

The Opal Express

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



Member

Member



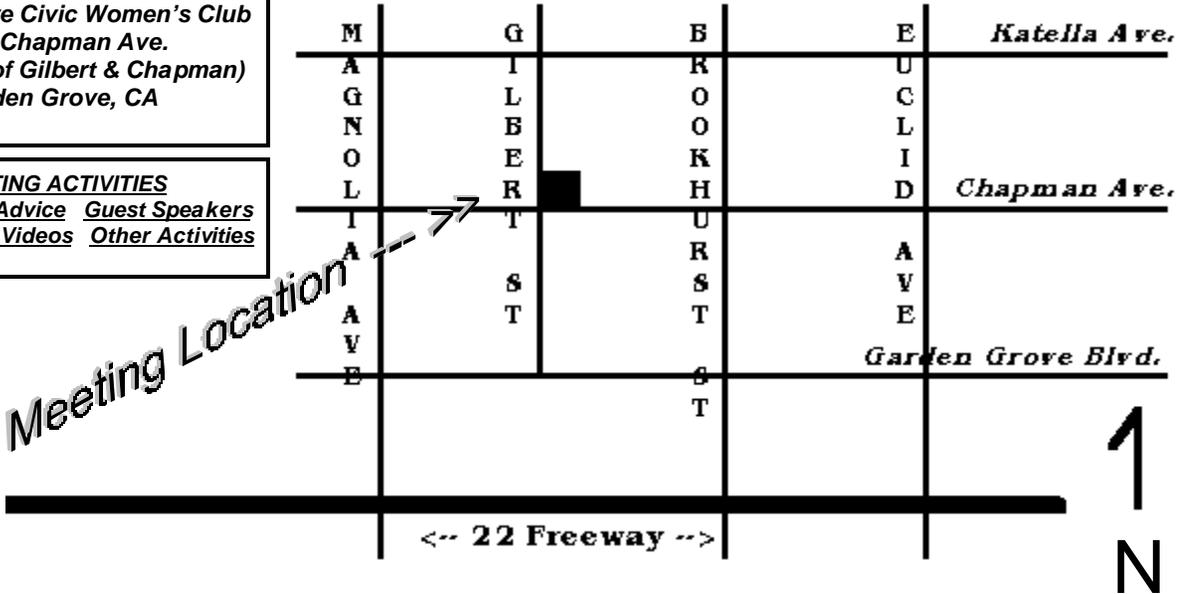
Volume #31 Issue #11 November 1999



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



!!! Happy Thanksgiving !!!

American Opal Society Officers

Carol Bova	President	(818) 845-8610	email bova@bovagems.com
Mike Kowalsky	Vice Pres.	(714) 761-4876	email mykowalsky@aol.com
Alan Farquer	Treasurer	(714) 537-0556	email nnf@earthlink.net
Jim Pisani	Secretary	(562) 948-6374	email vulajim@gte.net
Russ Madsen	Editor	(562) 425-9788	email 76550.1366@compuserve.com

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Joseph
Hallimmachmur

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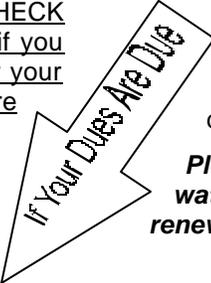


Outback Gems
Barbara McCondra

Owyhee Sunset Mines
Stan Pegram

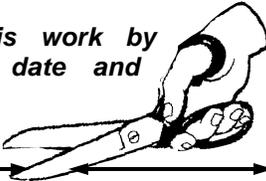
Are Your Dues Due Now? PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. If your dues are due now you will receive two additional issues of the newsletter. Please note



however that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

Please help us make this work by watching your expiration date and renewing promptly. Thanks!



DUES RENEWAL FORM

(membership renewal form rev. 1/1/98) d:\ameropal\newstrs\forms\dues_due.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: _____
 COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE U.S.) _____
 TELEPHONE: Home (_____) _____ : Business (_____) _____
 FAX (_____) _____

Please indicate any name or mailing address changes

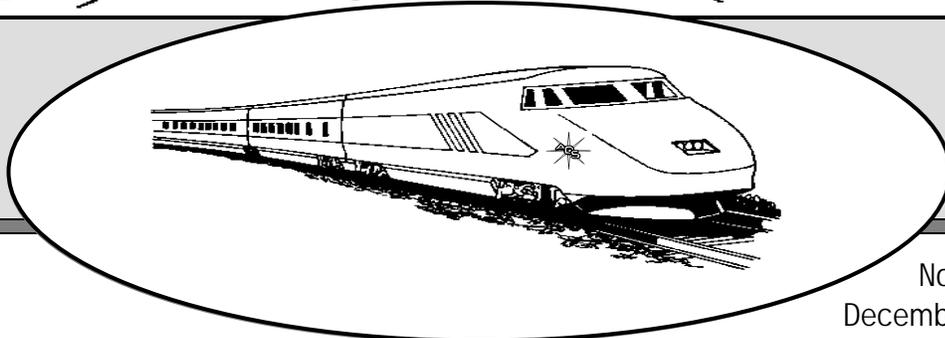
NAME BADGE ORDER FORM: (OPTIONAL)
 Number of badges ordered _____
 (\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)
 PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

The Opal Express

NOVEMBER 1999

Published monthly by the American Opal Society

Volume 31, Issue 11



November Opal & Gem Show
December Christmas Party

President's Message from Carol Bova

Dear Friends,

The first time I walked into the American Opal Society's Opal and Gem Show, I walked around like someone in a trance. It was overwhelming -- so much opal in one place at one time! So many kinds of rough, so many beautiful finished stones, so much lovely jewelry...and all of it opal! Took me another year's show to begin to calm down and appreciate all the other gem materials that are also at the show, but that first impression comes back for a moment every year as I walk into the show -- sheer awe at the wonder of it all.

Like many people, I didn't have a wide knowledge of opal, and I went the first time out of curiosity. What struck me speechless was the array of colors and number of types of opal, and what drew me in was the sharing of information by the opal dealers and members at the show. I joined AOS on an impulse that day, and I have never regretted it.

Through the American Opal Society, and its members, programs, symposia, and library, I have gained a world of knowledge since that first opal-struck day. Writing this in the countdown days before the 1999 show, I want to round up all the opal lovers of the world and say, come to Anaheim on November 6 & 7! Join the American Opal Society and share this wonder! Meet our members and the opal experts who gather on this one special weekend each year.

And this year, even if they can't travel to the show, I can invite the whole world to come to our American Opal Society website: <http://www.opalsociety.org>.

This is our time to shine! See you all on November 6 and 7 at the Quality Inn in Anaheim, California!

Carol

BOARD MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE: there will be a director's meeting Monday Nov 1 at the workshop.



DATES TO REMEMBER

1999 OPAL & GEM SHOW
NOV 6TH & 7TH

November General Mtg
Thurs - Nov 10th
7PM

[1] IT'S Opal SHOWTIME!!! ANNUAL AOS Opal & Gem Show
Nov 6th and 7th, Quality Maingate Hotel, 616 Convention Way, Anaheim, CA. **Show Times:** Saturday 10AM-7PM, Sunday 10AM-4PM Location is directly east of and adjacent to the Anaheim Convention Center; due south of the Disneyland parking lot -- near the southwest corner of Harbor Blvd and Katella Ave.

[2] CHRISTMAS PARTY POTLUCK

Mark your calendars now for our annual Christmas party potluck set for our regular December General Meeting.

Thursday December 9th 7:00 PM, if this is your first *annual*, WELCOME!!! You won't be disappointed. Great food, great company, great fun sharing a holiday visit with fellow opalholics.

Plan to bring your appetite and watch for more details in the December Opal Express.

Work Shop Information...

The Opal Society workshop is located in the lapidary classroom at Walker Jr High School, 8132 Walker St., La Palma, CA 90623

Directions: (Choice of 3 Freeway approaches)

[1] Exit the 605 at Carson St and proceed east, or **[2]** exit the 5 or 91 Fwy at Valley View and proceed south, or

[3] exit the 22/405 Freeways at Valley View and proceed north.

Walker Jr HS is on Walker St north of Lincoln Ave. It is on the east side of Walker between Crescent Ave. and La Palma Ave. Drive to the far back of the school to the Lapidary Arts classroom.

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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Notes From Lightning Ridge

Hi Hale and Others:

I thought I would tell you a bit about the human landscape here. As you may expect, we are an unusual group of Native Australians, Croatians, Serbs, Scandinavians, Americans, Canadians, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos..... I won't enumerate the entire list of 52 nations, but most of us answering to one of the above are now proudly Australian. No friction between the various diverse cultural groups to speak of, even when there is a scrap between the mother countries. I know a yank and Serb who were mining partners during the late unpleasantness in Europe.

As you can imagine with our broadband ethnicity, we eat well. I saw my neighbor Father Nick the Russian Orthodox priest with his smokehouse fuming yesterday. Must be doing some hams. He also does some baking in a little wood fired stone and mud oven in the yard.

Lots of people grow good little gardens with the water from their sink. The European tradition of artisanly produced beverages is alive and well and could even be dual purpose as fuel, if you catch my meaning. We do have an enormous supermarket, restaurants, cafes and pubs so we do these things by choice.

We have a lot of large and healthy wild pigs thru this inland country and the white ones are not acceptable for the German wild pig market; we locals get those instead. How do they get the pigs for export? With a 2 kilowatt light, a 4wd utility, (ute, pickup truck) and a rifle. A good shooter can make A\$500/night. These animals are a feral menace both to human works and native wildlife. Some people hunt them for sport with bull terrier cross dogs covered in leather armour. The dogs grab the pig(s), and the bloke(s) jump aboard the large black vicious boar and stick 'em in the goozle with a Bowie knife. They then sew up any dogs wot needs it, and orf home with the prize(s). It is not my thing, but I do like wild pork.

The fishin' is real good here too....but after the foregoing I don't want to go any further on local food gathering techniques. I suspect I have already tried your credulity enough for one day.

Regards,

james dumar
jdumar@iniaccess.net.au
www.lightningridgeopal.com

p.s. Reading over the above I realize that we sound like a polyglot bunch of mad max hippies, but that can't be cuz we all have short hair. In the next issue: alternative power and why opal mining is good for the environment. ✿

(from lapidary Digest #234 9/29/99)



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. ✿

October Guest Speaker Clare Gagnon's Trip to Minas Gerias – Brazil's Gem Fields

With about 20 AOS members and guests on hand at the October General Meeting, Clare Gagnon presented slides and a fine collection of faceted gems and examples of rough which he obtained on a recent field trip to Brazil.

This journey was organized by the Los Angeles Gem & Mineral Council and was headed by Dr. Tony Kampf, curator of the gem and mineral department of the LA Natural History Museum.

The two week trip included stops at 6 or 7 towns with each stop accented by a visit to one or more gem mines and local buying/trading centers where cut stones and rough material could be had although not always at bargain prices. The group was often treated to a fine open air BBQ meal compliments of the hospitality of a mine owner. It seems visitors are quite welcome and mine owners themselves often escorted the group's tour of their locale.

It was interesting to see the mines and how they were being worked. We also enjoyed views of local faceting equipment as well as the interior of many shops and a few design and production studios. Clare noted that almost all faceting performed in Brazil is done on jamb-peg machines which produce fairly poor, inaccurate results. On the other side of the coin though, they always cut for size and weight. Therefore it can be economically feasible to purchase Brazilian faceted gems with the goal of recutting for quality and brilliance.

One mine was sufficiently productive to abandon shaft and drift mining in favor of open pit even though the gem level was 120 meters below the surface.

When they weren't hosted by a mine owner, the typical BBQ was interesting. Their local guide would negotiate a price per person (\$5 to \$6 US) for all you can eat. This would include numerous large skewers of a variety of meats in addition to all vegetables, fruits, and deserts.

All in all this sounds like it was a great trip and judging by the quality of rough, it was worthwhile in that regard as well. Thanks very much for sharing your adventure with the club, Clare! ✿



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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Editor---Russ Madsen
Please address all inquiries to:
The Opal Express, P.O. Box 382, Anaheim, CA 92815-0382
E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com
(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

"The Black Prince", also known as "Harlequin Prince", was found in 1915 at Phone Line by Urwin and Brown. Perhaps the least significant of the four notable stones from the same claim, this stone weighed 181 carats, and displayed a flag pattern one side and the other was red. There was a sandhole in the face.

This black opal was acquired in England for the New York Museum of Natural History. Later "Prince" became part of the collection at Forest Lawn Memorial Cemetery Los Angeles, and was stolen at the same time as "Pride of Australia".

"Flamingo" was the largest of the four notable stones in the Phone Line patch, weighing over a quarter of a pound at 800 carats! This black opal plus "Black Prince", "Pride of Australia" and "Empress" were the ones for which Sherman paid Urwin and Brown 2000 pounds in about 1920. This was the most ever paid to that date for four black opals. Ernie's sister Bertha named the stones.

Each Opal Express presents an account of discovery as researched by Barbara Moritz, Secretary of the Ridge Historical Society, in her quest to unravel the early history of the black opal fields in New South Wales, Australia. Should you have constructive information, please email: barbeemitz@yahoo.com or write to Box 1, L/Ridge 2834.

ITEMIZATION

ITEM: Horse Canyon Field Trip (schedule changed) - a date change came in after last month's newsletter went to print. Sorry to report this special event has been rescheduled for the same weekend as the AOS Opal Show. New dates are Nov 6th & 7th. Starting time(s) and location information remain as noted in the October *Opal Express*. ❁

ITEM: In reporting **Clare Gagnon's** field trip to Brazil an activity of the Los Angeles Natural History Museum Gem & Mineral Council was described. Early in October, the AOS was pleased to present a special opal talk to the Gem & Mineral Council. Featured speakers for the evening were **Barbara McCondra** and **Jay Carey**.

In addition two truly spectacular opal displays were shared for the meeting. One was prepared by **Barbara McCondra** showing fine Yowah and boulder opal and jewelry from her collection, the other by **Stan McCall** showing stones and jewelry from the collection of **David Burton**. Considerable support and preparation were also provided by **Mike Kowalsky** and **Ron Vil**.

Special thanks to all who participated in this evening of opal lore, wonder, and detail. ❁

ITEM: Concerned about **Y2K**? Are you unsure whether your computer is compliant? Not sure what all the hubbub is really about? Here's a web site with significant assistance and 5 do-it-yourself system testing steps which could not be easier.

<http://www.winmag.com/library/1999/fea0061.html>

One writer described this test as "fast, free, and actually more accurate than some of the commercial Y2K compliance tests..." ❁

ITEM: *Anglic Gemcutter*, a monthly magazine "Of, For & About Gemcutters Interests; may our Global Tribe prosper". (503) 632-4826 Ph/FAX/Mess. information; DISCOVER/Visa/MC accepted by telephone/FAX/letter. Editor Rick Ford, mAGi@bctonline.com ❁

ITEM: [LA-Rocks/CFMS – another field trip] **Stone Canyon to open.** In an LA Rocks note dated 9/30/99 CFMS field trip south chairman Steve Blocksage writes – I have completed the primary negotiations with the owners of Stone Canyon, it is provisionally open. On Nov 20th it will be open for 1 day for the first time since 1974. It will be open to members of the CFMS and Guests provided they are above 18 years of age. I apologize for the late date but there was much to work out and I needed to advertise this in the CFMS Bulletin for No-

ember to give everyone a shot at it. It will also be announced at the CFMS business meeting. The owners have asked us to meet a \$5,000.00 minimum which seems a lot but I will point out that at the last opening there where 450 people there and the material was priced at \$1.00 per pound. I would estimate that the average per person cost will range between \$25.00 and \$50.00 dollars. This will get you up to 100 lbs. of prime material. If you are looking for commercial quantities you will have to negotiate with the ranch for a cost per pound based on quantity. The owners have asked me to raise the money based on attendance rather than on per pound charges. Thus the more the better!

The material lies just under the surface and will be removed mechanically in blocks that weigh 600 lbs. and moved to an area where they will be sledged down to working size by the field trip participants. There will be some float collection, however the primary source of material is the below grade seam.

General requirements will be: long sleeved shirts and pants, eye protection, gloves, boots and anything else to protect yourself from flying chips of razor sharp jasper. There are several miles of ranch roads which require a high clearance vehicle: four wheel drive or truck, no cars please. If you have to bring a car, we will provide a ride if possible with someone else but we wish to limit this practice.

I will require you to check in with me or Richard Pankey or Chuck McKie with a head count so that I can adjust the cost per person more closely. We will provide camping space near Parkfield on another jasper bearing ranch for a nominal cost however all those details have yet to be worked out. I will also require an e-mail site for you or your club should weather postpone the field trip so that we can broadcast a stand down. Or you will be given a number to call should weather be an issue to check on the status of the trip there will a recorded message instructing you.

This material is the prime example of brecciated jasper in the country – it defies description. Consider all the colors that fine jasper comes in then surround those islands of jasper with chalcedony in every color from electric blue to reds and purples and then tumble them 15 times and you've got an idea. No two pieces are alike and it makes remarkable spheres, jewelry, and decorative pieces, show winners!

For those who don't know where Stone Canyon is, it lies along the San Andreas fault line between Coalinga and San Miguel, just north of Paso Robles in central California. It is about 4 hours from LA, 3.5 hours from the San Francisco bay area, and 3 hours from most of the central valley. The closest town is Parkfield, the earthquake capital of the U.S. in Monterey County.

Steve Blocksage email is similite@aol.com ❁

1999 Opal Show Demonstrators

We are pleased to welcome the following demonstrators who will be presenting their techniques at the 1999 Opal & Gem Show. Special thanks to Clare Gagnon for handling arrangements of this important aspect of our show.

Ben Byland	-	Wire Wrapping
Chris Christopher	-	Woven Chain
Mona Compton	-	Bead Stringing
Conrad Cone	-	Silverwork
Adelle "Sammy" Florida	-	Gem Carving
Clare Gagnon	-	Faceting
David Gough	-	Wire Wrapping
Robert Haines	-	Faceting
Vince & Ruth Jarrell	-	Gem Carving
Virginia Pace	-	Gem Carving
C.C. Paxton	-	Wire Wrapping
Jim Steffenson	-	Wax Carving
John Valazeques	-	Wax Carving

BOOK review

Opal – Advanced Cutting & Setting

By Paul B. Downing, Ph.D.

In his most recently released book, **Opal – Advanced Cutting & Setting** (ISBN 0-9625311-5-4) Majestic Press, P.O. Box 1348, Estes Park, CO 80517-1348, Paul Downing addresses advancement of opal cutting techniques based on a background drawn from his earlier book, *Opal Cutting Made Easy*.

In this book the reader is presented 134 pages of very good advice and commentary including a short Appendix of opal terminology. Topics covered include many aspects of problem opals including rough with thin or uneven color bars, imperfections such as sand pits or cracks which penetrate a piece of rough, plus many other considerations. Among these are whether or not to cut a high dome; when to cut a doublet or triplet; carving techniques and how they apply to boulder versus solid opal; an intarsia project is detailed; inlay is discussed. A method of crack treatment is presented which is somewhat simpler than that of David Lippmann (explained recently in *Rock & Gem*). The second half of the book is devoted to jewelry design and techniques. Principles specific to opal such as protecting the stone's edges are emphasized along with many helpful hints and tips about design generally. ✨

Workshop schedule

Be sure to check here for workshop schedule updates. The dates listed below are those available to the AOS in our NEW WORKSHOP AT WALKER Jr HIGH SCHOOL. The shop can be opened to members on Monday and Wednesday nights. **Please continue to contact Stan McCall by calling him at Gems & Opals (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session.**

November 1999

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				

= Available Workshop dates = General Meeting date

WORKSHOP RULES

Please see calendar above 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 fees: effective immediately...SHOP USAGE FEE IS \$3 PER SESSION.
- ⇒ 5) 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.

OPAL SHOW HELPERS - CALL IN NOW!

If you have already signed up at the meetings to help at the show, we have your names and preferred days. If you haven't signed up, please call Murray Schiff, 818-845-8610 and leave your name, phone number and when you are available to help out.

We'll see you at the Opal Show!



What's happening???

Calendar of Upcoming Events Dates and Locations of Shows

Nov 5 – 7 10AM-5PM San Diego Lapidary Society,
Al Bahr Shrine, 5440 Kearny Mesa Rd., **San Diego,**
CA

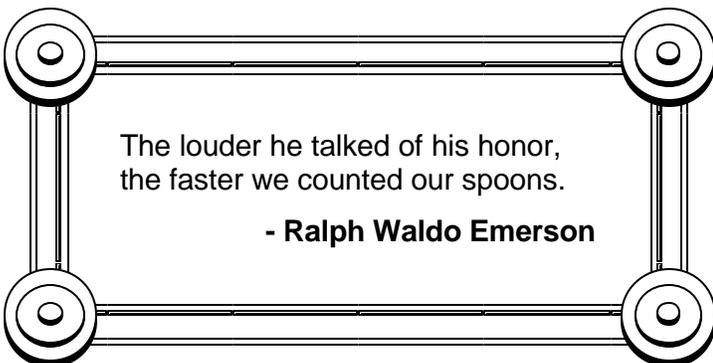
f Nov 6 10AM-7PM – Nov 7 10AM-4PM
AOS Opal & Gem Show, Quality Maingate
Hotel, 616 Convention Way, **Anaheim, CA**

Nov 6 – 7 10AM-5PM Kaiser Rock & Gem Club,
California Steel Industries, (near Calif Speedway),
9400 Cherry Ave., **Fontana, CA**

Nov 20 – 21 10AM-5PM Oxnard Gem & Min
Society, Performing Arts Center, 800 Hobson Way,
Oxnard, CA

Nov 20 – 10AM-6PM Nov 21 10AM-5PM Mineralogical
Soc. of Southern California, Pasadena Center,
Exhibition Hall*, 300 E. Green St., **Pasadena, CA** * **The**
show theme is Tourmaline. John Sinkankas and Bob
Jones will be speaking both days.

Nov 27 10AM-6PM Nov 28th 10AM-5PM Mojave
Desert Gem & Min Club, Community Center, 841
Barstow Rd., **Barstow, CA**



Safety Report

Take it off, take it all off

By Cathy Gaber

When you start working on a flat lap, a lapidary wheel, a polishing buff or a saw, you know what you plan to take off of your slab or nodule. Do you also think about what you should take off of yourself to make the project a safer one? Take off all of your jewelry. Necklaces may be obvious, but even a flat, tight ring has the potential to get snagged by the machinery. Take off any loose clothing, a tie (heaven forbid you would be wearing one in the shop in the first place!), a scarf, long open sleeves, etc. You probably can't take off your hair, but you should secure it safely out of the way.

After you've taken it off, what do you want to add on? Safety glasses are always a must, an apron is highly recommended. Rubber and leather aprons give even more protection. For some tasks, gloves might even come in handy.

Lastly, if you are interrupted or distracted, always take your work off the machine, not your eyes off of the work! ☸



WALT'S DOPPING TECHNIQUES

To SDMG (San Diego Min & Gem Society),

Reading in the last bulletin about dopping Mexican opal: I've dopped opal for many years using Elmer's glue or Wilhold glue on a wooden dop stick. The glue is usually "runny", so I let it sit for a while - putting a rather thin layer first so it will congeal faster on the stone. Then, I add some more glue on the stick. With the glue congealed, it will stick to the dop stick, all you need to do is press it down and lift up. With your fingers, move the new glue around the stick and let it dry. Overnight is best.

I've cut 38 x 40 mm agate cabs by putting fingernail polish on the dried glue using a little more glue for strength.

To take off place in water, warm is best, but it needn't be. Overnight is best.

Try one cab. If it works for you, it will save a lot of hot work and bother. This takes a little more time and planning, so it isn't to everyone's satisfaction.

-- Walt Abramson

PS The longer you let the glue sit, the stronger it holds. ☸

(from Pegmatite 9/99)

I have just given you a little bit of history about the fabulous and most interesting Black Rock. As you can see it is quite a place, it is one of the loves of my life. So now I will continue to give you a few more stories and "tales" of the Black Rock.

Joe, he is quite unique and different. He has got his set of morals that are as high as anyone's could be. Whenever someone on the Black Rock is out of line or has broken the desert "code," you can be sure that they will know about it. That is how and why this next very unusual story took place. As you can guess, justice was truly served "desert style."

The Tobacco Tin

This particular story I call "The Tobacco Tin." On one particular day, we had all gone to the other side of the desert to do some blasting in the old copper mine. Joe and I had to kill a couple of rattlers that were guarding the entrance and that were also close to the mine. On the Black Rock before you get involved in a project and a new area, you have to "clear the area" of all the bad guys with the forked tongue and a bad "sense of humor." After this was done, Joe skinned them out and gave the meat to a couple of friends who were visiting for a few days. I believe that they took them home and had them for dinner the next day. {this is in the movie too.}

That day we blasted and Joe got the samples that he wanted from the mine. Then we all headed back to the shack. Joe had just run out of tobacco and had gone into the kitchen to get some more. "It's gone. Someone took my tin of tobacco."

"I know who took it. There are only three of us who smoke on the Black Rock. You, me, and Tom."

{Poor old Tom, he has not been in the story since I started writing about the desert. What an entrance to make.}

"I know Tom took it because you were with me all day."

"Let's go."

You aren't going to believe what happened next!! It is 25 miles to the Soldiers Meadow Ranch and 25 miles back. We piled into Joe's WW2 ambulance and headed up there to poor old Tom's place. The ambulance with a strong tail wind was lucky to get 5 miles to the gallon with its tandem wheels and transmission geared low for the desert. I figured that it took about 9 or 10 gallons round trip. Gas on the desert was about \$1.50 at the time. So I figured that it cost him about \$15 to make the round trip. The tin of tobacco cost about \$1.00 at the time. After the long trip to the ranch, we finally pulled into the yard. Tom wasn't there! Thank God.

"Let's go."

"Where?"

"Out to the tool bin!" Not a word was spoken. Joe calmly reached into the tool bin and grabbed five nuts, and five bolts?? "This is what my tin of tobacco cost. We are now even." Forget about the \$15 in gas. Forget about the time it took to drive all that way and endure all the bad bumps on the road. To him, this made everything O.K.

The Hawk And The Frog

The next story is one that you will question whether or not this really happened, or could happen. It is simply called "The Hawk And The Frog."

Early one evening we were all sitting around the pond watching the ducks swim. Joe had built a bird perch out in the middle of the pond. It stood about 2 feet high. On the bottom was another perch that was about 4 inches out of the water. I looked at this "marvel" that was sitting out in the middle of the pond and couldn't figure out why the 4 inch perch?? I didn't have long to wait. Out of nowhere, a hawk landed on the "high" perch. I could see this black object that was moving in the water like a miniature submarine. If I could add music to the scene, picture the music from "Jaws." As the miniature "Sub" approached the 4 inch perch, it pulled itself up out of the water and then carefully positioned itself at just the right place. Now, the stage is set.

Joe casually said, "I'll bet that frog can take down the hawk." The bet was on. No way was that frog going to tackle that hawk. O.K., here we go. The "hawk" was eyeballing the frog as his next meal. The "frog" was eyeballing the hawk as his next meal. From where I sat, it looked like a Mexican standoff. IN fact, it appeared they were trying to stare each other to death.

What happened next is really hard to believe. In a blink of an eye, the frog jumped up, grabbed the hawk by the head, and hit the water all in one motion. I had never seen anything like that happen before. I don't know who was more surprised, us, or the hawk. The frog wasn't through yet. He had pulled the hawk down under the water. We knew something was going on. The only question was, who was going to come up the winner? Who would win the bet? The waves stopped, the birds quit singing, and a deadly silence came over the Black Rock Desert. Now they had spent about one and a half minutes in this deadly struggle. Time was running out for someone, but who? Like a submarine emerging from the depths, up comes the hawk! But...he was laying face down and his wings were extended on the water. The head looked like that of a bald eagle, no feathers anywhere.

My guess is the reason that the frog didn't swallow him was that the bird was too big or maybe he tasted a little funny. Who knows? The suspense was over for my brother and I. Joe had won the bet. Oh! I am sorry, I forgot to tell you that it was a "French bullfrog" which, by the way, was as big as a Chihuahua!

Have you ever been to a place and found yourself saying to folks that you really can't describe the feeling of being there? You tell them they have to be there themselves to really know what it feels like. Well, that is what the Black

Black Rock Desert

(Continued from page 7)

Rock is like. The quiet solitude that you feel in this place, I have never felt in any other place. There are some places on this earth that give you a good feeling by just being there. This is one of those places. My four years on the Black Rock will always bring a smile to my face when I think of all the crazy times that we had there. There is no place on earth like it. It is truly one of a kind.

THE DEATH ROUTE

They sat or stood around the fire, and by its light the thoughtful faces of the older men revealed the importance of the decision which must be made.

During the past week, rumors had come back along the line of wagons about a new trail which offered not only a shorter distance to the valleys of California but would bypass the dreaded Forty Mile Desert. The pioneers had come to this point this afternoon. The deeper ruts were heading south toward the Humboldt River, while the newer ruts headed west toward the unknown.

The older men were undecided and cautious. They had examined the tracks and had pointed out that for every wagon that had taken the new trail, hundreds had followed the old one. Would it be wiser and safer to stay on the established route? That was the decision that they would have to make.

The young men, welcoming a gamble which might save weeks, argued that it was late in the year and pointed out what had happened to the Donner party a year before when almost all of them perished on the mountain.

The fire had burned the last of its fuel before the decision was made. The next day, the wagons would head west to follow a trail that was destined to become known as "The Death Route." The year was 1849.

It is not possible that one person alone was responsible for the misinformation which caused the 1849 disaster, but many historical accounts credit Peter Lassen. Lassen was born in Denmark and migrated to the U.S.

In 1843, he received a land grant in the Sacramento Valley. Hoping to bring emigrants to his ranch, he went east and acted as a guide to bring people west to settle on his land. This was in 1847-48. He knew of the Applegate Trail but had blazed a trail through the Black Rock that would lead others to follow who were not as fortunate as he.

From Lassen's boasting of the shorter route, another party would try and follow his route. That was a mistake. Alonzo Delano, a writer with the ill fated wagon train, would document the things that happened next. The party started from Lassen's Meadows. The name is deceiving because this is in the middle of the desert. From there it was another 40 miles to Rabbit Hole Springs which had the promise of water - if it hadn't dried up.

Sure enough, when they hit Rabbit Hole, there were only a few sips left for the people. The animals had nothing to drink. The party left Rabbit Hole Springs with anxious hearts and the realization that they were really in trouble.

Alonzo Delano wrote, "As I walked on slowly and with effort, I encountered a great many animals perishing for want of food and water. Some would be gasping for breath, others - unable to stand - would issue low moans as I came upon them. Showing intense agony, the poor horse or oxen would stagger alongside of me with a low sound as if begging for a drop of water. I was helpless. For I myself was in need of that precious drink of water.

Our party was now on the forbidding Black Rock, there was no turning back. I had secured a little water from Rabbit Hole in a rubber flask that was made in India and was saving it for an emergency. Never did I realize that what lay ahead of me would test my love for my fellow man."

Delano goes on, "I came upon a wagon. Seated in the wagon was a young woman with a small child. The little boy was crying for water. The poor mother with tears running down her cheeks was trying to pacify the little sufferer. 'Where is your husband?' I inquired.

'He has gone on with the cattle in search of water, but I think we will all die before he returns. My son and I have not seen a drop of water in days. I think we will die before he returns. I can not endure it much longer.'

'Keep up a stout heart. I have a little water left, and you are welcome to it.'

'God bless you--God bless you,' she said, grasping the flask eagerly.

{This is where we all can see that the love that this woman had for her child would be the greatest love of all. Putting him first.}

'Here, my child, here is water. The gift of life is now in your hands.'

'Thanks to this kind man who has given us his last drink of water.'

{In the story, you can see how each one put the other ahead of themselves. I live by what I call Bob's commandment to himself. God First. His fellow man second. This includes wife and children and the people that need help in this world. Then I can look at myself and say that Bob has lived his life like the people in the story. Putting them ahead of himself. Now I am at peace with my God and myself.}

"Before she had tasted a drop, she gave it all to her child which was a little more than a teacup. Even in distress and misery, a mother's love is for her children, rather than herself."

This all happened in 1849. What has happened to morals that they had then. "Where have all the flowers gone, gone to graveyards everyone." That is a song of the sixties that may say how we have changed our way of thinking. Let us all think of the story and get to know its meaning. We all should be concerned for one another and learn to live in this world and to learn to help one another when someone is in need. Maybe one day, we will be the person that is reaching for the cup of water and we can say, "God bless you and thank you for your kindness."

The End

October's Gemstone is Opal

We know the people of ancient India valued opal as a precious stone because the Sanskrit name "Upala" stood for just that meaning. The Romans modified it to "Opalus," today's opal. This lovely silica gem, the October birthstone for centuries, has not decreased in value.

While superstitions hinting of bad luck befalling opal wearers seem to be of recent origin (some say a Sir Walter Scott novel!), some prejudice must have arisen from opal's sensitivity to sudden temperature changes, aridity, its brittleness and delicacy despite a hardness of 5 1/2 to 6 1/2.

All opal contains water to some degree, more in precious opal contributing to its translucency. Australian studies in 1966 with an electron microscope explain the "play of light" as produced by microscopic spherules layered within the stone which diffract rather than absorb light. These ultra fine grids return only the purest hues accounting for the intensity of color.

Opal silica carried by water is deposited wherever space is available, not infrequently replacing wood (opalized wood). It is often associated with volcanic rocks.

The following, taken from an old Gems & Minerals magazine, describes a safe environment for a precious specimen:

Opal specimens may be mounted in the globe containers, with a plastic base, originally designed to hold flowers. Use an odd piece of petrified wood for mounting the specimen. Do not use ordinary wood, as, after a time it will discolor the water. - Donna D. Hoffman, Sacramento, California

Submitted by Michelle Sebresos

(from The Rockhouser 10/98)



A Poetic Memorial Tribute To Harriette Breitman

My Mom, My Best Friend
By: Jody Fernandez

I never realized losing you would hurt so bad.
You always told me you were the best friend I ever had.

Of course there's no reason to put up a fight,
because in that truth, Mom you were right.

A child watches a parent's every move,
and indelible ink is written upon each groove.
These are the things I've learned from you.
The legacy you left, I hold so true.

You had your way of bringing sunshine into a room,
that drove away all sadness and gloom.
You looked for the silver lining in every cloud,
And seldom did I ever see you haughty or proud.

You were misunderstood, put down, and kicked around,
and by seeking God, your peace you found.
You pushed on when others would have easily given up,
and somehow life dealt you another bitter cup.

So then you carved beautiful things out of rock,
and birthed amazing creations to all our shock.
I'm sure there is a lesson there,
that Our Creator wants us to be made aware.

Your heart was always filled with hope,
and that was the means by which you did cope.
You were an example to us all,
especially how to triumphantly recover from a fall.

You instilled in me a desire to learn,
and a will to better myself at every turn.
Knowing that you believed in me,
gave me wings and set me free.

I'm proud of every investment you made in me,
and you're right, apples don't fall too far from the tree!
I only wished I could have eased your pain,
with every truth that I did gain.

But, I thank you for taking my Lord, as your own,
and giving me the peace of knowing, you're home.
And now, my dear darling mother, my best friend
Watch for me, wait for me, for I'll be there to embrace
you again!