Age 65 and over, deduct \$5 from the above rates.

Label Changes: Your address label now displays your dues expiration date as MM-YY where MM is the month and YY is the year your dues expire. Expiration dates also appear in the membership roster.

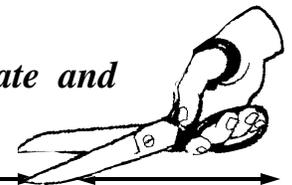
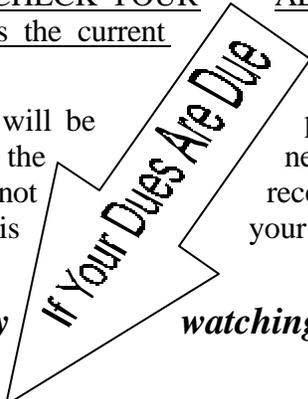
Are Your Dues Due Now? PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed there. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are **overdue.**

Renewal Grace Period of two months will be receive two additional issues of the system is now set up, if your renewal is not dropped from membership thereafter. It is current.

provided. If your dues are due now you will newsletter. Please note however that as the received you will be **AUTOMATICALLY** your responsibility to assure your dues are

Please help us make this work by renewing promptly. Thanks!

watching your expiration date and



DUES RENEWAL FORM

(membership renewal form rev. 1/1/98)
d:\ameropal\news\tr\forms\dues_due.pub



American Opal Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 382

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!!

Make check or money order payable to: American Opal Society, Inc.
Please mail payment and renewal form to the club address at left.

DUES RENEWAL RATES (select one)

- **
- 1) **LOCAL AREA member \$26.00**
(addresses in Los Angeles, Orange, & Riverside counties)
 - 2) **CALIFORNIA & USA \$20.00**
(all addresses outside local area counties)
 - 3) **FOREIGN \$30.00**
(all addresses outside USA)
- ** **\$5 SENIOR DISCOUNT = Age 65 or**

DEALER LIST: Yes, include my name/address on a list provided to Opal Dealers selling at the most recent Opal Show.

(if yes, please sign or initial here) _____ date _____

without your signature here you will

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER: Yes, include my name and/or address and/or phone information in a published AOS membership directory...

[Please circle any of these —> NAME / ADDRESS / PHONE if you prefer a partial listing.]

(if yes please sign or initial here) _____ date _____

without your signature here you will

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____ APT #: or PO BOX: _____
CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE U.S.) _____
TELEPHONE: Home (_____) _____ : Business (_____) _____
FAX (_____) _____

Please indicate any name or mailing address changes

NAME BADGE ORDER FORM: (OPTIONAL)

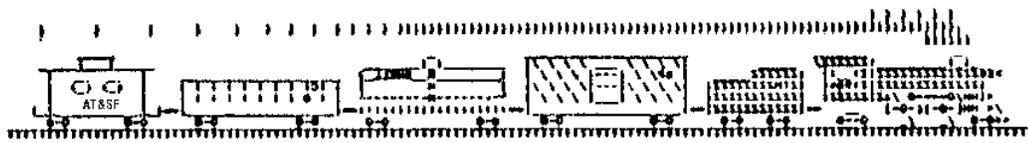
Number of badges ordered _____
(\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

The OPAL EXPRESS

MAY 2002

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American
Opal
Society

Issue 3



President's Message

from **Wes Roth**

Greetings,

This month's meeting will be an open discussion, so bring your problem stones and questions. Stan McCall will be on hand and will also have a Pixie setup for stone cutting.

Mexican Opal Rough will be available for purchase.

For those of you online; two new websites have become available.

1. www.lapidaryjournal.com

2. www.quartzite.com
(The Quartzite Rock Association)

If you haven't already paid, please bring your dues with you to the meeting.

As Always
Wes Roth
President

You may be a rockhound if...Your children have names like Pearl, Rocky, Amber or



The sort of ships that come in while we sit and wait are usually hardships.

When you take responsibility on your shoulders, there isn't much space left for chips.

McCondra Report

by Barbara McCondra

There is a new kid on the block in the opal neighborhood. I found out about it in Tucson at Jimmy Vacek's booth at the La Quinta, where we had our booth as well. The 'hew' find in the opal kingdom is "ice cream opal". It is a member of the potch family that made it to the gem market. Out of Spencer, Idaho area the pink and white potch (common opal) blend looks

(Continued on page 3)

AOS INFORMATION & VOICE MAIL
NUMBER IS (714) 502-1333



DATES TO REMEMBER

General Meeting
March 12 - 7PM

Board of Directors
Meeting Monday
March 9 - 7PM

Opal & Gem Show
Nov 7-8, 1998

Workshop Information...

The **Opal Society workshop** is located in a light industrial complex in Fullerton. The address is Unit #9, 651 N. State College Blvd.

Directions: exit the 91 Fwy onto State College Blvd. and go north. Proceed through the intersection of Orangethorpe continuing a short distance further on State College. Go over the railroad tracks and turn left into the complex on the west side of the street. If you go over the second RR crossing turn around. Proceed behind the front row of businesses and make your first right. Then follow the road around to the left. The workshop has a large "9" over the door.

Only AOS members may use the equipment and workshop. You will be required to sign a release

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Dues Renewal	1	Welcome New Members!	4	Parable - Can You Help??	5	Doublets/Triplets	7
McCondra Report	2	Opal Study-Chips Needed	4	Cutting Challenges-Part 4	6	What's Happening?	8
Club Badge Info	3	Workshop Info	5	Yogo Gulch Sapphires	7	Opal Identification-Part 3	9

McCondra Report (cont)

(Continued from page 2)

good enough to eat. Pink swirls throughout white just like an ice cream sundae. Hot Rocks of Idaho is mining it near Spencer. There is a lower grade carmelish color that also crops up. Yum! If you are a rock licker at heart this is sure to appeal. Looks great cabbed or carved and takes a good shine, remember there is no fire though. Maybe eventually.

There's a new book out well worth the price of \$75.00 written by Allan Eckert. Such a great update on the opal world and written in such a comfortable reading style. It is obvious that a tremendous amount of research went into this effort. Color plates of our beloved opal were to be in the center of the book but the author is crestfallen that the publisher made most of the magnificent colored photos he submitted of opal in black and white. That's right----sacrilege! However, the tremendous treasure chest of opal information makes up for it to the TRUE aficionado. Opal books can be more than just another pretty face you know. AOS members will be pleased to see that one of our opal GURUS, Mr. Len Cram, is featured in detail in a chapter devoted exclusively to him and his opal formation theories. Exceptionally interesting reading. There has only been about 7,500 books printed so it is well worth adding to our collectible opal books list. The name of the book is The World of Opal. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1997

I am compiling a book of "secrets" of cutting Yowah nut opal and will print and give credit to any tips that you may have concerning this if I haven't already included them. Any secrets you wish to share please send to me at 5802 W. Rosewood Lane, Phoenix, Arizona 85031 or call me at (602) 846-0407 or Email me at mccondra@aol.com

Just before Christmas of '97, the Arizona Chapter of AOS met at Tom Hays home in Mesa. We used the



Name Badges...

Price per badge is \$5 which includes the badge itself and engraving of up to two lines of text: one line for your first and last name and, if you wish, a second line for nickname or if applicable, your opal related business name. These engraving options give members flexibility to include many types of identification.

Please allow 3 to 4 weeks for completion of engraving. ✪

old dollar bill trick to again choose a door prize winner of one of Len Cram's books. Our winner, Del Stevens was a lucky man that night as he also drew the lipstick marked piece of rough out of our rough bin. If it was marked you got to keep it. This will be the last time we use the dollar bill trick as I wouldn't want to encourage anyone to "stack" their wallet in future. No more lipstick, too. Del provided us with some fun because he brought his black light to check opal fluorescence. We found very black black opal did not fluoresce but if the opal were white, it did. They use black lights in the tailings heaps at Coober Pedy so we expected this. Jim and Darlene Hilliard brought some fine pieces of Andamooka matrix that he was working with. It was educational to see such a variety of quality Andamooka stones.



Condolences

Our sympathies go out to Hisako Schlatter whose husband passed away recently.

Our thoughts are also with Pam Strong whose mother Adele Strong passed away January 24th.





PLEASE NOTE!!! The American Opal Society assumes no responsibility for injury or damage due to accidents or carelessness. Members and guests assume all risks

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E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com
(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

#1163 Ellen De Lashmutt
#1164/65 Mr.s & Mrs. Walter

Shop Hint

When polishing stones, sometimes fine threadlike scratches develop. These may be due to grit which has penetrated the polish buff. One grain will do it. To clean, hold a strip of plywood or balsawood firmly against the buff. The grit will embed itself in the wood, leaving the buff clean.

from Slab Gab 7/93 via The Nugget 2/98

Membership Roster Changes/Additions

New Listing - Lyle Backus 9739 Iona Lane Franklin Park, IL 60131	Member # 9005 Dues Expire 99-01
New Listing - Annette Bryant P.O. Box 5398 Whittier, CA 90607	(562) 693-7342 Member # 1101 Dues Expire 99-01
New Listing - Ellen De Lashmutt 53 North D Street Fairfield, IA 52556	(515) 472-9012 Member # 1163 Dues Expire 99-03
New Listing - Barbara McCondra 5802 W. Rosewood Ln Phoenix, AZ 85031	(602) 846-0407 Member # 9647 Dues Expire 99-01
New Listing - K. Robert Scholz 8649 Rio Grande NW Albuquerque, NM 87114	(505) 897-4424 Member # 1126 Dues Expire 99-01
Changes - Carol Bova (for email now use <bova@bovagems.com>)	Member # 1072 Dues Expire 99-01
Changes - Dorothea Pattee	(562) 425-2426 Member # 9579 Dues Expire 99-01
Changes - Mike Salazar 447 Robinwood Dr. NE Bainbridge Isl, WA 98110-1967	Member # 1042 Dues Expire 99-01
Changes - Melinda Sargent 6765 Westminster Blvd. Suite C-461 Westminster, CA 92683	Member # 1146 Dues Expire 99-01

Talk About a Grain of Salt, How About a Grain of Opal?

Bits of Opal Scrap With Fire Needed for Research Project!

From Carol J. Bova

Recently, James L. Weston, <jweston3@ua1vm.ua.edu> of the University of Alabama (MTE), asked for help on an internet newsgroup. I am extending the appeal to our AOS members and friends. **Who else would be better equipped to help with a project on opal!**

James wrote that as part of a current research project, **he wants to study the size and ordering of the silica particles in opals.** He needs small pieces of gem-quality opal scrap from diverse sources, perhaps leftovers from cabbing. He said that ideally, the pieces should be millimeter sized or smaller and clean, e.g. no cutting fluid other than water.

He says, "I would like pieces of opals with fire. I am going to be doing electron microscopy on them, so the pieces can be quite small. Pieces about the

(Continued on page 5)

YOUR OPAL CHIPS NEEDED

...Researcher needs small pieces of gem-quality opal scrap from diverse sources...

...ideally, the pieces should be millimeter sized or smaller and clean, e.g. no cutting fluid other than water.

"I would like different opal types from different geographical locations..."

(story at left)



INTERESTING MONEY TRIVIA.... In the United States, coins migrate causing a problem for the Federal Reserve banks. Half-dollars tend to collect in New York, and pennies in Pittsburgh and Dallas; quarters congregate in San Antonio, Little Rock and Cincinnati, while nickels and dimes find their way to Baltimore, Louisville and Nashville. The Federal Reserve Bank experts say that the coins follow these patterns year after year, but nobody seems to know why.

Submitted by Blaze Guerin in Grubstake 4/97 via The Nugget 2/98



INTARSIA... If you missed our February guest speaker, Connie Grundke, you missed a fine discussion of the techniques and artistry of intarsia. There will be a copy of the video of Connie's presentation available soon in the club library. ✨



Football combines two of the worst things about American life. It is violence punctuated by committee meetings. -George Will

Opal Chips Needed

(Continued from page 4)

size of table salt grains would be about ideal. If they are larger, I'd probably have to grind or crush them."

"As for sources, I would like different opal types from different geographical locations - I would like a 'representative sample,' whatever that is. Any aid you can offer will be greatly appreciated."

James

How about it, folks? Think we can find a few bits to send to James? I'd suggest sealing them in a bit of plastic bag and putting masking tape or a label on the bag with the origin of your opal bit and your name and address in case he wants to contact you directly. His address is:

James L. Weston

The University of Alabama

The Center for Materials for Information Technology



A Modern Parable

Once upon a time, there was a rock club. It's members were all old hands at the hobby. Whenever they met and talked, they wished that more people would join the club. "We cannot do the things the club once did because we are so few." They tried and tried to get new young members. And they often did. Then, in a few meetings, the new ones disappeared. And the old members looked at each other and said, "What did we do wrong?" And no one answered.

There came a time the club had two new families as members. The youngsters were vibrating with excitement and curiosity at each meeting. Then slowly, one family came less often and less often. A field trip was scheduled - the first since last year and the second since the year before. The meeting was Thursday, the trip on Saturday. The trip was to local fossil sites where much wonder abounded. Both families were going. But, the club building needed work. At the meeting the old members said "I've got lots of fossils, let's fix the shed instead." So the new families hunted no fossils.

Another field trip was scheduled the Saturday after the next meeting to dig crystals at a famous mineral site. The kids were excited. They had asked friends to join them. Then the old members said, "Well we've lots of crystals - and if we go a week later, we can go to a swap and talk with other other friends instead." So they moved and voted to change and forget the crystals. And the new members frowned.

Once upon a time, there was a rock club. It's members were all old hands at the hobby. Whenever they met and talked, they wished that more people would join the club. "We cannot do the things the club once did because we are so few." They tried and tried to get new young members. And they often did. Then in a few meetings, the new ones disappeared. And the old members looked at each other and said, "What did we

WORK SHOP

Be sure to check here for workshop schedule updates. The dates listed below are those available to the AOS in our time share agreement with the Searchers. The shop is presently being opened to members on Wednesday nights but...Please continue to contact Stan McCall by calling him at Lapidary Intl. (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session. Also, please check the AOS voice mail for information about expanded and/or modified shop

MARCH WORKSHOP CALENDAR	
MONDAY:	2nd - 9th - 16th - 23rd - 30th
WEDNESDAY:	4th - 11th - 18th - 25th
SATURDAY:	14th - 28th
SUNDAY:	15th - 29th

WORK SHOP RULES

These rules are effective October 1, 1997. Please see newsletter for monthly shop schedule.

- 1) Shop may only be used by AOS members.
- 2) Shop users must sign liability waiver.
- 3) Shop users must sign in. Shop supervisor will maintain sign-in list and collect usage fees.
- 4) Shop usage will be in sessions on scheduled days as noted below:
 - Session #1 10AM - 2PM
 - Session #2 2PM - 6PM
 - Session #3 6PM - 9PM
- 5) Shop usage fees: effective immediately...
SHOP USAGE FEE IS \$3 PER SESSION.
- 6) To assist us in scheduling, shop sessions need to be reserved in advance. Please contact Stan McCall or any member of the board of directors to reserve shop time.

Cutting Challenges (part 4)... by Russ Madsen
(A 1997 Opal Symposium Presentation
by Tim Thomas of House of Tibara)

To this point in our discussion we have looked at approaches to opal that underlay technical cutting challenges. These have included buying decisions and understanding of ways to avoid shocking and possibly cracking opal rough in the process of cutting. These notions are the foundation for all opal cutting. Here we will begin looking at specific "troubles" one might encounter.

Figure 1 below depicts a large piece of rough from Lightning Ridge. It weighed 237 carats and was offered at \$28 per carat (\$6,500 for the piece). Areas 1 - 2 - 3 all evidence very nice color play while area 4 is pitted and there is a black patch area running up the middle of the piece.

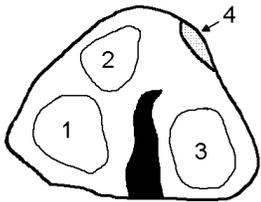


Figure 1

The cutter's questions: first - is there color play under the black (opaque) patch? Is there a way to shape the pitted

area? Perhaps put another stone there? Cut three stones?

Almost all Lightning Ridge material that reaches the public has been sanded or "rubbed" to investigate the interior. Rubbed nobbies show hints but one cannot tell with certainty what will be revealed as cutting progresses. It is OK to tumble as a rubbing technique. Tim uses a lateral type vibrasonic tumbler and notes the rotating type are also gentle enough. Typically tumble approximately one hour then examine the nobbies. They should be clean enough to assess.

Another rubbing approach is to employ a bead blaster. 50 micron glass beads are used to sculpt out sand and clay deposits and determine what IS there to cut. One can also use a flexshaft tool and get the same effect. This can lead to a sculpted finished stone if desired.

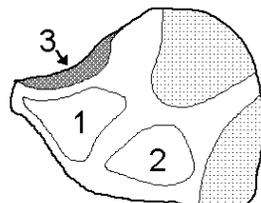


Figure 2

Once the rough is clean you know exactly what you have and you can formulate a **cutting plan**.

Figure 2 depicts another

nobbie. Areas 1 - 2 are lenses of good color, and area 3 has been "cobbed" off. Cobbing is the term for a process of windowing or nipping off an area of a nobbie with the same intent as rubbing. However, Tim expressed a strong dislike for the practice as it is usually done with tile nippers and is hard on the opal. Unfortunately time is money and sanding takes much longer than a quick nibble with a pair of tile cutters.

If the cobbed area shows fire with light or eye perpendicular to the stone it will almost always face.

If a part of a stone will face, generally all of it will face.

With opal from other Australian fields, if you see fire all the way around, very rarely will it be dead in the middle. Lightning Ridge nobbies are an exception.

Tim Thomas' Shop Hint

For all opal cabochons try going from the 600 grit sanding wheel to a session of hand sanding with 600 grit wet/dry paper. This will quickly round away any flat spots on a cab and prepare it for pre-

On the other hand the reverse can be also be true with Lightning Ridge material. Where a nobby shows little fire on the outside the center can be fantastic! There is no way to reliably know which will be the case and this is why most all LR material is cobbed, faced, rubbed or sawed through.

Facing may also involve doing some grinding or sanding on a chunk of rough to get more information or clues about its qualities and characteristics. Facing is sometimes useful even if a nobby has been cobbed or rubbed.

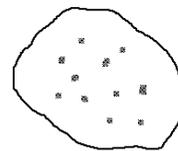


Figure 3

Notice as we continue that there are seldom any "answers". This serves to illuminate the fact that the Queen of Gems is a unique lady!

In Figure 3 is an example which (with some imagination) can be seen to have great color play all across the face, but it is "speckled" throughout with black spots of iron oxide staining. Any rough with these spots should be avoided Tim says, "Unless you can get it cheap enough and are willing to cut it up hoping for something in the middle. If you are paying for the nice surrounding color, think twice!"

K.I.S.S. "RULES":

FEAR - Relax. If you are afraid of a stone keep a simple truth in mind, "this is only a rock!" Uh huh.

(Continued on page 7)

Opal Cutting Techniques (cont)

(Continued from page 6)

HEAT - Avoid it. Use water for grinding, sanding and polishing.

HASTE - If you get anxious to "hurry up and see what's inside," stop. If you CAN'T put the stone away, take out some wet/dry sandpaper and sit at the TV to work with it. That'll slow you down! (smile)

SKILL - Try not to cut beyond your own skill level. If it doesn't make sense you might be over your head. Ask around. Show others what you are trying to do and get their opinions. When it makes sense, you'll know. You will get a "consensus" between your head and your gut. If it doesn't feel "good", don't do it.

PRACTICE - There's no substitute here. Keep studying and you will be improving your technique as you are cutting. ✨ *(to be continued)*

YOGO GULCH SAPPHIRES...

Jake Hoover was panning for gold in Yogo Gulch in 1895. His luck wasn't very good, but he noticed some small blue pebbles in his pan which were sent to Tiffany's in New York. The legendary prospector had stumbled onto one of the largest sapphire dikes in the world, right in the gullies of central Montana. Since then \$30 million worth of sapphires have been extracted from the five mile long gem-encrusted fissure in the Little Belt Mountains, near Lewistown.

Yogo Gulch is the only place in the world where sapphires are found in the original rock formation deep under the ground. Jake sold the mine for \$5000 and headed for Alaska. The current owner hopes to

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Opal Doublet and Triplet Making

Notes on Making Doublets & Triplets

by Geoff Haughton

Opal triplets are usually made to conserve valuable opal. By using paper-thin slices of opal between a backing of potch or some black material and a clear cap, a small amount of opal can be made to go a long way, and relatively inexpensive stones can be produced. There are other reasons, but this is the most common one.

Generally, the opal used in triplets is extremely thin and fragile; it is usually cemented to the backing material right after being cut with specialized equipment. I think fine wire saws are used, but other folk may be able to provide more details. You would cement the cap on to the backed opal and then cut the whole sandwich down to the size of the cap. Usually, the base is tapered down slightly so as to place the opal slice at the widest part of the stone.

I rarely make triplets. However, I do make doublets.

There are a number of reasons for making doublets and, to some extent, the technique employed varies with the purpose intended. Three possible purposes would be:-

1. To add bulk to a stone that would otherwise be too thin to use, as with some pieces of opaque opal. In this case, the best backing material is opal potch of the same body color as the precious opal to be backed. This is easy to come by, since it makes up the majority of the cheapest grades of opal, sold by the pound as "practice opal" or "beginner opal".
2. To protect the surface of an attractive but fragile or soft stone. I have treated abalone shell and ammolite in this way, but there is a host of other stones that can be used. In this case, the idea is to put a quartz cap on. In general, the cap should be quite thin and low domed unless you really want the magnifying effect of a thicker quartz lens.
3. To provide a dark background for a transparent or translucent opal, so that the play of color shows more brightly. I have used this approach to good effect when working with Brazilian opal, the best of which is quite transparent. I use obsidian for the backing and vary the effect by use of opaque black, translucent or rainbow obsidian. Basinite or onyx can also be used.

Some of the general guidelines to follow in cementing any two stones together, whether for a doublet or a triplet are:-

(Continued on page 9)

What's Happening?

Calendar of Upcoming Events
Dates and Locations of Shows

Mar 6-7 10AM-6PM; Mar 8 10AM-5PM Maricopa Lapidary Society, Mt. Preserve Reception & Conference Center 1431 E. Dunlap, **PHOENIX, AZ**

Mar 6 12-7PM; Mar 7 10AM-7PM Mar 8 10AM-5PM Gem Faire, Del Mar Fair Grounds, 2260 Jimmy Durante Blvd., **DEL MAR, CA**

Mar 7 10AM-6PM Mar 8 10AM-5PM Monrovia Rockhounds, Masonic Temple, 204 W. Foothill Blvd., **MONROVIA, CA**

Mar 7 10AM-6PM Mar 8 10AM-5PM Ventura Gem & Mineral Society, Seaside Park, (Ventura County Fairgrounds), **VENTURA, CA**

Mar 13 12-7PM Mar 14 10AM-7PM Mar 15 10AM-5PM Gem Faire, Orange County Fairgrounds, Bldg 12, Arlington Ave., **COSTA MESA, CA**

Mar 14 10AM-6PM Mar 15 10AM-5PM Pasadena Lapidary Society, San Marino Masonic Temple, 3130 Huntington Dr., **PASADENA, CA**

Mar 14 10AM-6PM Mar 15 10AM-5PM Northrop Gruman Gem & Mineral Club, 12329 Crenshaw Blvd., Gate 16, **HAWTHORNE, CA**

Mar 21-22 10AM-5PM Silvery Colorado River Rock Club, Bullhead City Junior High School Gym, Hancock at Lakeside, **BULLHEAD CITY, AZ**

Mar 28 10AM-6PM Mar 29 10AM-5PM San Diego Gem & Mineral Society, Al Bahr Shrine, 5440 Kearny Mesa, **SAN DIEGO, CA**

Mar 28 10AM-6PM Mar 29 10AM-5PM South Bay Lapidary Society, Torrance Recreation Center, 3341 Torrance Blvd., **TORRANCE, CA**

Mar 28 10AM-6PM Mar 29 10AM-5PM North Orange County Gem & Mineral Society, La Habra Clubhouse, 200 W. Greenwood, **LA HABRA, CA**

Apr 17-18 10AM-6PM Apr 19 10AM-4:30PM Las Vegas Gem Club, Henderson Convention Center, 200 Water St., **HENDERSON, NV**

Apr 17 12-7PM Apr 18 10AM-7PM Apr 19 10AM-5PM Gem Faire, Scottish Rite Temple, 1895 Camino Del Rio South, **SAN DIEGO, CA**

Apr 25-26 9-5PM Antelope Valley & Palmdale Gem & Mineral Society, Challenger Memorial Hall, Antelope Valley Fairgrounds, **LANCASTER, CA**

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WEST COAST GEM & MINERAL SHOW

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MAY 15 - 16 - 17, 1998 Show Hours:
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OPAL IDENTIFICATION...

how to tell where it came from (part 3)

by Russ Madsen

(A 1997 Opal Symposium Presentation
by Joan Skinner of Opal Traders International)

Distinguishing varieties of black opal (particularly black opal from Mintabie and Lightning Ridge): Joan Skinner noted the importance of this because the base colors are or can be the same from these regions. However, Mintabie black has a very grainy exterior. It will range from gray to black but unlike Lightning Ridge the colors occur in straight bands not circular/spherical layering like nobbies. This is because Mintabie opal forms in seams.

“Black” material from Coober Pedy is generally no darker than dark gray, with seams of color through the gray. It also has very dark red iron staining on the outside. Coober Pedy material is also characteristically found in straight seams and in massive size pieces.

Varieties of Andamooka matrix:

Treated Andamooka Matrix: This material is an opalized silty sandstone and is somewhat porous. While there are several methods it is typically blackened by soaking it in a sugar solution which is then carbonized by a bath of 95% sulfuric acid.

Opalized quartzite: Does not take treatment very well and will therefore not appear as “black” as treated sandstone matrix. The base material will frequently have a shimmering appearance other than that of the opal color play. This is very hard material, thus it can be sliced very thin and used for inlay.

Andamooka honey matrix: This is a natural, untreated material with a base color tinged orange by the titanium traces in the region’s soils.

Here Joan showed a slide of a combination piece displaying three types of opal: Andamooka crystal, opalized quartz, and honey matrix. This illustrated another important distinction of the Andamooka region. Opal found at most sites has a single formation process and thus tends to be somewhat uniform. In Andamooka sedimentary and volcanic processes both occur and therefore geothermal formation of opal takes place alongside sedimentary opal. These combinations can form into relatively massive pieces.

Andamooka also has fossils. Everyone was cautioned to be aware that opal fossils can have greater value to collectors as fossils than they might as cut opals. In

Notes on Making Doublets & Triplets

(Continued from page 7)

1. The surfaces to be joined should be absolutely flat, but not polished. I usually use a 260 grit diamond disk; this leaves the surface sufficiently rough for the glue to bite.
2. The surfaces must be clean and absolutely free of oil. To be safe, I usually wash them with hot water and dish washing detergent, followed by alcohol and then followed by acetone.
3. The choice of adhesive is important. I have tried several and have settled on Devcon "2-Ton" clear epoxy. Its advantages are that it is relatively heat resistant so that I can dop the stone with wax and it is waterproof so that the stone will not fall apart in a rainstorm or in the shower. It is also space filling, so that it forgives me if the surfaces are not quite optically flat. I don't know that this is the best possible glue and would welcome suggestions.
4. Avoid bubbles in the glue. This means that one must be very careful in mixing the two components of the epoxy cement. If bubbles are left in the joint, they will show but if the epoxy is not mixed thoroughly, it won't work.
5. Don't work with the doublet until the glue has really hardened. Give it at least two days and keep it warm. Epoxy cement will not cure properly in the cold.

When working with Brazilian opal, I cement several pieces onto a slab of obsidian and put it in a warm place for a couple of days. I then cut it up with a trim saw, dop the pieces and carefully grind the top



Andamooka there are Bolemnites, and clam shells. In addition, to date there have been 5 complete Plesiosaur skeletons found in South Australia. While they bear resemblance to Coober Pedy finds, Andamooka fossils can be distinguished because



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