

The Opal Express

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



Member

Member



Volume 30 Issue #09 September 1998



TO:

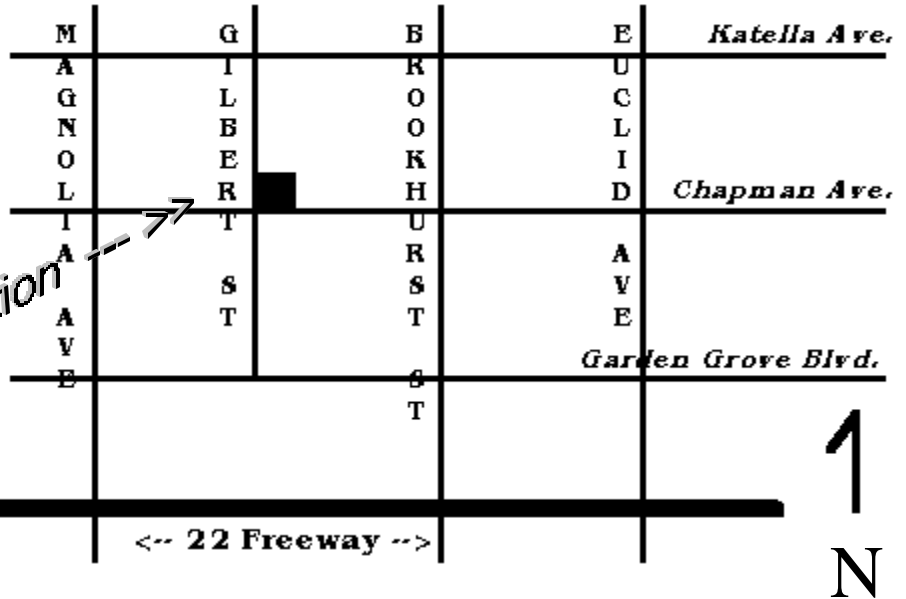
GENERAL MEETINGS —

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
Slide Shows Videos Other Activities

Meeting Location →



American Opal Society Officers

Wes Roth	President	(714) 897-2843 email wesroth@earthlink.net
Carol Bova	Vice Pres.	(818) 845-8610 email bova@bovagems.com
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Pete Goetz	Secretary	(714) 666-2084 email mpg1022@aol.com
Russ Madsen	Editor	(562) 425-9788 email 76550.1366@compuserve.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.

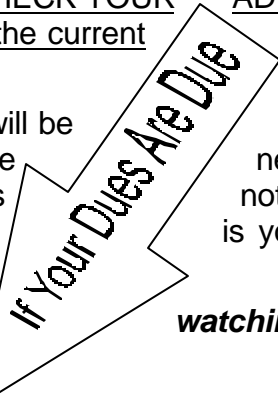
Label Changes: Your address label now displays your dues expiration date as MM-YY where MM is the month and YY is the year your dues expire. Expiration dates also appear in the membership roster.

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.**

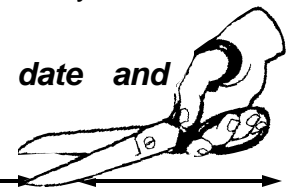
Renewal Grace Period of two months will be received. If your dues are due now you will receive two additional issues of the newsletter. Please note however that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

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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)
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pub



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

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 over <deduct \$5.00 from above>

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 not be included in the dealer info list

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 not be included in the member roster

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____ APT #: _____ or PO BOX: _____
CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
C O U N T R Y (I F O U T S I D E U . S .)

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.

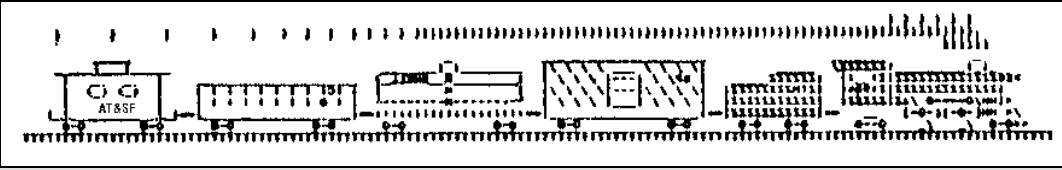
Please indicate any name or mailing address changes

The OPAL EXPRESS

OPAL & GEM SHOW

Published monthly by the American Opal Society

Issue 9



President's Message

from **Wes Roth**

GREETINGS,

Welcome to a "pleasant" Southern California September. Its a balmy 102 in my computer room as I put word to keyboard....

Whereas the Australian fields are currently underwater, we are just the opposite so to anyone who is visiting any of the local digs, carry more water than you think you'll need. **PLAY IT SAFE.**

We are still accepting any and all volunteer help being offered for the November Opal Show.

All Gifts and Donations for the show can be brought to the September or October meetings(remember, no meeting in November) or if you prefer you can bring them directly to the show, just let a board member know so it will be expected at the show and can be added to the list.

Dr. Jay Carey is back from Australia and if he is available we may be able to get him to say a few words at this months meeting.

See you at the meeting

Wes Roth
President

You may be a rockhound if....You associate the word **HARD** with the value on a Mohs scale rather than with the word **WORK.**

AUSTRALIAN OPAL JOURNEY

by Jay Carey

Jay Carey and Mike Kowalsky just returned from a very successful three week tour of the major opal fields of Australia. The success of the trip was made possible by Barbara McCondra and fellow Yowah miner Gwen Burney without whose insights, introductions to opal miners, and general hospitality, the trip would have been far less interesting. The following are highlights of the trip.

We landed in Sydney and were picked up by Mike's two Australian cousins. We spent the first day driving in the rain to Dubbo where we spent the first night. We drove to Yowah the next day encountering swollen creeks that inundated the road up to 0.5 meter in several

(Continued on page 3)



DATES TO REMEMBER

Board of Directors Meets Monday Sept 7th 7PM

At the workshop

General Meeting Thurs Sept 10th 7PM

AOS annual OPAL & Gem Show November 7th & 8th

Work Shop 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 form as well.

Workshop Schedule on Page 5 shows dates/times and appointment instructions. ☼

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AUSTRALIAN OPAL JOURNEY

(Continued from page 2)

places, causing us to stall out and forcing us to push the vehicle thru the water. We arrived in Yowah that evening after being towed through the last flooded area by Barbara's son Ron Vil. We then spent five delightful days in Yowah where we mined and fossicked in Barbara's claim and Gwen's claim. We also spent a half day in John and Chris's mine where we got some hands on experience helping John in his 60 foot deep underground mine. We also visited with old friend Rod Griffen who is spending a lot of time in Yowah presently. Not to be missed is the Saturday night barbecue put on by Gwen Burney and the Sunday afternoon opal showing and selling by the local miners. Both are held at the Yowah Community Services center.

We next drove to Lightning Ridge where we spent the next two nights. There we descended an 80 foot shaft into a working mine, fossicked on Barbara's mullick heap, visited with opal dealer Peter Carroll and his wife Liss, and visited the many shops and attractions of Lightning Ridge. The highlight of the trip was a visit to Len Cram's house where we picked up a copy of his latest book "A Journey with Color" and were privileged to view the results of his pioneering research on opal formation and growth for which he was awarded an honorary Ph.D. degree.

After leaving Lightning Ridge, we were forced to make a 300 km detour around the flooded stretch of highway between Walgett and Dubbo. This put us late into Broken Hill where we visited Jack Absalom's art gallery. Mr. Absalom is a noted opal miner and out-back personality as well as being a famous Australian artist.

We then proceeded to Adelaide where we were graciously hosted by long time opal dealer and friend Murray Willis and his wife. We viewed some magnificent parcels and pieces of opal and then caught daughter Nicole, who is a local TV personality, on the afternoon TV talk show. Nicole is currently finishing up a video on Coober Pedy, and Murray has promised us a copy for our library when it is finished.

The next day we drove to Andamooka and visited Alex Mendelsohn, noted artist and long time opalminer and dealer, who showed us both his opals and paintings. Stephen, of the Andamooka Motel and Pub, graciously gave us a tour of his working mine and even more graciously



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. ✨

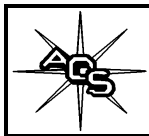
towed us out of the outback when our 2WD vehicle proved no match for the soft mine field roads. We also visited AOS member Ed Zutaut, who takes two months a year leave from his aerospace engineering job to mine his claim at Andamooka. Ed showed us where he is mining the "false" level before digging down to the single level where opal is normally mined at Andamooka.

One of the highlights of the whole trip was a visit with Yarijan "Mario" Anic, entrepreneur and "bon vivant" who has developed a proprietary process for treating opal concrete. Concrete is a conglomerate of quartzite, siltstone, and pebbles in sandstone and is similar to Andamooka matrix, but is more common and doesn't normally take a polish, hence it requires a surface treatment. We spent many hours watching this dull white rock being transformed into DESERT FIRE OPAL which resembles precious black opal. The material is carved into art objects, fabricated into jewelry, etc., etc. This product line hasn't yet hit the U.S. and dealers who are interested in further info may contact Mario at P.O. Box 49, Andamooka, South Australia 5722.

Our next stop was Coober Pedy where we sampled underground living. Over 80% of all habitats are dug into the sandstone terrain - sometimes making their owners rich at the same time. In fact, they were excavating an extra room at my motel the day before I left and hit a pocket of opal valued at over \$20,000 (Au.) including 3 gem color clams.

There are many shops and attractions in Coober Pedy, and as always the wonderful Australian hospitality. Yanni Athanasiadis of the Umoona Opal Mine and Museum showed us his mine and museum. We also saw a terrific opal video which Mike purchased for our library. The Opal Cave and Big Winch are other attractions not to be missed. Jon James Box 512, Coober Pedy, South Australia 5723 also has a hands on mine tour for \$25 (Au) where you can experience actual mining and keep any opal you find. He is extremely knowledgeable and well worth meeting.

(Continued on page 5)



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

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

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

#1175 Curtis Trace



Membership Roster Changes/Additions

Changes - Eric Scott Land Of Wonder (new phone)

(818) 785-7394 Member # 1047

Dues Expire 99-01

A Workshop with Harriette Brietman

Learn a wonderful new way to "Carve your Cabochons"

Interested in carving your opals? Read on. Here's a great way to get started with hands-on instruction from American Opal Society member and professional carver, Harriette Brietman.

Harriette Brietman is pleased to announce she will be teaching a special workshop on "Carving Your Cabochons" to be held on a Saturday (your choice) from 10 AM to 4 PM. Attendance will be limited to ten people to ensure everyone gets plenty of bench time and personal attention.

Attendees will learn how to turn an ordinary cabochon into a beautiful carving of a flower, animal or free-form. Everyone is guaranteed to go home with a finished piece, ready to polish.

Requirements for the session include a Dremel or Foredom tool, diamond burrs, and two unpolished cabochons made from material with a hardness less than 6.5 on the Mohs scale.

There will be a pot luck lunch break at 1 PM or bring your own sandwich.

Fee \$65

The instructor has been carving for nine years and demonstrates regularly at many rock and gem shows on the west side of Los Angeles.

If you are interested in signing up or would like further information, please call Harriette at (310) 204-3513.

Stumped by the shape of a piece of opal rough? Carving may be just the answer you are looking for! Many pieces of opal lend themselves readily to carving. ❁

ITEMIZATION

ITEM: In a recent article in *Blue Ribbon Magazine* the interests of rockhounds were recognized by the Blue Ribbon Coalition. At issue is a relatively new method of determining road and trail usage (we might read "usage" to mean "closures") wherein special interest groups are asked by the Forest Service or other land management agencies to identify trails that should be kept open. Once this identification process is complete certain of the identified routes and trails will be selected for "open" status while ALL other roads and trails are summarily designated closed.

BRC California State Representative Don Amador, writing on the subject of "Closed Unless Posted Open." (Pg 21 *Blue Ribbon Magazine* - 8/98) commented that there are inherent difficulties with this methodology. The trouble lies in the fact that no special interest group can identify ALL the trails that are available for "designation". Citing examples of the many and varied interested parties, Amador listed family recreationists, hunters, fishermen, **rockhounds**, sightseers, and other resource users. Equestrians, mountain bikers, and commercial interests such as timber and mining are also among those potentially affected by this approach.

While the BRC focuses primarily on protecting public land access for off-road vehicular recreation it is gratifying to see the interests of rockhounds recognized by them as well. ❁

ITEM: Do you have email? As you may have noticed, most AOS officers are now online. If you have email, please feel free to contact us so that we may compile an address book of online members. This may be a useful way to interact when time is of the essence or items of interest to a group of members need to be discussed in a forum other than the newsletter or general meetings. ❁

ITEM: Don't miss the 1998 OPAL issues of *Lapidary Journal* (August) and *Rock & Gem* (October). Both contain numerous opal articles and excellent opal photography. ❁

While the Blue Ribbon Coalition focuses primarily on protecting public land access for off-road vehicular recreation it is gratifying to see the interests of Rockhounds recognized by them as well.

AUSTRALIAN OPAL JOURNEY

(Continued from page 3)

My only regret was in passing up a couple of opals that I wish that I had bought and missing Mintabie and the new field at Lambina due to running out of time. I did however make it to the top of Ayers Rock, which was another of my long time ambitions.

In summary, the trip was a marvelous experience and I recommend it for any AOS members who want to learn more about opal. ✨

What's Happening?

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Dates and Locations of Shows

Sept 19 10AM-6PM **Sept 20** 10AM-5PM Faceter's Guild of Southern California, 2271 W. Crescent Ave., **Anaheim, CA**

Sept 26 – 27 10AM-5PM Vista Gem & Mineral Society, Bregle Terrace Community Recreation Center, 1200 Vale Terrace, **Vista, CA**

Oct 10 8AM-5PM **Oct 11** 8AM-4PM Searles Lake G&M Soc Lapidary and Show Bldg. **Trona, CA**

Oct 10 9AM-5PM **Oct 11** 9AM-4PM San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 14800 7th St., **Victorville, CA**

Oct 17 10AM-6PM **Oct 18** 10AM-5P Whittier G&M Soc Whittier Masonic Temple, 7604 Greenleaf Ave., **Whittier, CA**

Oct 24 10AM-6PM **Oct 25** 10AM-5PM El Cajon G&M Soc El Cajon Valley Masonic Temple, 695 Ballantyne

Nov 7 10AM-7PM **Nov 8** 10AM-4PM **American Opal Society OPAL & GEM SHOW**, 616 Convention Way, corner of Katella Ave. and Harbor Blvd., **ANAHEIM, CA**

Jan 22 through Jan 31, 1999 Blythe Rock & Gem Show Colorado River Fairgrounds **BLYTHE, CA**

Workshop schedule

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.**

September 1998

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

WORKSHOP 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.

Opals At Museums (and...)

McCondra Report

A VISIT TO THE OPAL AND GEM EXHIBITS OF THE LOS ANGELES NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

by Pete Goetz

One of the tenets of the Opal Society's charter is to designate information pertaining to our beloved name sake. In keeping with the spirit of making available opportunities in which you may view Opal that has been well prepared and well displayed, the Board of Directors suggests you visit gem and mineral exhibits in local museums. Last month several members of the Board visited the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. The following is a synopsis of that visit.

The GEM ROOMS: Upon entering the room where the gem and mineral exhibits are housed, you will note the lighting is kept low. Each individual obelisk is lighted from above giving the observer an excellent rendering of the minerals therein. The colors and textures are displayed without 'glass glare.' This treatment of the entire collection gives a crisp visually pleasing presentation. One you should not miss.

The OPALS: The Opal exhibits are located in three different places. The first is the **F. C. Hixon Vault Room**. When you enter, walk to your left about five or six feet and you will encounter the Opal obelisk. This display is about 16 inches square and contains fourteen specimens of Opal. There are eight examples of black Opal, two pendants and five free form dazblers from Lightning Ridge. The remaining examples include two jelly Opals from Queretaro, Mexico, a Mexican 'fire opal' weighting 93.08 carats, and a truly bright harlequin pattern from Mintabie weighting 7.51 carats. Of special interest, in the center of the display is an Opal sphere about two and half inches in diameter found in German Gulch, Andamooka.

How Opal Formed: When you leave the Vault Room turn left, walk through the short hallway and look to your left along the wall. There you will find a display showing how Opal is formed. Adjacent is an excellent graphic showing the difference between common and precious Opal. As we all know, it's the arrangement of the silica spheres. Electron microscope images in the graphic illustrate this very well.

Where Opal is Found and How It Is Mined: After you have finished checking out how Opal is formed, turn around, walk about three feet and you will encounter a display that shows a map of the mining districts in Australia. There are several examples of black Opal from Lightning Ridge, some boulder Opal from Queensland and a white Opal rectangle weighting 189.9 carats from Andamooka. While standing there look up and you will see several photographs of mining operations in Coober Pedy.

In summary, the museum has an excellent mineral collection. It is well displayed and presented with a flair for the

Phobia Retort

by Barbara McCondra

A lover of opal who admits to being afraid of putting opal to the wheel informed me it was not meekness of spirit, or tightness of purse that caused him to sweat so profusely when contemplating cutting into opal rough. He explains that he and others like him so love the magic and beauty of opal that the fear stems from destroying,

perhaps through error or ignorance, such a treasure of Mother Earth that came so far to share its light and spectral dance. The immensity of the responsibility is what shook his usually steady hands.

I was able to identify with the stress of responsibility. It plagued me as a novice miner. I was in agony when my pick inadvertently smashed and turned to sugar a silica dioxide beauty. I repeatedly kicked myself through out the week at the loss of a stone that I had cut into an El cheapo or muggy as the Aussies call them when if I'd approached from the opposite side it would have been an extraordinary gem of some value. I point out though that doing nothing gets you nothing and forever leaves the opal as an embryo, never to have a chance at development and having its day in the sun. I have no answer for this particular fear for I harbor traces of it still. I

wanted to share this position with you but will not retract my wuss and whine descriptions. I just hold to them with a bit more empathy. (only a bit) ☼

(FROM OUTBACK REPORT 6/98)



dramatic. We encourage all of you to visit when convenient for you and/or your family.

AND... Now for the business part of our visit. The Board of Directors and the Museum staff have in effect agreed in principle to collaborate on an "Opal Gala" to be presented in the fall of 1999. We have tentative agreements from several Museums and opal collectors interested in contributing displays and opal information. I would like to tell you more, but a lot of this is still in the planning stage. More later I promise.

On this inaugural visit 5 board members viewed the opal collection at the LA Museum of Natural History: Pete Goetz, Mike Kowalsky, Stan McCall, Jay Carey, Harold Andersen (special thanks to Harold who arranged the visit), and Russ Madsen. The original idea was formulated by Mike and Harold with the intent to assist AOS members in finding other places to enjoy the wonders of opal. We are excited to note the idea has grown into something very special. Stay tuned for more details as they develop. ☼

it was not meekness of spirit, or tightness of purse that caused him to sweat so profusely when contemplating cutting into opal rough

Federal Guns Protect Environment?

(exchange newsletter editors, please be aware that ALL REPRINT PERMISSION OF THIS PIECE IS SPECIFICALLY RESERVED by the author). Before you can reproduce the following material in any way you must contact Mr. Casebier for permission as noted at the end of the text.

(The article which follows is an excerpt from Dennis Casebier's column titled "From the Mouth of the Cannon" which appeared in issue #171 6/25/98 of the **Mojave Road Report**. It is reprinted here with one-time republication permission from the author.)

A Related Matter?

Speaking of the expanding federal government and its relentless drive to expand its power and deprive us of our freedom, here's a little item you might find interesting. Every year the Department of Commerce publishes a tome titled Statistical Abstract of the United States - the most recent one, published in October, 1997, is the 117th edition. It is a massive compilation of statistics about the United States. I buy one every few years so as to have those statistics available if I need them.

On page 241 (the book has more than 1000 pages), Table 341, is a compilation of "Federal Agencies Employing 500 or More Full-Time Officers with Authority to Carry Firearms and Make Arrests ..." Would you believe the National Park Service has 2,160 such officers? They rank 10th of all federal agencies. They are right behind the Secret Service and, in this data, they are ahead of the U.S. Marshal's Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and others. And to this must be added the U. S. Forest Service with 732, the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service with 620, and BLM which was not listed (meaning, I believe, they have fewer than 500).

Let's estimate that BLM has 250 officers that meet this criteria and add them to the totals for the NPS, Forest Service, and U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service. That comes to 3,762. This defines a conglomerate dedicated to restricting our freedom on lands ostensibly owned by the public. Returning to the table we see this conglomerate now as ranking 5th or 6th out of all federal agencies. It is a larger force than the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Secret Service (just to name two with high name recognition).

Now doesn't it strike you as odd that this conglomerate of Public Land Police would need more armed officers with authority to make arrests than the Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the ATF? Could this be because the primary business of the NPS and its brethren isn't preservation of resources like it says on the billboard, instead it has to do with power. Their job has to do with regulating citizens - telling them what they can do and what they cannot do, and even when and where they can

do it. And their message is so offensive to freedom-loving Americans that they require this huge police force to maintain their position. Not to protect resources, but to maintain their position of power.

The Statistical Abstract of the United States - 1997 is a fascinating book, but I stop short of urging you all to run out and get a copy (it costs \$51.00!). It doesn't make for good general reading.

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PUBLICATION NOTICE

This report has been prepared for subscribers and for distribution to a selected list. It is written by Dennis G. Casebier and edited by Jo Ann Casebier. Artwork by Tad Jensen. Layout by Chris Ervin. Subscriptions are available at the above address at the rate of \$15.00 for the next 12 issues. Make remittance payable to Friends of the Mojave Road. Periodicity is not predetermined. The reports are issued as needed to support ongoing activities of the Friends. **Written permission is required from the copyright owner (Dennis G. Casebier) for reproduction of any part of this report for any purpose.** ☼

From Mojave Road Report #171 6/25/98

Now doesn't it strike you as odd that this conglomerate of Public Land Police would need more armed officers with authority to make arrests than the Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the ATF (Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms)?



In Memoriam

William F. Kaliher, Jr.

January 16th, 1909

July 28th, 1998

AOS member Bill Kaliher was involved with jewelry and opal much of his adult life. Professionally, he was a jeweler and wholesale buyer of opal and was making opal buying trips to the orient in the years prior to WW II. A quiet and kind man, I got to know him as we shared a metalsmithing class at Long Beach City College a few years ago. He wasn't able to be very active in the AOS due to declining health but enjoyed

Opal Varieties and Variables

Opal

Lapidary Chatter via Rock Writing 0/95

Instead of giving you the usual mineralogical and historical information on this well known member of the quartz family, I will tell you about the various kinds of opal there are to be found.

POTCH OR COMMON OPAL: A plain colored stone with no fire or play of color. Potch comes in white, gray, amber, black and blue. It frequently occurs with chalcedony, or in petrified wood. This stone has little or no gemstone value.

WHITE OPAL: This is a white base background material. When the opal has all the colors, including red, they are the most valuable. The larger color or fire patterns are preferred.

JELLY OR GEL OPAL: This is the colorless, glass-like background opal. Blue is the only fire color in the cheaper material. Better grade stones show green, and sometimes red and orange.

FIRE OPALS: These are also *Jelly* opals that show a bright range of reds and orange. Also called *Mexican Fire opals*, as this is where these stones are frequently found. These are among the most valuable and fashionable opals used in jewelry today.

GRAY OPAL: This stone has a gray base. The quality depends upon features similar to those found in other types of opal. In Australia, this type of opal is not prized.

CRYSTAL OPAL: Like *Jelly* opal, the base has a colorless, glass-like background but the concentration of colors is richer. *Only* the top quality crystal shows red. The lack of background milkiness adds value to stone.

BLACK OPAL: This is a stone with black or deep blue background. The most valuable of this type of stone is the kind with a royal blue base and broad flashes of reds and other colors

HARLEQUIN: This is one of the rarest of the opals. The stones show a wide variety of broad flashes of bright colors from reds, yellows, oranges, greens, and blues. The backgrounds are often of mixed types.

MIXED TYPES: There are many opals that do not show pure features. Mixtures of white and crystal, or crystal and black are two examples of these types. ❁

From Breccia 6/98

(I had mixed feelings about printing the above as there are a few seeming misstatements. But it serves to show yet again that the "myths" of opal continue to survive. How many incorrect statements can you find? I see four right away. {1} Potch can have value for its patterns, {2} jelly opal is distinguished from crystal not by its degree of color play but because it is not water clear, {3} while Mexican fire opal may be desirable it is by no means "among the most valuable...opals ...", and {4} the definition given of harlequin falls outside even the most liberal interpretations of this pattern.)

ROCKHOUND SAFETY

Summer Safety

The classic joke picture of rockhounds as a bunch of people standing with straight legs, bent over at the waist and touching the ground, is too often true, unfortunately. Another thing we rockhounds do is put those heavy rocks and tools into a vehicle — or take them out — often by swinging things.

The result is a lot of bad backs, sore backs, back strains, sometimes even permanently damaged backs. So we need to learn and practice the proper way to lift and lower heavy stuff and light stuff too, without hurting ourselves.

PRACTICE THIS PATTERN

To lift and move something, several steps should be followed:

1. Stand with your feet apart, shoulder width, the rock between your feet, and one foot slightly in front of the other for balance.
2. Lower yourself by bending your knees until you can grab the rock. The rock should be close to your body. Keep your back straight and your knees bent.
3. SLOWLY lift the rock by straightening up your knees pushing with your leg muscles. Keep the rock in close to your body. Do not twist sideways.
4. Once standing, do not twist your back. To move the rock sideways, turn with your feet. Keep the rock in close to your body.
5. Once you get where you're going with the rock, reverse the steps you used to lift the rock. Remember: KEEP YOUR BACK STRAIGHT!
6. If the rock must go into a trunk or whatever, set it down on the edge keeping a straight back. Then slide it into the vehicle. Most of us will bend over at the waist and swing it in -- a sure way to get a bad back!
7. You aren't superman or woman! If the rock or bucket is too heavy for you to carry easily, do it another way. Get help. Use a skid made from a heavy cloth or a wood slat with a rope tied to the

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

end. Roll the rock using a long handled tool to pry with. Use your ingenuity! ❁

(from AFMS Newsletter 4/98 via The Rockorder 6/98)

And Don't Lick the Rock!

While we're on the subject of getting you all back safe and quite sound, here's another very important safety tip:

Do not lick a rock to identify it. Carry a spray bottle of water to spritz rocks, overheated faces and necks, for cleaning cuts and scrapes, and for an occasional drink. Licking rocks can be very dangerous. At least one death has been attributed to a fungus contracted from licking a rock. **Materials containing arsenic, mercury, selenium, borates and even phosphate minerals can be deadly.** ❁

(from Breccia, 5/98 via The Rockorder 6/98)

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By Barbara McCondra

"Nine Mile Kenny"

Ken is an anomaly. He is both wild eyed and big hearted. An intelligent man, he works hard with ungainly antics and comedic posturing to hide his keen mind. His military pension came from many years of having to solve mechanical problems on the spot. Whenever I had mechanical problems with mining equipment, mosquito larvae in my water tank, or any such bush-living problem to overcome, he was able to cleverly find a way to jury rig a gizmo to solve the problem. He also had a cuppa tea to sip while he shared a wiseacre quip or two. His jesters approach to sharing his philosophy of life always made me laugh the problem into its proper perspective. So what if at times his clever paranoid sounding one-liners sometimes left you wondering if he was kidding at all. He was prone to tipping the bottle (Woodley's Sherry) and a few cans of brew. Occasionally his home brew plant would blow a cork or two as would Ken if he visited the pub in town too long. I always approached his camp with some trepidation however as he was always adopting stray dogs that were as wild eyed as he but unlike Ken was prone to bite. Although Kenny was not one to bite, he could snarl with the best of them, especially if in his cups. He was always helpful, never hurtful and a colorful friend to have indeed. Living out at the Nine Mile field for more than the fifteen years that I knew him, his life was more isolated than those living closer to town. The heyday of the Berlin Rush in the sixties was long gone and aside from an occasional small open cut near by, not much mining activity was happening aside from Ken and a few of his mates having a scratch at the dirt now and again. He would dash here and zoom there to solve a problem but never without first observing the British cup of tea and Australian hospitality rites. His humble but orderly camp was always a welcoming place. The wild eyed gentleman out in the scrub always serves an interesting, friendly cup of tea. ❁

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