

The Opal Express

American Opal Society
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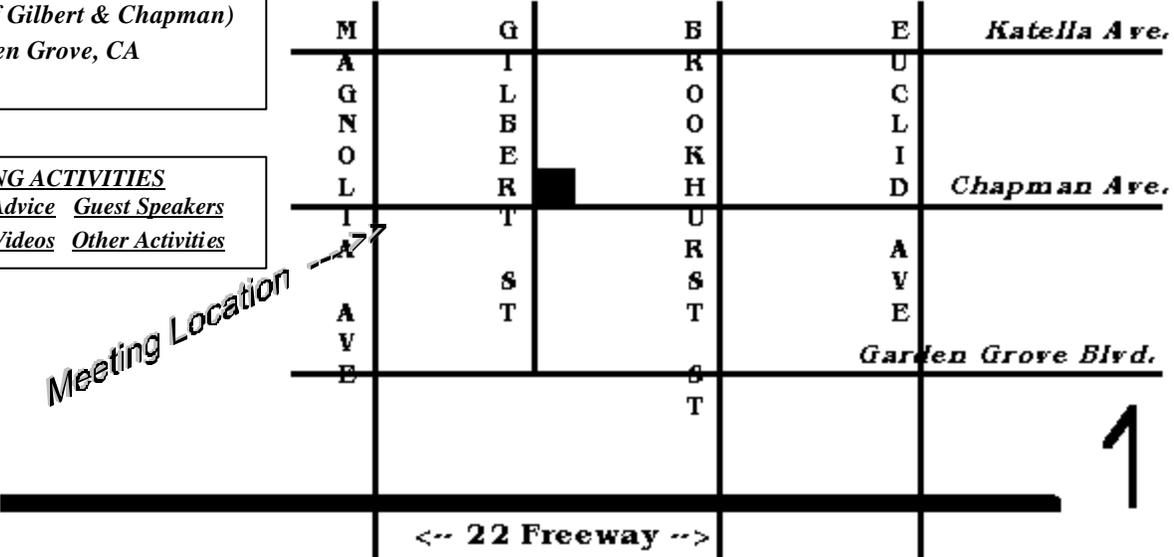
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Volume #33 Issue #09

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>

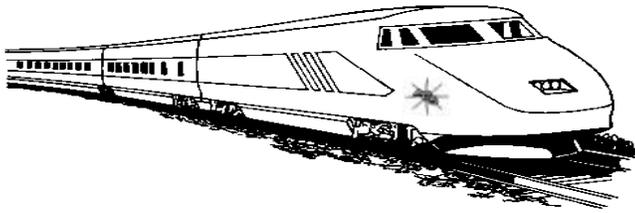
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

From Mike Kowalsky

It is nice to be back in my own home and its summer time. My journey to Australia was timed to visit the Festivals at Yowah and then Lightning Ridge. I must say that it is a journey that every opaloholic should make at least once in a lifetime. It will take many superlatives to describe the entire experience. Some people ask why go to Australia when you can buy anything at the many shows as well as at Quartzsite and Tucson. You really have to go to the mining areas to meet the miners in their home turf and see the opal that never makes it to the US and also watch the hunt for the elusive next find of opal. I have come to appreciate the many different types of opal that come from a mining area, within the same mine as well as adjacent or nearby mines. It appears that every mining area produces more types of opal than are typically associated with it. As we know, some areas are noted for specific types of opal, but each area has many types of opal that we may not have seen here in the US, and each has its own beauty. Opal comes in such varieties and many times in such close proximity, that only by going to the festivals in each mining area can we have any hope of seeing more of the different types of opal.

I was amazed at the variety of new types of opal found in Yowah that were not there in "98". If you consider the other fields in close proximity to Yowah, such as Ducks Creek, Pride of the Hills and on to Koroit, there are many types of opal even though we normally associate the iron-stone matrix as the normal type. Within Yowah there was the new opalized wood with beautiful

reds and blue from Johns new mine, as well as new fossils. I found the same

to be true in Lightning Ridge with many more types of opal than the normal knobbies that we associate with that area.

Opal fields near Andamooka are being explored far beyond the original finds with White Dam being mined and producing opal that is similar but different. Even the Stuarts Creek area has signs of exploration and some mining going on. In Andamooka, I saw a small parcel of beautiful opals with normal characteristics of the area changing to a unique part of the same stones. This part had a honey base that was completely different from the rest of the crystal opal. Within this portion were perfectly square harlequin type flecks scattered throughout that started as a light green changing to yellow and ending as actually looking like metallic pieces of gold. I believe this is a one of a kind specimen. It is this type of viewing of spectacular specimens of opal that you only get to see in the fields. Plan that trip of a lifetime for a lifetime of memories.

Interview with Len Cram - His Publishing Plans

My trip was filled with many experiences, one of which was to dine at the head table in Yowah next to Len Cram. We had many discussions and during one of the evenings I asked Len if he would give us some of his plans for future books he expects to publish. He said he would be glad to do that and the opportunity came when I visited him in Lightning Ridge just before that festival began.

We were in his office and photo studio which is also his computer facility. Len, I asked, are you ready to tell me about your publishing plans?

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (cont'd from Pg 1)

He replied, "Why don't you turn on your video camera and we'll do it that way".

Now I have a wonderful video of Len Cram giving me all this information. Thanks Len!

Many of you have seen or own the book titled, "A Journey With Color; A History of Queensland Opal." Len pointed out that on the back is the notation "Volume One." He is planning to publish three volumes in this series. Volume Two will take two books to put all the pictures and words that it describes the material for the history of opal in New South Wales. The first book, Volume 2A, will describe the history of the early finds and the beginning of opal mining at White Cliffs starting in 1889. The second book, Volume 2B, will describe the history of Lightning Ridge. This book will have about another 250 thousand words, but the number of pictures will be very large. Len said he has a massive amount of photography on Lightning Ridge and selecting the photos to include in this volume will be the difficult part.

Volume Three (Book four) will cover South Australia starting with Coober Pedy in 1915 then Mintabie about 1920 and Andamooka about 1929. This volume will cover Lambina and other South Australian opal mining areas.

Volume One is now available with one book now in the AOS Library. Volume 2A is expected to be published by the end of 2001, which isn't very far from now. Volume 2B will be written in 2002. Volume Three may be published by October of 2002.

In addition to these books Len expects to publish a new field guide by the end of 2001. That certainly provides us Opal book collectors a lot to look forward to by the end of this year!

Len Cram mentioned that he is working on a new book on the History of Opal around the World. He has already toured many of the opal mining areas of the United States. He has toured some of the early European areas. He has plans to visit some of the Mexican Opal mining areas in 2002, and perhaps visit the mining areas of Honduras after that.

Len mentioned that he is considering writing a book which covers his research and the science

of opal. In that book, he may cover an early version of the formula for opal which he developed in his laboratory. This might allow individuals to grow soft opal with color for their experimentation. The plan for this book is not as firm as the books on the history of opal.

I want to personally thank Len Cram for the interview and sharing all the information on his plans for completing the history of opal in Australia with readers of the Opal Express. Thank you, Len.

Announcement

The American Opal Society has received some wonderful prizes for our raffle held at our annual show on November 3rd and 4th.

Top Prize "A Journey with Color" donated by Len Cram. This is a autographed collector's item; A new release this year containing history of Queensland Opal; 1869 – 1979.

Other Prizes

Magnificent Rose "Created Opal" necklace in a Sterling Silver setting

Ironstone Matrix rough opal

Lightning Ridge rough opal

This is a wonderful start for the raffle prizes. Any other donations will be gratefully accepted.

In Memorium: Cliff Coan

I was saddened to learn of the passing of one of the early members of the American Opal Society when I returned from Australia. Cliff had been one of the early members of AOS and had a long history of his love of Opal. Cliff left the Society for a long period, but I met him again when I started going to Quartzsite. After some discussions, he came back and joined AOS again. He gave us his approach and methods he used to cut and polish opal through lectures and a seminar at our annual show. He shared his knowledge willingly and with fervor. After all, he was an opaholic like many of us.

We will miss him and we are glad he came back to share his knowledge with us. Thanks, Cliff.

Mike Kowalsky

SEPTEMBER SPEAKER

The speaker for September General Meeting will be our President, Mike Kowalsky. Mike will give an overview of his trip and have a slide presentation on the Festival. He will have a few samples of the opal that was available at the Festival. He was able to display four specimens of Opal from the Americas at part of the magnificent display of opals at the Festival.

The McCondra Report

by Barbara McCondra

There is a new rush that looks promising up out Grawin /Glengarry way outside of Lightning Ridge, NSW, Australia. It is Rotten Plains an area between Glengarry and Lightning Ridge. Perhaps you already knew of the one from a couple years ago called, The Mulga Rush? All of this type opal is usually seam opal which is good cause there isn't much water or facilities to wash the opal like there is nearer The Ridge. Seam opal with dry processing means lots of opal can be missed by the miners and there is a lot more noodling of the dump heaps than ever before. Noodling is the digging through and walking over the opaldirt looking for those missed chunks of opals. The Pug in the Scrub and the Glengarry Hilton Pub both are open to slake the thirst of both miners and noodlers alike. There is even a backpackers kind of bunkbed accommodation for a night or two at the Hilton for tourists wishing to stay and noodle for a couple days.

The sleepy little town of Cumborah is sort of a halfway point between The Ridge and the new fields, so it is experiencing a little real estate boom and is less sleepy for a town only a couple blocks long. I asked why is that area called Rotten Plains and was told well the plains there look pretty rotten! There you go. I shoulda known that. I got this information from a couple miners out at Grawin on their way through Yowah, Queensland to Kakadu for some Baramundi fishing. I just can't see why anyone would go where there is no opal, but plenty of crocodiles. Each to their own.

Mark Your Calendar!
AOS Opal and Gem Show Nov. 3 & 4, 2001
Quality Hotel, Anaheim, CA

Newsletter Archives Online

There is one password for all members: the password is Opalsrus. (Do not touch the member box and just type the password.) The newsletter archives have been just recently made to work, and more articles will be added in the future.

OPAL SOCIETY WORKSHOP

The workshop at Walker Jr. High is available for the use of AOS members on Wednesday nights. Please call Stan McCall 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.

To assist us in scheduling, please call Stan or a board member in advance to reserve shop time. Thank you!

SHOW DATES

September 22, Escondido, CA Palomar Gem & Mineral Club, Redwood Senior Center Meeting Room, 13th Avenue & Redwood Street, Hours: 10 - 4 One day show, Don Parsley (760) 745-6181

September 29, Los Altos, CA Peninsula Gem and Mineral Society Los Altos Rancho Shopping Center Foothill Expressway and So. Springer Rd.

Hours: 9:30-4:45 (No Dealers) Frank Dina (650) 967-3424

September 29-30, Antioch, CA Antioch Lapidary Club Contra Costa County Fairgrounds, Tenth and L Streets, Antioch, 10-5 Both days David Zabaldano (925) 516-0651 / davez@cctrapp.com Susan Zabaldano (925) 516-0651 / susan@cctrapp.com

September 29-30, Downey, CA Delvers Gem and Mineral Society, Inc. Woman's Club of Downey 9813 Paramount Blvd. Hours: Sat 10-5 Sun 10-4, Manfred Dextling (562) 425-0192

September 29-30, Monterey, CA Carmel Valley Gem and Mineral Society Monterey Fairgrounds 2004 Fairgrounds Road, Hours: Sat. 10-6; Sun. 10-5 Co-chairs: John Wills (831) 394-9099 / jbmarsha@aol.com, Sky Paxton (831) 663-6978 / paxtons@ips.net

October 3-7, Joshua Tree, CA Sportsmans Club Sportsmans Hall 6225 Sunburst Avenue Hours: Wed-Sat 8-5 Sun 8-3 Gary Palmer (760) 366-3430 e-mail: sportsmansclub@thegrid.net

*Trip Report: **Topaz Mountain Gem Mine, Tarryall, Colorado***

By Jim Pisani

Since my wife Rhonda gave birth to our son Johnny two years ago, our family rockhounding trips have become somewhat tame and limited. So, until Johnny is big enough carry his own backpack and rock hammer, our journeys are restricted to easy pickings, such as drive-in "fee" mining locations. A good example is Virgin Valley's Royal Peacock Mine. There we rented a heated trailer with a kitchen and real beds, just the right size for a toddler.

So, when we decided to vacation this past August in the Denver Colorado area for a family wedding, I was itching to get in a day or two of gem hunting, but somewhere that was "easy". Now I have heard that about three minerals that Colorado was famous for. The first was aquamarine. After doing a little research, I realized that for aquamarine you had to hike about 6 miles one way up Mt. Antero over 14,000 feet altitude. Well forget that one! The second was amazonite, which though attractive, didn't really interest me. The third was topaz, which, after getting a nice specimen at Quartzsite last year and having a friend facet it, really had my rockhound interest flowing.

I remember reading an article on topaz in *Rock & Gem Magazine*. I searched my pile of magazines and found an article by Steve Voynick (Jan. 2001) on the Topaz Mountain Gem Mine in Tarryall, Colorado. It talked about his visit to there and the almost certainty of finding topaz. So off we went!

We flew into Denver International Airport on a Wednesday and then proceeded to Breckenridge, Colorado in a rental car. Breckenridge is an old mining town now a ski resort situated at 9500 feet. After enjoying the resort's small shops (there is an excellent rock shop that had beautiful pieces of calcite) and mountain scenery, along with sleepless nights getting used to the altitude, we took off over the pass to "South Park", a beautiful high altitude plateau ranching region south of Breckenridge and the namesake for the cartoon comedy. There, in a town called Fairplay, there have an interesting mining town reconstruction - actually original buildings transported from other ghost towns.

From there, it's about an hour's drive to the turnoff to the Topaz Mountain Gem Mine. The mine is located on the west side of a medium size mountain range called the Tarryall Mountains. Mostly granite, the mountains are full of pegmatites, where the topaz is formed. The area is forested with pine and juniper, and is in the same general area of Pike's Peak. If you are coming from the east, the closest large town

is Colorado Springs, which is also about an hour's drive.

The route to the mine is paved all the way except for the last mile or two, which is a well graded dirt road, easily driven with a regular car, which was great since we didn't have to worry about safety with a toddler or risk to our rental car. We arrived at the mine site at about 2pm, and the first thing we saw was a house trailer, with a highly visible sign. I left my wife and child in the car because it had started to rain, and knocked on the trailer door.

A sleepy voice said, "Come in" in a western drawl. The first thing I saw in the trailer was a glass case with specimens with a revolver in a holster sitting on top of it. My gaze then fell on Walt Rubeck, the mine proprietor, an elderly gentleman with a fixed stoop (which I attributed to years of bending down mining) sporting a cowboy hat. I had just awoken Walt from a catnap, but he immediately accommodated me.

Walt gave me a tour of the site, first showing me some rough and cut stones. The topaz at the mine comes in clear, light blue, and a sherry color. The mine is a placer mine from alluvial gravels that were worn down from the close surrounding mountains. The size of the gems can be considerable, with 5 to 10 carat stones being common. When you see dig at the site, you are not really digging. Walt and his crew do all the digging before hand and concentrates and pre-sorts the gravels. The topaz in the gravel is completely hidden by a thick layer of dried red mud. Walt has some tents set up with 1/8-inch screens on tables. The process is to wash the gravels with water through the screens to expose the topaz crystals.

I was excited about finding my first topaz. Then we started talking business, and my excitement started diminishing. The gravels are sold in 5 gallon buckets, each one weighing about 50 pounds. There are two grades: premium and "carryout". The premium buckets cost \$60 each and the carryout \$20 each.

I thought that \$60 for 5 gallons was a little high but what the heck, how often can you find good topaz? As we talked further, Walt stated the condition for the premium buckets is that you had to buy two. Hmm, I thought, \$120... well, that means twice as long to screen it but then you get twice as much topaz! OK I said, when do I get started? Well, Walt then told me his other condition: you had a guaranteed contract from Walt that he would cut the stones when the mine closed for winter from \$165 to \$200, depending on the size of the stone. I asked could I have the stones cut on my own? No was the answer. All of a sudden, this vacation's cost was skyrocketing! I contemplated that if I was really lucky, then one stone cut wasn't that bad as long as I could bring home the rest of the rough that I found. NO said Walt - unless

he cutted them, I had to forfeit any additional stones that were found.

Well, I asked, how about the carryout buckets? Fine, he said, they are \$20 apiece, minus the bucket. No bucket? Why do I need a bucket? Well, you can't wash them here. Only premium buckets are allowed to be washed on premise. I'm thinking, where can I wash the gravel? Well, you can buy a screen for \$30 and do it yourself wherever you can find water. I'm thinking, here I am with a crying 2 year old, my wife near the end of her endurance, it's raining, and I got to find a stream somewhere to wash gravel? Walt must of read my mind and suggested, for \$2 each, buying a nylon burlap style bag and shipping them home to California. I started doing a mental luggage calculation: three paying seats equals six allowable pieces; I had two bags, one baby car seat, and one portable crib – hey, I had two extra luggage spots! Ship'em all the time with no problem, said Walt.

So that's what I did. I did, however, put the nylon bags into two plastic storage contains I bought from Wal-Mart (no relation to Walt, but he couldn't be much poorer), and secured them with nylon tie-wraps. The airlines didn't blink an eye, just marking them "oversized".

So there they sit, in my garage, still in their containers, with all their hidden topaz, while, in my busy life, I try to find time get a 1/8 screen made to get at it! Maybe I should have spent the extra \$30 for a screen and brought it on the airplanes as a carryon! Directions: Go West on Highway 24 from Colorado Springs to Lake George. Just past Lake George, you'll encounter County Road 77. Turn right and go 7 miles to Matukat Road. Turn right and go 2.3 miles to the mine and look for the white house trailer and tarp tents sifting area. There are obvious signs. The mine is open only from May 15 thru Sept. 15th.

Pertinent info: Walt Rubeck, 2010 Wold Avenue, Colorado Springs, CO, 80909; phone, 719-596-5492, website: <http://www.topazmountaingemmine.com> e-mail: Rubeck@topazmountaingemmine.com.

-----Opal Express Advertisement-----

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The American Opal Society

Proudly presents its

**34th Annual
OPAL & GEM SHOW**

Largest Opal show in USA!

November 3rd & 4th, 2001

Saturday 10AM - 6PM

Sunday 10AM - 5PM

Australian Opal: *Lightning Ridge, YOWAH, Koroit, Mintabe, Coober Pedy, Andamooka*

American Opal: *Idaho Blue, Spencer Opal, Mexican Opal, Honduras Opal*

Opal Related Seminars; Demonstrators

Location: Quality Maingate Hotel
616 Convention Way **ANAHEIM**, California
Close to **DISNEYLAND**

One block South of Katella Avenue
On Harbor Blvd at Convention Way

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