

The Opal Express

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

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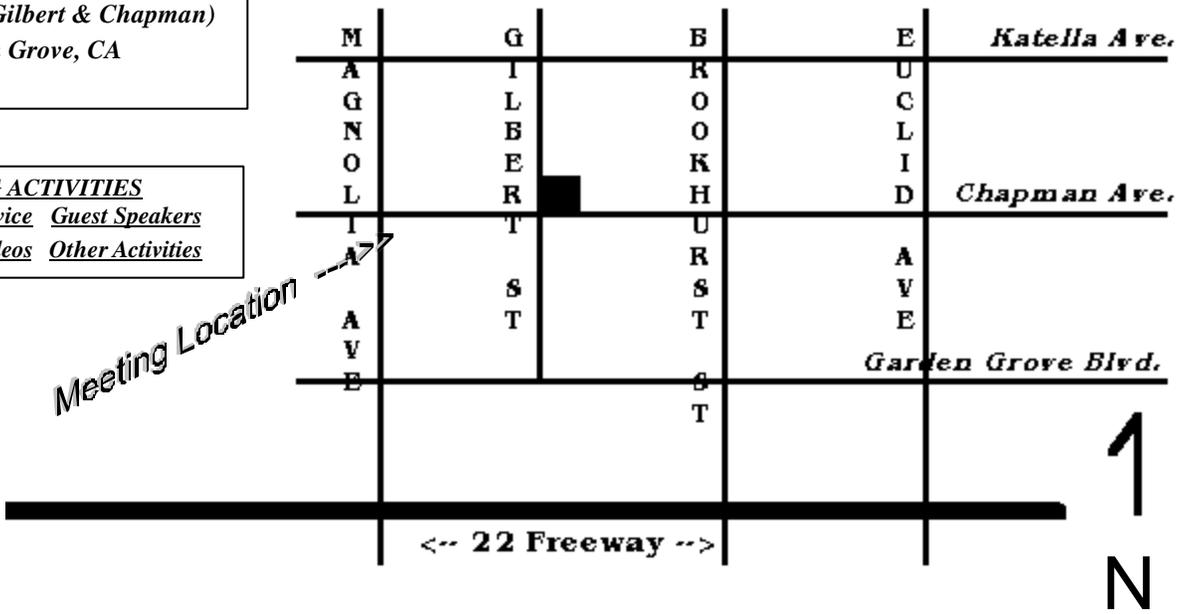
General Meeting – March 8!
 Major Opal Mining Areas of Australia and Opal
 Geology presented by Jay Carey



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

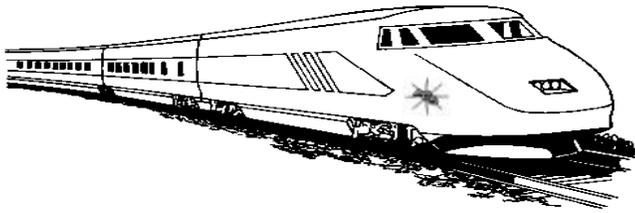
MEETING ACTIVITIES
Opal Cutting Advice Guest Speakers
Slide Shows Videos Other Activities



The American Opal Society
<http://www.opalsociety.org>

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The Opal Express



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Volume 33, Issue 2

Election Results!

Congratulations to our new officers, elected at the January, 2001 meeting:

President: Mike Kowalsky Vice President: Bob Dixon Treasurer: Bob Olinskas

President's Message from Mike Kowalsky

I'd like to welcome everyone to the new millennium and wish you all a Happy and Prosperous New Year. I am starting my term in office with many challenges and will need all the support from our local members that they can make time for.

We are reviewing venues for our show, and have not made any decision yet, but need to soon. Several members are preparing presentations to give to other Rock and Gem clubs. We hope this will attract new members from the local area.

Bob Dixon and I are planning to make trips to Quartzite and Tucson. I will have some info about Quartzite in the next Opal Express. We are planning to attend the Opal Seminars to be hosted by Tim and Barbara Thomas at the Tucson Show. I plan to videotape the seminars, and, with their permission, have the videotapes available in the AOS library.

The seminars have been excellent and most important when you are there in person, you can ask your questions and have an opportunity to examine samples and examples, which the videotapes do not allow.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Wed., Date Change! Board of Directors Meeting 7 PM.
Feb 7
Thurs. General Membership Meeting 7 PM
Feb. 8

Recently, I was able to visit Jake Schmidt, one of our oldest members, who is now 98 years young. I have known Jake since the early 70's when I joined AOS. We had a very nice afternoon. Jake donated a number of books about jewelry and opals. I am sure that the books on opal are now collector's items. He also donated some hand tools and a Foredom type flex shaft tool. The tools have been put in the AOS workshop for members' use.

Jake also donated a large quantity of small parcels of tumbled stones, which he stated should be given to young children who attend our annual show. I must say that Jake is doing well. He lives in his mobile home by himself Still drives in the daytime, and is as sharp as he always was.

One of the principle objectives of the AOS is to pursue information about opal and provide the information to members. I have been thinking about this, and will provide my thoughts in future articles. I solicit ideas about this area and suggestions of the educational part of the AOS. I know we have some members who are very knowledgeable, and hope some of them will share that knowledge by writing articles for the Opal Express.

I realize that writing for other publications supplements the income of some writers, but many individuals have stories about opal that would be interesting to our members, but not be material that magazines may accept. Please communicate with Carol Bova or myself about any stories that we could publish.

I hope many of you have an opportunity to visit Quartzite and Tucson this season.

Mike Kowalsky

Trip Report:
Precious Opal of Lead Pipe Springs, CA
A Mineral Investigation

By Jim Pisani

A few years ago, I was browsing in a used bookstore. As an avid collector of old maps and gem books, as well as opal, I was quick to buy a small book named "California Gem Trails" by Darold J. Henry, published in 1957. I got home, briefly glanced through it, saw a mention of opal somewhere, put it away, and then forgot about it.

It sat on my bookshelf until I became a member of the American Opal Society. While at a monthly meeting, my ears pricked up when the guest speaker, giving a talk of mineral collecting in California, showed a sample of Lead Pipe Springs opal he had collected many years ago. It was actually quite nice, a white based opal with lots of color. This triggered my memory about opal in "California Gem Trails". That night I found on pages 50-56, a description of a precious opal deposit at a place call "Lead Pipe Springs" in the Northwestern Mojave Desert, about 35 miles east of Johannesburg. It stated, "Up on the hill there are blue agate nodules in red rhyolite matrix which is somewhat jasperized as to appearance. Blue geodes and rarer fire opal geodes are found... The fire opal geodes are walnut size up to golf ball size. I have never dug one larger, but that does not mean that there aren't cannon ball fire opals. Only about one in eight have fire opal in them."

Well, this really sparked my interest. I had been attempting to create an opal collection that had a representative sample of all American precious opal deposits and here was a chance to add another sample to it. My small collection currently had three different types: Virgin Valley, Nevada; Opal Canyon, California; and Spencer, Idaho. I had never heard of this opal site, so after a little investigation I found out why. It lies entirely on the China Lake Naval Weapons Center, near the town of Ridgecrest, about 160 miles North of Los Angeles. The Naval Weapons Center, a large, active, U.S. military test range, has been closed off the general public for about 50 years.

I was hooked now. Somehow I had to find a sample to study. First I tried on the direct approach. I phoned the Naval Weapons Center directly, and got in contact with their Public Affairs person. I asked if civilians were allowed on the base to examine mineral deposits. Her response was that permission was very unlikely and very difficult to obtain. Because of the expense to escort non-cleared personal, the base would allow only serious researchers of academia, where the request was well documented and worthy of the federal government to get involved. A gem and mineral club didn't seem to fit that bill.

Well, that path didn't pan out. So I checked if anyone had any samples by using the Internet. I posted questions to a number of gem and mineral forums, asking if anyone had any information or samples that were collected years ago for sale.

I received no responses. Out of curiosity, I performed a search on the whole Internet using the keywords "Lead Pipe Springs". Success! I got two "hits".

The first was a mineral anthology from Nebraska State University

(<http://csd.unl.edu/csdJprograms/lexicon/lexico-1.html>) with a list of the various agates found over the United States, with reference to a type of blue agate found near Lead Pipe Springs, which was interesting in itself but not what I was looking for. The second was to a website called the F. M. "Shady" Myrick Research Project:

(<http://fhome.earthlink.net/~fmyrickJindex.html>). The keyword search had found a caption "Lead Pipe Springs" to a photo of "Shady Myrick", dated about 100 years ago. I had no idea who "Shady Myrick" was or what he had to do with opal, but an e-mail was listed, so I fired one to the website owner.

A few days later, I received a very nice response from a gentleman named John Lightburn who currently lives in Hawaii, but was from San Bernardino County, California. It turns out that John Lightburn is the great grand nephew of a 19th century prospector named F. M. "Shady" Myrick. Shady was a prospector and miner in the Mojave Desert around the turn of the century. He had discovered a number of gem & mineral deposits and was quite a famous and colorful character in those days. Some have called him the father of rockhounding in the U. S. John had inherited a huge mineral collection, numerous period photos, and many personal items from his great-uncle. John sent me many good details of his uncle and the deposits he had discovered. Three of these were opal. Shady Myrick was the original discoverer of the Lead Pipe Springs opal deposit! Now I was getting somewhere. I thought of writing an article on him for the Opal Express, but was preempted by "Rock & Gem" magazine that same month by an article about Shady. I put my project on hold.

Shady was a prospector and miner in the Mojave Desert around the turn of the century. He had discovered a number of gem & mineral deposits and was quite a famous and colorful character in those days. Some have called him the father of rockhounding in the U. S.

A few months later, I received another e-mail from John Lightburn. John was inviting me to accompany him to the Lead Pipe Springs opal deposit, as part of a research project on the actual mineral deposits that Shady Myrick had discovered. What a stroke of luck! John had not only received permission from the base commander for his research but was getting an escort by base employees. The leader of the expedition would be Bob Wheeler, one of the senior managers of the base, an avid rockhound, and quite familiar with the remote areas of the base. The base archeologist would also accompany us.

So I changed my 4-wheeler's oil, phoned my ole' mining buddy Ed Zutaut, packed up the SUV, and we headed to Ridgecrest on Dec. 26, 2000. After rendezvousing that evening with John Lightburn, who had made a special trip from Hawaii, we crashed early for a good night's sleep to be fresh for our adventure the next day.

We woke early to drive to the base, which was about 30 miles away along a very deserted, private, government road. There, at the base entrance, covered with “Do Not Enter” and “Restricted”! signs, we met Bob Wheeler, along with John Lightburn, his two sons, and five other employees and friends. After introducing ourselves to everyone and registering and getting passes to the base, we started a convoy of 4 huge base 4WD trucks and my puny Honda Passport. All vehicles had Radio Shack Walky-Talkies, which allowed Bob to give us a running dialogue of the various historic sites along the way. Mineral collection was prohibited, but I would take photographs and Ed would take videos.

We started driving east in Pilot Knob Valley on a barely paved road for about 5 miles, past a number of military installations (we were warned not to take pictures), towards a mountain range called Robbers Mountain, supposedly named after a thief that was buried there. The terrain was fairly flat salt brush desert on alluvial deposits. We passed the north of the mountain towards an interesting rock formation called Battleship Rock, then made a right hand turn on jeep trail. Along the way, Bob pointed out a trail as the original 20-mule team borax route from Death Valley to Mojave.

After going through a few dry washes that made me glad I had high clearance, we turned into an arroyo on the eastern flank of Robbers mountain. We traveled about a mile and came upon the end of a small valley, where we parked the cars. We faced some interesting white outcroppings and scenic formations, with a small patch of green surrounded by a fence on the side of a backside of the valley, about 400 feet up. As we were hiking toward the green patch, Bob directed us up to the foundations of two small rock houses. Here Shady Myrick had lived when he was prospecting this site. John Lightburn was able to position himself in the exact spot from an old photograph from his collection by matching the rock formations where Shady had stood over 90 years ago. Scattered around were old-style rusted tin cans, along with Prince Albert tobacco tins, which John Lightburn said were the same type that Shady had smoked in his pipe. We walked up to the green area, which was the actual Lead Pipe Springs, where water slowly flowed a couple hundred feet as a small stream until disappearing into the soil. Naval Base personnel had surrounded the spring with a pipe fence to keep the wild burros from spoiling the water for the native wildlife. The archeologist stated that this site had been also been inhabited by American Indians, probably the Shoshones or Piutes, being the only watering hole for miles. Indian morteros and petroglyphs had been found on earlier trips.

To the east and downhill of the spring were the indications of some previous digging. Here we found geodes that had been mentioned in Henry’s “California Gem Trails”. The Myrick Research Project had discovered an old U:S. government report called “Opal-California”, by Douglass B. Sterrett, USGS Geologist, written in 1913, after he had made a mineral expedition to the West and actually visited Shady. On pages page 675-676, Sterrett describes in detail better than I could the deposit:

“Opal from the Lead Pipe Spring locality has been called ‘Sobriskey’ opal. It occurs in nodular masses at

the contact of a red rhyolite flow with underlying white tuffaceous beds. The rhyolite is perlitic near the contact and has been partly decomposed. It contains an abundance of nodules and clusters of siliceous balls varying in size to over 2 inches in diameter. When these are broken open they are found to contain cores of red rhyolite, chalcedony, common or white opal, and occasional precious opal. Mr. Myrick states that it is sometimes necessary to break open hundreds of the nodules to find a few enclosed precious opals. The cores of precious opal are rarely over three-fourths of an inch thick, but some of the specimens seen had very good color showing flashes of red, blue, and green, in gray or milky white background. Many of the cores included fragments of chalcedony or rhyolite, so that pure gems could not be cut from them. If larger pieces of the precious opal can be found and in greater abundance than up to the present time, the prospect would prove of value.”

We located a number of these nodular masses lying about, most which had already been broken in half, probably by Shady himself or the other small number of rockhounds who had ever made it to this desolate but beautiful location. Most of the centers contained white non-precious opal. Some though had amber-colored and clear opal. Some were partially filled with agate, layered around the opal. We left the specimens where they lay, but took many pictures and video.

After we had visited here for an hour or so, Bob directed us to the location of the second opal site. It was about a mile east of the springs, on the north side of a small but steep hill. We could see the hill and a white outcropping near the top, capped with red rhyolite. Ed and I hiked across the arroyo and climbed about 200 feet to the site, myself taking pictures, and Ed with the video camera.

Sterrett’s description is almost accurate:

“The other locality has so far not yielded any precious opal, and the claim has been called the ‘white opal’ claim after the variety first found. The deposit occupies the same relative position with the rock formations as Lead Pipe Spring; that is, in partly decomposed perlitic rhyolite forming the contact between a rhyolite flow and the underlying tuffaceous beds. The decomposed perlitic layer is about 10 feet thick, and in this are numerous nodules or balls of common opal from 1 to 5 inches in diameter. White opal was found first and later greenish, yellow and red opal without fire. A small spring has been opened by Mr. Myrick, on the ‘white opal’ claim.”

We found the white outcropping of tuffaceous ash, with numerous little geodes imbedded in it at a lower lever, which had been undercut in the past by about 3 feet. An old shovel handle that looked to be by 100 years old was lying there. The site differed from Sterrett’s description in one important note - we found precious opal! When we arrived, we cracked open a number of geodes and found a tiny one had color! It reminded me of Mexican opal, but clear instead of red. This got the group

fairly excited, and everyone got to pounding on the geodes, which were numerous. However, we were on a limited schedule and had to return empty handed to the vehicles to continue on to two other Shady's claims.

When we returned to the vehicles, Bob Wheeler told us that he had collected at the Site in the mid-60's with a Naval Base gem & mineral club and had dug quite a bit of the undercut himself. They had found a number of the geodes to be precious, and that he had a jar full at home to account for 3 weeks of digging. We then visited the two other sites Shady had discovered, one a blue chalcedony claim and another a gold find - reported to be the last gold rush of California. We spent half the next day trying to find an opal hyalite find of Shady's, but that is another story. On the way out on the second day when we were leaving the base. Bob showed us his bottle of opal from Lead Pipe Springs. Then to my surprise, he donated a very nice specimen to the American Opal Society. So we finally had a specimen!

In conclusion, we were privileged to have a rare rockhound and opalhound's visit to one of the last unvisited, untrammelled, pristine, mineral sites in this country, protected on government land. I wonder how much of the opal would be left if the site was accessible? The American Opal Society gives a big thank you to John Lightburn of the F. M. Myrick Research Project and to Bob Wheeler of the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division for a splendid field trip!

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SHOW DATES

Feb 16-25 INDIO, CA: 10AM-10PM San Geronio Miii & Gem Society, Riverside County National Date Festival, Gem & Mineral Bldg, 46-350 Arabia St (909) 845-9361 or 849-1674

Feb 17-18-APACHE JUNCTION, AZ: 36th annual show, "Symphony in Stone"; Apache Junction Rock & Gem Club; Apache Junction H.S. Cafetorium, Tronwood & Southern Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4 (480) 983-9050
iswanson@worldnetattfll~

Feb 24-25 N. HOLLYWOOD, CA: San Fernando Valley Gem Fair, Del Air Rockhounds, Sierra Pelona Club, Woodland Hills Rockchippers; Valley Plaza Recreation Center 12240 Archwood St, 10-5 PM (818) 886-7190
ohmarin@flash.net

Feb 24-25—SAN JOSE, CA: 2001 A Gem Odyssey; Santa Clara Valley Gem & Mineral Society; Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, 334 Tully Rd.; Sat 10-6 Sun 10-5; (408) 241-0477

Mar. 2-11, EL CENTRO, CA - IMPERJAL VALLEY GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY. 52nd Annual Mid-Winter Show. Jeep Swerdfeger, 760-344-6230.

Mar 3-4--ARCADIA, CA: Monrovia Rock-hounds Inc.; The Arboretum, Ayers Hall, 301 N. Baldwin Ave.; Sat 9-4:30, Sun. 9-4:30; 12 dealers, (626) 337-8596

Mar 8-11--DEMING, NM: Rockhound Roundup; Denting Gem & Mini Soc.; Southwestern New Mexico Fairgrounds; all 4 days 9 to 5; field trips Thurs., Fri. and Sat. at 8:30; Geneva Haworth, P0 Box 1459, Deming, NM 88031, (505) 546-0348

Mar 24-25--TORANCE, CA: Nature's Treasures; South Bay Lapidary & Mineral Soc.; Torrance Recreation Center, 3341 Torrance Blvd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; Doris Turney, (310) 322-2556;
www.palosverdes.com/jsblap/

Mar 24-25—COTTONWOOD, AZ: Verde Valley Gem & Mineral Silver Anniversary Celebration, Mingus Gem & Mineral Club, Cottonwood; Oak Creek Gem & Mineral Society, Sedona; Mingus Union H.S., Sat 9-5, Sun 9-4

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(Article Deadline is the 15th of the month prior to

FEDERATION LIABILITY INSURANCE

By Fred Ott, Chair,
CFMS Insurance Committee

I have received a couple of inquiries from member clubs as to the possibility of "opting-out" of the Federation's insurance policy. While I addressed this matter to those in attendance at the meeting in Visalia, I wanted to provide every member with my findings.

The Federation's insurance policy 1) provides \$1 million of liability coverage for each member of a club, regardless of the "status" of the member (e.g., active, junior, honorary, lifetime, etc.). There is no way to "exclude" anyone who is a member-then 2) charges the Federation each year approximately \$3.00 per member for the coverage. The premium charge is calculated by adding up the membership "count" of each club, then multiplying by \$3.00. If a club wanted to exclude a specific member, the Federation would nonetheless be charged for the coverage that is being provided (remember, there are no excluded members under the Federation policy).

Clearly, there are situations (as with honorary membership) when a club may not receive any money from the member in dues payments, and other situations (such as family memberships) when clubs receive less in membership dues than the cost of the family membership. Nonetheless, the Federation is charged by the insurance carrier for each member of each club, and the Federation must then charge each club \$3.00 for each member.

In January of each year, each member club is supposed to provide the Federation with a list of their members (as of December 31st) and then forward a payment to the Federation in an amount equal to \$4.50 times the number of members. If memory serves me, there is no "double-checking" of the membership list-it is assumed to be an accurate reflection of the club's membership as of Dec. 31. If a check for \$450.00 is

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

NOTE! There will be no workshop sessions on Feb. 7 and 14 while due to the Tucson Shows. Stan McCall will resume sessions on Feb 21.

Call Stan at Gems & Opals (714) 827-5680 if you plan to attend a shop session.

WORKSHOP RULES

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 fee is \$3 per session.
5. To assist us in scheduling, please call Stan or a board member in advance to reserve shop time. Thank you!

Rough Australian Opal

We have recently returned, with cases full of opal, from a buying trip to the Australian opal fields. Write or call for a Free Price List/Newsletter.

With inventory from Coober Pedy, Lambina, Mintabie, and Lightning Ridge we can supply you with rough opal from \$5.00/oz to \$9,000/oz.

Satisfaction guaranteed. You may return any unaltered parcel for a full refund.

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mailed to the Federation, it would indicate a total membership of 100 members (\$450.00 divided by \$4.50 = 100 members).

Additional liability coverage should be purchased by any club that has exclusive use of a facility (such as the exclusive use of a workshop area or lapidary room in a building owned by the club or someone else). "Premises liability is not included in the basic Federation policy; clubs that have exclusive use of any premises can be sued (and not covered unless they have purchased the optional additional "premises liability insurance").

Finally, clubs that want insurance coverage for buildings, office equipment, computer, supplies, lapidary equipment, etc., must purchase separate coverage for these items. Coverage may be obtained through the same carrier as provides the Federation's liability policy at very competitive rates by contacting me directly.

CFMS EARTH SCIENCE STUDIES

**March 25 - April 1, 2001
Zzyzx Road, Soda Springs, California**

A CFMS Earth Science Seminar will be held at Soda Spring (Zzyzx) which is located 50 miles northeast of Barstow on 1-15 at Zzyzx Road.

These desert studies offer instruction in our hobby/craft, field trips to historical and collecting sites, and discussion of flora and fauna of the area. Our primary goal is to provide a congenial learning experience.

The facilities are rustic with dorm style rooms and rooms with double beds or cots. Rest rooms and showers are provided in a separate building nearby. No pets are allowed.

Register for this educational and fun filled week by completing the form below, with a check for \$220 per person by March 1, 2001. An administrative fee of \$25.00 will be assessed for any cancellation prior to March 1. There will be no refund for cancellation after March 1 unless you can provide a replacement. The fee includes instructions, quarters and meals.

Send form and payment made out to CFMS Cal & Dee Clason (661) 589-4189
to:

Florence Meisenheimer
101 N. Wake Forrest Ave.
Ventura, CA 93 003-2246
(805) 642-3155

Ray & Florence Meisenheimer (805) 642-3155

Keep part above this line
Please Print in Block Letters

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

I belong to _____ society, an AFMS Member

Do you use a cane _____ Walker _____ Are you diabetic _____

Please list the activities that interest you - 1st, 2nd, 3rd choice

FIELD TRIPS

_____ Rock Collecting
_____ Sightseeing

PROGRAMS

_____ Speakers
_____ Films

WORKSHOPS

_____ Beadstringing
_____ Silversmithing
_____ Sculpting
_____ Wire Wrap
_____ Cabochons

Name & number of persons to contact un emergency _____

Double room	\$220.00 per person	_____
Dormitory room	\$220.00 per person	_____
RV (no hook-ups)	\$220.00 per person	_____
Total amount enclosed		_____