

THE OPAL EXPRESS



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President's Message

Greetings Opalholics!
Happy Fourth of July!

I hope everyone is staying cool - the weather has been brutal lately!

How many of you are going out of town this summer? Lora and I will be going to Nipomo, August 5-7 for the Orcutt Gem & Mineral Society show at Nipomo High School. Our editor, Kathleen James, will be sharing the booth with us again this year. If you're planning on visiting the Central Coast the first weekend in August, stop by the show and say hello!

Until next time, stay safe, stay busy and stay cool!

Stan McCall
AOS President
Custom Creative Gem Cutting

Member area access is available only to members in good standing. Any other entry is unauthorized.

**USER NAME: member
PASSWORD: RedflaSH79 (case sensitive)**



Let's extend a hearty AOS welcome to
our newest member!

Denise Ross

Thank you Denise for joining the
American Opal Society!

And we're very happy to welcome back!

Naomi Higuchi
and
Laura LeVan

Wire Wrapping Demo For July Meeting

Are you interested in learning how to wire wrap a beautiful cabochon? If so, then be sure to come to the July 21st AOS meeting.

Paula Purpura will be demonstrating how to wire wrap a cabochon with prongs.

The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. Be sure to get there early for a good seat!

Opal: Australia's Troubled Gemstone

*by Naomi Levin,
24 February 2011*

For decades opals have had a bad rap. Too many of the poor quality stones have been inlaid into poorly constructed kitsch tourist jewellery. Naomi Levin reports.

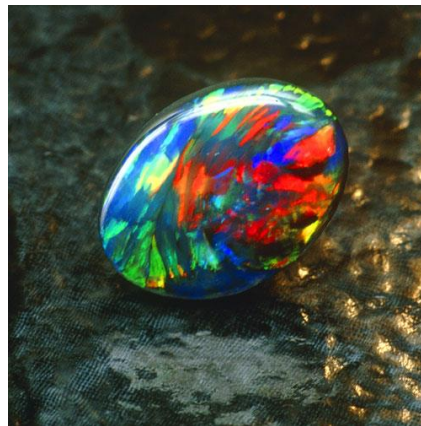
Couple this with a mining crisis, which sees opal miners attracted to the more lucrative coal industry for a stable wage, and it would be fair to say Australia's national gem needs a bit of help.

Unlike other gemstones, an opal's challenge begins when it is still in the ground. Opals only occur in specific geological conditions in sedimentary environments around the Great Australian Basin. To laymen, this means most opal is far, far inland in NSW, Queensland and South Australia – hundreds of kilometres from the closest cities. Being an opal miner is, according to those in the know, a tough and lonely existence.

Maxine O'Brien, who is manager of the Lightning Ridge Miners' Association in the region that is home to some of the most spectacular black opal, says government regulations add to the pressures on opal miners, as has a 30 per cent drop in the field price of opal. This has resulted in lower output and fewer discoveries of new seams. "There are substantially fewer miners compared with five years ago and state government in NSW and Queensland are actively making life difficult for small miners through increased prices and regulation," she says.

Miners are not going down without a fight though, she explains. "Opal miners are lobbying hard and will have new areas opened up for exploration, which should result in increased production within the next five years."

Opal, like all stones, varies greatly in quality. Today, the larger stones, O'Brien says, are moving well. In the past five years, the top end



An exceptional gem opal.

– "larger stones of good to excellent quality" – has remained stable. The same cannot be said for the less expensive opal.

Allan Cheng, director at Opals Australia, estimates 70 per cent of Australia's opals are exported – that figure includes those bought in Australia by international tourists.

"Traditional export markets for opals include the USA, Europe, in particular the UK and German, and Asian regions spearheaded by Japan," he says. "The Chinese market obviously has huge potential going forward."

Once opal reaches the jeweler there are a number of different paths it can take. The most well-known, and possibly most maligned in the wider jewellery industry, is the low-end tourist market. But it is the design-focused, higher end that is being cultivated.

Much of the hostility toward opal in Australia is aimed at the tourist sector and its use of poor quality doublets and triplets, boring designs and shoddy craftsmanship.

Doreen Wallman, from Spectrum Gems in Sydney's Strand Arcade, has been in the industry for decades – since her family started mining the gem in Queensland – and has seen the industry from other sides too, having been involved in the wholesaling and export of opal, and now the retail and manufacture side. Her shop stocks a range of price points –

Continued on Page 3

all the way up to bespoke pieces – and relies significantly on the tourist market, these days mostly Americans, Brits and Germans.

It is with a sense of regret that Wallman speaks about much of the industry’s focus on tourists. “It’s never been promoted properly,” she says of opal, adding, “Diamonds are the thing every young [Australian] woman dreams of.”

As well as, in some people’s opinion, tarnishing opal’s reputation, the problem with relying on the tourist sector is when the visitors stop coming, so too do the sales. With the bleak financial situation in America and Europe, coupled with a very strong Australian dollar, the flow of international tourists has dropped – something Wallman has noticed.

Opal Australia’s Cheng is partially relying on an economic bounce back to get the industry back on track. “The economic recovery of the key markets for opal will no doubt be closely monitored by the industry as a whole,” he says.

However, many see the future of opal as being in drastically increased domestic consumption. “We need more education by industry bodies,” Wallman says. “Most Australians have only seen the white opal their granny wore.”

Two other opal specialists interviewed for this story spoke of an identical refrain: customers walking into their store and asking in disbelief whether the magnificent stone in front of them is really an opal.

Ian McArthur, known to all as Mac, is an opal guru from Bellingen in New South Wales. He specializes in Queensland ironstone matrix, a stone where the opal veins and layers are virtually inseparable from their dark ironstone hosts. “The best way to market opal is to educate the Australian market so they speak on the stone’s behalf,” he says.

“I educate people every day.” The day before our conversation, he taught a couple of

backpackers about the beauty and rarity of opal. They ended up buying \$600 worth of opal – “That was probably all the money they had,” he laughs.

It is also a familiar situation to Kingsley Wallman, co-owner of Venerari in Sydney and the son of Spectrum Gem’s Doreen Wallman. Kingsley Wallman has been selling design-focused, high-end jewellery for six years. He started out trying to “reinvent the opal”, but has diversified into other coloured gems. “Opal is still our largest-selling gemstone,” he says. “But there is still a perception that opal is a product for tourists only.”

Venerari uses only the best quality black and boulder opal, eschews doublets and triplets and creates designs that showcase the opal in the best possible light. And it sells. “We do make big opal engagement rings,” the former lawyer turned gemologist says. “I wouldn’t have believed it myself six or seven years ago.”

Opal is softer than other stones – 5.5 to 6.5 on Mohs hardness scale, compared with a diamond’s 10 – and requires a skillful jeweler to set it. This though, should not deter buyers, who, as with pearls, can maintain their opals with a little care to avoid scratches. Black, boulder opal is slightly harder than the white variety; it is also more sought after in cutting-edge design.

However, it concerns Kingsley Wallman that local designers are not matching these incredible stones with cutting-edge settings to attract local buyers.

“There is still an unrealized opportunity,” he says. “A perception that opal is a second-class citizen, but people are getting the wrong story. It’s not so much about the stone, as about the design and service.”

From <http://www.jewellermagazine.com>

Opal Grading System Aims To Restore Confidence

by Sonia Nair
14 July 2011

Brisbane-based gem company Opal Horizon has launched a comprehensive quantifiable opal grading system as the first step in a global marketing effort to restore confidence in the gemstone.

Opal Horizon managing director David Horton said his company enlisted the expertise of international opal authorities to formulate the grading system in the hope that it would make opal gradings and valuations more transparent and therefore help increase worldwide acceptance of opals in the jewellery industry

“After interviewing the CEOs of around 20 of the top jewellery companies in the world, we found that every single person was saying the same thing. There was no transparency in how opals were classified, graded and valued,” Horton said.

Opal Horizon unveiled its opal grading system at the Gemological Institute of America’s (GIA) Symposium on May 30 and Horton said it received “excellent” feedback from key industry players.

With Opal Horizon’s grading system, jewellers and consumers can evaluate opal by quantifiable grading parameters based on the opal’s category, colour and cut. ‘Category’ stands for the presence and degree of host rock in the opal, ‘colour’ assigns points to the opal according to its face, body tone, play of colour, brightness, pattern, directionality and special

attributes while ‘cut’ looks at the opal’s finish and polish, ease of setting, symmetry or balance and exclusion of defects.



A Fine Gem Opal

Assessment of these three quality features will categorise an opal into five quality grades ranging from ‘exceptional gem opal’ to ‘fine gem opal’, ‘gem opal’, ‘commercial opal’ and ‘promotional opal’. The grading system also allows for certification of quality.

Opal Horizon has also developed an international marketing strategy to reintroduce and promote opals to retailers and consumers. As part of the strategy, it intends to implement a retail education programme on opals.

Horton believes local retailers will reap the benefits of this grading system.

“There are a lot of myths and uncertainty about opal and while some retailers will admit that they prefer it that way because they can sell at the price they want, they

Continued on Page 5

admit it has damaged the industry and this is now the best way forward,” he said.

While he concedes that the Opal Horizon-formulated grading system is not the first of its kind, he feels it is evolutionary and gemologist Helen Levonis who gave a presentation at the GIA symposium about the grading system agreed with Horton.

“While there are other grading, appraisal and evaluation programmes for natural precious opal, none have caught on as an industry standard because they are either too consuming, too complex or too simplified,” Levonis said.

Several gemologists from Opal Horizon will be attending the National Opal Symposium in Lightning Ridge in late July to talk about the new grading system and the company is also looking to get the grading system promoted in GIA publications.

“GIA does set global standards and by getting it accepted by GIA, which we appear to have done, we expect this will be the first step towards global acceptance,” Horton said.

Horton hopes global acceptance will increase opal’s standing in Australia, where more than 95 percent of gem-quality opal is produced. “The Australian opal industry wants to grow but it doesn’t want to change. You can’t do one without the other.”

From <http://www.jewellermagazine.com>

A Different Treasure

Not all lost mines beckon with the promise of gold or silver, The Land of Enchantment, for example, holds promise to a wealth in jewels – opals in particular – if one can find the mine. When first discovered in 1879, New Mexico’s opal mine so disappointed the party finding it that they traded it to two prospectors for grubstake to go searching for treasure. Unfortunately for the new owners, relations with their neighbors were not friendly. Cochise’s Chiricahua Indians were on the warpath and chased the mine owners away. Figuring that something was better than nothing, they traded their interests in the mine. The new owners were even less fortunate. They were killed on site by marauding Chiricahuas.



Scones – Miner’s candle holders- by Stephen M. Voynick

The mine lay quiet for several years until 1902, when investors in Phoenix tried to float a promotion to reclaim it and remove the opals from its depths, but the scheme floundered for reasons unknown.

There has been no recent attempts to work the mine, for the records indicating its exact location are lost. All that is known is that it was the Horseshoe Range, close to the Arizona state line.

Horseshoe Mountain, near Summit, Hidalgo County, NM, 7 miles southwest of US 70, between Lordsburg and the Arizona state line.

From Southwest Traveler Guidebooks – “Lost Mines & Buried Treasure – A Guide to Sites & Legends of the Southwest”, by Edward Rochette

Famous Opals - The Red Cosmos



The Red Cosmos after being rubbed when first found.

It often happens that great stones are not always found by the original claim holder. There are many stories where the second or third owner has found a great stone in the patch. The discovery of "Red Cosmos" is one of them. It all happened on 9 July 1988 at one of the new Carter's rushes. The area had originally been discovered in 1970 by Art Carter, an enterprising American businessman, who had fallen in love with opal. Although not related, two miners by the name of Baker bought the claim after the original owners believed there was none of the patch left they had been working on.

Little more than half the claim had been worked when they took it over, and except for a long slide that the original owners had driven through and found nothing, no interest had been taken in it. With their experience, they worked parallel along the slide for 15 ft, getting opal almost all the way and wondering how the original owners could have possibly missed it. They had been digging out opal for days, when one morning an incredible gem fell out of the wall at their feet. They were astonished by the size and brightness of the stone, even before they had picked it up.

It was the thickness of the colour bar that attracted their attention and on close examination they found that it was also naturally jointed. There was another piece, but where was

it? Looking up, they saw the other piece looking at them in the wall where they had been working, still embedded in the slide. It looked so beautiful sitting there in its natural state they said that they wished they'd had camera to record it.

The excitement was too much, even for experienced miners like them, and they called it a day. They had found a once in a lifetime gem. Up in the daylight the colours almost mesmerized them and they were little better when they first brought the two pieces to me to be photographed. They wanted a record of the gems in the rough as they had come out of the ground, and after cutting, they came back on two occasions to have them photographed.

I must admit that at first I didn't share their optimism as to both of the stones cutting so clean, with so little loss, although I never said as much. I didn't want to dampen their spirits. Had I done so I would have been proved wrong. They cut two beautiful clean stones. The grey scum that often covers the top of such gems lifted as clean as a whistle, exposing broad red ribbon like patterns flowing across the large stone and to a lesser extent, smaller ones across the other piece. The final weight of both pieces was 725 carats and they were bought by a well known German dealer for an undisclosed sum.



The Red Cosmos after finishing.

From "A Journey with Colour; A History of Lightning Ridge Opal, 1873-2003" By Len Cram.

Also from Seda Opals at

<http://www.opalauctions.com/famous-opals.php>.

~ Bench Tips ~

This page will be dedicated to bench tips and techniques from our readers. If you have bench tips you'd like to share, let us know! Bench tips can be anything - metal work, lapidary, wirework - anything creative that you would like to share. Send your tips to: aos.editor.02@gmail.com

HOMEMADE WAX TOOLS

by Brad Smith

Save your used X-Acto or scalpel blades for utility work on the bench. They're wonderful for delicate wax work. Use a cutoff wheel or other type of grinding wheel to shape the blades to what you need.

For instance, you can carve away excess metal on the spine to make yourself some narrow carving knives that do a great job of detailing small pierced areas of your waxes.



REMOVING A STONE FROM A BEZEL

by Brad Smith

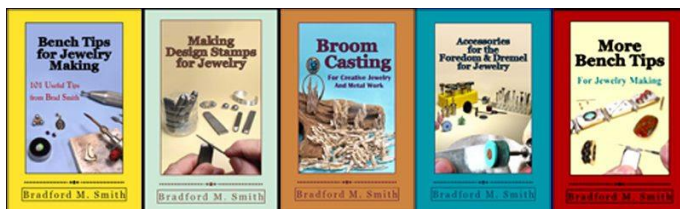
If you've forgotten to use dental floss and got your stone caught in a bezel, there's one thing you can try before starting to pry.

Find some sticky wax or beeswax. Roll it into a pencil-sized cylinder and stick the end onto the top of the stone. Mold it on well and yank.

But if the stone is really stuck, there are two other tricks - but each with risks and consequences. The first is to pry open the bezel with a sharp knife blade being very careful not to wrinkle or tear the bezel. If you try this, make sure to pry gently in several passes around the stone.

The last solution is to drill a small hole into the bezel setting from the back side so that you can push the stone out. Note that this does leave a hole, but in some cases you can use it to saw out a design under the stone.

Work Smarter & Be More Productive with Brad's "How To" Jewelry Books on [Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith](https://www.amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith)



UPCOMING EVENTS

Reader: If your organization has an opal or rockhound-related event, please email particulars to info@opalsociety.org. Upcoming Event listings will be included at the discretion of The Opal Express editor as space and scheduling permit.

July 16-17, 2022 – Culver City, CA

Culver City Gem & Mineral Society

Fiesta of Gems

Veterans Memorial Auditorium, 4117 Overland Ave., Culver City, 90230

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

36 vendors plus exhibits, demos, workshops and games. Fun for the whole family – Free admission and free parking.

Contact: BradSmithJewelry@gmail.com

Website: <http://CulverCityRocks.org/fiesta.htm>

August 5-7, 2022, Nipomo, CA

Orcutt Mineral Society

Nipomo High School, 525 N. Thompson Ave., Nipomo, CA 93444
54th Annual Rainbow of Gems Show & Sale – “OMS Rocks the Central Coast”

Hours: Friday & Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

Contact: nipomocowgirl55@yahoo.com

Website: <http://omsinc.org>

August 6-7, 2022, Roseville, CA

Roseville Rock Rollers Gem and Mineral Society

@the Grounds, Roebbelen Event Center, 700 Event Center Dr., Roseville, CA 95678

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

Roseville Rock Rollers 60th Diamond Jubilee! Diamond give away each day, in the huge air-conditioned Event Center. Over 60 vendors, inside and outside, featuring: Crystals, Fossils, Minerals, Opal, Amethyst, Beads, Gemstones, Meteorites, Gold, and for Kids – “Education Station”, Prospecting equipment, detectors and supplies, Petrified Wood, Stone carvings. Watch Demonstrations in the Lapidary Arts & bid on Silent Rock Auctions. Free – Scientific Mineral and Gem ID! Bring your Rocks, Gems, Minerals, for a no-cost Scientific Identification. Lots to see for adults and kids!

August 20-21, 2022 – Arcadia, CA

Pasadena Lapidary Society

“Inspiration Unearthed”, 62nd Annual Tournament of Gems

Arcadia Masonic Center, 50 W. Duarte Rd., Arcadia

Hours: Saturday 10 AM- 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

Contact: Ellen Ferrell 1-727-512-0381

Email: ellenbf2007@aol.com

Website: <https://www.pasadenalapidary.org>

August 20-21, 2022 – Tehachapi, CA

Tehachapi Valley Gem and Mineral Show

500 East “F” Street, Tehachapi, CA

Hours: 9 AM – 5 PM

Rocks, Minerals, Fossils, Beads, Gifts, Collectables, Gemstones and Jewelry

Dealer inquiries accepted. For information contact Ron Myrick, E-Mail: travis462@outlook.com (661) 972-1117 or Robert Papac:

getback@csurfers.net (661) 342-5589

Contact: email: getback@csurfers.net

Website: <http://tvqms.org>

September 10-11, 2022, Reno, NV

The Reno Gem & Mineral Society, Inc.

Jackpot of Gems

Reno Convention Center, 4390 S. Virginia, Reno, NV 89502

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

Contact: sailondan55@aol.com

Website: <http://www.renogms.org>

August 20-21, 2022 – Tehachapi, CA

Tehachapi Valley Gem and Mineral Show

500 East “F” Street, Tehachapi, CA

Hours: 9 AM – 5 PM

Rocks, Minerals, Fossils, Beads, Gifts, Collectables, Gemstones and Jewelry

Dealer inquiries accepted. For information contact Ron Myrick, E-Mail:

travis462@outlook.com (661) 972-1117 or Robert Papac:

getback@csurfers.net (661) 342-5589

Contact: email: getback@csurfers.net

Website: <http://tvqms.org>

September 24-25, 2022 – San Luis Obispo, CA

San Luis Obispo Gem and Mineral Club

San Luis Obispo Veterans Memorial Building, 801 Grand Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA

Hours both days: 10 AM – 5 PM

Contact: 2022show@alogem.org

Website: <http://www.slogem.org/show.htm>

September 24-25, 2022

Long Beach Mineral and Gem Society

Gems on the Hill Show

Signal Hill Public Library, Signal Point Terrace and Community Room

1800 E. Hill St., Signal Hill, CA 90755

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

Free event, Children's activities

Contact: 562 253-1390, karin.yasuda@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.facebook.com/LBMGS>

October 8-9, 2022 – Los Altos, CA

Peninsula Gem and Geology Society

Los Altos, CA 94022

Hours: Saturday and Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

Recreation with Rocks

Contact: 650 575-3144

Website: <http://pggs.org>

October 9, 2022 – Fallbrook, CA

Fallbrook Gem and Mineral Society

Fall Festival of Gems & Minerals

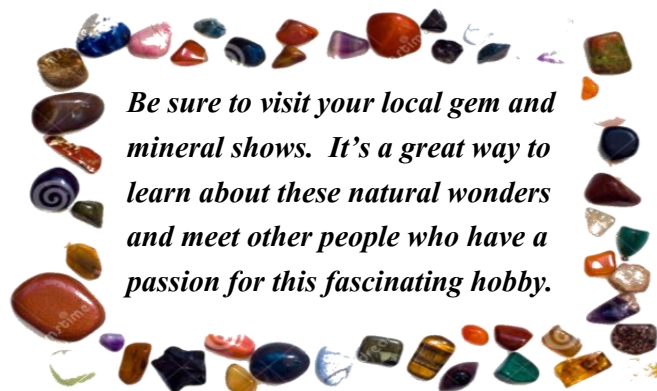
123 W. Alvarado Street, Fallbrook CA 92028

Hours: 9 AM-4 PM

Vendors: apply by August 1, 2022. Free booths for nonprofit organizations promoting minerals, fossils or gems.

Contact: (760) 728-1130, info@fgms.org

Website: <http://www.fgms.org>



Be sure to visit your local gem and mineral shows. It's a great way to learn about these natural wonders and meet other people who have a passion for this fascinating hobby.

American Opal Society Membership Application

FILL IN APPLICABLE INFORMATION		DUES / FEES	AMOUNT PAID
DUES:	RENEWING MEMBERS	\$35.00	
SELECT ONE	NEW MEMBERS	\$45.00	
INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP FEE (All addresses <u>outside</u> of USA)		\$15.00	
PRINTED NEWSLETTER FEE (Paper copy postal mailed instead of PDF file by e-mail)		\$10.00	
ADDITIONAL BADGES (Your first badge is <u>free</u> when joining)		\$15.00	
TOTAL PAID DUES plus International, Print or Badge Fees if Applicable:			

Please make check or money order payable to "American Opal Society". Mail payment and application to:

American Opal Society: PO Box 4875, Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

An optional quicker method of payment is via the internet. To pay via PayPal, please visit the membership page on our website at http://opalsociety.org/aos_application_by_web.htm to complete the form and make your PayPal payment. You may pay with a credit card or via PayPal account. The transaction is completely secure and the AOS never sees your credit card number. The AOS PayPal account is membership@opalsociety.org.

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ADDRESS	APT # or PO BOX
CITY	STATE
ZIP OR POSTAL CODE	COUNTRY (IF OUTSIDE USA)
PHONE - Home ()	PHONE - Business ()
E-MAIL	
WEBSITE	
OCCUPATION	HOBBIES and INTERESTS

NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:

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

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

☐ Address ☐ Phone-landline ☐ Phone-cell ☐ E-mail ☐ Website

Please sign here: _____

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Are Your Dues Due Now?

PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL OR NEWSLETTER E-MAIL.

There will 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 Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. Please note, that as the system is 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

(revised 11/27/19)

The Opal Express

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

Volume 55, Issue 7

— GENERAL MEETINGS —

3rd Thursday of the Month
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Anaheim Community Center
250 E. Center Street
Anaheim, CA 92805



Meeting
July 21st at 7 p.m.
Anaheim Community Center

TO:



General Meeting Location at:

Anaheim Downtown Community Center

250 E. Center Street
Anaheim, CA 92805

Next meeting will be July 21st, at 7:00 p.m. at the
Anaheim Downtown Community Center

American Opal Society

Website: <http://OpalSociety.org>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/opalsociety>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanOpalSociety>
Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/opalsociety>
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCegTIH1IEyO7y8wdqvRfyUA?view_as=subscriber

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