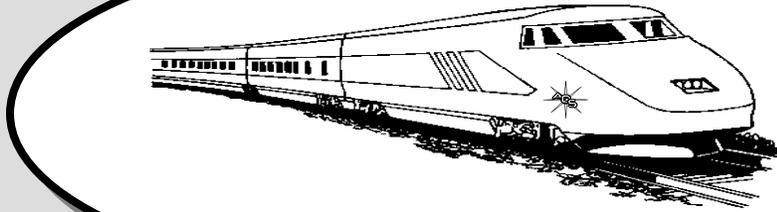


# The Opal Express

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## President's Message

*By Gene LeVan*

Shear beauty, high value, rare natural stone material, hard to fine, bountiful colors of the rainbow, what is? Black opal of course. It is called black because the back of the stone is black but the front can be red, which is of the highest value the other colors yellow, orange, blue and green have lower value. The brightness value of all opals set the standard for high value along with consistent light pattern and great cutting. The microscopic spheres inside the opal is what reflect the various wavelengths of color, smaller spheres make the red, larger ones create blue/green. The last meeting was held to make brightness kits for our members to grade their opals. Jim Pisani will tell you more about this meeting. He said that making the kits was not easy to do, finding higher bright stones level four to five are rare. I am still out recovery from a hip operation and should be home later in October. Be sure to come and meet other fine opal lovers at our meetings and learn more about these mysterious, colorful stones. Also, don't forget the upcoming Opal & Gem Show!

## Faye McDowell has Passed Away

Alma Faye McDowell was born on in Houma, Louisiana on March 11, 1921 at 8:00 PM. Her father was Edward Gordon Whigham. He worked in the oil fields. Her mom was Sarah Elizabeth Maxwell. She was a housewife. Both parents were from Grady, Ga. They had 4 children, Fay, Eileen and Madelle and 1 brother, Terrance. Eileen today survives Fay and lives in Florida. At her young age her family moved from Houma back to Georgia. She went to school there, and after school, she use to help her mom sew and do house chores. In 1937 at the age of 16 she married James Carlton McDowell. They had 2 boys; Gregory Eugene and James

Edward. After having the boys, they moved to Florida. In 1944 Fay divorced and never remarried again. After her divorce she started working for the Department of Transportation doing bookkeeping. When she was finish with work, she would go home to do alterations for extra income. In 1963 she came to California and lived in Santa Monica, San Pedro, and then moved to Long Beach.

Fay loved the outdoors, hiking, gardening, and snorkeling with her son Greg in the Caribbean's. Collecting rocks, polishing rocks, and making jewelry soon became her favorite hobby. She belonged to three different clubs: - The Searchers Gem & Mineral Society, Long Beach Gem and Mineral Society, and the American Opal Society. She loved to help at meetings and the shows and held many positions in the different clubs. Treasurer and 1st VP.

She was sweet, kind, and always smiling. When we went on field trips, her motor home was always full of friends, as she always invited everyone over for her special margaritas. Oh, and let's not forget that Texas Red wine! She was a real trooper, going thru 4 strokes and a broken hip, yet Fay never complained. She always pushed herself to get better (and she did.) and always had a positive attitude about life.

On September 1st, Fay fell at her son's house in Texas and hit her head. Within a short time she went into a coma and never woke up. She passed away on Sept 4th, at approx. 4:30 am. She is now in good hands. We will always remember her as a good friend, our hero. I know all of us will miss her.

A celebration of the life of Faye will be held on Sat., Oct. 27, 11:30 am to 3:00 pm, at the **Phoenix Club - Loreley Restaurant**, 1340 S. Sanderson Ave., Anaheim, CA 92806. **RSVP only**, by Oct 4, with **Norbert and Ana Bernhardt (714-734-9665)** with number attending and which entrée you want.

**Directions:** From the 57, exit Ball Rd. From northbound exit, turn onto Ball Rd. drive east to the first signal, which is Phoenix Club

Dr. From southbound exit, turn onto Ball Road and drive east to the second signal and turn right. Drive to the second street on the right, Sanderson Ave. Turn and the Phoenix Club is at the end on the left side.



Faye McDowell at the 2001 Opal & Gem Show

**IT'S COMING!!!  
Make your plans!!!  
The American Opal Society's 40th Annual  
ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW**

**The Largest Opal Show in USA!  
Sat. & Sun., November 3 & 4, 2007  
Saturday 10AM - 6PM  
Sunday 10 AM - 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** on Saturday & Sunday 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**  
Phone: (714) 891-7171, e-mail: [jilamb777@yahoo.com](mailto:jilamb777@yahoo.com)  
**Jay Carey**  
Phone: (714) 525-7635, e-mail: [jaycarey@charter.net](mailto:jaycarey@charter.net)

**Volunteers Needed for Show**

The Opal & Gem Show, the AOS's biggest fundraiser, is coming soon. We will need volunteers to man the various posts for the show. Please contact Jim Lambert or Jay Carey or sign up at the Oct. Meeting.

**Raffle Donations Needed for Show**

The Opal & Gem Show has a large raffle every year. This is a big fund raiser for the society. The AOS asks its members for tax-deductible donations for the raffle. Any extra gem, mineral; cut or rough, equipment, books, new or used, etc., would be appreciated. Please bring them to the Oct. meeting or to the Show. Thanks!

**Opal Society Workshop**

The American Opal Society's workshop will re-opened on Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> after being closed for the month of August. The shop is located at Ball Jr. High School and will occur 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 east on Ball Rd. the parking lot entrance you need to use is just before 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. 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. Please contact Pete Goetz at (714) 345-1449 if you have any questions.

**Members Only Website Password**

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



The AOS gets busy comparing opals for various brightness at the AOS meeting hall.

**Opal Brightness Workshop Report**

*By Jim Pisani*

We had our introductory Opal Brightness Workshop for the September General Meeting. We had around a dozen opal lovers who brought what they considered some of their best and brightest opals.

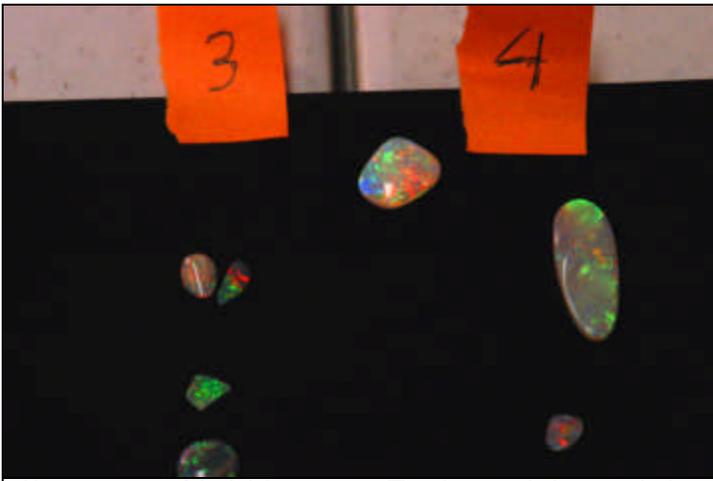
This workshop was held in the aspiration of establishing opal brightness kits for both the Society and individual members. Historically, the American Opal Society was the first organization to provide a quantitative method of appraising opal and invented the opal brightness kit as an aid to allow an opal evaluator to systematically determine an opal's brightness by comparing it to a number of calibrated stones.

We started the workshop by arranging a table with a couple bright lights. Each of us brought out what we thought we are best stones and laid them side by side on a background of black felt. We compared opal to opal, and we immediately started learning some lessons:

- 1) A stone is usually not as bright as you think when compared to others stones.
- 2) A stone, to be a part of a kit, must have uniform brightness in all directions; otherwise, if the stone is too directional (e.g. broad flash), it makes it difficult to compare. Pin fire would be a good choice.
- 3) Opals of brightness level of five (5) are extremely rare.



Some of the stones that were brought were aligned to what the common consensus was.



Here are some of the brighter stones. The photograph does not do the right hand stone justice.

- 4) A good kit would have at least 2 colors; 3 would be optimal. (e.g. Red, green, and blue).
- 5) The light should be a 100 watt incandescent bulb. Fluorescent and halogen do not have the proper spectrum.
- 6) A good method to determine if a stone has good brightness is to hold the stone under the table and see if the color is still bright.
- 7) You do not need to have a level 5 brightness opal for a kit; a level 4 will do. If the level is higher than the 4, then it is a 5. Given the cost per carat that a stone would have, even a small stone would be expensive; this would discourage the use of such a stone in a kit and the owner would rather sell it or keep it.

We want to continue pursuing establish a baseline kit for the AOS. If we re-establish a calibrated kit, it can then be used to create more kits. Stay tuned for an announcement of additional workshops.

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*As an avid scuba diver, and someone, in his foolish youth, actually dove into a number of underwater caves, this article held a fascination to me. Imagine, two of the big passions of my life - opals and diving - were combined together! This article was translated into English from Czech- it may have odd syntax occasionally. The Editor*

## Diving in the Opal Mines of Dubnik, Slovakia

8-30-2006

*By David Cani & Petr Vaverka*

### THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF THE OPAL MINES

Only a few places in the world have a thousand year old history of human activity connected with diving. The opal mines in Dubnik - located close to Presov city on eastern part of Slovakia is one of them, and we chose that place for our dive site because they are unique.

### ALIVE UNDERGROUND

The first mining of opals in this place around Dubnik was in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

At that time they were already extracting the precious opal and because of that a Dubnik is the oldest and the largest opal mine in the world. Additionally, these are the deepest mines to acquire opals.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were about 800 workers and they built over thirty galleries with a total length of over 22 km (13.75 miles) by hand.

If we want to find something similar, we have to go to Australia to places like Lightning Ridge, Coober Pedy or Mexico's Zimapan.

The other locations are in the Americas especially in Honduras and in USA, Brazil, Russia and Germany. However, the quality of their minerals is not that good as that of Dubnik's stones.

One of the Dubnik rarities is the "Vienna Imperial Opal" also known as a "Harlekyn" which is the biggest opal in the world with a weight of 594 grams (20.952 oz) and its value is estimated at \$500,000.

The next valuable stone is "Burning of Troy" (about \$50,000) which is now a part of France's coronation treasure collection.

In spite of the tremendous output from these mines, they were shut down in 1922.

Shortly after the mine closed, opal thieves entered and destroyed what was left.



Dubnik's underground spaces are not just great for precious stones, they are also perfect as a winter home for bats – it is the biggest European winter home for more than fourteen different kinds of bats. During the winter there are over 4000 bats living in the caves.

### IN CLATTER OF BUBBLES

After traveling 670 km (420 miles) from Prague we were sitting at the location with Vlado Konrad, the local boss, by late afternoon, and already talking about situation underground...

Vlado is a very friendly person and we were happy to go with him to see the dry parts of the main cave.

Dubnik's main cave is not all underwater the underwater part is only a portion of Viliam's gallery with an intricate labyrinth very close to Fedo's gallery.

Corridors are on three levels with a depth of 15, 30 and 50 meters (50, 100 and 166 feet) they are all connected by vertical passages, stairways, and a main gallery Fedo.

The visibility in the slightly acidic water is absolute – limited only by flash light power. The maximum depth of 67 meters (223 feet) depends on the water level.

We've planed one dive for each day. Transporting our dive gear in to the water wasn't so easy because of the very intricate corridor system. We had to travel hunched over three times for a half kilometer (1600 feet) from the underground entrance with all our dive equipment threw a slippery corridor with a very low ceiling using only light from our flash lights.

And believe me, every slip or fall with a load of tanks hurts... Finally the dive time comes and we couldn't wait to get wet.

We were so excited, we finally got into the entry passage with our last load of equipment for the last trip through the long, intricate, dark and already somewhat known corridors all the way to our dive gear storage place.

Dive briefing and getting dressed was very difficult and uncomfortable because of high humidity and the constant annual 1° C (33.8° F) air temperature.

After finishing all the procedures we finally got into the incredible, crystal clear, cold water. Our dive path was going from the crossroad point on right side through the 6 meters deep (20 feet) tunnel.

Roughly after about 20 m we had to snake through the partially collapsed walls which were built so many years ago. The water was not very muddy...so-far. Then we were amazed by "CICVARS" (that is local name for formations growing from the ceiling) in the corridors. At the end of the corridor there were steps leading down to the next section – horizontal tunnel at 30m of depth. When we arrived at the next tunnel all that was left was a heavy wood frame from the ventilation door. We were descending deeper and deeper. Threw twisting steps the corridor continued until we entered into the shaft named "Fedo"...

In a world of powerful diving lights, we were suddenly in a spacious



hall.

From the darkness the wooden construction of the shaft showed up with more than a hundred year old patina. We were moving very slowly to keep from stirring up the heavy sediment. With great respect we looked down into the very deep shaft. Concentration on our own movement was number one, because just one bad move can very easily ruin extremely clear water and turn it into an impenetrable fog.

The main corridors are lined with a many different reels and crosses witch are marked with arrows. For movement in cathedrals around "Fedo" and in lineless spaces we are using our own reels and jump ropes...

"The visibility is still very good, because of the gentle movement of the other divers."

We are leaving the shaft through the horizontal corridor (-100 feet) in the direction of the vertical passage which is at the end of one of the circles created by the flooded tunnels."



The Opal Express

The American Opal Society

There were a lot of wood boards on the ground a front of us and between them you can still see the foot prints of horses. Les then eighty years ago horses were working here and pulling heavy loads of earth through the dark intricate labyrinth. We decided to ascend through the vertical tunnel where the visibility was about 20 cm (not even one a foot).The ascent went well in a rattle of bubbles from the open circuits of other divers and it was very enjoyable.

"I'm so excited and I cannot wait for tomorrow's dive which starts in the same vertical tunnel but the descent headfirst..."

At the end of this first dive we took a look (during the decompression at -6 m) on the left side of the main crossroad and we enjoyed the colorful scenes in that intricate corridor system...

Carrying all of our stuff back outside was not been a big deal, after that great and enjoyable diving experience.

It was neither a long nor difficult way out of the darkness and it was not getting in the way of our excitement.

For the rest of day we were just exploring the mine's dry site – looking for some opals in many extracted earth piles and talking about today's dive a planning the dive for tomorrow.

Currently "Opalove bane s.r.o." is taking care of the protected "Dubnik mine", which is 6 ha (14,8 acres) of property including the underground spaces, corridors, shafts, tunnels and technical monuments.

Visitors and amateur opal hunters are allowed to visit the dry area of the mine during the summer season to look for opals after paying a local fee.

There are two circles for diving in Dubnik which are about 600m (2000 feet) long. But because of the high risk and overhead, cave diving with the right configuration, special training and experience (certification) are needed!!!

#### **HEAD SIDE FIRST**

For Sunday we had decided to go into a non marked and lineless corridor at -40m of depth (133 feet) which is going to the mezzanine all the way into "Fedo", which was discovered two years ago by a couple of divers Hasa & Skovajsa.

After the descent to the main crossroad – Marek was the first who penetrated – head side first – into a small slot and the rest of us were following him down one by one.



The last one to descend into the vertical tunnel was Petr. He was going down just by instinct with absolute zero visibility...I did not envy him.

To go down into a chimney with a mix of rolling bubbles, dirt, ooze and mud is a courageous achievement.

Going down very slowly, deeper and deeper from the connecting corridor on our own reel was nice because this area has been penetrated by very few divers (you can count them on one hand).

The ceiling of this tunnel is still almost untouched, more then two feet long decoration of "limonitas" curtain.

Marek has been leading us through a corridor which was known only by him. I followed him about three meters (10 feet) behind with great

admiration of his brilliant movement in a space like this, with a lot of ooze it can get very cloudy easily...

He did not stir up any sediment when moving, so I had a great chance to take a lot of pictures in great visibility.

I could not believe my eyes when we came to a spot with rails which lead us back to the shaft "Fedo" where it connected to a bizarre underground railway station.

There we were floating like in the air and unbelievably looking at all the rest of the human activities which made this county a hundred years ago, known and famous all over the world.

The space in the shaft "Fedo" is very unstable because of a collapse above it.

It is impossible to dive to the bottom with an open circuit system to discover corridors at levels -50m (166 feet) deep. This might be possible for divers with rebreathers which are not making bubbles... Because of this we were just documenting details of the shaft's exterior, rails and adjacent corridors.

The wooden supports here are in much better condition than in the tunnels at -30m (100 feet). For example you still can see pulleys on beams.

The wall's colors were changing from red-brown to green-gray until they were almost blue and we were "quietly" astonished by the incredible and amazing scenery. On the other hand our way back was like a "blind wander" by touch in absolute zero visibility.

But thanks to all of our training, drills and a lot of practice it was not a big deal for us at all to get safely back to the surface in the entry tunnel.

For our dives we've chosen as a BG: Nitrox 32 in double sets 2x18L and 2x12L with 80 cuft stages. Jakub dove with his rebreather CCR CIS LUNAR.

And we used argon (as usual) to fill-up our dry suits because the temperature of the water was 3°C (37,4° F)

Quite often a certain gem stone or mineral is named for the person by whom it was first discovered. Being new, it must be given a name, and what is more fitting than that it be given the name of the one who first brought it to public notice?

And that is the reason one of the most outstanding ornamental gem stones found in Malheur county, eastern Oregon is known as "Morrisonite," named for James Morrison, who for a half century has made his home in a canyon of the Owyhee river some six or eight miles above the discontinued post office of Watson. During those years Mr. Morrison has explored much of that rugged area known locally as the Owyhee breaks. Deeply interested in Indian lore Mr. Morrison has accumulated a large collection of Indian artifacts most of which he found at old campsites and in caves along the river.

It was fifteen years ago that I first heard of Morrison and his unique place on the Owyhee. It was thru Riley Horn, an old-time stockman in Malheur county, that I learned of the Morrison collection of artifacts and of the Indian rock writings along the Owyhee about eight miles above the Morrison ranch.

I believe that Frank Zimmerman of Payette, and myself can justly lay claim to being the first rockhounds to make a trip to the Morrison ranch, for that same summer we managed to find our way in. That was a trip well seasoned with grief, such as car trouble and much walking. At that time neither of us was particularly interested in rock collecting...Indian relics is what we were after. But while we were there "Jim" called our attention to a few small pieces of the gem stone which were lying about the place, and told us where he found them.

I don't recall bringing any of the material out with us on that trip. Don't believe we did. But on a later trip we went with the express purpose of bringing back some "Morrisonite," realizing here was an unusual gem stone.

We made but one trip to the location, which, measured in terms of miles, is but a short distance from the Morrison ranch, but on a hot summer day that was plenty, for the steep climb out of the canyon is really something.

As a result of that trip 15 years ago, Morrisonite, as far as I know, was first brought to the attention of rock collectors in this region. I remember sending a small specimen to a rockhound in Boise, a chartered member of the Idaho Gem club. He immediately came back at me with the query: "Where in h---I did you get that rock?" That was Harry Eslick, now located at Auburn, Calif.

Soon after that the Boise rockhounds got wind of the location, as did other collectors in nearby communities, and several parties made trips to the locality. In spite of the this, not a great deal of Morrisonite has been taken out. It is formed in rhyolite, and is confined to a small area, by no means being what one would call plentiful. I have made a number of trips to the place, but my supply of Morrisonite is quite limited, though a few pieces I think are outstanding.

Now you have been given a brief history on "Morrisonite." What type of gem stone it is I would not say. Some say it is a form of jasper. Others call it a jasp-agate...

if there is such a stone. It has even been classified as jade, perhaps because occasionally solid green specimens are found. But those who have sawed and polished the material are inclined to disagree and are content to call it Morrisonite, and let it go at that.

Strange as it may be, the fact remains, Morrisonite is confined to one small area, although the surrounding territory is of the same formation. At least it would appear thus, for Morrison has pretty well covered the country and reports no new finds. Therefore the material is not easy to find, and collectors are loath to part with it.

Perhaps you will think I have described this Morrisonite in terms rather glowing; which I have. But it rates all of that. However, rockhounds, I'm telling you this: The road to Morris on's is rough and there's lots of it. We found it plenty bad 15 years ago, and it is no better today.

But here is a real gem stone, and classify it as you may...we call it Morrisonite.

Via the internet, [www.thegemshop.com/morrisonite4/htm](http://www.thegemshop.com/morrisonite4/htm).



Our maximum depth for each dive was 34m (112 feet) with a dive time of 70 min.

**Over the hundreds of dives on wrecks, in caves, seas or in fresh water are still the memories of atmosphere and experience from diving in opal mines in Dubnik. This still has a first place in my private diving life.**

<http://www.vaverka.net/down/dubnik/>

From <http://www.deeperblue.net/article.php/742/28>

**DeeperBlue.net Article:**

More articles like this can be found at <http://www.deeperblue.net>

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*Morrison Ranch Jasper has been a sought-after lapidary material for over 50 years. Below is a very early article published in The Sundial of Payette, Idaho, in the May-June issue of 1948. A special thank you to Doris Snyder of the Midwest Mineralogical and Lapidary Society of Dearborn, Michigan, for providing a copy of this article.*

**"We Call It Morrisonite"**

*By Julian Field*



*Bowers Museum Trip With Vicki and Russ Madsen, Jim Pisani, and Will Shaw.*

**Bowers Museum Trip Report**

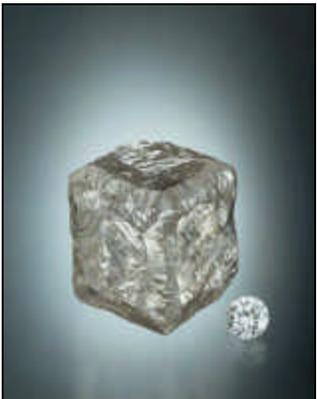
A number of us visited the Michael Scott Exhibit at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, CA. Russ and Vicki Madsen, Jim Pisani, Pete Goetz, and Will Shaw attended. We saw a number of one-of-a-kind gemstones from all over the world, mostly the best of the best.

The exhibit is one of two at the museum; the \$19 admission feed allows you to see GEMS! Colors of Light and Stone and Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt Treasures. Both can be seen at the same time.

The Gem exhibit is composed off the Michael Scott Collection; one of the most important private gem collections in the United States, one that has few rivals in the world. GEMS! Colors of Light and Stone is among the most important exhibitions of colored gemstones, diamonds and gems as art ever shown in a U.S. museum. It not only includes spectacular examples of cut stones of the major gem varieties, but also crystals, jewelry and magnificent gem carvings, including those by German artists Bernd Munsteiner and Gerd Dreher and the work of Seattle-based silversmith, John Marshall.



**Queen of Kilimanjaro.** This spectacular tiara features the world's largest faceted Tanzanite on 18 karat white gold. 242 carats Tanzanite. 803 garnets total weight 32 carats; 913 diamonds total weight 14 carats; Entire piece weights only 250 grams!//



*Cubic Diamond Crystal. Surfaced with triangular growth features known as trigons, the cubic shape is one of the rarest forms of gem quality diamond. 156 carats. Ghana, West Africa*

Michael Scott was the first CEO for the Apple Computer Corporation from 1977 to 1981. Mr. Scott was CEO's of various other companies since then and has retired. In his retirement., Mr. Scott has become an expert on colored gemstones, having written a book on them. He also sponsored Ruff, a project creating a complete set of high quality spectral data from well-

characterized minerals.

We had our own tour guide the Will Shaw had arranged ahead of time. The museum will provide that service for small groups free of charge. This gave us a lot more enjoyment because the guide would add little bits of information that wasn't displayed.

We saw huge, rough diamonds, which are very rare. There were also a collection of multi-colored garnets; pointing out that garnets can come in any color but blue. Fantastic tourmalines were in abundance; from Paraiba to bi-color to some fantastic specimens of crystals in matrix. There was a gigantic, complete ammonite, the whole thing gemmy. The largest cut Tanzanite in the world, the Queen of Kilimanjaro, was impressive.

I was disappointed that there were no precious opals. Maybe Michael Scott hasn't got to that letter yet. However, the exhibit is not to be missed. You will be impressed!

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**A Gem of a Fossil**

Australia's world-renowned opal field, Coober Pedy, is home to another kind of treasure. Fossils are sometimes found there, preserved as chunks of dazzling opal. This semi-precious stone is exposed when tunneling machines crush large amounts of rock. When struck by the blades of the tunneler, an opal makes a distinct sound that alerts the operators to the presence of the gemstone. It's a crude, but effective technique. In 1987, opal miner Joe Veda stopped the machine when he heard that particular opal intonation. Veda had struck the skeleton of a small marine reptile called a pliosaur - the most complete vertebrate fossil preserved as opal. Despite the damage caused by the tunneler, enough of the skeleton was salvaged to show the tiny bones of a fish in its belly region - its last meal.

*From the [American Museum of Natural History](#).*

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**The Backus Opal**

This lovely, unusual Nevada opal from Virgin Valley was found in the mine tailings of the Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine – a fee digging area – by Mrs. Standish Backus about 1970. A large piece of specimen rough wit one end polished, the stone's base color is a light transparent brown, while the presence of color is a lively deep blue, green, and yellow-green. The stone, which measures 5" x 4.75" x 2" [127 mm x 120.65 mm x 50.8 mm] weighs 3870 carats [1.71 pounds]. It is presently part of the collection of the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, to whom it was donated by an individual who did not wish to be identified. Valuation of the stone, past or present, is undisclosed.

*From [The World of Opals](#), by Allan Wesley Eckert.*

*If anyone, has any information as to the current whereabouts of this opal, please contact the Editor.*

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**The Many Uses of Gypsum**

When you bake baking powder biscuits or use self-rising flour, do you know that you are using food containing a ground-up mineral called gypsum? There is nothing toxic about it; it dissolves to form harmless liquid in your stomach and supplies your body with calcium.

It is used in toothpaste, in the heads of matches, in cement, in chalk to write with, in splints for broken limbs, in the brewing industry to help settle and clarify their products, in peanut fields, in mushroom beds, and in our houses as wallboards. It is used as molds for dishes, knives, forks, spoons, bathroom fixtures, and aircraft ductwork. The White Sands proving grounds in New Mexico is a gypsum deposit. It is estimated that if ever needed, there is enough gypsum there to supply the world for 60,000 years at its present rate of consumption.

*From the [Hellgate Breezes](#), 4/93, via the [Breccia](#) 6/2007*

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## Sugilite

Sugilite is named after a Japanese geologist, Kenichi Sugi, who discovered the first tiny specimens in Japan in 1944. It is a rare ore, potassium sodium iron lithium silicate, ranging in color from pink to purple. The primary gem deposit was found in 1979 at the 3,200 ft. level in the Wessels Manganese Mine, 14 miles northwest of Hotazel, South Africa, in the Kalahari Desert. Smaller deposits occur in Brazil and Canada.

Sugilite usually occurs in pegmatites of alkaline magmas and crystallizes into opaque masses. It occasionally occurs as small crystals or inclusions within quartz, and very rarely, in a translucent gemmy form known as "gel". It is frequently found in combination with manganese [black streaks], Bustamite, a calcian variety of rhodonite [orange/brown areas], and sometimes with Richterite [blue].

Based on article in *Rock Rollers* 11/02), via the *Pegmatite*, 2003-01.

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## Shopper's World; Opals from the Outback

February 23, 1986

By Jane Perlez

Perched in the display case of an elegant jewelry store in Sydney stands a figurine carved from opal, the brilliant green, blue and red colors of the gem sparkling under the artificial light.

Not everyone desires such an extravagant opal ornament, or even the rare opal, the size of a small egg, that was sold by Percy Marks's jewelry store in Sydney not so long ago for nearly \$150,000. But for visitors to Australia, opals are among the best buys: the country is renowned for the world's finest opals - 95 percent of all commercially sold opal comes from the arid interior of the nation, known as the outback. One mining town alone, Lightning Ridge, produces the most precious variety, the black opal, found nowhere else. In all, seven mining towns, with such aboriginal names as Mintabie, Andamooka and Eromanga, are the source of Australian precious opal.

Opal consists of thousands of tightly packed, minute, uniformly sized spheres of silica. The shimmering colors are created by the effect of light passing through these spheres and the spaces between them. As the wearer of an opal moves in the light, the pattern of colors changes, sometimes setting off a kind of small fireworks display on a lapel or neckline.

In general, opal specialists say, a buyer should seek bright hues rather than subdued pastels and look for a large pattern in the stone, rather than fussy, small squints of color. Opals should also be held to the light to insure that there are no lines - an indication of dirt - in the stone.

A working knowledge of the different kinds of opals is a help before stepping inside the jewelry stores, and it should be accompanied, according to local lore, with skepticism about places that offer large discounts and that have tourist buses parked outside. "They have to put the margin on before they can take it off," said one jeweler.

The jewelry stores founded by Percy Marks in 1899 are generally regarded as the premier opal dealers in Australia. The Percy Marks stores - there are three in Sydney and one in Melbourne - sell a range from traditional, formal opal brooches surrounded by gold and diamonds to avant-garde necklaces set with jagged opal pieces to simple rings and all manner of unset stones.

The most sought-after stone is the black opal mined from a hill about three miles in circumference at Lightning Ridge, population 2,000, in north-western New South Wales, the state of which Sydney is the capital.

Named for its black background, an unset black opal stone the size of a green pea would retail for about \$680, according to Cameron Marks, the manager of the Percy Marks store at the Intercontinental Hotel in Sydney. A black opal of the same size that flashed with lustrous dark reds and blues - the most difficult colors to find - retails for \$4,700, he said. "It's very hard to find stones of that quality," he noted.

After the black opal, the variety considered most valuable is the boulder opal, which is found in massive dark rock formations in Queensland, a northern Australian state. Often these stones are cut with the ironstone left on the back and, at times, the boulders are sawed into baroque shapes. The effect of these boulder opals is often that of luminescent bright lights twinkling against a dark background where the ironstone stands out. Some of these irregularly shaped opals are expensive: an example with streaks of aqua, cobalt blue, oranges and red was for sale at Percy Marks for \$2,040. A stone of more subdued coloration in a concave triangular shape was \$475. An ultra-modern necklace for someone with dramatic taste - the center boulder opal was the size of an apple, surrounded by gold and diamonds - sold for \$23,000.

Less costly are light opals, which have translucent to opaque backgrounds for the fiery colors. The poorer cousin of these opals, according to Mr. Marks, is the milky opal most commonly seen in the United States. He says that fine Australian light opals - those that exhibit flashes of bright colors rather than muted shades - are excellent stones and because they, too, are hard to find, they are rarely exported for sale to the United States.

Light opals were first discovered in Australia in 1915 at Coober Pedy, a remote town with searing temperatures in the South Australian desert. The shaft mines, about 50 to 80 feet deep, and the underground dwellings built by the miners to escape the heat, led to the aboriginal name Coober Pedy, meaning "white man in a hole."

A good example of a light opal with bright, clear colors about the size of a shirt button would cost about \$1,200, Mr. Marks said. Stones with more pastel colors would be considerably less.

For the less serious collector, those on a budget or those seeking more than a boomerang as a souvenir, jewelers also sell what are known as doublets and triplets. A doublet is a very thin slice of light opal joined to a dark background of common opal called potch. A triplet is similar to a doublet but has a piece of clear quartz covering the opal. Earrings and rings of doublets and triplets sell for under \$70; some of the larger specimens for up to \$275. (Buyers should be wary of dealers who offer doublets or triplets as solid stones.) The better Australian jewelers sell opals as loose stones or made up in ready-to-wear designs - most often set in gold, with sometimes small diamonds - for rings, earrings, necklaces, pendants, pins and cufflinks. They will also make up stones to individual requests. This takes time, however, and the Percy Marks stores, for example, say they need more than three weeks.

Opal prices in Australia are frequently significantly less than prices for the same quality stones in the United States. A light opal stone purchased in Australia several years ago for a New York woman for \$340 was appraised at double the amount by her Madison Avenue jeweler.

Percy Marks stores in Sydney are at 65 Castlereagh Street (telephone 2331355), at the Regent of Sydney Hotel, 199 George Street (271322) and at the Intercontinental Hotel, 117 Macquarie Street (2513481). Also in Sydney is the Australian Opal Center, The Wynyard Travelodge, 9 York Street (291938). In Melbourne, Percy Marks is at George's department store, 162 Collins Street (620411). Another opal shop in Melbourne is Altmann and Cherny, 227 Collins Street (639685).

Jane Perlez is a reporter on *The Metropolitan Staff of The New York Times*.

From the <http://www.nytimes.com>

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## October 2007 Gem & Mineral Shows

3-7--JOSHUA TREE, CA: 32nd annual show; Joshua Tree Sportsman's Club; 6225 Sunburst Ave.; Tue. 8-5, Wed. 8-5, Thu. 8-5, Fri. 8-5, Sat. 8-5; free admission; more than 50 dealers, gems, rocks, minerals, crafts, raffles, lapidary and rock polishing equipment, classic car display, Sheriff's Mounted Search and Rescue demonstration, flag raising ceremony; contact John, 6225 Sunburst Ave., Joshua Tree, CA 92252, (760) 366-2915; email: k.brown@unity-home.com.

5-7--BIG SUR, CA: 16th annual jade festival; South Coast Community Land Trust, Pacific Valley School PTO; Los Padres National Forest, Hwy. 1,

opposite Sand Dollar Beach; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; jade, jewelry, sculpture; contact Kirk Brock, (831) 659-3857 or (831) 402-1143.

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

7--FALLBROOK, CA: 10th annual show, "Fall Festival of Gems"; Fallbook Gem & Mineral Society; 123 W. Alvarado; Sun. 10-4; free admission; gold panning, geode cracking, gemstone identification, Wheel of Fortune, silent auctions, raffle, vendors; contact Mary Fong-Walker, (760) 723-3484; e-mail: mrwizard@tfb.com; Web site: www.fgms.org/organization/org-locations.htm.

12-14--SACRAMENTO, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center, 6151 H St.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; weekend pass \$5; contact Gem Faire Inc., (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

12-14--SANTA ROSA, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Sonoma County Fairgrounds/Grace Pavilion, 1350 Bennett Valley Rd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; admission \$5 (weekend pass); contact Gem Faire Inc., (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

13-14--CAYUCOS, CA: Show, "Cayucos Gem & Mineral Show"; San Luis Obispo Gem & Mineral Club; Vets Hall at the Pier, Pier #1; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; free door prizes, gems, jewelry, beads, minerals, fossils, tools, findings, wire wrapping, carvings, rough slabs, polished cabs, gifts; contact Bob Hurless, (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.

13-14--GRASS VALLEY, CA: 39th annual show; NV County Gem & Mineral Society; NV County Fairgrounds, Main Exhibit Hall, 11228 McCourtney Rd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$2, children free; exhibits, mineral identification, prizes, demonstrations, dealers, minerals, fossils, jewelry, lapidary equipment, silent auctions, children's games; Cliff Swenson, (530) 272-3752.

13-14--TRONA, CA: 66th annual show; Searles Lake Gem & Mineral Society; Trona Lapidary and Show Bldg.; displays, dealers, demonstrations, tours, field trips, geode cutting and sales, shows, movies, prizes; contact Bonnie Fairchild, 84830 12th St., Trona, CA 93562, (760) 372-5356; Web site: www1.iwvisp.com/tronagemclub/.

19-21--DEL MAR, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Del Mar Fairgrounds/Exhibit Hall, 2260 Jimmy Durante Blvd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7,

Sun. 10-5; admission \$5 (weekend pass); contact Gem Faire Inc., (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

20--WEST HILLS, CA: Show; Woodland Hills Rock Chippers; First United Methodist Church, 22700 Sherman Way; Sat. 10-5; free admission; gems, minerals, rocks, fossils, jewelry, dealers, displays, demonstrations, hands-on activities, ; contact Thalia Goldsworthy, 9510 Keokuk Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311, (818) 349-2943; e-mail: info@rockchippers.org; Web site: www.rockchippers.org.

20-21--ANDERSON, CA: Show; Shasta Gem & Mineral Society; Shasta District Fairgrounds; Sat. 95, Sun. 10-4; contact Bill Seward, (530) 365-8641.

20-21--PLACERVILLE, CA: Show, "Wonder of Geodes"; El Dorado County Mineral & Gem Society; El Dorado County Fairgrounds, 100 Placerville Dr.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3, children 12 and under free; geode display, demonstrations, children's activities, gold panning, more than 30 dealers, 40 displays, minerals, gems, jewelry, beads, fossils, meteorites, lapidary supplies and equipment; contact Jackie Cerrato, P.O. Box 950, Placerville, CA 95667, (530) 676-2472; e-mail: gemshow@eldoradomineralandgem.org; Web site: www.rockandgemshow.org.

20-21--SANTA ROSA, CA: 31st annual show; Santa Rosa Mineral & Gem Society; Veteran's Memorial Auditorium, 1352 Maple Ave., across from the fairgrounds; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$5, kids under 12 free; dealers, exhibits, raffles, demonstrations; contact Tom Dering, (707) 546-4537.

20-21--WHITTIER, CA: Show, "Treasures of Rockhounding"; Whittier Gem & Mineral Society; Whittier Community Center, 7630 WA Ave.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; dealers, demonstrations, displays, hourly drawing; contact Jay Valle, 1421 Latchford Ave., Hacienda Heights, CA, 91745, (626) 934-9764; e-mail: res19pnb@verizon.net.

26-28--PLEASANTON, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Alameda County Fairgrounds, 4501 Pleasanton Ave.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; weekend pass \$5; contact Gem Faire Inc., (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

#### NOVEMBER 2007:

3-4--ANAHEIM, CA: 40th annual show; American Opal Society; Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort, 616 Convention Way, one block south of Katella on Harbor Blvd., near the Anaheim Convention Center; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$4, students \$3, children under 15 free; opal and gem dealers, rough and cut opals, raffle, opal symposium, free demonstrations; contact Jim Lambert, American Opal Society, P.O. Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842, (714) 891-7171; e-mail: jlamb777@yahoo.com; Web site: http://opalsociety.org.

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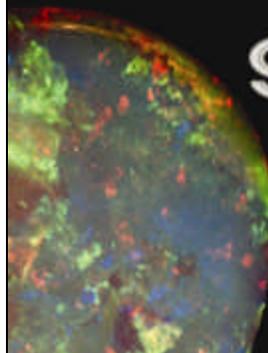
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 Thank you,  
*The Editor*

# The Opal Express

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



**Volume #40 Issue #10  
October 2007**

TO:

**Some Topics In This Issue:**

- Faye McDowell has Passed Away
- Volunteers Needed for Show
- Raffle Donations Needed for Show
- Opal Brightness Workshop Report
- Diving Opal Mines of Dubnik, Slovakia
- "We Call It Morrisonite"
- Bowers Museum Trip Report
- A Gem of a Fossil
- The Backus Opal
- The Many Uses of Gypsum
- Sugilite
- Opals from the Outback

**Important Info:**

**Board Meeting - October 4<sup>th</sup>**

**General Meeting - October 11<sup>th</sup>**

This meeting will be a working meeting for the Opal & Gem Show

**Opal & Gem Show – Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>**

**— GENERAL MEETINGS —**

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

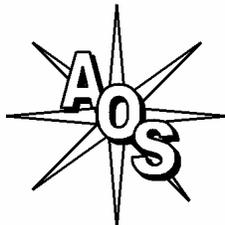
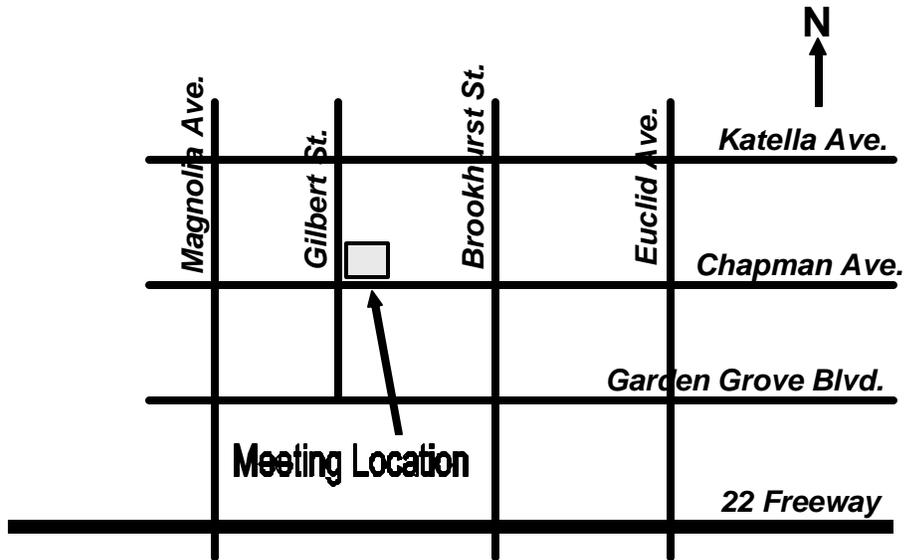
Garden Grove Civic Women's Club  
9501 Chapman Ave.  
Garden Grove, CA 92841

(NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)

**MEETING ACTIVITIES**

Opal Cutting, Advice, Guest Speakers,  
Slide Shows, Videos, Other Activities

## October 11th: Working Meeting for the Opal & Gem Show



## The American Opal Society

<http://OpalSociety.org>

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