

The Opal Express

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



Member

Member



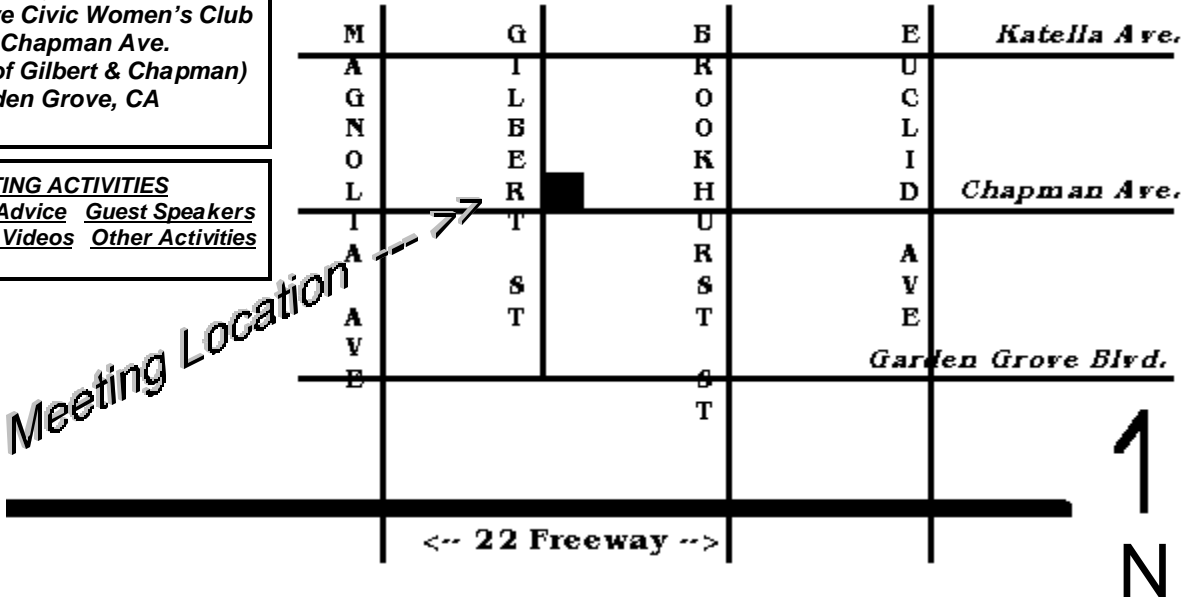
Volume #32 Issue #04 April 2000

**General meeting Thursday
 April 13 7PM**

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



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
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Russ Madsen	Editor	(562) 425-9788	email 76550.1366@compuserve.com
American Opal Society website		http://www.opalsociety.org	

PS. I'd like to start an internet directory of AOS members. If you have an opal related website, or have an email address you'd like to share with other opal folks, please email me at: bova@bovagems.com

Hello all! This is your personal invitation to join **The Opal List**. We are **Doc and Liz McKay** and we are the moderators of a new discussion group for opal lovers. We invite all of you to join our group. Joining is simple. If you go to our web site at <http://opalopal.com>, there is a sign up form that sends your email address to Listbot for inclusion on the list. You can then send your messages to The Opal List through Listbot or you can send them directly to us at opal@opalopal.com.

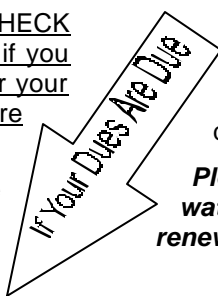
Our goal is to provide a place where you can share knowl-

edge and seek advice about: cutting opal, identifying opal, pricing cabs or any other even relatively pertinent topic. It is not our intent to limit what topics can be discussed on The Opal List. We want The Opal List to be something that benefits all participants. We also post photos of List Members items for discussion on our web site on a page named Show and Tell. The items posted there at this time include a "mystery stone" for identification, a finished pair of opal earrings, and a faceted opal. Take a look. Please do consider joining The Opal List. We are positive that many members of this group have a great deal of knowledge to share with other opal lovers. We would love to have instructions written on any number of topics for inclusion on The Opal List. Back them up with photos and we will make a page of your instructions on the web site. So, run to your computer and sign up. We will look forward to hearing your ideas.

Liz McKay

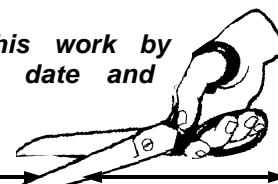
Are Your Dues Due Now? PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

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\news\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)

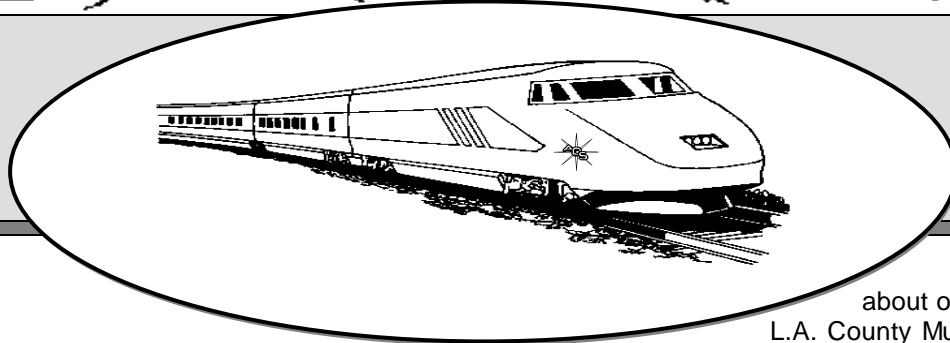
Number of badges ordered _____
(\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

The Opal Express

APRIL 2000

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Volume 32, Issue 4



President's Message from Carol Bova

Love of opal is not a new phenomenon. Opal lore has been recorded through the centuries, and the George Frederick Kunz book, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, recounts many opal stories. For example, an eighth-century book on the meaning of dreams records that dreaming of opals means great possessions. Now that could be read as possessing great things, or being greatly possessed, which could apply to opal either way!

For the internet connected, in addition to our Opal Society website, <http://www.opalsociety.org>, Opal Society members **Liz and Doc McKay** have started a new emailing list called, The Opal List (details will follow at the end of this column).

And "**Opal Bob**" Halahan shared his Black Rock Desert stories online recently on the LA-Rocks list, and reached some folks new to us who are opal lovers.

If you start talking opal (or should I say, keep talking opal?), you find opal enthusiasts everywhere. As **American Opal Society** members, encourage these folks to join you in belonging to the AOS. If we are to remain a vibrant and useful organization, we must continue to grow in numbers. I'd like every member to take on the personal goal of bringing in 2 new members this year. Now with all the opal people you know and will meet this year, that shouldn't be a difficult task at all.

If you all will work at doing this, we will more than double the AOS in one year! This will mean we can take on more educational responsibilities and participate in more events to share information

about opal, like the AOS presentation to the L.A. County Museum of Natural History's Gem and Mineral Council last year.

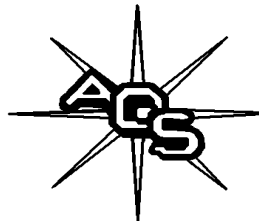
If you need membership forms sent to anyone, just call, email or write to us! We'll have a packet prepared and sent out. If you'd like some blank forms to have at a retail site, or at gem show booths, just let us know!

Looking forward to seeing all you L.A./Orange County folks at the April meeting. The meetings (including door prizes!) have been really fun lately, so come on out!

Opally yours,

Carol

(Continued on page 1)



DATES TO REMEMBER

General Meeting
Thurs April 13th
7PM

Board of Directors
Mon April 10th 7PM

AOS
Opal & Gem Show
Nov 4th - 5th

Work Shop Information...

The LOCATION for the Opal Society workshop is 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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"Green Hand George"

Not done with this character yet. Let me give you a little more background on him. He had come to the Virgin Valley some 20 years before I did. That would make it about 1964 when he arrived. Before that, he attended college and was a chemical engineer. He was sure no dummy.

George had inherited the family fortune brought from England by his aunt. By the time he hit the valley, he had more than a half a million in the bank. When I met him, he was almost in rags and living in a "Bomb" shelter. It's not that he lost his money, he never spent it. It was well known around the valley that he was "Loaded."

After a while, he decided that the cost of food was getting too expensive. To him something had to be done. Some cheaper type of food would have to be discovered. This is the story as I heard it from different people around the Virgin Valley.

Now "Green Hand" was getting along in years and at that time was about 80 years old. He was in great shape for his age. He could dig a 10 ft. hole in a day. I saw him do this.

Time passed and it was time for him to go down to the DMV to have himself evaluated to see how fit he was to drive a car. They were giving him all the tests and he was passing them all with flying colors. Then it was time for the eye test. Everyone knows that as you get older, your eyes begin to fail - at least a little bit. Well, let me tell you, they gave him the test and he came up with 20-20 eyesight! I'll bet you are wondering how the cost of food has anything to do with the eye test? I am getting to that.

The instructor congratulated him on his 20-20 vision and asked him, "To what do you attribute your good vision?"

"Dog Food!" George then went on to explain, "A few years ago, my vision started to fail a little. At the time I was looking for a cheaper source of food and came up with dog food. I killed two birds with one stone. I got cheaper meals and my vision got better."

Now he had the guy from the DMV scratching his head and thinking. When the DMV guy couldn't stand the suspense any longer, he asked George the question that was on his mind.

"What Brand?" True story - as related by the locals.

Green Hand had invited my brother and I over to his place one day to see how he mined his opal. He took us into his "Home"

and we were really surprised! The temperature outside was around 95 degrees and it was a cool 75 inside the shelter. I had seen this on the Black Rock when my brother and I went over to the other side to visit Ken one night. Ken's cabin was built three fourths inside the hill. This kept the whole cabin cool in the summer and fairly warm in the winter. It works both ways.

This also was the day that we were to film George mining and see some of the material he was getting. We finished filming everything and he invited us in for a "Drink." This was to be a very special drink that only he could come up with. Here is where the story gets good.

Green Hand had been living on the desert all this time and had learned to be a survivalist. He had some old wine sitting around for years and wasn't quite sure if it was fit for man or beast. Being a thrifty type of guy the idea of throwing away something never entered his mind. If there was a way to prove the wine was fit to drink he wouldn't have to get rid of it. {Are you starting to get the picture?} We were going to be the guinea pigs (again).

He planned to kill two birds with one stone. He would be the perfect host and if we got sick on his wine, out it would have to go. Now came the test.

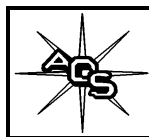
Green Hand, "I've got some vintage wine here, would you like to sample some of it?"

His partner Paul was quietly sitting in the corner sipping on a beer. Paul was smiling when he kind of looked at us and gave a nod of his head. We didn't quite get the nod right. We thought he said yes, but later found out he meant no. Don't forget all this time, we knew nothing of George's "Vintage" wine.

"O.K. we will try some of your wine." My brother isn't a drinker and wouldn't know if it was good or bad. This sets up the second part of the story. I took a few swallows and politely asked Paul for something to wash down what I had just swallowed. He quickly gave me a beer which I hoped would neutralize the bad taste. In the meantime my brother, the social drinker, really liked the "Stuff." he drank about four glasses!

When Green Hand saw that my brother wasn't going to drop

(Continued on page 6)



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.



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. ❁

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(Deadline for items: 15th of the month prior to each issue)

ITEMIZATION

ITEM: Tourmalines stolen from Colby College on March 7, 2000 Professor Donald Allen at Colby College (Waterville, Maine) reported that somebody broke into one of their exhibit cases in the geology building March 7, and stole many of their finest tourmaline crystals from Berry-Havey Quarry in Poland, Maine.

These specimens were collected during the early mining at Berry-Havey. They are superb terminated emerald-green gemmy crystals, typically 24 inches long! A large and choice watermelon tourmaline crystal from Newry (another old-time specimen) was also taken. Other showy minerals of much less value were left behind, so the theft appears to have been done by somebody who knew the importance of these specimens.

Please watch for these specimens in the marketplace and forward this information to other knowledgeable dealers, collectors and clubs. This message was originally circulated on the internet on March 8th in the hopes that it would arrive one step ahead of the thieves if they try to sell the crystals.

Anyone with leads on this case should call or e-mail Donald Allen at the Geology Department at Colby College. His number is (207) 872-3249.

E-mail: dallen@colby.edu

Woodrow Thompson, of the Maine Geological Survey advised that because of this theft, the exhibit of these remarkable tourmalines, which had been planned for this spring's Maine Mineral Symposium, has been cancelled.

ITEM: DOOR PRIZES Wes and Frann Roth donated the headlight Optivisor door prize won by **Clare Gagnon** at the March General Meeting. Thanks Wes and Frann, and congratulations Clare.

I'm sorry to say I can't read my notes very well and the winner of the magnifier lamp will have to remain anonymous. Here's hoping the lamp will make up for this oversight. Ulp.

ITEM: AOS Club Show Case two items: First, we have been invited again this year to present an opal case at the Searchers Gem & Mineral Society show coming up the first weekend in May. In order to accomplish this we need opal from members for the display. We had a very nice club case at our show last November. Let's see if we can do the same again. For those interested in presenting examples from your collection, be assured very stringent security will be in place to protect the contents of all cases at the Searchers show including 24 hour guards.

The second Club Case item involves an effort to re-establish the fine permanent display put together from donations by AOS members many years ago. This included examples of rough and finished opals from a variety of locations around the world. We are presently looking for opal in matrix, sedimentary opal, volcanic opal, rough and fin-

ished stones from the many Australian opal areas, likewise from the Virgin Valley and other opal sites around the world. We also would like examples of opal doublets and triplets, perhaps finished jewelry with set opal stones. This will be a permanent AOS display case intended to give an excellent overview of the wonderful world of the Queen of Gems. Individuals and dealers who contribute will be recognized in the display so if you'd like your treasured beauties to be shared with the opal loving rockhound community with a permanent place in the Opal Society club case this is a great opportunity to do so while helping the club add to awareness of opal.

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: March Guest Speaker Clare Gagnon gave a very nice talk on the basics of carving. Clare suggested alabaster as a good starter material. It is readily available and is workable with household tools. He offered also soapstone which brings the added benefit of actually sharpening your knife as you carve. Alabaster is gypsum and soapstone is talc which accounts for its soft, slippery feel.

Always begin with a plan. Transfer a pattern to your material with an outline and begin removing everything that isn't part of the final result. Simple subtraction!

Do not use power tools on soft material due to the health hazard of dust.

Tips for carving a face...look for "planes". If the head is sideways, there will usually be 3 planes: (a) the mouth-nose, (b) eye-cheek area, and (c) ear-hair. Carve generally down to each plane then work into the details. Cave Jasper was mentioned at this point as another carving medium because it has layers that often lend themselves to cameo type carving.

For Master Carvers there are 2 materials of choice: jade which is tough and slow going and opal which is softer than jade and takes good detail. Clare mentioned that opalized wood can make excellent carvings. He advised he most often uses diamond tools with opal. Another useful carving material is the family of reconstituted substances such as turquoise.

Some carvers enjoy working in great detail while others prefer to achieve a more representational or symbolic result.

For those interested in carving the **Gem Carvers Guild of America** has a list of materials and appropriate tools for each. They also have advice on polishing. Clare mentioned orangewood and bamboo sticks are two good carriers for diamond to polish fine details.

He suggested carving opal dry while using a breathing mask. The stone won't overheat because quite a lot of material is being removed with each cut. It has also been suggested to work various areas rather than stay in one place on the opal for too long at a time.

"Some carvers enjoy working in great detail while others prefer to achieve a more representational or symbolic result."

Thank you Clare for the fine talk on carving!

Safety Report

by Cathy Gaber

Hatchet Job

There one was a fellow named Ratchet,
 Who tried to break rocks with a hatchet.
 But don't be a fool
 And use the right tool.
 You don't want to catch it like Ratchet!

Here's another safety item...

How To Survive A heart Attack When Alone

(Some people are alone when they suffer a heart attack, this article seems in order.)

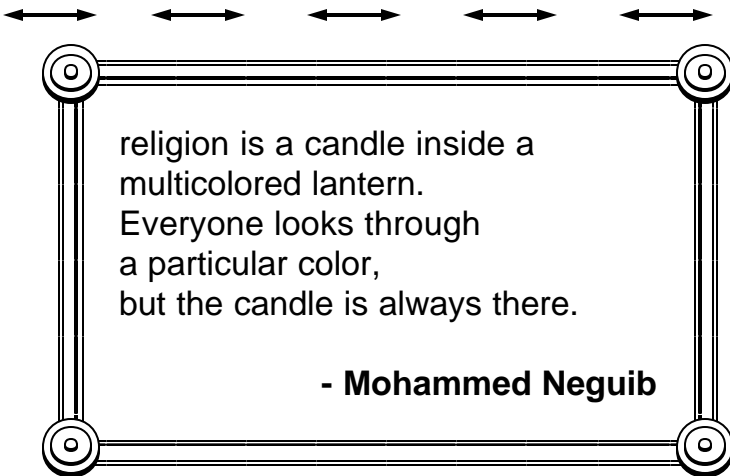
Without help, the person whose heart stops beating properly and who begins to feel faint has only about 10 seconds left before losing consciousness. However, these victims can help themselves by coughing repeatedly and very vigorously.

A deep breath should be taken before each cough, and the cough must be deep and prolonged, as when producing sputum from deep inside the chest. A breath and a cough must be repeated about every two seconds without let up until help arrives, or until the heart is felt to be beating normally again.

Deep breaths get oxygen into the lungs and coughing movements squeeze the heart and keep the blood circulating. The squeezing pressure on the heart also helps it regain normal rhythm. In this way, a heart attack victim can get to a phone and between breaths, call for help.

1-Deep Breath 2-Deep Prolonged Cough 3-Breath/Cough 2 sec

(from Staurolite 10/99)



Workshop schedule

Be sure to check here for workshop schedule updates. The dates listed below are those available to the AOS in our 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.**

April 2000

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.

(Continued from page 3)

over dead, and had given the "vintage wine" enough of a test, he didn't offer him anymore. Later on we found out the true story of Green Hand's "Vintage Wine" hospitality. We all had a good laugh. Good old George, anything to save a nickel.

By now, he is about 90 years old. And I know one thing for sure – when he meets his maker, he will have 20-20 eye sight!

The first (and last) "Mud Volleyball Tournament" of VV

On the fourth of July one year, we had our first (and last) "Mud Volleyball Tournament." Boy was it fun! The plan was originated by the owner of the Denio Junction Cafe. And as you will see, it was a great plan; in fact it was one of the greatest I have ever seen. This was going to be a volleyball tournament that would never be forgotten by those who saw or participated in the game.

The first step was to make the slipperiest surface volleyball was ever played on. They found the "Crazy Material" in Virgin Valley. It is called diatomaceous earth. It is composed of millions of tiny sea creatures know as "diatoms." This stuff runs all through the valley and is the clay from which the opal is mined.

This is a very unusual clay. When it becomes wet, it swells up to five times its volume and becomes as slippery as a greased pig! Are you starting to see the plot develop here? Each winter Keith Hodson of the Rainbow Ridge mine would close it down after carefully leaving furrows about one to one and a half feet high over the length of his extensive tailings pile. These furrows sit there all winter long.

Now here is where an amazing story begins. As the winter rains hit the diatomaceous earth, the earth expands pushing up opal toward the tops of the furrows. The constant wet and dry cycles eventually push all the small opals to the top of the furrows. I found out later that Keith was being hounded to give people the exact day that he would open up so that the first people to arrive there could just walk along the furrows and pick up all the opal.

Now back to the original story. The order was given to get that real slippery dirt that comes from Virgin Valley. Two truck loads were taken to the Junction. A bulldozer dug three one foot deep pits. Then each was filled with the "Famous" dirt. Finally water was added to make what was surely the slickest surface ever for playing a game of volleyball.

In the practice sessions, everyone was falling all over the place while trying to hit the ball. The audience was cracking up. To make things worse, 30-40 mph gusts of wind started coming up unexpectedly. Following this came a huge dust storm, billowing with loose dirt it had picked up.

Well, let me tell you! Not only did you have to judge where the ball was coming down, you could barely see it. Then to hit it, you had to be able to stand up in the slick mud. On that day I think someone was smiling down from the heavens and having a real good laugh along with the rest of us. I think a few gusts of wind were thrown in just for the fun of it.

Somehow our team managed to get second place and a tee shirt to remember the day when we all played in the mud and had a chance to become little kids again. I will never forget the first and last "Mud Volleyball Tournament" of Virgin Valley.

A Little Bit Of Heaven

In my nine years at the valley while staying at the CCC campground, I saw a lot of people come and go. Some became good friends, some I never saw again. It was always a pleasure to come home in the evening, hit the pond, have a nice dinner, then see all the "Finds" of the day. There were a lot of Oooh's and Aaah's all around.

I hardly ever noticed any envy, just lots of genuine admiration for this beautiful stone. It didn't seem to matter who owned it as long as they could look and admire God's handiwork. I had completed the Black Rock Desert film and a good portion of the Virgin Valley film.

Sometimes in the evening after dinner, I hooked up the 12 volt power supply from my van and showed these movies. Often 20-30 people arrived to watch. At the end of the viewing everyone would come up and say how much that they really enjoyed this.

As I look back, these people were miners and I think that is probably why they enjoyed the movies. To other people, folks who are "city people," these are just movies of somebody doing something. It's a shame that these people can't look at the movies and appreciate some of the beautiful things to enjoy in this world.

Their world is composed of "city stuff." I remember the movie "The Earthling" starring William Holden. It is one of the best movies I have ever seen. In the movie, he is walking through the woods trying to teach this kid "Ricky Schroder" to listen to the sounds of the animals in the forest, trying to make him aware of his surroundings.

He said, and this line is burn't into my mind, "My God – listen boy, there is a whole symphony going on here." That's the way that I see some people. They're letting life pass them by and missing all the beautiful sounds of the forest. You will only pass this way once. Open your eyes and look. Open your ears and listen. There is a beautiful symphony going on and you don't want to miss it!

The nine years that I spent in the Virgin Valley are precious to me. Watching the Peregrine falcons fly the Thousand Creek Gorge. Seeing the Redtailed hawk fly in his domain.

In the evening, I listened to the bull frogs croak as they sang their songs that told of the ending of another beautiful day. To hear the sound of coyotes howling after they made their kill for the evening is something that can only be experienced in the wilds.

Yes, and then running side by side on the desert with the Pronghorn antelope in a race that we would never win. These were the sights and sounds of the Virgin Valley. I was there at the concert. I saw. I listened to the symphony and heard the sounds that made me come alive and feel that I had experienced a "Little Bit Of Heaven On Earth."

The End ❁

(A very special thanks from The American Opal Society to "Opal Bob" Halahan for sharing with us these stories of adventure, intrigue, and good times from his years of mining opal on the Black Rock Desert and in the Virgin Valley, Nevada. -

Sourcing Rough Opal

by Larissa A. Williams

One of the biggest problems facing an opal enthusiast can be where to find rough opal. After many years of networking, most hobbyists have their contacts built up among dealers and cutters. But what about those of us first starting out? Or when we're stuck in an area without any local contacts? How do we find opal then? In this article are listed a few simple ways to find opal without actually digging it up ourselves. ;-)

Gem Shows

Nearby gem shows that opal dealers go to are a wonderful source, as you can actually look over the material they have and see the quality for yourself. Most dealers are also very nice about letting you pick through groups of stones and buy individual pieces. Of course, picking out the individual stones like that will generally cost more than the parcel method, but sometimes it is well worth it to get exactly the stone you want. Most opal dealers will have a list of what conventions they plan to be at every year. If there is a particular dealer you are interested in buying from, you can also "suggest" a convention in your area and if there is enough interest (i.e. possibility of making enough money to cover the transportation costs) then they might come out to your area.

Bob's Rock Shop keeps an excellent listing of convention dates and places.

<http://www.rockhounds.com/>

<http://www.rockhounds.com/rockgem/showlist.html>

Going to the American Opal Society's yearly convention in Los Angeles gives an excellent source of multiple opal dealers all in the same place, not to mention all the wonderful exhibits and symposiums that are usually presented. For a future long-term relationship with rough opal, the most important thing to do is to get the names and cards of the dealers there and finding out where they are going to be in the next year. The AOS convention is usually held the first week in November.

<http://www.opalsociety.org/>

As always, another wonderful place to be every year is Arizona for Quartzite and the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show held every February for several weeks. Hundreds of dealers from all over the world go to this, and a lot have come straight from the mines and cutters with "never seen before" opals. Tucson can be the *prime* spot for the best rough opal. Be prepared to spend a lot of time, and a lot of money!

Opal by Mail

There are several opal dealers who sell parcels of rough opal through the mail. For stay-at-homes like me, this can be an excellent resource. One way to find mail-based opal dealers is to buy a copy of Rock & Gem, then ask for a price and source listing from every dealer mentioned in the

ads. This will take a day of work and about 30 or so letters, but the resources you get back are usually worth it as you then have several comparable sources. A first time buy from any mail order place should be done within a strict limited money range, and very carefully mark down on your list what the quality was of the stones that you ordered. For example, almost everybody has different levels of 'quality' from potch on up. Pick a mid-range comparable quality and price on the lists, buy equal amounts from the most likely sources, and then see who has the better product, and mark it on your list. Most serious mail order opal dealers will also offer to send samples and are eager to communicate with the buyer as to your individual needs.

Opal by Web

The newest and most "with-it" resource for finding sources. The web can be a mixed bundle when trying to evaluate what type of rough opal to buy. There are many dealers who now have websites, and some of them will even put pictures of their rough parcel material up on the site for viewing. However, we all know just how hard it can be to take a good picture of an opal – let alone the rough material! One of the advantages of the web is that a good dealer will update their site often with lists of parcels and prices, and some of them will send out emails when they get new shipments in. For a long-term relationship, this is a very good way of knowing the source. When first buying from web-based dealers, as a general rule, treat them in the same manner as the mail-based dealers. Bookmark the sites, compare basic quality and prices, and then buy small quantities of the same range. When the opal arrives, mark down on your sheet how the sources compared. To find web-based dealers, do a search for "rough opal" on any of the web search-engines, or check out the links on the AOS website or Bob's Rock Shop. ☼



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Spencer Idaho Opal

(a recent interchange on *Lapidary Digest* discussed handling Spencer, Idaho opal rough. The questions put to the list involved not only techniques of producing opal doublets and triplets from Spencer material but also addressed what type of equipment might be best for the task)

The questions: (from *Lapidary Digest* #268 03/25/00)

"...I have been making cabochons for about four years, and have a used 10" flat lap. It came with a master iron lap, but no other grinding disks. Are there any *Lapidary Digest* subscribers who have made triplets from Spencer opal? I hope someone can offer suggestions about processing the rough into finished cabochons. I would also appreciate help on equipment needs. I have a 10" flat lap with an iron master lap, but don't have any diamond disks yet.

How much will I have to spend to get the proper diamond laps? Are any of the less expensive diamond laps any good? Can I use silicon carbide disks and achieve the same results? -Jed

The answers: (from *Lapidary Digest* #269 04/01/00)

Regarding saws, one contributor offered...The saw to use is something like a Faceting type with a thin blade (I use a 5" blade that is .004" thick in a Rock Rascal saw). Then I hold the piece of Opal by hand and cut between the color bands, hopefully parallel to the color band. Then I use a 6" All-U-Need to cut down to the color...

Lapidary Digest editor Hale Sweeney provided an additional comment on sawing opal...Hale wrote, "Just an added piece of advice about sawing. Hold the opal with the first two fingers of each hand, pressing on each side of the opal with your first and second fingers, and possibly add the thumbs lightly on top of the opal. Then facing the edge of the blade, lower the opal toward the table top, but support it away from the table top with your third and fourth fingers, which are bent under. That way, the opal does not touch the table top, and you have excellent control of it during sawing."

It bears noting here that Hans Durstling's article "The Kitchen Table Opal Triplet" was mentioned. This article is in the archives of *The Eclectic Lapidary*, internet ezine published by AOS president, Carol Bova, and was reprinted in these pages two years ago.

Extensive advice and commentary was presented in the next item, also from *Lapidary Digest* #269 04/01/00

...I've been cutting Spencer opal as well as opal from other locations for some time now. I still like silicon carbide for the final work as it's less aggressive than diamond. The key to triplets is proper orientation of the fire band (especially with Spencer opal where the band is sometimes thinner than a piece of paper) The brightest fire band must be located and oriented absolutely parallel to the backing material.

To identify and isolate the brightest fire band it's best to work in direct sunlight. If direct sunlight is not available, the next best light source is a 100 watt clear incandescent light. I find it helpful to sand any jagged edges off the rough to

make it easier to see the fire all the way around. Keep the stone wet until the fire band is located. Turn the stone so that you are holding the fire band horizontal & rotate it to make sure it runs completely through the stone. If there are multiple fire bands identify the brightest one. After you have done this take a fine tip indelible felt marker and carefully trace on the fire band completely around the stone.

Dop the rough opal to a round wood dowel, large enough to provide a strong support for the stone. Mount the dop in the vice of the trim saw so that the marked line is parallel to the saw blade. (Set the vice so that the cut will be about 4 or 5mm beyond the marker line.) Make the cut.

Remove the opal from the dop. Lap on a flat lap with 180 mesh diamond lap or 100 grit silicon carbide disk to remove the bulk of the potch. Be sure to check your progress often. It is very important to stay parallel to the fire band. As you cut if you notice one side is thicker than the other you can control the cutting by applying more pressure to the thicker side. Once the fire just begins to

show switch to the 220 mesh diamond lap or 400 grit silicon carbide and cut approximately one third of the way into the fire band.

After you have lapped down to the fire band clean the stone with alcohol and inspect it for any fractures. If you find a fracture you have the option of treating the stone with fracture sealer or cutting the stone to eliminate the fracture. (The quartz will not have any fractures although it will magnify any obvious blemishes in the opal below). If you choose to seal a fracture use a good two-part sealer such as Opticon. Apply a coat of the sealer without the hardener and put the stone in the oven at 150 degrees for 15 minutes. Remove the stone from the oven and wipe clean with a soft lint free cloth.

To prepare the backing, cut a slab of Basenite approximately 1/8" thick, large enough to extend beyond the opal 1/16" on all sides. Lap both sides flat on the 180 diamond lap (100 grit sc.) followed by the 400 mesh lap. Wipe the slab clean with alcohol and set aside to dry. Place the Basenite slab on a piece of waxed paper about the size of a note card. In a plastic bottle cap or on a piece of doubled aluminum foil squeeze out a dab about the size of a kidney bean of both the epoxy and the hardener. Use a slow setting, crystal clear epoxy such as Epoxy-330. Carefully mix the epoxy slowly trying to avoid adding air bubbles. Allow the epoxy to sit for about two minutes, using a Popsicle stick transfer enough epoxy to the Basenite slab to cover the area which will hold the opal. Don't spread the epoxy, instead allow it to flow from the Popsicle stick onto the middle of the slab. Carefully take a tooth pick and gently push any air bubbles in the epoxy to the edge of the flow. You don't need a great deal of epoxy, just enough too lightly float the opal when it's placed on the slab. Gently place the opal on the slab and allow it to sink into the epoxy. Gently push the opal down onto the slab, squeezing out some of the excess epoxy. Set the assembly on a level surface and allow to cure for a minimum of 24 hours.

Go to the expandable drum, on the 100 grit belt, and sand back the edges of the Basenite until the edge of the opal is reached. Lap on the 180 mesh (100 grit SiC) until the fire from the band

(Continued on page 9)

After the epoxy has cured...dop the stone as you would any other opal...(and) cab with one slight difference. The girdle should be slightly beveled so the quartz cap slightly overhangs the backing...



(Continued from page 8)

closest to the backing starts to show. Be sure to check often to make sure you are staying truly parallel to the backing. Adjust the pressure as required to stay level. After the fire starts to show through switch to the 400 mesh diamond lap (or 400 grit SiC) and continue to lap the face of the opal until it has thinned to the thickness of about two pieces of paper. Wipe the start clean with alcohol and allow to dry. At this point you have two options. You can either use a commercial quartz top on your triplet or you can cut your own. If you opt to use a commercial top clean the surface of the opal with alcohol and allow to dry. If the opal shows any fractures apply a coat of Opticon and follow the same procedure as above. Select a commercial cap, which will fit as close as possible the size of the start. Next prepare another batch of epoxy using the same procedure as for gluing the opal to the backing. Follow the same procedure for gluing as before: gently place the quartz cap directly on top of the epoxy. Allow it to settle naturally, then gently push down on the cap to force out any remaining air bubbles (remember an air bubble will show up as an unwanted light reflection in your finished stone). Once you are satisfied all the air bubbles are out set the stone on a piece of wax paper on a level surface to dry for another 24 hours.

If you decide to make your own quartz top the approach will be somewhat different. If you want to cut a calibrated size stone now is the time to define the size. Mark it on the top of the opal start with a water proof fine tipped marker or aluminum pencil. On the cab unit sand the start to the marker line. Select a piece of optical grade quartz large enough to overhang the start by 1/8 inch all the way around. Wipe the opal with alcohol to remove any marks and set aside. If large enough, saw the quartz to approximately 1/4" thick. Lap to remove any saw marks. Lap both sides. Finish on the 400-mesh lap. The reason you want to lap both sides is so that you will be better able to see any bubbles which might be trapped in the epoxy before it sets up. Mix the epoxy as above and proceed as detailed above for commercial caps.

After the epoxy has cured for 24 hours you can dop the stone as you would any other opal & cut like any other cab with one slight difference. The girdle should be slightly beveled so the quartz cap slightly overhangs the backing (otherwise you'll get a black ring around your stone).

One final alternative, which I have had a chance to try myself, is a relatively new adhesive, which depends on the UV rays from sunshine to cure. The product is called "Crystal Clear Glass Adhesive" and is made by Duo, a division of Manic Corporation. It comes in .07 fl. Syringes. It's a thin, bubble-free adhesive, allows you to move it around before it set up, and is water clear. It's been talked about here on the digest before. I found it at ACE hardware. It cures exceptionally fast. I haven't been using it for very long so don't know how it will hold up ten years from now (I know the epoxy will).

I hope this helps,

Noel ☼

(from Lapidary Digest #268 03/25/00 & #269 04/01/00)

What's happening???

Calendar of Upcoming Events Dates and Locations of Shows

Apr 8 9AM-6PM Palomar Gem & Mineral Club, Redwood Senior Center, 13th Ave & Redwood St,

Apr 8 10AM-5PM Apr 9 10AM-4PM Paradise Gem & Mineral Club, Veterans Memorial Hall, Elliott &

Apr 8 10M-5PM Apr 9 10AM-4PM Puente Hills Gem & Mineral Club, Steinmetz Park, 1545 S.

Apr 15 9AM-6PM Apr 16 9AM-4PM Mojave Mineralogical Society, Boron High School Multi-purpose Room, Boron, CA

Apr 29 – Apr 30 9AM-5PM Antelope Valley and Palmdale Gem and Mineral Clubs, Antelope Valley Fairgrounds, Challenger Memorial hall, Lancaster, CA

May 6 10AM-7PM May 7 10AM-4:30PM Searchers Gem and Mineral Soc, Brookhurst Community

May 6 – 7 10AM-5PM Kern County Mineral Soc, Kern County Fairgrounds, Ming Ave & South P

May 19 – 20 – 21 Palomar Gem & Mineral Club, 1352 W Valley Pkwy (next to Sports Authority),

Aug 4 - 6 CFMS Gold & Gem Show, hosted by Valley Prospectors, Riverside Convention Center, Riverside, CA

☼ **Nov 4 10AM-7PM Nov 5 10AM-4PM** ☼

AOS Opal & Gem Show

**Quality Hotel 616 Convention Way,
Anaheim, CA**