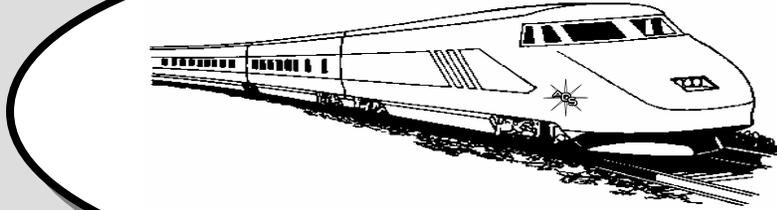


The Opal Express

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President's Message

By Gene LeVan

Wow!!! February was a big month for AOS, first a great regular Thursday meeting with Clair Gagnon showing the members about stone identification on his computer, he also spoke about opal cutting and faceting. Clare used a program called "Gemology Tools Professional". The program can be found at web at <http://www.gemologytools.com/>. There is a cost for this program (\$69.95) but for a serious ock person it will be worth it. The

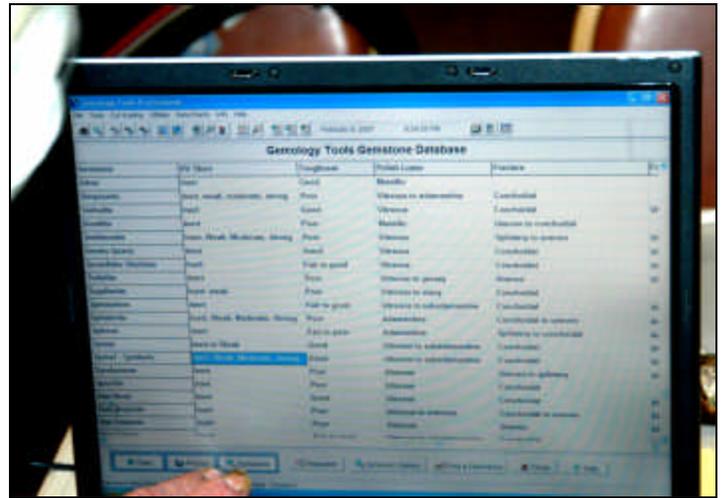


Clare Gagnon, speaker on Gem Identification

company makes a less expensive tool for students and hobbyists called GT Gemstones that is only #30.

The second event was the great dinner meeting with Len Cram at Carrows Restaurant on Friday. His presentation about opals was outstanding, plus each member was given a signed colored booklet

about Lighting Ridge showing opal stones and history of the area. See you at the March Thursday meeting.



Gemology Tools Professional Program

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: "knobby".

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. This is between Euclid Ave. and Harbor Blvd. If you are traveling east on Ball Rd. the parking lot entrance you need to use is just before the railroad tracks. If you are traveling west, the lot is just after the railroad tracks. Room 37 is in the center of the campus.

Instruction will be given in cutting opal, wax models, lost-wax casting, fabrication, and setting stones. The workshop will furnish machines to cut and polish stones as well as a centrifuge for casting and a kiln for burnout. You will need to furnish other equipment you wish to use. Please bring a roll of PAPER TOWELS with you for clean-up as the room is a science lab and needs to be kept spotless.

To attend, membership in the American Opal Society is a must due to insurance. A nightly fee of \$2 is asked to help keep the equipment in good running condition. Our thanks to Pete Goetz and the Anaheim Union High School District for the use of this classroom for our workshop.



Len Cram with AOS President Gene LeVan, wearing gift from the AOS

Len Cram Visit

The American Opal Society was honored by a visit by one of the great people in opal – Dr. Len Cram - on Feb. 16th. We had a great turnout from the Society at the Carrows restaurant in Huntington Beach. Len was very gracious to everyone that came, stopping by each table and talking personally to each member.



Photo Op with Jim Pisani, Laverne Christenson, Len Cram, Mike Kowalsky

Len thanked the Society for making him a lifetime member. Len stated that he valued this greatly. Mike Kowalsky presented the lifetime membership to Len last year on his visit to Lightning Ridge, NSW, Australia.

Len was returning from Tucson after making a number of appearances there.

The AOS presented Len with a western cowboy hat as a memento of his trip to the Southwest United States. The AOS would



Dr. Carey, Dr. Cram, and Dr. Johnson

like to thank Len Cram again for his great contributions to the world of opal.

We should all thank Mike Kowalsky for contacting Len and arranging his visit with us. Also, let's give a big thanks to Will Shaw for purchasing the hat.

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Mr. Len Cram was the guest lecturer at the Tucson Gem & Mineral Society in Tucson, Arizona, on February 7, 2007, immediately prior to visiting the AOS in Southern California. I found this great write-up of that visit in their February 2007 Newsletter, the "Rock Talk". The article gives some great details of Len's great experiences that gives us better insight of the man's accomplishments. – The Editor

Mr. Len Cram

By Susanne Tester

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you a most remarkable man, author, photographer, former pilot, scientist, and Australia's expert on Australian opal, Mr. Len Cram.

Here is a very brief outline of Len Cram's participation in the opal industry here in Australia.

Len grew up by beautiful Lake Macquarie and he was 16 years old when World War II ended. Three years later, following the death of his father, Len left home to seek work in the Australian bush. He had no idea what fate had in store for him.

Due to an accident on a lonely central Queensland road early in 1952, whilst heading for the Northern Territory Goldfields, Len and his young companion Lost their vehicle and were befriended by an older person who just happened to be going opal mining.

On the 17th April that same year they stopped at Longreach where Len purchased his first Miner's Right. He was told it was the first one taken out since 1910, which gave some idea of just how flat the industry was in Queensland at that time. A few days later Len found his very first opal. He picked up a lovely piece of matrix off an old mine on Fermoy Station just east of Opalton. Len described it as "Love at first sight! A love that has never waned and grown deeper with years of experience."

The three men knew absolutely nothing about opal and unfortunately there wasn't a living soul to be seen on any of the fields that could assist them. They sank a 33 ft shaft in an area that proved to be a 'duffer' so they continued their travels around the old deserted opal fields of Queensland for almost 10 weeks.

During that time they traveled over 300 miles and visited the spectacular Hayricks, north of Quilpie, the only working mine in Queensland. Joe Knehr, who originally found the mine in 1929, was the only man working. He was a member of a small syndicate and the only fulltime opal miner in the whole of Queensland.

Following their weeks of wanderings, Len's two companions returned to their respective homes, but Len's love for the opal and the country that carried it would not let him leave. Len settled in a little town called Adavale, 60 miles from the Hayricks and his now close friend Joe Knehr.

Over the next couple of years and ever searching for knowledge and between numerous prospecting trips into the hills, Len often visited the Hayricks. He was always inquiring for work at the mine and almost driving Joe crazy with questions relating to opal and its formation. Finally Len was offered a job, and he with Joe, became the only fulltime opal miners in Queensland.

At the time Len was unaware that fate had already set a course for his life that would eventually lead him to become one of the foremost experts on the subject of Australian opal. He was about to see and play a part in lifting the opal industry from the ashes of the Great Depression and war years that followed. It was at the Hayricks that Len began his research into opal and where he bought his first microscope to carry out his first experiments.

Except for about three years, Len has been associated with opal in one form or another since 1952 when he obtained his first Miner's Right at Longreach in Queensland. During that long period, except for retail, his wealth of knowledge has expanded to cover

every aspect of the industry from prospecting, mining above and below ground, professional cutting, buying and exporting, to at one stage being the largest exporter of black opal in Australia.

For many years Len has quietly carried out his own opal experiments, and finally to his satisfaction he has solved many of those unanswered and complex questions on the genesis of opal. Although his research has never been published, the only exception being an article he wrote for the German Extra Lapis Magazine, he occasionally allows interviews for books and magazines. He said "This way I don't have to disclose more than is necessary for an interesting story."

Len has been made honorary members of many Opal associations. One surprise came in July 2005, when the American Opal Society presented him with a beautifully polished plaque for Life Membership, which reads "A life membership for recognition as the world's foremost expert in Australian opal. he has captured and brought to the world the history of opal discovery and Mining in Australia with his outstanding books and photographs. We honor these accomplishments and thank him for his generous contributions to the American Opal Society."

With total agreement to the above inscription I am proud to have been asked to give you a small glimpse into the life of Len Cram and his beloved opal.

Bibliography: Personal conversations over many years with Len Cram. His publication: "A Journey with Colour, A History of Queensland Opal" 1869-1979.

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AOS Live Auction for March 8th

"O-Bay," the first AOS live auction, will premiere Thursday, March 8 to start our general meeting, with preview beginning at 7:00! O-Bay will be fun, and "fund-raising," so come and snag a bargain while supporting your club!!

Don't miss a chance to buy or sell opal rough, cabs, books, tools, display cases, and other neat gem stuff when Will Shaw, our volunteer auctioneer, takes up the gavel Thursday night! Members may bring up to 5 items each for sale, as long as they are gem-related, and are approved by the AOS Board of Directors. You must be an AOS member to sell at the auction, and you must sign a vendor agreement, printed here for preview. Vendors must donate 10 percent of the final price to the AOS, and will be paid after the refreshment break prior to close of meeting. Will will arrive at 6:30 to help vendors prepare their items. If you have items for sale, please come early, and allow us to assign a Lot Number, any minimum "Reserve" price you may request, and log your items into our computer for easy checkout later!



First Auction Item: Raytech Blazer Diamond Saw Blade for auction Donated by Will Shaw

Bidders may be members, or visitors, provided they have a photo ID like a drivers license, and are willing to abide by Bidder rules. You must have an official bid paddle to bid, so sign up early when you first get to the mtg. Copies of the Vendor Rules and Bidder Rules will be made available at the signup table when you arrive.

If you want to bid, you must sign in to get a paddle, and agree to the Bidder rules, which state that

all items must be paid for prior to close of meeting, the highest bid wins, all sales are final, no returns or refunds. The AOS auctioneer has final authority to determine the high bid, and can accept or reject any bid at AOS discretion. Bidders cannot bid for another person, and must pay for and remove their auction items prior to the end of the meeting. Bidders are not permitted to loan their paddles to others.

Proceeds from the O-Bay auction will go toward AOS activities like our workshop, and our annual show preparation and advertising. Please be generous with your bids, and get a bargain at the same time! Ladies and gentlemen, start your bidding!!! I have \$15 dollars, do I hear \$20??? \$15 dollars going once...going twice....SOLD!!!

Bidder Agreement TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By signing Bidder Agreement Sign-Up form, and accepting bid paddle, bidder agrees to the terms and conditions of the American Opal Society's auction rules and regulations, as described herein, and any laws of the State of California that may pertain. Bidder agrees that auction bid constitutes a legally binding contract and that s/he is obligated legally to pay the total amount of his bid(s) in full to the American Opal Society, henceforth to be known as the AOS, at auction close, in cash or check (with photo ID), prior to taking possession of any auction item(s). Bidder agrees NOT to bid on his own items, nor act in the capacity of a shill or confederate with regard to any other auction vendor, bidder, or item presented. Bidder agrees that s/he is at least 18 years of age, and enters into this agreement willingly, and has read this agreement in full, that he has carefully examined all auction items, and that all items are sold "AS IS, WHERE IS," with no warranty implied or expressed, CAVEAT EMPTOR. Bidder further agrees that by his signature, s/he agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the AOS from any claim resulting from auction or auction item(s). S/he also agrees that any claim at all shall be arbitrated by an ombudsman mutually agreeable to both parties, and who conducts business in the County of Orange, California.

AOS Live Auction Rules

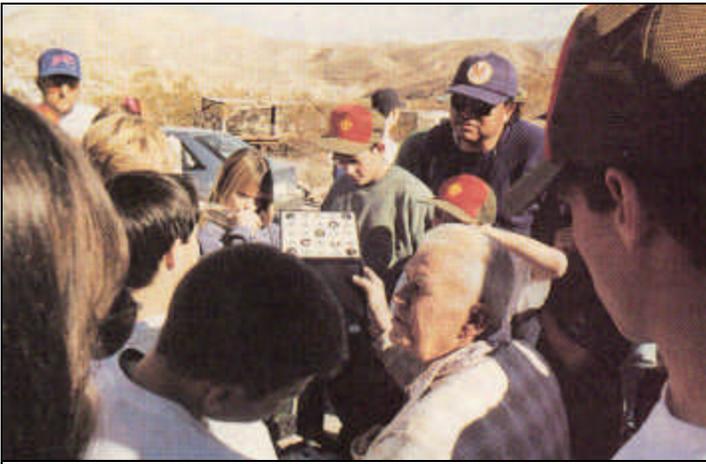
1. Winning bid is final, and all sales are final, no returns or refunds.
2. High bidder awarded possession of auction item(s) at the sole discretion of the AOS designated auctioneer and the AOS Board of Directors.
3. Winning bidder to take possession of any and all items s/he wins immediately after payment in full, and prior to auction close, at his expense, and remove said items from the auction area and the building prior to the end of the scheduled meeting.
4. The AOS reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids made.
5. Bidder will not transfer or loan or assign his bid paddle and rights to any other party.
6. Auctioneer may, at the discretion of the AOS Board of Directors, bid as any bidder would, and agrees to abide by same terms, conditions, and rules stipulated herein.

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It's been around 10 years since the following article has been written. Since then, Richard Barnett has passed away and the mine is no longer active and has been annexed by the Red Rock Canyon State Park. Collectors are still allowed to dig and signs still mark the way. The Editor

Mojave Opal Hunting

By Max Gilbertson

My first visit to the Barnett's Opal Mine was in the fall of '95. Dick & Shirley Barnett's claim is at the end of a typical desert road about 6 miles off the highway. I plugged along in my camper down the winding dirt road until I came across a group of trailers and pulled up in front of the Barnett's. I was met with a warm greeting



Opal mine owner Dick Barnett showing his opal collection to a scout group.

from Dick, "Howdy, come on up." This was the start of my opal hunting career.

Dick and I had many discussions about the Mojave opal and the best techniques for finding the beautiful stones. He showed me his collection of opals which includes "The Mojave Flame", truly a magnificent specimen.

Mojave opal is made up of the mineral silicon. It's found in basalt or loose dirt, usually disguised in the form of peanuts with a green covering. Other times, you'll find the opal in vugs or just encased in basalt. The majority of opal is of the common variety, but occasionally precious opal is found. The difference between common and precious is that the precious opal will have at least one

color of the rainbow flashing within its body (fire), whereas common opal has no internal flashes of color. Fire, as it is referred to by the opal community, results from the alignment of thousands upon thousands of small spheres within the opal (just think of

baseballs, rolls of them, stacked up), which act like a prism in dispersing light into its component parts. Since white light is primarily constructed of red, blue, and green, with secondary components of magenta, cyan, and yellow, all these components can be visible. Usually the fire in opals is a combination of some of these colors.

The most difficult part of digging for opal, or any gemstone for that matter, is deciding where to start. I talked with John, a caretaker on the Barnett's claim, and then walked around a bit looking for a likely location to dig. I ended up settling on a spot near my camper. So much for the scientific method.

What I did learn was to look for seams of silicon dioxide deposits within or near the basalt. The deposits are light to dark green; the darker, the better. It's often found between the hardest



Clear opal found at Barnett Claim. Approximately 1/2 inch in size.

rocks or in the layering under a few feet of dirt. You can either bust open the hard rock or shovel off soil, take your choice. The faint of heart can just search for opal in the loose dirt or screen the dirt. I choose to dig in the 'stratas', the layer of basalt a few feet under the top soil.

I chose a spot about 20' down from the crest, on a slope of about 30 degrees. After digging down a few feet, I hit the basalt layer. Its color ranged from light green on top to a darker hue on the bottom and was about 10" thick. This layer broke open easily but the layer beneath, composed of a brown, compact basalt was much more difficult to dig through. At this point I decided to work the green layering instead of digging further into the layers beneath.

I spent the next four or five weekends digging and found a fair amount of opal; usually consisting of blues'. A blue opal has fire inside and although they were the 'norm', a white opal with fire was occasionally found. I was told that another type, referred to as the 'honeys', are found in the light brown strata beneath the green deposits. I haven't ventured into the lower layer myself; not yet

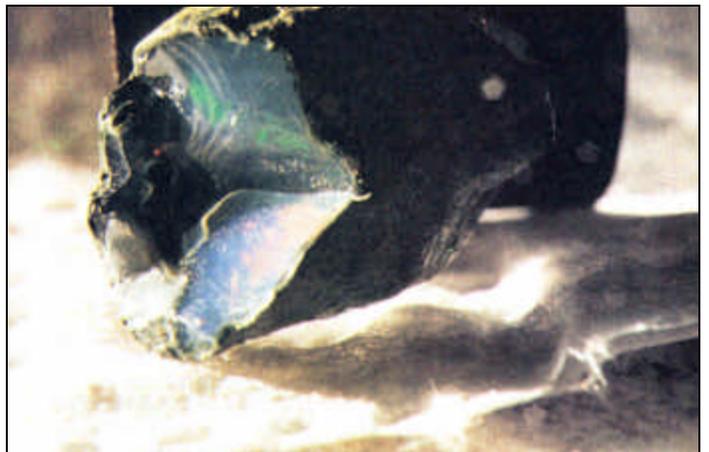


Author using gem separator to sift for opals.

anyway.

I used the following equipment: A shovel, a 6 lb sledge, chisels, a tie rod splitter, knee pads, a pillow (for between the legs), a small whisk broom, a 7 power magnifying glass, a bucket, a pair of wire cutters, both small and medium size picks, a pair of goggles, and a pair of gloves. Occasionally, I'd screen the gravel with my newly built gem separator. The tie rod splitter was very effective, when used with the 6 lb sledge, in penetrating the green layering and prying the basalt loose. A small pick was then used to further break up the gangue. When opal was found, I'd snip the end with the wire cutters and check for 'fire' using the magnifying glass.

To summarize my method of operation; dig the dirt off, remove the layering, break up the rock and then check for opal.



A "Blue Fire Opal" found at the Barnett claim. Approximately 5/8 inch in size.

I found blue, white, and a number of clear opals, all with beautiful fire. Unfortunately, some cracked and, while I'm not positive, I have a pretty good idea of why.

Since opal has a water content, usually between 5 and 20%, cracking can occur when it starts to dry out. After a bit of researching, I learned that opal miners in Virgin Valley, Nevada would often pack their opals in mud. They would "cure" their goodies; simply slow dry the opal, therefore greatly reducing the chance of cracking. Keeping this concept in mind, I devised a strategy for finding opals with a low water content. I dug in areas where the rock was less dense, more porous; where the opal had been drying out naturally over thousands of years. My observations seemed to support my conclusions. Most of the opals I found in solid, hard rock cracked; the opals I found in loose dirt and porous rock did not. This was the reason I chose to avoid the brown hardrock layer beneath the green silicon dioxide. Keep in mind, this is just a theory on my part.

On future trips I plan on using the same technique for digging, but I'll add a saw to the list of tools. That tough brown layer, as well as the green, will cut up easily with a diamond blade or one that will cut steel, (I tested some sample rocks on a bench grinder with the steel cutting blade, it worked great).

I've returned to the Barnett's claim a number of times; always scratching, searching, questioning, digging, looking for and trying to understand the nature of Mojave opal.

My opal hunting trips were very enjoyable. I found some nice opal, met some real nice folks, and got my share of exercise. Will I be back?—You can count on it. Perhaps I'll see you there some time.



The "Mojave Opal" set in gold and surrounded by diamonds.

The Barnett opal claim can be reached by taking Highway 14 north out of Mojave, California, for about 20 miles. You travel through Red Rock Canyon and then the road widens to a passing lane. On the right is a sign, "Opal Canyon." Follow the markers to the Barnett claim, about six miles.

The claim is open on weekends only. Camping is free, but there is a \$2.00-a-day charge for digging. Any well-maintained vehicle can make the trip but pulling a trailer is not recommended. You must bring your own food and water as no services are available at the claim. June, July and August are the months to avoid on the Mojave Desert, as the temperature often exceeds 100 degrees.

From the *International California Mining Journal*, May 1997. Reprinted for educational purposes under the "fair use" provision of the U.S. Copyright Act.

Is the Cufflink Dead?

By [Gary Hocking](#)

Cufflinks are amusing things to wear. When you buy a pair of earrings you only need ears to use them and when you buy a

necklace you only need a neck to wear it but when you buy a pair of cufflinks you need a special shirt to wear them with and when you buy a shirt with cuffs you have to buy a pair of cufflinks or you cannot wear that shirt.

Before buttons men and women tied the ends of their sleeves with cord so that the wind and cold couldn't get in. More elegant dress clothes were tied with ribbons.

But is the cufflink dead? Hell no! There is a cufflink museum in New Hampshire USA, and a National Cufflink Society. There are people who are obsessed with collecting cufflinks. Take Derek Anastasia who has a collection of almost 17,000 pairs of cufflinks. Anastasia believes that cufflinks made a resurgence in America when Regan came to power and wore cufflinks a good deal. Gene Klompus president of the National Cufflink Society has more than 35,000 pairs!

The first cufflinks were chains, really called cuff fasteners, and as they became more elegant they evolved into items of jewellery and bits were added to the chains.

During the period of the Industrial Revolution in England there was an explosion in the presence of cufflinks as manufacturing methods went from hand made one-off pieces to mass production.

When I see someone wearing cufflinks I always take notice of them. Those cufflinks are making a statement about that person and that person is making a statement about themselves. They are telling me that they are proud of themselves and that they are making an effort to dress to impress.

You can dive out of bed, drape a shirt around you and toss your coat on and rush off to the office and hardly even know what you have done, but the moment you start to put those cufflinks through your sleeves something magical happens.

It is a kind of ritualistic thing where now you are adorning yourself in order that other people will notice you. Now you start to think is this shirt the right one? Is it ironed well enough? Should I wear another coat? You cannot simply snap cufflinks on or push them through your cuffs hastily without thinking. The act makes you slow down and forces you to think about why you are wearing cufflinks. No, the cufflink is far from dead!

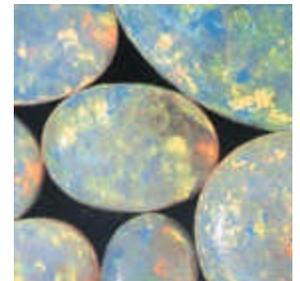
Gary Hocking is an Australian manufacturing jeweler who has his own website: <http://www.jewelleryexpress.com.au> You are free to copy this article as long as you leave the live link to his website. Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Gary_Hocking

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Mining Opals

Precious opal occurs in both sedimentary and volcanic rocks. Nearly 100 per cent of Australia's opal production is derived from sedimentary opal deposits.

All the Australian opal fields are situated in arid inland areas with little relief; and the opal is found at shallow depths, usually less than 30 meters, in



deeply weathered rock in which there has been considerable silica movement.

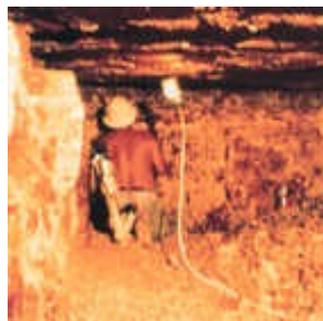
Opal occurred during the latter stages of extensive weathering of the sediments during the late Cretaceous (approximately 136 to 64 million years ago) or Tertiary (approximately 64 to 1.5 million years ago) period. Silica released during this period

percolated downwards with ground water through the rock mass. The opaline silica accumulated, concentrated and was subsequently deposited as a gel in sites provided by various structures. Gradual loss of water from the silica gel resulted in the hardening of the material and the formation of opal.

There have been many methods of mining developed to unearth opal from the Australian outback. Following are a few of the most common methods.

Sinking a Shaft

Although this is one of the most effective ways of finding opal, it is also the most laborious. The length of the shaft could be as short as three meters or as long as 20 meters. A drilling rig with a 36-inch bucket auger would save a miner the several days it could take several days to reach the opal level by hand.



Puddling And Rumbling



and 'opal nobbies'- are captured in the mesh. A related technique is dry rumbling.

Large amounts of opal dirt are sifted through in a short time by using a mesh tray.

Open-cut Mining

This mining technique is created by running over a large area with a bulldozer, slicing through thin layers of sandstone until the opal level is reached. Although this method is more expensive than shaft mining, the chances of finding opal are increased because such a large area is being covered.



Noodling

In simple terms, a noodler is a person who goes over what other miners have discarded as 'dud' mullock heaps. All that is needed is a sieve and a very keen eye. An abandoned open-cut mine is another good place for a noodler, using a rake and sieve for tools.

Some have even taken to large scale machine noodling by allowing large amounts of opal dirt travel on a conveyer belt under ultra-violet light, which detects the precious opal.

Cutting and Polishing A Nobby

Opal is rarely faceted but rather cut and polished into cabochons. These may be solid stones, doublets, or triplets. In the case of boulder opal, the ironstone is left attached to the opal as a natural backing.

Generally, rough opal is cut using a diamond saw at high speed and plenty of water.

The nobby is then held against a grinding wheel until the colour bar is revealed and it is ready to be mounted on a dop stick with wax. The grinding wheel has a safety tray beneath it should the stone come loose from the dop stick. The stone is then held against the grinding wheel and given a final shape, removing all final faults for a smooth face. Any scratches are removed using a sanding disc and a spray of water during the process. The stone is then given a final sanding using a second disc and a little spray of water, followed by a dry finish. Any debris is then removed from the stone before it is polished. Before the final polish, the back of the stone is reshaped and finished.



From <http://www.costellos.com.au/opals/mining.html>

Opal Collector Retires

Reporter: Genevieve Hussey

TV Program Transcript Australian Broadcasting Corporation Broadcast: 21/11/2005

KERRY O'BRIEN: For the past 50 years, John Benny has been on a quest to amass the world's most magnificent collection of opals. It's an obsession that has seen him mining on all the major opal fields across the Australian outback. His collection is now irreplaceable, valued at up to \$40 million. But after more than half a century of living in the bush, the veteran miner plans to retire and he's put his huge collection up for sale. He hopes the buyer will keep the collection intact and in Australia. Genevieve Hussey reports.

JOHN BENNY, OPAL MINER: In my opinion, the only true gem is opal. The opal is beautiful. Shakespeare wrote "queen of the gems". Diamonds, sapphires, rubies - one colour. They're boring. Opal is never boring.

FRANK TYNE, AUSTRALIAN OPAL EXHIBITION: John's collected this over 56 years. Some of the pieces are just incredible. You couldn't replace it.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: This is the largest collection of opal in the world. Valued at up to \$40 million, it's the result of one man's life-long obsession with mining for the perfect stone.

JOHN BENNY: Every piece of opal is different, that's the beauty of it.

FRANK TYNE: Some of them are so large it's not funny. I mean, if we ever found some of these pieces in the opal field we'd go mad, we'd love it so much.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: John Benny's adventure began after the Second World War when the former Polish soldier joined the British Merchant Navy and sailed to Australia. When the ship docked, he saw the possibility of making a new and better life in this country.

JOHN BENNY: Came to Fremantle and jumped boat and went straight bush and never come out of the bush up till today. I used to mine by hand, sinking dip shafts and eventually when I got some money, then I bought heavy equipment, bulldozers. This is very unusual piece. You've got opal around, beautiful colour, too. And natural ashtray. Unusual - that's how the nature made it.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: John Benny's quest took him across the outback, through the opal fields in Coober Pedy and Lightning Ridge. As well as opals, he began finding and buying thousands of Aboriginal artifacts and fossils.

JOHN BENNY: I used to pay £1.10 per week for Aborigine to take me to the bush. They teach me how to live in the bush and they also show me where to collect those artifacts. Whoever had any Aboriginal artifacts I used to buy them, because in those days they weren't expensive because nobody wants them. But today, they are national treasures.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: Thirty years ago, John Benny bought a parcel of rough stones for \$3,500. One was an opal he calls 'Picasso', now valued at well over \$1 million.

JOHN BENNY: I gave it to one Chinese cutter and a few days later he brought me that piece, I was shocked, because it was so beautiful. It's a natural mosaic.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: Another stone John Benny had carved into what is now acknowledged as the world's largest opal statue - a statue of Moses, held in a vault at the Reserve Bank and worth more than \$6 million.

JOHN BENNY: I took almost two years to carve that Moses. It weighs over 34,000 carats. Beautiful, and probably one could never find another piece of opal like that.

FRANK TYNE: John, I've never seen a wall like this size in my life.

JOHN BENNY: Frank, it's about 10,000 pieces here.

FRANK TYNE: 10,000, yes.

JOHN BENNY: It took 25 years to collect it.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: Frank Tyne is an opal expert. He says John Benny's collection is priceless.

FRANK TYNE: Some of the pieces are just irreplaceable. You can't get them anymore. They're finished and this is why I think his collection is so unique.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: But while John Benny's collection is worth a lot of money, he's not a wealthy man. That's why he's finally decided to sell his life's work for a total of \$4 million.

JOHN BENNY: I haven't got any money and I don't even have a house, I rent a house, because everything what I had is to put in collection and I also would like to help my children, my grandchildren.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: But there's a catch. He can't bear to see his collection go overseas, or be split up.

JOHN BENNY: I have a lot of offers. They want to buy singularly from different countries - America, Japan, Switzerland, Germany. But I don't sell anything. I prefer the full collection goes to one person and stay in Australia and to show everybody the beauty. Because my collection is Australian national treasures.

FRANK TYNE: There will be no other country in the world that will have a collection like this. I think it's vital that it stays here.

GENEVIEVE HUSSEY: John Benny has moved to the Gold Coast to be near family. But some of his children are still carrying on the family tradition, mining opal in west of Queensland. John Benny has no regrets about devoting his life to opal mining, but now it's time to retire.

JOHN BENNY: On January 1 I'll be 81 years of age and it's time to retire now. I'm slowing down. I like fishing, I go fishing. If I had my life again I would start the same thing, because I love bush and I love nature. If you are good to nature, nature will help you; even help you to find the opal.

From <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1513110.htm>

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March 2007 Gem & Mineral Shows

2-4--COSTA MESA, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Orange County Fairgrounds/Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; 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.

2-4--HAYWARD, CA: Show and sale; Mineral & Gem Society of Castro Valley; Centennial Hall; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$5, 3-day pass, children under 12 free, \$1-off flier on Web site; contact Larry Ham, (510) 887-9007; e-mail: info@mgscv.org; Web site: www.mgscv.org.

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2-11--EL CENTRO, CA: 60th annual show; Imperial Valley Gem & Mineral Show; CA Mid-Winter Fairgrounds; Fri. 12-10, Sat. 12-10, Sun. 12-10, Mon. 4-10, Tue. 4-10, Wed. 4-10, Thu. 4-10, Fri. 4-10; contact Paul Steward, P.O. Box 1721, El Centro, CA 92244, (760) 355-1888.

3-4--VENTURA, CA: 45th annual show, "Ventura Gem Show"; Ventura Gem & Mineral Society; Seaside Park, Ventura County Fairgrounds, 10 W. Harbor Blvd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; free admission; contact Ed Clark, (805) 983-0028; e-mail: clarkoe@adelphia.net; Web site: www.vgms.org.gem, 9-11--DEL MAR, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; 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.

9-11--VICTORVILLE, CA: Tailgate; Victor Valley Gem & Mineral Club; Stoddard Wells; Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; contact JoAnn Beall, (760) 217-2628.

10-11--ESCONDIDO, CA: Annual show; Palomar Gem & Mineral Club; Escondido National Guard Armory, 304 Park Ave.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; Matt Boeck, (760) 296-8971; e-mail: mkboeck@hotmail.com.

10-11--SALINAS, CA: Annual show; Salinas Valley Rock & Gem Club; Spreckels Veterans Memorial Bldg., 5th and Llano St. (Spreckels exit); Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; beads, gemstones, jewelry, rocks, minerals; contact Bob Brewer, (831) 758-6274, or James Bassett, (831) 758-5830; e-mail: jbmssc@sbcglobal.net.

10-11--SAN MARINO, CA: Show, "The Magic of Crystals"; Pasadena Lapidary Society, San Marino Masonic Center, 3130 Huntington Dr.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; contact Marcia Goetz, 755 W. Dike St., Glendora, CA 91740, (626) 914-5030; e-mail: joenmar1@verizon.net.

10-11--TURLOCK, CA: 41st annual show; Mother Lode Mineral Society; Stanislaus County Fair Grounds, 900 N. Broadway; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$5, children 12 and under free with adult; contact Bud and Terry McMillin, (209) 524-3494; Web site: www.motherlodemineralsociety.com.

15-18--SAN BERNARDINO, CA: 5th annual tailgate; Orange Belt Mineralogical Society; Western Regional Little League ball park, 6707 Little League Dr.; Fri. 9-dusk, Sat. 9-dusk, Sun. 9-4; contact Al Carrell, (951) 961-5988, Emma Rose, (951) 288-6182, or Lyle, (909) 887-3394.

16-18--SAN FRANCISCO, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Fort Mason Center/Herbst Pavilion, Landmark Bldg. A; 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.

17-18--VALLEJO, CA: Annual show; Vallejo Gem & Mineral Society; Solano County Fairgrounds, County Bldg., junction I-80 and Hwy. 37; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; exhibits, demonstrations, crystals, gemstones, jewelry, beads, mineral specimens, hourly door prizes, grand prize; contact Phyllis Malicki, (707) 745-3255.

23-25--BAKERSFIELD, CA: 5th annual show, "Indoor and Outdoor Rock and Gem Rendezvous"; San Joaquin Valley Lapidary Society; Kern County Fairgrounds, 1411 S. P St., corner of S. P and Belle Terrace; Fri. 9-8, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; Fri. 9-8, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; sphere making, cabochon making, silversmithing, wire wrapping demonstrations, hourly drawings, raffles, spin the wheel of fortune, silent auction, Trading Post, U.S. and international dealers, rocks, fossils, gems, rough rock, dichroic glass making lapidary equipment, beads, beading supplies; contact Lewis M. Helfrich, 2225 River Blvd., Bakersfield, CA 93305, (661) 872-8230; e-mail: lewsrocks@netzero.net; Web site: http://heartostone.com/jewelrycreations.

24-25--ANGELS CAMP, CA: Annual show; Calaveras Gem & Mineral Society; Calaveras County Fairgrounds, Hwy 49.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; admission \$2; dealers, door prizes, raffle, demonstrators, exhibits, kids' booth; contact Tom Reeves, (209) 754-4863; e-mail: star@volcano.net.

24-25--ROSEVILLE, CA: Show, "Roseville Gem, Jewelry & Mineral Show"; Roseville Rock Rollers Gem & Mineral Society; Roseville (Placer County) Fairgrounds, 800 All America City Blvd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$5, seniors (60+) \$4, kids 12 and under free; more than 35 vendors, minerals, crystals, gold, opal, jewelry, rough and cut stones, gemstones, supplies, equipment, petrified wood, fossils, demonstrations, exhibit cases, special children's activities, silent rock auctions, educational exhibits; contact Jim, (530) 367-5108, or Gloria, (530) 367-2262; e-mail: g16marie@ftcnet.net; Web site: www.rockrollers.com.

31-1--TORRANCE, CA: 58th annual show, "Nature's Treasures"; South Bay Lapidary & Mineral Society; Torrance Recreation Center, 3341 Torrance Blvd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; no dealers; contact Leslie Neff or Larry Hoskinson, (310) 318-2170.





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The Opal Express C/O
Jim Pisani
P.O. Box 4875
Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875
 E-mail: editor@opalsociety.org

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

American Opal Society
P.O. Box 4875
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**Volume #40 Issue #3
March 2007**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

Len Cram Visit
Mr. Len Cram Bio
AOS Live Auction for March 8th
Auction Bidder Agreement
Live Auction Rules
Mojave Opal Hunting
Is the Cufflink Dead?
Mining Opals
Opal Collector Retires

Important Info:
Board Meeting
March 27th

General Meeting
March 8th

AOS Live Auction

BRING IN YOUR OPAL (or other gem related product) to SELL or bring your money to BUY

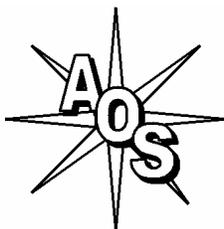
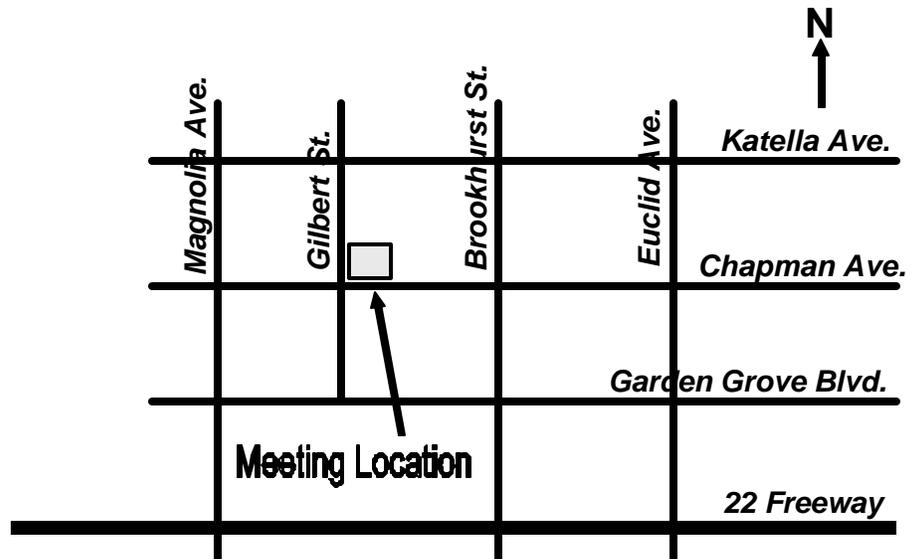
— GENERAL MEETINGS —

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

**March 8th:
AOS Live Auction!!!
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(562) 621-1805
(714) 891-7171
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email: fineblackopal@sprynet.com
email: jlamb777@yahoo.com
email: chairman2rgm@charter.net
email: editor@opalsociety.org