

# The Opal Express

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



**Volume #37 Issue #12  
December 2004**

### Some Topics In This Issue:

- Opal & Gem Show Report
- Special Newsletter Report
- Show Dealers
- Rare Opal Found
- Caveat Emptor
- Sunstones in Oregon
- Lake Superior Agate
- Opal Cracking Theory

### Important Info:

**Dec. 9th**

## **Christmas Holiday Dinner**

## **Potluck at Clubhouse**

General Meeting  
**December 9<sup>th</sup>**

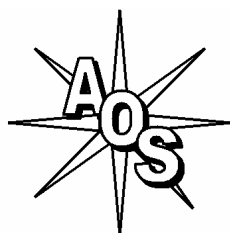
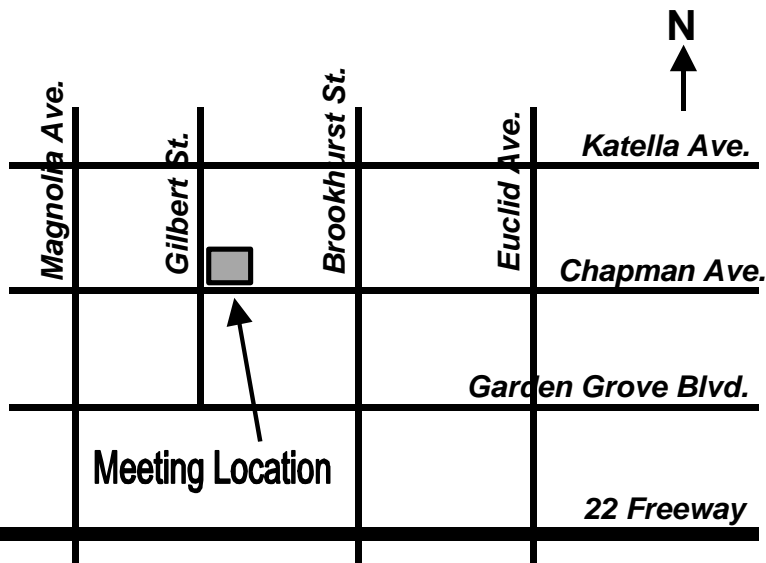
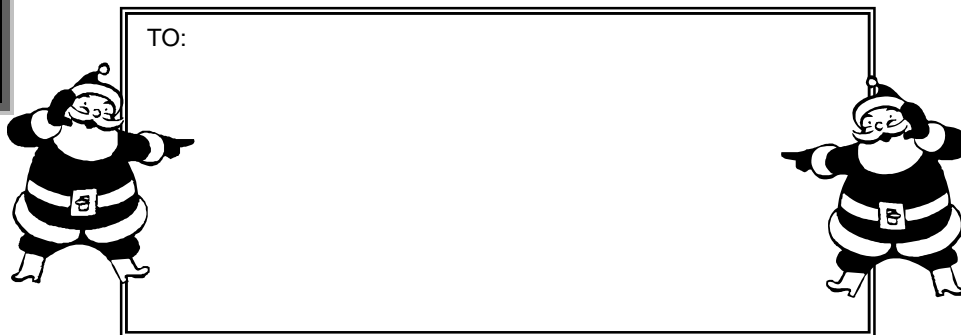
**Christmas Holiday Dinner  
Potluck at Clubhouse**

### — 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



## **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**

An optional, quicker method of payment is via the **Internet** using **PayPal.com**. To pay, just log onto your PayPal account and "Send Money" to the AOS account, **webmaster@opalsociety.org**. There is no transfer charge!

NAME		
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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 and NEWSLETTER MAILING:** 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     E-Mail the Opal Express Newsletter instead of Postal Mail

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

Please sign here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Editor-Jim Pisani

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## Are Your Dues Due Now?

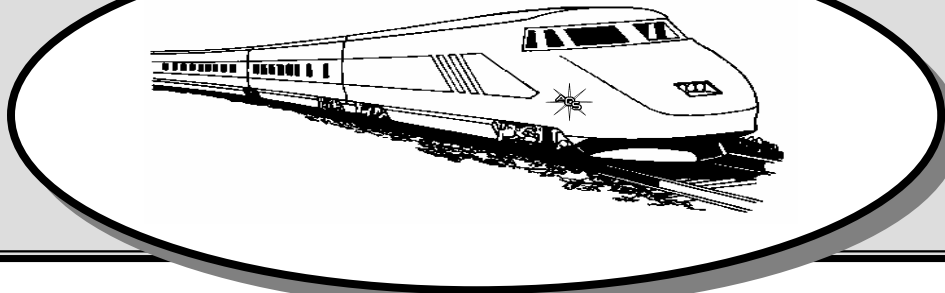
**PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL.** If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

**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  
American  
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December 2004

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## Christmas Potluck Dinner

The annual holiday dinner will be held on December 9, 2004 at the clubhouse (Garden Grove Civic Women's Club). Please attend and bring your favorite casserole, dessert, salad, etc. A main course will be provided by the AOS. Contact Pete Goetz for details if you need them at (714) 530-3530.

## Opal Workshop

The AOS opal workshop is at Ball Jr. High School on 1500 W. Ball Rd., Anaheim, CA. It can be open for members on Monday. Contact Stan McCall at (714) 220-9282.

## Members Only Website Password

To log onto the website's members only area at: [http://opalsociety.org/aos\\_members\\_only\\_area.htm](http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm) type: Name: "member" and Password: "opalshow".

## To have your Newsletter e-mailed to you...

About a third of the members responded positively to an e-mail asking if they wanted to receive the newsletter electronically. Thank you! You are helping your Society!

Since we don't have everyone's current e-mail address, we need to hear from you. A mass letter mailing will occur shortly, but if you want it e-mailed sooner, please e-mail the editor, Jim

Pisani, at [webmaster@opalsociety.org](mailto:webmaster@opalsociety.org). Please indicate your name and e-mail address that you want it mailed to.

Thanks,

Jim Pisani, Editor, American Opal Society

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## The Opal & Gem Show Was A Great Success!

The Opal & Gems Show was a great success! We had quite a few new people coming tot the show this year. We had a great raffle, with over 45 prizes given away, donated by our members and dealers. Four new members joined at the show.

We want to give a big thank you to the following volunteers for helping at the show: Frann Todd, Jay Carey, Pete Goetz, Mike Kowalsky, Jim Pisani, Diane Robinson, Hisako Schlatter, Lyle & Lucy Backus (from Chicago), Claire Gagnon and his demonstrators, Pam Strong, Frank Gross, Faye McDowell, Fran & Wes Roth, John Hall, Lora Heidrich, Stan McCall, Walt & Donna Johnson, Russ Madsen, Eva Coan..

Gene LeVan, of Australian Opal Imports, had a fish bowl drawing at the Show and the winner was Marne Ryan. Marne won a beautiful black opal!

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## Special Newsletter for November

As you noticed, the November Opal Express was a special color edition that we mailed to our members. This edition was entirely paid for by our advertisers who had the full and partial page ads.

I would like to thank everyone who helped pull the newsletter together, especially Mike Kowalsky and Sally and Natasha Patel. We plan on making a special edition newsletter at least once per year.

We had numerous extra issues printed, which will be used to generate revenue for the Society. If you wish to have extras, they are for sale at \$5 per issue. Contact us at our e-mail address at [webmaster@opalsociety.org](mailto:webmaster@opalsociety.org) or mail us at:

American Opal Society

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Last month, we mailed all the newsletters and did not e-mail any. The e-mail versions will be continued this month for those who signed up for them.

## Show Dealers

The show was a great success with a varied selection of great dealers. The AOS thanks you for being in our show!

Business Name	Contact Name	Specialty
Al's Opal Import	Al Ramirez	Opal rough, cab, faceted, specimens, jewelry, Ethiopian
Australian Opal	Leslie Neff & Larry Hoskinson	Australian Opal of all grades & types
Australian Opal Imports	Gene and Loretta LeVan	Australian Opal - finished & Rough
Australian Opal Mines	Murray Willis	Australian opals
Casa del Lumbre	Sal Chavez	Opal & other jewelry, books, etc.
Coffee Creek Mining & Gem Co.	Joseph Edwards	Colored stones, Jewelry, etc.
Custom Creative Gem cutting	Stan McCall	Gemstone cutting, repolishing, repairs & custom design
David's Creative Jewelers	David & Bonnie Burton	Diamond & Opal Specialist
Andrew DeBoer	Andrew DeBoer	Misc. Jewelry, cabs, etc.
In A Flash	Tony Thurber	Australian Opal & Inlay Jewelry
J & J Gemstones	Hugh & Joyce Sessions	Gemstones, Andamooka matrix
Land of Wonder	Eric Scott	Australian Opals, All Fields, Calibrated & Freeform
Lasco Diamond Products	Donald Schultze	Diamond Products for Foredom tools, etc.
Marrujo's Creations	Paul Marrujo	Lab Created Black Opal & beaded necklaces
Carters Creations	Terrell Carter	Custom Opal Jewelry
Walter Johnson	Walter Johnson	Jewels of Perfection – Master Jeweler
Opalcutter	Wes Roth	Opal rough, finished, jewelry
Opal Traders International	Walter & Joan Skinner	Opals of Australia & the World
Oro Valley Gems	Edward Newman	Fine facet rough, cut gemstones
Savings & Unlimited Gems & Minerals	Dale Yvonne Atkins	We deal in all lapidary items
The House of Tibara	Tim & Barbara Thomas	Opal rough, finished, jewelry
Tikka Opal	Mattie Tikka	Lightening Ridge Black Opal
True Blue Opals	Sally Patel	Wholesale Black Opals
Y. P. M. International	Miao Yang	Importer & Wholesaler of gems & minerals

## Rare Opal Found

07-30-2003

News of a large and rare opal find on the fields of Lightning Ridge recently would have the potential to give the industry a major boost.

Mayor Peter Waterford who spoke on ABC radio about the find more than a week ago said there was a lot of potential because usually when one quality gem was found there would be more in the area.

"It could stretch out to be a \$50 million patch."

Cr Waterford said he met the miner who showed him the specimen.

He said the miner was drilling in an area that had previously been mined but not for quite some time, when he stumbled across the large red on black gemstone.

"It's about 150 carats and I estimate its worth around \$200,000." Cr Waterford said of the significant find.

"It's the first opal I've seen of that size and calibre in a long time and it's created a lot of excitement among the miners in town.

"From what I've heard a lot of interest has been shown, more people have been coming into town in the past three months and this is just putting the icing on the cake," he said.

Meanwhile, mineral resources minister Kerry Hickey said if the reports were accurate, it was great news for the opal industry which was worth about \$48 million a year and was vitally important to the region and the State's economy.

Mr Hickey said reports of the find at this stage were sketchy.

"The interest the reported find is generating is not surprising, we are world renowned for our quality black opals," he said.

"My department has spoken to the Walgett mayor (Peter Waterford) who is remaining very tight lipped over the location of the find and identity of the miners, we'll just have to wait and see."

Opal mining at Lightning Ridge has provided major benefits to the community and associated industries such as jewellery and tourism.

Nearly all rough opal produced is cut in Lightning Ridge with about 80 per cent exported principally to Japan, with other markets being the USA and Europe.

*From The Ridge News*

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## Caveat Emptor (Let the Buyer Beware)

*By Lois Zarka*

I was up in Maine for a few weeks visiting friends on the way there I stopped over in Boston for a few days for a pre-auction viewing at a high end auction house. October has the most fabulous auctions of jewelry the whole year. As my mothers old saying was "you never need jewelry, you just keep accumulating and have fun with it".

As I stepped to one of the counters my friend was holding an 18k ring with 3/4 points in diamond chips (so it was large) and about an 18-25 ct white opal. It was white, but had great flash and was a nice color stone. I took it out of her hands admiring it and than turned it over. The bottom side facing the finger was open (good) and beautiful and flashing. At this point I borrowed a loop and kept turning the stone and ring over and over, and realized I was looking at a beautiful fake stone.

This one was better than a good friend had bought in one year Tucson as a joke. I grabbed the shows brochure and sure enough, here it was "Opal rings / 4 points diamond \$400 - \$800. Hell, they knew it was a fake but anyone who bought it would figure they got the bargain of the year and wear this" Genuine" opal for the rest of their lives.

Laughingly I walked to another case and saw a stunning black opal necklace, surrounded by diamonds, about 30 cts round. A black opal to die for! I asked to see it with the loop and after staring for awhile and loving this thing it came to me... I HAD SEEN STONES AND LOVED THEM, LIKE THIS BEFORE. NEVADA OPAL not only excites me, but makes me believe in God! I find it the most beautiful of all opal and stare at it all the time in the jars of water I keep on my window sills. This beauty was appraised at \$4000 - \$8000. Well worth it, if it had been an Australian black and not an unstable stone.

I kept looking at the cases and lastly ran across another Opal ring. This was again surrounded by diamond chips; more jell than the others, but white and jelly and upon looking at the brochure found they expected the ring to go for about \$2500 - \$4800. That was a fair price. Nice deal. Than, I took the loop up and looked at the stone. The whole top was crazed. And so, I wonder what really

a semi-broken, nice stone is worth? I don't know, and I certainly don't care.

At this point I stopped looking. I was just disgusted. If this is what this auction house is doing with opals, what a good time they must be having with everything else. This is an auction house I not only shop in a lot and spend a lot of money in, but know the jewelry partner who buys the stuff, personally. Caveat emptor certainly fits here. Let the buyer beware I thought the AOS members would be interested in this story.

*Lois is a member and avid opalhollic who lives in Brooklyn, New York – the Editor*

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## **Rockhounds Look for Bright Side of Oregon Dirt**

*By Lee Juillerat*

PLUSH - It's an unlikely place, just a spot in the desert. But it's here, about 25 miles from the Lake County community of Plush, that a seasonal encampment of recreational vehicles and trailers emerges in a sea of sagebrush. It's here, over a 7-square-mile area, that people search for sunstones, Oregon's state gemstone.

Sunstones are feldspar crystals that form in basaltic lava flows. They're found in many areas of the world, but Lake County's are said to be unique - with colors ranging from transparent to yellow, peach, pink, copper, red and green. Most unusually, some of the stones, known locally as the "Plush diamond," have metallic flashes called schiller. Stones vary in size. Some are as thin as flakes, others as big as a thumb. Jewelers shape faceted sunstones into earrings, pendants or necklaces, or carve them into imaginative designs.

### **Vacation Central**

Sunstones have a history. It's believed that American Indians used them for barter, and that Vikings used them as protective talismans. "This area has been known for hundreds of years," said Don Buford, an owner of the Dust Devil Mine, a commercial mine open to the public.

The season is winding down now, but from Memorial Day to early fall this remote place is where people carting shovels, hoes, pry bars, pick axes, wire screens and even portable generators search for sunstones. On holiday weekends it's not uncommon for the Dust Devil to have 75 to 100 diggers, with more at the public area and other private claims.

People come from all over. This season rockhounds have come from Oregon, California, West Virginia, Germany and Switzerland along with a Japanese tour group. Rockhounding clubs make regular visits.

Four square miles of Bureau of Land Management lands are available for public digging, but most of the searching takes place on adjacent private claims, including the Dust Devil. From the early 1900s until about 1940, the Dust Devil claim was owned by Tiffany & Co. "But they discovered they couldn't manage a claim from New York City," said Terry Clark, another Dust Devil owner.

Clark and his wife, Judy, Don and Pasty Buford and Steve Hatcher have owned the mine since 1992. The facilities aren't fancy, but the owners and staff are friendly and helpful. "It's about having the way of life, and having fun," Clark says of digging. "It's a nice getaway," said Mike Funk of Astoria, who travels to the mine two or three times a year, usually for at least a week. He sleeps in his trailer, shares some meals with the mine's owners, and spends his days digging, chipping and screening. "You drive all day and get to a totally different world." "I'm just a rockhound," said Tim Fisher of Oregon City, a consulting fisheries biologist who has made numerous extended visits over the past eight years.

"This is the way I spend my vacation," said Kathy Dilley, who works for a Portland insurance company. She was spending eight days at the mine with her husband, Jerry, a retired mechanic and welder. The mine provides basic equipment, but the Dilleys and most other frequent diggers come prepared. The Dilleys' equipment

stash included a portable generator they use to power a drill that splits the often unyielding soil.

The ore body is typically 15 to 25 feet deep, so the Dust Devil owners use a D-9 tractor with a ripper to dig out pits in the basalt soil. Front-end loaders move mounds of loosened soil to the nearby commercial operation, where there is an array of sorting and sifting machines. The pits and exposed walls are left for public digging.

### **There's Money In It**

First-timers are shown digging methods. A popular method is scattering a shovel load of material onto screens, which are jiggled to separate loose soil from larger rocks. Sunstones usually are easily seen, especially when the semi-filtered screens are held overhead so they glow in the sunlight.

"Your chance of finding good stuff here is excellent," Clark said.

His claims were seconded by Dilley, who told of finding a sunstone that was appraised at \$17,310 and wholesaled for \$10,000.

At the nearby public collection area, Garwin Carlson of Klamath Falls demonstrated less sophisticated methods of searching for sunstones, such as dragging a flat shovel along the ground, then tossing shovel loads of disturbed earth onto screens plunked atop sagebrush.

Sunstone collectors can keep what they find on the public area. Stones collected at the Dust Devil are sorted. While there's no charge for the clear and most of schiller stones, charges for colored stones are one-quarter the wholesale price.

The Dust Devil can arrange to have stones faceted. Part of one trailer, used by Clark and resident carver Wes Kester for finishing stones, also serves as a sales area for loose and carved sunstones and finished pieces, which are usually mounted in silver or gold.

"We supply sunstones to the world market in the rough and cut form and as finished jewelry," Clark said. "The market is getting bigger all the time. The colors are pleasing and warm. It's a stone that people enjoy."

*From the Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon, via The (Klamath Falls) Herald and News; October 18, 2004*

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## **Lake Superior Agate**

*By George Judd G.G., Mineralogy Chairman*

The rich and famous like to show off their diamonds, emeralds and rubies but for many of the average people nothing can compare with the colorful and various patterns of Lake Superior agates. This agate became so prized in Minnesota that it became the state's gemstone in 1969. Large numbers of people eagerly search the lakeshores and gravel pits of the Lake Superior region each year looking for "lakers" that can be made into jewelry or just displayed for their beauty.

A little over one billion years ago, massive lava flows spread over the Lake Superior region. These basaltic flows were made up of silica, iron, magnesium, aluminum and oxygen. Lake Superior agates were formed by the filling of cavities in the basalts. Silica, along with iron oxide, dissolved out of the basalt into concentric layers in the cavities. This formed into Lake Superior agates that are among the oldest agates on earth. Some agates became free of these cavities by chemical interaction and flowing water, however, most stayed intact in their basalt cavities. Then around 10,000+ years ago, during the Ice Age, glacial ice moved through the Lake Superior region, freeing many agates from their cavities and moving them to new locations. All of this freezing and then thawing and movement not only freed them; it also fractured and abraded many of the agates.

Although Lake Superior Agates can reach up to many pounds, most are only one to two inches in circumference. Lakers come in many colors and patterns that make them highly sought after by lapidary people. Perhaps the most common type is the fortification

agate with its parallel banding caused by quartz with small amounts of different chemical elements. Perhaps the most treasured type of Lake Superior Agate is the rare "eye" agate. Generally the eyes are on the surface of the agate and when polished are very stunning in appearance.

In Minnesota, places to collect Lake Superior Agates include rivers and streams that empty into Lake Superior along the north shore. Also the beaches along Lake Superior and the great many lakes in that region, as well as the Mississippi River, provide excellent hunting grounds. The gravel pits in the area provide a treasure trove of "lakers" for the diligent searcher.

Other good locations to search for Lake Superior agates include the beach areas around Grand Marais, Michigan. Beaches from the mouth of the Two-Hearted River west are productive. The Keweenaw Peninsula south to Houghton, Michigan has historically been good hunting grounds for lots of years.

If you've never looked for Lake Superior Agates before, you might wonder what should you look for in order to be successful in your search. The following list may be helpful in your quest for that gem agate:

A. Get close to the stones on the beach, it will help you tell an agate from the millions of other stones there.

B. A translucent, waxy appearance. This is the optical look of quartz, which agate is a family member. C. Any kind of banding in a stone that has that translucent look. D. Surface pitting on the stone and the look of an old potato.

E. Colors of rust-red and yellow primarily, but can be many different colors caused by staining from iron oxide.

F. Change of color, often from red to white or a darker to lighter color.

G. Any stone that has a brighter, shiny look than the stones it is surrounded by.

Now that you've found those Lake Superior agates how do you transfer them into lapidary works of art? Tumbling is probably the most used technique. Larger stones can be sawed into slabs and then cut into different shapes to be ground and polished into cabochons and set in pendants, rings, and belt buckles. Another way is to polish a surface of the stone in its natural shape. This is then displayed much like you would a mineral specimen. Agate has a hardness of 7, which will make for a good polish easily. Personally I like to use Cerium Oxide on a felt wheel.

**References:** (1) G. LaBerge (1994) Geology of the Lake Superior Region. (2) L. Quick (1963) The Book of Agates. (3) Lake Superior Agate (2002) Minnesota DNR (4) R. Pabian (1994) Banded Agates Origins and Inclusions

via MWF Newsletter 12/02 and Arkansas Rockhound News 3/03

**Rock Collector Editor's Note:** This has been a favorite vacation activity for our family for many years, since I lived in Minnesota and hunted at Moose Lake almost every weekend during the summer. In my opinion, the active gravel pits are the absolute best spots to collect. Unfortunately, through the years, more and more of the gravel pits are now off limits. You will, at the least, be chased off by police and possibly be arrested for trespassing. Make sure you have permission before going in. The gravel pit at Moose Lake now sports a very large sign: "No Agate Pickers, Please". They used to allow you in after signing a waiver and I was even allowed to camp in an inactive section of the pit on many occasions. I don't know of a single gravel pit that closed off agate collecting because of bad collectors, like many places that have been lost to collecting. Every one I know of did it for insurance reasons.

By the way, one of the best times to look for agates are early morning and near sunset. The low level of the sun will make some of the more translucent agates glow red. I used to love to walk around in the gravel pit while my breakfast was cooking. My two largest agates were found before breakfast the same day.

From *The Rock Collector* 04/2003

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## Disputing All Opal Cracks Theory

From the *Orchid Digest* from <http://www.ganoksin.com>, dated Oct. 7-16, 2004. The Ganoksin Project provides an information forum on the Internet free of charge for all things connected with jewelry and jewelry making. Visit it and see! Printed with permission of Ganoksin. - The Editor

**From:** C Rousset

Hi all, I would like to dispute the claims made that all opal cracks eventually, this is simply not true, Some unstable opal will crack and craze but this is a very small percentage considering the amount of opal in the market place. Claims like this is not good for any industry just like some people will slam opal from certain counties, this is an unfair and uneducated claim as there is unstable and risky material in any gemstone category and the only way to avoid this risk is education, education and more education on the particular gemstone you wish to purchase. I have cut and carved black opal here on the field in Lightning Ridge for 13 years now and have spoken at length to long term opal buyers and their percentage of stones cracking over some 30 and 40 years in the trade was less than 1%, yes less than 1%, Keep in mind that these buyers deal mostly in Black opal and Queensland boulder opal.

I am only responding to this as it's the 2nd time in the last 3 months that these suggestions have been made.

Just a quick comment on all the orchid posting contributors, you people are just wonderful and so sharing with your hard won experiences, this is probably the most valuable thing in the jewellery trade today. WELL DONE TO YOU ALL.

Christine

**From:** Teri Davis

I Totally agree with Christine. I carve and freeform Lightning Ridge, Mexican opals all the time and I must say that if kept properly most opal crystal or otherwise lasts just as well as any other stone.

Teri D - America's only Cameo Artist [www.cameoartist.com](http://www.cameoartist.com)

**From:** MillsGem

Dear Christine,

I certainly agree with of most of what you say, but will have to take great exception to your inference that most opal sources produce crack free opal. There are some opal localities that rarely produce crack free opal (i.e. Virgin Valley, Nevada), some that have a high rate of cracking, (Queretaro, Mexico) and some that almost never crack (your own Lightning Ridge)

While you may perceive that spreading rumours about opal instability is a threat to your industry I would suggest that your greatest threat is the pervasive spread of jewelry made with man made opal. Oddly enough one of your most illustrious residents there at the "Ridge" has done much of the pioneering work in opal synthesis.

Yes... education is the best antidote to ignorance. We all have to keep an open mind and explore every aspect of a problem before we can form an enlightened perception.

Ron Mills , Mills Gem Co., Los Osos, CA

**From:** coralnurt

Christine,

What I said about opal was not a slam and in no way meant to denigrate the industry! Goodness knows I have cut enough opal over the past 30 years and still do cut it. I also teach opal cutting. What I said was a statement of reality based on my experience and what I have seen with my own eyes. I have had many, many opals come in to me that were from one Grandma or another and a percentage of them were crazed... not cracked... but crazed. Many were chipped many scratched, etc, etc. That was, after all, what the original point of this discussion was - how to repolish an opal. I doubt the statement was unfair either but I totally agree with you

that education is the way to preclude 'old wives tales'. That is why many people talk about opal being 'unlucky' which is pure nonsense. On the other hand, there are certain aspects of nature that we cannot ignore and the delicate nature of opals is one of them. But then the same is true with Tanzanite which has its own problems of acceptance as well as other stones.

By the way, I have a nice piece of LR black that ... guess what... its crazed! Guess its just part of that 1%!! Would I make a general statement about LR black crazing because of this one stone? No way. I have cut too much of it to say that. But, its crazed. Bolder opal? Well, I haven't seen it but wouldn't bet it won't craze! Mexican opal? It crazes. Baltic Opal? It crazes. Two opal materials I don't think crazes is Louisiana opal and Honduran black. Nonetheless, opal is one of the most beautiful stones on earth and nothing I would or could say from my little studio will have much effect on the world opal market!

Cheers from Don at The Charles Belle Studio in SOFL where simple elegance IS fine jewelry! dcdietz@comcast.net

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**From:** David L. Huffman

I'm not a gemologist or lapidary artist, but I would tend to agree with you and the others who've disputed this claim that all opals eventually crack. I base my opinion on my experience with repairing estate jewelry. I have seen many, many opals, some very old, with abrasion, chips, etc., all probably from wear. But on rare occasions, I've seen opals with multiple fractures that appear to be the result of internal stresses rather than external impact. I have strong suspicions that the primary cause of this condition is that the opal has been subject to extreme or abrupt temperature changes, such as putting an opal in the jewelry case, under the hot lights, or in a store window with the sun blazing in on, then back into the nice, cold safe for the night. Or wearing an opal ring to do dishes in hot water, then rinsing one's hands in the cold water.

David L. Huffman

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**From:** Derek

The reason I say that opal can crack when it's old and being repolished is that I've had it happen completely without explanation, even under sufficient water to keep it flushing.

Upon father reflection I realized a couple of things. First that since opal that needs repolishing is more than likely a ring or bracelet stone that's been abraded through wear. It has by definition had a bit of a tough time of life or it wouldn't be scratched to begin with. That's the exact reason it needs repolishing. Had it not received rough wear, it wouldn't need repolishing. The other part of that is that when it needs repolishing, obviously it's because it's cloudy and you can't see through that cloudiness. It seems very possible that there are problems underneath that cloudiness that a person polishing wouldn't know about because you can't see through it until it's somewhat better polished or unless you wet it. Of course then the water gets into and fills the crack temporarily which is why you can see through the clouds. Then when it dries again, the crack might reappear but you can't see through it again. Even a tiny crack could cause a big problem. As all of us who have cut opal know, once a crack begins somewhere, it will sooner rather than later extend across the stone unless that part of the stone where the crack is is removed. Actually one question has always kind of struck me and is a little difficult to explain. Why is it when a small crack is removed from a stone the rest of the stone tends to stay stable but when the crack is left it seems to inevitably want to extend? The part of the stone that remains uncracked, or uncrazed if you will, should not seem to be affected by a crack that's not reached there whether you remove the crack or leave it. It's possible that a weakness or instability actually remains whether you've removed the crack or not.

Incidentally, I believe it was Charles who made a distinction between cracking and crazing. To me that's a distinction without a difference. I know it is semantically the same, dictionary-wise. At least according to the Oxford English dictionary. I wonder what the difference in stone speak would be.

Derek

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**From:** moncsi

Hi all,

I am so glad that Christine has defended our good old opals. My brother regularly mines on the Ridge, my husband-to-be cuts them and I have set a few of them in silver.

I don't seem to have any problems setting them, even though I'm just a beginner. However, black opal is very different from other kinds of opal. Having spent a bit of time on the Ridge myself and having a few miners as friends, I know a few tricks that they do just to sale bad quality opals to the novice, hence the misconception regarding opal quality.

But please don't underestimate the fire of Lightning Ridge, it is one of the most beautiful stones I have seen. And seeing my brother in the mines, I can honestly say that I have a much greater appreciation for them.

PS - Wet pumice powder on a polishing disc can do wonders for the scratches on the stone. Take care.

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**From:** Mary Beth Mudgett

Would like to ask your opinion...Regarding the opal thread-

I received a ring as a gift about 10 years ago. It was made by a local artisan. I was told that the center stone is a triplet - a round opal sandwiched between a lower layer of black onyx, and the top layer being clear quartz.

My question is, will the quartz layer prevent fissures or cracks from occurring inside the opal, or will it merely provide some protection against abrasion?

I also admit that although the quartz layer has become abraded, I am hesitant to have it polished, as I am not sure if this might heat up the opal or damage it.

Any opinions shared would be welcome.

Sincerely, Mary Beth

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**From:** Greg DeMark

Mary Beth,

An Opal Triplet is created because the Opal is generally too thin and delicate to be used as a gemstone on its own.

The Onyx back and clear Quartz top are glued to the Opal to give it strength and durability. This does not mean it makes the Gemstones indestructible.

An Opal triplet should be taken care of the way a solid Opal would be. Avoid harsh household cleaners, extreme heat and cold as well as sharp blows.

If the Opal doesn't have cracks or crazing now it most likely will not develop them unless the stone is subjected to the harsh treatments I mentioned above.

As for repolishing the Quartz top of a Triplet, yes it can be done but you should have a professional lapidary do this job. If the stone is not kept cool the Opal can craze or crack and the glue can become compromised.

Greg DeMark [greg@demarkjewelry.com](mailto:greg@demarkjewelry.com)

<http://www.demarkjewelry.com>, <http://www.outdrs.net/demark>

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**From:** The Doctor

Hi Mary. You probably know this but, for the most part, opal triplets are constructed for precious opal that is too thin to be a durable solid opal, usually the type where there is a thin seam of color that wouldn't be thick and durable enough by itself. That being said, yes, the quartz layer, along with the backing (be it

onyx/chalcedony, jade, etc.) AND the glue/epoxy/binding agent can all act together to help protect the thin opal layer inside from cracking/crazing/chipping/breaking and, as you mentioned, abrasion.

I'm not saying it will prevent any of the above, only that it can help prevent them. Also, please note in the second sentence, I said "for the most part." There are other reasons to make triplets from opal. And I'll never take a position as to whether "all opals crack" or not. Every opal on the planet (except for the lab-created) is millennia in the making; I don't think I'll be around long enough to really know. I feel much more like a curator or custodian than an owner.

James in SoFI, President of the local chapter of Opalholics Unanimous.

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**From:** C Roussel

Hi All,

There is no 100% accurate answer to your question Mary Beth but I will have a bash at it anyway.

The crystal is there first and foremost to create the illusion of a cabbed stone and to magnify the colour and pattern of the very thin sliver of opal in the triplet.

If it is a well made triplet it should not crack or craze, most problems happen with triplets when they are worn in water doing the dishes etc. This causes the glues to let go and then the colour of the opal has a clouded effect as it has lost total contact with the quartz dome. Most triplets are calibrated and are not very expensive so I would tend to get my jeweller to replace the triplet if it gets too scratched. If you know a lapidary person that makes triplets who will do the repolishing of the triplet you may be able to get the job done without damage to the triplet.

An inexperienced person may cause heat while repolishing and this will also cause the glue to let go and this may not be noticeable until some time has passed.

Here once again as with everything please get recommendations as to who has the experience to do the job.

In the States you guys have some of the best lapidary people in the business so please use your countrymen's talents and buy local, it may be a tad more expensive but the quality will surpass most imported goods.

Your local lapidary clubs are a huge well of information and most are only too happy to help out with advice and recommendations for these sorts of jobs.

Christine

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**From:** Dick Friesen

Sorry to be late getting to this, my wife has been in the hospital and my mind has been there rather than on things like this.

Let me offer a different view on the hows and whys cracks in opal. I do want to emphasize this is speculation on my part, I don't have the equipment to verify it.

There has been some interesting work done on the effect of moisture on cracks in glass. A limited review was published in "The Eclectic Lapidary"

[http://www.bovagems.com/eclectic/HTML/19980101\\_9801GEMPOL.html](http://www.bovagems.com/eclectic/HTML/19980101_9801GEMPOL.html)

I believe the original article was:

B. C. Bunker and T. A. Michalske, "Effect of surface corrosion on glass fracture," in Fracture Mechanics of Ceramics, edited by R. C. Bradt, A. G. Evans, D. P. H. Hasselman et al. (Plenum Press, New York, 1986), Vol. 8, pp. 391-411 If anyone has access to the original I would like to read it.

The proposed fracture mechanism is that when a crack occurs in glass and moisture is present, a chemical reaction takes place at the bottom of the crack causing the crack to grow. If you want a better explanation, read the references, I am trying to put a long article into one sentence.

The effect appears to take place in obsidian (a natural glass), but as far as I can find, no work has been done on whether quartz is affected by the reaction.

Now for the speculation, if opal is susceptible to the reaction, then any opal that has been scratched or has had its surface polish abraded (or wasn't well polished to begin with) could have cracks or crazing occur over an extended period of time. Opal's molecules are more tightly bonded than glass so if the reaction does take place, I would expect it to be slower and sometimes taking years to occur doesn't seem unreasonable to me. I would also expect that opals from different locations could give faster, slower, or no reaction. I would also expect that this would be a different mechanism and independent of the traditional moisture related cracking normally associated with opal.

If anyone has had unexpected crazing of finished stones it would be interesting to know if they could have had surface problems prior to the occurrence. It would also be a good argument for getting the best polish possible on your stones.

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

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## December Gem & Mineral Shows

**3-5 — SANTA BARBARA, CA:** Gem Faire; Earl Warren Showgrounds, 3400 Calle Real; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; admission \$5 (weekend pass); contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com);

**4-5 — SAN BERNARDINO, CA:** 58th annual show, "Rocks Galore in 2004" Orange Belt Mineralogical Society; San Bernardino Woman's Club, 503 W. 31st St.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; dealers, exhibits, silent auction, door prizes, hourly prizes, raffle, wheel of fortune; contact Pat Wind, (909) 381-0089 or (909) 792-0668.

**10-12 — COSTA MESA, CA:** Gem Faire; Orange County Fairgrounds, Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; admission \$5 (weekend pass); contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com).

**17-19 — SAN DIEGO, CA:** Gem Faire; Scottish Rite Center, 1895 Camino del Rio S.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; admission \$5 (weekend pass); contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: [info@gemfaire.com](mailto:info@gemfaire.com); Web site: [www.gemfaire.com](http://www.gemfaire.com).

## JANUARY 2005

**7-16 — QUARTZSITE, AZ:** Show; Tyson Wells; Tyson Wells Show Grounds, 100 W. Kuehn St.; free admission; gems, rocks, minerals, jewelry, silversmithing, goldsmithing, faceting, precious metals, lapidary tools, equipment, supplies; contact Kym Scott, (928) 927-6364; Web site: [www.tysonwells.com](http://www.tysonwells.com).

**21-30 — QUARTZSITE, AZ:** 27th annual Sell-A-Rama; Tyson Wells; Tyson Wells Show Grounds, 100 W. Kuehn St.; free admission; gems, rocks, minerals, jewelry, silversmithing, goldsmithing, faceting, precious metals, lapidary tools, equipment, supplies; contact Kym Scott, (928) 927-6364; Web site: [www.tysonwells.com](http://www.tysonwells.com).

**26-30 — QUARTZSITE, AZ:** 39th annual show, "QIA Pow Wow" Quartzsite Improvement Association; 235 E. Ironwood Dr.; Wed. 9-5, Thu. 9-5, Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; more than 400 vendors of rocks, gems, minerals, beads, wire wrap supplies, jewelry, fossils, and lapidary, daily field trips, displays, demonstrations; contact Diane Abbott, P.O. Box 881, Quartzsite, AZ 85346-0881, (928) 927-6325; e-mail: [qia@redrivernet.com](mailto:qia@redrivernet.com); Web site: [www.quartzsiteimprovementassoc.com](http://www.quartzsiteimprovementassoc.com).

**29-12 — TUCSON, AZ:** Annual show; Martin Zinn Expositions; The InnSuites Hotel, 475 N. Granada; 10-6 daily; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437, (303) 674-2713; e-mail: [mz0955@aol.com](mailto:mz0955@aol.com).

**29-12 — TUCSON, AZ:** Annual show; Martin Zinn Expositions; The Mineral & Fossil Marketplace, 1333 N. Oracle Rd.; 10-6 daily; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437, (303) 674-2713; e-mail: [mz0955@aol.com](mailto:mz0955@aol.com).

**29-12 — TUCSON, AZ:** Annual show; Martin Zinn Expositions; Clarion Hotel-Randolph Park, 102 N. Alvernon Way; 10-6 daily; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437, (303) 674-2713; e-mail: [mz0955@aol.com](mailto:mz0955@aol.com).

**29-12 — TUCSON, AZ:** Annual show; Martin Zinn Expositions; Smuggler's Inn, 6350 E. Speedway; 10-6 daily; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437, (303) 674-2713; e-mail: [mz0955@aol.com](mailto:mz0955@aol.com).

**29-12 — TUCSON, AZ:** Annual show; Martin Zinn Expositions; Ramada Limited, 665 N. Freeway; 10-6 daily; free admission; more than 400 dealers from all over the world; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, Box 999, Evergreen, CO 80437, (303) 674-2713; e-mail: [mz0955@aol.com](mailto:mz0955@aol.com).





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