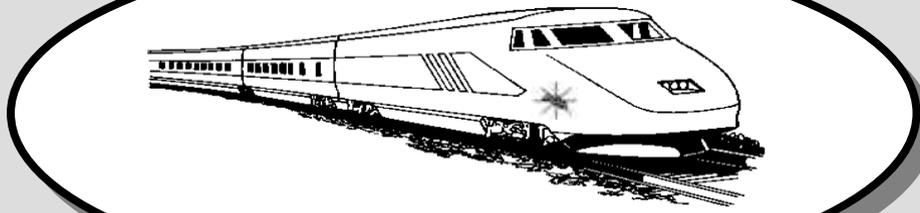


The Opal Express

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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: "boulder".

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.

Stan McCall to Speak at February 12th General Meeting

Expert Jewelry Maker Stan McCall of Custom Creative and AOS VP will give a mystery lecture concerning jewelry making. Don't miss Stan's presentation on the AOS's new projector!

Australian Opals - A Primer

By Gary Hocking

What has attracted people to opals over the centuries? Colour, colour and more colour! Opals change colour when you look at them from different sides and angles. Sometimes there is little colour at all and you move your head and suddenly a breathtaking burst of brilliant colour flashes from the stone. There are very few natural gemstones which do that.

Unless you are lucky the more you pay the better the quality is. But you can still get the high flashy colours for a lower price if you
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The American Opal Society

buy doublets or triplets. These are opal pieces reinforced with a solid backing of colorless opal. A triplet has a clear dome of quartz or other material on top.

Opal starts off as a silica gel which seeps through sedimentary strata and gradually hardens over millions of years and the process of nature. As an opal miner I have occasionally seen opal in this early stage where it is soft. Opals contain a lot of water as much as between 3 and 10 percent. On the Moh's scale of hardness it comes in around 5.5 to 6.5 and that is relatively soft.

Australian opals are classified in several groups:

Black opals which come from the Lightning Ridge area in NSW.

White opals and light opals which come from the Coober Pedy region in South Australia. These types also come from notable areas such as Mintabie and Andamooka.

Boulder opals come from Queensland.

Then there are some other minor areas which produce smaller amounts of high quality opal.

Black opals have a dark base and white opals have a white base whereas Boulder has opal which is on top of or through an ironstone base.

Then you get various levels of blackness you might say. So you might get an opal from either Lightning Ridge or Coober Pedy which has a grey base. That means that the stone has flashes of perhaps bright red and blue or other colours mixed inside of a grey base colour. This grey base might be light grey or almost black. When it reaches a very dark colour we normally call that a black opal. It is like some children's' marbles that you see.

Then we have Crystal opal. Crystal is transparent but the colours can leap out at you from this clear, see through base. We also have varying degrees of crystal opal. When we cannot see clearly through the crystal then we would classify it as semi crystal.

What does it cost? It is very difficult to say what opal is worth. We can weigh it and measure it but that doesn't help until we can establish the quality. We look for the best pattern in the opal, the brightest colour and the most vibrant colour. Red is generally the most expensive colour. However, a small bight, vibrant green stone will command much more than a larger dark and dull red stone. Since every opal is so different to the next it is very much a personal opinion. Of course, people with experience will easily point out the major characteristics of a good or not so good opal

From http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Gary_Hocking.

How History Is Changed

By Stephen & Mary Aracic

Are we just as guilty of standing aside and letting others reshape history for us by changing original names of mines, putting opal fields in wrong locations or wrongly classifying opal?

For instance, if you turn to p11 of a recent book, Opal: The Phenomenal Gemstone a picture of a specimen of Queensland boulder opal is incorrectly classed as Lightning Ridge opal. The caption states, "Layers of precious and common dark opal formed in this 12 cm long section of opal seam from Lightning Ridge, New South Wales, Australia. New research indicates that the type of opal seen in each layer reflects changes in the viscosity of the opal gel. The specimen is courtesy of the California State Mining and Mineral Museum; Photo by Jeff Scovil."

How could such a specimen with ironstone backing be described as Lightning Ridge opal when it's obviously not?

And do we laugh when we read in a nice colourful little book Opals - from the Fred Ward Gem Series (First printed 1997) which says "Quilpie is normally a hard three day dirt road drive from Sydney" a journey that becomes halved in a Revised edition printed in 2000 which says: "Quilpie is normally a one-and-a-half day drive from Sydney." But no mention is made of dirt roads in that edition.

The books are beautifully presented and are a credit to him, so perhaps the author ought to be forgiven for thinking, when researching for his books, that he'd brought the dirt road with him from Sydney, as he'd stepped off a chartered plane on "a private dirt strip in the middle of a large sheep station 50 miles from nowhere."

Of course we all know that Australia has some of the best sealed roads in the world. But it is thanks to miners like John & Gem Kelly in Queensland, who way back in the 1970's discovered the original Hammond's Mine. And this is how it happened.

They found evidence of an old campsite and a few shafts and trenches dug into the hillside by the old timers. It caused some confusion back then when the Kelly's sought to register their lease in the mining office. You see a miner had randomly named all the mines on Yeppara out of the early mines report. As a result he didn't get many of them right. Consequently some miners who had registered a mine as Hammond's had to be convinced otherwise by checking into the old records at the local Mining Warden's Office using the directions given.

Finally it was agreed that the mine discovered by the Kelly's was in fact the real Hammond's Mine. John pegged claims over the area and in 1974 he secured a Lease there. This puts John Kelly as being the second real owner since Ned Hammond leased it before the turn of the century (1880's). Thus a lovely bit of history is rightfully restored. (See p 305 Rediscover Opals In Australia, 1990)

But how do we put The Pride of the Hills Mine back into its rightful location, on Glen Valley property when, according to a beautifully illustrated book A Journey with Colour - A History of Queensland Opal - 1869-1978, published in 1998 by Len Cram and as evidenced by a picture on p31, he puts The Pride Of The Hills conveniently, albeit incorrectly, beside the road to Duck Creek.

The same picture features again on p4 of Beautiful Boulder Opal: the Exquisite Gem released in 2003 also by Len Cram under the heading "The Pride of the Hills. Australia's oldest opal mine, first registered in 1871." It goes on to say on p7 "For those who appreciate historical sites, this original lease is well worth a visit, as it's perfectly situated long side the Quilpie to Duck Creek road. The ideal plan would be to make a day's outing to Duck Creek opal field and back, and as a bonus, stop over at Pride of the Hills. You can't miss it; It's the only big mine on the road. Remember it's a mine, so use a lot of common sense, otherwise, don't stop."

Such good advise, but wrong mine. Coparella is the first field encountered on the Duck Creek road. Then comes Lushington's a short distance around the bend on the left and Brodie's Hill is on the right side of the road, just before Lushington's Mine.

Now according to the Jackson Report (featured in my book Rediscover Opals in Australia page 365) The Pride of the Hills is

located 12 miles NW of Duck Creek or 13 miles E of Toompine. And Lushington's Mine is 6 mile N of Pride of the Hills. Surely a government geologist like C.F.V Jackson wouldn't get locations wrong when he visited the fields back in 1901.

Anyone that has been to The Pride of the Hills will tell you that the going is rough & requires a 4WD vehicle to get there.

Mary & I made the journey from Duck Creek via the bore drain in Sandy Kent's 4WD with Mike Pasalic in the back with me. After a mud map got us to a fence, Sandy got us to the historical mine using his GPS directions.

We also went to The Pride of the Hills on another occasion with friends from Lightning Ridge, access being gained this time from Toompine via Glen Valley property having first asked permission from the manager to visit the mine and take a few pictures for our book Determined, (2003). We got as far as the first deep creek when we balked at our chances of negotiating it. So returning to the Homestead, we humbly asked the manager to take us there in his sturdy land cruiser. Having loaded us aboard, Mary and Marcia in the front, Don & I in the back, we took off on what was to be an exciting journey.

Bear in mind it was Sunday and his day off so our driver had had a couple of beers while listening to the footie on radio so little did we realise that he, being a commercial pilot and a good natured fellow, was out to have some fun. When we'd nose dived into the bed of the first creek, our intrepid driver stopped the vehicle butt end up, swung the door open and, much to the ladies surprise, shouted to Don and I, 'Hey mate, if you think this is deep wait until you see the others.' With that promise in mind he got us out of there and then duly got us bogged in the deepest one, telling us we'll never get out of this. But we did. By the time we'd rounded a cluster of trees in the middle of nowhere and continued by a bit of dilapidated fence the track was non existent. Our driver stopped again and screwing his face into a confused look shouted back at us, 'I'm lost mate. I can't find The Pride of the Hills!'

By this time Mary and Marcia, with tears streaming down their faces from laughing, yelled at him to get moving, that the cattle nibbling the branches were wondering what was going on. So, within minutes we were seated at the foot of the hill affectionately known as 'Pridie' having a good laugh and enjoying coffee and biscuits. We specked some pieces of colourful opal floaters eroded from the hill where an open cut was made. No mining was in progress at the time.

Our journey back was just as hilarious because our valiant driver stopped in the deepest creek again, back of the 4WD sticking perpendicular in the air leaving the ladies staring at the sandy bed. He then swung the door open and disappeared down the creek to check missing stock!

What could we do but laugh at our predicament. It was something to tell the family back home.

Perhaps readers of Metal, Stone & Glass could help put "Pridie" back where it belongs in the not too distant hills. But do take this bit of advice from Len Cram's beautiful books; because those historical mines are well worth a visit on a days outing to Duck Creek.

Just remember that the mines you will see beside the road are Coparella on the left and a short distance further on the right is Brodie's Hill and just around the bend on the left is Lushington's. But to get to Pride of the Hills, south of Lushington's Mine, you will need a 4WD and a GPS to get there. The going is rough, but well worth it and do bring water with you. Opal specking is good but records of rich opal finds are sketchy.

See p276 in Rediscover Opals in Australia for an actual picture of The Pride of the Hills Mine. The view is fantastic.

The AOS would like to thank Stephen for writing this article for our newsletter. Stephen Aracic is a well known author who lives in Lightning Ridge, Australia. He has written a number of books on opal and the outback, including [Rediscover Opals in Australia](#), [Fortunes from Australian Opals](#), [Discover opals: Before & beyond 2000 with surface indications](#). The Editor

Giant Matrix Opal Discovered on the way to Coober Pedy

By Maggie Wallace



Check this one out!

The big rock I am holding is one of the two largest matrix opals in the world - and it was absolutely magnificent!

I found it in Tanunda, Barossa Valley. The owner, Patrick Kelly, had for 30 years been digging opals in Coober Pedy, and had moved South only a couple of years ago to open an opal shop. He kindly brought the matrix out so I could hold it. Its weight is

nearly 10,000 karat (ab. 2 kg's) and the estimated value is over 750,000 AUD!! I did offer him a good price(!), but he said it wasn't for sale at any price, so there!

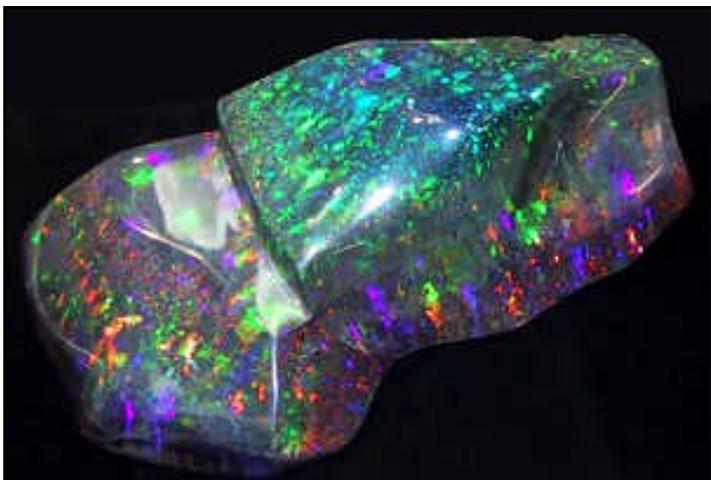
....Wow...opals are a girl's best friend, is all I can say...

That brings us to one of the most interesting towns along Stuart Hwy. Coober Pedy is situated about 850 km North of Adelaide, and is a little, dusty place with lots of surrounding holes in the ground - mine shafts.

In 1915 young William Hutchison was in the area with his father's prospecting company, searching for gold. They were short of water, and on that day the adults had gone searching for something to drink, leaving William behind in the camp.

The men later returned, unsuccessful in their search, and found William had disappeared. They went out looking for him, but had to give up after a while. The boy was not to be seen. Hours later he came strolling happily back to camp with a good supply of water and a bag full of opals. That was the beginning of what should become the world centre of opals.

A week later the first opal claim was pegged, but due to extreme heat and lack of water, the party soon had to leave. Towards the end of WW I Australian soldiers returned home from the front, and some found their way up to Coober Pedy in hope of a fortune in opal-digging. They had been living in trenches in France



What a beauty...

for weeks, and brought back with them the idea of living under ground to escape the sun during the day. Today about 60% of the population still lives like that.

I stayed at the Experience Motel, close to The Big Winch, from where you have a great view of the town centre. And it was a bit of an 'experience' to sleep inside the side of the mountain. It was pitch black when the lights were off, and, I thought, a bit stuffy... I kept wanting to open my door to the hotel corridor to get some fresh air. But it was very interesting to get a feel of how so many people live. I certainly noticed the difference in temperature when I went outside during the day.

From <http://www.maggiewallace.com/cooberpedy.htm>

I believe Maggie has it wrong. The matrix opal has to be from Andamooka, not Coober Pedy. The Editor

Rockhound Finds Ice Age tusk in Perris Flood Channel

January 21, 2009

By Julissa Mckinnon, The Press-Enterprise

What started as an afternoon of rockhounding in the riverbed behind his Perris home ended with Greg Riecke discovering a tusk that experts say likely dates back to the last Ice Age -- 16,000 to 2 million years ago.

Upon inspection, an archaeologist and paleontologist from a Hemet museum believe the 4-foot long tusk belonged to either a mammoth or a mastodon, two extinct ancestors of the modern-day elephant.

Riecke, a part-time plumber who regularly combs the flood channel for gold with a metal detector, said in the past he has found oyster shells, coral and what he believes might be a dinosaur or shark tooth.

But he said the ancient tusk and a nearby tusk tip that he unearthed Monday is by far "the biggest thing I've ever found."

"I get bored and come back here and scoot around," said Riecke, who describes himself as a geologist at heart. "I find glass and trash, but every once in a while you find something that was a piece of the environment thousands and thousands of years ago."

The fate of the fossil lies in the hands of the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, which owns the drainage channel that stretches from Moreno Valley to Perris, where it empties into the San Jacinto River.

Steve Stump, the district's chief of operations and maintenance, said although the county would likely be in favor of studying the fossils, he needs to check with county attorneys to determine the district's responsibility.

In his 30 years with the flood control district, Stump said he has never heard of a fossil surfacing in a drainage ditch.

After Riecke and a few neighbors worried about rain forecast

February 2009

Page 3



Greg Riecke, a part-time plumber who says he regularly combs the riverbed behind his home with a metal detector, inspects the tusk he found that experts say may date to the last Ice Age. Frank Bellino / The Press-Enterprise

for Thursday damaging the fossils, they covered the tusk and tusk tip with the same dirt Riecke had removed earlier using spoons and his hands.

Two scientists from the Western Center for Archaeology and Paleontology said either their museum or another organization will likely be interested in surveying the surrounding area for other bones from the same animal and other skeletons.

"To a certain extent it's cost versus benefit to figure out the best spots to target," said Doug John, a paleontologist who visited the riverbed bones within hours after the Western Center received a call from Riecke's boss and landlord, Patrick Bellows.

John said mastodons and mammoths were among dozens of mammals that roamed the Inland valleys during the Pleistocene period, just before the arrival of humans.

Other resident beasts could have included lions, camelops (ancestors of modern-day camels, llamas and alpacas), bears and sloths.

"Camels and horses were the major large mammals," John said. "You would have seen herds of wild camels and horses and a few odd mastodons and mammoths."

He and archaeologist Darlene Harr said scientists would need to see teeth from the specimen whose tusks were found to determine whether it was a mastodon or a mammoth.

Apparently, both animals were grazers, but mastodons had more teeth with more cusps that helped them eat twigs and leaves whereas mammoths dined mainly on grass, Harr said.

Mammoths had more hair and were more closely related to modern-day elephants, John said.

"Mastodons were a little smaller and stockier, about the size of today's Asian elephant," John said.

John and Harr said the last find of intact fossils they recall dates back to 1999 when thousands of prehistoric skeletons turned up during the excavation for the Diamond Valley Lake Reservoir.

Riecke said he is certain that there are more fossils waiting to be found in his beloved wash.

"I think I know of another dinosaur right over there," he said, with a vague wave downstream.

Reach Julissa McKinnon at 951-375- 3730 or jamckinnon@PE.com

From http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE_News_Local_S_fossil21.4cd7f80.html

Perris is a local town in Southern California, where quite a few of the AOS members live. The Editor

Synthetic Opals, Should I Buy Them?

By Gary Hocking

First of all what is a real opal? A real opal is a natural occurring stone. They vary like most gemstones from being dull and lifeless to brilliant and mystifying.

Well then, what is a synthetic opal? It is a man-made copy of nature.

Great looking opal is hard to find and expensive. Even the tiniest pieces can be made into something saleable. There are basically three type of opal pieces sold: Solids, which are one piece of natural opal stone, Doublets, which are two pieces and Triplets which are three pieces.

Doublets are usually one piece of real opal with a piece of black opal or some other stone glued to the back of it. So a doublet may no longer be 100% real natural opal. A triplet will be a doublet with a dome of clear substance on the top of it. This is often glass, quartz or something else. Triplets then, most likely only have one of their three parts as real opal.

Are doublets and triplets bad? Heavens no! They suit the lower budgets and that's a good thing. Solids are the real thing and are the best. Doublets are a thin layer of real opal and are not as valuable and triplets are less valuable again.

Now we have totally man made or synthetic opals. These are actually opals but the normal process of nature has been sped up so what occurs over millions of years now occurs in a laboratory in months or years. The result is stunning!

How can I tell if it is synthetic?

It is not easy but let me say that most retailers will wittingly not try to pass off synthetic opal as real. I have gone into shops in different parts of the world and told the owners that what they are calling opal is not real but synthetic opal. In all cases they were selling a lovely piece of jewellery with a small piece of synthetic stone and they were interested to learn, particularly when I showed them some real opal.

If you look at synthetic opal from the side it mostly has vertical striations which are quite uniform whereas natural opal is generally wobbly and layers go all over the place. These striations are too uniform and is a good sign that you are looking at synthetic, but I have seen and mined real opal that looks like this too.

Synthetic opal will be perfect in most cases whereas natural opal is flawed. If it looks too good then it probably isn't a natural stone.

But should you buy a synthetic opal? Why not! They look stunningly beautiful. I buy them and I cut them and make them into fantastic pieces of jewellery that my customers and my family are happy to wear. You just have to appreciate that they are synthetic.

Author: Gary Hocking is an opal miner and manufacturing jeweler who has his own website:

<http://www.opaljewelryexpress.com>

Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Gary_Hocking

Fluorescent Opals Discussion

From the International School of Gemology Forums

From : 2-20-2009 to 2-21-2009

From [Sharon in the Blue Ridge](#)

Location: North Georgia Mountains

Hi,

My uv light from ISG arrived today, and I checked out a few gem stones. I was surprised when a number of my white opals not only fluoresced, but a few were phosphorescent for a few seconds, with a yellowish glow under the long wave. The short wave didn't cause much of a reaction; they glowed, but not much. The dark/black opals didn't show anything. I looked up "opal phosphorescence" and found this from the Australian Gemmological Society:

When exposed to long-wave ultraviolet of 365 nm wavelength (LWUV), most Australian sedimentary precious opals emit a bluish white fluorescence of moderate to strong intensity. The intensity of this fluorescence is strongest in white and light opals and weakest in black opal. In contrast, the opal's response to short-wave ultraviolet light (SWUV) is much more subdued. Importantly, following irradiation with ultraviolet light, Australian sedimentary precious opal displays a yellowish green phosphorescence of moderate to strong intensity that may last up to twelve (12) seconds after the ultraviolet source is extinguished. Some Queensland boulder opals show may show variable luminescence.

This is so neat and lots of fun! :-))

Sharon...ISG Student

From [VP2006](#)

Location: Pikes Peak, CO

Thanks for the great info on opals, Sharon. Excellent citation! I wonder if you or anyone else out there knows if synthetic opals also undergo reaction?

Thanks in advance

Roni

From [Kiwi inoz](#)

Location: Melbourne, Australia

Synthetic opals

Hi,
Well I know that some synthetic opals phosphoresce but it is for a noticeable shorter duration. Apparently synthetic opals only last for 2 seconds or so (if at all).

From [Sharon in the Blue Ridge](#)
Location: North Georgia Mountains
Roni,

I don't know much at all about synthetic opal. I do know that not all my opals show fluorescence, but those that do show varying degrees of phosphorescence--up to about 8 seconds.

My opals are all solid or boulder type except for one triplet, and it is inert under LW/SW UV. Only one of the boulder opals fluoresced and that was with tiny little pin points of light.

I looked up the synthetics and they, like natural opal, are listed as having Inert, Weak, Moderate, Strong reactions to LW/SW UV, so it looks as though fluorescence of opal, if present, might tend to rule out other material, yet not serve as a decisive tool for ID'ing between natural and synthetic opal.

It might help to weed out fake opal (if they're good enough to deceive the eye). I noticed a dealer on eBay selling "Ersatz Opals." LOL A power seller too, so it must succeed. This is on a par with P. T. Barnum's attempt to thin out big crowds by putting up signs saying, "This way to the Egress."

Sharon...!SG Student

From <http://www.yourgemologist.com/ISGForumsBoard>

+++++

Zimbabwe's Deadly Diamond Fever

The rich Marange diamond field draws illegal miners as well as regime thugs who will gun them down.

*By Robyn Dixon
December 4, 2009*

Reporting from Mutare, Zimbabwe — Ronald seems a sober, respectable, church-on-Sunday type. Not the kind you'd find prospecting for diamonds here in Zimbabwe's wild east, a world of swaggering foreigners, dirty money and shoot-to-kill police. Not the sort who'd utter movie-script lines like this one: "You can make \$15,000 or \$20,000 in 30 minutes. But you can die within seconds."

Ronald, like the rest of Zimbabwe, has caught Africa's nastiest ailment -- diamond fever.

Sleepy towns such as Mutare have blinked awake to find their quiet streets buzzing with opportunists and black marketeers. Every day, illicit miners show up at the hospital with gaping bullet wounds



A crowd digs for diamonds at the Marange field in eastern Zimbabwe in 2006, when the rush began. The field is known for large quantities of diamonds close to the surface — making it almost unique. (Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi / Associated Press)

and flimsy excuses for how they got them. Characters straight out of "Blood Diamond" cruise like sharks.

But the biggest sharks are nowhere to be seen: Officials of President Robert Mugabe's regime are looting the diamonds, industry sources and members of Zimbabwe's security services say.

Not only are they personally enriching themselves with one of the few natural resources still left in this ruined country, party fat cats may be finding life support in the diamond riches, Western diplomats and analysts fear, and gaining one more motive to cling to power.

"I think the political implications are very interesting," said a diplomat based in Harare, the capital. "Right now, the government's getting very little. If it can regularize this in some way, it could really prop things up for a while. It could give them some time to pursue their interests and just keep going."

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid political problems with Zimbabwe's government. Others who were willing to discuss the diamond trade declined to be identified for fear of repercussions.

Industry and security sources say government leaders have their own syndicates to dig and trade diamonds on the black market.

"The diamond game is the filthiest game in town and everyone's into it," says one source familiar with the gem industry. "It's not even semi-organized chaos. It's a bunch of thieves who backstab each other."

"A lot of leaders of the political regime are involved in trading. They have their own diggers and traders. But it's all to their personal account. They've all got a vested interest in chaos."

Regime cracks down

Diplomats, industry sources and some nongovernmental agencies believe the Marange field here could be one of the most significant diamond discoveries in decades.

Mugabe's regime is certainly behaving as if it is. In mid-November, the government sent in the military to crack down on unsanctioned miners. Soldiers even fired on miners from helicopters, local sources say. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change says nearly 140 people have been killed.

One insider close to the ruling party said the scope of the crackdown was a measure of how significant the diamonds were to the regime.

"I don't think they would expend such resources if there was not something significant there," he says.

A prison official in Mutare said top figures in the ruling ZANU-PF party and security officials are running the illegal diamond trade here.

"The people in the police, prisons service, army and CIO [Central Intelligence Organization] have got groups of people who are working for those lieutenants, known as syndicates," says the official. "Usually these high-ranked officers in the armed forces are working for the ministers, governors and other ZANU-PF bigwigs."

The exploration rights at the Marange field were initially held by a subsidiary of the diamond giant De Beers, which let its license expire in early 2006. The rights were then taken up by a British company, African Consolidated Resources.



Source: ESRI

MARK HAFER Los Angeles Times

In late 2006, a rush began, driven by the large quantities of diamonds close to the surface -- making the site almost unique. The government promptly evicted the company in much the same manner it evicted white farmers from their land in 2000. Today, the site is ostensibly being developed by the state-owned Zimbabwe Mining Development Corp., but most of the gems find their way onto the black market.

The British company continues to pursue a legal battle in the High Court over the right to mine the area, but in cases involving property rights in the past, High Court judges -- appointed by



Miners take a break at the Marange field in eastern Zimbabwe in 2006. In a country where the paralyzed economy offers few opportunities, diamond mining is an attractive gamble.
Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi / Associated Press

Mugabe -- have sided with the government.

Almost irresistible

In a country where the paralyzed economy offers few opportunities, diamonds are almost irresistible. Ronald, 31, who had given up working for an insurance firm for black-market currency dealing, was drawn into illegal mining. He gave only his first name, fearing possible jail.

Ronald says he saw five unsanctioned miners, including two women, shot to death by police on the diamond field late last month as they fled carrying large sacks of soil. One of those killed was a policeman mining illegally.

"It's like war," Ronald says.

At dawn that same day, he had been in the diamond field filling bags with dirt to carry off and later sieve. "We heard a gunshot. It was very close. Then everybody, including myself, started to run, carrying our bags of soil. We were running and running. . . . We were more than 50 and they were firing shots at us."

They scattered, but Ronald didn't want to drop his sack, thinking he might have a gigantic diamond. Finally, exhausted, he ditched it to save himself.

"That was the day I thought, 'Maybe this is the end of my life.' " Yet he went back in.

It is filthy, back-breaking work, a shock after his peaceful insurance job and black-market money dealing. The hastily dug tunnels can be deep, and they often collapse, burying prospectors alive.

Opinions differ on the significance of the Marange field. Some put its worth in billions of dollars annually; others estimate this at under \$50 million.

Local industry figures say that in the last 12 months, high-quality diamonds have increasingly been turning up. The Reserve Bank chief, Gideon Gono, said last month that more than 500 syndicates were operating in Marange, and estimated that the government was losing \$1.2 billion in diamond revenue every month.

But a Belgian-based diamond expert scoffed at the figure -- equivalent to global diamond production -- and said 90% of the gems were low-quality industrial diamonds.

'Dangerous'

Brilliant flame trees line the streets of Mutare, like dawdling women bearing scarlet parasols. Intelligence men are everywhere. Foreigners brag loudly and flirt with local women in restaurants and bars. A car draws up and a plump fellow nods hello.

"Ah, things are tough, eh? Things are dangerous," he says, grinning slyly. Pause. "You wanna buy dah-mons?"

It's a place of treachery and swirling rumor: People talk of a \$5-million diamond found here recently, or the woman who made her fortune trading cabbages for diamonds.

When the rush started, miners were loath to leave their diggings even for water: It was common for them to swap a diamond for a bottle of water, or so the story goes.

Industry sources whisper the names of notorious international diamond dealers said to have fingers in the Marange pie.

The fenced area in Marange operated by the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corp. is known locally as "Mai Mujuru's Breast," meaning the breast of Mama Mujuru, a reference to the country's corpulent vice president, Joyce Mujuru. You need just a short time there, people tell you breathlessly, and you'll have a diamond the size of a bird's egg.

"It's a ZANU-PF place," says opposition lawmaker Pishai Muchauraya. "No one is allowed to get in there. If you're a special person, you will go there and you will be allowed just 20 minutes. That's where you can get clear diamonds."

But Ronald, the illegal miner, says he paid a bribe to a policeman to spend several hours at Mai Mujuru's Breast. He got only one tiny diamond, which he sold for \$150.

A \$30,000 deal

Itai, 28, got into trading diamonds 18 months ago. He smuggles them in his mouth across the border to sell to Lebanese and Israeli dealers in Manica, Mozambique. He's bought two houses and five cars. Three months ago, he says, he and his aunt traded a clear 30-carat stone as big as his thumbnail for \$30,000 in a hotel-room deal with an Israeli.

He says most of the illegal miners are well educated: "They're teachers, nurses, soldiers, policemen and civil servants."

The prison official said the real aim of the recent crackdown was to give the syndicates operated by top ruling party figures free rein.

"In effect, these operations are not to restore order but to make sure [the syndicates] can take the diamonds," the official says. "But what is devastating us is that they're actually killing people. They're shooting to kill."

Political violence and power struggles in Manicaland province, where the Marange diamonds are found, suggest how important the area is to Mugabe and ZANU-PF. Manicaland was one of the areas most severely hit by political violence after the elections in March, which saw ZANU-PF lose the Mutare council, the mayoral post and 20 parliamentary seats there to the Movement for Democratic Change.

Although Zimbabwe's diamonds are not technically "blood diamonds," or ones that fuel wars, they are bloody in nature.

'I might die'

Isaac, 38, and Richard, 32, brought their brother Cledious to the hospital after he was shot in the back while mining illegally. The three brothers and two cousins were in a tunnel at about 6 a.m. when police threw in a tear-gas canister.

"We started running away. He was the last to come out. We heard a gunshot and we looked back and saw our brother on the ground," Isaac says. Police took him to their camp and dumped him, unattended and bleeding profusely.

"The base wasn't guarded," Richard says. "I went in to collect him. We carried him five kilometers [about three miles] to our base camp. He was crying, saying, 'I might die.' "

The brothers assured him that he would live. In their hearts, though, they fear he faces a slow and painful death.

But seeing fortunes being made all around them, they won't give up mining, even if their brother dies.

"If one person is killed," Richard says, "there's more for the rest."

Dixon is a Times staff writer. robyn.dixon@latimes.com

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A Lost Opal Mine

By H, H, Batchelor

In North Eastern Australia there is a belt of desolate sandstone country extending for some twelve hundred miles in a south-westerly direction varying in width from fifty to three hundred miles. This is the great opal belt of Australia. Outing my wanderings as a hunter and prospector through this country in 1903, I was shown a remarkable specimen of crimson opal - an opal that is considered even more valuable than black opal.. Having done a good deal of prospecting for opals I was keen to find cut something about it for I had seen nothing like it before. And this is what I gathered: In far Northwestern Queensland there is a desolate range of rugged spinifex covered hills, intersected by broken sandstone gullies with gaunt blood-wood trees growing about 100 yards apart, and here and there a thick belt of lancewood scrub. These ranges are an offshoot of the Kirby range, and are the head waters of the Diamantina River. All kinds of game are to be found there, from the great red and blue kangaroos and the rare emu to the little rook wallaby, the size of a hare. In the vicinity of the rock wells pigeons are numerous and on the plains beneath the hill emus and bustards are to be found: The only water to be had is from the rook wells, but they are few and far between and nearly always in most inaccessible places. The numerous creeks that go to form the Diamantina River below hold water only for a few weeks after rain, and for about nine months out of the year they are dry. More than one adventurous spirit has never returned from those hills, for if prospectors fail to find water they die a lingering death from thirst.

Early in 1897 two stockmen were searching for wandering cattle which had made up into the hills after the first rains. One morning whilst they were driving a small mob along a rough hillside, a beast wilder than the rest made a break for freedom. Sam Elton, one of the stockmen, immediately followed it. Whilst he was galloping along, something bright on the ground caught his eye. Quickly dismounting, he saw a piece of sandstone sticking out of the ground, and the top of a large pipe of opal glittering in the sun. It was the work of a moment to break off a piece. Putting it in his pocket, he mounted his horse and continued after the beast. As it was opal country it was not unusual to pick up specimens. After about a month later he happened to be in the town of Winton, and, remembering the opal, took it to the local lapidary to get it cut. As the stone had been exposed to the weather for ages the surface had become dulled, but the cutting told a different story, for the chance find turned out to be a crimson opal, more valuable than a diamond. There was great excitement in the township. Sam Elton lost no time in providing himself with an outfit of mining tools and provisions with which he started back to his find. After a three days' journey he arrived in the vicinity of the mine, and having pitched his camp, he sallied forth with a pick to open his find up. Since he was a good bushman he hadn't troubled to mark the place, never doubting he could go to the exact spot. But that was just what he couldn't do. The country being a mass of stones and spinifex in every direction and exactly alike for miles around. He searched there for nine months, and then gave it up as hopeless.

Many other prospectors tried to locate that mine, but with no better result. Whether the rain had washed the soil over the sandstone, or whether the exact spot was never found is hard to say. There is no doubt, however, that the mine exists and that there is a fortune awaiting the lucky prospector who finds it, far the opal

pipe may be eight or nine feet long. My partner and I spent six months in those lonely hills searching for it. Although we obtained a good deal of ordinary opal, nothing like that specimen rewarded our long search. Two other prospectors had even worse luck, for they never returned. Months after they had gone out, a man's skeleton was found by a hunter at a dry rock well and through a ring, was identified as that of one of the prospectors. In his withered hand was clasped a tin pannikin.

From *The Otago Witness*, Issue 2872, 31 March 1909, from <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>.

Who knows? Maybe no one found it yet! The Editor

February 2009 Gem & Mineral Shows

2-9--TUCSON, AZ: Show, "Bead Renaissance Show"; J&J Promotions LLC; 3340 E. MI, next to the Holidome and Gem Mall; Mon. 10-6, Tue. 10-6, Wed. 10-6, Thu. 10-9, Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6; contact J&J Promotions LLC, P.O. Box 420, Williamsburg, NM 87942, (575) 894-1293; e-mail: info@beadshow.com; Web site: www.beadshow.com

12-15--TUCSON, AZ: Show, "Tucson Gem & Mineral Show"; Tucson Gem & Mineral Society; Tucson Convention Center, 260 S. Church Ave.; Thu. 10-6, Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$9, children 14 and under free with a paying adult; displays of "Mineral Oddities," 250 dealers, jewelry, minerals, fossils, door prizes, free lectures and symposiums, interactive children's event Fri. through Sun.; contact Tucson Gem & Mineral Society, P.O. Box 42588, Tucson, AZ 85733, (520) 322-5773; e-mail: tgms@tgms.org; Web site: www.tgms.org

13-15--ANAHEIM, CA: Show, "The New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Anaheim Stadium Exhibitor Hall, 2000 Gene Autry Way; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; door prizes, gold panning specialist and certified gemologist and appraiser on hand; contact High Sierra Investment Group Inc., 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (702) 869-0269; e-mail: GEFisher39@aol.com; Web site: www.HighSierraInvestments.net

13-15--MONTEREY, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Monterey County Fairgrounds, 2004 Fairground Rd.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; free admission; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

13-15--SANTA MONICA, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, 1855 Main 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

13-22--INDIO, CA: Show; San Gorgonio Mineral & Gem Society; Riverside County Fairgrounds, Gem & Mineral Bldg., 46-350 Arabica St.; 10-10 daily; county fair and National Date Festival; contact Bert Grisham, (951) 849-1674

14-15--OAK HARBOR, WA: 44th annual show, "Sweetheart of Gems"; Whidbey Island Gem Club; Oak Harbor Senior Center, 51 S.E. Jerome St.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; contact Keith Ludemann, (360) 675-1837; e-mail: rock9@whidbey.net

20-21--ANTIOCH, CA: Show, "Treasures of the Earth 2009"; Antioch Lapidary Club; Contra Costa County Fairgrounds, 1201 W. 10th St.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3, active military with ID and spouse, Scouts in uniform, and children 12 and under free; lapidary demonstrations, dealers, faceted stones, lapidary tools, findings, hand-made jewelry, rocks, beads, supplies, opals, fossils, minerals; contact Ellen Bauer, 130 Viking Way, Pittsburg, CA 94565, (925) 458-2539; e-mail: ebauer_lapidary@yahoo.com; Web site: <http://antiochlapidaryclub.tripod.com>

20-22--RENO, NV: Show, "The New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Reno - Sparks Convention Center, 4590 S. VA St.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; door prizes, gold-panning specialist and certified gemologist and appraiser on hand; contact High Sierra Investment Group, Inc., 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (702) 869-0269; e-mail: GEFisher39@aol.com; Web site: www.HighSierraInvestments.net

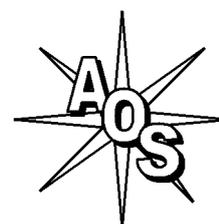
20-22--SANTA BARBARA, CA: Show; Gem Faire Inc.; Earl Warren Showgrounds/Exhibit Hall, 3400 Calle Real; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

21-22--EVERETT, WA: 56th annual show; Everett Rock & Gem Club; WA National Guard Armory, 2730 Oakes Ave.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; contact Fritz Mack, P.O. Box 1615, Everett, WA 98206, (425) 232-0809

21-22--MONROE, WA: Show, "Gold, Gem and Mineral Show 2009"; WA Prospectors Mining Association; Evergreen State Fairgrounds; adults \$5, children 13 and under free with adult; Sat. 9-4, Sun. 9-4; free gold, prospecting equipment and supplies, jewelry dealers, metal detectors, high

bankers, gold panning instruction, raffles, door prizes, Dept. of Ecology lead and mercury collection; contact Keith Hovland, (360) 678-7759
 27-28--NORTHRIDGE, CA: Annual show, "GEMboree"; The Del Air Rockhounds; United Methodist Church, 9650 Reseda Blvd.; Fri. 3-9:30, Sat. 10-5; free admission; educational activities, demonstrations, games, exhibits, beads, gems, jewelry, minerals, fossils, silent auction, tools, books, boutique, plants; contact Julie Marin, (818) 886-7190; e-mail: DelAirRockhounds@gmail.com; Web site: http://delairrockhounds.blogspot.com
 27-29--COSTA MESA, CA: Show; 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
 27-1--ALBUQUERQUE, NM Show, "The New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau, 20 First Plaza NW, Ste. 601; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$3, children free; door prizes, gold panning specialist and certified gemologist and appraiser on hand; contact High Sierra Investment Group Inc., 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308,

(702) 869-0269; e-mail: GEFisher39@aol.com; Web site: www.HighSierraInvestments.net
 27-1--ANAHEIM, CA: Show, "The New Jewelry, Gem, Bead & Mineral Rock Show"; High Sierra Investment Group Inc.; Anaheim Stadium Exhibitor Hall, 2000 Gene Autry Way; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors \$5, children under 12 free; door prizes, gold panning demonstrations, specialist and certified gemologist and appraiser on hand; contact Gerald Fisher, High Sierra Investment Group Inc., 20385 Pahute Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92308, (760) 961-2728; e-mail: GEFisher39@aol.com; Web site: http://www.HighSierraInvestments.net
 28-1--BOISE, ID: Annual show; ID Gem Club; Expo ID Glenwood & Chinden; Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-5; gems, minerals, jewelry, fossils; contact Charlie Smith, P.O. Box 1264, Riggins, ID 83711, (208) 628-4002; e-mail: info@IDgemclub.com; Web site: www.IDgemclub.com
 28-1--SAN FRANCISCO, CA: Show, "The Great San Francisco Crystal Fair"; Pacific Crystal Guild; Fort Mason Center, Bldg. A, Laguna and Marina Blvd.; 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



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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 #42 Issue #2
February 2009**

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Australian Opals - A Primer
- How History Is Changed
- Giant Matrix Opal Discovered
- Ice Age tusk in Perris Flood Channel
- Synthetic Opals, Should I Buy Them?
- Fluorescent Opals Discussion
- Zimbabwe's Deadly Diamond Fever
- A Lost Opal Mine

Important Info:

Board Meeting - February 10th

General Meeting - February 12th
Expert Jewelry Maker Stan McCall
of Custom Creative will give a
mystery lecture concerning jewelry
making.

— 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

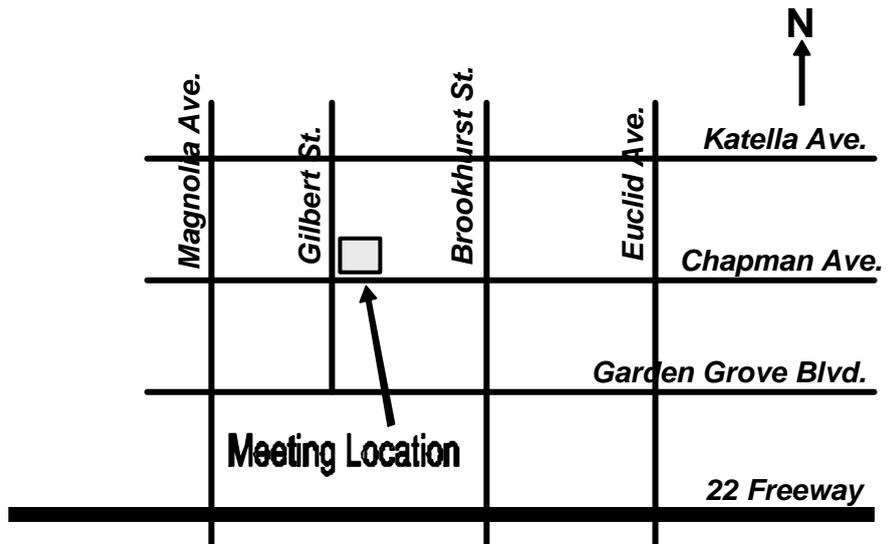
Opal Cutting, Advice, Guest Speakers,
Slide Shows, Videos, Other Activities

TO:

February 12th

Meeting Speaker:

Stan McCall on Jewelry Making



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