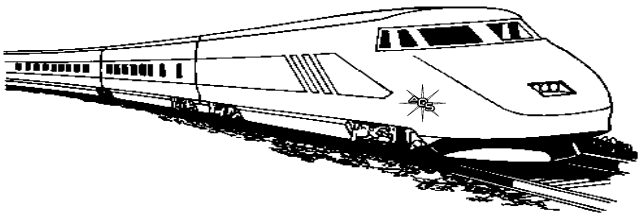
The Opal Express



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September Meeting Agenda: Opal Cutting Seminar – PART 2!

This month we will be having a continuation of our **Opal Cutting Seminar!**. We will have at least two Diamond Pacific Pixie lapidary sets and experienced cutters for opal cutting demonstrations. Also, bring in your some of your rough opal to cut. The AOS will also provide rough to cut.

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It's Coming!

The American Opal Society's 47th Annual

OPAL & GEM SHOW

The Largest Opal Show in USA!

Sat. Nov. 8, 2014 - 10AM - 6PM

Sun. Nov. 9, 2014 - 10 AM - 5PM

Opal and Gem Dealers from the USA and Australia.
Rough and Cut Opals; gemstones; jewelry & supplies.
Huge Raffle many prizes of gemstones, jewelry, tools, etc.
Free Opal Seminars on Saturday with Paid Admission.
Free Demonstrations on gem cutting, jewelry making, etc.

Same location as last year!

The Phoenix Club - Festhalle

1340 S. Sanderson Ave., Anaheim, CA 92806

Dealer spots are still available!

If you are interested, contact us ASAP!

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(714) 815-4638, editor@opalsociety.org

American Opal Society Calendar	
Date	***General Meeting Topic / Speaker***
01/09/14	*Gregg Bunch on Lab Created Quartz Crystals*
02/13/14	*Video of "Gem Hunt" on Welo Opal*
03/13/14	*Gabriel Mosesson on Ethiopian Welo Opal*
04/10/14	*Jim Bowden on Rattlesnake Awareness*
05/08/14	*Jim Pisani on an Introduction to Metal Detection*
06/12/14	*Live Opal Auction*
07/10/14	*Stan McCall on "Inlay with a Twist"*
08/14/14	*Opal Cutting Seminar*
09/11/14	***Opal Cutting Seminar – Part 2***
10/09/14	***Opal & Gem Show Work Session***
11/08/14	***47th Annual Opal, Gem, & Jewelry Show***
11/09/14	***47th Annual Opal, Gem, & Jewelry Show***
11/13/14	***Opal Show Recap / Possible Speaker***
12/11/14	***AOS Christmas Party Potluck***

Members Only Website Password

AOS website's members only area: Name: "member" and Password: "opalbug".

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I never heard of this plant, but, "ten times worse than poison oak" got my attention! The Editor

An Ancient Threat Awakens In California

By Mark Nelson, EMT

Poodle Dog Bush, *Turricula parryi*,

After sleeping for many decades, an ancient threat rises from the ashes! Following a brush or forest fire many lapidary enthusiasts anticipate rocks and minerals being more visible than they were when covered with vegetation. I learned something interesting during a recent biennial Emergency Medical Technician recertification course provided by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Many of the L.A. County Sheriff's EMT's are mountain rescue specialists and, among other things, the course updates these EMT's on hazards facing potential rescuers.

One of the new hazards is the widespread growth of a plant that threatens the unwary with weeks of pain and irritation suffering. The Poodle Dog Bush, or *Turricula parryi*, is endemic to the California's and is now being found in chaparral from the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley southwards to Baja California. In recent years authorities in areas such as the Angeles National Forest and in Orange County reported hiker's complaints of severe reactions to contact with this colorful plant. Those hikers told of wandering through fields of beautifully colored purple flowers.

Those search and rescue members that I spoke with described the plant as having puffy and colorful flowers and leaves reminding them of a poodle dog's trimmed tail. Stimulated by intense heat, the plants are erupting in areas where forest and brush fires have burned away the other vegetation that was once dominant and which kept the poodle dog plant dormant. Often mistaken for Lupine or Phacelia, clusters of lavender shaded flowers top stalks of up to 8 feet long with slender leaves of 1.5"- 4" long. The leaves and stalks have fine hairs. On the tips of these fine hairs is a sticky chemical compound of benzoic acid that produces a most unpleasant reaction in humans. These sticky hair can be deposited on clothes or skin after the slightest contact with the plant. It is believed that breathing the air around the plants can be dangerous to lung tissue, similar to poison oak. These hairs are on the leaves and stalk all year long and the toxic effects are not seasonal.

Skin contact with this plants needles results in a delayed outbreak of intensely irritating rash, blisters, itching and pain. Search and rescue squad leaders described it to me as being ten times worse that the most severe case of poison oak dermatitis. The effects can last for a month and the current best treatment products for poison oak - Zanfel and Technu - have little effect. Experts recommend over-the-counter pharmacy products containing hydrocortisone and seeing

Flower of Poodle Dog Bush

your doctor for a cortisone injection or other treatment options should blisters develop.

When in the field avoid contact with the plant! Wear gloves, long sleeves and pants. Wash your tools at the end of the day and wash your gloves and clothes separately from other laundry. Wash skin thoroughly with soap and water after contact with the plant or with clothes. I suggest that field trip leaders in California include this plant in their field trip safety briefings on potential site-specific hazards.

Resources

- http://www.socaltrailriders.org/forum/generaldiscussion/59360-poodle-dog-bush-toxicity.html
- http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/24/local/la-mepoodle- dog-bush-20110724
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turricula_plant

From **CFMS Newsletter–September 2014,**
http://www.cfmsinc.org/newsletter/news2014/009newsSep14.pdf

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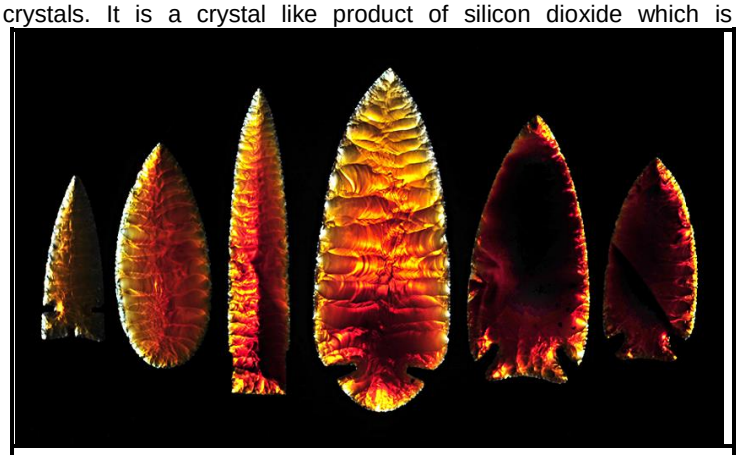
Where to Find Opals in Oregon

By: Elizabeth M Young, July 7, 2010

Opals, especially Fire Opals, are the hottest new gemstones, but their fame and desirability goes back through the centuries. They are intense, colorful and astounding when incorporated into jewelry designs. There is intensity and in some cases, movement of color inside of the gemstone, as opposed to the surface effects of other gems.

Opals are formed in rhyolite, basalt, sandstone, marl and rhyolite. Rhyolite geodes are a common source of opals. They are classified as mineraloids, meaning that they do not have the characteristics of crystals. It is a crystal like product of silicon dioxide which is



Knapped Juniper Ridge Opal

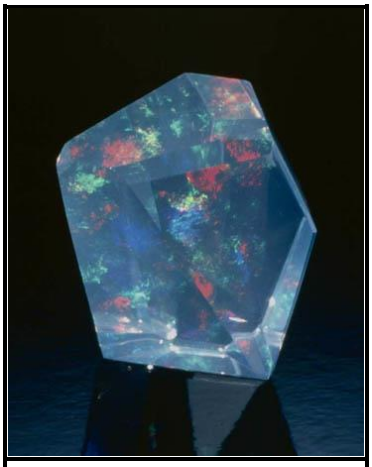
Carved Juniper Ridge Opal

deposited under somewhat low temperature and forms in fissures and cracks of rocks.

Opals are also a gel, which is high in a liquid content that is between 3 to 30 percent water, but the opal gel operates as a solid. In essence, they are a silica gel! They can be quite friable and brittle, making them difficult to maintain after mounting for jewelry.

Types of opals include: common and precious opals. Oregon opals include the types, rainbow, ryalite, contra luz, hydrophane, crystal, fire, blue, and dendritic.

Opals are found in almost every place in the world, but how do we get to Oregon and finding those intense wonders? The Juniper Ridge Opal Mine (http://www.juniperridgeopal.com) is the site of a huge opal discovery and workings that went on for 30 years before abandonment. A Father and son team, Ken and Chuck Oldham, formed a group of lapidaries and miners after spending two years to find and take over the abandoned claim in 1998. After mining the claim for years, they opened it for a type of mining called "fee dig" mining.



Opal Butte Opal

Fee Dig mining is simple! Pay a small fee, get a little training and a spot to mine, and take away whatever you find!

Opal Butte is a mountain summit that is near the town of Hepner in Morrow County, Oregon. There has a working mine that has been in operation since 1988, but known about since the 1800's, when opals were not considered to be that valuable. West Coast Mining Company (http://www.wcmining.com) has a mine there, and sells opals through its outlets.

Klamath County, Oregon hosts Opal Creek (http://opalcreekwilderness.com) and Klamath Falls, where opals have been found. The Favell Museum in Klamath Falls actually boasts an arrowhead made of fire opal!

Warning: It is always wise to contact the local treasure hunting clubs, to inquire at clubs in your own area and to make serious plans to deal with some remote and possibly hazardous territory. It is never wise to get mixed up with the mountains of the Wild, Wild West without good planning, organization and reliable guides. Then, there will be happy hunting!

Opal Butte Opal

From http://www.sciences360.com/index.php/where-to-find-opals-in-oregon-9412/#sourcesAndCitations.

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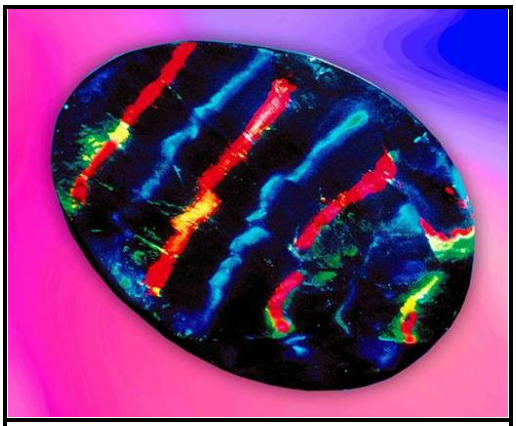
Old Man, Black Opal

By Len Cram

A Ridgee-Digee "Old Man Black Opal", what a gem! Very few miners these days ever use the term, or have even heard of it, but it was a common saying on the field, 50 years ago. It was another way of saying. "They don't come much better". It would have to be about 45 years ago that I had the pleasure of photographing this little, stunner, a Cantefell gem, a little over three carats. The lucky miner was Percy Freeman, who lived in a camp not far from the edge of the field, just off the eastern side of what is now, Gem Street. If I remember correctly, he wasn't in too big a hurry to sell it. Who in their right mind would want to pat with a gem of this quality, especially when they hade food in the cupboard, didn't have too? Like all great gems, I can tell you it's not that easy to put them down after the photographing is over. They are like magnets in your hands with their amazing patterns and ever changing colours, that never seem to stop talking to you. There is little doubt today tha



Old Man Black Opal

t i would to class this gem in the top ten small stones I've ever had the privilege of handling, and that's saying something. While penning these few thoughts of yesteryear, I couldn't help but wonder who the lucky owner now might be? Whoever it is I truly hope they realise what they have, and treasure it, and not just leave it in some dark lonely drawer with other seldom used jewellery. Rarely do you ever see a ribbon pattern this beautiful that goes almost straight across a stone, that is itself is stunning. But to watch those patterns roll along the full length of the gem,. Bobbing up down like waves upon a beach changing colour as they go, only to disappear at the end of the stone and then to re-emerge from where they started, was breath taking!

From https://www.facebook.com/len.cram?fref=ts

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From Russia with Jade

By Richard Hughes & Nickolai Kouznetsov
Photos by Richard W. Hughes

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Richard Hughes is an author, gemologist, and webmaster.
Nickolai Kouznetsov is president of Stoneflower, a Moscow-based company specializing in Russian gems, minerals and fossils.

IT IS AN OLD AXIOM that precious stones are rarely found in good places and nowhere is that more true than with jade. Burma, the world's premier source features mines located in a miserable piece of SE Asian shrubbery that would have even George of the Jungle screaming for Agent Orange. Thus when I learned that top-grade jadeite had been discovered in Russia, I quickly made plans to expect the worst. Topped up my life insurance, said my last goodbyes to relatives and friends, gave away my collection of Velvet Underground records and canceled my lifetime subscription to the *Watchtower*. That last one really hurt.

My companion and guide for my Russian sojourn was Nickolai Kouznetsov, a Kazakhstan-born Russian whose love of gems and minerals is matched only by his prodigious consumption of vodka.

Our journey to the Russian jade mines began in the capital of Moscow, a citywide case of schizophrenia, a Joseph Stalin commie habit sandwiched around a burgeoning case of youthful freedom.

Nickolai Kouznetsov enjoying nyamnyukh (raw reindeer meat) and spirt (grain alcohol) with the Khant people near Kechpel (western Polar Urals). July, 1993.

Moscow is a beguiling collection of contradictions.

The first stop in Moscow was Stoneflower, Nickolai's mineral and gem company, housed in Andreievsky Monastery, which dates to the 16th century. It was here that I viewed my first Russian jade, and also here that I drank my first Russian vodka. Both events would be repeated many times during my three weeks in the country.

The armored personnel carrier that transported the author to the Polar Urals jade mines.

Two days later, we set off for Salekhard, from Sheremetevo #2, one of Moscow's six airports. At some point in the Soviet period, it was decided that an airport was needed for each point on the compass, a sweet thought, but one that makes for pure hell when flying into Moscow with the idea of changing planes and departing in a different direction.

Polar!

At Salekhard, we are met by Sergei Mikheev, one of the discoverers of the Polar Urals jade deposits. From Salekhard, a short ferry ride across the River Ob brings us to Labutnangyi, but not without incident. Our captain ripped a rail off another ferry leaving the dock. No doubt he had been hitting the vodka. A one-hour drive brings us to Kharp, at the base of the Ural mountains, where we will spend the night. One thing about the roads up here is that you don't need to worry about driving at night, because during the summer, there isn't any – night, that is. August in the Arctic Circle is the time of "white nights." When the sun does dip below the horizon, it is for just a brief period, before coming back just two or three hours later.

A young Komi girl. Polar Urals

Kharp is quite frankly, depressing, a monochrome mixture of rust and concrete, a gray gulag of a town, whose major industries are cement and prisons. Even the sky displays a leaden, industrial quality. Not even the slightest attempt is made at gaity or beautification, as if even the thought is too much work under these harsh conditions.

Nickolai Kouznetsov of Stoneflower Co., holding a large box of rutile specimens from the Caucasus Mountains in his Moscow office.

This is the land of permafrost. While no snow is visible, only the first few feet of earth are thawed; below that all is frozen. To beat the cold, All the houses are built above the ground and insulated pipes also run above ground. At times, one sees telephone poles sticking out at crazy angles, evidence of the yearly cycle of freezing and thawing that makes it impossible to anchor anything into the soil.

We arrive at the Kharp "Sheraton," our night stop, a dimly lit above-ground cellar. Take a cheap Indian brothel, reduce the size of the windows and paint everything gray and you'll get the picture. But our room does have an attached kitchen. This is a common feature in Russian hotels, for the concept of restaurants and dining out is a new one in the former Soviet Union. Even today, years after the fall of communism, less than one percent of the population of Russia takes more than one restaurant meal per year. Yes, *per year.*

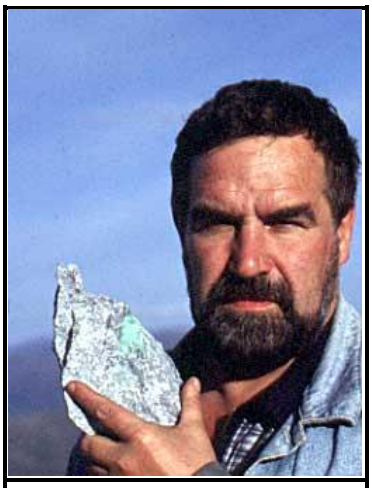
Tanked up

Transport to the mines, some 160 km from Kharp, was via a Russian armored personnel carrier (APC). After climbing aboard in a vacant lot in the middle of Kharp, our driver turned over the engine and the roar called out: "Are you ready to RUMMBBBBLLE?" Verily. Banking quickly out of the lot, one city block later we encountered a river. *Whoosh,* our vehicle splits the water like Moses parting the Red Sea. Then it was up onto the opposite bank and thus began one helluva ride. I felt simultaneously like a can of paint in a shaker and Rommel in a blitzkrieg on the Russian steppes. Tree in the way. No problem – drive right over the sucker. Rivers? We crossed several that were close to two meters deep. Over hill, dale, mound, rock, and every other manner of obstruction. Mud, rocks, trees – nothing could stop us. After my 1996–97 visits to Burma's jade mines, I thought I knew

Map showing the important jadeite localities in Russia and Kazakhstan.

what a bad road looked like, but these polar paths were their equal to the nth degree. The difference was our vehicle, which made mincemeat out of every bit of terrain thrown at it.

After an hour of white knuckling across tundra, river and forest, I turned to Nicky and asked about just how far away these mines were. With a sly smile he replied: "Only nine more hours." "Nice," I thought as I chewed on my tongue. If I ever do get down off this tundra tank, my butt cleavage will make Dolly Parton look flat-chested.



Geologist Sergei Mikheev, with a piece of Polar jadeite. After ten years of looking Sergei discovered the first piece of jadeite in the Polar Urals.

Here come the Komis

Imagine this. After close to six hours of bouncing across the Polar tundra, we cross a rise and encounter a scene straight out of the old American plains. Teepees dot the landscape, surrounded by sleds, with reindeer grazing peacefully nearby. As we rumble closer, white-skinned people dressed in red tribal outfits emerge from the tents and it hits me – I've just discovered the summer home of Santa Claus.

What we had found was an encampment of Izhma Komi (yes, pronounced like 'commie'). While there are over 500,000 Komi in Russia, the Izhma Komi number but a few thousand. These are the tundra Komi and unlike the other groups have reindeer herding as a main source of income.

In addition to the Komi, another tribal group, the Khant, are also found in the Polar Urals. But in contrast to the Komi, who have white skin and blue eyes, the Khant are more Mongolian in appearance.

Timeless

Scenery along the way was just beyond spectacular. Treeline this far north is probably less than 500 meters above sea level, with the highest peaks in the Polar Urals topping just over 1000 meters. But it is hard to be a tourist amidst the roar and bounce of this Russian Taiga tank. Occasionally we would pass a small settlement, but otherwise there was little sign of human activity. Only wave after wave of forest, green hills and tundra. After three hours of bone-jarring action, we crossed a small rise and came to a river. Standing along the bank was a wizened old man with what looked like all his worldly possessions on the back of a small wheeled luggage cart. Obviously waiting for the next train to Nowheresibirsk. He flags us over and blurts out something in Russian. Translation: "What day is it?"

Mine at last

Nine hours into our journey and I've made an important decision. Upon my return to Moscow, I will register a complaint with the Russian highway department, and then go right into the pearl business, because I cannot take these jade roads anymore. The KGB had no need for torture. All that was necessary was to bring a prisoner up here. Ten hours of this road and anyone would give up state secrets. How did I come to be here? How did John Hinkley come to shoot Ronald Reagan. I don't know. I have no fixation with Jodie Foster, I have no answers, but am obviously just as nuts as Hinkley.

Green veins are clearly visible in this large block of jadeite at Lot 88 in the Polar Urals jade mines.

The Polar Ural town of Kharp, jump-off point for the Polar jadeite deposits.

Eventually we arrived at the mine site, Pusyerka, also known as Lot 88. A few ramshackle mine buildings showed evidence of past mining activity. How anyone ever discovered a gem up here is beyond belief. The country just oozes emptiness. It would be beautiful, were it not for the thought that, in a day or two, we will have to make this same journey back.

Exploration for jade in the Polar Urals was begun by a Russian geologist named Yevgeny Kouznetsov (not related to Nickolai). In 1979, geologists mapping the area discovered rocks favorable for the formation of jadeite. Sergei Mikheev joined the yearly expeditions in 1985. Patiently they explored, during the three months per year when the snow and ice yielded to the sun. In the summer of 1989, Sergei reached down and picked up a stone that would change his life. Incredibly enough, after ten years of looking, he had found his first piece of jadeite. And it was no ordinary jadeite, but imperial jade, of a quality that compared favorably with the fine material from Burma.

Sergei took that first piece to Hong Kong, where he showed it to one local jade trader. Only a trace of imperial green was visible at the surface. When Sergei voiced his belief that the green vein would continue throughout, he met only skepticism. So Sergei made the Chinese an offer. The stone would be sawn open. If the green continued throughout, Sergei would receive his asking price. And if the green disappeared, the Chinese would pay his much lower offer. As the saw blade parted the boulder, the tension was palpable. When it reached the end, each half of the boulder tumbled away, revealing a fine emerald-green color within. Sergei's belief in his stone was vindicated. And the Chinaman became a believer. He later invested heavily in the mining, but alas, could not wring enough profit out of it to continue.

88 different outcrops of jadeite have been identified in the Polar Urals. At Lot 88, we could see remnants of the mining activity. Everywhere along the ground lay pieces of white jadeite, riddled here and there with veins of intense green. The jadeite in this area occurs in dikes within a serpentine matrix, with actinolite and phlogopite and from all appearances much material remains. But there is that old bugaboo, the weather. Today,

Nickolai Kouznetsov demonstrating how large jadeite blocks are split for transportation at the Polar Urals jade mines.

the mine lies fallow, awaiting another visionary investor, someone who can see the promise in the green stone. And Sergei continues in his belief that if the right investor can be found, the icy green stone from the Polar Urals will take its place alongside Burma in the pantheon of imperial jade.

White-knuckling it across the Polar tundra,

Good Clean Fun

Forty lashes and chest pains?

Here's to your health at the banya…

Russia offers a unique blend of customs, and there is certainly nothing more unusual than that of the *banya,* or sauna.

I normally consider myself a level-headed, sober individual, and dislike those who rejoice in the idea of "getting crazy," "walking on the wild side" and "letting it all hang out." Thus when my friend Nickolai suggested that we visit a Russian banya, where we would get naked in a room just slightly below the melting point of Satan's trident, beat each other across the back and neck and shoulders with branches, and then plunge into a pool of ice-cold water, my reply was simple: *"Yeah, baby, let's do it!"*

According to the Russians, you cannot consider yourself truly clean until you have gone through the ritual purification of the banya. The first step is to obtain bundles of birch branches (the bundle I selected was particularly nice). Then it's off to the banya. These are sex-segregated locker room-cum-bath houses where one strips naked for a quick shower before moving on to the warm-up room. Finally the main event, a wooden hot box where naked Russian sadists continually splash water onto hot rocks, sending up pillars of scalding steam which increase the temperature to solar levels. Being a novice in the banya scene, my friend Nickolai suggested I go first. He asked me to lay face down upon a wood bench and proceeded to beat me senseless with the birch branches. This lasted about 10 seconds – the time it took for me to arise screaming from the third degree burns on my… hmm… let's just call him Peter.

After applying the same to Nickolai, we fled the hot room, plunging into a pool of ice water. This is said to increase blood flow. I suppose it works – at least for those whose heart continues to beat after the shock. According to Nickolai, some Russians actually build their banyas near a lake so in winter they can go directly from Hell to a hole in the ice. A brief shower and several skin grafts later, Nickolai said it was time to do it again – and so we did, repeating the process again and again. Finally, the banya ritual was finished off with massages by two hefty Russian bears. During the massage, I began to consider making a permanent move to Moscow. My skin literally glowed, and as we glided out of the banya house I felt cleaner than I had ever been in my life. Banya? *Yeah, baby, let's do it!*

Fortune strikes

Shortly after returning from the Polar Urals, Nickolai and I found ourselves shooting a game of pool in a Moscow taproom when fortune smiled upon us. We were approached by a manic man with a cat-that-ate-the-canary grin named Mikhail "Misha" Khronlenko. An old friend of Nickolai's, Misha also happened to be Russia's biggest jade miner and exporter. After much banter and vodka during dinner the next evening, Misha told us he would be leaving soon for his jade mines in Khakassia and invited us along. As Misha explained it, "every dog gets his day." and if we would come with him to Khakassia, he promised "a fantastic day."

Not so fast. With the experience of the ten-hour Polar ass-cracker fresh in my mind, I needed to know more. Just where were these mines? Misha smiled and replied that they were just two hours outside the capital on a good road. *Oh, real-lah?* How could we refuse? A day later we found ourselves on a plane bound for Abakan, capital of Khakassia.

Let me say this from the outset. Air Abakan is not the Concorde. No sleep at all. I spent most of the flight obsessing that if the seat in front of me moved back even one more centimeter, the air hostess would have to remove me from the seat with a decal scraper. Over six hours after deplaning, the Air Abakan bird logo from the seatback in front of me was still plainly visible on my crushed nose. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing, considering that my blocked nasal passages hindered the entry of the airline's unique aroma.

The Republic of Khakassia lies in Siberia, just north of Altay and Tuva, near the border with Mongolia. Indeed, a walk through the market in Abakan, shows a strong Mongolian influence, with perhaps 10–20% of the population being of Mongolian origin. But ethnic mixtures abound. I'll never forget seeing one family walking down the street. Both mother and father displayed strong Mongolian features, with round faces, black hair and narrow eyes that would have been entirely in place in Beijing. Their child had identical features, except for one – blond hair – testament to the fact that Khakassia has been a crossroads of conquerors for centuries.

The capital, Abakan, means "bear's blood," a reference to a local legend of its founding. It was founded in 1693. Today the population is 160,000. According to legend, in the early days a large bear took a liking to the local ladies, particularly those who were young and beautiful. This bear ate so many young virgins that the Hun declared that any man who could slay the bear could marry his daughter. In the ensuing fight, one man stabbed the bear over and over. The bear's blood flowed out, clearing the valley and forming the river. Thus the name, Abakan, which means "bear's blood." If this isn't enough, Ghengis Khan is said to have buried his treasure somewhere in Khakassia. It was never found.

The jade mines in Khakassia are situated near the banks of the Yenisey River, near Sayano-Shushenskaya, one of Russia's largest hydroelectric dams. A two-hour drive from Abakan brought us to the lake created by the dam. From here, the mine lay some one-and-a-half hours across the lake by boat. Forest is everywhere. After Moscow, the air up here almost chokes you with its clarity. Thirty-six hours without sleep and I am exhausted. But eventually I move beyond exhaustion, where an epiphany is reached and I realize just why I travel. Here I am, out on a lake in the middle of Siberia, and all

The author getting down to serious business – piloting a boat on the Yenisey River, near the Khakassia jade mines. Due to the large number of logs floating in the reservoir, one must remain ever vigilant. The year before my visit, Misha was on a boat in this reservoir and, not paying attention, hit a swimming bear. Needless to say the bear was not happy.

is well, all is peace, all is right in the world. Russia is such a land of contrasts – amazing!

Truckin'

Arriving at the mining camp, we were greeted by Misha's brother and father and were pleasantly surprised at the comfortable Siberian accommodations, complete with banya. The mine employs some twenty people and the climate allows mining over seven months per year. To get to the mines, we hopped in a truck and took off on one of those incredibly steep, muddy tracks that seem to be found only on the way to a jade mine. We could have walked, but I guess when you have a chance to get stuck in the mud, riding is more fun.

Mikhail "Misha" Khrolenko (center) and his father Yakov Borisovich(left) and brother Sergei (right), owners of the Khakassia jade mines. They are standing in front of a huge chunk of Khakassia jadeite.

There is something about a jade mine that seems to bring out the worst in roads. An intense five-minute drive later, we arrived at the mine. Amidst a hillside open cut stood what is probably the single biggest jadeite boulder I have ever laid eyes on. Workers crawled across its surface like ants, sticking their jackhammer stingers in to pry away small bits, which were loaded onto waiting trucks. As I marveled at the scene, Misha was beaming. "What do you think?" he asked. "It's incredible," I gushed. "Yes," Misha answered, laughing that manic laugh: "Every dog gets his day."

Kidnapped

The next day it was back down to Abakan, where we proceeded to consume copious quantities of vodka as Misha regaled us with stories of jade and life in Siberia. Early the next morning, we rushed to the airport, only to find that the Air Abakan flight was full.

After missing our plane, I expected a couple restful days in Abakan, but Misha had other plans. The previous night's vodka fest had left each of us with little sleep and far fewer brain cells, but that did nothing to stop our dynamo guide. We paid a visit to a gold miner in a nearby town, and then it was off to a *dacha* in the countryside. Two-and-a-half hours drive later, I was beginning to understand how Patty Hearst must have felt. Eventually, we arrived at a lake. I was in miserable condition, with too little sleep and too many miles on my body, thinking to myself, "Why am I here?" I really am too old for this jade mines stuff.

The next day, recovering, I climbed a mountain above the lake. As dark clouds swirled above my head and a hawk traced lazy circles off the cliff at my feet, the answer appeared. Looking out upon the hills, the sheer vastness of the land beat open the doors to my consciousness. These hills and steppes stretched on unbroken for thousands of miles in every direction, the largest wilderness left on the planet. It had a calming effect. Even as the rains forced me down off the mountaintop, the sun was shining in my mind and heart.

In Dreams

Down below, we had a final meal before departing for Abakan and I had an opportunity to speak with Misha about his dream. He was born in Khakassia and has a deep love of his homeland and its peoples. His family was once rich and powerful, but when a brother married an American student in Moscow and immigrated to the USA, they were ostracized from Soviet society. Misha went through a number of different businesses, everything from truck driver to vodka maker before being told one day of the jade that had been found in his homeland. He was immediately smitten, deciding then and there to make it his life's work.

Working a house-sized boulder of jadeite at the Khakassia jadeite mines, near the Yenisey River.

Misha's decision seemed ever more right when his wife read to him an encyclopedia entry on jade, which stated that, next to colored diamonds, jade was the most precious of all stones. And so he set out to learn all he could about the subject, visiting Hong Kong, studying up on this gem that he hoped would become his life's work. "I have looked at all the jade deposits in Russia and Kazakhstan," Misha told me. "The Polar deposits have fine material, but the conditions are too severe, while the quality of material from Kazakhstan is not good enough. But here in Khakassia, we have the perfect combination – an accessible deposit with good material. I know it is not as good as the best from Burma, but it is quite nice and I am positive that with hard work, we can be successful."

As we packed our bags to leave, one building next to the lake caught my eye. It sported a window, but where the glass should be, the frame was filled with bricks. Above, clouds clashed in the sky. This seemed to symbolize all that is Russia today. Looking outward, but after 80 years of communism, somehow afraid of what she might find. Mother Russia moving, like the clouds, simultaneously in two opposite directions.

We hit the road as the sun's final glow began to fade. A more beautiful sunset I have never seen. Stopping the car, Misha and I look each other in the eye, smiling, then take in the vast Siberian expanse that lies before us. He tells me: "Khakassia – this is a big, big country. We are small." Just then, a rainbow shoots down through the clouds. As we embrace I tell him, "Now I understand why you brought me here." I think I've discovered that lost treasure of Ghengis Khan. "Yes," he nods knowingly. "Every dog gets his day. Every dog gets his fantastic day."

What is Jade?

Over 2500 years ago, Gautama Buddha recognized that much of life involves pain and suffering. So few of us here on Earth have been provided with a glimpse of heaven. Instead, we mostly dwell in hell. But for the Chinese, there is a terrestrial bridge between heaven and hell – jade.

Products of Russia.

While stones such as diamond are a relatively recent entry into Chinese culture, jade has a history stretching back thousands of years. In ancient China, jade was already used for making tools, weapons and ornaments. Jade's antiquity contributes an aura of eternity to this gem. Confucius, who wrote about its brilliance and beauty, praised jade as a symbol of righteousness and knowledge.

Jadeite cabochons from Khakassia.

Part of the Chinese' love of jade is its beauty and toughness. But they also ascribe mystical powers to the stone. A circular piece of jade, such as a bangle, is said to possess a protective function. If the wearer is caught in an accident, the jade will break, leaving its owner unharmed. Even more popular is the belief that it is possible to predict the stages of one's life, depending on whether a jade becomes more brilliant and transparent – meaning enjoying good times and good fortune – or whether it becomes dull – meaning there is bad luck ahead.

Just how does one classify a piece of heaven? To the Chinese, jade was defined by its "virtues," namely a compact, fine texture, tremendous toughness and high hardness, smooth and glossy luster, along with high translucency and the ability to take a high polish. But the Occidental psyche, with its propensity to pigeonhole, does not sit well with such apparent indifference to scientific definition. Thus it was left for the intruders from the West to finally cross all the t's and dot the i's of this most arcane of gem substances.

In 1863, French mineralogist Alexis Damour analyzed bright green jades from Burma. Finding them different from ordinary Chinese jade (amphibole jade, or nephrite), he named the "new" jade, jadeite. Today, gemologists apply the term jade only to amphibole jade (essentially a nephrite rock) and pyroxene jade (essentially a jadeite rock). Nephrite is a tough fibrous subspecies of the actinolite – tremolite series, whereas jadeite is a more granular, compact species of the sodium pyroxene mineral group.

Depending upon impurities, the color of jadeite jade encompasses variations of white, through red- and orange-brown, light purple to violet ('lavender'), bluish gray and black, to an extensive range of greens. The "Imperial" (chrome) green, which is not found in nephrite, is the most highly valued.

A love of jade was not limited to the Chinese. Wherever the stone was found, it was held in great esteem, from the nephrite of New Zealand's Maoris, to the jadeite of Mesoamerica. Indeed, as Cortez cut his swath through the Aztec empire, pillaging gold, silver and emeralds, Montezuma is said to have remarked to his followers: "Thank god they don't know about the jade." Gold, silver and precious stones might capture interest in the rest of the world, but in cultures familiar with jade, they were simply also-rans. In Chinese athletic competitions, ivory was given for third place and gold for second. Jade was reserved solely for the winners, including high officials in the imperial court.

Within jade's verdant interior, the Chinese, Maoris and Aztecs saw all that is good with humanity – virtue, purity, justice, humanity, and more. As the Chinese saying goes: "Gold has a price – but jade is priceless." And today, many are beginning to wake up to this truth. As we enter the new millennium, jade is the world's most precious stone, fetching prices higher than anything except the rarest colored diamonds. Indeed, five of the ten most expensive jewelry lots sold worldwide by Christie's in 1999 were jade, including three of the top five. *From http://www.ruby-sapphire.com/jade_russia.htm*

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September 2014 Gem & Mineral Shows

Shows can be found at http://www.rockngem.com/show-dates-display/?ShowState=ALL

12-14—SAN DIEGO, CA: Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; Scottish Rite Center; 1895 Camino del Rio S.; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

19-21—SAN RAFAEL, CA: Wholesale and retail show; Gem Faire Inc.; Marin Center; 10 Avenue of the Flags; Fri. 12-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; contact Yooy Nelson, (503) 252-8300; e-mail: info@gemfaire.com; Web site: www.gemfaire.com

20-21—CHICO, CA: Annual show; Feather River Lapidary & Mineral Society; Silver Dollar Fair Grounds; 2357 Fair St.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; adults $2, children (16 and under) free;; contact John Scott, 1288 Glenwood Ave., Chico, CA 95926, (530) 343-3491; e-mail: jweazel@sbcglobal.net; Web site: www.featherriverrocks.org

27-28—MONTEREY, CA: Annual show; Carmel Valley Gem & Mineral Society; Monterey Fairgrounds; 2004 Fairgrounds Rd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; adults $4, children free with adult; contact Janis Rovetti, 1047 Roosevelt St., Monterey, CA 93940, (831) 372-1311; e-mail: janis12@sbcglobal.net; Web site: www.cvgms.com

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Are Your Dues Due Now?

PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL or NEWSLETTER E-MAIL. There should be a date that shows the current month/year of your membership. If the date is older than the current date, your dues are overdue. A warning will be stated if you are overdue.

A Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. Please note, however, that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

Thank you,
The Editor

The Opal Express
American Opal Society
P.O. Box 4875
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Volume #47 Issue #9
September 2014

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- **An Ancient Threat Awakens In California**
- **Where to Find Opals in Oregon**
- **Old Man, Black Opal**
- **From Russia with Jade**
-

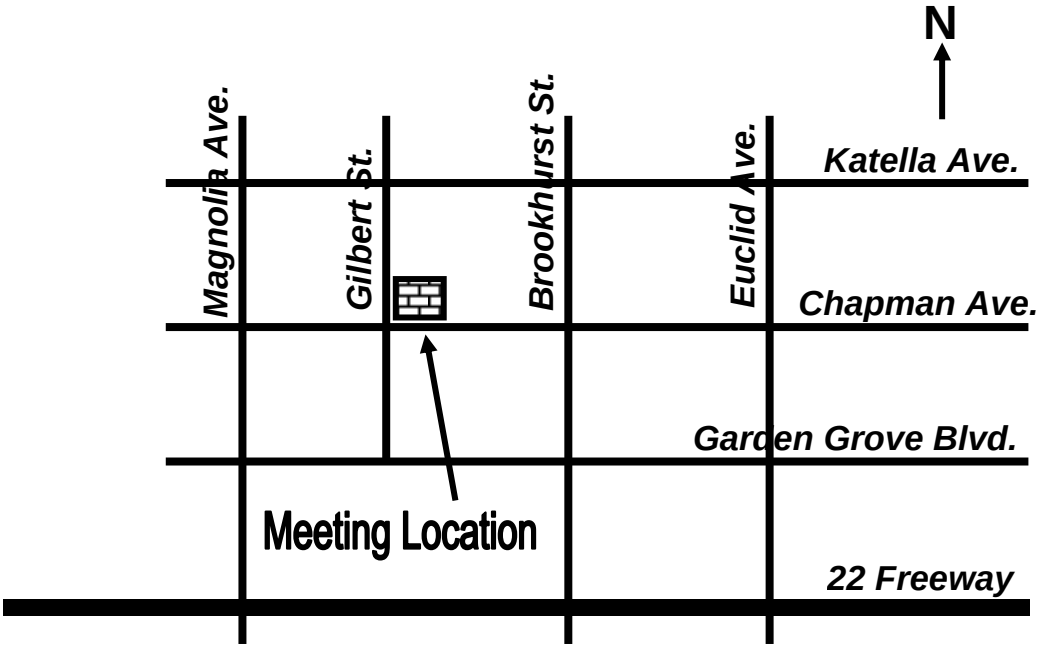
Important Dates:

September 9th - General Meeting

This month the AOS will be having Part 2 of the Opal Cutting Seminar.
We will have at least two Diamond Pacific Pixie lapidary sets and experienced cutters for opal cutting demonstrations.
Bring in your some of your rough opal to cut. The AOS will also provide rough to cut.

September 9th General Meeting

Opal Cutting Seminar - PART 2



— *GENERAL MEETINGS* —
2nd Thurs. of the Month
7:00 pm - 9:30 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

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http://OpalSociety.org

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