

# The Opal Express

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



**Volume #36 Issue #11  
 November 2003**

TO:

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**Important Dates:**

**Opal & Gem Show**  
**November 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>**

**General Meeting: November 13**

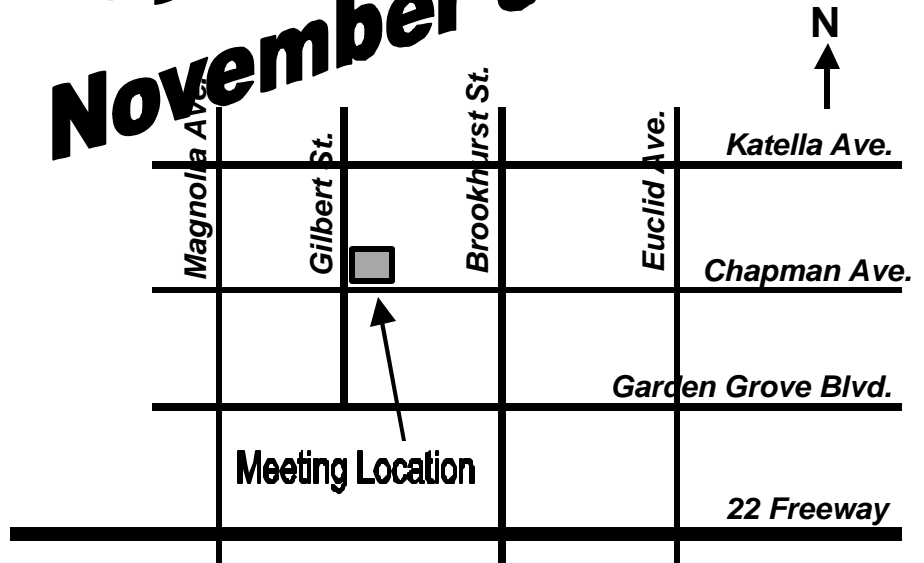
— **GENERAL MEETINGS** —

2nd Thursday of the Month  
 7:00 pm - 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

# Opal & Gem Show November 8th & 9th



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

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# American Opal Society Membership Renewal

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP		DUES / FEES)	AMOUNT PAID
<u>DUES:</u> <u>SELECT ONE</u>	All <u>US</u> Addresses including Alaska and Hawaii	\$25.00	
	<u>International Members</u> = All addresses <u>outside</u> of US Addresses	\$30.00	
<u>ADDITIONAL BADGES</u> = \$5.00 each (First Badge <u>free</u> when joining)		\$5.00	
<u>ONE TIME INITIATION FEE</u> = All <u>New</u> members		\$10.00	
<u>SENIOR DISCOUNT</u> = Age 65 or over deduct \$5.00		-\$5.00	
<b>TOTAL PAID – DUES, less Senior Discount plus Badge plus Initiation Fee (if Applicable)</b>			

Please make check or money order payable to "American Opal Society". Mail payment and application to:  
**American Opal Society; PO BOX 4875; Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875**

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**NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:**  
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.

**MEMBERSHIP ROSTER & DEALERS LIST:** The AOS publishes a membership directory once per year in its Newsletter, the *Opal Express*. Your name will be included. Please check what additional personal information that you want listed for other members. If it is different from the information above, please note that on the application.

Address     Phone     E-mail     Website

Include my name & address on a list provided to the Dealers selling at our Annual Opal & Gem Show.

If you checked any box above, please sign here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Without your signature here you will not be included in the member info list or included in the dealer roster.

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**Editor-Jim Pisani**

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**Email: [webmaster@opalsociety.org](mailto:webmaster@opalsociety.org)**  
Article Deadline is the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to each issue

## Are Your Dues Due Now?

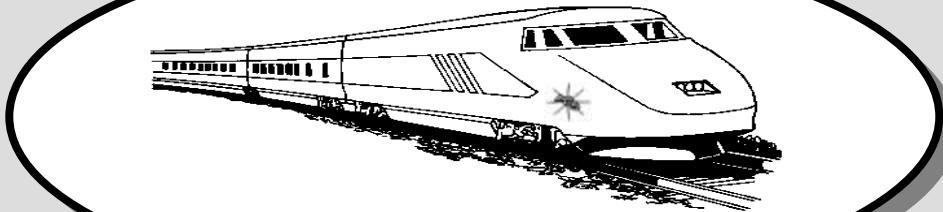
**PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL.** If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

**A 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.

Thank you,  
The Editor

# The Opal Express

Published  
monthly by  
The  
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Opal  
Society



November 2003

Volume 36 Issue 11

## President's Message

*By Pete Goetz*

It's finally here! We are down to completing the final plans for the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Opal & Gem Show! "Rainbow of the World" is our theme this year.

Our Grand Prize is a jewelry set designed, fabricate, and created by Lifetime Member Conrad Cone. The set includes a necklace, earrings, ring and bracelet. The set is made of two types of inlay opal that are inlayed into a matching configuration. Please visit our website to see the jewelry in outstanding color. An article on Conrad Cone is on page 4. We have to report that Conrad recently suffered a slight stroke but is expected to fully recover.

I want to thank those of you who have already volunteered to help out at the show. We could still use some help for breaks and lunch runs for Saturday and Sunday. Additional help could be use Friday from 5 PM -7 PM to help setup the show and Sunday 6 PM - 8 PM for tear down.

Please make your best effort to come to the annual show. Our seminars alone are worth the trip. Most important,. Come on down and have a treat time looking, buying, and talking opal!

\*\*\*\*\*

## November Snippets

*by Barb Whyre*

The icon of the Lightning Ridge opal fields is the automatic hoist, developed right here in the 1960s. Eric Catterall, the miner given credit for this effort, was born near Geelong at Deans Marsh, Victoria. He had polio as a child and walked with crutches. No one would mine with him as a cripple so he devised a machine he could work alone. Not good from a safety point of view, but who can you trust anyway?

Eric loved his greyhounds. They got their exercise trotting behind his Ferguson tractor on leads. The dogs loved kangaroo meat, and you could smell remnants of their dinner on a hot

**IT'S HERE!!!**

*The American Opal Society's  
36th Annual*

**ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW**  
*Largest Opal show in USA!*

**Sat. & Sun., November 8 & 9, 2003**

Saturday 10AM - 6PM

Sunday 10AM - 5PM

**Location: Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort**

616 Convention Way **ANAHEIM**, California  
Close to **DISNEYLAND**

One block South of Katella on Harbor Blvd.

summer's night when passing his camp. PU!

Eric had strong feelings and published a book of poems, many with a skeptical view of politics and religion. He chose a lonely life and was a very private man. He died alone in 1977. Such life stories are not uncommon on the opal fields. A friend marked his grave 25 years later.

We thank Eric for his inventive nature and our icon, the automatic hoist, used in many variations, 2003.

\*\*\*\*\*

great opal... great prices

Black  
White  
Boulder  
Rough

[www.opalshop.com.au](http://www.opalshop.com.au)



## Member Creates Masterpiece for Show

Conrad Cone, a Local Artist & AOS Lifetime Member, will be featured at the annual Opal and Gem Show in Anaheim, CA.

The American Opal Society is presenting its 36<sup>th</sup> annual Opal and Gem Show on Saturday and Sunday; November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. It will be held at the Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort located on Convention Way at Harbor Blvd. Hours will be from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.



Complete Jewelry Set By Conrad Cone

This show will feature, as a **grand prize**, a set of created opal stones set in an inlay design of a complete jewelry set. This jewelry set was designed and fabricated by Conrad Cone, a resident of Buena Park. More amazing is that Conrad Cone has just celebrated his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday. He will be demonstrating his artistic jewelry design and master

silversmithing techniques during the show hours. He will have a display case, which will contain many of his jewelry designs, which depict his artistic talents. The jewelry set consists of different opal stones inlaid in silver mountings. The set consists of a necklace, bracelet, a ring and a set of earrings each having matching inlay opals. It is an outstanding unique, unmatched one of a kind design.

Conrad Cone was born in Chester, Connecticut in 1910. He has lived in Southern California since 1946. He retired from the US Navy in 1953 after serving during World War II and the Korean War. He attained the rank of Lieutenant. He spent another 19 years with the Long Beach Unified School District.

Conrad learned his craft by taking a series of jewelry, lapidary and silversmithing classes at the House of Opals and refined his techniques over the last 50 years. He does most of his work at his home workshop and has created many beautiful jewelry pieces. Some of his artistic creations can be seen at his



Conrad Cone

## Opal & Gem Show Seminar Schedule

### Saturday; November 8th

12:00 noon	Walt Johnson	Inherent Hazards in Setting of Opal
1:30 pm	Stan McCall	Inlay Jewelry Design Techniques
3:00 pm	Mike Kowalsky	Created Opal Identification

### Sunday; November 9th

10:30 am	Tim Thomas	Opal Buying Factors
12:00 noon	Barbara McCondra	Up Close and personal With Yowah Opal
1:30 pm	Larry Hoskinson & Leslie Neff	Australia Opal Mining Update

showcase at the Opal and Gem Show. Conrad had been very generous in donating several jewelry sets to be used for fund raising for the American Opal Society, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the beautiful and multi-colored gemstone opal.

Conrad has passed on his artistic techniques to his son, Skip, who collaborates with him on some of his creations. Skip has followed his father and pursued a Navy career prior to forming his own business in San Diego. Together they design intricate pieces of jewelry such as earrings, necklaces, pendants and rings. They fabricate the designs in silver and gold, and then cut the opals or other stones to exactly fit the inlay channels of the design structure.

The American Opal Society Gem and Mineral Show will feature a variety of rough opal, finished opal stones from many parts of the world as well as other gemstones, lapidary supplies and gem and mineral related books. There will be a series of lectures on various aspects of opals, such as opal mining, cutting and polishing of gemstones and jewelry fabrication. There will be demonstrations on opal carving, jewelry design and fabrication and lapidary techniques.

### “Members Only” Area on Website

The “Members Only” area on our website, <http://opalsociety.org>, is a password protected area. Two links are there: The Opal Express Archives and Opal Collecting Sites. An account name and password are required to get into the protected area. This password will change periodically and will be in the current issue of the Opal Express. The link is: [http://opalsociety.org/aos\\_members\\_only\\_area.htm](http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm).

To login into the protected area, click the following when prompted: **Name:** member - **Password:** nopotch

### Advertising Rates for the Opal Express

Business Card Size:	\$ 5 per month
Quarter Page Size:	\$10 per month
Half Page Size:	\$20 per month
Full Page Size:	\$40 per month

**Contact: The Opal Express C/O Jim Pisani**  
**P.O. Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875**  
**Email: [webmaster@opalsociety.org](mailto:webmaster@opalsociety.org)**

## Opal Workshop

The AOS opal workshop is at **Ball Jr. High School** on 1500 W. Ball Road, Anaheim, CA. It will be available for AOS members on Wednesday. Contact **Stan McCall** for details at (714) 220-9282 if you plan to attend a session.

## Gem Tip - Don't Put Opals In Glycerin

According to a letter to the editor of AFMS Newsletter, written by William R. Cook, PhD, Mineralogy, this is a very bad idea. This will cause cracking rather than preventing it. Glycerin has an affinity for water and it will actually draw the moisture out of opal. He says water is not good either, as long exposure to water can cause them to redissolve slightly. He suggests mineral oil - or - to wear them frequently, as they will pick up the oil in your skin which is a good barrier to moisture. (Fr. AFMS Newsletter & others via Rock Rollers, 7/99)

From the GNEISS GNEWS, October, 2002

<http://members.thegateway.net/hlgms/>

## Cab Bottoms

Here is a great thread from The Lapidary List, posted October 20-26, 2002. It has some great info on how to finish a cab back, something opal cutters may be interested in.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LapidaryList> - Reprinted for educational purposes under the "fair use" provision of the U.S. Copyright Act.

Subject: Cab bottoms

From: [RoCkHeAd2u@aol.com](mailto:RoCkHeAd2u@aol.com)

Hi to cabbers and jewelers I have a question about the bottom of cabs. Do all jewelers, (most, some, or it varies with jewelers) who purchase cabs want the bottom polished?

I cab stones but I also use part of what I polish in mountings I purchase and in SS jewelry I fabricate.

Just wondering if there is a current trend. I could then finish my cabs in a way that would make the sale of my cabs competitive.

Larry in Portland. OR

From: Jim [jsmall47@earthlink.net](mailto:jsmall47@earthlink.net)

Larry - I've been cutting for over 40 years, full-time for 10. My standard is matte finish backs (flat lapped to 600 grit). I know what you mean about trying to be competitive; unless it is a custom order I won't do any of the smaller standard sizes, as folks expect to get them for under a dollar each!

Jim Small - Small Wonders

From: Richard Friesen [friesenr@ix.netcom.com](mailto:friesenr@ix.netcom.com)

Larry, this is an old question that will probably never be completely resolved. The argument against polishing the back is, generally, if it is going to be set in such away that the back can't be seen why bother polishing it.

I think the arguments for polishing are:

Unless you are going to set it, you don't know how it will be set.

If you are selling to the public your cabs will be compared to other, usually cheaper, imported cabs, mostly tumble polished, and yours will be considered "unfinished" regardless of how well made.

Many (most?) cabs have as attractive a back as front and polishing the back allows it to be shown.

It is hard to keep from being considered a low quality, production cutter, by anyone viewing your "unfinished" cabs, even if they recognize the quality of your work.

But I think the biggest reason is your own attitude toward your work. You know, consciously or unconsciously, that an unpolished back is not the best work you can do. You will end up

over time accepting that less than your best is a acceptable way to do business. Don't let finding a buyer who will purchase your "unfinished" work, at a reduced price, justify reducing the quality of your work. --

Dick Friesen [friesenr@ix.netcom.com](mailto:friesenr@ix.netcom.com)

From: Mark Williams [stnbrk@rio.com](mailto:stnbrk@rio.com)

Richard and everyone,

Just thought I'd put my two cents worth in here. I have had the opposite problem on the few occasions I have polished the backs of cabs... People assumed they were tumble polished, therefore, they weren't really "hand cut" stones. In these particular cases, the stones were almost transparent and I explained that I had polished the backs on purpose to get the effect I desired. I don't know if they believed me or not. Most of the stones I cut for clients these days are on order, so I can ask them which way they prefer. I also have a pretty set client base, so I know most of their tastes and can cut accordingly. My opinion is this: Do what you think is best for any given stone. I prefer the rounded bottoms on most of my stones, as they are MUCH less apt to break or chip when setting (Since opals are somewhat fragile, this is the main reason they SHOULD be cut this way, not for yield). If, for some reason, you think a stone will be epoxied (inlay, setting or whatever) the stone would probably be best sanded to 600 or so to allow the epoxy to attach well. Some setters use epoxies and some would consider it sacrilegious to do so. You never know, so better to hedge it. This is one of those topics that can get a lapidary's (or stone setter's) "dander up," so I hope I'm not coming off as a know-it-all here. The main thing is that it's a matter of opinion and circumstance. Just try to imagine how it will be set and by whom and then go with what the stone says it should be! (The stone is ALWAYS right). You probably will get negative comments from some no matter what way you choose to go. You can't please everyone, so please the stone and yourself.

Mark Williams - Eugene, Oregon, USA

From: "Gold Rush/Opal Opal" [goldrush@starband.net](mailto:goldrush@starband.net)

Mark said: "(Since opals are somewhat fragile, this is the main reason they SHOULD be cut this way, not for yield)."

In the spirit of offering a different opinion:

Mark, you are right that there are differing opinions on these issues.

I agree that you simply cannot please all of the people all of the time with your cutting, but I do not agree that opals "should" be cut with domed bottoms. I do think that the opals are cut with domed bottoms to increase yield, though I have heard the arguments on both sides. A cabochon that is domed on both sides is suitable for an open backed pendant or earring dangles that are surrounded by a metal strip, but that is about it as far as I am concerned.

We cut all of our opals with flat bottoms and with chamfered edges to prevent chipping. Personally, I have set a lot of opals and do not have a problem with chipping them. With a domed back in a bezel setting with a solid back the pressure of the bezel is concentrated onto the center part of the bottom of the dome, if you are able to set the stone at all. It is preferable to spread the pressure out over the full surface of the bottom of the cab in my opinion. Setting an opal with a domed bottom into a bezel cup with a solid flat bottom is almost an impossible feat in any case. The dome on the bottom causes the opal to "rock" when pressure is applied to the bezel. (Not a fun experience.) In prong settings the problem is not as pronounced, but my preference is still for a flat bottom to establish a nice firm seat for the stone. I would prefer that all cabs of all types have flat bottoms for my jewelry making.

In general, I like a slightly "frosted look" on the bottom of transparent cabs for my jewelry. Otherwise, you are looking right at the metal on the bottom of the bezel cup, or the base of the prong setting. Just a matter of preference for each jeweler, but unlike faceted stones, cabochons allow you to look straight through the stone to what lies beneath and that may, or may not fit with the design. Sometimes, for design reasons, there are reasons to have transparent stones be clear, but in general a 600 grit finish suits me just fine.

When we buy stones cut by others, if the workmanship is good I do not care if the back is polished or not unless it is a stone that will be in an open back type of setting. Then it would depend on the type of stone and the setting itself. I generally buy stones because of some pattern that appeals to me in the cab or the color without regard for whether or not there is a high polish on the back. The general workmanship is quite important, however. That is my two cents worth. Normally, I just lurk and enjoy the posts, but I do have a lot of opinions when it comes to opals and cabochons with domed bottoms. No offense intended, Mark, my opinion just differs from yours.

Liz McKay Doc and Liz McKay - Gold Rush Jewelry, Bead and Art Co.- Opal Opal - <http://www.opalopal.com> P.O. Box 635 Fairplay, CO 80440 719-836-2143 [opal@opalopal.com](mailto:opal@opalopal.com)

---

From: Jim [jsmall47@earthlink.net](mailto:jsmall47@earthlink.net)

Liz - I have to go along with you; setting domed bottom stones is not fun! This connects directly with tumble polishing cabs - many foreign produced stones are not only off-size due to lots of tumbling, but also have so much rounding that they rock back and forth slightly; in effect, they're domed slightly. I also liked your point about frosted stones to hide the metal of the setting.  
Jim Small - Small Wonders

---

"Margaret Malm" [kadok@infowest.com](mailto:kadok@infowest.com)

On the other hand, (from the jewelry-makers' standpoint) rounded bottoms on cabs present extra difficulties in making the setting; without a flat bottom, you have to use a step bezel -- which has to be handmade (at least, I don't know anywhere to buy it) and is much more difficult to make than the usual bezel. (But don't misunderstand me; I certainly agree that the bottom edge should be rounded.)

Margaret

---

From: [mwillow@oz.net](mailto:mwillow@oz.net)

Um, am I just too "old-school" here, or does nobody pad behind the cab with paper, sawdust or felt any more? Just make the bezel a bit taller, put some padding behind the stone, and set as usual.

The advantages are that you can easily set domed-back stones, the padding helps cut down on rattling, and it even cushions the stones somewhat against damage.

The big disadvantage is that, once installed, it makes for a nasty fire hazard should an unsuspecting jeweler need to do any soldering on the finished piece.

Thoughts on this?

Jeannette - <http://vikki.oz.net/~jeanne/>

---

From: "Gold Rush/Opal Opal" [goldrush@starband.net](mailto:goldrush@starband.net)

Jeanette, my thoughts:

The fact that these materials cannot take the heat of repair is only part of the problem, the other problem with padding behind cabochons with these materials is that they are organic and over time they break down causing the cab to become loose in its setting. I do frequently raise a cabochon in its setting, but I do so by sawing a round or oval (whatever is appropriate) piece of metal and putting it behind the stone or, occasionally, using a

stepped bezel. As previously stated, I prefer the stones with flat backs, I set them firmly in their settings and they do not rattle. A stone that would rattle is not properly set. Many jewelers have seen older pieces come in for repair that had been set with sawdust originally and have become loose in their setting. The best course, in my opinion, is to avoid the problem in the first place and stay away from organic materials behind stones.

Liz McKay

---

From: "Fran and Irv Baker" [irvingb@sonic.net](mailto:irvingb@sonic.net)

I have set many stones with domed bottoms and have found that pyrite when ground up makes a great bed for the stone. Fireproof and when mixed with dilute epoxy it is permanent.

Irv B.

---

From: [mwillow@oz.net](mailto:mwillow@oz.net)

Thanks, Irv! Not only would this allow setting stones with domed backs, but it would remove the rattle, too, though the epoxy is still a fire concern.

Jeannette

---

From: Jim [jsmall47@earthlink.net](mailto:jsmall47@earthlink.net)

Irv - The single shortcoming of using powdered pyrite is its chemical instability. In the presence of water (even humid air) pyrite breaks down chemically and releases sulfuric acid. The use of epoxy creates a problem when repairs or re-sizing are necessary, as epoxies release their own toxic fumes when heated. If the owner knows what's in the jewelry that is enough, but they then need to communicate it to whomever they take their jewelry to for repair/resizing.

Jim Small - Small Wonders

---

From: TAM <[tam2819@c...](mailto:tam2819@c...)>

Jeanette, Are you aware that Mylar has been used behind translucent stones? They have a great selection at Wal-Mart, wonderful colors and patterns too.

Teresa

---

From: "Orville & Rose Alene" <[obmcarthur@c...](mailto:obmcarthur@c...)>

It seems to me that you might have some trouble keeping sterling silver from tarnishing with iron pyrite in that close proximity to the metal.

Rose Alene McArthur

---

From: Mark Williams <[stnbrk@r...](mailto:stnbrk@r...)>

List members,

As I stated earlier, this topic can be a tough one to tackle, as there are a lot of different opinions on it. I would just like to say a few more things from my own experience and then I HOPE to stay out of it. Please don't think of this post as an attack on anyone's opinions. It is just another view that I hope you consider. I got into lapidary due mostly to my love of opal (Lightning Ridge black, to be specific). I learned to cut opals by reading and thoroughly absorbing everything Paul Downing has ever written on the subject. Of course, I have also read a lot of other things and I try to work closely with the people for whom I cut (mostly local goldsmiths). I must admit, I took exception to the statement that I might cut low domed bottoms on opals to gain on yield and therefore \$. In most cases, I'm cutting AWAY good material to get the low dome on the back. I consider it a sacrifice for the good of the stone. I don't even own a carat scale. I don't do this for a living. I charge based on the cost of the rough used (If I use my rough) and the time I put into cutting. The weight of the stone has little to do with it. I only hope to break even in most cases, as this is a hobby for me. The only reason I charge at all is to keep my wife from divorcing me due to the

expense of my addiction (lapidary). I cut stones the way I do because I feel that it is the right thing to do.

Over half of my lapidary "income" is from cutting replacement stones... mostly opals. I hate the job because there is little creativity involved. I have to cut the stone to nearly the exact shape of the broken stone, so it will fit into the setting. I do this boring task, as it keeps my customers happy and then I get to cut other, more creative stuff for them. Actually, it is my main source of income, so I guess I shouldn't preach my feelings on cutting opals! Keep cutting them flat-bottomed ones! (humor) I have never kept track of the amount of replacement stones I have cut, but I can estimate it to be well over a hundred. All of them have been either inlay or (the majority) flat bottomed, low and high dome pieces. Only a few of them have been prong set, so I can't really put the blame on that. I have never had to replace a well-cut (in my opinion) opal. I agree that setting them can be a royal pain in the arse. However, once they ARE set, they are very difficult to break. Let's face it; once the jewelry leaves the shop we have no control over how the jewelry is treated. We can only do what we can to make sure the piece can handle as much abuse as possible. Dome shapes are just physically stronger than flat (just like the VW commercials say). The toughest part of setting is at first, before you get the bezel to hold the stone. Once that occurs, I find it easy to finish it. One of my best customers is a very accomplished setter (he has all the GIA master stuff). He doesn't use any backing material or even step bezel. He only uses the very heaviest bezels. He simply cuts out a smaller part in the bottom center of the setting for the bottom to "sit" in. Sometimes (depending on the setting) it's cut all the way through; sometimes he only cuts out an indentation... Doesn't take much. He then holds the stone in place with one finger while he uses the hammer setter to set it at first, then finishes by hand. I have set a few stones myself and don't own a hammer setting hand piece, so I know it can be done entirely by hand this way, too. It's a little tougher, but I think, well worth it. I guess what I'm saying is that it's not something for production shops maybe. It takes more time and care than the average setting job. The problem is that opals ARE relatively fragile and therefore (I think) need a little more attention. What can I say; it's the love of the stone speaking. Most of the tougher stones I cut are with flat bottoms with bezels. I HAVE been known to cut other, non-opal, but fragile material using the low dome bottom too. I know I shouldn't have said that opals "should" be cut my way.... As I said, there are no real cut and dried rules out there. I wouldn't be so careful with medium to low intensity fire opal. Not really worth the extra effort. I firmly believe the stone sets the rules for cutting and if I can't find a customer that likes it; I set it myself (I mostly modify catalog settings or have one of my customers make a custom one - I haven't gotten to the point of making my own settings yet, but hope to start some classes soon). Those transparent stones I mentioned in my earlier post were some ice-blue opals from Opal Butte, here in Oregon. They had a quality to them (as most transparent opals do) that made really cool "rays" shoot through wherever the most light hit them. I noticed it while it was wet (thereby looking polished all over). I initially sanded the back to 600-grit, but noticed that the play of light was no longer there. That is why I polished the backs. I only mentioned them to show that some people consider a polished back to be a sign of tumble polishing or otherwise non-handmade, so I don't usually do it unless there's a reason. Usually I go to 600 or 1200 grit.

This turned out to be MUCH longer than I had hoped... Please forgive a true Opaloholic his fanaticism...

Mark Williams, Eugene, OR

OPAL: As Unique As You Are! OPAL: As Unique As You Are

OPAL: Your Personal Rainbow©

## HOUSE OF TIBARA, Inc. Tim & Barbara Thomas

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From: "Margaret Malm" <[kadok@i...](mailto:kadok@i...)>

Yes, Jeannette -- really don't like to use sawdust, paper, felt, or anything absorbent behind a stone. Granted, it makes nice padding. But on the other hand, most rings (and quite a few bracelets, at least) often end up in the water during dishwashing etc. When those materials get wet they can get moldy, mildew, disintegrate, etc., etc. But I have used chunks of things like CDs (AOL keeps us supplied with a seemingly endless supply of them) to fill in some gaps.

Margaret

From: Dave Arens <[gemstonesetc@g...](mailto:gemstonesetc@g...)>

I suppose what's used as backing when setting a cab is a matter of how one was trained or personal experience & if you asked 10 folks what was best, you'd get 10 different answers.

In my book, anything that isn't as permanent as the cab being set & the metal the piece is made from should be avoided. It won't stand the test of time (& innumerable soakings in water etc).

If a cab needs to be raised or supported a little distance from the back of the piece a step bezel can be used. If that's not available or can't be used for some reason here's another way that might solve the problem.

Make a ring of the appropriate size wire & place it inside the bezel so it contacts the bezel & the back where they meet. After fitting, it's best to tack it in a few places so it doesn't move.

Dave

From: "Pay Dirt Mining" <[southstar@e...](mailto:southstar@e...)>

The way Dave has described is my technique as a silversmith. I don't particularly like stepped bezels, so I make my own with the appropriate size wire pieces soldered inside the bezel as described. This works great.

I don't like organic materials as sawdust etc, as they can turn rancid and smell, or other flammable materials as I try to think ahead for any possible repair.

Mitzi

From: [mwillow@o...](mailto:mwillow@o...)

OK, I can see that my views regarding using some cushioning material behind a cab are decidedly not popular, and I'm beginning to see a bit of a trend here. It looks to me like the majority of people opposed to a domed-back cab, with a padded bezel cup setting, are silversmiths.

To me, it looks rather like the silversmiths are willing to subject a cab to a much higher risk of damage and destruction, on the off chance that there might be some call to apply torch to the setting

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at some later date. No padding makes torching much easier, as they won't need to use anything like Kool Jool to protect the stone from heat.

I still see padding is necessary, especially for high-wear settings like rings. OK, not too many pendants are going to get bumped into brick walls, but rings sure do, and I've seen far too many rings get their stones shattered, because of poor settings - prong settings for cabbed opals are especially prone to damaged stones.

I'm not a silversmith. At best, I can make a silver setting that will allow me to show off the stone that Mother Nature made, and allowed me to shape for Her. The silver work, for me, is of far less importance. That's all man-made, there is very little trace left of Mother Nature in it, and it's something that anybody with the right skill set can easily duplicate. While cabs can be duplicated, that exact stone will never be duplicable, and I place far more value on the stone than on the setting for it.

So go ahead, shoot me. I'm a \*lapidary\*, not a jeweler, and certainly not a silversmith. I don't do this for a living, I rarely even sell my work - most of it, I give away to friends and acquaintances. I'm an amateur, I do this for love, not money.  
Jeannette

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**From:** "kdhrocks" <[kdhrocks@m...](mailto:kdhrocks@m...)>

Hi Margaret and all on the list. I find that if a Cab Grabber, Cinch Mount or Wrap tite mount is used it behooves me to dome and polish the backs to at least to a 12,000 finish. This allows the mount to be fully engaged with no gaps or mismatches and have a nice finish if it is seen. They also seem to sell better. On the other hand if the stone is to be bezel set the back is flat and has no finish. Just my thoughts and all discussion is welcome. Dave Harris

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**From:** TAM <[tam2819@c...](mailto:tam2819@c...)>

Jeanette, No need for flames. A good Smith, gold or silver, will use the metal to enhance the stone, not compete with it. Metalsmiths can demonstrate their abilities working metals, piercing, forging, marrying, and keep the piece stone free. That works to show fabrication and design ability.

Designing metal to support stones must take into consideration the degree of possible abuse to, and the fragility of the stone. In more recent years with the popularity of wire work, there is not enough consideration of the tensile strength of the stone itself, and the ease of which wire work can disengage from the stone.

There is a benefit to learning more about mixing metal and stone. Many books are out there, not everyone is willing to take the time to read and learn. Forums such as this help greatly when questions are asked. We can all learn from the answers.

At times the customer requests a design with a stone too fragile to be worn in that manner. I often read the lament of the jeweler unable to convince the customer the request is not practical. Then a short time later the customer is back in with a broken or



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lost stone and blames the jeweler. Yes frequently it is a prong set opal; Go figure.

Jeanette, I have seen your work, were you so inclined you could sell them. Soon you will have many wanting on your "friends" list.  
Teresa

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**From:** "Margaret Malm" <[kadok@i...](mailto:kadok@i...)>

Hi, Dave -- I (being a silversmith) never heard of any of those mounts! I assume they are something that you buy ready-made? And are meant for wire-wrap, or something that will be viewed from both sides? Just stick it in and hang it from a chain? I agree that for such things a domed and nicely finished back is not only an asset, but necessary.

All my work is bezel-set, so a flat back is a definite advantage. And I do enjoy working with things like petrified wood and agate cabs. But I don't need (and don't try to make) calibrated cabs; I also enjoy (and sometimes prefer) the unusual ("baroque" ) shapes.

So it sort of looks like what this whole discussion comes down to, is the intended final use. Or, to put it another way, what particular market you are aiming at.

Margaret

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## A Million Dollar Game of Chess Coober Pedy Style

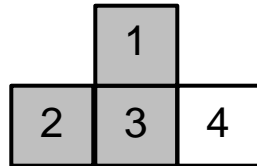
A miner named Anthony and his two partners were working three adjoining claims pegged in the shape of a reversed "L", the leg of which ran east and west. To the east of the southeastern claim and directly adjoining it was one pegged by a man named Nick. Immediately to the south of this was one pegged by Nick's partner.

Anthony found traces of opal running towards Nick's claim. In order to gain possession, Anthony devised a clever psychological trick. In full view of Nick he moved his pegs from the western claim and inserted them directly to the south of his other two claims. This made Nick think that a run had been found passing through Anthony's claims in a north and south direction, so he immediately pulled the pegs from his own claims and inserted them to the south of the three claims pegged by Anthony (in the hope of gaining the tail end of the imagined run). This, of course, was what Anthony expected. It was a simple matter to remove the pegs from one of his own claims and peg the one just vacated by Nick.

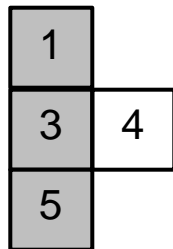
Nick's temper was more than a little upset when he realized how he had been tricked. But fate played the final move against Anthony. After working for a few more days, this unfortunate trickster decided that his original claim was the best one after all. He gave the claim he had obtained so cleverly to a friend and repegged his original claim.

It so happened that the claim he gave away carried all the opal. This was opal in giant thick slabs, enough to make several men rich for life, just waiting to be dug – and Anthony gave it all away.

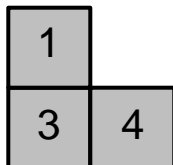
**First Move:** Claims 1, 2, and 3 pegged by Anthony. Claim 4 pegged by Nick. Anthony finds traces of opal running toward Claim 4.



**Second Move:** Anthony moves his pegs from Claim 2 to Claim 5, thus making Nick think that he found a run passing through Claims 1, 3, and 5.



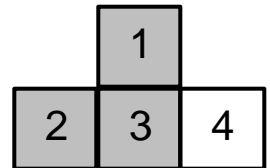
**Third Move:** Nick moves his pegs to Claim 6 in the hope of getting the tail end of the supposed runs; which is exactly what Anthony expected.



**Fourth Move:** Anthony pegs Claim 4.



**Fifth Move:** "Checkmate". Anthony gives Claim 4 to a friend. The friend gets all the opal.



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## Andamooka's Etamoogah Pub

By David J. Oldfield

Etamoogah Bill was a real old timer. I met him back in the late 1960's when I was living in Andamooka. I used to go to a place called Blue Dam, a big watering hole that was part of Andamooka cattle station. It is normally taboo to swim in a stock dam because it causes the animals to not want to drink there when they get the scent of humans. But because this was the closest dam to the opal mines the station owners used to let us use it. It was a great place to swim and catch big blue yabbies (fresh water crustaceans). They lived in the mud walls of the dams, were easy to catch and very good eating.

Close by Bill had an old tin shack next to his wheel-less caravan tucked in amongst the massive heaps of kopi and mullock from the open cut mining operations of White Dam opal fields. The drive to his pub was along a rough dirt track that snaked in and out between the deep open cut mines and the tall hills of mounded up kopi.

As I slowed up in front of his shack, the tattered fly wire door squeaked open and Bill came out of the shadows with a smile. His thin stooped body had seen better days. He wore an oversized T-shirt almost down to his knees and rubber boots almost up to his knees and nothing else. He had sparse hair on his well tanned head, a bushy grey beard and was covered all over with a fine dusting of white kopi (like talcum powder). One

of his long wiry arms reached out of the T shirt towards me and he greeted me with a huge iron grip hand and invited me in for refreshments.

The corrugated iron walls and roof were held up by desert cypress posts still wearing their bark. Two small windows - no glass - just fly wire, allowed some light in. Andamooka is brutal desert country with a four inch annual rainfall. Every 2 years it usually floods down eight inches in one day. If you leave your steel tools out in the sun for ten minutes they are too hot to pick up. I've fried an egg on a spade in the scorching sun. The air used to get so hot I could not breath in through my nostrils without covering them to cool the air a little.

The shack was only about 12 feet square with no electricity and a dirt floor. A card table, three chairs and a kerosene fridge made up the furniture. On the wall by the table hung a hospital drip feed bag complete with tubes, but instead of containing blood it was full of warm cheap red port wine. He offered me a glass of water and said I could have a swig of port free of charge. He couldn't charge for it because he had no alcohol license. In exchange for his hospitality he asked me to play a board game and my score would determine how much I should donate to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. If I played more games for more donations I could have a cold beer and a chance to win a small prize.

Bill had done a lot of hard work in his time but his sole reason for being out there with his "pub" was to collect money for the R.F.D.S. and to date he had collected over \$40,000 for them. A very worthy cause in outback Australia.

I've bumped into men and women of the calibre of Bill in many remote areas of the outback. It gives a deeper, richer meaning to life. It's all part of the colour and character of opal.

David J. Oldfield [peacepie@iprimus.com.au](mailto:peacepie@iprimus.com.au), is an expert opal cutter whose sole US distributor is Dida Kutz, at [www.candidaopals.com](http://www.candidaopals.com).

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### Shop Tips - Old Miner's Rule

While a miner's tools, equipment and personal belongings remain in or next to a digging, that is his until he relinquishes it either by removing said property or announcing that he is finished digging in that area. Furthermore, specimens or rocks cached on or near said personal property are also the property of the miner and shall not be touched or removed without his express permission. Every Rockhound should obey this rule.

Via the Geode via the Palomar 2003-03

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### Helpful Hints - Is it a CZ or a diamond?

If the stone is loose, turn it upside down on its table and slide it over a thin black line on a piece of paper. When looking straight down through a CZ, you will see a circle in the center of the stone. A diamond won't do this.

### Helpful Hints - Is it Citrine or topaz?

Clean stone. Then with a toothpick put a drop of water on the table. A bubble will form on real topaz but not on quartz.

Don Ashby In Gemrock 4-99 via The Rockhound's Ra, 1-03

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## November Gem & Mineral Shows

**1-2--CONCORD, CA:** 44th annual show; Contra Costa Mineral & Gem Society; Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd.; contact Sam Woolsey, (925) 837-3287; e-mail: [sdwools@earthlink.net](mailto:sdwools@earthlink.net).

**1-2--OXNARD, CA:** 34th annual show, "CAGems"; Oxnard Gem & Mineral Society; Oxnard Performing Arts & Convention Center, 800 Hobson Way; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; free admission; contact Lois Allmen, (805) 483-6871.

**1-2--RIDGECREST, CA:** 48th annual show; Indian Wells Gem & Mineral Society; Mesquite Hall, Desert Empire Fairgrounds, 520 S. Richmond Rd.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; contact John De Rosa, (760) 375-7905.

**1-2--SAN DIEGO, CA:** Annual show, "2003 Rockhound Gemboree"; Council of San Diego County Gem & Mineral Societies; Al Bahr Shrine Center, 5440 Kearny Mesa Rd., behind the Hampton Inn; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$4, seniors (65+) \$3, children under 12 and active military free; gems, minerals, jewelry, fossils, crystals, display cases, gem identification, demonstrations, drawings, many local dealers; contact Gretchen Ainsworth, San Diego Lapidary Society, 5654 Mildred St., San Diego, CA 92110, (858) 277-0240.

**1-2--WICKENBURG, AZ:** 3rd annual show, "Way Out Wickenburg Way Gem & Art Fair"; Wickenburg Gem & Mineral Society; Wickenburg Community Center; adults \$2, children under 12 free; displays, field trips, dealers of gems, minerals, jewelry and rough; door prizes, silent auction, raffle, e-mail [timbuk2@globalcrossing.net](mailto:timbuk2@globalcrossing.net) for \$1 off admission coupon; contact Ernie Leschner, c/o WGMS, P.O. Box 20375, Wickenburg, AZ 85358.

**8-9--ANAHEIM, CA:** Show, "OPAL: Rainbows of the World"; American Opal Society; Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort, 616 Convention Way, at Harbor Blvd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3.50, seniors \$3, students \$1, children free; contact Jay Carey, P.O. Box 4874, Garden Grove, CA 92842; (714) 525-7635; e-mail: [jaycarey@gte.net](mailto:jaycarey@gte.net).

**8-9--DeRIDDER, LA:** 16th annual show; DeRidder Gem & Mineral Society; Beauregard Parish Fair Exhibit Hall, 610 West Dr.; Sat. 9-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$2, children under 12 free; minerals, gemstones, jewelry, Indian artifacts, fluorescent mineral display, gem-cutting equipment and supplies, educational exhibits, demonstrations, silent auction, door prizes; contact Adam Valin, (337) 474-4833.

**8-9--YUBA CITY, CA:** 12th annual show; Sutter Buttes Gem & Mineral Society; Yuba-Sutter County Fairgrounds, 442 Franklin Ave.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; free admission; contact Charlie or Barbara Brown, P.O. Box 1636, Loomis, CA 95650.

**14-16--COSTA MESA, CA:** Show, "West Coast Gem & Mineral Show"; Martin Zinn Expositions; Holiday Inn-Bristol Plaza, 3131 S. Bristol; Fri. 10-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; free admission; 85 dealers from U.S., France, Brazil, Russia and India; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, P.O. Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437-0999, e-mail: [MZ0955@aol.com](mailto:MZ0955@aol.com); Web site: [www.mzexpos.com](http://www.mzexpos.com).

**15-16--PALMDALE, CA:** 2nd annual show; Palmdale Gem & Mineral Club; Palmdale Elks Lodge, 2705 E. Ave. Q; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; dealers, exhibits, special booth for Boy and Girl Scouts; contact Gail Becker, (661) 256-4689; e-mail: [Gail1010becker@aol.com](mailto:Gail1010becker@aol.com).

**21-23--SACRAMENTO, CA:** 61st annual show, "Golden Harvest of Gems"; Sacramento Mineral Society; Scottish Rite Temple, 6151 H St.; Fri. 9-5, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; adults \$4, 12-6 \$1, children under 6 free; kids' day Fri., school groups welcome; rocks, minerals, rough rock, gemstones, silversmithing, carvings, fossils, beads, lapidary equipment, findings, jewelry, demonstrations, exhibits, prize drawings; contact Jim Foskett, (916) 685-4111.

**22-23--VICTORVILLE, CA:** 28th annual show; Victor Valley Gem & Mineral Club; San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 14800 7th St.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; contact Bob Harper, (760) 947-6383.

**24-25--SAN FRANCISCO, CA:** Show, "Great San Francisco Crystal Fair"; Pacific Crystal Guild; Fort Mason Center, Laguna at Marina Blvd.; Mon. 10-6, Tues. 10-4; Pacific Crystal Guild; contact Jerry Tomlinson, (415) 383-7837; e-mail: [sfxtl@earthlink.net](mailto:sfxtl@earthlink.net); Web site: [www.crystalfair.com](http://www.crystalfair.com).

**29-30--BARSTOW, CA:** Show; Mojave Desert Gem & Mineral Society; Barstow Community Center, 841 S. Barstow Rd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; contact Bob Depue, (760) 255-1030.

