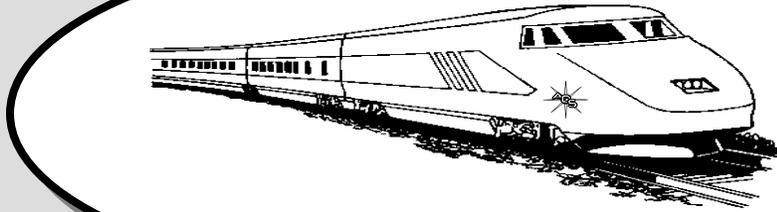


The Opal Express

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Table of Contents:

Presidents Message	1
Members Only Website Password	1
Opal Society Workshop	1
Anaheim Arts Council Raffle	1
Opal Cutting Workshop at Sept. Meeting	1
Opals at Zabriski	2
Humour and Stress Free, Opal Miners Lifestyle	4
The 'Flame Queen' in June Auction at Bonhams & Butterfields	5
Opal Hat Feature of Event	5
Coober Pedy Ranked in SA Quality of Life Index	6
How to Cut and Polish Opal	6
September 2008 Gem & Mineral Shows	7

Presidents Message

By Jim Lambert

Pete Goetz gave an excellent slide show and presentation at our August General meeting on how to enhance the beauty of opal with sugar. Just when I thought that sugar was only something to sweeten up coffee, cakes, candy and doughnuts. Now, we find that it can even sweeten up gemstones. Pete is really one of the finest teachers in the Orange County School system; and he gave all those in attendance a great education about the procedure of "cooking" opal in sugar and acid. Once the process is complete, a black background is created that enhances the play of color in opal. Even though Pete says his slide show is "a work in progress", we believe that it can be used at future events or the Opal and Gem Show in November. Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Pete for a great presentation!

Speaking of "The Show", It is just around the corner on November 1st and 2nd, 2008. Please be ready to volunteer your help. The Board gets very busy during the planning of this very complex event and, in our own humanity, may neglect to personally request individuals for help at the show. Please don't be shy or feel forgotten and walk up to any Board member to ask how you may help. Your help is needed very much and truly appreciated. Especially at the front table! Hope everybody had a great summer - Thank you!

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: "blackopal".

Opal Society Workshop

The American Opal Society's workshop is open at Ball Jr. High School every **Thursday** 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. 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.

Anaheim Arts Council Raffle

September's meeting is the last chance to buy tickets. Also, please bring in all ticket stubs and payment for tickets this meeting.

**It's Coming!!!
Mark your Calendars!**

**The American Opal Society's 41st Annual
OPAL & GEM SHOW**
The Largest Opal Show in USA!
Sat. & Sun., November 1 & 2, 2008
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:

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near the Anaheim Convention Center
For more information, contact:

Gene LeVan

Phone: (562) 621-1805, e-mail: finelblackopal@sprynet.com

Jay Carey

Phone: (714) 525-7635, e-mail: jaycarey@charter.net

Opal Cutting Workshop at Sept. Meeting

The AOS will hold an opal cutting session / workshop at the September general meeting. Multiple lapidary machines (Pixies) will be provided, along with instructors to help members cut their own opal. Free opal will be provided by Australian Opal Imports.

This is an excellent opportunity to "polish" up on your cutting skills and get a free opal!

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Here's another great article from Desert Magazine written in the golden age of rockhounding and when the US desert was a large unknown to most people and traveling to it was a risky journey. Some of the places mentioned don't exist anymore; (e.g. Zabriski and the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad. Zabriski is gone and the area is now referred to as Tecopa. The T&T RR was dismantled for its steel during WWII. The adobe ruins are much smaller. However, the articles descriptions are still accurate, even though they were written almost 70 years ago!
The Editor

Opals at Zabriski

By John W. Hilton

Probably you have never heard of the opal field at Zabriski near the southern edge of Death Valley in California. The gem trade knows little about this deposit for the reason that the stones found in this locality have no commercial value. They are too small. But they are colorful little specimens nevertheless, and make an interesting item for collectors.

My first visit to the Zabriski opal field was many years ago when Max Felker and I made a midsummer trip into Death Valley. We went in over Wingate pass on a day when the temperature was reported at 134 degrees.

As we reached the top of the pass the great below-sea-level basin lay before us with all its white hot splendor. The alluvial fans of the Funeral range extended like gigantic webbed feet with their toes hidden in the shimmering haze that covered the floor of the valley.

We had entered the valley by the hardest route in the middle of August to see what this Death Valley country really was like in the summertime. We soon found out. Every few miles we had to stop and add water to the radiator. We were thankful for the advice of a prospector at Barstow. He told us to take all the water we would possibly need—and then add 10 gallons more.

We reached the flats in the floor of the valley and the fine white alkali dust filtered up through the floor boards and in through the windows. It burned our lips and irritated our nostrils. Behind us it ascended in a white cloud that blotted out all vision in that direction. Before us a quivering lake of quicksilver seemed to cover the road and recede as we advanced.

Suddenly there appeared ahead an object, dark and foreign to the landscape. It wavered for a moment and disappeared, then came in full view again. Our phantom became more distinct as we approached, but still we were unable to identify it. Sometimes it had

the height of a three-story building, and then it would shrink to the size of a man. Finally it emerged from the mirage and we stopped our car beside a high wheeled ore truck that appeared to be deserted.

We called but no one answered. Then I walked around the truck and saw two human feet protruding under the shade of the running board. A pair of shoes and a torn shirt lay on the ground near by.

I called Max and we stood there hesitating. We were both familiar with the tragedy of heat and thirst on the desert—of the victims in a final delirium tearing their clothes from their bodies. That torn shirt had a foreboding look.

Then Max stepped over and nudged one of the feet with his toe. An answering grunt from beneath the truck dispelled our fears. A moment later a sleepy-eyed individual emerged from beneath the vehicle.

"Are you all right?" one of us asked.

"Sure, I'm okay," he answered. "Guess I must have dropped off to sleep. Shore's hot, ain't it?"

"You mean there isn't anything wrong?" Max asked.

"Oh, nothin' serious. Just a flat tire on this crate—and I don't intend to fix it until the sun goes down. You fellows had better crawl under here out of the sun."

It was noon and we got our lunch from the car and accepted the invitation. We washed our sandwiches down with water from hot canteens.

The ore truck we learned was being operated between a lead mine in the Panamints and the railroad at Shoshone. The driver had spent most of his life around the mining camps in the Death Valley region and had a store of experiences to relate.

Eventually the subject turned to gems and when he learned we were interested he began telling us of various deposits in that area. A majority of the places he mentioned were inaccessible at that time of the year, but when he told us there were opals near the old town of Zabriski we began asking questions. We intended to go out by

way of Zabriski and Baker, and this might be an opportunity to obtain opal specimens for our collections.

We learned several efforts had been made to develop the deposit commercially, but that all the gems found so far had been too small. Also, he said the miners had been told there was not much demand for opal because it was a bad luck stone.

The legend that opal is unlucky probably dates back to ancient history when the soothsayers of the period attributed mystic powers to the

gem—but warned that any effort to use it for selfish or evil ends would doom the owner to ill fortune. At a later date it gained disrepute among English speaking people after Sir Walter Scott had used the stone in one of his novels as the symbol of ill omen.

Our truck-driver friend expressed the view that no mere "rock" could affect the lives of people either for good or evil other than the pleasure it gave them because of its beauty. We agreed with his conclusion, and so the discussion ended.

Following our friend's advice we took a siesta under the truck and then with the sun dropping toward the horizon resumed our journey.

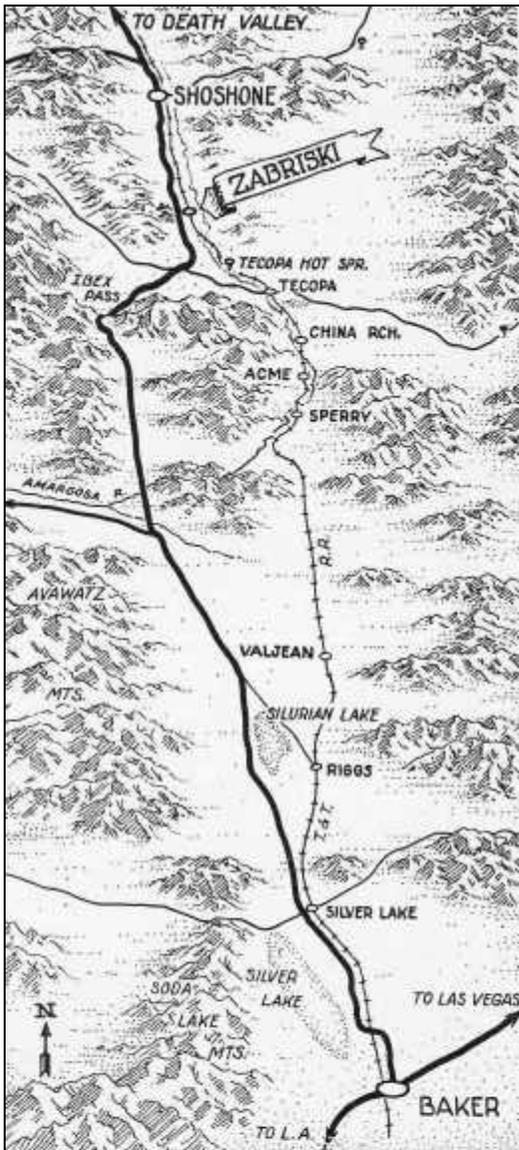
This was before the era of good roads in Death Valley and as we ascended the grade toward Jubilee Pass the going became



On the slopes of this hill, within a stone's throw of the paved highway at Zabriski, John Hilton picked up the opal specimens pictured on page 11. Standing walls of the 0 ld ghost borax camp are seen in the lower left corner.

rougher and the curves sharper. A recent cloudburst had not improved the trail.

As we were climbing the last steep pitch toward the summit the motor coughed and died. We tinkered awhile and then decided to investigate the gas supply. It seemed incredible that we could be out of fuel, but we had not allowed for many miles of low gear driving and the increased consumption due to high temperatures.



Local map of the Zabriski area

breakfast next morning so we could be out in the hills before the sun was too high—but the meager supply of wood at the old borax works wouldn't burn. After losing both time and temper we discovered the sticks were so impregnated with minerals they were practically fireproof.

There was a gallon of gas in the tank, but the pitch of the hill was so steep it would no longer feed to the motor. Then Felker furnished the idea that solved the dilemma. "Let's turn around and back 'er up the hill," he suggested. It worked, and we reached the top of Jubilee pass in reverse.

Since the road from the summit to Shoshone is nearly all downhill we were able to make it without mishap. The thermometer on the porch at the general store registered 124 degrees. The moon had risen by the time we reached the old borax camp at Zabriski. It was a spooky place. The walls of the ghost town, with gaping windows and doors, cast long weird shadows across the borax caked soil. But we wanted to find some of the opals, and so we spread our beds on the ground for the night.

We tried to hurry the

Eventually we warmed our coffee over some brush twigs. later in the day when we returned to camp we found that tie core had burned out of some of the original firewood, leaving a hollow shell of fireproof wood a half inch thick.

If firewood is scarce at Zabriski dishwater is at least plentiful. Although the flowing well water is not fit to drink, it reaches the surface at just the right temperature for use in tie camp kitchen, and



Here is a slightly enlarged picture of the fantastic clay concretions in which the Zabriski opals occur. The gems are not visible until the matrix is broken.

carries so much borax it does a perfect job of cleaning without soap.

We climbed the slope back of the town site and found pieces of clay containing sparkling bits of fire opal. Surely, I thought, if tiny opals are so common in this formation there must be a quantity of larger ones somewhere in the vicinity.

Several hours of hiking in the hot sun failed to disclose any gems of commercial size, however, and we returned to the hillside where we had found the small gems in place in small concretions. We discovered that the prettiest stones were beneath the surface of the ground.

Opal, unlike most gems, is a jell or colloid and as such is capable of gaining or losing water. The surface opals at Zabriski had lost a high percentage of their moisture and were white and opaque. Just under the surface, those not exposed to the sun's rays remain translucent and brilliant.



Here are cross-sections of the opal-bearing concretions after they have been cut and polished. Some of the white deposits shown in this picture are opaque and without luster while others are sparkling bits of fire opal. The figures in the picture are enlarged to one and one-half times the size of the original specimens.

Some of these tiny gems display as fine an array of colors as any of the precious opals of Mexico or Australia.

We noted another interesting fact. Many of these little stones appeared to have crystalline shapes and angles. Now opal, as all the books will tell you, is a silicious jell composed of silica and variable amounts of water—and never, never crystallizes. Yet here were opals with crystal faces on them. Close examination disclosed that some of these gem stones had round holes in their centers, and there were many crystal-shaped cavities with no opal in them, or with only a thin lining of color.

The answer is that these opal "crystals" are pseudomorphs, economies, or replacements of one mineral after another. The

complete story of how this came about would make a fine subject for a thesis in geochemistry. It is possible to reconstruct the general outline of what happened.

The flat topped clay hills of the Zabriski district were once the bed of an ancient playa or dry lake. Erosion slowly is cutting these hills away and the various levels of the lake bottom are exposed on the hillside.

These dry lakes are not always as dry as their name would imply for they catch the cloudburst runoff from the surrounding hills. Soluble salts and minerals from the surrounding highlands are gradually carried down and concentrated in these giant mixing bowls. Water coming from one canyon may bring one type of mineral during a summer cloudburst. A few years later a storm in the headwaters of another canyon may bring to the lake an entirely different mineral that reacts chemically with the first.

Such a series of occurrences no doubt is responsible for both the concretions and the opals they contain at Zabriski. First the concentration of some slightly soluble mineral caused the clay in the lake bed to harden in the shape of weird concretions, and an excess of the mineral formed actual crystals within the newly formed stone. Then came a period of heavy rains which filled the lake for several seasons and so diluted the solutions in the water that the salts which formed in the concretions were dissolved out again, leaving the clay moulds porous with the cavities once occupied by the crystals.

Finally there must have been a period of great chemical activity in the lake during which certain alkaline silicates were broken down to form silicic acid or silica jell which found its way into the cavities and slowly dried to opal. This process must have been repeated several times with slight variations during the history of the lake for there are several layers of opal bearing concretions as well as some which do not contain opal.

Since that first hot trip to Zabriski I have visited the locality many times and have always felt well repaid for the effort. Recently my wife and I made the trip and enjoyed it immensely. The entire route is now paved and the new highway from Baker to Shoshone passes closer to the opal bearing hills than did the old road. The borax well still flows, but the state highway department has drained the water off into the desert on the other side.

Overnight accommodations are available at Baker and Shoshone and the visitor should plan to see Death Valley on the same trip since it is only an hour and a half's drive beyond. This trip can be made in one day from Barstow, but of course more time means more enjoyment. I

I believe I am safe in saying that this is the only place in the world where an inexperienced collector can pick up bits of gem opal within 300 feet of a paved highway.

From The Desert Magazine, FEBRUARY, 1939, Page 9

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Humour and Stress Free, Opal Miners Lifestyle

The opal-miners-lifestyle does not include the people that work at shops, schools and businesses in Lightning Ridge. The opal-miners-lifestyle does not have any nine to five rush, or associated stress.

Most of the [Lightning Ridge population](#) here could be described as life stylers or miners, or a combination of both. Life stylers live here for the stress free life the opal fields offer, and of course miners are here to find opal. There is a blend of both.

In the outlying fields like Grawin and Glengarry, where we are currently mining and living, the world slows right down. Miners please themselves when they work. Some might work three days a week where as others do a full five days a week. Or, like ourselves, we try to work three weeks, seven days a week and then travel to Armidale to visit family for ten days of so.

Grawin and Glengarry both have [golf-courses](#) with a strong and committed membership. Golf is played every Sunday on both courses in the cooler months and hold a serious end of season competition. Of course the greens are not grass but just hard red earth.

Most people who live here have a field car and a town car. The field cars are unregistered and are used to travel around the fields. From their camp to their claim, to the pub, to the shop.

Although the Grawin, Glengarry, Sheepyard Miner's Association maintains the roads around the fields, strictly speaking they are still public roads. The police visit the area occasionally and issue infringement notices as a deterrent to the use of unregistered vehicles on these roads. Most mine trucks are also unregistered.

The opal fields are home to some very colourful characters with names like Smurf, Flooby and Lumby who are hard working miners. They all love a beer and a yarn. I have known these guys for about four years, but I wouldn't have a clue as to their real names.

There is a saying that alcohol is a social lubricant. This is an important part of the opal-miners-lifestyle. As with any small Australian community, there is a lot of gossip and rumours passed around. The only difference here is that most of the stories are about opal, and who is finding it. I have been told several times that someone said I had found a big patch of opal. Of course I would deny it, regardless of whether it's fact or fiction.

Some say the real locals here are the people who stay here right through the summer months when the day temperatures can consistently reach forty-eight degrees and the nights cooling to only thirty-three degrees for weeks at a time.

Trying to work in these conditions is almost impossible. Hot, sweaty, sleepless nights, with no real escape from the heat during the day causes everyone's patience to be very short.

All miners that live on the opal fields live in [camps](#)

This is the name given to their dwelling, regardless of how extensive it may be. Some camps are quite large, comfortable homes, with elaborate solar power systems, and run a generator twenty-four hours a day through summer to keep the air conditioner operating.

The winters are quite mild compared to most parts of the country. I have seen a morning temperature as low as minus four degrees, but the days that follow these cold mornings are quite comfortable. All camps on the field have a wood fire for winter heating.

There is no mains electricity on any of the opal fields except for a very thin power line that runs to the [Club In The Scrub](#) , and [The Hilton](#). These are small country pubs. A lot of camps now have a land-line phone, internet connection, and only quite recently, four television channels and mobile phone signal across most of the fields.

Some camps are on claims with old underground workings beneath them. A fan can be used to suck the cool air from underground to cool their camp in summer, and warm it in winter. Underground temperatures remain stable all year round.

Some camps are not much more than a tin shed or caravan, and use a twelve-volt fan and a hand held water spray to try to keep cool in the summer nights.

You may say a opal-miners-lifestyle sounds very hard, maybe it is. Most people that come here either love the opal-miners-lifestyle or they hate it. Understandably, most miners try to leave the opal fields for at least January to avoid the peak of summer.

Miners and there families who live in the town of Lightning Ridge enjoy all the modern facilities Australian outback towns have.

There is one luxury that very few other towns have and that is the Lightning Ridge [Bore Baths](#)

These are council owned pools that use water from the water bore which is close by. The hot water comes from about 1000 meters underground.

These baths have purported therapeutic value for all types of arthritic ailments. I visit them every time I go to Lightning Ridge and certainly benefit from them. Most miners frequent these pools at least once a week. They are recognized as an important part of the opal-miners-lifestyle.

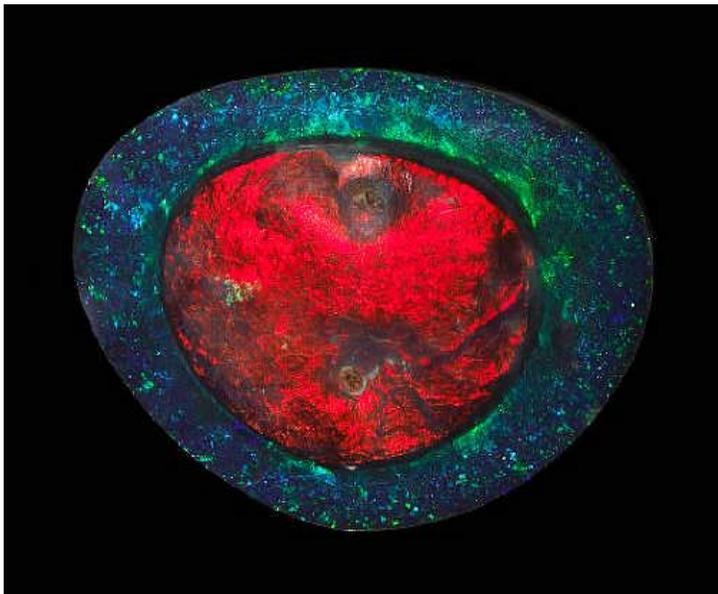
Lightning Ridge, [the-name](#) , has a unique origin. A man, his dog, and 600 sheep were killed in a storm, sometime around 1870.

From <http://www.blackopalbargains.com/opal-miners-lifestyle.html>

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The 'Flame Queen' - World-Famous Opal - in June Auction at Bonhams & Butterfields

International fine arts auctioneers Bonhams & Butterfields will offer in its June 22, 2008 sale of Natural History perhaps the most famous and recognizable opal in the world. Dubbed the "Flame Queen," the legendary stone highlights the core of an opal collection on offer this summer in the auctioneer's first simulcast Natural



The Flame Queen

History sale in seven years – bidding from the San Francisco and Los Angeles salesrooms expected to be competitive.

Extraordinary not only for its large size (263.18-carats), but also for its unusual shape and color pattern, the "Flame Queen" is one of only a handful of large museum-quality opals known to man, even fewer have ever been offered at public auction. The "Flame Queen" is oval in shape with a flat central dome surrounded by a blue-green band – lending it the appearance of a fried egg.

Known to aficionados around the globe, The "Flame Queen" could bring as much as \$250,000, sought after by collectors and connoisseurs alike. It is one of the most prominent examples of the eye-of-opal effect, which is created when an opal in-fills a cavity. A truly magnificent stone, the "Flame Queen" possesses the ability to change color when viewed from different angles.

According to Bonhams & Butterfields' consulting gemologist Claudia Florian, the "Flame Queen" opal was discovered in 1914 at the Bald Hill Workings in Lightning Ridge, Australia by three partners: Jack Phillips, Walter Bradley and Joe Hegarty. Speculating at Lightning Ridge was a risky venture and these miners had begun working the land after another miner had abandoned his plot to fight in WWI.

After completing a tunnel 30-feet down, traditionally "opal level," the dig appeared worthless to Hegarty. The clay revealed none of the telltale color that indicates the presence of gemstones. Hegarty and Bradley then attempted to redirect the digging vertically --a dangerous endeavor that could result in a collapse of the entire site.

Almost 35-feet below the surface, in a 2-foot wide tunnel, Bradley, suffering from lack of ventilation and light, discovered an opal formation known informally as a "great nobby" otherwise described as an opal nodule—a ball that is clay-like in composition filled with opal producing material. He signaled his crew to hoist him up to examine the stone in daylight.

Bradley was the most skilled lapidary of the three partners and was therefore responsible to polish and cut the rough stone. His labors produced a brilliant red-domed raised center surrounded by a strong expanse of green-blue border. Exhausted and broke, the miners sold the stone in 1914 to a gem buyer for a reported £93. At

Auction in 2008, the "Flame Queen" is estimated to bring \$150,000-250,000 on June 22 at Bonhams & Butterfields. Its historic provenance should add some further appeal to an already aesthetic piece—it was on display in London at the coronation of King George VI in 1934.

Also on offer within the opal section of the June sale is a huge 1,397-carat free-form polished "light" opal found in 2001 in a relatively new opal field on a Lambina cattle station not far from the region of Mintabie in a remote part of South Australia. Opal from this renowned location is referred to usually as "Lambina opal"—and this particular specimen is classed as "light opal" as it is better quality than the more common "white opal". This is a category between white and crystal opal in value. Stones of this size, with play-of-color on both sides and without fractures, are very rare. It is estimated to bring \$20,000-30,000 at auction.

The Australian localities of Andamooka, White Cliffs and Koroit are also represented with examples of matrix opal (estimate \$2/3,000), an opal "pineapple" (est. \$40/50,000), and a pure black opal-filled Yowah nut (a type of nodule—estimated to bring \$65/80,000). But perhaps the most astounding lot is an opalized pleiosaur jawbone fragment—truly gemmy in appearance with brilliant flashes of play-of-fire beneath its surface, this example from Coober Pedy, which is expected to fetch \$25,000-30,000. Also from Coober Pedy are examples of opalized clams, both individuals suitable for mounting as jewelry, or an entire "plate" of opalized clams.

Rounding out the section of opals are selections of unmounted stones and jewelry from other localities such as Mexico, Brazil, and the far less frequent domestic examples stemming from Louisiana, Oregon and Nevada.

As long-time pioneers of Natural History sales, Bonhams & Butterfields, with the guidance of Thomas Lindgren and Claudia Florian G.J.G, has expanded the collecting area's strict association with million-year old remnants of plant and animal life or rough mineral specimens, to include rare and unique objects d'art, exquisite jewelry and wearable gemstones as well as exceptional décor. Auction previews open to the public June 13-15 in Los Angeles and continue in San Francisco June 20-22, daily from 10am-5pm until the start of the auction. The illustrated catalog will be available online in the weeks preceding the sale at www.bonhams.com/us.

Editor – We had an article on this Famous Opal in our January 2006 issue. The Flame Queen was sold on 6/22/08 for \$120,000 inclusive of Buyer's Premium.

From <http://www.bonhams.com/cgi-bin/public.sh/pubweb/publicSite.?sContinent=EUR&screen=HeadlineDetails&iHeadlineNo=3470>

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Opal Hat Feature of Event

7/08/2008

The work of Lightning Ridge opal artists has hit the big stage after the world's first million dollar hat was featured at the seventh Australian Opal Exhibition.

The hat was created by Brisbane milliner Ann-Maree Willett and boasts 28 precious Australian opals weighing a total of 1,486.34 carats, which were supplied by Down to Earth Opals, set by Gerd Schulz and carved by Daniela L'Abbate, all from Lightning Ridge.

Nikeisha Richardson, Opal Fashion Bash 2008 Model of the Year, paraded the hat for the media and guests at the exhibition's gala dinner held on Friday night.

Ann-Maree describes her piece 'The Deep Blue Sea' as "a fantasy of hand-blocked Australian wool felt, awash with swaying feathers and bejewelled with Australian opal, inspired by our amazing Great Barrier Reef".

More than 300 visitors attended the exhibition to sample the wares of about 60 exhibitors who displayed the largest range of opal ever seen in one location .

The exhibitors travelled from all corners of Australia, including Lightning Ridge, Coober Pedy, Adelaide, Winton and Quilpie as well as overseas.

The exhibition also hosted several models from the NOMA 2008 Opal Fashion Bash.

Kendal Schuller and Jesinta Campbell-Hogg modeled some amazing, innovative jewellery designs, which will give the industry some excellent photographs of opal jewellery to use for future promotions.



Nikeisha Richardson modeling the world's first million dollar hat.

entertained guests with a bush yarn and revellers carried on until well after midnight.

The 2009 Australian Opal Exhibition will be held on August 6 and 7 at the Gold Coast International Hotel, Surfers Paradise.

From <http://lightningridge.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/opal-hat-feature-of-event/1238174.aspx>

Coober Pedy Ranked in SA Quality of Life Index

A national survey has ranked almost 600 council districts across Australia based on the quality of life of their residents.

Sixty-eight towns in South Australia were surveyed in the BankWest Quality of Life Index.

Among the 10 factors taken into account by the study were crime rates, the number of empty homes in an area, school attendance levels and broadband internet access.

Kimba and Cleve on the Eyre Peninsula were two of the state's best ranked regional towns - with the highest volunteering rates in the country.

Coober Pedy, Port Augusta, Whyalla, Port Pirie and Murray Bridge all finished in the state's bottom 10.

Mount Gambier was ranked just behind Port Lincoln in 385th spot.

According to the study, the Southern Mallee has the best employment level in the state.

The Coober Pedy Council has questioned its bottom ranking in the index.

Australian Opal Exhibition coordinator and Lightning Ridge Miners Association secretary/manager Maxine O'Brien said the Lightning Ridge connection was alive and well at the gala dinner.

Formalities included the announcement of the door and raffles prizes.

Winners on the night were Grand Opal who won their space for free in the 2009 exhibition and Neva and Bruno Ast from Ca-Do Manufacturing who won the \$2,000 travel voucher.

The lucky winners were drawn by our 2008 Opal Queen Rhiannon Chapman.

Local Amanda Moorehouse won the karaoke competition that followed the dinner with several brilliant performances.

We were very lucky to have a surprise guest speaker in celebrity cowboy Troy Dann who

The council's chief executive officer, Trevor McLeod, says the lifestyle enjoyed in the opal mining town is unlike any other in Australia.

"We have an enjoyable lifestyle here in Coober Pedy," he said.

"It may get hot in the summer, but we live in a unique underground style, we have great restaurants, we have a great social life, there is employment through the mining, so I am bewildered by the assertion that Coober Pedy has an extremely low quality of life.

"If they're simply basing it on statistics, then they've got no idea."

From <http://www.abc.net.au/>

How to Cut and Polish Opal

FAQ: How is opal cutting done? How do I cut rough opal?

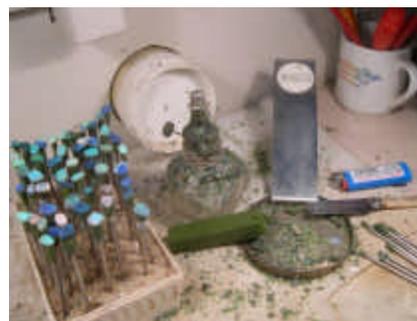
Where can I learn about cutting opals? How is opal polishing done? How can I polish an opal?

Opal cutting and polishing is a very specialised skill. Rough opal is normally purchased from the [opal miners](#) as 'parcels' (Bulk quantities of opal in its rough state). Potential buyers sort through the parcels and try to predict the value of stones which can be produced from the rough material.

However there is never any guarantee, as opal cutting can produce very unpredictable outcomes. Once the opal cutter has sorted through the parcel and decided which pieces are worth cutting, a diamond saw is used to cut the rough opal into 'rubs' (opal in the rough shape of a stone). During this process, any excess material, cracks and potch (colorless opal) is cut off, and the piece of opal is cut into a basic stone shape.

Probably the most basic concept which any opal cutter needs is to keep the stone as large as possible, i.e. minimizing waste and maximizing the end size of the stone.

Each moment of cutting reduces the size of the stone, so control must be exercised. The second basic concept is that opal can be 'burned' or may even crack if subjected to extreme temperatures. For this reason, water must always be used when cutting opal to avoid overheating due to friction. 'Burning' a stone during polishing results in small pits forming on the surface thereby ruining the smooth surface and polish.



After the stone has been cut on the saw by hand, the opal cutter will then normally place the stones on 'dop sticks', consisting of nails or lengths of wood dowling, using heated wax to adhere the stone to the end of the stick. This allows a greater degree of control of the stone on the cutting wheel, especially when the stone is small. The wax is softened on a burner to permit the fixing of the stone, which is first adhered with the face of the stone pointing upwards. The face of the

stone is decided by the opal cutter, considering which side has the best colour, and the best shape for the stone.

The opal cutter then uses a series of diamond grinding wheels (coarse to fine) to shape and perfect the stone. Importance is placed on removing imperfections, such as sand spots, and removing saw marks and rough spots from previous stages. The face of the stone is shaped into a cabochon (dome shape) and the shape is decided depending on the stone (normally oval). Again, maximizing the size of the stone is an important consideration.



The final stage for the face is polishing. Cerium Oxide is used as a polishing agent on a felt wheel with water to give the stone a beautiful polish. If the cutter is happy with the shape, and the absence of scratches, grinding marks or imperfections, he removes the stone and sticks it back on the wax with the back facing up.

The back of the stone is cut on the same set of grinding wheels, this time producing a flat bottom for the stone, and an edge which tapers up to the 'girdle'. The shaping of the girdle is an important and difficult part of cutting, and refers to the point on the side of the

stone where the two top & bottom edges meet. This edge is used by jewelers to set the stone underneath the gold, to provide a secure setting.

Boulder opal can be significantly more difficult to work. The opal forms in tiny cavities in the



ironstone, therefore the seams of opal that run through the boulder can be of very excellent quality but are very thin veins from .25 mm to 20 mm thick. The ironstone is generally left as backing to support the stone.

Occasionally a thick vein is deposited allowing the cutter to cut the opal in cabochon, however frequently the veins are thin and wavy, so the cutter is challenged to cut and polish the piece following the deposition of the opal, resulting in an undulating or baroque surface. Stones are generally cut into freeform shapes, which is dictated by the opal deposition and flaws within the piece.

Ironstone is also significantly harder than opal, (opal is only as hard as glass) which provides another challenge for the opal cutter. Opal will grind much quicker than ironstone, so extra care must be taken when polishing a surface comprised of both materials.

So, now you know how to cut opal! Well, not exactly... this is only a very rough guide, and it takes a lot of practice to cut opal correctly. We recommend that learners get hold of some cheaper rough material to begin with, and to get a feel for the stone.



Cutting and polishing opal is a great skill, and it's also very rewarding to uncover such beautiful colour!

Sources: [Queensland Boulder Opal Association](http://www.queenslandboulderopalassociation.com.au)

From <http://www.opalsdownunder.com.au/articles/cutting.php>

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September 2008 Gem & Mineral Shows

5-7--FERNDALE, CA: 4th annual show, "Wildcat Gem Fest"; Wildcat Gem Society; Humboldt County Fairgrounds, 5th St.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; more than 40 vendors, club displays, classes, gemstones, jewelry, minerals, beads, fossils, opals, jade, handcrafted jewelry and art, jewelry boxes; contact Mike Martin, P.O. Box 189, Miranda, CA 95553, (707) 943-1575; e-mail: mmartin@saber.net

5-7--ONTARIO, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Ontario Convention Center/Exhibit Hall B, 2000 Convention Center Way; 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

6-7--ROSEBURG, OR: Show, "Rocks Under Foot"; Umpqua Gem & Mineral Club; Douglas County Fairgrounds, I-5 Exit 123; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4:30; free admission; dealers, rough, gems, minerals, fossils, beads, jewelry, tools, equipment, books, displays, demonstrators, silent auction, wheel of fortune, geode cutting, raffles, door prizes, gold panning, kids' rock hunt; contact Dave Snyder, (541) 679-7553; e-mail: dwilliams@mcsi.net

6-7--SAN DIEGO, CA: Annual show; San Diego Lapidary Society; Bernardo Winery, 13330 Paseo Del Verano Norte; Sat. 10-4, Sun 10-4; free admission; 40+ vendors, gems, minerals, fossils, beads, jewelry; contact Marty Roks, (858) 717-0121; e-mail: info@sandiegolapidarysociety.org; Web site: www.sandiegolapidarysociety.org

12-14--DENVER, CO: 41st annual show, "Minerals of CO"; Greater Denver Area Gem & Mineral Council; Denver Merchandise Mart Expo Hall, 451 E. 58th Ave., I-25 exit 215; Fri. 9-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and teens \$4.50, children 12 and under free; dealers, minerals, fossils, meteorites, gems, beads, unusual jewelry, gift items, books, lapidary equipment, exhibits, demonstrations, fluorescent room, kids' corner (treasure hunt, gold panning), admission includes CO Fossil Expo; contact Denver Area Gem & Mineral Council, P.O. Box 621444, Littleton, CO 80162, (303) 233-2516; e-mail: info@denvermineralshow.com; Web site: www.denvermineralshow.com

13-14--DOWNEY, CA: Annual show; Delvers Gem & Mineral Society; Woman's Club of Downey, 9813 Paramount Blvd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; free admission; vendors, demonstrations, exhibits, grab bags, boutique, rocks, minerals, gold panning; contact Guynell Miller, 7315 Cloverlawn Dr., South Gate, CA 90280, (562) 633-0614; e-mail: delversrockclub@sbcglobal.net

13-14--WALLA WALLA, WA: 39th annual show; Marcus Whitman Gem & Mineral Society; Walla Walla County Fairgrounds, Community Center Bldg., 9th St. and Orchard; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; contact Warren Rood, (509) 525-0101, ext. 578; e-mail: wwood@coffeycomm.com

18-21--McDERMITT, NV: 5th annual show, "Rockhound Rendezvous"; Diamond A Motel; 140 Hwy. 95 S; Thu. 9-5, Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; dealers, agates, jaspers, opals, petrified wood, jewelry, field trips; contact Illyssa I. Fogel, P.O. Box 437, 140 Hwy. 95 S, McDermitt, NV 89421, (775) 532-8551 or (775) 532-8088; e-mail: rocks@diamondamotel.com; Web site: www.diamondamotel.com

19-21--COOS BAY, OR: Show, "South Coast Rock & Gem Fest 2008"; Far West Lapidary & Gem Society; 4th St. parking lot, across from Outdoor-In Family Restaurant, downtown; Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; dealers, rockhound sales, jewelry, gems, minerals, fossils, rough and finished rocks, tumbled rock, geodes, faceted stones, cabochons, thunder eggs, during the Bay Area Fun Festival; contact Don Innes, (541) 396-5722

19-21--SAN RAFAEL, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Marin Center/Exhibit Hall, 10 Avenue of the Flags; 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

20-21--CASTLE ROCK, WA: 43rd annual show; Southern WA Mineralogical Society; Castle Rock Fair, 110 A St.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; free admission; dealers, door prizes, gem dg, demonstrators, spin table, Country Store, silent rock auction, voice rock auction; contact Diann Thurston, 76254 Delena Mayger, Rainier, OR 97048, (503) 728-6449; e-mail: fwloff@comcast.net

20-21--COOS BAY, OR: Show, "South Coast Rock & Gem Fest 2008"; Farwest Lapidary & Gem Society; 4th St. parking lot, across from Outdoor-In Family Restaurant; Fri. 10-5, Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; dealers, tailgaters, jewelry, gems, minerals, fossils, rough and finished rocks, tumbled rock, geodes, faceted stones, cabochons, thunder eggs, during the Bay Area Fun Festival; contact Don Innes, 54416 Arago-Fishtrap Rd., Myrtle Point, OR 97458, (541) 396-5722

20-21—JACKSON, CA: 8th annual Tailgate Gemboree; Fossils For Fun Society; Kennedy Gold Mine, 12954 Kennedy Mine Rd.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; parking \$2, indoor exhibits, outdoor dealers, rocks, gems, minerals, fossils, live auction Sat., surface mine tours; contact Keith Lindholm, P.O. Box 2484, Fair Oaks, CA 95628; e-mail: fossilsforfun@hotmail.com;

www.geocities.com/fossilsforfunsociety/index.html

20-21—PASO ROBLES, CA: 17th annual show, "Rockhound Roundup"; Santa Lucia Rockhounds; Pioneer Park and Museum, 2010 Riverside Dr., south of the Mid-State Fairgrounds; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; free admission; dealers, exhibits, raffle prizes, youth activities, silent auction, demonstrations; contact Mike Doherty, (805) 466-4061; e-mail: mdoherty@tcsn.net

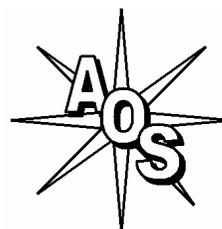
20-21—SAN FRANCISCO, CA: Show, "The Great San Francisco Crystal Fair"; Pacific Crystal Guild; Fort Mason Center, Bldg. A, Laguna and Marina Ave.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; adults \$6, children under 12 free; gems, jewelry, crystals, beads, psychics; contact Jerry Tomlinson, (415) 383-7837; e-mail: sfxtl@earthlink.net; Web site: www.crystalfair.com

25-28—SAN BERNARDINO, CA: Annual tailgate, "Lyle 'Pappy' Strayer Memorial Tailgate"; Orange Belt Mineralogical Society; Western Regional Little League Park, 6707 Little League Dr.; Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; rocks, gems, jewelry; contact Emma, (951) 288-6182, or Al (951) 961-5988

26-28—SANDY (SALT LAKE CITY), UT: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; South Towne Exposition Center/Exhibit Hall 5, 9575 S. State St.; 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

27-28—MONTEREY, CA: 49th annual show; Carmel Valley Gem & Mineral Society; Monterey Fairgrounds, 2004 Fairgrounds Rd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3.50, children free with adult; more than 50 displays, guest and member exhibitors, 15 dealers, jewelry, gemstones, beads, crystals, rough rock, minerals, fossils, equipment, demonstrations (jewelry making, sphere making, rock cutting, grinding, polishing), silent auction, kids' activities; contact Janis Rovetti, 1047 Roosevelt St., Monterey, CA 93940, (831) 657-1933; e-mail: janis12@sbcglobal.net; Web site: www.cvgms.org

27-28—STOCKTON, CA: Show, "Earth Treasures"; Stockton Lapidary & Mineral Club; Scottish Rite Temple, 33 W. Alpine; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$4, children 12 and under free; Touch & See table, silent auction, children's games, dealers; contact Anna Christiansen, 245 N. 6th Ave., Oakdale, CA 95361; e-mail: achrist361@sbcglobal.net; Web site: StocktonLapidaryandMineralClub



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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 #41 Issue #9
September 2008**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Opals at Zabriski
- Opal-miners-lifestyle
- The 'Flame Queen' in June Auction
- Opal Hat Feature of Event
- Coober Pedy in SA Quality of Life
- How to Cut and Polish Opal

Important Info:

Board Meeting - September 2nd

General Meeting - September 11th

The AOS will hold an Opal Cutting Session, with lapidary machines (Pixies), instructors (AOS Experts), and FREE OPAL for cutting (provided by Australian Opal Imports).

COME CUT AN OPAL AND KEEP IT!

— 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)

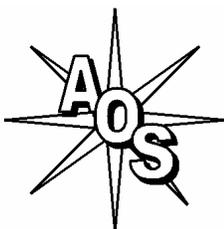
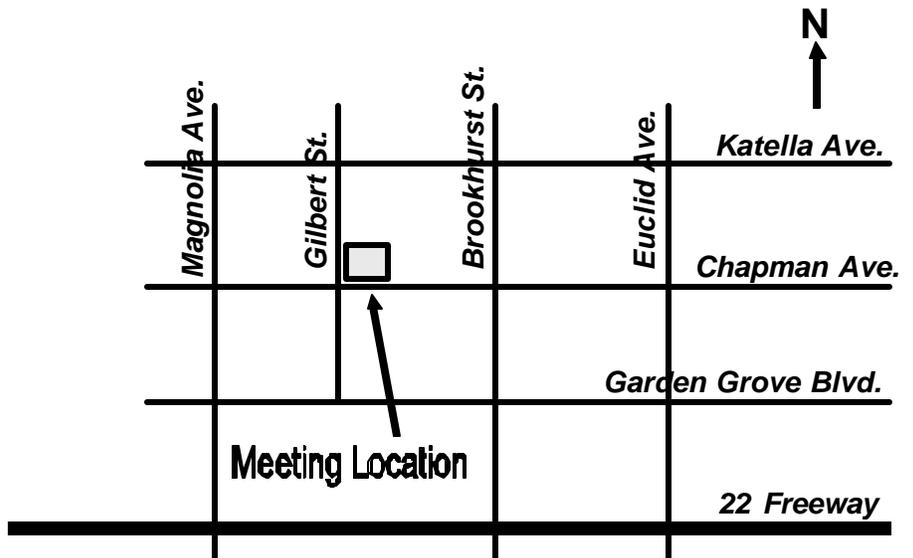
MEETING ACTIVITIES

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

September 11

Hands-On Opal Cutting Instruction

Free Opal Provided for Cutting



The American Opal Society

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