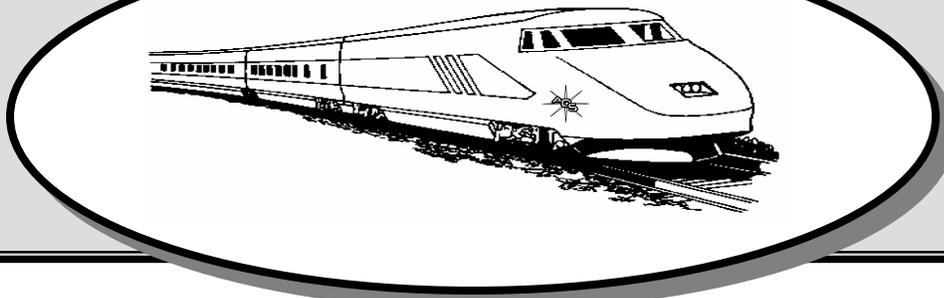


The Opal Express

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President's Message

By Gene LeVan

Show time is November 11&12 2006. We need membership support to make this a successful event. Please come to this show to volunteer and to assist other members.

The October meeting this month will close the speakers for the year, with opal show next month then a Christmas pot luck meeting in December. It is time to thank all members, special speakers and board for all your support this year making meetings interesting and informative about opals.

A little word about the special value in opal stones; none are the same, all have value, some are brilliant with high color even in small sizes. One of the best pleasures is rough opal material with its many surprises when opened up for you to see. If you have cut a stone, it will bring you back time and time again with the eye candy mystery. For myself, opal is life long friend and I really enjoy the beauty of all the shapes and sizes.

Members Only Website Password

To log onto the website's members only area at: http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm type: Name: "member" and Password: "nevadaopal".

Volunteers Needed for the Opal & Gem Show

We need volunteers for the Opal and Gem Show. Please sign up at the October meeting or contact Jay Carey or Jim Lambert.

Raffle Donations Needed for the Opal & Gem Show

If you have any extra opals, gemstones, rough, jewelry, lapidary equipment, books, etc. that you would like to contribute to the American Opal Society, please bring it to the October Meeting or to the Opal & Gem Show. The raffle is a big money-maker for us and the more gifts we have, the better. The AOS will give you a receipt that you can use as a charitable **tax deduction**.

October 12th Speaker - David Kramer – Opal Cutting

We are looking forward to hearing our October guest speaker, opal expert and jeweler David Kramer. David's talks are always extremely informative and educational because he demonstrates as talks.

David is planning to bring in his special grinder to demonstrate his unique opal cutting techniques. He plans on demonstrating how to plan and cut an inlay piece. He will also show techniques for mounting a stone in a prong finding.

David will also demonstrate proper ways to cut a stone. He will also show dopping techniques for smaller stones. Be sure to mark you calendar for this opportunity to learn from one of the foremost opal jewelers in America.

Opal Canyon Trip Planned for November

The Leonids Meteor Showers is predicted to be at 2AM in the morning on Sunday Nov 19th. Russ Madsen is planning to visit Opal Canyon during the showers. Interested members can meet at the Subway in Mojave at 9AM Saturday morning. Russ plans to dig during the day and stay up most of the night to watch the show. The Leonid activity is NOT scheduled to be great but the moon will be new that night - the sky therefore should be inky black providing one of the important elements of a good meteor show. Overnight temperatures are likely to be around freezing (literally). So warm clothing is a must. Day time temperatures in November can be fairly cool too, maybe high 50's to high 60's.

Opal Society Workshop

The American Opal Society's workshop is open at Ball Jr. High School every Monday from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. The school is located at 1500 W. Ball Road in Anaheim. If you are traveling West on Ball, the lot is just after the railroad tracks. Room 37 is in the center of the campus. Please bring a roll of PAPER TOWELS for clean-up. Membership in the Society is a must due to insurance. A nightly fee of \$2 required.

IT'S NEXT MONTH!!!

Get READY!!!

**The American Opal Society's 39th Annual
ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW**

The Largest Opal Show in USA!

Sat. & Sun., November 11 & 12, 2006

Saturday 10AM – 6PM

Sunday 10AM – 5PM

Opal and Gem Dealers from around the USA and Australia.

Rough and Cut Opals; other gemstones; jewelry & supplies.

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

Free Opal Seminars both days with Paid Admission.

Free Demonstrations on gem cutting, jewelry making, etc.

Same Location Since 1991:

Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort

616 Convention Way ANAHEIM, California

Close to DISNEYLAND

One block South of Katella on Harbor Blvd.

near the Anaheim Convention Center

Notice to Interested Dealers

If you haven't registered yet for the show,
please contact Jim Lambert at:

Phone: (714) 891-7171 or email: jlamb777@yahoo.com

A Message from our Opal & Gem Show Chairman

Hi all, I am alive and well, haven't left the country yet. I've been working on the opal show faithfully. I'm looking forward to a fun show in November. I've been very busy at work, working 10-12 hour days. Call me or Karen at our cell phones if you have any show questions at: Jim (714 595-6417) or Karen's (714 595-9214). Many thanks to all the dealers/vendors that have agreed to return to the show this year. Your dedication to the world of Opal and AOS is very much appreciated. Thanks,
Jim Lambert

**Famous Opals: The Andamooka Opal
(AKA "The Queen's Opal")**



The Queen's Opal

In 1954, an extensive search for the finest opal ever found at the South Australian opal fields was announced by the South Australian Government.

The opal would be presented to Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her first visit to Australia. [Altmann & Cherny](#) submitted an outstanding piece of rough opal which had been mined at Andamooka. The Government selected this opal as the most appropriate and befitting gemstone for this auspicious

occasion.

The opal was then cut and polished by John Altmann. Once cut it weighed 203 carats and displayed a magnificent array of colours including red, blue and green. It was set with diamonds into an 18 carat palladium necklet.

From <http://www.altmanncherny.com.au/queens.htm>.

Gems and Their Role as Elements of Animal Design

By Russ Madsen

For September we enjoyed another talk by wildlife artist Daniel Toledo. Daniel's focus for this talk was on using gems as elements in jewelry, sculpture and other art forms.

Daniel shared examples of his work including a finely detailed tiger drinking from a pool of "water". In this piece the pool is a blue-green crystal opal. The very lifelike tiger, formed of yellow gold, surrounds the pool with its paws. The creativity and fine detail of animals Daniel crafts make them literally seem to be looking back at you.

In addition to several other examples of his own creations, Daniel shared a volume of depictions showing a wide variety of ways gems have been employed by jewelry artists in animal themes.

The subject of back-setting was discussed again and members may enjoy reviewing the article about Daniel's technique which appears in the July 2005 issue of The Opal Express. This article can be found in the newsletter archives on the AOS website.

Our thanks to Daniel Toledo for another interesting presentation.



Daniel Toledo at September Meeting

Rockhounding in California

California's geological forces have created one of the widest varieties of rocks and minerals found in any state. This rock and mineral wealth has long been recognized by rockhounds even before the gold rush days.

Early rockhounds were prospectors looking for valuable minerals and gemstones for commercial purposes. Eventually, however, more people were drawn to rockhounding for recreational purposes, mainly for the beauty that rocks and minerals provide.

By the 1930s, interest in rockhounding increased significantly, and it was during this period that rockhounding groups were formed and collecting areas in the desert were publicized.

With increased popularity of rockhounding, some rockhounds regarded certain areas as their own and feared that other collectors would deplete their rocks and minerals. This led to substantial amounts of material being removed and an increase in mining claims. By the 1960s, the government saw a need to regulate the collection of rocks and minerals on public lands.

Visitors to the Mojave Desert often ask where they can rockhound. Perhaps the best source of information is rock, gem, and mineral groups found in communities throughout southern California. Libraries, bookstores, and "gem and mineral shows" are also very good sources of published information. Although any hill, mountain, or wash can provide some wonderful rock and mineral discoveries,

the following listed areas are some of the well-known sites visited by rockhounds in which good samples can still be found.

Many rockhounding sites require hiking or driving to remote areas on sandy or rocky roads where there is a possibility of getting stuck. It is always a good idea to travel in a group and to bring plenty of drinking water with you when traveling in the desert. If you must travel alone, be sure to let someone know of your plans. Remember to stay on designated open roads. Cross country travel is illegal, as is driving in designated Wilderness Areas.

Rules and Regulations. Part 8365 of Title 43 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) provide for the collecting of "reasonable quantities" of rocks, minerals, semiprecious gemstones, and invertebrate and plant fossils of nonscientific importance, for personal use. With respect to rockhound material, the Field Office considers a "reasonable quantity" to be not more than can be carried in a daypack. Regulations do not allow collecting on "developed recreation sites and areas," or where otherwise prohibited or posted. Care should be exercised not to collect minerals on mining claims. Most claimants will allow rockhounding if the individual interested in rock collecting first asks permission. Remember, it is your responsibility to determine if an area is open to collection or if you are on private land.

Petrified Wood. The collection of petrified wood is governed by regulations found in Part 3622 of Title 43 CFR. Persons may collect petrified wood for noncommercial purposes without charge, from public lands. There is a limit of 25 pounds per person per day, plus one piece (to avoid breaking a large piece) to a maximum of 250 pounds per year.

Vertebrate Fossils. The collection of vertebrate fossils is illegal on public lands without a paleontological permit. Violators will be prosecuted under the "theft of government property" provision of 18 USC (United States Code), Section 641, and may face a minimum fine of \$1,000 and a year in jail, and up to \$10,000 and 10 years in jail. Permits to paleontologists are available from BLM State Offices.

Prehistoric Artifacts. Virtually all sources of colored silica (agate, chalcedony, jasper, obsidian, etc.) have been historically used by Native Americans in the building of weapons and other tools. The collection of any artifacts, including projectile points, ovate bifaces, cores, flakes, and all other material worked by prehistoric cultures and now found on public lands, is prohibited by the Antiquities Act of 1906, and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, without an archaeological permit; such permits may be obtained from BLM State Offices.

Rock for Decorative Purposes. With respect to the collecting of decorative veneer stone, the Barstow Field Office considers a "reasonable quantity" to be not more than can be carried in the trunk of a car.

Mining Claims. The requirements for location of mining claims on public lands for commercial mineral development is contained in various Federal Regulations. The information is also available in an easily readable publication entitled "Discovery, Location, Recordation, and Assessment Work for Mining Claims in California." This publication can be purchased at any BLM office. BLM field offices maintain a record of location for active and abandoned mining claims in the LR-2000 computer system.

Maps. Desert Access Guide Maps showing the distribution of public and private lands are available for sale at BLM offices. These maps can be purchased at any BLM office.

California Desert District Office, 22835 Calle San Juan de Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, CA 92553 (951) 697-5200

Barstow Field Office, 2601 Barstow Rd., Barstow, CA 92311 (760) 252-6000

Needles Field Office, 101 W. Spikes Rd., Needles, CA 92363 (760) 326-7000

Ridgecrest Field Office, 300 S. Richmond Rd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 (760) 384-5400

Palm Springs South Coast Field Office, 690 W. Garnet Ave., N. Palm Springs, CA 92258 (760) 251-4800

El Centro Field Office, 1661 South 4th, El Centro, CA 92243 (760) 337-4400

Additional Information If you would like additional reading material on rockhounding, please visit the **California Welcome Center,** Tanger Way, Barstow, CA 92311 (760) 253-4813.

Rockhounding Locations

1. **Opal Mountain Black Mountain** - 5 miles north of Fossil Bed Road via dirt road. Jasper, Nodules, Opal
2. **Mule Canyon** - 3 miles north of Yermo. Agate, Borax, Celestite, Jasper, Olivine, Petrified Wood, Satin Spar, Silver, Travertine, Olivine
3. **Alvord Mine** - 7 miles north of Manix via dirt road. Agate, Calcite, Chalcedony, Jasper, Pyrite
4. **Pisgah Crater** - 1 mile south of Interstate-40 off of Historic Route 66. Lava, Volcanic Bombs
5. **Cady Mountains** - 6 miles north of Pisgah via dirt road. Agate, Chalcedony, Geodes, Jasper
6. **Afton Canyon** - 1 miles southeast of Afton off ramp via dirt road. Agate, Calcite, Chalcedony, Jasper, Nodules
7. **Broadwell Dry Lake** - 6 miles north of Ludlow via Crucero Road; west to hilly area. Banded Agate, Moss Agate, Geodes, Jasper, Onyx
8. **Halloran Spring** - Turquoise Mountain North of Halloran Springs. Azurite, Turquoise

Reprinted from California-BLM Newsletter, From <http://www.blm.gov/ca/barstow/rock.html>

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I had never heard of Argentium™ until recently. Here's a good description of the pros and cons of it. The Editor

Dueling Opinions: Argentium™

Opinion 1 *By Carrell Chadwell Lloyd*

Argentium™ sterling silver is now available for purchase. This exciting new alloy has a number of advantages over standard sterling silver.

- It is tarnish resistant. According to a press release from the Silver Users Association, if standard sterling silver tarnishes in 2 weeks, then Argentium™ sterling silver will still be tarnish-free after 2 years. It requires only light dusting or occasional wiping with a soft cloth to keep its shine.
- It does not develop firescale. No more polishing and polishing to remove the pink!
- It can be made nearly twice as hard as standard sterling silver—even after soldering—by a simple heat treatment, even in a domestic oven at 450°F for 2 hours.
- It is more ductile than standard sterling silver, facilitating forming processes such as stamping.
- It is stronger and more dent-resistant.
- Unlike standard sterling silver, it can be used in products requiring spring properties.

Argentium™ sterling silver was invented at Middlesex University in Britain. Argentium Silver Co has partnered with Stern-Leach, a leading American silver manufacturer, to sell Argentium™. The Silver Users Association expects that Argentium™ will replace up to 50% of the total worldwide silver market share from traditional sterling silver as early as 2010.

There are several differences in working with Argentium™ as opposed to standard sterling silver, as described below.

Silversmithing Argentium™ melts at 60 F lower than standard sterling silver. When annealing, it should be noted that Argentium(TM) shows a paler colour when heated. If it looks light yellow or orange, it is too hot. To avoid overheating, annealing and soldering should be performed in a darkened area.

In soldering, lower-temperature solders are recommended—medium, easy and extra-easy. Standard soldering fluxes are used. Argentium™ should not be quenched immediately after heating for annealing or soldering. It retains heat longer than standard sterling silver. It is important to wait to quench until any visible red heat,

observed in a darkened room, has disappeared. If quenched too soon, it will be brittle.

Investment Casting The casting temperature range for Argentium™ is 1750-1800 F (955-980 C). Casting temperature cannot be judged by eye, since it displays a paler color when heated or molten.

Lower flask temperatures are recommended, a minimum of 85 F (30 C) below regular temperatures used for standard sterling silver.

A protective environment is recommended when melting Argentium™. If not available, flux can be used (preferably boric acid.) Any oxides should be skimmed off the surface before stirring.

Never mix Argentium™ with standard sterling silver. To avoid contamination from other alloys, separate crucibles should be used, and silicon carbide crucibles should not be employed. (Note: scrap does not need to be kept separate from standard sterling silver; it is .925 silver and may be combined with standard sterling silver for refining.)

For wet investment removal, flasks should cool for 20-25 minutes before quenching. Castings will have approximately the same hardness as standard sterling silver (70-HV). To increase hardness to approximately 95-HV, castings can be heated at 580 F (300 C) for 30-45 minutes and air cooled to room temperature.

For dry investment removal, flasks should cool to room temperature before removing castings from investment. Hardness will be approximately 100-HV.

To re-melt, use at least a 50% fresh/50% scrap mix. More fresh metal will improve quality. Be sure that used trees and buttons are free from investment powder residue.

Finishing Processes Separate polishing wheels should be used for Argentium™, to avoid contamination from other alloys.

To clean, it is important to use a neutral pH degreasing/cleaning solution, such as dish soap or Sunshine burnishing compound. Cleaned articles should be thoroughly rinsed with water and dried to avoid water spotting.

For tumble finishing, use rough cut with epoxy or plastic cones and triangles and steel shot mixture in a rotary tumbler. It is very important that shot and solution are clean. Treatment processes, such as coloring with liver of sulphur, will take longer than with standard sterling silver.

Cost Argentium™ sterling silver is 15%-18% more expensive than standard sterling silver. For example, in a price quote from Rio Grande on 1/12/06, a 6"x6" sheet of 24 gauge sterling costs \$50.70 for standard sterling, \$55.43 for Argentium(TM) sterling.

Silvermark A representative of Rio Grande states that the traditional "sterling" silvermark should not be used on products made of Argentium™, which is not actually sterling silver. He suggests that, because Argentium™ is guaranteed to be not less than 92.5% pure silver, fabricated articles can be stamped ".925" to indicate the standard of silver. However, as increasing use is made of Argentium™, products specifically stamped with the "as" mark will become more saleable than those marked "sterling" or ".925".

In order to utilize the "as" silvermark, a silvermark license must be purchased from the Argentium Silver Co Ltd. The application form can be downloaded from the website: www.argentiumsilver.com. The application cost is \$300; an annual fee for companies/ individuals with a turnover of less than 0.5 \$M (that's us!) is \$600, with discounted rates for 2 or 3 year licenses. This would seem to put it out of reach for most of us.

Sources Of Argentium™ Rio Grande (www.riogrande.com, 1-800-545-6566) is now selling Argentium™ in casting grain, sheet, wire (including bezel wire) and tube. Rio expects to have Argentium™ Silver solder available soon. G&S Metals (www.argentium-sterling-silver.com, 1-800-852-3860) sells casting grain, flat sheet, wire, tubing, and solders in Easy, Medium and Hard. It also sells Argentium™ findings, including beads, jumpings and earnuts.

Argentium™ is very new, and sounds promising. Further information and technical help can be obtained at: www.argentiuminfo@sternleach.com or from Rio. Reports of personal experiences with this alloy are welcome. If you try working with Argentium™, please send your comments to the Newsletter.

Opinion 2

By Sam Howeth

After gathering and reading articles, some of which had twenty-two sources listed in the bibliography, about Argentium™. The previous reviews concern themselves with differences and similarities between Argentium and traditional sterling silver. But this new material is just that, and as such has different properties and different problems associated with it, as does standard or traditional sterling silver. And by the way, all the articles refer to the sterling we have worked with as the "standard" or "traditional" sterling. "Sterling" has meant 92.5% of fine silver with 7.5% of copper. The word silver is not normally used with items stamped "sterling" since 92.5% fine silver is understood when the word "sterling" is used, and with that same understanding the remaining 7.5% was copper. This new alloy meets the requirements of 92.5% fine silver and can claim the title of sterling but the balance is not 7.5% copper. Therein is a possible problem to all silversmiths.

The following has been proposed. Items made of the new alloy are to be marked ".925" indicating the percentage of silver but not sterling. It is suggested that "AS" be added to indicate the new alloy. It is hoped items so marked will be more saleable than items showing the traditional marks. But to use the Argentium brand "AS" mark, a silvermark license must be applied for (\$300) and then an annual fee (\$600) if you gross less than a half million in sales per year. Herein lies the problem, very, very few silversmiths are going to fork over \$900 for a license to mark the new alloy so they:

- 1) do not use the metal,
- 2) use it and mark it without getting licensing permission, or ™
- 3) my greatest fear, use it and not mark it as Argentium.

Those of us in the trade will not know for sure what we are working with in a repair scenario. This can cause a big problem considering the difference in the melting temperature.

Until the inventors or the purveyors of the new alloy come up with a simple drop of fluid that will indicate the presence of their alloy, it is suggested you exercise extra caution when repairing metals of questionable parentage.

A new diamond simulant came on the market that when tested registered to be a real diamond. The trade refused to sell them until the maker came up with a tester for the new stone... and they did.

Déjà vu?

From *The Hounds Tail*, 2006-04, Arlington Gem & Mineral Club

Editor – These articles neglect to mention what the main difference between Sterling Silver and Argentium™ is. It is the use of the metal germanium instead of copper. Germanium is the ingredient that makes it tarnish resistant and firescale free.

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Safety Article: Be Safe–Be Well

By Don Monroe, AFMS Safety Chair

Jewelry making can be a most enjoyable hobby, but there are certain hazards which must be avoided, and can be, by following a few simple rules.

1. Don't polish a wire or chain on a rotary tool without nailing the wire or chain to a board. This might wrap around the arbor and pull your hand with it.
2. Don't set fire to your clothing with the torch. Fuzzy sweaters are dangerous.
3. Don't drop the torch or fail to turn it off. An explosion might follow.
4. Don't pour water into acid when making pickle; pour acid into water.
5. Don't turn over the pickle pot or the boil pot. Keep handles to the rear.

6. Don't put a large piece of very hot metal in pickle. It might splash.
7. Don't pick up the charcoal block or hot metal until you know it's cool.
8. Don't hold a piece being drilled with your hand; the drill might slip or break or the piece might spin when the drill breaks through. Use pliers.
9. Don't put your fingers inside any item being polished, for example, a belt buckle, ring bracelet, etc. Hold the work being polished between finger-tips and thumb.
10. Don't wear rubber gloves or fingerstalls when polishing. These might wrap around the arbor.
11. Don't work without some protection for the eyes such as plastic goggles or a magnifying eye piece, particularly when using a rotating wire brush.
12. Don't let your tie or hair get caught by the rotating arbor. This could be fatal.
13. Don't get into contact with electricity or belts. Don't work on a wet or damp floor.
14. Don't fail to report any apparent hazard immediately.
15. We repeat: "Work safely. You can't get by on luck." Just fail to observe these rules, and you will find your situation comparable to that of the fellow whose wife had the stone-cutter carve on his tombstone, "I told you to go to the doctor."

Via CFMS Newsletter, August, 2006; via the Breccia, 2006-09

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A Guide to Buying Opals Online

By [Gary Hocking](#)

Buying opals loose in a shop is difficult enough if you don't understand them but to buy them online is a daunting task. You are at the mercy of the salesperson and that is not always in your best interest. But I can help with some advice which will smooth the way.

Natural or Synthetic?

Synthetic opals are man made in a laboratory and will be called "created opals" by most websites. They can make stunning jewelry too. They may also be called "imitation opals."

Solid, Doublet or Triplet?

Let's say after deciding that we want real or natural opals rather than man made opals we now need to decide whether we want a solid opal, a doublet or a triplet.

You may be aware that a solid opal is one piece and is the best and most expensive. A solid opal which is very thin, too thin to make into a piece of jewelry, will have another piece of black colored opal glue to the back of it to give it strength and to bounce the stone's bright colors. These are doublets and are cheaper than solids and can often look even nicer. We just have to be aware that they are not solid opals.

A triplet is basically a doublet with a dome of clear material such as quartz or glass on the top of it. These are the cheapest of all but often look fantastic. Again we just need to have an understanding of what we are buying.

Doublets and triplets may not be just thin or poor quality opal products which cannot be sold. Sometimes good opal is deliberately cut up into tiny flat pieces and made into doublets and triplets. It is anathema to a real opal lover like me. I have seen these wafer thin pieces cut so thin that when you place them in the palm of your hand they sink into the hollow of your hand. They are then made into lots and lots of triplets from the one original solid opal.

Which is the best Color? Let us assume that we want a natural, solid opal. The next thing is to think of color. Anything with red in it is going to be the most expensive. Then green is the next expensive and then blue. But, having said that, I have seen plenty of bright blue solid opals which are far nicer and much more expensive than dull pieces of red. So it is a matter of how bright and fiery the actual stone is rather than whether it is red, blue, green or any other color.

What Shapes Should I Look For? As most good opals come from Australia you are going to see their measurements in millimeters

rather than inches or parts of inches. Most opals will be an oval shape. The market over many years has dictated that oval shapes are the most popular. If it is not an oval shape then it will be called a "free form." That means that it is an irregular shape. Some opals will be round but this is not popular and is the most difficult shape to cut.

This is an important distinction since ovals are more likely to go into a setting that your jeweler already has rather than having to make a setting specially for that free form stone which is going to cost you a good deal more. Possibly twice as much or more as a mounting which has been mass produced and is freely available to your jeweler.

Is size important? Read the description of the opal or opal jewelry very carefully. What you want to know is the size firstly. If it is for a ring then you'll be looking for an oval 7 x 5 mm, or 8 x 6 mm, or 10 x 8 mm, or even 9 x 7 mm. These are the sizes that your jeweler might have a ring mounting ready made to suit your stone. Otherwise he will have to custom make one.

A pendant size can be anything from 8 x 6 mm and bigger. I think that any smaller than this is getting a touch too small for a pendant.

The next thing you want to know is the thickness of the stone. Generally, any opal less than 1.5 mm thick is going to be too thin. An opal thicker than 4 mm may be difficult to set in a ring.

Of course, I am generalizing here. I have set solid opals measuring 18 x 13 x 6 mm in rings but they were large.

What about Inclusions? Next you want to be aware if there are any inclusions or faults in the top surface of the stone. Stones such as emeralds, sapphires and diamonds have what we call inclusions. If you look closely at the stone you will see some cracks, tiny holes discolorations and other things. These devalue the stone but most times do not make it unworthy of sale.

Opals are different. We don't want any cracks or holes in our opals. It is okay to have a pitted surface on the bottom of the opal or a bit of what we call sand. This is sometimes mixed in with the opal structure and the cutter will make sure that is the bottom or underneath of the opal.

Can an opal be Poorly Cut? Most opals are cut by miners or their wives. There are very few professional opal cutters. They usually have no formal training in a college or school of some sort. Consequently the cutting is poor.

The problems here are that the stones will not be a perfect shape and might need cutting again to allow them to be made into a lovely piece of jewelry. People who can cut opals well are hard to find in Australia so in another country they are going to be even rarer. Your jeweler will almost certainly not know how to or want to cut opals. So, you should look at the shape of the opal carefully and ask the seller if this will be ready to set into a ring without needing any further cutting.

Does it matter what it weighs? The weight of the opal is also important. We in the Lightning Ridge area of opal mining in the state of NSW in Australia weigh our opals in carats. A good sized opal for a ring will be between one and three carats. Naturally, there are tiny sized stones which are lovely. I have set 0.3 of a carat many times but if you are unfamiliar with buying opals you will be disappointed with your purchase which will always look big on a website if you have bought a 5 x3 mm stone weighing 0.2 carats.

In summary, look for a decent thickness greater than 1.5 mm, a size of 5 mm or bigger, an oval shape for a ready made mount, a stone with no visible blemishes and one carat or bigger. You can go outside of these parameters but ask the seller some questions. Remember that opals are very difficult to photograph and it is a good idea to ask the seller if when you turn this stone around will it still have that fiery color?

Author: Gary Hocking is an Australian Jeweler who has his own website <http://www.opaljewelryexpress.com>
From http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Gary_Hocking

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Montana Agate - An American Gemstone Treasure

By [Lynn Baldwin](#)

Since the time Man descended from the trees, personal adornment in the form of jewelry has been part of every culture. Each person wishes to express herself or himself in an individual manner, and jewelry allows us one means to accomplish that goal.

Usually, when someone thinks about gemstones, the big four come to mind. These are diamond, emerald, ruby and sapphire. One might also consider opal, garnet, and a few others, but typically it would end there. Of the gemstones just mentioned, all but the opal would be cut as faceted stones, and allow little in the way of individuality. The opal would be the only gemstone in the list to be cut cabochon. As defined by the American Heritage Dictionary, this means a highly polished, domed, unfaceted gem.

The opal is the only stone of the previously mentioned gemstones to offer much in the way of exclusivity, as no two opals are ever the same. This property alone allows an opal to be chosen to reflect its owner,



Montana Agates

and to assure a one of a kind piece of jewelry. Unfortunately opal has a big drawback. It is a fairly soft and brittle gemstone, and must be worn carefully or you risk breaking it.

So far, virtually everyone is aware of the previously mentioned gemstones.

Something to consider though is

that this barely scratches the surface of the potential gemstones available to be used in various ways as personal adornment.

For instance, there are a great number of agates and jaspers (topics for another day) that are cut for use in jewelry about which almost no one knows. One of these that I would like to discuss is Montana agate.

Found only in America along the Yellowstone River and its tributaries in Montana and Wyoming, Montana agate is truly an American treasure. It was formed millions of years ago in holes left in lava flows. The lava has since weathered away and the agates are found in the gravel beds along the river.

With more variety in its colors, types, and figures than agate from any other known deposit in the world, Montana agate is especially wonderful for jewelry use. Historically it has typically been cut in standard sizes and shapes as cabochons and set as pendants, pins, rings, or bracelets.

There are however many modern lapidaries (a person who cuts, polishes, or engraves gems) who choose to cut these gemstones as free forms, as carvings, or even to facet them, which maximizes the potential and beauty of each stone. Just as in the opal, no two pieces of Montana agate are alike and this guarantees a totally exclusive and



Montana Agates

personal piece of jewelry from each one.

Long a favorite of hobbyist and professional cutters alike because of the beautiful and highly variable patterns and durability, Montana agate is a very hard and tough stone that wears well in jewelry. A classic scenic agate, it produces luminous and lustrous gemstones with evocative scenes of lakeshores or mountains as well as figural gems. With many of these agates, in order to appreciate their subtlety, you will have to view them against the light. No two are ever exactly alike, not even matched pairs.

Agate, the Mystical birthstone for the month of September and the birthstone for the Zodiac sign of Gemini, is believed by many to possess unique properties that protect its wearer from dangers and promotes strength and healing.

Lynn Baldwin is the owner of <http://www.fine-find.com> and has been involved in collecting, cutting and carving fine gemstones, including Montana agate, for more than 30 years. Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Lynn_Baldwin, http://www.cabbers.com/cabs/agates/montana_agate2.shtml

The Trona Pinnacles

AREA DESCRIPTION: However it may appear to you, a visit to



Trona Pinnacle

the Trona Pinnacles will be a journey into one of the most unusual geologic wonders in the California Desert. This unique landscape consists of more than 500 tufa (calcium carbonate) pinnacles rising from the bed of the Searles Dry Lake basin. These tufa spires, some as high as 140 feet, were formed underwater 10,000 to 100,000 years ago when Searles Lake formed a link in an interconnected chain of Pleistocene lakes stretching from Mono Lake to Death Valley.

The Trona Pinnacles were designated by the Department of the Interior as a National Natural Landmark in 1968 to protect one of the nation's best examples of tufa formation. The area is managed by the Bureau of Land Management to protect its scenic values and has become a popular filming location for movies and

commercials.

GETTING THERE: The Trona Pinnacles are located approximately 20 miles east of Ridgecrest. Access to the site is from a BLM dirt road (RM143) that leaves SR 178, about 7.7 miles east of

the intersection of SR 178 and the Trona-Red Mountain Road. The 5-mile long dirt road from SR 178 to the Pinnacles is usually accessible to 2-wheel



Trona Pinnacles

drive vehicles, however, the road may be closed during the winter months after a heavy rain.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT: The Trona Pinnacles are located at around 2,000 feet above sea level in the Western Mojave Desert making it an ideal place to explore in the fall, winter, and spring months. Visiting the site in the early morning and evening is especially dramatic as are nights with a full moon.

Summer temperatures often exceed 115°F at the Trona Pinnacles, so if you plan on visiting in the summer try the early morning or evening hours. Bring plenty of water (at least 2 gallons of water/person), and if you do not have 4-wheel drive, stay out of the sand washes. Quite a few cars have been stranded in the wide sand wash that divides the main Pinnacles group.

A network of dirt roads wind throughout the site and provide numerous vantage points from which to view and photograph the Pinnacles. A .50-mile hiking trail leads into the heart of the Pinnacles for a close-up view of these spires and the surrounding desert environment. The hike is not difficult, but you should wear sturdy shoes.

Primitive camping is permitted at Trona Pinnacles and campers are encouraged to use existing campsites and fire rings and to pack out all trash. If you plan on having a campfire, bring your own firewood. Camping is limited to 14 days.

The only development of any facilities is a vault type toilet. There are no other services at the Pinnacles. Operate your motor vehicle and mountain bike on existing routes to protect this fragile place. Cross country travel will destroy vegetation and create scars on the landscape that may take years to heal. Shooting is prohibited at the Trona Pinnacles to ensure the safety of other visitors. From <http://www.blm.gov/ca/ridgecrest/trona.html>, via CFMS Newsletter 10/06

The Case of The Stolen Moon Rocks:

Last of 3 NASA interns sentenced for grievous theft. 11/18/03



Back in 1969 and the early 1970s, the world watched with wonder as Apollo astronauts collected rock samples from the lunar surface. These precious items, along with a piece of meteorite that could hold signs of life on Mars, were sealed to prevent contamination with the earth's atmosphere and were ultimately stored in a safe at a Johnson Space Center lab in Houston.

That's precisely where three NASA interns found them in the spring of 2002. And took them. And eventually put them up for sale on the web site of the Mineralogy Club of Antwerp, Belgium. Genuine moon rocks – going for anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000 a gram!

But a Belgian rock collector who got wind of the sale was suspicious, and he decided to contact the FBI. With the collector's help, Special Agents in Tampa set up a ruse to catch the thieves.

Here's how it worked: FBI Agents had the collector e-mail "Orb Robinson" (one of the interns who was offering the rocks for sale) and say he was interested in buying the lunar treasures. The collector said: "Contact my brother and sister-in-law in Pennsylvania to set up a meeting." The Belgian collector's American relatives were really undercover FBI Agents. "Orb" and the rock collector's "relatives" agreed to meet at an Italian restaurant in Orlando,

Florida, on July 20, 2002 – ironically, on the 33rd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. There, "Orb" and two partners were arrested and the moon rocks successfully recovered in their nearby hotel room.

So who were these brazen young criminals? "Orb Robinson" was really Thad Roberts, former NASA college intern and ringleader of the plan. His partners in crime were former interns Tiffany Fowler and Shae Saur. A fourth associate from Utah who had set up the web site and sent e-mails was also arrested and charged in the conspiracy.

How did they pull off the heist? Using their NASA IDs, they slipped into the Johnson Space Center at night and made off with a 600-pound safe containing moon rocks from every Apollo mission.

What damage did they do? The young thieves did more than just try to sell off a collection of lunar samples worth as much as \$21 million. In the process, they also contaminated them – making them virtually useless to the scientific community. They also destroyed three decades worth of handwritten research notes by a NASA scientist that had been locked in the safe.

What happened to them? All three interns pled guilty. On October 29, Roberts was sentenced to more than eight years in prison for his role in the moon rock caper, as well as for stealing dinosaur bones from a Utah museum (the fossils turned up during a search of Roberts' house). The fourth accomplice was convicted at trial. From <http://www.fbi.gov/page2/nov03/apollo111803.htm>

October 2006 Gem & Mineral Shows

7-8--LAKESIDE, CA: 32nd annual show, "Gem & Mineral Roundup"; El Cajon Valley Gem & Mineral Society; Lakeside Rodeo Grounds, 12584 Mapleview; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; exhibits, demonstrations, vendors, minerals, gems, jewelry, handcrafted items, contact Patrick Smock, 10583 Oak Creek Dr., Lakeside, CA 92040, (619) 443-8327; e-mail: cprpsm@yahoo.com.

13-15--SANTA ROSA, CA: Show; Gem Faire; Sonoma County Fairgrounds, Grace Pavilion, 1350 Bennett Valley Rd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

14--WEST HILLS, CA: 8th annual show; Woodland Hills Rock Chippers; First United Methodist Church, 22700 Sherman Way; Sat. 10-5; free admission; gems, minerals, rocks, fossils, jewelry, 17 dealers, kids' games, silent auction, raffle and door prizes; contact David Dills, P.O. Box 205, Woodland Hills, CA 91365, (818) 774-0900; e-mail: DDDDCW@aol.com; website: Web site: www.RockChippers.org.

14-15--CAYUCOS, CA: 4th annual fall show; San Luis Obispo Gem & Mineral Society; Cayucos Vets Hall, Pier #1; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; free admission; dealers, minerals, fossils, gemstones, jewelry, carvings, cabs, slabs, tools, findings, supplies, door prizes; contact Bob Hurlless, (805) 772-7160, or Richard Sittinger, 1770 Orville Ave., Cambria, CA 93428, (805) 927-2223; e-mail: Richard@Mineralofthemonthclub.org; Web site: www.mineralofthemonthclub.org.

14-15--TRONA, CA: 65th annual show, "Gem-O-Rama 2006"; Searles Lake Gem & Mineral Society; Trona Lapidary and Show Bldg.; Sat. 7:30-5, Sun. 7:30-4; mineral collecting, displays, dealers, demonstrations, tours, geode cutting and sales, shows, movies, prizes; contact Bonnie Fairchild, 84830 12th St., Trona, CA 93562, (760) 372-5356; Web site: www.1iwvisp.com/tronagemclub/.

20-22--DEL MAR, CA: Show; Gem Faire; Del Mar Fairgrounds, Exhibit Hall, 2260 Jimmy Durante Blvd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

21-22--WHITTIER, CA: Show, "Treasures of Rock Hounding"; Whittier Gem & Mineral Society; Whittier Community Center, 7630 WA Ave.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; dealers, demonstrations, displays, hourly drawings; contact Jay Valle, 1421 Latchford Ave., Hacienda Heights, CA

28-29--STOCKTON, CA: Show, "Earth Treasurers"; Stockton Lapidary & Mineral Club; San Joaquin County Fairgrounds, Bldg. 2, 1658 Airport Way; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$4, contact Wayne or Nettie Meissner, (209) 858-2263, or Anna Christiansen, (209) 847-1173.

28-29--VISTA, CA: Show; Brengle Terrace Recreation Park, 1200 Vale Terr.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; free admission; 13 dealers, rocks, slabs, opal, gems, jewelry, lapidary equipment, faceting material, 40 exhibits, 10 demonstrators, free gem identification, wheel of fortune, country store, raffle; contact Mary Anne Mital, (760) 758-4599.

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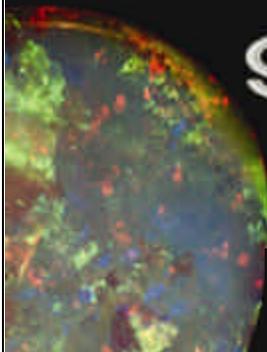
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Are Your Dues Due Now?
PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.
A Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. If your dues are due now you 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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**Volume #39 Issue #10
October 2006**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Gems and Animal Design
- Famous Opals: The Andamooka Opal
- Opal Canyon Trip Planned for Nov.
- Rockhounding in California
- Dueling Opinions: Argentium™
- The Case of the Stolen Moon Rocks
- Safety Article: Be Safe—Be Well
- A Guide to Buying Opals Online
- Montana Agate
- The Trona Pinnacles

Important Info:

**Board Meeting
October 3rd**

**General Meeting
October 12th**

- Lecture: David Kramer on Cutting Opal
- Bring Show Raffle Donations to October Meeting!
— GENERAL MEETINGS —

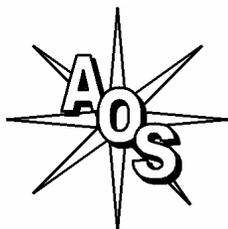
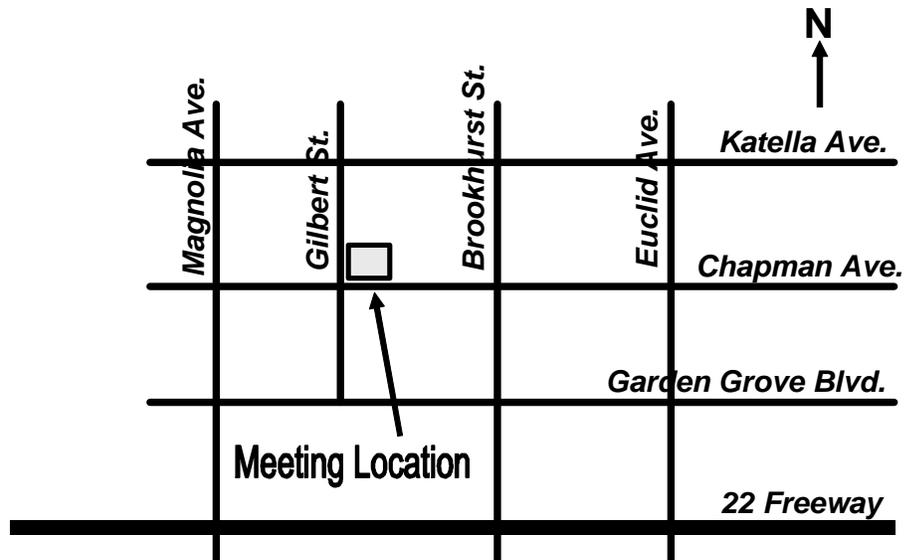
2nd Thursday of the Month
7:00 pm - 9:00 PM

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

October 12th: David Kramer on Cutting Opal



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