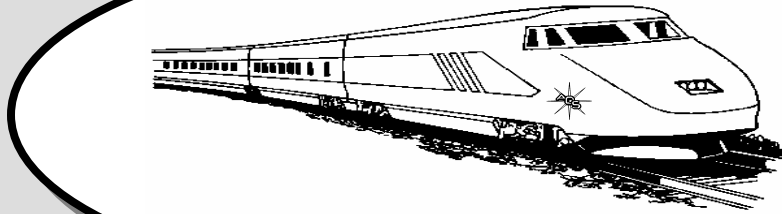


# The Opal Express

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## Presidents Message

*By Jim Lambert*

Our Opal & Gem Show was a great success! We had a great turn out of dealers, thanks to the efforts our show chairman, Gene LeVan. Gene was able to book a full house of dealers; in fact, we had to put one of our dealer in the hallway! Al's Opals, of San Diego, was happy to take the hallway and greet the opal show guests first!

We will be having our **Annual Potluck Christmas Dinner Party** this month. Please come to the December 11th General Meeting at 7:00 pm at the Garden Grove Women's Club, Garden Grove.

We will again have great food and door prizes. This is a **potluck** party, so bring your favorite dish! The main course of turkey and ham for dinner is **free**. See you there!

## 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: "fireopal".

## 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.

## This article is really more geared towards non-opal – The Editor How to Select that Cab from that Slab

*By Alene Innes*

We now have several members that have learned how to cut that cab, and now want to know how to select it. I use a template. A template is made of plastic or metal with squares, rounds, ovals, or other shapes cut out, leaving the center of the hole open so that you can see through it. I find that by using a template as a frame and moving it all over the slab, slowly, I can usually find one picture that appeals to me more so than some other selections. Sometimes the cut I have selected ruins another good picture, so then it becomes choosing one of the two, whichever one appeals to me more than the other. And, at times, I can find only one picture in a whole slab, that I think is worth going after.

At these times, I will waste the whole slab for just one outstanding picture. I use metal templates because they do not wear or warp as the plastic ones do. I use a brass or aluminum marking pencil to outline the "frame" I want to cab. These "pencils" can be made from heavy aluminum or brass wire, or purchased. With expertise, perhaps I wouldn't place so much pressure on the plastic templates while outlining the desired picture, but eventually the plastic will wear. I use all the shapes, squares, rounds ovals, and marquis shapes to search for the scene in the slab. This takes some time, but to get the best, you have to search for it. Usually one can get several cabs from one slab; however, sometimes one picture is worth the price of the whole slab. Normally though, there are several good selections in one single slab and it becomes a matter of taste in selecting the "best" one. Mark it with a #1, and the other scenes in order of preference.

The second thing to remember in choosing your slab is to wet it and watch how it dries. If it dries in "spotty spots", one spot drying faster than another or other spots, remember that these "spots" are too porous to take a polish. The "spotty" spot will either have minute holes or is soft and will continue to undercut and will never take a polish. Undercutting means that it will continue to look dull as you continue to grind it and will never take an even smooth surface.

The last thing to remember is to take it easy in the grinding stage. Experience will show you how light a touch it takes to grind the stone, whether it is grit or diamond, to remove the unwanted material to get a uniform surface on your cab before continuing on to the next step. This will prolong the life of your grinding stones. Hope this helps, and happy cab hunting.

*From Far West Lapidary and Gem; via Breccia, 11/08*

# A Trip through the Opal Fields

By Kath Hobson  
Jun 1, 1999

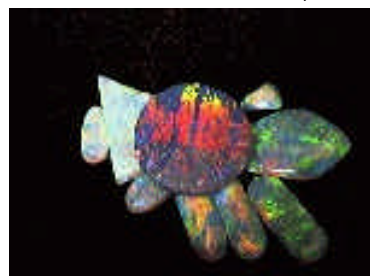
This morning we will head off southwest along the Barrier Highway and across the South Australian border to Peterborough.



This stretch of road is relatively featureless but is dotted with small settlements with weird names such as Cockburn, Mingary, Yunta and Oodla Wirra.

Peterborough is an historic Railway town on the edge of the Flinders Ranges. It was originally named Petersburg but with anti-German feeling running high during World War 1 its name was anglicized.

Three different railway junctions met in Peterborough and it was almost unique in the World as it is one of the few places that has 3 different railway gauges, narrow, standard and broad depending on where the line goes. Unfortunately through some planning genius, and I use that term very loosely, Australia does not have a standard railway gauge across the whole country. So if you cross borders on the train you often have to change trains as well!!! After the arid countryside around Broken Hill, Peterborough is like an oasis so please drink in the sights and smell of the rich pastoral land and the fields of grain as this will be the last we see for some time as we head off into the sunset!! (For the deserts of Central Australia.)

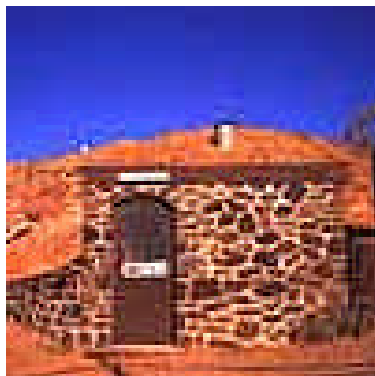


From Peterborough we head north to Port Augusta. Port Augusta has a population of around 15,000. It was first charted by Mathew Flinders in 1802 and has a history of white settlement. It is know as the Crossroads of Australia and is a major export port for wool, minerals and wheat. It is also a

huge power source for most of South Australia with large power houses dotting the surrounding area. Its second major industry is the National Railways. From here we will once again head north to the Red Center via the Stuart Highway. Our next stop will be Woomera.

Woomera is the home of the Long Range Weapons Research Establishment and the Woomera rocket range. Not far from here and part of this sight is Maralinga which was the site of the British nuclear bomb tests .

A little further along but off the main highway is Roxby Downs. It is relatively new town with a population of less than 3,000 and was built mainly to house the miners of the nearby Andamooka mining project. Here at Andamooka they mine gold, silver copper and uranium. Our next stop will be Coober Pedy.



We can expect to see many different and for most of you, unusual types of wild life along this section of our trip. There will of course be many varieties of kangaroos and their smaller cousins the wallabies. There will be emus which can probably run as fast as this bus if not faster and there will be many varieties of snakes and lizards . Among the lizards

you can expect to see the bizarre looking Thorny Devils which as their name suggest are covered in mean looking spikes. You will also see perentie. These lizards are a member of the goanna family

(kind of like a komodo dragon!) they can grow to over 6.5 feet in length, and believe me if I come across one during the next toilet stop I will break all land speed records!

Coober Pedy is 600 miles or 960 kilometers north west of Adelaide (the capital of South Australia). It has a population of around 2,500. It supplies a large part of the world's opal and the first opals were discovered here in 1915. It is Australia's largest and oldest opal mining town and is known the world over for the unique lifestyle of its inhabitants. To escape the heat and dust of this town all the residents live in underground houses known as dugouts. Most were originally opal mines. Even the churches, shops, restaurants and hotels are in dugouts.

Coober Pedy is a very cosmopolitan town with miners coming from all over the world in hopes of striking it rich! Coober Pedy can also be a dangerous place and is not somewhere you wander alone at night. The danger does not come from the inhabitants but rather from the hundreds of untended holes that have been dug by generations of miners in their quests for opals. It is very easy for the unwary to simply fall down one of these abandoned holes never to be seen again! The name Coober Pedy comes from an aboriginal word meaning "hole in the ground" or as the local aboriginals refer to it "white feller's burrows"!! Temperatures here often exceed 104F or 40C for most of the year.



This is where we stop this month, the next tour will take us to the "real" center of Oz, where we will get to play with the Devil's Marbles, dodge road trains, check out magnetic termite mounds and visit Ayres Rock among other things.

Hope to see you there!!.....Hooroo

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## Opal Stories

### The Mystery Opal Miner - Carney Jimmy

About 100 hundred years ago there was an old opal miner in south-west Queensland who was too mean to buy meat. He used to tether lizards and eat them. Also, according to one report, he salted and ate his saddle horse after it died of old age. He was a Scot and a miser, and the only name by which he is known to history as 'Carney Jimmy'. Carney is the bushman's name for the frill-necked lizards that formed part of his staple diet. It is said he had learned to eat them whilst living with the Aborigines.

Jimmy was tight-lipped and never disclosed how much he got out of his mine. Even today there are people who believe a fortune lies buried somewhere on Carney Jimmy's claim. He was as silent a man as ever worked on an opal field; though rumour had it he was well educated. He never volunteered any information about himself, yet he was liked, as far as he allowed anyone to like him.

His accent betrayed his Scottishness and the only letters he received were from Scotland, but no-one ever knew from who. He also received Scottish newspapers and took a solemn interest in the land of his birth – indeed, far more that he took in Australia. His mine, 'The Little Wonder', produced an enormous amount of crystal opal. Since Carney Jimmy's claim joined it, the miners always supposed he had won great wealth too. He was not at all ashamed of his diet of lizards, in fact, he used to say they were very energizing.

He was never known to buy meat, eggs or flour, but once or twice a year he bought a little rice and some tea. In season, he would go eat goanna eggs and he used to boil pig-week, which he called bush cabbage. Jimmy was reputed to be lucky and he certainly worked hard. One of the great differences between him and the other miners was that he worked alone.

To everyone's astonishment, he once accepted an offer to go halves in a partnership with Joe Bridle. They worked a new mine together, the Yellow Nell, and for a while Jimmy lived a more normal life, eating damper and even bacon and eggs. The patch of opal

produced a nice parcel of opal in which Bridle sold his share for \$280, but Carney hung onto his. He was never known to sell opal. When the opal gave out in the mine, Carney drifted back to his solitary life and his tethered lizards.

Curiosity about Carney's secrecy became so great that a close watch was often kept on him. No one intended to steal his opal, at least not whilst he was still alive, they simply wanted to know about it. He was so secretive that no many of the miners often said only the desert stars and dingoes would ever know where he hid his treasure.

Strange noises seemed to come from Carney's claim at night. The most frequent noise was the muffled thud of a pick on sandstone. Often men crept under cover of darkness to see what was going on, but as they got near to Carney's claim, the noises would stop. If Carney had heard something approaching, he had phenomenal hearing. It seemed more likely he had a sixth sense that warned him of people coming to secretly watch him. Yet often, as the intruder left, the thudding would begin again.

Carney also made mysterious night trips on his rather peculiar horse. People on the filed believed he was taking opal to a rendezvous in the darkness. Carney's horse was a brumby of sorts whose breeding had run out many years earlier. He was practically hairless and toothless and in some ways his life bore a resemblance to that of his master.

Like Carney, his horse simply appeared on the field one morning. Nobody knew where he came from and Carney offered no information. The horse had never been in the district before. Generally, Carney kept the horse 15 kilometers away and every now and then would bring him back to camp. Carney always rode him at night on his strange journeys. Was it to sell opal or to hide it? No-one ever found out. Wherever he went his hiding place was not close at hand, for sometimes he would be away three or four days. A few men tried to track him but they always failed.

Eventually, one night the horse died. People said he had long outlived his usefulness and Carney Jimmy had killed him for food. It was certain that about the time the horse died, Carney had a change of diet. A large amount of salted meat was strung out to dry between the mulgas. Carney claimed it was kangaroo meat, but old hands said it was Carney's horse.

He did not outlive his horse very long. Peter Nurra, an Aborigine who seemed closer to Carney than anyone else, found him lying of the ground near his camp. He told Nurra that he had been bitten by a snake, but would be alright as he was going to make strong a strong herbal tea that would 'fix him up'. Carney died near the clump of mulgas to which he used to tether his horse.

So the story of this silent, mysterious Scot ended. Curiosity about his treasure lived on and he had scarcely been buried before his camp was torn apart in the hectic hunt for his riches. Carney had hidden it well, for it was never found. Today, only the desert stars know its hiding place in those lonely, dingo-infested hills.

From <http://www.opalauctions.com/docs/articles/opal-stories>

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**New Endangered Species: The Rockhound**

*By John Martin*

*Public Lands Advisory Committee - South*

The habitat of the rockhound is diminishing at an astounding rate. More and more of its free roaming areas are being gobbled up each and every day by the changing environment. Soon the range of the Rockhound and its offspring the Pebble Pup will become so diminished that extinction will be imminent. As the environment changes, the ecosystem of the rockhound is slowly being replaced by the ecosystem known as "Wilderness", which is a poisonous



dead zone for the Rockhound and Pebble Pup. Soon they will go the way of the Smilodon, the California Grizzly Bear and the now extinct Naugas (which were hunted late in the last century for their hides that were used exclusively in the creation of the Bean Bag Chair).

What can be done to save the ecosystem and the free range habitat of the endangered Rockhound and Pebble Pup? We can do a lot if we ban together and take action now, before it is too late. We need to review all the facts, formulate a plan, distribute the plan and then execute the plan by contacting all of our elected representatives with our facts, figures and recommendations for saving the ecosystem of the rockhound.

Currently before congress there are 4 new wilderness bills and one bill that will make some fossil collecting and ownership a federal crime.

The California Wild Heritage Act and The Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act when passed by Congress could reduce the ecosystem of the rockhound, just in California, by around 3.26 Million acres of new wilderness habitats.

The Paleontological Resources Preservation Act when passed by congress will make the collecting and ownership of vertebrate fossils found on public land (BLM, USFS, and State land) a federal crime with punishment with fines and/or imprisonment. Collecting of these fossils on private land is allowed with the proof of collecting on the holder of the fossils. There needs to be allowances for the collecting, ownership and public display of these vertebrate fossils by the amateur collector without the fear of criminal prosecution or civil legal action. We all understand that significant finds like "Sue" need to be preserved for all to enjoy, but the collection, ownership and public display of smaller finds of non-significant, non-descript vertebrate fossils should be allowed in the legislation.

If we do not get involved and take a proactive approach the above legislation will become law and the Rockhound and Pebble Pups will become extinct just like their ecosystem and free range habitat.

So what can we do? First read the proposed legislation, determine the effect of the legislation in your collecting areas. Inform all of your club members of the urgency of the legislation. Formulate a response with recommendations that are attainable. Write letters to your elected officials and present your case and points. If we do not make our voices heard we will loose the battle of the Rockhound and we will become extinct. We can make our voices heard in Washington by supporting and joining the American Lands Access Association (ALAA) as clubs or as individuals. <http://www.amfed.org/ALAA.htm>

Below are the Bills and their authors with links to the websites where full information on their status can be obtained.

S. 493: California Wild Heritage Act of 2007  
Introduced by B. Boxer [D- CA]  
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-493>

H.R. 860: California Wild Heritage Act of 2007  
Introduced by Hilda Solis [D-CA]

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-860>  
S. 3069: Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act  
Introduced by B. Boxer [D- CA]

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-3069>  
H.R. 6156: Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act  
Introduced by Howard McKeon [R-CA]

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-6156>

H.R. 554: Paleontological Resources Preservation Act  
Introduced by James McGovern [D-MA]  
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-554>

I have copies of all the above bills in MS Word format. If you or your club would like copies please send me a note with your email address and I will send them to you.

From CFMS – 10-08

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# Large Blue Diamond Expected to Fetch about \$15 Million

By Mike Collett-White  
Nov 3, 2008

LONDON (Reuters Life!)

A 35.56 carat 17th century blue diamond, part of the dowry of the Infanta Margarita Teresa on her engagement to Leopold I of Austria, is expected to fetch in the region of \$15 million when it goes on sale in December.



A diamond is held for a photograph in this undated handout image, received in London November 3, 2008. A 35.6 carat 17th century blue diamond, part of the dowry of the Infanta Margarita Teresa on her engagement to Leopold I of Austria, is expected to fetch in the region of \$15 million when it goes on sale in December.

Christie's said on Monday it is putting the Wittelsbach Diamond on to the international market for the first time in almost 80 years.

"The appearance of a large blue diamond, among the rarest of colors, with a history that can be traced back to the 17th Century and 300 years of royal connections will surely be a thrilling occasion for all collectors of ... rare jewels," said Francois Curiel, international head of jewelry.

According to Christie's, King Philip IV of Spain selected the finest gemstones for the dowry of his 15-year-old daughter, the Infanta, upon her betrothal.

This included the diamond going under the hammer at a London auction on December 10.

On the princess's death in 1673, her husband, Emperor Leopold, retained the dowry and the diamond was passed on to his heirs.

In 1722 the diamond entered the Wittelsbach family. It is being sold from a private collection.

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**I saw some polished "bubble" opal for the first time at the Opal & Gem Show. It was quite nice! The Editor**

## Bubble Opal

From <http://www.opalopal.com/showandtell.htm>

These are photos sent in by Tom of some Utah opal material and I copy his words as a description of the opal materials.

Some people have capped it (this opal - Ed. note) with great success due to its opalized nature it does have inherent problems found with opal, fractures and crazing. If you can imagine huge dolomitic boulders in volcanic ash being dissolved by acidic hydrothermal solutions and then replacing the nodules with silica from a rhyolite cap over the ash layer and mineral rich water full of Magnesia and Fluorite. You end up with silica and water.

Here are three pics of the same piece of some bubble opal (satin flash) not the candy stripe or bacon rind as we call it. I have also included pics of the opalized nodules. I am sure people will be able to tell the difference between the satin bubble opal and the other.

I couldn't resist sending these pictures as well of a beautiful purple opal nodule I cut and polished. Tom"

Many thanks, Tom for sending all of the photos. I really enjoyed seeing them. Purple is one of my favorite colors.

From <http://lists.drizzle.com/pipermail/rockhounds/2006-September/019533.html>

Catherine Gaber [bg@his.com](mailto:bg@his.com)

Sep 22, 2006

Can anyone point me to a website, book or article about bubble opal from Utah? if not, locality anyone? or anything else? thanks, Cathy

Grant Johnston [roughrock@gmail.com](mailto:roughrock@gmail.com)

Sep 22, 2006

There are some photos here. Not much info but good pics.

<http://www.opalopal.com/showandtell.htm>



Bubble Opal

Mr EMan [mstreman53@yahoo.com](mailto:mstreman53@yahoo.com)

Sep 22 2006

Hello Cathy,

I haven't had time to google it but I have also heard this referred to as "bacon" or "bacon rind" opal. The photos from the site Grant posted appear to be the same material as I seen called such.

EJ

Margaret Malm [kadok@infowest.com](mailto:kadok@infowest.com)

Sep 23 2006

Hi, Cathy --

If it really is bacon rind opal you are talking about, I have found some (rather poor quality) some years ago north of Milford, off the road that goes (east) over to the geothermal power plant. It was on a minor side road that turned off to the south.

The story we got was that the landowner had buried the good stuff to keep it from being stolen. (I was with a Geology class, and we had permission to look there.)

Margaret

jabac [jabac@hal-pc.org](mailto:jabac@hal-pc.org)

Sep 23 2006

The "bacon rind" and "bubble opal" are found on BLM land in the Black Rock Desert in Millard County. The road just North of Milford, leading East, is easy to find. The area is rife with obsidian and pitchstone, which is the reason most people go there I would

guess. The opal location is quite extensive and was or is a claim of the Utah Gem Society (name?) in Salt Lake City.

It can be found by following the road towards the geothermal plant to where it makes a rather sharp drop or dip to the left. Just before this is a slim but passable road leading right at an acute angle to the main road. After a few hundred yards one can easily see the opal in a long rising or small ridge.

The quality varies quite a bit. Most is in layers of honey brown and cream (hence bacon) but other hues occur including purple and red. Almost none of it shows the mixed flash of precious opal, but it is an interesting material nonetheless. I collected about three gallons of it easily in about two hours. It cuts and polishes well but crazes a lot so that large pieces are hard to work up.

Refer to James R. Wilson's "A Collector's Guide to Rock, Mineral, & Fossil Localities of Utah" which is by far the best published source for Utah.

It would be prudent to contact the Salt Lake club to gain permission, and perhaps throw a few bucks into the kitty for upkeep and maintenance. The area is clean and it would be nice to keep it that way.

If one follows the main road past the geothermal plant to just where it joins the mountains, there is obsidian a-plenty of fair quality. There is better quality material elsewhere in the desert but watch out for claims...and this is free by the bucket-full as well as very easy to get to!

John

Steve & Marilyn [smtravis@plateautel.net](mailto:smtravis@plateautel.net)

Sep 2006

There is an article about in a 1962 lapidary Journal I think I'll look it up and give you the date and location.

Keep on Rockin'

Steve

Steve & Marilyn [smtravis@plateautel.net](mailto:smtravis@plateautel.net)

Sep 25 2006

The March 1986 Rock and Gem has an article and map of where the "Bubble Opal" is found on page 36 The map says 5 miles north of Milford Utah then angle right E. on a dotted line (I assume unpaved road 6.0 more miles N.E. to a little hill running north south and the opal is supposed to be on the south end of the hill. It also shows a steam power plant a little further down the unpaved road on the north side (opposite side) of the road of the hill. All the best - Keep on Rockin'.

Steve

## A Guide to Mexican Opal

By [opalbuyer](#) of Ebay

As a radiologist, writing a review on Mexican opals was perhaps the last thing I expected to be doing, but having fallen in love with this most beautiful and diverse of gemstones, and given the paucity of information available about this amazing gem on the internet, I have set about acquiring a collection of these stones on Ebay and have recently visited a Mexican opal mine. (see user ymcomp's listings for details of this amazing trip). I thought I might share some of the knowledge I have acquired to help other users understand this amazing gemstone.

This guide may be of particular interest to those familiar with Australian opal who want to find out more about Mexican opal.

### About opals

Most people are more familiar with Australian opal than the Mexican variety. Opals consist of veins of silica which are found in the host matrix rock. In the case of Australian opal veins of opal are often found in ironstone which may be polished along with the opal to produce boulder or Koroit opal. Mexican cantera opal, which is the equivalent of boulder opal, is found in pale rhyolite matrix which is softer than the opal itself. The play of colour seen in all types of opal depends on the arrangements of the microscopic spheres of

opal silica which diffract the incident light. If the arrangement of these spheres is haphazard there is no play of colour and the opal is referred to as potch opal. A regular arrangement of the spheres is required to produce a play of colour. The size of the spheres determines the colour, with smaller spheres producing the red hue, and larger spheres the purple colour. The colour play in Mexican opals is often strongly dependent on the intensity of the light in which the stone is viewed, the more valuable stones have colour play in dim light and the colour play often takes the form of a rolling flash.

Mexican opal mines exist all over Mexico, many are near the town of Magdalena, where several Mexican opals are sold. One of the largest opal mines is the San Martin mine which produces almost all of the types of Mexican opal described below, many newer mines are appearing all the time and there is much unexplored territory in Mexico which may yet yield opals.

### Types of Mexican opal - not an exhaustive list

The terminology is confusing as the same terms cannot be applied to Mexican opal as Australian opal.

#### Mexican Fire opal

This term often produces some confusion. Mexican fire opals are clear crystal opals prized for their base colour, which in the most sought after of stones is either deep orange or red. These stones do not have any play of colour, (in contrast to Australian fire opal, the term here is used to describe opals whose play of colour is predominantly of red colour). These stones are often found near the surface in an opal mine.



Mexican Fire opal

#### Flash opal



Flash opal

These stones are crystal opals with colour play. I have seen this group of opals referred to as water opals (there is play of fire in these stones but the base colour is clear), or as crystal opals (although the fire opals also fit into this description). The base colour of these stones may vary and many of the particularly prized stones are clear or orange in base colour. The intensity of the colour play determines the value, as well as the size of the stone.

These stones are also found near the surface of an opal mine, and are usually free of rhyolite matrix.

The physics of the colour play is explained above. Purple colour play in stones is the rarest and these command the highest prices (in contrast to Australian opals in which red colour play is most prized).

There is a variant of this form of opal which looks much like Australian opal and looks very attractive, from the La Nayarita Mine in North Mexico.

#### Cantera opal

These stones are comparable to Australian boulder opal and its origins are similar. These are found as small pockets or seams/veins of opal associated with rhyolite matrix, the host rock, which is softer than the opal. The word cantera refers to the host matrix. Like boulder opal and Koroit opal, these stones were not initially as prized as the pure cuts but cutters and buyers of both Koroit/boulder and cantera opal came to appreciate the attractiveness of the matrix



Cantera opal

cut and polished with the opal. Mexican opal often requires a dark background to bring out the colour play and the cantera although in some cases quite light, provides a natural backing to the opal, call it a natural doublet-like effect if you will. The most stunning cantera opals have a pool or "eye" of central opal within the matrix.

These stones are found deeper in the mine. If the cantera or matrix is cut away completely the stone will appear like a flash opal. These opals are difficult to

mine as the rhyolite cantera can be very hard, and they are found by laboriously breaking the cantera by hand and looking for veins of opal.

### Contraluz opal

This refers to a property of both Mexican and Australian opals where when illuminated from behind, the stones develop a brilliant colour play. This effect is rare and it will require the breakage of several tonnes of matrix to get a few of these stones. Flash opals can demonstrate this Contraluz effect.



Contraluz opal

### Mexican black opal

These opals are extremely rare and are seen as an extremely small percentage of Mexican opal. They are extremely valuable.

### Jelly opal

As with Australian opal, this refers to a cloudy translucent stone, with or without colour play.

### Carbonera opal

The opal from the Carbonera mine is similar to Andamooka matrix opal and Honduran black opal, and has small flashes of opal within a basalt type dark matrix.

### Pink opal

From the Rositas mine, these opals are pink and show no colour play. They are particularly prized by the French.

### Synthetic Cantera Opal

Man made cantera opals are starting to appear on the market. The matrix is man made and is resin based. These stones can be quite attractive but the cantera does not feel the same as that of authentic cantera opals.



Synthetic Cantera Opal

### The Market

Mexican opals are particularly prized by the Japanese and Germans to whom the stones of the highest quality are exported. The French are particularly keen on pink opal. Some people remain suspicious of opal, it is considered by some to be unlucky and others to be lucky. It was thought that the the diamond industry was responsible for the labeling of opal as unlucky as it felt threatened by the emergence of the opal as the most brilliant gemstone showing all colours of the rainbow. This is thought to have stuck with various cultures.

### Valuation

Similar variables are of importance as in Australian opal, and more detailed literature is available elsewhere: the important variables include:

Intensity of colour play (the most valuable gems show bright colour play in even dim light)

Spectrum of colour play - as described above purple colour play is most rare and prized

Pattern of colour play - special patterns such as harlequin and pinfire patterns also exist in Mexican opal and are prized.

Size of the stone - of course in combination with other factors, a 100 carat patch opal is not worth much!!!

Cracking and crazing may reduce the value of a stone dramatically. Some types of Mexican opal are unstable so the length of time the stone has been kept may be important when buying your stone - ask your seller!

Rarity is obviously also very important, Mexican black opal is very rare and the Contraluz crystal opals are also scarce.

Darkness of the base colour is not an issue in Mexican opal, unlike Australian opal, this is probably because most types of Mexican opal are crystal opal. There is no grading of this, in contrast with Australian.

Cut (see below)

### Types of cut

#### Cabochon cut

All of the above varieties can be cut in this manner (see pictures above)

#### Faceted stones

Fire and flash opals can be faceted, these forms are prized for jewellery (see pictures above)

#### Carved stones

Carving an unusually shaped stone can greatly increase its yield. Carved opals are often called freeforms. Cabochons can be referred to as freeforms too, these are stones not cut into a regular shape.

#### Buying Mexican Opal on Ebay- tips

Many of the same tips apply to purchasing other gemstones too:

Mexican opal is very difficult to photograph particularly as the play of colour is very dependent on the lighting conditions. Read the description carefully in terms of the lighting, how was the picture taken? Most Mexican opals are photographed in artificial light with a digital camera. Shining the light through the stone can enhance its appearance.

Read the listing carefully. Some undesirables might be in very small print - doublet is often put in small letters at the bottom of the listing in Australian opal. The stone may be greatly magnified and look great on the photo but when it arrives it's tiny! Look at the carat weight it's not always in a prominent place.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell what the quality will be until you have bought a few items off a seller. I buy most of my items off about half a dozen good sellers from whom the quality is always high. I started by buying a few gems off them and buying in higher quantities when I knew what I was going to get and got to know the seller. Good sellers are very keen on repeat custom and will communicate attentively with you and even provide freebies.

Feedback is obviously very important and lots is written about this elsewhere. My tips are **read it all!** Some buyers will leave quite negative comments under the guise of positive feedback to avoid damaging their own buying profile.

A feedback score several multiples below the total number of items sold is very good and means that people are repeat buying. For example if a seller has a score of 500 and has sold 3000 items, each customer has bought six items on average - a happy bunch of



Carved stones

customers! I think personally that this is even more helpful than the percentage positive.

Use the guide above for valuation of your stone before bidding. A large stone is not necessarily a good one. Cracking and crazing reduces the value of a stone markedly and look for this in the photograph as it is often evident. Many cantera opals do have natural fracture lines and are still very attractive, though. Sometimes you won't know the true colour intensity till your package arrives - so if it is a new seller, try a few items, if you like what you got, buy more next time.

Some real bargains can be had in the 99 cent listings and as you gain more experience you will be able to spot bargains! There are stones worth thousands of dollars with a 99c start, I have bought some myself! The buzz of snaring a bargain keeps us coming back! I think it is risky buying any very expensive gem without some previous experience of the seller - I've been ripped off before (not in the Mexican opal market!).

It may be worth asking how long the gem has been stored for - if it has been stable and not cracked for several months, it is unlikely to crack or craze subsequently. Some sellers guarantee their stones.

Back to the stones...

#### **Doublets and Triplets**

The same terminology here as for Australian opals. Doublets are opals with dark backing material (which may or may not be opal) attached to bring out the color play. Triplets are precious opal sandwiched between a dark backing material behind and clear material at the front to protect the stone.

Doublets are generally worth more than triplets and both are worth far less than a comparable solid stone.

#### **The Mine Trip**

I have just returned from an amazing trip offered by ym company (Ebay user=ympcomp) to visit an opal mine in the Guadalajara area, and learn how to cut stones. It has been immensely educational and we were extremely well looked after by our extremely kind host. I would highly recommend this trip to anyone who has any interest in Mexican opal.

Ympcomp is my personal favourite seller and offers all of the gems described above.

He has opened a new site called mundogem in which there are many more stones.

From [http://reviews.ebay.co.uk/A-guide-to-Mexican-Opal\\_W0QQuqidZ10000000001440303QQ\\_trksidZp3286.c0.m17](http://reviews.ebay.co.uk/A-guide-to-Mexican-Opal_W0QQuqidZ10000000001440303QQ_trksidZp3286.c0.m17)

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### **Opal Lore**

*By Richard Busch (FGMS Member)*

Perhaps no other gemstone has been as loved and as feared over the centuries as opal. Opal of ancient times, known as Hungarian opal, came from Marmaros in the Nagy-Banya district of what is now Czechoslovakia. The colors scintillate on a white or pale-tinted background, and so this variety, which is also found in Australia, Honduras, and many other countries of the world, is called white opal.

In startling contrast to white opal is the black opal of Australia and Nevada. Against a curtain of dark blue, gray, or black, the opal colors flash in incomparable richness, glowing like a "smothered mass of hidden fire." The black opal from Nevada and Australia is found replacing fossil wood, shells of sea animals, and the bones of extinct reptiles which lived in the days when dinosaurs ruled the earth. Most opal occurs in thin seams in the rock.

The ancient Arabs believed that opals fell from the heavens in flashes of lightning, acquiring their marvelous colors in the process. The ancient Greeks felt that the opal gave foresight and the gift of prophesy to the wearer.

To the Romans, opal was the symbol of hope and purity. In fact, Pliny, the ancient Roman scholar in about 70 A.D., wrote that opal had the fire of the ruby (or the carbuncle), the brilliant purple of the

amethyst, and the sea green of the emerald all shining together in incredible union. Opal was thought to prevent disease and to strengthen one's sight. Opal also provided the spirit of truth and the perfection of beauty. It is reported that the Roman Senator Nonius chose exile rather than surrender a large opal to Marc Antony.

Until three or four centuries ago this stone was thought to combine all the virtues of the various colored stones whose hues are united in its sparkling light; however, during the Black Plague in the 14th century opal took on an evil connotation, as it was thought to lose its luster when its owner died of the plague. Opal is thought to be a good thieves stone in that it makes one invisible. It is also thought to preserve blond hair. The birthstone for October is opal.

The fear of damaging an opal is not entirely fair to the species since no gemstone is indestructible. Opal is a bit softer and more fragile than most gemstones, but with proper setting and ongoing care, an opal can last a lifetime. Here are some tips. Generally, the thicker the opal, the better. Look for settings that protect the opal, such as bezel settings where the metal holds the stone all the way around its edges. Prong settings should be avoided.

Because opals contain water, they are prone to drying out which causes them to craze. Avoid storing opals in a bank safe deposit box. The atmosphere in bank vaults is purposely kept dry in order to protect papers. Unfortunately, this climate hastens the drying (and destruction) of precious opal.

When purchasing opal, it is best to buy from a reliable dealer and look for material that is at least one year old since, if the material was prone to crazing, it probably would have occurred by then. When working opal, keep the stone wet and cool to prevent it from shattering.

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From <http://fgms.home.att.net/opalore.htm> Lithosphere (May 1995); Fallbrook Gem and Mineral Society, Inc.; Fallbrook, CA

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### **December 2008 Gem & Mineral Shows**

5-7--SAN RAFAEL, CA: Show, "The New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Marin County Fairgrounds, 10 Avenue of the Flags; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; seminar on "How and Where to Pan for Gold," certified gemologist and appraiser on duty; contact Gerald Fisher, 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (760) 961-2728; e-mail: gefisher39@aol.com; Web site: highsierrainvestments.net

5-7--SPRING HILL, FL: 34th annual show; Withlacoochee Rockhounds; Slovene American Club, 13383 County Line Rd.; Fri. 9-5, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; adults \$3, teens \$1, children 12 and under free; minerals, gemstones, fossils, demonstrations, handcrafted jewelry, lapidary equipment, gem and mineral auction, Aaron's Breastplate replica, famous diamond replicas; contact Jerry Johnson, 387 Martina Dr., Spring Hill, FL 34609, (352) 688-7810; e-mail: Hisnibs@earthlink.net

6-7--ARCATA, CA: Show, "The 3rd Northwest Crystal Ball"; The Northwest Crystal Conservatory; The Portugese Hall, 1185 11th St.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-6; adults \$2, children free; contact Jeffrey Wigginton, 3144 Broadway, Suite 4159, Eureka, CA 95501; e-mail: rift1976@yahoo.com

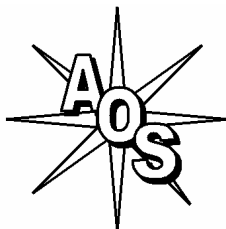
12-14--COSTA MESA, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; OC Fair & Event Center/Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

12-14-DENVER, CO: Show, "New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Denver Merchandise Mart, 451 E. 58th Ave.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; free seminar on "How and Where to Pan for Gold," certified gemologist and appraiser on duty; contact Gerald Fisher, 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (760) 961-2728; e-mail: gefisher39@aol.com; Web site: highsierrainvestments.net

12-14-LONGMONT, CO: Annual show; Flatirons Mineral Club; Boulder County Fairgrounds Exhibit Bldg., 9595 Nelson Rd.; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 10-4; adults \$5, children free with paid adult; 15 dealers, gems, rocks, minerals, jewelry, lapidary equipment, exhibits, demonstrations, speakers, classes in wire-wrap, bead-stringing, silversmithing, kids' gold panning, scavenger hunt, mineral identification game, and dig site; in conjunction with the Boulder Model Railroad Club Annual Show Dec. 13-14; contact John

Hurst, 2863 Nebrina Pl., Boulder, CO 80301, (303) 443-7885; email: john.hurst2@comcast.net; Web site: <http://bcn.boulder.co.us/community/fmc/>  
19-21-SAN DIEGO, CA: Show, "Gem Faire"; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center, 1895 Camino del Rio S; 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](http://www.gemfaire.com)

19-21-VENTURA, CA: Show, "New Jewelry, Gem, Bead, & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Ventura County Fairgrounds, 10 W. Harbor Blvd.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; free seminar on "How and Where to Pan for Gold," certified gemologist and appraiser on duty; contact Jerry Fisher, 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (760) 961-2728; e-mail: gefisher39@aol.com; Web site: [highsierrainvestments.net](http://highsierrainvestments.net)



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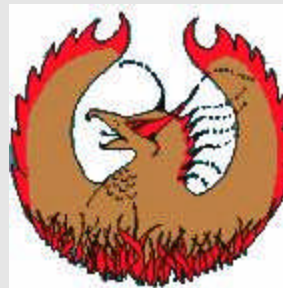
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**NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:**  
 PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname, or name of your opal related business.

**MEMBERSHIP ROSTER and NEWSLETTER MAILING:** The AOS publishes a membership directory once per year in its Newsletter, the *Opal Express*. Your name will be included. Please check what additional personal information that you want listed for other members. If it is different from the information above, please note that on the application.

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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

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



**Volume #41 Issue #12  
December 2008**

### Some Topics In This Issue:

- How to Select that Cab from that Slab
- A Trip through the Opal Fields
- The Mystery Opal Miner
- Endangered Species: The Rockhound
- Large Blue Diamond to Fetch \$15M
- Bubble Opal
- A Guide to Mexican Opal
- Opal Lore

### Important Info:

**Board Meeting - December 8<sup>th</sup>**

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

## Annual Potluck Christmas Dinner Party

Please bring your favorite dish!

There will be a raffle and Door prize!

The main course of turkey and ham for dinner is FREE.

### — 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

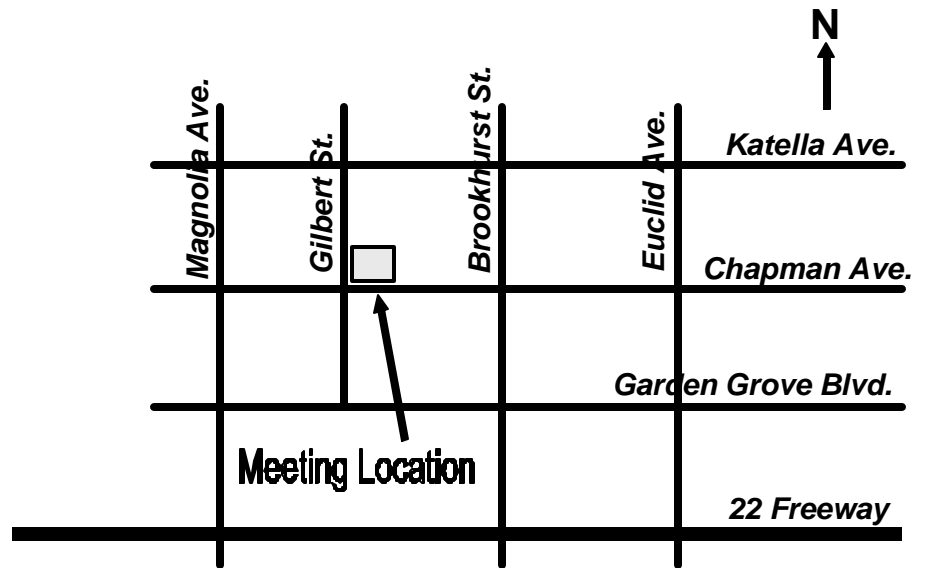
Opal Cutting, Advice, Guest Speakers,  
Slide Shows, Videos, Other Activities

TO:



# December 11

# Christmas Dinner Party!



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