

# The Opal Express

American Opal Society  
 P.O. Box 4875  
 Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875



Member

Member



Volume #32 Issue #07 July 2000

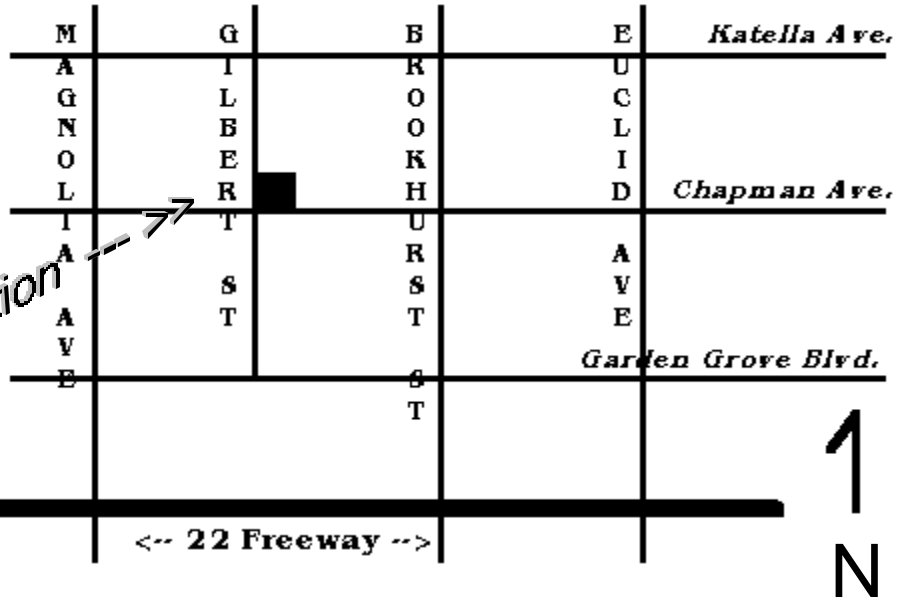
**General meeting Thursday  
 July 13 7PM**

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

*Meeting Location* →



Happy 4th AOS!!



## American Opal Society Officers

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American Opal Society website		<a href="http://www.opalsociety.org">http://www.opalsociety.org</a>	

By Margaret Malm

(while we have a fine virtual tour via the internet presented on Murray Willis' website - see page 4 of this issue, we continue here with a report of the real deal - touring the Australian opal fields with Barbara McCondra via Margaret Malm's report begun last month as our McCondra report)

Well! Did we make it through the flood to Yowah? You betcha!

In fact, although it was still a question of 'Flood Boat'? Or 'Flood Truck?'; by the time we got there the flood had receded very rapidly and we were able to drive across! Which was great, as it meant we could take our luggage with us!

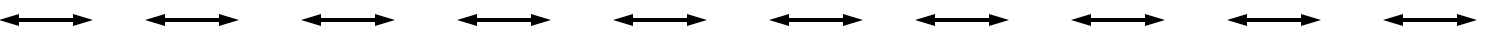
Our tourist luck again!

Yowah is very different from Lightning Ridge. Much

smaller, more intimate. Barbara knows everyone in town! And they were all eager to meet us -- and help us. The town is about 6 blocks long, and 2-3 blocks wide. Their water, like Lightning Ridges, is from an artesian well. But Yowah's yields hot water -- about 135 degrees. This is piped directly to the houses, and so water heaters are really not needed. They usually have a tank that they use to hold water for the "cold" water to cool, before using it. It is slightly sulfur-y, but not too bad.

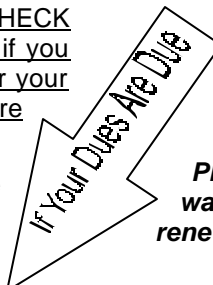
The mines are right across the road from the highway. Many are open cut, in contrast to Lightning Ridge where open cuts have recently been discouraged. But there are some underground ones, too; we visited one this afternoon. (NOT a tourist mine!) There are fifteen (yes, that's fifteen) shafts leading down into it. Part of the ground has been set aside as a "fossicking" area, where anyone can

(Continued on page 5)



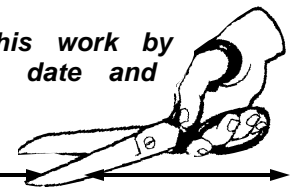
**Are Your Dues Due Now?** PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or the membership roster if you are listed. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

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 4875  
Garden Grove CA 92842-4875

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

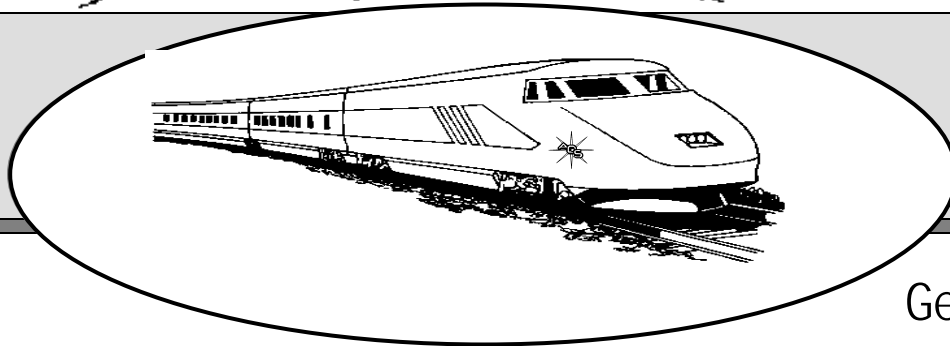
**NAME BADGE ORDER FORM: (OPTIONAL)**  
Number of badges ordered \_\_\_\_\_  
(\$5.00 EACH - includes engraving)  
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname or name of your opal related business.

# The Opal Express

JULY 2002

Published monthly by the American Opal Society

Volume 32, Issue 7



## General Meeting News

### President's Message from Carol Bova

Hope you're all having a hot and happy summer so far! I recently received a sample of common opal from Kansas for the American Opal Society's collection. It's a whitish to buttery yellow with gray to black dendrites, and I want to thank **Larry Davis** of *Davis Designs* in Wichita, KS, for sharing this with us.

It would be fun to see how many states (and countries!) we can gather samples from for the AOS collection. If we can gather a sufficient number, we can make up a permanent display to use at our own show and other local shows. If you have some opal, common or precious, you would like to add to the collection, please let any board member know. We will be happy to provide a donation acknowledgment letter for tax purposes.

The CFMS website hasn't picked up our **Opal & Gem Show** yet, but everything is moving right along for our show on November 4th & 5th. If you would be available to spend 1/2 to 1 hour offering hands-on advice on opal cutting to visitors at the show, please let us know! This is a new idea, and we can only implement it if enough members can pitch in to share their knowledge and experience.

Have an opal question or conundrum? Send it to the Board! We may not have all the answers, but we can give it a try!

Looking forward to seeing you at the July meeting!

Carol



#### DATES TO REMEMBER

General Meeting  
Thurs July 13th 7PM

Board Meeting  
Mon July 10th 7PM

AOS OPAL & GEM  
SHOW  
Nov 4th & 5th

**Door Prize and Raffle Drawings:** More unusual results for June. While **Bob Olinskas** took home almost the whole enchilada for two months running things may have changed but they didn't get very \*normal\*.

**Hisako Schlater** was asked to draw a Door Prize ticket for a set of jewelry files. Well enough, and I guess we can all sigh and say poor Bob...the winning ticket? **Hisako Schlater!**

If that weren't enough, amid joking cries of "fix" and "rigged" **Bob Dixon** then asked **Pete Goetz** to draw the ticket for the Raffle Prize, a nice carrying case. Ok, everybody, in unison now...pooorrr Bob. The winning ticket? Yep...**Pete Goetz**.

Come on out to the July meeting and see if it's your lucky night. Guests and friends are always welcome too!

### 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. ☼

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Dues Renewal	1	Itemization	4	Workshop Info	5	What's Happening?	6
An American Opalhollic in Paradise	1	Letters to the Editor	4	Safety Report	6	Diamond Buying Tips	7
McCondra Report	3	The Old Rockhound	4	Dispersion	6	Cutting Boulder Opal	8

# The McCondra Report

By Barbara McCondra

I'm heading back to Australia for the Yowah Opal Festival and the Lightning Ridge Gem Expo. Both are held in July every year. What an opal overload! Heaven. This year Lightning Ridge will also present a jewelry design award. Hosting the competition will be: the Opal Jewelry Design Awards Association. Their focus is on promoting the freeform cutting of Lightning Ridge opal to compliment conventional cutting. For years the standard cabochon cut dictated what was a "saleable" stone and many gem carats of valuable black opal color were ground away. Although most opal enthusiasts of the Northern Hemisphere have been contour and freeform cutting black opal for years, the international opal industry with a "gem" reputation has mostly continued to conform to the popular commercial market cabochon cuts in black opal. The Japanese market primarily dictated this because it was Lightning Ridge's main consumer of black opal.

However, observing the many valuable and collectible name stones of Lightning Ridge in the opal literature available today shows us large top gem quality named stones that were not always cabochoned. Australia's boulder opal industry developed a contour and free form cut that has been accepted internationally in the gem market for many years. Couple that with the burgeoning popularity of opal in emerging countries with spendable income, and voila! --- the time is ripe to give freeform contour cuts of the deliciously gorgeous black opal its due.

The LRMA (Lightning Ridge Miners' Association) March newsletter states, "These awards are to encourage buyers to establish export markets for freeform opal and jewelers nationally and internationally to create incredible designs for natural shapes."

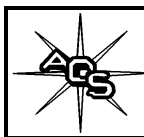
I think all this is well and good for many people be they miners, merchants, or jewelry clients, but there may be a downside. The hobby lapidary who has freeformed Lightning Ridge for years and cut lovely gems in this manner out of "potch and color", did so because the miners and cutters of the opalfields of Australia used to throw good sized nobbies of color into the "potch and color" parcels because they would cut only tiny cabochons once flaws and

clay had been ground away. If the Aussie will be cutting more because the marketability has changed, potch and color may become less in quality and quantity.

Recent years have seen the growth in popularity of Lightning Ridge "rubs". That is black opal that has been rubbed down to show full face color although sand spots and clay flaws or matrix or potch are still in place or just below the surface of color that shows. So there is still gamble in what stone will result during the finishing process of shaping and polishing. Rubs cost more than rough but the gamble is less. One doesn't have to deal with rough where the color bar is still hidden beneath porcelain caps, potch, matrix, and clay-stone. Magnificent contour stones have been cut by the American lapidary who took the time to use a hand drill with diamond bits to contour cut the flaws out of both rubs or potch and color. If our Australian friends find this profitable there may be a bite in the supply of good lapidary rough.

To be fair, I must point out that good boulder rough is still amply available even though the contour cut has made its mark in the Queensland opalfields. I must also point out that boulder opal never commanded the thousands of dollars per carat that a black Lightning Ridge opal did, all qualities being equal. Another question will be raised of course. Up till now, the type of cut affected the value of a Lightning Ridge black finished stone. Freeforms and contour cuts were considered less valuable per carat.

Will the Ridge's new approach bring the price up on contours, up on good quality rubs and rough, or down per carat for all Lightning Ridge stones? Will it affect the prices of black boulder cut stones? Will the quantity of rough available to the lapidary dwindle? Welcome to the opal rollercoaster. I have faith that, as usual, the market levels out to a playing field that works for all and the deal of the century is always out there somewhere for the informed opalholics to score. Happy hunting. ✨



**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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Editor---Russ Madsen

Please address all inquiries to:

The Opal Express,

P.O. Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

E-mail 76550.1366@compuserve.com

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

# ITEMIZATION

## Letters to the Editor

**ITEM: NEW PO BOX REMINDER** our new PO Box is open for mailings — American Opal Society, Inc., P.O. Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875. We are keeping the former box for a few months too. ❁

**ITEM: ENJOY A VIRTUAL VISIT TO AUSTRALIA** — brought to us by Murray Willis. this is an interesting internet report from Coober Pedy including nice pictures. Website address and information are included in Murray's letter which appears to the right. ❁

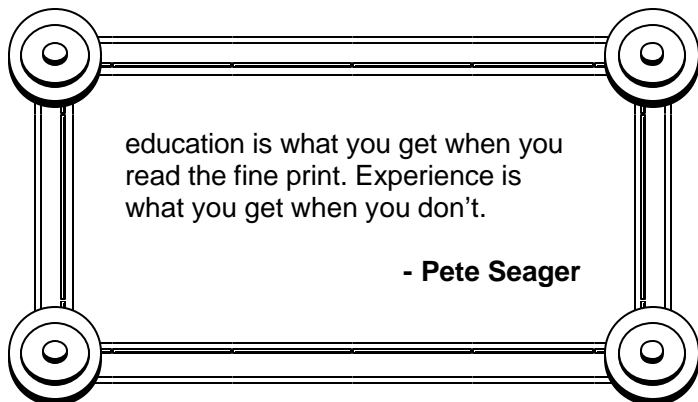
**ITEM: WORKSHOP DATES** as shown on the calendars (page 5) the workshop will be open only on Wednesdays until further notice. ❁

**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: CABGING VERY SMALL OPALS** is the subject of an item from the Rocks and Fossils email list passed along by **Carol Bova**. The writer asked for hints and tips particularly about dopping. One reply explained a technique using very small nails held in a pin vise. The dop sticks demonstrated to the AOS by guest speaker David Kramer would be ideal for this application. They included a handle portion slightly smaller than a pencil shaft and a very narrow steel shank. I made a similar dop stick using a finishing nail wrapped at the shank with duct tape to increase it's diameter. Primitive but it got the result. With the head of the finishing nail ground flat and the end tapered it was possible to dop and cut stones down to 2 or 3 mm.

In another part of the query the writer wondered if it were possible to heat the shank of the dop stick to release the finished stone. I found this to be possible. And it also was possible to heat the shank while dopping initially to improve the bond with the opal.

There is a video of a slide show prepared by early AOS members suggesting this technique. It presents this method of dopping opal using nails as dop sticks and heating the shank as described above. ❁



education is what you get when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get when you don't.

- Pete Seager

Editor, American Opal Society.

Dear Russ,

I have just read volume 32 with interest. It is always good to read what you guys are up to. Because we are all opalholics I think I have got something that might be of interest to your readers.

If they were to look at our website, the address is:

<[www.shed.com/aom/home.html](http://www.shed.com/aom/home.html)>

and go to "Tales of the Field" this is a story about a client of ours who came to Australia, we took him to all the fields. You could put in the Opal Express that if you want to visit the fields the cheapest way is to click on here and go for a ride and have a look at different things.

Keep up the good works. Give our regards to your President Carol Bova.

Kindest regards,

Murray Willis.

ENJOY A  
VIRTUAL  
VISIT TO  
AUSTRALIA – Check  
Murray  
Willis' web-  
site at right

## The Old Rockhound

by Stu Chalfant

Alone, he sits upon the soft earth beside his dig,  
A single rock – softball size – held aloft in his bony left hand,  
His right still clutching the World War II entrenching tool  
That liberated it from its ancient grave.

Squinting toward the burning Mojave sun,  
a tattered sleeve falling back along a withered arm  
where enlarged veins and bluish blotches mark his age,  
he examines the dirty lump of reddish brown  
with hints of blue that match his tired skin,  
hoping that God's light reveal some feature  
of hidden beauty found only in the finest agate.  
He lowers it to scrutinize its surface and with the meticulous  
care of a nurse attending a painful bruise,  
brushes away the dust, first with hand,  
then a stubby whisk drawn from a dirt-spattered pocket.

Again he lifts it skyward, as if in supplication  
to the gods of old, seeking answer to his silent prayer.  
Now down again, his hammer deftly strikes a chip  
from a craggy edge, revealing a possible show of color.  
He wets the rock's fresh wound, and turning the rude orb  
in the golden desert light, his ancient face  
spreads in a hundred wrinkle smile.

Translucent reds and blues with streaks of ochre,  
gray and green, dance in the light, confirming his dream.  
Dropping his trophy and tools into a faded canvas bucket  
he stands, fills the hole, stretches, and with aching stride  
moves toward his sleeping truck that patiently waits  
for its master to take it home.

(from Rocky Review 01/00)

## An American Opalhollic in Paradise Part 2

*(Continued from page 1)*

go and look for Yowah Nuts and gorgeous opal. This is prime territory, in contrast to most places where the fossicking area is a barren (or something slightly salted) tourist area.

A large block of ground is tied up in native claims, which are still under negotiation and thus not being worked just now. Seems that when the land became available for native claim, the natives all rushed out and filed on everything, and there are 45 claims for each parcel! Barbara McCondra's mine is called the Boomerang, due to its shape. We have been looking assiduously for opal, and have not had too much luck as far as finding any \$10,000 opals. But we've really gotten to see how things are done in the mines. One day her friend and partner Trafford Hughes brought in his loader and scooped up about 3 loads from the material Barbara is going through, and stuck them into a butt "trummel", which is a rotating perforated drum that just tumbles them and separates them from all the surrounding dirt, etc. We got 3-1/2 5-gallons of buckets full of potential "nuts" back, washed them in a small (hand-cranked) washer (like a very small cement mixer) and then cracked them.

Oh! And while we were standing around watching the trummel (on Trafford's claim) I looked down and found a gorgeous opal on the ground at my feet! And he let me keep it! And one day the local fire engine -- complete with sounding siren, came to wet down the heaps to make it easier to spot any opal that was exposed. But we've found a lot of absolutely stunning cabs and rough at prices that would probably floor you back there, as we were buying direct from the miners. We also did some "specking" (looking over the leftovers, as it were) at Gwen Burney's mine. She is a good friend of Barbara's, a lovely homey lady who has helped her with the cooking, too. She also does cutting, and we bought some great stuff from her mine. And then visited the open cut itself and watched her working. It is one of the claims where power equipment is allowed, and she uses a small jack hammer. She let me do some jack hammering (we all got to if we wanted to) and it happened that when I was doing it she got into a good section and brought out 1/2 5-gallon bucket of really nice opalized wood. She invited me to come back and bring her more good luck!

Mining laws vary a great deal from state to state in Australia, and also in how assiduously they are enforced. For instance, in Lightning Ridge, which is in New South Wales, you have to get a license for each piece of mechanical equipment, at \$1000 each. And each piece of equipment has to pass a very stringent mechanical inspection. Everything has to be absolutely perfect. I can certainly understand that the brakes have to be good, and the tires, etc. But when someone is failed for a small spot of rust, that is really going too far. It appears, on the other

*(Continued on page 7)*

## 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 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.**

### July 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	31					

### August 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	31		

= 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.

## Safety Report by Cathy Gaber

### Lifting

Next time you get ready to lift a heavy box or container of opal (you wish!), rocks, books or supplies, take a moment to plan your moves. Your back, neck, muscles and other body parts will thank you.

To make sure that your lift will be a safe one, clear the area so you have plenty of room to maneuver. If that is not possible, note the clearest safe areas and see if there are possible intermediate emergency "landing sites". Push or pull the container to the best position so that the least possible actual lifting will be needed. Get help if you think it might be necessary.

Body position is very important. Never bend to pick up something heavy. Bend your knees and let your legs do the work of lifting. A half kneel with one foot in front of the other may help maintain balance. Carrying the weight close to the body with your elbows tucked into the body will be the easiest. The best position is between your hip and chest level, near your center of gravity. Your body should be erect and in as nearly normal a posture as possible. Do not twist. Turns should be made by pivoting on your feet.

If a number of items are to be moved, change positions and stretch frequently. Repetitive movements are likely to be more stressful. If minor (not doctor quality) injury does occur in spite of these precautions, take an anti-inflammatory (aspirin or ibuprofen) and give your body a break for a couple of days. Studies show that prolonged bed rest is not any more effective for healing than getting back to normal activity as soon as possible. ❁

### DISPERSION

Dispersion is more of concern to gemologists than to mineralogists. Dispersion is another property that is affected by the index of refraction. The above discussion of refraction dealt with the refraction of only the same wavelength of light. But to make it more complex, refraction is affected by the wavelength as well. Blue light is bent more than green light which is bent more than red light. If dispersion in a mineral is low, than white light can travel through the mineral nearly unaffected and emerge as white light. But if dispersion is high, the white light will have its component wavelengths or colors dispersed through increasing refraction. This is what causes the flashes of color, called fire, in cut gemstones. Diamond is the champion of cut stones and has a high degree of dispersion or fire that is almost always unmatched by diamond simulants. Zircon, cubic zirconia and YAG all have high dispersions and are the popular diamond impostors of the day; although zircon is a lovely gemstone in its own right. Dispersion is the reason we have rainbows and why a glass prism can separate light into its many colors. ❁

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(from <http://mineral.galleries.com:/minerals/index.htm>)

## What's happening???

### Calendar of Upcoming Events Dates and Locations of Shows

**July 8 10AM-6PM July 9 10AM-5PM Culver City Rock & Mineral Club, Culver City Veterans Memorial Complex, 4117 Overland Ave., Culver City, CA**

**Sept 23 10AM-6PM Sept 24 10AM-4PM Delvers Gem & Mineral Society, Women's Club of**

**Sept 30 Oct 1 10AM-5PM Vista Gem & Mineral Society, Brengles Terrace Community Recreation**

**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**

### Advertisement



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# Diamond Buying Tips

## Twelve Little Facts You Probably Didn't Know

### The Dirty Dozen (TM)

by Fred Cuellar

- ⇒ The average person in the United States pays twice what they should for an engagement ring.
- ⇒ 1 out of every 3 diamonds sold in the United States is laser-drilled.
- ⇒ 1 out of every 20 diamonds sold in the United States is fracture-filled.
- ⇒ 1 out of every 3 diamonds sold in the United States has been treated to some degree, including doublets, coating, and irradiation.
- ⇒ 75% of all round diamonds are cut poorly to salvage weight, resulting in diamonds that lose 2/3 of their potential sparkle.
- ⇒ 88% of all fancy diamonds (pear, marquise, emerald cut, etc.) are poorly cut to salvage weight, resulting in diamonds that lose 2/3 of their potential sparkle.
- ⇒ The average diamond sold in the United States has been over graded in quality by two grades to enhance its salability.
- ⇒ 2 out of every 3 diamonds have fluorescence (a diamonds reaction to ultraviolet light) that causes the diamond to look oily and milky in sunlight.
- ⇒ 3 out of every 5 diamonds are weighed incorrectly to increase the profit margin of the jeweler.
- ⇒ The average diamond sold in the United States is tinted yellow and will probably never appreciate in value.
- ⇒ The average diamond sold in the United States has cracks, breaks, or carbon that you can see with your own eyes.
- ⇒ If we define a good diamond in general terms as a diamond that is big, white, clean, sparkly, and will appreciate in value over time; less than 25 out of every 1,000 diamonds sold in the United States would classify as good. ✿

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from <http://www.diamondcuttersintl.com/>)



## An American Opaloholic in Paradise Part 2

(Continued from page 5)

hand, that these rules and regulations are not being enforced on the large concerns. Just for the little guy.

It has been said that they are trying to drive out the little miners, simply because it is easier for the state to keep the books on the taxes they collect. So they are driving out a lot of the miners, who are going to places, such as Queensland, where they are not so particular about the licensing.

We also had another adventure -- not really having to do with opals, but --- on our way over here from Lightning Ridge we stopped for a few minutes in a small town, and the lady barmaid brought out a baby kangaroo -- a Joey --- that she was raising (temporarily), as its mother had just been killed. We all took turns holding this remarkably cute little guy and having our pictures taken with it. 'Roos are killed by the hundreds by peoples' cars; they come out about dusk and go hopping across roads with out looking (like our deer) and get smashed. Often it is a mother carrying a Joey in its pouch. And often that Joey dies a miserable death; starving or being eaten alive by the wild animals that consume the mother 'roo. This one had been rescued by a more thoughtful driver.

Yesterday evening Michael came back from Eulo (the nearest small town) after an error, got out, said "we have a small problem" and opened up the jacket he was carrying to reveal -- another Joey, that he had rescued on his way home, it's mother having been recently hit by somebody and killed.

What to do? Ron had some experience along this line, and we called the barmaid in Bolen for feeding advice. In order to keep it warm (they have a little higher body temp than we do) it was bundled up in jackets and flannel shirts, a couple of bottles of warm water added, and I got to cuddle it through the evening. Joy! It is so cute! I named it "Outback". And it slept with Ron, who the next morning really looked like a new father! Apparently Outback had tossed and turned, and he had to put on a sweatsuit, as Outback kept nuzzling him looking for a nipple. We figure he's about a year old: fully covered with fur (soooo soft!), big enough to hop about a bit, and ate a little grass from the yard today, I understand. We will take Outback with us when we leave, as far as Bolen, and leave him with the barmaid who has the other one.

Regretfully, tomorrow morning we must leave and start heading home. We've had a really fabulous time.

If you are interested in really seeing these opal fields, and trying your hand at it, on a non-touristy adventure, go with Barbara and Ron. They are tops! ✿

Ta for now!

Margaret

(from Lapidary Digest #277 05/30/00)



## TIPS FOR CUTTING BOULDER OPAL

These lessons and tips were learned in Australia from the pros - the miners and cutters themselves.

### INTRODUCTION:

**THE KEY TO CUTTING BOULDER OPAL IS TO REMEMBER THAT IT IS A SEAM OPAL; THAT IT IS THIN BUT -- BEAUTIFUL AND MUST BE EXAMINED CAREFULLY RELATIVE TO**

### **YIELD - YIELD - YIELD**

**READ THIS WHOLE PAPER BEFORE BEGINNING ANY OF THE PROCESSES.**

Reading this whole article will give you an overview of the processes and a better understanding of the need to examine, evaluate, saw, split and polish each piece of boulder opal.

### THE FOUR STEPS OF CUTTING BOULDER OPAL:

[Cutting and finishing boulder opal is similar to carving opal or sculpting fire agate]

- (1) Examination of the material for potential surface stones, splits, stones from split material or as a specimen and development of your cutting plan
- (2) Sawing the stone in order to maximize the yield
- (3) Splitting and pre-polishing boulder opal
- (4) Polishing the boulder opal to obtain a finished opal

### STEP 1 EXAMINATION & DEVELOPMENT OF CUTTING PLAN



Examine the piece of rough boulder 360°. Look at all sides. Is there evidence that an opal seam goes all the way around the stone? Examine the piece in order to map out the number of saw cuts and the sequence of the cuts using a marker (flo-pen) with a narrow point:

- if the piece is faced or has a face that you would like to see as a finished opal, mark the surface with a dotted line just outside the 'to be finished edge' and mark the cut line for the back of the stone and also for any areas that need to be trimmed
- OR
- if no surface face is evident locate the most promising seam and therefore potential face. Examine the piece for any additional potential seam/stones.

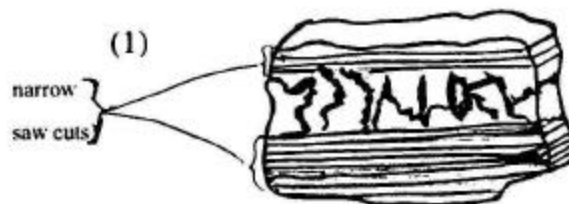
- Do any of the seams run through the whole piece? If so, a split will be a viable option. With the marker, using a dotted line/s mark **all** potential saw cuts. Examine, again, how the potential saw cuts intersect each other or not.
- Determine the sequence of cuts in order to maximizing the yield as evidenced by:
  - (1) The best stone
  - (2) The most stones
  - (3) Specimen. Creative uses like pen stand, card holder, visual accent or it's just beautiful to look at.

## STEP 2 SAWING

BOULDER material is easy to saw using diamond blades. .006 is a good thickness. The diamond blade will cut faster when there is lots of water and the rough material is slowly moved in and out along the blade eliminating the debris. Always place the material in the lower quadrant of the saw blade as this reduces chattering and grabbing by the blade. **OPTION** - while holding the rough with your other fingers gently place your ring fingers on the saw blade so you can feel how true the blade is and how the rough is cutting. **Caution this could be dangerous if done carelessly or with too much finger or stone pressure on the blade.**

- Saw cuts should always leave 1/4 of an inch of ironstone/sandstone for the backing of any potential stone.
- It is most important to map out the sequence of cuts.
- **AND AFTER EACH CUT** re-examine the stone to make sure your saw cut hasn't uncovered a nice surprise.

(1) If the boulder looks like this with sandstone or ironstone on both sides of the opal, make narrow saw cuts until you reach the opal layers



(2) Given, a piece of boulder with crossing bands of opal, the cut for maximum yield



(3)--make diagonal cuts (dotted lines)--now a minimum four stones

