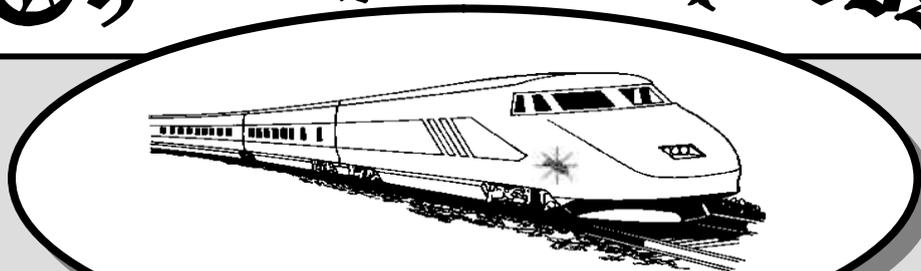


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Presidents Message

By Jim Lambert

We had a great general meeting in July! Jack Liu explained about his gem polishing (faceting) operation in a province not far from Hong Kong. The city is just on the other side of the border and has a population about as large as LA County. Many AOS members have taken advantage of his services and have been very satisfied with the results.

On a sad note, Yolanda Kowalsky announced that Mike passed away in June. Mike was a long time member of the AOS and donated much of his time and energy to help make the AOS a successful organization. He had many friends who will miss him a great deal. Unfortunately, many were unaware of Mike's serious health problem. Our deepest and heartfelt condolences to Yolanda and family. Sincerely, Jim Lambert

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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: "america".

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August Speaker – LaVerne Christenson on Art Clay Silver

LaVerne Christenson is the Treasurer of the Metal Arts Society of Southern California. She is a Level 1 certified instructor for Art Clay Silver and is a signature member of the Art Clay Society. She also has a number of years experience in jewelry fabrication, lost wax casting, forging, forming, and lapidary.

Art Clay Silver is a form of silver ground into tiny microns of silver and mixed with a small amount of water and an organic binder. It allows the artist to mold it into pieces that are then fired in a kiln which burns off the binder and water to leave an article of fine silver. The silver clay can also be thinned to a paste form and painted onto organic items and fired in the same way as the clay.

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Hints for Rock Collectors from the U.S. Geological Survey

1. Label specimens as they are collected. Identification can wait until later but the place where rocks were found should be recorded at once. Many collections have become mixed because the collector did not do this.
2. For displaying your specimens, trim rocks in the collection to a common size. Specimens about 3 by 4 by 2 inches in size are large enough to show rock features well. Other display sizes are 2 by 3 by 1 inch, or 3 by 3 by 2 inches.
3. Ask for permission to collect rocks on private property. The owners will appreciate this courtesy on your part.
4. Be careful when collecting rocks. Work with another person if possible and carry a first aid kit. Wear protective clothing, safety glasses, hard-toed shoes, hardhat and gloves when dislodging specimens. Avoid overhanging rock and edges of steep, natural or quarried walls.
5. Do not collect rocks in national parks or monuments, not in state parks; it is illegal. Similar rocks commonly crop out on land nearby.
6. Look for unusual rocks to study in large buildings or in cemeteries. Dimension stone blocks and monument stone are often transported long distances from where they are quarried. Polished stone sometimes looks different from unpolished rock. This provides good identification practice.
7. Join a mineral club or subscribe to a mineral magazine—a good place to discuss and learn about rocks.
8. Collecting rocks from each state or country has no scientific significance. The distribution of rocks is a natural phenomenon and is not related to political divisions.

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Synthetic Opals

Synthetic opals may pave the way to cheap electronic books and advertising displays. The "photonic ink" (P-Ink) can display any colour in the visible spectrum using very little electricity while mimicking the structure of opals. Mass production will be a daunting task involving perfecting the production of the gel's microstructure, but developers are hopeful that modification of existing techniques used to make flexible solar cells will hasten the process.

Science Bites,

Amanda Naaum

http://theontarion.ca/viewarticle.php?id_pag=2218

In Memoriam - Mike Kowalsky The Passing of an Opal Legend



Michael Kowalsky
Sept. 24, 1931 to June 11, 2009

Michael Kowalsky, one of the American Opal Society's dearest members, has passed away. Mike died on June 11, 2009 due to complications from cancer.

Mike was one of the AOS's earliest members, joining in 1973. Mike's interest in opal occurred after visiting Andamooka while in Australia for work at Woomera on a military project. Mike was a long time engineer/scientist, involved in many aerospace projects and was known to be an expert in his field. Mike retired from the Aerospace Corporation of El Segundo, California.

Mike had a long history of participation in the Opal Society. He was Vice-President from 1/1999 to 1/2001, President from 1/2001 to 1/2003, and Treasurer for 1/2003 to 2005, and been a board member at large ever since. Mike was made an AOS life-time member at the 2000 Opal & Gem Show.

Mike was very well known in the opal community in Australia. He had traveled there frequently and had given lectures at the various festivals there. 2001 Mike also became an expert in lab-created opal in the past decade and gave numerous lectures on it.

Personally, Mike as was good friend. I'll never forget how Mike advised me in changing my career as an aerospace engineer and how it improved my life greatly. His passion for opal was contagious and helped make me an opaholic. It's hard to believe he's not around. He will be truly missed.

Jim Pisani, Opal Express Editor

Many years ago, I had just returned from my first trip to Lightning Ridge, with a handful of opal rough and no idea of what it was, or how to cut it. I joined the Opal Society, and was fortunate enough to meet Mike Kowalsky, who became my mentor, patiently explaining to me about the different kinds of opal and how to cut it.

We became good friends, making several trips to Australia, Tucson, and skiing together in Colorado and California. We were both aerospace engineers and visited the Australian space site in Woomera, where Mike was stationed and first became aware of opal.

Mike had a variety of interests, and we would have been good friends even without our common interest in opal. However it was his consuming interest in opal that made Mike such a special person for me to know. Mike will be always remembered and my sincere condolences go out to his family.

Jay Carey, AOS Board Member At Large

We'll miss the late Mike Kowalsky in Australia's opal scene. Whether eating with him at the Yowah Festival's BBQ or sitting with him at the Lightning Ridge Opal Festival's gala evening or exploring Quartzite with him in his van, there was a buzz around this man whose life revolved around opal, photography and travel, and not necessarily in that order. We enjoyed Mike's company.

He was a lively man with a commanding presence. He was generous – nothing was too much trouble – he loved to laugh and was always a gentleman. Mike packed a lot into a short space and gave so much to the Opal World. He made things happen and his spirit knows no boundaries.

"Some of Mike is with us at the Ridge..." writes Barb Whyre, originator of Concise Chronicles as printed in the Opal Express a few years ago.

Prepared by Barb Moritz, on behalf of Len Cram, the Lightning Ridge Historical Society, and Mike's many friends at the Ridge.

Yowah Mike, ambassador to the world for The American Opal Society. He so loved opals, opal people and the opal life. I was lucky he counted me as one of his friends. One never remained merely an acquaintance with Mike Kowalsky for long. He adopted you into his opal family of friends so readily.

When he first began to plan a trip to Yowah, Queensland... town and opal field, he began to sign his name "Yowah Mike" on his emails to me. Soft spoken and with elegant manners he walked among the opal field's rough, simple, and/or refined successful with equal ease. He was a good friend to have and I will forever treasure the memories of his visits to Yowah and the opal trek he and his new found Aussie cousins, made from Yowah to Lightning Ridge, Andamooka and Coober Pedy.

I never heard an unkind word from his lips about anyone even though he had had his fair share of Life's knocks too. He was able



Mike being Mike at the 2006 Opal & Gem Show

to laugh off all the outback tribulations such a journey entails. His ability to laugh and then solve the problems was priceless. His good hearted nature coupled with his opal fever opened doors and hearts wherever we traveled. It was the same when meeting new Opal Society Members.

I will sorely miss him.

Barbara McCondra

A few words from Gwen Burney...

"Mike was a beautiful man... a true gentleman and kind spirit."

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The Great 1902 White Cliffs Opal Robbery

By Len Cram



Mail Coach arriving at White Cliffs in the early 1900s

A large crowd mingled outside the courthouse waiting for the verdict. They didn't have long to wait. It took only one and a half hours for the jury to return and to find John Edward Burgess not guilty.

Burgess had been charged with robbing the White Cliffs – Wilcannia – Broken Hill coach of its opal treasure on 20 January 1902, after it had left Wilcannia for Broken Hill. He did this without stopping the coach. The driver, Alex Wilson, and Constable Riley, the armed escort, knew nothing about it.

Known locally as Moonlight, he and his friend in transgression Peters, were well liked, and it was rumoured they made a comfortable living from cattle duffing.

Some years back a friend of mine still had some opalised shells from the robbery, given by Burgess to his father while an employee of the Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney, at Wilcannia. He was a close friend of Burgess and Peters, and at the time was living in Peters' sister's boarding house at Wilcannia.

It became common knowledge that Burgess had masterminded and carried out the daring robbery. My friend, whose family still had some of the opalised shells told me how the robbery was carried out. His account differs little from that which Tullie Wollaston in 1924 jokingly recorded in his famous book, *Opal, The Gem of the Never Never*.

According to my friend, Burgess robbed the coach using 19 station horses, on which he used only a bridle. Peters had strung them out in the bush at specific locations. After the robbery he rode each horse bareback, flat-out, arriving back in Broken Hill the following morning. He said Peters followed picking up the horses, returning them to their correct stations.

Burgess's trial lasted more than 12 months. The complete story is recorded in *A Journey With Colour: A History of White Cliffs Opal 1889-1999*, which I published in 2002.

Tullie Wollaston's humorous version of the mail coach robbery, although a little exaggerated in places gives a clearer picture as to how the deed was carried out. Having said that, I have taken the liberty of condensing and paraphrasing it without changing the meaning of his content.

Early in 1902 a big, solemn, ponderous policeman, known throughout the neighbouring country as the Thick-un, guarded the mail coach, which carried the opal from White Cliffs to Broken Hill. It was a description, which applied to his head as much as his girth. His real name was Riley.

The policeman's favourite saying, which he uttered with an impressive air of authority, was, "You be goided by me, man." The words were repeated behind his back with a mischievous and, indeed, a sarcastic inflection, as if there were some doubt as to where the constable might lead anyone willing to follow.

However, people were willing enough to have him watch over their opal, as the degree of lawlessness on the roads hardly warranted employing a razor-sharp intellect to escort the opal and mail. The days of the bushranger were long past, and with them had gone the old-time mail guards, whose carbines had been more than just another bit of baggage forever getting in the way of the driver.

For years there had been no escort on the mail. Then a youngster, with more boldness than cunning, held up the coach 8 miles from White Cliffs, throwing a scare into the honest, law-abiding members of the community. The young man was soon caught, but the opal miners demanded some sort of future protection for the fruits of their long and arduous digging.

The Thick-un was detailed to ride with the coach, and although, the constable had a peat-bog somnolence about him, people assumed that his presence would be enough to frighten off anyone who might be tempted to make another raid on their opal. But they didn't reckon on Johnny Burgess, a colourful scallywag known locally as "Moonlight Burgess", whose practical joking was known far and wide. Charming, humorous, but with little regard for the law or surrounding properties, it was rumoured that both he and his offside, Silent Peters, made a comfortable living from duffing cleanskins. Johnny Burgess was an attractive man, with a tendency to plumpness. His blond hair, neatly trimmed curly beard and twinkling soft blue eyes stirred romantic flutters in the hearts of many a local girl. Everybody liked Johnny Burgess. Everybody, that is, except the Thick-un, who was a constant target of his teasing.

A feud between the two, which was to end in one of the most bizarre pieces of highway effrontery in the history of western New South Wales, began with an affair about some pigs, which disappeared from a nearby property. The Thick-un, with an Irishman's regard for the species, embarked on an elaborate and time-consuming search.

At the end of two days tracking and ferreting, to his delight, he caught Burgess red-handed with the missing pigs under his shanty. Burgess said, "Fair cop, but before you take me in, come in and have a pot of tea." Burgess was one step ahead of the Thick-un. While they boiled the billy, Silent Peters, Burgess' partner, removed the evidence.

The Thick-un was furious as he made his way back to the police station. He had caught the culprit red-handed, but lost the evidence. Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks, for, ahead of him, inside the police station gate and rooting up the garden, was the missing pigs. His face turned as red as a beetroot in a blaze of anger. Somewhere, or not far away, was Johnny Burgess bent over with laughter.

The case of the wandering pigs encouraged Burgess to look for better fun. He began to study the mail coach, which plied between White Cliffs and Broken Hill. He soon discovered that the valuable packets and registered parcels were always stowed in the boot with the rest of the mail. The load was held in by a canvas covering, which was strapped down and buckled at the bottom of the boot.

Burgess knew the coach's timetable. It left White Cliffs at 8 p.m., travelling all night reaching Wilcannia towards noon the following day. After lunch it set out again for the fast-growing silver town of Broken Hill, some 120 miles to the west.

About 10 o'clock on the second night after leaving White Cliffs, the coach came to a series of red sandy ridges, traversed by a narrow track and walled in on both sides with dense mulga scrub. By this stage, the driver and the escort had endured roughly 30 hours

continuous buffeting travel, and 36 without proper sleep, and so were not likely to be alert.

Knowing they would have fortified themselves at Wilcannia with a nobbler or two of rum and milk, Johnny Burgess had good reason to believe they would be snoring in chorus as the five-horse team laboured through the sand.

What better place for an ambush! Johnny Burgess, who knew every inch of the track, rode out from Broken Hill one afternoon ahead of the coach and reached the sand hills well before the mail was due to pass.

He lay down in a patch of mulga and, gazing up at the stars, mentally rehearsed what he was going to do. He was proud of his plan, which he had worked out down to the finest detail, even to the bleached emu's shank bone protruding from his saddle bag, and the 19 fresh horses tethered between there and Broken Hill, which Silent Peters would later return to their paddocks.

He had been lying there for more than an hour when he heard the creaking of harness, the rattle of trace chains and the slither of wheels through the sand. The coach had caught up with him.

As the lumbering vehicle drew near, Johnny Burgess saw two figures huddled together on the driver's seat. The driver's head was jogging on his chest, while the Thick-un's was rolling around like a sunflower too heavy for its stalk. But for the safety

of the strap around his waist the Thick-un would have had a rude awakening under the wheels of the coach.

When the coach had struggled by, Johnny Burgess stepped from his hiding place, walked up behind it and calmly began to slash the straps on the boot cover. It was like rifling a self-service store with the cashier asleep. As the coach swayed on, Johnny Burgess rolled back the cover and removed the mailbags; parcels and crates, letting them fall silently onto the soft sand. A few bundles could not be reached from the road, so he climbed onto the boot and threw them out.

Satisfied the boot was empty, he dropped off. Leisurely, he gathered up his spoils and carried them back to where his mount was hidden in the mulga. There was no need to hurry, for he knew the theft would not be discovered before the next change of horses at Topar, and that was two hours away.

After he had boiled a billy and rolled a smoke, he got down to sorting the mail. He wasn't interested in private letters, cheques or money orders. These he put aside, but rough opal and loose notes, which could not be traced, he transferred to his saddlebags. He carried the ransacked mailbags and parcels back to the track and placed them in a neat pile. In the middle of the pile, he stuck the emu shank.

The mischief wasn't discovered until the coach was about to leave Topar. The driver was hitching up again when he noticed the straps over the boot had been cut. News that the boot had been rifled drove everyone back to the pub, where the talk was digested

over three or four rounds of grog. The general opinion was that robbery had been committed.

Those who thought that the stuff had just fallen out were silenced when asked to explain how the ropes over the boot had been slashed. In a lower voice, in case the robber may be listening, the Thick-un advised all to "be goided" by him. He prophesied that the thief would soon be caught. Everyone immediately felt that the situation was under control. The driver collected the passengers and pushed on, leaving the Thick-un to solve the crime.

Leading a group of locals, he searched by lantern-light for the robber's trail in the sandy soil around the staging post. The only tracks they could find led back to the pub, where they had a couple of quick ones before resuming the hunt, but nowhere within a half a mile radius of the spot could they find a trace of the bandit.

As the new day dawned they were back in the bar, softening their disappointment with a few more rounds of grog. Nobody knew

what to do because no-one had the faintest suspicion that the robbery had been committed miles away from Topar.

"The nerve of the swine." The policeman kept mumbling. "So help him if I get on his trail."

After breakfast they had another look around, but in a half-hearted fashion. By 11 o'clock they were all back in the pub. They were on their fourth round when a traveller from Wilcannia drove up in a rig and reported having passed a peculiar

pile of mailbags and parcels about 20 miles back.

This announcement was greeted by a death-like silence, which was broken only by the sound of bursting froth bubbles from the beer. Then the Thick-un exploded. "That careless driver," he raved. "The cow ought to be horsewhipped."

But the traveller would not agree that the bags had fallen off the coach. They were arranged too neatly for that and, anyway, what about the big white bone sticking out of the top like a flagpole? The information was too much to be taken in as unadulterated dry fact. It had to be washed down with a little more alcohol. Finally, with a dramatic flourish, marred by a slight slurring of the speech, the Thick-un called for volunteers to ride to the scene of the crime.

Three managed to detach themselves from the bar. They mounted hastily and, with a wild banishing of carbines, set off like a weight for age field. But the fervour died a few miles up the road. One by one, the volunteers dropped out, and the Thick-un was riding alone when he came to the pile of mailbags.

Dismounting heavily, he plucked the emu shank from the top of the pile and saw that something had been written on it in pencil. Slowly he spelt out the words, which had a familiar ring: "You be goided by me, man." Blood rushed to the Thick-un's face like petrol mounting in the dome of an old petrol bowser. "It's that b-Burgess," he bellowed.

Violent emotion produced quicker action than was customary with the Thick-un. Leaving the mail by the road, he jumped back into



Johnny Burgess on the far right at Wilcannia in 1900

the saddle and set off through the mulga to follow the tracks of Johnny Burgess.

It was a perplexed policeman and a weary horse that drew up outside the police yards at Broken Hill the following evening. He had followed the robber's tracks all the way. He looked in the police yard and at once knew why this was the end of the trail. Standing there, fresh as a daisy, was Johnny Burgess's big chestnut gelding.

"Ah! At last I have got him." He conjured up rosy images of the townspeople watching in reverence as he led in the culprit by the scruff of the neck. But his dream of glory was soon lost, as this was part of Johnny Burgess's well-laid plan. Using all the fresh horses, Burgess had arrived in Broken Hill on the afternoon of the robbery and asked permission to paddock his horse in the police yard.

When the Thick-un insisted that Burgess was the culprit, the local police said it was laughable, dismissing the idea as impossible, because Burgess had ridden into Broken Hill on a fresh horse the previous afternoon. The Thick-un never did make an arrest in this case. In fact, he did his best to forget it. But he never could blot out the vision of the writing on the emu's shank. From that day on, he was never known to tell anyone, "You be guided by me, man."

Written by Len Cram especially for the American Opal Society.

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The New Andamooka Saga

From Murray Willis

On Friday afternoon I was sitting with my wife having a coffee when I saw a friend, who was standing in the middle of the road dialing his mobile phone. Whose phone do you think went off? Yes it was mine, I didn't answer the phone I just called to him, saved his call and he came over sat down and had a coffee with us.

I said, "Hey, would you like to come to Andamooka with me?"

He said "Yes, of course, when do you want to leave?" and I said "What about in 1 hour?"

And he said "What about I let you know tonight?"

So before watching a pretty big football match on television in the evening, I rang him and he said:

"Yes, 95% he would come", so I didn't bother to ring any other of my friends. (I have been promising 2 other friends for years that I would take them to our mine and haven't done it yet.)

The guy I wanted to take is an opal miner and has lots of suggestions and he is the best company that you could ever have on a 400 mile trip. After the football match I rang him and he was asleep, had lost his enthusiasm and didn't want to come. I planned on leaving at 5 am but I didn't sleep very well due to the excitement of going to our mine so I was up at 4.15 am and left by 5 am.

Whilst I traveled down the highway, there were police cars and ambulances etc., the road was blocked off and I was re-directed around an horrific accident. Unfortunately 3 out of 5 youths had been killed, the 4th is critically injured and the driver walked away just about unscathed, unbelievable.

I arrived in Andamooka after watching the sunrise in the east over some beautiful hills. There were dead Kangaroos on the road with crows and eagles pecking at them and having their breakfast. On arriving in Andamooka I went straight to the mine and saw our little bulldozer and listened for our excavator but alas I couldn't hear it working.

At first I thought it may have broken down and then I thought, Aha, we are on opal. My partner must be sitting down the hole digging it out. No he wasn't there.

I drove back into the town, past Willis Corner and found my friend. He had been selling some opals to a friend's friend who was about to travel overseas. So we had some lunch in a local store as my partner is a bachelor and we then ventured back to the mine. Well, what an afternoon we had.

I brought joy to at least 1000 bush flies, they were everywhere. Fortunately for me with every scrape we had of the excavator into the face of our mine we found some material even if it was only potch. I found dead Matrix, I found a Painted Lady, the excavator had come down and obviously broken a stone in two.

I found the stone that was in the wall but I couldn't see the one that had probably been picked up in the bucket and thrown on the dump. The Painted Lady was only worth about \$50 but you never know what the other side would have been like, it had beautiful reds and greens in 3 different places. The first person who wants it, can have it.

My partner has got me a new pick, both ends are flat, normally there is one sharp pointy piece to a pick but we prefer both ends to be flat. I spent quite a lot of time sitting on the loose dirt with our 30 tonne Komatsu excavator while my partner dragged down loose rocks at the top of the cut which could come down and smash my skull in, even with a hard hat.

He then trims off the top of the cut to expose what we call "the Squibby level". The ground is then dragged down and lands at the bottom of the face of the cut. I then crawl up on it. It is very uneven and it's difficult to stay on my feet, to look at the squibby level to see if there is any opal in that level.

A miner from years ago had a little D6 and he said to one of his friends, "That D6 has pushed me a \$1,000,000, however, I know now that it has probably pushed \$500,000 from the squibby level that I never checked in the early days. He then said that he was getting quite a bit of opal from New Hill on the squibby level. Unfortunately I never found any opal in the squibby level in the 2 days that I was mining.

When I had completed the squibby level I had to climb down from the mound and then climb up a very big mound of dirt that is sitting in front of the excavator and go and sit on one side of the excavator far enough away so that I didn't get knocked over when it swings around dumping dirt and wait until the face is scraped probably about 6 to 9 inches back from where we last checked it. I eagerly watched the wall to see if that big ultimate fantastic flash of colour is going to be reflected by the sunlight. So far that hasn't happened but we are always hopeful that we are going to hit one as big as a football. We will see it from afar.

We opened up the face and a lot of loose dirt appeared just to the right of centre, it was at least 12 foot wide and went from the bottom of the face to the top. My partner and I suppose that may have been an old D6 bulldozer cut. My partner tells me that the ground to the right will yield a little more colour and looks more promising than the ground to the left.

On the 2nd scrape to the right as I picked into the opal level I hit dead matrix, it is like a river stone about 9 inches long and 5 inches wide, beautifully smooth and under that stone I could see colour, I saw brilliant colour.

I saw greens and golds covered with dirt. I took a screwdriver and pried it away from the stone only to find that less than 1/3 of what I am looking at was opal and the other 2/3 was just dirt and rocky type material. My heart sinks, then I look into the hole where the stone came from the face and I see another little lump with a sparkle of light coming quickly to my eye.

My heart jumps and I think this could be a beautiful stone. I carefully remove the stone from the mud and clay, put it in my mouth to wash off the residue of mud and as it comes from my mouth, I am gladdened of the spectacle of a beautiful green orange crystal, it is better than the one next to it but not as big.

My partner is right. The best opal is going to come from the right hand side of the claim or at least it had until that moment. The back of the stone is flatter than you could get anything if you saw through it. A closer inspection shows that the colour is mainly in the top of the stone but that doesn't matter because that is what one is going to look at when it is set in jewellery.

On the left hand side of the face, my partner is carefully placing his pick into the level and finds a huge piece of potch with a speck of red, so out came the screwdriver and the probing went on. Out came 2 lovely little red stones, not full but very bright and enough to lift our spirits until the next scrape. But alas it never opened into a pocket, just the 2 little red stones.

It is things like this that spit partnerships unless all the partners are at the face of the mine, when 2 good stones are produced they

are always thinking where is the rest? Andamooka is like that, it might just put 1 or 2 nice stones there and then nothing. The next climb back up to the excavator is done much more easily, who cares about climbing up this loose dirt when the next scrape might produce the big one. Not me.

I watched eagerly and with my renewed enthusiasm started to brush the flies away from my face. Normally my face is theirs to do their will, the more you chase them the more you stir them up. Sudden movements and you get an extra 50 flies in your face. I then checked the squibby level with eager eyes and anxiety and I watched the face as it was scraped again.

This time well to the left, just one single stone of jelly was produced. It weighed about 3/4 oz, not a lot of money but a nice stone. 100 oz of that jelly would make beautiful faceting material or beads so today might be THE DAY.

Whilst I was there I made some new friends and met some old ones. At the bottom of this you will see some very, very beautiful Treated Concrete. These stones weigh approximately 20 oz plus and can be yours for only \$1000 which is less than 30c per carat, you can't be that.

PART 2

It is now winter but you wouldn't know it in Andamooka it is very much like the Arizona area, hot and dry in summer and beautifully warm and clear in winter, balmy days and very chilly nights but no snow whatsoever.

Andamooka is a beautiful town set in a valley with a creek running through the middle, however, only in times of flash floods do you see water in the creek. There is part of a branch known as Andamooka Station and for almost 100 years have hopeful people endure the 400 mile drive in the hope of finding that elusive rainbow.

The rainbow is well in our sights. At 6 am we arose for some quick toast tea, donned our heavy boots and tough mining clothes that would protect our bodies should we fall across one of the thousands of piles of sandstone in our mine and headed to our cut on New Hill.

The excavator was up on high ground as every night when we finish work we take it from the cut in case of a flash flood or another mishap. We put it in an area that we could work on should be have any problems with the machine. Before we took it down its steep and narrow drive to the base of the cut we greased the machine as we do every 2 days.

We have a special grease gun that is operated by an air-compressor, this is no more than a 15 minute job and then the machine is walked down to the face. I don my hardhat, throw my pick over my shoulder, as did the 7 dwarfs and glided to the cut face. For a moment I feel like a foot soldier walking behind a tank towards the enemy.

In reality, I am the soldier who has to fight the earth. The earth is prepared to take on the machine and always wins. There is not a mining machine that has never broken down with the wear and tear of tearing into the earth for its treasure. The earth takes the men on and wears them down with its dusty hot desert, tests their patience and sends many men from the fields with their tails between their legs. Some lose their families because they have become opalholics and continue to drive and dig in search of the earth's treasure. They are besotted by the stone and finally lose their stake and often their families as a result.

Today once again my partner and I did battle with the earth. In the cool of the morning and the renewed energy produced through the night is sat with very high hopes. As you will remember the last scrape had produced some very beautiful jelly. Was there to be another few stones hiding behind the last? I watched the machine as the large bucket, which will hold 3 men shoulder to shoulder, drove through the squibby level down to the bottom of the face. No. I couldn't see any brilliance from the safe distance I sat from the bucket, but as I stepped down through the mullick, tiny bits of sandstone tried to sneak down the side of my boot to aggravate me.

I did spot some dark potch, maybe 4 or 5 pieces but it was as dark as lead. I indicated to my partner as he sat on the machine

waiting for it to cool down before he turned it off to come down and check the level that there were traces. Here it was early in the morning on our first scrape and we have a trace already. Surely today was going to produce the big one. Potch was just potch nothing more. To the left some very thin skinny translucent potch and to the right, well today we won't know what is to the right because there is so much overburden that if we step in there we could be buried.

My partner thinks that to get opal in this cut the opal will come more to the right. He tries to explain why to me but I figure it is more intuition than any reality. He talks of opal running this way and opal running that and something stopping the flow and the opal is formed one hundred million years ago. How he knows I don't know. I certainly wasn't there to verify his theory. So we were concentrating on the left. Nothing on the first scrape, a little potch on the second scrape, even less potch on the third scrape.

The sun was coming out and so I lifted the collar on the back of my neck, I didn't expect to be getting sunstruck on this Sunday. In battling with the earth I didn't figure I was going to allow the sun to become its ally. I carefully covered the rest of my body with some material so that the sun would not damage me. On the 4th scrape I saw some colour as large as the point of a pin. As I scraped around it, it grew bigger.

The tinge of blue became bright blue green, however, to my disappointment there is a little sand through the blue green. Yes, we were on blue green Crystal trace. Behind that stone was another and to the side of that stone was another, behind that stone was another but it was only trace but that was good enough for us so early in the day. Scrape after scrape more potch and more potch, the blue green disappeared as fast as it appeared. Opal is shy and it is hidden for many eons and by lunchtime had not shown her face.

I had lots of work to do in Adelaide. I had asked my partner as a special favour to me to work on a Sunday morning. I figured that if I knocked off by 12 noon I could have lunch, clean up and be ready to leave by 2 pm and be back in my home in the city by 8 pm. As the excavator was driven from the cut, I walked behind it, took my hardhat from my head and felt the cool relief of the wind as it fanned my perspired brow because to get the excavator to high ground we have to go up hill.

I trudge behind the machine and felt like a defeated soldier, I had no fear of what was ahead of me. My footstep was heavy in contrast to the lighthearted step I had behind the machine as we walked down the incline towards the cut in the morning. My mining for the weekend was over with just a few stones to show but nowhere near enough to pay for the fuel that we had expended or to cover the food that we had consumed or to pay for the electricity for the power to heat the expensive water used to clean our bodies though in my case it doesn't matter much because fortunately I have an opal business to rely on for my living.

But I can tell you my partner didn't have too many smiles on his face. He has payments on his 4 wheel drive to make and no opal to sell to make those payments. He also has other commitments and has taken me in as a partner and I have to pay all the mining expenses and provide the machinery. He has had to take in a partner to minimize the gamble of producing opal.

We attend the local supermarket to have our lunch. We have to provide our own because the miners wife has had enough of the fields, taken the children and gone, another disappointment for my partner. He told her many times that things will improve, that he will find a big one. He did before he became my partner and he will again and he will enjoy the luxuries of what the earth has to provide but she is gone and so we will buy a pie for our lunch.

There are little tables in front of a television screen and the locals are sitting staring at the screen. I am told that it is a Keno screen and they play. As number 23 was my old football number I watch to see if the number appears, it doesn't in 3 games so I put \$20 on the 4th and it doesn't come, I put \$50 on the 5th it doesn't come, I put \$100 on the 6th it doesn't come, I put \$200 on the 7th it doesn't come. I asked my partner to put \$400 on the 8th and he

doesn't come fast enough so my money is not on. We anxiously watch the screen to see whether number 23 comes up, we are sure that it will and this was my last punt, it doesn't come.

On the 9th game we are on and 23 comes, we collect \$1200 but had an outlay of whatever it adds up to and we figure that I am \$480 in front but not really because I have a partner. I handed him \$240 and keep \$240 for myself so the day wasn't so bad. My partner doesn't want to take the money but he knows how badly he needs it and tries to give it back but I force it on him. It should feed him for another 3 weeks.

From <http://www.shed.com/aom/storyfile/andasaga.html>,

Australian Opal Mines.

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**What a great story – I wish I was there! The Editor
Northern Nevada - Opal; Eastern Oregon -
Sunstone; and more...**

By Lee Bates

June-July 2006

I left early in the 24th of June to head to Oregon for a yearly trip with my 2 brothers Jay and Scott. On Satus Pass WA, I hit a deer with my car and killed it. I hate to see animals suffer. The deer whistles on my 1967 Cougar have worked many times but this deer jumped from behind a hill and apparently did not hear them. I did not swerve, since I did not want to roll the car. Ten hours later I met my brothers at Mann Lake, OR for fishing.

The fishing was poor so we sat around in the 100 degree heat telling stories. We went to the hot springs in the Alford Desert... to soak... in the 100 degree heat. This is the only time of the year that I am not cold. We met Carl Thomas, our old prospector friend who lives there on the desert. He needs a knee replaced and looks like he is dying. He is 88. I will never forget his late wife chewing him out for giving me her best rocks. I am good at getting free rocks. (You ought to see me get free hats at air shows. My wife says where are going to put all these free hats?) We had a milk shake in Fields, OR but since the restaurant changed hands the shake was more expensive and not as good as in the past.

The next day we headed south to Virgin Valley in Nevada to camp at the Hot Springs and mine precious opal. My brother, Scott, worried about seeing his son in Whitefish, MT, drove back the next morning. That night it rained so we went to bed early. A wild burro brayed in the desert keeping me awake. I think he was calling his harem. I sleep in my 1967 Cougar on a board and a foam mattress, I have for 20 years. I take the passenger seat back out to make room. Beats putting up a tent. I amaze \$150,000 motor home owners who look out their picture window in a campground at me sleeping in my 39 year old Cougar camper.

We went to the Honeymoon Opal Mine the next day but had no luck. People back at camp told us how they were getting good Precious Opal at the Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine but it was closed that day. Precious Opal is formed when silica replaces the wood and opalizes instead of petrifying, forming irregular patterns which reflect light in every direction and angle, creating every color of the rainbow. It is beautiful to behold.

The next day we went to the Rainbow Ridge Opal Mine and started finding opal right away, like everybody else. I was digging away when I hit a dirt clod that suddenly gave off a reflection from the sun. I cleaned the dirt clod and "the stuff dreams are made of" appeared. A precious Opal about 80 carats reflecting every color of the rainbow. Was I dreaming? I'd finally hit pay dirt after all these trips to the opal mines. I showed my precious find to everyone around. We kept digging and found about 20 more opals. That night a yuppie from Sacramento pulled in at 10 PM into the campground with his huge trailer and new pickup with an ATV. Since I could not go to sleep with his noise, I joined him at his fire. We burned beautiful cabinet boards from his father's construction sites and he told how Daddy paid for his power boat racing. Why was I not born to a rich father?

The next day we drove north to Lakeview, OR for supplies but forgot to dump off the garbage. Then on to the top of Hart Mountain, OR, an Antelope Reserve, to soak in another hot springs and camp. I told a woman camped near the hot springs that I was going in nude. She said that was ok since she had been married several times before. We saw two Pine Martins which are extremely rare. Then all hell broke loose. A hail storm hit us just as we were dividing up our precious opals. Hail bounced off the hood of my car so hard I was afraid it would dent the steel. The thunder was weird - it went BOOM, CRACKLE, BOOM! Three tornados tore through the sunstone mines on the valley floor below.

The next day we met Jay's rock club, the San Francisco Gem and Mineral Society, at the Sunstone area near Plush, OR. Sunstone is a precious gemstone which is cuttable into jewelry. The next day at the Dust Devil Mine people found good Sunstones right away, but I had no luck. One guy from our group found a 155 carat Sunstone worth about \$1,000 dollars.

The next day we went to the Spectrum, Mine where Jay and I found many good big Sunstones with red flash and schiller. We dug for 8 hours. We used water to wash our tailings which from now on I will never be without. At the potluck that night we invited the mine owner who showed us a huge 300 carat Sunstone. The potluck was excellent with grilled chicken, cream puffs and pizza. I had olives stuffed with garlic for the first time in my life. I bought tailings from the Himalaya Tourmaline Mine near San Diego, CA in which I found 40 good cuttable red and green tourmalines. Also at the Spectrum Mine, I bought Diane a Namibia Blue Agate pendant which was wire wrapped for \$50 (a good buy - it was worth \$150). My wife loves me again.

The next day we headed for Hampton Butte to dig for beautiful red and green petrified wood. I arrived at Riley, OR after crossing the desert with only 1 1/2 gallons of gas left. I could just see someone coming across my bleached bones in a rusting Cougar in the middle of the desert. Jay and I ate in a restaurant in Burns. I think I scared the waitress with my 10 day old beard (prevents sun burn). At Hampton Butte I hiked out 1-mile looking for loose roundels on the surface but found nothing. What beautiful Juniper Pine country.

The next day we hit it big with beautiful green and red petrified wood becoming a king. It was perfect 80 degree weather - Ellensburg had 100 degree weather - I told people I had to go to the desert to escape the heat. Also, since there was no water there were no bugs. I used up Jay's hot shower water cleaning my rocks. That night we sat around talking about UFOs so I naturally told my Sasquatch story.

The next day we drove to the Paulina limb-cast area, now famous as the place where Jay stepped on my hand to out-reach me for a big limb-cast. Limb-casts are clear glass-like pieces in which silica replaces wood producing a clear duplicate of part of the tree. Jay as usual found more pieces than I did (but I found the big precious opal). Then all hell broke loose, again. It thundered and rained so hard, we all got the hell out of there before we became trapped in the gulch. I drove up to Washington against a 60 mph headwind. When the trucks went by they almost blew me off the road. I stopped in a campground at Satus Pass to spend the night. I showed the campground host my big opal. She did not realize that I was the same guy after I shaved.

The next day, after 14 days, I arrived back at Ellensburg. After my shower, I had to call a plumber to clean the rocks and dirt out of my drain. The trip cost \$400 and was typical of the trips I have taken with my 2 brothers for the last 34 years. Our dad used to go with us, and my nieces and nephews, but my dad is dead and my nieces and nephews are grown up. Since all 3 of us Bates brothers have had prostate cancer, I hope we can continue to do these trips. Jay is a good cook of steak and beans every night and I wash the paper plates. We vary the menu with steak and pork and beans one night and steak and chili the next night. "Cookie we have to stop feeding these boys beans" (borrowed from Mel Brooks' movie, Blazing Saddles).

PS: What is the big 85 carat Precious Opal worth? Tune in next summer for the conclusion.

From *The San Francisco Gem & Mineral Society, Inc.*,
<http://www.sfgms.org>

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August 2009 Gem & Mineral Shows

1-2--SAN FRANCISCO, CA: 55th annual show, "Jade"; San Francisco Gem & Mineral Society; County Fair Building/Hall of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, 9th Ave. and Lincoln Way; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults \$6, seniors and students \$5, children under 12 free; demonstrations, jade carving, precious metal clay modeling, bead stringing, chain maille weaving, faceting; contact Carleen Mont-Eton, 4134 Judah St., San Francisco, CA 94122, (415) 564-4230; e-mail: publicity@show.sfgms.org; Web site: www.sfgms.org
8-9--LAKEVIEW, OR Show, "Tallman Rock Chippers Rock Roundup"; Tallman Rock Chippers; Lake County Fairgrounds, 1900 N. 4th St.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4:30; displays, dealers, demonstrations, activities for kids, field trips; contact Johane Deidrich, 244 N. M St., Lakeview, OR 97630, (541) 947-3237, or LeRoy Johnson; e-mail: lostmymarblesoregon@yahoo.com

8-9--WALNUT CREEK, CA: Show, "The Great Contra Costa Crystal Fair"; Pacific Crystal Guild; Civic Park Community Center, 1375 Civic Dr. at Broadway; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; adults \$5, children under 12 free; gems, jewelry, crystals, beads, psychics; contact Jerry Tomlinson, (415) 383-14-16--SACRAMENTO, CA: Gem Faire; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center, 6151 H St.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com.

14-16--SEASIDE, OR: Show, "Seaside Gem, Mineral, Jewelry & Fossil Show"; Jean Miller; 415 1st. Ave.; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; free admission; free strand of pearls to 1st 100 ladies daily, drawing Sun.; contact Jean Miller, P.O. Box 136, Molalla, OR 97038, (503) 829-2680; e-mail: shadow92337@molalla.net; Web site: www.ogmshows.com

28-30--COSTA MESA, CA: Gem Faire; Gem Faire Inc.; OC Fair & Event Center/Bldg. 10, 88 Fair Dr.; Fri. 12-7, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; \$5 weekend pass; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; email: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

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Thank you,
The Editor



The Opal Express

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**Volume #42 Issue #8
August 2009**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Hints for Rock Collectors
- Synthetic Opals
- In Memoriam - Mike Kowalsky
- The Great 1902 Opal Robbery
- The New Andamooka Saga
- Nevada - Opal, Oregon - Sunstone

Important Dates:

August 14 - Board Meeting
(before meeting)

August 14 - General Meeting
Speaker: LaVerne Christenson on
Silver Art Clay

— GENERAL MEETINGS —

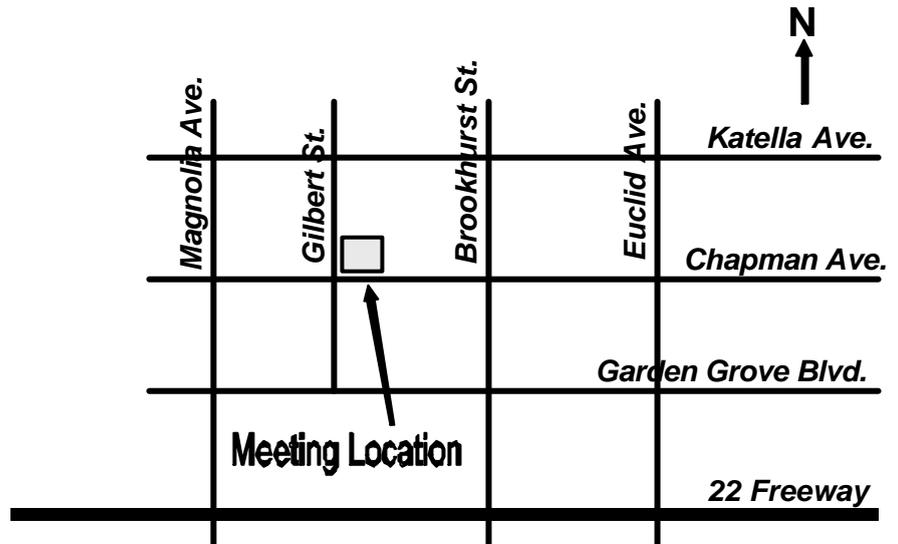
2nd Thursday of the Month
7:00 pm - 9:00 PM

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

August 14 LaVerne Christenson on Silver Art Clay



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