

# The Opal Express

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



**Volume #38 Issue #9  
September 2005**

TO:

### Some Topics In This Issue:

- Len Cram & Steven Aracic Donations
- Yowah & Lightning Ridge Festivals
- Techniques of David Kramer
- How to Make Spencer Opal Triplets
- Enhanced, Treated, etc.: Fake
- Travels in Aust with Frank Gross Pt 3
- Splitting Boulder Opal Seams
- Advise on Opal Storage

### Important Info:

**Board Meeting  
September 6<sup>th</sup>**

**General Meeting  
September 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Lecture: Noel Lamkin on  
Designing Tips, Do's & Don'ts**

### — GENERAL MEETINGS —

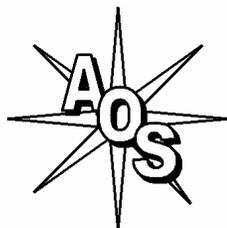
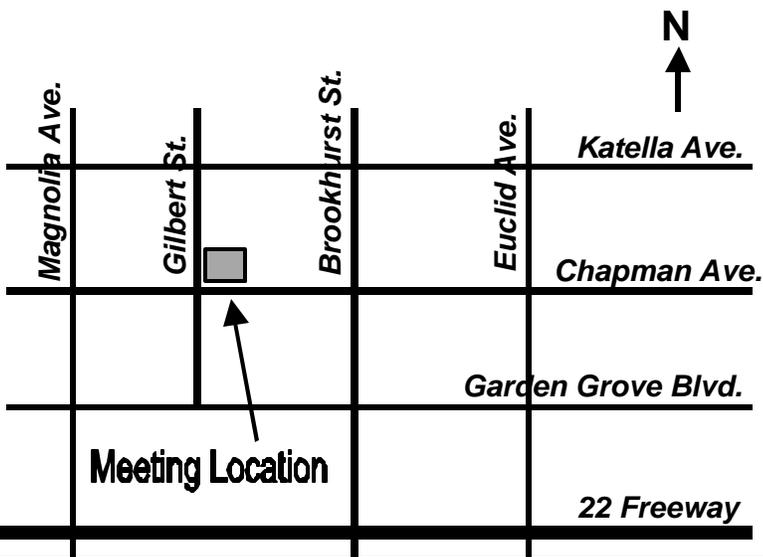
2nd Thursday of the Month  
7:00 pm - 9:00 PM  
Garden Grove Civic Women's Club  
9501 Chapman Ave.  
(NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)  
Garden Grove, CA

### MEETING ACTIVITIES

Opal Cutting Advice Guest Speakers  
Slide Shows Videos Other Activities

## September 8th Lecture:

# Noel Lamkin on Designing Tips, Do's & Don'ts



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# American Opal Society Membership Renewal

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!

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ADDITIONAL BADGES = \$5.00 each (First Badge <u>free</u> when joining)		\$5	
ONE TIME INITIATION FEE = All <u>New</u> members		\$10	
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<b>TOTAL PAID – DUES, less Senior Discount plus Badge plus Initiation Fee (if Applicable)</b>			

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**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!

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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.

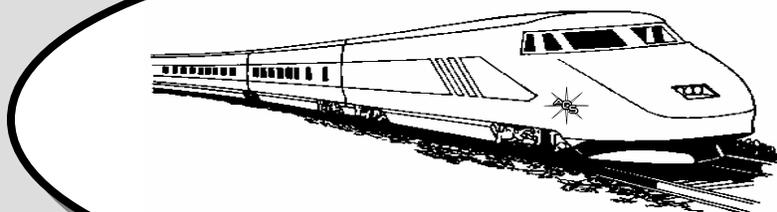
Please sign here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**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

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monthly by  
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Volume 38 Issue 9

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### Vice President's Message - *By Eugene LeVan*

Our general meetings are great! The attendance is over thirty members each month with fine speakers and demonstrations like David Kramer.

He showed all us how dopping in mass production is done, then fine skills in cutting opal dry. More to come every month so do not miss a meeting!

The board is still working on the work shop at the school, I have given this project to Fran and she is doing a great job on it, we will need a member to head up the opal shop so please step forward and help. Call anyone on the board to assist with this project.

### Len Cram & Steven Aracic Donates Opal Books to AOS

Legendary Opal Authors Len Cram & Steven Aracic have donated collector books to the AOS.

Len Cram has donated two volumes of "A Journey With Color" and Steven Aracic has donated the Special Collector's his most recent book "Rediscover Opals in Australia".

All three books will be given away at the annual club show raffle. These books comprise a wonderful gift and together will be highlighted as the Grand Prize of our raffle. Thank you again.

### 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: "grawin".

**START MAKING PLANS...  
IT'S COMING!!!**

*The American Opal Society's 38th Annual*  
**ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW**

*The Largest Opal Show in USA!*

**Sat. & Sun., November 12 & 13, 2005**

**Saturday 10AM - 6PM  
Sunday 10 AM - 5PM**

Opal and Gem Dealers from around the USA and Australia.

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Huge Raffle many prizes of gemstones, jewelry, tools, etc.

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Free Demonstrations on gem cutting, jewelry making, etc.

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Phone: (310) 987-0642 or email: [toddle@aol.com](mailto:toddle@aol.com)

## Sept. Speaker - Noel Lamkin on Design Tips - Do's & Don'ts

The speaker for the September 8<sup>th</sup> General Meeting will be accomplished Jewelry designer Noel Lamkin. Her topic of discussion will be on Design Tips Do's and Don'ts.

Here are some highlights of Noel's design background and related accomplishments.

- National Scholastic Federation Gold Key award for jewelry in High School
- Fashion design major at the University of Redlands and UCLA
- Blue ribbon for Jewelry, Orange County Fair
- First place, Professional division, jewelry design, American Opal Society
- 1984 through 1987
- Practicing jeweler for 23 years

We look forward to Noel's lecture which should complement last month's speaker, David Kramer, would give an excellent talk on opal cutting techniques.

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## Visiting Yowah and Lightning Ridge Festivals 2005

*By Mike Kowalsky*

I was fortunate to successfully make a trip of a lifetime which was to go to both the Yowah and Lightning Ridge Opal Festivals. It was my third trip to Australia as an opaholic. I must say that I looked at this trip with a different view as I compared it with my other two trips.

It was planned to start in Brisbane, where we rented a car and drove to Yowah. That portion of the trip was a two day drive and was not very difficult. We had to watch our driving times so as to be at an overnight destination before dusk which is the time that the kangaroos, being nocturnal, start to populate the roads.

I looked at the roads as we drove and noted that we would not have made the trip if it were a rainy winter. Large stretches of the road had markers which showed that in rainy times large parts would be under water. That would ruin a trip as it can take up to weeks to lower the water level. We were fortunate that Queensland was in drought this winter.

The other problem was lodging. Yowah only has a few caravans for public rental. All the folks visiting the Yowah festival must find their own lodging or bring a caravan or a tent as AOS member Frank Gross did. (See Frank's e-mails write-up this month - the Editor)

Lightning Ridge has a number of motels and hotels and all were filled up for the three days of the Festival. I had the good fortune to be able to stay at the private house of AOS Dealer Sally Patel's son Sam, for the three days of the festival.

Now was it worth it? Definitely yes as I saw more opal and was able to purchase some very unique stones through out the trip. I also brought back some black opal rough that will be interesting to cut. If you can't make the trip then go visit Stan McCall and he may have some rough black opal that will be very inexpensive compared to the price I paid including my trip.

One of the priceless reasons to go was the time I spent with the legendary opal expert and author Len Cram. I have some video that I hope to share with AOS in which he took me around Lightning Ridge and narrated at many of the mining locations and also to the Grawins. Len Cram has donated a pair of his recent books to AOS to be used as a prize for our raffle at our show. I also visited with Stephan and Mary Aracic and they donated a collector's version of his latest opal book, Rediscover Opals in Australia. I noted that if you are an opal book collector you will find many more books on opal in Australia than ever make it over here.

My main reason for going was to present to **Len Cram** a **lifetime honorary membership** in the AOS. I presented a paper copy with signatures at the Yowah Festival and then the very nice plaque at the Black Tie Ball during the Lightning Ridge Festival. He was very appreciative of both of the presentations. I have a video of him thanking AOS for the honorary lifetime membership.

Overall it was a very memorable trip and I will long remember it. I was helped by Barbara Beemer Moritz, who is our representative in Lightning Ridge. She even had me over for an excellent steak dinner with great conversations with her and her mate, Joe.

I also want to thank Tim and Barbara Thomas for the help I received from them during my trip and Barbara McCondra for helping with Yowah accommodations.

You can try to plan everything but sometimes it's not possible to make all arrangements from here. It took me a week to recover the seven hour time difference between California and Queensland.

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## Hints, Tips, and Techniques from Professional Opal Jeweler David Kramer

*By Russ Madsen*

David Kramer began this evening's (Aug. 11 General Meeting - *The Editor*) talk with a number of pointers. The more expensive the opal rough, the easier it is to cut. Every cutter needs knowledge and confidence; both are borne of experience and diligent study. David noted candidly many cutters have poor technique or bad habits. Both can lead to cutting difficulties, worry, and/or lackluster results.

### Dopping

Good cutting begins with proper dopping. It is important to employ a good dop stick. No wood, no iron nails. Wood provides poor "feel" during cutting and the shank of an iron nail doesn't allow for good hand control.

Select rough that is thick enough to cab. It is helpful if the back of the rough is flat but proper dopping technique with wax can adhere a stone regardless of the shape. For epoxy dopping the rough must have a flat back and be oriented prior to being dopped.

### Dopping Techniques - Green Dop Wax

David suggested wearing an Optivisor for accurate dopping results. He demonstrated how he begins by forming a portion of dop wax around the end of the dop stick using an alcohol lamp for heat.

The warm wax is then shaped into a cone while it is the consistency of putty. The "base" of this cone is the surface to which the opal will be dopped. Fashion a base in a shape similar to the planned finished stone. Form a round base for a round stone, appropriately oblong for an oval or freeform.

Once the wax is sized and shaped, the flat area (base of the cone) is heated again in the alcohol flame and the opal is placed on the flat, face side up. While it cools slightly and is beginning to adhere, David waves the stone/dop combination through the flame a few times with the opal and wax directly in the flame to gently bring the stone and wax to a temperature warm enough to form a secure bond with the rough.

Notes: make sure the lamp is nearly full so the alcohol will travel up the wick easily providing a good strong flame; make sure the opal is absolutely clean, no skin oils etc. as these will interfere with the bond.

After the stone is placed and bonded but while the wax is still soft, shape the wax to match the rough assuring support of the entire opal. Make sure wax does not extend beyond the border of the opal's expected final shape. Re-warm the wax if necessary and orient the rough so that the planned finished face of the cab is perpendicular to the dop stick.

### Dop Sticks

David keeps an assortment of dop sticks on hand. Most are aluminum rod about 4 inches long of several diameters ranging from about 1/8 inch to as much as 1/2 inch. For smaller opals he prefers a very fine tool which consists of a shank about 3/16 inch diameter attached to a stainless steel wire about half the thickness of a coat hanger. This particular dop stick is about 2-1/2 inches long overall. Each cutter should adjust the length of their dop sticks for the size of their hands.

For any and all dop sticks, David emphasized it is imperative to have a shank that has a somewhat coarse surface (sand blasted, scored or roughened) for good grip and large enough to provide good "feel" and control during the cutting process.

He also suggested having on hand a stock of acrylic rod of various diameters. These can be shaped as desired.

With dops having a very small end for small stones, shape the wax a bit over the end of the dop stick.

To remove the stone from the dop, warm the wax at the shank and slice the stone off with a knife. Trim any remaining wax with a knife or razor blade or wipe with a rag soaked in acetone.

### **Dopping Techniques - Epoxy**

It is important to have a box of sand about 2 inches deep. This will be used to support finished dop setups as they are prepared.

Again, make sure stones are clean, wipe with alcohol to remove all traces of skin oil, cutting oil or any other contaminants which will interfere with a good bond.

Before mixing epoxy select all stones and have dop sticks ready

David uses 5 minute, two part epoxy. Dispense equal portions and stir for a full minute to assure good mixing of epoxy and hardener. It is possible to prepare as many as 30 dopped set ups before the epoxy hardens. As each is assembled stick them upright in the sand while the epoxy cures. Hint: it is more efficient to dop small stones first and arrange them at the back of the sand box.

After all dop setups have been prepared, give them a final review and adjust any stones that may have been bumped or slipped.

To get a well-cut stone with epoxy dopping, assure the rough has a back oriented so the stone's final face is perpendicular to the dop stick because it is not possible to adjust the rough in the horizontal plane as it is with dop wax.

David removes stones dopped with epoxy by waving the assembly in a pan of very hot (near boiling) water for about 15 seconds. Glue releases as the stone, epoxy and dop stick expand and contract at different rates. As with dop wax scrape off any remaining epoxy with a razor blade.

### **Cutting Techniques**

David always uses hard diamond 6" wheels. He identifies Crystalite Company as producing the best diamond wheels. Hard wheels run true and provide a reliably even and smooth cutting surface, absolutely critical to successful cutting.

David uses a Contempo Lapidary unit modified to hold a pair of 6 inch wheels: one, a fresh 600 grit for shaping and roughing in; the other a well worn 600 grit for sanding.

From shaping on the worn 600 go to wet pre-polish on resin bonded white or grey wheel. Polish wet with chrome oxide.

David advises it is important to cut with a single light source. Make sure it is positioned to illuminate the working area of the cutting wheel and doesn't cast a shadow over the work piece. A single light source provides the best view of both color bars and the shape of the stone during cutting.

Interesting note: David suggests cutting crystal opal dry in a well ventilated workspace using a small fan blowing across the work area. He indicated water creates a certain amount of distortion in viewing the work in progress. He also prefers to cut small boulder opal dry, using water with good size boulder.

Cutting opal dry? Heresy you say?!

Sure! But try it!!

Just be careful to cut using hard diamond wheels with gentle pressure letting the diamond do the work. Follow every opal cutter's first rule: cut a little, look a lot. The opal will not be overheated or damaged and precision is much easier to achieve cutting dry.

In setting opal, aesthetics is everything! An oddly shaped opal can be acceptable if it is balanced, not awkward. Don't cut for weight retention, cut for beauty. Generally try for symmetry as this is almost always the best presentation of a stone. Try leaving any templates

on the shelf. Cut by "eye" and develop a sense of aesthetic judgment as your cutting progresses.

Position the entire cutting process so that the wheel is above the stone: in other words use the bottom third of the wheel's area. This may require modifying the cutting equipment because drip pans often cause obstruction. Also, for better control position one of your hands to the outside of the edge of the wheel being used. This may require adding spacers between your wheels.

Begin cutting using smooth round strokes to cut the edge and establish the stone's shape. After shaping, begin at the base and make a full turn around the stone (always using gentle pressure to avoid flat spots). Tilt the stone slightly and make another full turn. Continue tilting the stone against the wheel while turning the dop stick until the dome is formed. Remember: always employ a very light touch.

Here is where a proper dop stick shows it's importance. A good dop stick provides control and "feel" as the stone turns against the wheel.

David commented he generally completes cutting a stone in 10 to 15 minutes.

Always re-dop and cut a bevel around the back to avoid placing stress on the edge of the stone when it is set.

David prefers to cut opal in low domes. He notes this almost always displays a stone's patterns and color play best. It is notable that a low dome also makes the stone less susceptible to damage after it has been set.

To review:

- Dop
- Set Shape
- Set Dome
- Assure a cushioned rounded edge
- Finish Sand
- Pre-Polish and Polish
- Re-dop and bevel the edge of the back

Our thanks for a captivating evening of hands-on demonstration and commentary on the subject opal cutting from David Kramer, one of America's top expert opal jewelers.

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## **How to Make Spencer Opal Triplets**

*by Marge Lucy*

I have been to the Spencer Opal Mine about seven times and learned to make opal triplets from Doyle and Claudia at their shop.

To reach the mine you would first get on board their converted school bus and be driven up the mountain to the mine. Other times I've bummed a ride with people having 4-wheel drive vehicles. When my orange van was a "stick shift" I was able to drive it up the steep mountain. Fond memories!

The opal at the mine is in rhyolite and is volcanic in formation. It is mainly in bands from a thickness of a hair to 1/16 of an inch. Dynamite was used to blast selected areas of rock to expose opal areas for hard rock mining. The public was not permitted on the mountain at those times. When fee digging was permitted you had your choice of hard rock mining or going through the dumps for the opal. I've tried both, but the latter was certainly less strenuous. I haven't been there in over 5 years so I don't know what their digging procedure is now.

Triplets are composed of a quartz cap over a band of opal which is backed by basanite. To make triplets you need a combination machine that has a saw and a flat lap. I use a .025 blade to cut away the excess rock. Add Crystallite or Water Aid to your water. Do not use oil. Slice parallel to the fire band, about 1/4-inch away from the band. On multibands choose the brightest and most promising. You can use a .012 blade for splitting the bands if they are far enough apart.

Using a diamond 180 grit flat lap, grind the edges of the opal at an angle to expose the fire. That helps you to determine if your cut was parallel to the band.

Now grind it flat into the fire band. Let up on the pressure for a bit at the end to reduce scratching. Then move to a 600 grit diamond flat lap and continue lapping until you are about half way into the layer of fire. The 600 diamond smoothes out the scratches the 180 diamond put into it.

Next, clean the opal, wiping off the excess water, and then clean with either denatured alcohol or acetone. Be sure to keep oily fingerprints off the opal.

Apply fracture sealer (Opticon Resin 224, made by Hughes Associates) using a toothpick. Heat the sealer using a light with a 75W bulb (no larger) placed about 2 inches above the stone for 30 minutes (no more). I place the stone on a wire mesh screen suspended on wooden blocks. The heat expands the pores of the opal and thins the fracture sealer.

Allow the stone to cool. Wipe off excess sealer with a clean rag. Do not clean the sealer off with acetone! A thin layer should remain on the opal.

Prior to starting this project, obtain a 1/16-inch slab of basalt or basanite for backing the triplet. It should have been soaked in acetone at least overnight to get the oil out of it. Oil, including skin oil, is the biggest enemy of the triplet. Wipe the basanite with clean acetone.

Put two-part 330 Epoxy on a business card, mixing slowly together using a toothpick. Roll it forward and backward slowly under a 75W light. Get the air bubbles out with the toothpick. Put the warm epoxy on the stone. Pick off any more air bubbles you see on the stone, looking at it with an Optivisor. Glue the stone to the basanite, pushing down and wiggling it to get out the last of the air bubbles. Set it aside and leave it alone for 24 hours.

The next day you should saw as close to the other side of the fire band as you can. Beginners should cut 1/4-inch away from the band. Using the 180 grit diamond flat lap, grind the edges at an angle to expose the fire. Then grind the center down part way into the fire band. Using the 600 grit diamond flat lap, grind out the scratches until the opal band is about the thickness of two sheets of newspaper.

When you have decided where to put the quartz caps, clean the stone and quartz caps with acetone or denatured alcohol. Apply fracture sealer as before, but don't heat under the lamp longer than 20 minutes. Cool the stone and then wipe off the excess fracture sealer.

Mix the epoxy and coat the stone as previously described. Pick off the air bubbles. Drop the caps straight down onto the stone and press firmly on top of the caps. If there are any bubbles they will look like bright silver spots. If so, remove the cap, apply a little more epoxy, and check for bubbles and apply the cap again. Dry for 24 hours.

Remove the excess dry epoxy that has squished around the edges of the cap. I use a small-blade pocket knife. This must be done to avoid grinding the cap wrong. Dip the stone on top of the cap. I use a nail and one drop of 330 epoxy. Or use green dop wax.

Hold the stone at an angle of about 15 to 20 degrees to the lap. This will allow you to undercut the backing at a slight angle and will keep you from touching the quartz cap to the grinding wheel. Flat grind the backing to a thickness of a little less than 1/16-inch. Snap off the nail from the triplet. Mount your priceless stone!

Someone asked where to get quartz caps. I bought mine from the people at Spencer. Alpha Supply, Inc, Bemerton, WA 98310 shows them in their catalog on page 19. I'll bring a copy of the page to the next ARGMS meeting.

*Note: A special thank you to Marge Lucy who gave a program on opal triplets at the April ARGMS meeting and, when asked, graciously agreed to write an article for the newsletter*

*Ella. From American River Currents, June 2000, (6th Place, 2001 CFMS Adult Article Contest)*

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## **Enhanced, Treated, Heated, Dyed, Stabilized, Created, Irradiated: Fake**

*By Deborah Pfian*

Gemstones and semiprecious stones have been fiddled with for centuries to make them 'more' colorful, more eye-catching, and easier to work. This does not make them 'fake'; however one should know what some of those terms and treatments mean.

Heat Treated: this is the most common treatment and is as old as fire. Humans heated agate and jasper so as to be able to knap the stones for tools. Humans also heat gem material to enhance, clarify or create color in a stone. Amethyst is heated for citrine and ametrine. Zircon is heated to clarify the stone to clear white. Sapphires are heated to get the most amazing pinks and blues. Tiger-eye is turned blue or red. Carnelian turns orange-red. Aquamarine may go from green-blue to blue. Rubies may lose a purplish tint. Iolite may be turned a deep blue. It is also used to enhance the 'color change' gems such as tanzanite.

Dyed: this is also a very common practice. Agate is dyed to get fancy pinks, purples, oranges, and blues-eye catching and very saleable. Chalcedony is often dyed; black is sold as onyx and green is sold as chrysoprase. Howlite is often dyed to look like turquoise, lapis, sodalite and charite. Turquoise and Jadeite are often dyed to enhance the natural color. Alabaster, coral banded calcite, and marble are dyed to enhance their color or to imitate other semiprecious stones.

Irradiation: while topaz is currently the most commonly irradiated gemstone (to get various shades and tones of blue) this is also how one gets those fabulously colored diamonds. In fact diamond was the first gemstone color treated with radiation. Stabilized Opals are often stabilized-either by filling such as with Opticon resin (similar agent) or by capping either as a doublet or triplet. Emerald has a long history of fracture filling due to its popularity and its tendency to be highly included and fractured. While natural oils have traditionally been used for filling and stabilization, modern synthetic resins are now being used, such as Opticon, which are more permanent than the natural oils were. Turquoise and coral are also stabilized in such a manner so as to make them a bit more durable.

Created: this is a touchy subject for some folks. Much like formed pearls are real with a center of plastic or mother of pearl rather than sand. Still real, still a pearl just helped to grow by a human. Laboratory grown crystals of ruby, sapphire, diamond, emerald and star sapphire are real semiprecious stones. They just weren't grown in the earth.

So what is the answer: Real or FAKE? This 'real vs. fake' can be argued with all sides being technically correct. That is not the most important information one can have. The really important bit about this from a lapidary or jeweler's point of view is disclosure. Does one know up front that the stone you are getting has been 'helped along' by the human touch? Do you as a lapidary artist, gemsmith, jeweler, or craftsperson know what you are using? The beauty and art that we create with these stones is being helped along by our touch, much as it was to first get our attention. There is beauty in the knowing-be sure to shore that with those around you.

*From Rock Chips 6/01, via the Flatiron Facets 2/05*

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### **The Adventures of Frank Gross in Aussie Land – Part 3**

*This is the third and final part of a series of entertaining commentaries via e-mail by member Frank Gross on his travels in Australia. The Editor*

**July 26, 2005 - News from the Ridge**

Hello all,

My last full day in Lightning Ridge is upon me. I plan a little trip to Angledool, about 40 kilometers away towards Queensland, and see if they have anything to offer me besides XXXX Beer. I might even drive the next 23 kilometers to Hebel in Queensland itself. My friend Chris has relatives in Hebel.

My trip yesterday to Grawin and Glengarry scored me nothing except a couple of Tooheys Old beers and the Sheeppark Inn and the Club in the Scrub. Both of these places are, shall I say, rustic and accessible only by corrugated dirt road. I took lots of pics so be ready for a slide show, or two, at the club meetings when I get back. Mike has been off with Len Cram almost every day now. He has taken lots of video to show at the club.

Anyhow, that's all from me right now.

Best wishes from

Frank Gross, in Lightning Ridge

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### **July 27, 2005**

G'Day Everybody,

This is the day I leave Lightning Ridge and head back to Nowra. I will drive back over two days so as not to get too tired. I think Chris and I will be passing through Coonaberrabran to see the AAT (Anglo-Australian Telescope) which is the biggest telescope in the southern hemisphere.

Today, in Lightning Ridge there is a markets going on which would make each and every one of you drool! It part of the yearly festival here at the Ridge and there are hundreds of tables with precious "rainbow candy". I walked around and saw bargain after bargain in opal. I wanted to buy it all but space limitations in my luggage and finances don't permit me to get too much. I DID buy a bottle of rough with bits of RED showing here and there for \$AUD 50 (about \$USD 38). There is some GREAT boulder opal selling. One table had BIG pieces selling from anywhere from \$30 to \$300. One piece looked like a giant eye about two feet across with blue opal for the iris. I think this piece would have been a few thousands of dollars.

I found out that I could have a completely solar home fitted for me including all batteries, 3500 watt inverter, 8 large solar panels (to turn sunlight into electricity) installed in a home for \$AUD 10000. Not bad. This is the system I want when I get back to OZ permanently and build my house.

Gasoline here in Lightning Ridge is about \$USD 3.40 a gallon but the cost of food is still cheaper than buying it in Ralph's, Albertsons, or Vons in Los Angeles.

I put in the order for rough to Vicki and Peter and have given her all our names. It will be a matter of time and she will have the rough together to send. I hope she is shopping herself today at those markets as she could easily gather our requirements there. I appreciate your patience. When the parcel is ready to send I will wire the money to their bank account in Lightning Ridge. I can do this over the computer. The US amount will be \$1200 which is approximately \$AUD 1500.

This will be the last message coming from me at Lightning Ridge. Next one will be from Nowra, NSW.

Best wishes to you all.

Frank Gross, in Lightning Ridge

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### **August 1, 2005**

G'Day All,

Chris and I left Lightning Ridge about 12 noon and drove to a place called Coonaberrabran. This town is nested in the Warrembungles mountain range. The Warrembungles are located in an area of extreme flatness. You can travel hundreds of miles in any direction and see no hills or mountains EXCEPT at the Warrembungles. You can see them in the distance when you are driving just popping out of the flatness. When you get closer to them you see that they are made up of many strange rock formations:

Spiky Spires, giant butt shaped rocks etc. Chris and I drove through them to get to Coonaberrabran and I'll tell you I have never seen so many kangaroos in my life. They were everywhere munching on grass in picnic areas and paddocks. I drove especially slow in fear of one jumping out of the bush and hitting my car and causing damage. One did jump out but then jumped right back into the bush in front of my car. I was lucky. The Warrembungles is home to the largest telescope in the Southern Hemisphere. It is called the AAT or Anglo Australian Telescope. It is a joint venture between Australia and England. We got there at 4 pm and found the place locked up tight. Too bad. We then drove to Coonaberrabran and rented a overnight trailer at the outskirts of town for \$USD 22.50 for the night. It got pretty cold there at night but we had a blower heater on all night and didn't feel cold at all. Outside, though, the temperature must have dropped to below freezing as there was ice on the wind shield in the morning. We had a BBQ for dinner and had Bratwurst, boiled potatoes and broccoli. It was pretty good. We were going to have lamingtons and custard for dessert but as I was heating up the custard the glass heating vessel broke and the custard spilt all over the stove. We had dry lamingtons that night. Rats!

We were off in the morning about 9 AM and I drove for 12 hours to get back to Nowra. We stopped many times so I could rest and there was some rather heavy traffic when we reached the Blue Mountains. It seems that they are always working on the road there and it really holds up the traffic. We waited in a line of traffic for about half an hour before it got moving. When we were down the hill an on the plains of Sydney at a place called Penrith we hit the quitting time traffic. We got back to Nowra to Nobby and Yani's place at 9:30 PM. Nobby just called Chris up on his mobile phone asking where we were just as we were driving into his street. We told him to look outside his window as we had just driven into his driveway at the time.

Today Chris and I are packing again in preparation for our trip to Tasmania. We leave tomorrow at 6 AM and will drive to a place called Glenrowen in the state of Victoria. I have worked it out and I will have to drive 670 kilometers which will take me about 10 hours including rest stops along the way. We should arrive in Glenrowen about 4 PM. Glenrowen is just a tiny town but it has historic value to Australia as it was the place of the shootout, back in the 1870's, between police and the bushranger Ned Kelly. The town's whole theme is centered around the Ned Kelly theme. The next day we will drive the remaining 250 kilometers to Melbourne and catch the "Spirit of Tasmania" a large ferry that is the main link between Tasi and the mainland.

My trip to the Lightning Ridge, Grawin, and Glengarry areas was most satisfying! I and Mike Kowalski have taken lots and lots of video to show you all when we get back. The opal pickin's were quite good. We were at the EXPO at the Ridge the day before it officially opened. However, there were hundreds of vendors already set up offering their wares. I got some good stuff.

I hope Vicki Drackett got us some good stuff to send up whilst she was selling at the EXPO.

Anyhow, that all from me right now.

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### **August 5th, 2005**

Hello All,

After an uneventful trip on the Tasmanian Ferry "The Spirit of Tasmania" from Melbourne on August 3rd I am in Hobart visiting my son, Blake. We all went out to dinner to La Porcheta, which is Blake's favourite eating out place. Blake had a Meat lovers Pizza and I had a Pizza with the lot. Chris had a vegetarian spaghetti. We ate and talked for 1 and a half hours before we left. I showed Blake most of the 250 pictures I have taken with my digital camera. Blake is looking good, still thin and his hair is a mousey blonde - a very light brown. I think his hair colour changes with the seasons and his friends influence. He is still working at the printing factory in the city

of Glenorchy. he doesn't completely like his job but as I told him HE IS GETTING PAID FOR DOING IT. He told me he had a big fight with his immediate boss yesterday over work issues. It seems they added extra duties to Blake's schedule which Blake was finding hard to keep up so he said he stood up for himself and complained. Well, his immediate boss didn't take kindly to this and immediately started an argument. More than likely there was faults on both sides and Blake said he went up to his boss to sort of make up but he didn't want to talk to Blake and told him to "F... Off". It's a good thing that Blake gets on well with the main boss (and owner) of the shop.

Tonight we are having Chinese at "king Wah", Blake's favourite Chinese eatery.

On Saturday I plan to take Blake out and show him how to fly a remote controlled airplane. The one we had together about 10 years ago crashed on its first flight with me at the controls. I fixed it up but we never had a chance, together, to fly it again as his mum took him down to Tasmania in 1997 during the divorce. Now, he will be flying again.

Saturday night we are having a BBQ at my caravan at the Treasure island Caravan Park.

The weather is chilly during the day here in Hobart and the nights are colder. I would liken it to the nights at Lightning Ridge. Petrol (gas) here is about \$3.50 an US gallon but you don't see anyone skimping on keeping their fuel tank filled.

You probably won't hear from me until I get back to Nowra in a few days time.

Best wishes to you all,  
Frank (Bill) Gross, in Tasmania

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### August 17, 2005 - Back in the USA - Frank Gross

Hello All,

Qantas Flight 11 from Sydney to Los Angeles arrived safely at 10:03 AM Wednesday, August 17th. I was on board. It was one of the smoothest flights across the Pacific I had ever had. The plane was about 95% full as they combined an American Airlines flight with the Qantas Flight.

They served lunch, a snack and breakfast. For Lunch I had a nice Chicken dish with mashed potatoes and green beans along with a salad, a nice roll with Australian butter with a Heaven ice cream bar for dessert. I had all this with a shot of Bundaberg Rum with soda. MMMMMmmm Good! Instead of dinner they served us all a plastic bag with a bottle of water, a fruit bar, some herb and garlic bread sticks and a macadamia nut and dried fruit mix. No dinner because everybody just wanted to sleep. For breakfast the next morning I had scrambled eggs with sausage and ham and beans, a Sara Lee blueberry muffin which could have hidden under the side of the plate and melon bits. Oh, I had orange juice and tea. Yummy.

I got searched at customs! This was the first time in many years. I had reported on my customs card that I had some opal specimens for future sale in my bags. I was honest. The customs officer grilled me for about half a minute than started asking me about my business. I had all the answers and I was out of there in three minutes. My bags were HEAVY. Heavy with what you ask? Well I had been to Lightning Ridge, Grawin and Glengarry hadn't I. My bags were heavy with bags of nobbies from all over the opal producing area there. Why I could use one of the packages as a weight for exercise. You will see a few choice specimens at the next meeting. Oh, by the way Mike Kowalski had too much to take back for his return flight so he gave me this rather large opal specimen. I nearly lost it in security at the Sydney end as they said large rocks weren't really allow on board the plane. They talked it over and then let it through. I kept it stowed away in my travel bag in the overhead lockers.

Got to get to sleep... jet lag..., See you all soon,  
Frank G, in the USA

**This has been a Gross Production (2005)**

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## Splitting Boulder Opal Seams

To Split Boulder Opal Seams that are splittable, Use a diamond saw, not a #\*\$\*!# hammer!! Exposes the seam on all edges, leaving an extra, extra thick back on both sides of the seam using a saw and grinder. Inspect the seam/rock DRY for cracks, if partly naturally cracked/split already, GO WITH THE FLOW!

Using the saw, cut into the seam where it will split wasting a little bit of opal if the seam is thin cut 1/4 inch deep where the weakest color/potch is, or on the strongest bit of rock and wide enough to insert a butter knife snugly. IF some natural splitting of the seam is evident, use it and insert diamond blade there. You MUST have NO ironstone holding either side of the splits anywhere on the opal seam edge. Freeze for an hour or so till frosty, put Knife in saw cut, twist knife, POP, and hopefully if your lucky, Matching Gems!

When they don't match it still turns one seam into two boulder opal stones when possible. Vertical seams mostly makes matching color patterns (Ear rings). Horizontal seams mostly don't, (two different looking stones). Some rocks split very easily, some very not! Try a small piece as a test if possible. Sometimes disappointing, sometimes two very exciting surprises and lots less grinding!

Cheers,

Boulder Opal Miner/Cutter \*-)

Author Unknown, from the AOS Opal Discussion Forum,

<http://opalsociety.org/talkshop/>

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## Advise on Opal Storage

The newest advise on opal is that you should not store rough opal in water or glycerin. Most opal is found in desert environment and does not have to be kept moist. A well-polished opal will hold up well without the frequent baths that are sometimes recommended. NEVER put opal in an ultrasonic cleaner.

From the Golden Spike News-7/98 and Lapidary Journal

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## September 2005 Gem & Mineral Shows

**2-5 — FORT BRAGG, CA:** 43rd annual show; Mendocino Coast Gem & Mineral Society; Town Hall, Main and Laurel; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-6, Mon. 10-4; free admission; contact Don McDonell, 643 N. McPherson, Fort Bragg, CA 95437.

**3-4 — FORESTHILL, CA:** CA State Gold Panning Championships; American Legion Post 587; Old Foresthill Memorial Park; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; annual pig roast and Foresthill Heritage Celebration, family events, crafts, gold panning, metal detecting, lumberjack contest; contact Foresthill Chamber of Commerce, (530) 367-2474 or (530) 367-2891; e-mail: [info@foresthillchamber.org](mailto:info@foresthillchamber.org) or [golddust@direcway.com](mailto:golddust@direcway.com).

**3-4 — VIRGIN VALLEY, NV:** 1st annual show; [thegemdealer.com](http://thegemdealer.com); Opal Negra Mine millsite, Sagebrush Rd. (map on Web site); Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; dealers, tailgaters, fee digging for precious opal; contact Scott Ryals, (800) 803-7601; e-mail: [gemshow@thegemdealer.com](mailto:gemshow@thegemdealer.com); Web site:

**17-18 — JACKSON, CA:** 5th annual show and sale, "Tailgate Gemboree" Fossils For Fun Society; Kennedy Gold Mine, Hwy. 49/88 and Kennedy Mine Rd.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; indoor show, outdoor dealers and tailgaters, bargain fossil table, Sat. live auction of rocks and fossils, mine museum and gift shop; contact Dan Brown, (209) 296-6466; e-mail: [danbrown@volcano.net](mailto:danbrown@volcano.net); Web site: [www.geocities.com/fossilsforfunsociety/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/fossilsforfunsociety/index.html).

**17-18 — PASO ROBLES, CA:** 14th annual show, "Rockhound Roundup" Santa Lucia Rockhounds, Pioneer Park and Museum, 2010 Riverside Ave.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; dealers, demonstrators, displays, kids' activities, silent auction; contact Joyce Baird, (805) 462-9544; e-mail: [liljoycee@webtv.net](mailto:liljoycee@webtv.net).

**17-18 — REDWOOD CITY, CA:** 40th annual show, "Harvest of Gems" Sequoia Gem & Mineral Society; Community Activities Bldg., 1400 Roosevelt Ave.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; more than 30 displays of gems, minerals, jewelry, and lapidary arts, live demonstrations of rock cutting, wire-wrapping, carving, bead making, and silversmithing, gem, mineral and jewelry dealers, kids' grab bags, games, silent auction, lapidary books and magazines; contact Walter Skinner, (650) 589-3505.

**17-18 — WALLA WALLA, WA:** 36th annual show; Marcus Whitman Gem & Mineral Society; Walla Walla Country Fair Ground, Community Center Bldg., 9th St. and Orchard; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; contact Jack Edwards, 1475 Bussell Rd., Walla Walla, WA 99362, (509) 529-3673; e-mail: edwardsj@wwics.com.

**22-25 — MCDERMITT, NV:** 2nd annual show, "Rockhound Rendezvous" Illyssa I. Fogel, Diamond A Motel, City of McDermitt; Diamond A Motel; Thu. 10-6, Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun 10-5; free admission; many dealers selling agates, jaspers, opals, petrified wood; contact Illyssa I. Fogel, P.O. Box 437, McDermitt, NV 89421, (775) 532-8551; e-mail: lisa@diamondamotel.com.

**23-25 — SAN BERNARDINO, CA:** Tailgate; Orange Belt Mineralogical Society; Western Regional Little League Park, 6707 Little League Dr.; gems, minerals, rocks; Mike Woolery, (909) 882-6806; e-mail: ROCKPIK98@aol.com.

**23-25 — SAN RAFAEL, CA:** Show; Gem Faire; Marin Center/Exhibit Hall, 10 Avenue of the Flags; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; gem show; contact Gem Faire, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

**24 — LOS ALTOS, CA:** Annual show, "Recreation with Rocks" Peninsula Gem & Geology Society; Rancho Shopping Center, corner of Foothill Expressway and S. Springer Rd.; Sat. 9:30-4:45; exhibits, sales of polished stones, rock critters, cutting material, mineral specimens, cut geodes, rocks,

slabs; contact R.D. (Dave) Smith, (650) 967-7392; e-mail: rdsmeks@sbcglobal.net.

**24-25 — DOWNEY, CA:** Show; Delvers Gem & Mineral Society; Woman's Club of Downey, 9813 Paramount Blvd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; free admission; dealers, demonstrators, exhibits, gemstones, minerals, jewelry, grab bags, raffle; contact Michael Herrick, (562) 422-1543.

**24-25 — MONTEREY, CA:** 46th annual show; Carmel Valley Gem & Mineral Society; Monterey Fairgrounds, 2004 Fairgrounds Rd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3.50, children free with adult; contact Sky Paxton, (831) 755-7741; e-mail: sky@familystones.net; or Janis Rovetti, (831) 657-1933; e-mail: fjrovetti@sbcglobal.net; Web site: www.cvgms.org.

**4-25 — SAN DIEGO, CA:** Annual show; San Diego Lapidary Society; Bernardo Winery, 13330 Paseo Del Verano Norte; Sat. 10-4, Sun 10-4; free admission; gems, minerals, fossils, beads, jewelry; contact Kim Hutsell, (619) 294-3914; e-mail: sldlapidary@yahoo.com.

**28-2 — JOSHUA TREE, CA:** 29th annual show; Joshua Tree Sportsman's Club, 6225 Sunburst St.; Wed. 8-5, Thu. 8-5, Fri. 8-5, Sat. 8-5, Sun. 8-3; free admission; more than 50 dealers, rocks, minerals, fossils, jewelry, new and used rock equipment; contact Joshua Tree Sportsman's Club, (760) 366-2915 or (760) 366-2010.

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