

The Opal Express

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Happy New Year

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President's Message

Happy New Year Opalholics!

I hope everyone had a great holiday and you're ready for a brand new year!

As mentioned in previous newsletters, we are working on details for the 2023 Opal Show and when they are finalized, we will let everyone know

Although I will be in Quartzsite January 16th thru the 23rd, there will be a January meeting. Russ Madsen or Pete Goetz will officiate.

Speaking of Quartzsite. If you're looking for some great quality gems, minerals and jewelry, come on out to Pow Wow at the Quartzsite Improvement Association. There's something for everyone and it would be great to see our members there!

Stan McCall
AOS President
Custom Creative Gem Cutting





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

Bob Jones

Mark Lawson

Thank you Bob and Mark for joining the American Opal Society!

Did You Know?

If birds begin to whistle in January, there will be frost.

Birds are usually around and active in the northern states during the heart of winter only when temperatures are unusually mild, which means that the steering winds high aloft have a large north-south component. The southerly component is what brought the warm weather, but, as those steering winds move, they will become northerly, bringing along very cold air.

Source: <https://www.almanac.com/january-weather-folklore>

Australia: Ridge over Rubble Paupers

by Darrin Ratajczak
18 September 2008

"I want opal. I want opal."

Old Clarrie coaxes the divining rods as he slow-dances with them in the white dust. One twitches and the other dutifully nods for him to slow. A shift of the foot and they twirl with excitement.

"There's opal here. The wires know it," he says as he sidles up to the rock and runs his fingers over its contours as if it was the face of a lover. The "wires" may know it, but the wall of white rock in front of us isn't giving much away.

After nearly 20 years working claims around The Ridge, the wires are a relatively new thing for Clarrie. Opal, particularly the highly-prized black variety endemic to The Ridge, is an elusive and demanding master, so any hint to the inside running is more than welcome.

This particular claim in the Sheep Yard opal field 80 km west of The Ridge has been Clarrie's life for the best part of 13 years, chipped away with no more than a jack hammer, brute strength and a blinding faith. What it has yielded barely covers the yearly registration fee.

For many in the fields, spending much of the day underground is unexceptional. But 20 minutes is enough for me to feel the dusty



Claims around Lightning Ridge are peppered with piles of tailings, discarded machinery and open mineshafts.

In the harsh tungsten light some 10m underground, it's as if the old man's face has been cut from the rock itself. With a thick mop of grey hair licked back and random outcrops of salt-and-pepper stubble, he looks like a Dorothea Lange portrait of a prospector.

I came to Lightning Ridge expecting to find a plastic reproduction of Australia's most famous opal mining town, but to my surprise found a living frontier where you can still experience the life of an opal miner much as it has been since the first shaft was sunk back in 1901.

tailings eating into my throat and my heart pound as if I'm breathing underwater. Clarrie reinforces the impression.

"Aw, Christ yeah, it's a bastard of a place; blokes get lung cancer all the time. Worse is the snakes. They get pretty snakey when they fall down the shaft."

"So what do you do?" I ask.

"Ya grab a shovel and beat the shit out of it." Of course.

Locals will tell you that The Ridge's northernmost opal fields of Sheep Yard, Grawin and Glengarry are how Lightning Ridge used to be.

Continued on Page 3

At first sight, Sheep Yard looks like the colony of giant mutant ants. Scrubby clumps of stunted cypress pines, box gums and Mitchell grass are separated by the ubiquitous mullock heaps.

From a couple of feet to several metres high, these mounds of grey-white rock and soil are the by-product of excavation and the reason everything is covered in a dusty film. Rusting hulks of abandoned machinery dot the landscape like the left-over shells of insects.

Among all this sit the miners' camps. Clarrie's is typical of many. The basic structure of corrugated iron and unfinished logs seems to be held together more by disused mining equipment, odd sticks of crumbling furniture and the detritus of life than actual walls and roofs.

Although opal was first found around the fields as early as 1906, little happened until the discovery of an opal the size of a man's fist. Called The Light of The World and weighing in at almost 450g, it started the rush of 1928.

The area slowly fell into decline again until the discovery of a rich seam in Glengarry in 1970 at a spot now known as Millionaires' Gully.

Fittingly, the Sheep Yard rush began on Melbourne Cup Day, 1985, when a wandering couple found opal near some old sheepyards.

Lightning Ridge now supplies nearly all the world's black opal, the most rare and valuable form of the gem.

Maps of the fields are more of a loose guide than a definitive depiction. The rough-hewn tracks skirt around claims and between mullock heaps. Then there are the open shafts - only recently fenced to prevent wayward drunks from coming a cropper.

That evening, I joined the local mining fraternity at the Glengarry Hilton. As the name suggests, the Hilton is the most opulent of the fields' "pubs in the scrub". In effect, it's a more impressive collection of unfinished logs and corrugated iron than the camps.

At the Hilton, ZZ Top-style beards and beaten-up Akubras are *de rigueur* - teeth optional.

I'm soon embraced by a group of locals keen to share a yarn. Gisella, one of the co-owners of the Hilton, happily pulls out a pack of opals she's selling for a friend. The half-dozen or so gems range in size from a pea to a 10c coin. "There's more than \$10,000 worth here," she tells me.

The term "black opal" can be deceptive. Black refers to the underlying body colour that makes overlaying colours more vivid. Some contain only blues and greens, like a tropical lagoon. Others blaze with fiery reds and oranges. Others mix every colour.



*Rare black opals actually come in a range of colours.
Photo / Brett Phibbs*

The famous stones have names like Picasso's Palette, Halley's Comet and The Fire of Gidgea.

On the surface, the town of Lightning Ridge looks much like any outback town. But there's an eccentric side to this miners' paradise. Ever since Charlie Nettleton first gathered saleable quantities of opal in the

early 1900s, the Ridge has attracted a veritable United Nations of prospectors, drifters and gamblers: the lucky and the lost. Nobody really knows how many people live in the town. Officially it's around 1800, but some say it's 10 times that and eight out of 10 are said to be born outside Australia.

To taste the eccentric, take a guided tour or one of the four car-door tours - self-drive tours where numbered car doors act as signposts - and you'll find Amigo's Castle, a private home built single-handedly from ironstone in the style of Roman ruins near the builder's birthplace in Northern Italy.

Just up the road is a strange concrete monument to the world's famous astronomers. Why astronomers? Why here? Beats me.

The car doors will also lead you to one of the town's better tourist attractions - The Walk-In Mine. Here you can take a self-guided tour of what was once a working mine. It's one of the easier mines to access, but still not recommended for the claustrophobic.

To the west of town is the Three-Mile opal field and Lunatic Hill. In 1986, an opal valued at \$2.5 million and named Halley's Comet was found at the open-cut mine here.

However, for me, it is the names of the claims and the history behind them that is more interesting. With names like The Black Hand, Dead Bird and Blind Freddie's, you can image the stories.

The Leaning Tree claim, for example, got its name back in 1921 when claim owners Jack Souter and his brother discovered a ratter (thief) in their mine.

Being pragmatic folk, the brothers put a rope around his neck and hung the man from a nearby leaning tree.

The good-hearted Souters didn't leave the hapless ratter there for long, however, and as soon as he was released, he lost no time leaving town.

Frankly, if you chose a place called Lunatic Hill to rob a mine, you were never going to make it as a ratter anyway.

If you prefer to get your hands dirty, there are plenty of places around town to go for a noodle (local parlance for scouring discarded mine tailings for opal).

I heard several stories of tourists who found opal worth hundreds and even thousands of dollars this way.

But for my money, prospecting is best left to the professionals like old Clarrie, because it's the people and stories of the Ridge that are far more colourful than anything pulled from the ground.

GETTING THERE: Lightning Ridge is 359km from Dubbo. Qantas Link and Rex fly to Dubbo from Sydney daily, with a Rex connection to Lightning Ridge daily except Saturday.

ACCOMMODATION: The Glengarry Hilton has backpacker-style accommodation in rooms for two or four. Ph +61 2 6829 3983. The Lightning Ridge Hotel Motel has camping from \$18 for two, cabins \$63 and \$5 per extra person, double rooms \$85. Ph +61 2 6829 0304, www.ridgehotelmotel.com.

FURTHER INFORMATION: The Visitor Information Centre has tour maps for \$1. Ph +61 2 6829 1670; www.lightningridge.net.au. Town tours for \$25 a head by Black Opal Tours and Outback Opal Tours. From <http://www.nzherald.co.nz>.

* Please note that these rates are not current, as the original article was written in 2008.

Giant Matrix Opal Discovered on the Way to Coober Pedy

by Maggie Wallace



Check this one out!

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

I found it in Tanunda, Barossa Valley. The owner, Patrick Kelly, had for 30 years been digging opals in Coober Pedy, and had moved South only a couple of years ago to open an opal shop. He kindly brought the matrix out so I could hold it. Its weight is nearly 10.000 karat (ab. 2 kg's) and the estimated value is over 750.000 AUD!! I did offer him a good price(!), but he said it wasn't for sale at any price, so there!

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

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

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

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

A week later the first opal claim was pegged, but due to extreme heat and lack of water, the party soon had to leave. Towards the end of WW I Australian soldiers returned home from the front, and some found their way up to Coober Pedy in hope of a fortune in opal-digging. They had been living in trenches in France for weeks, and brought back with them the idea of living under ground to escape the sun during the day. Today about 60% of the population still lives like that.



What a beauty

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

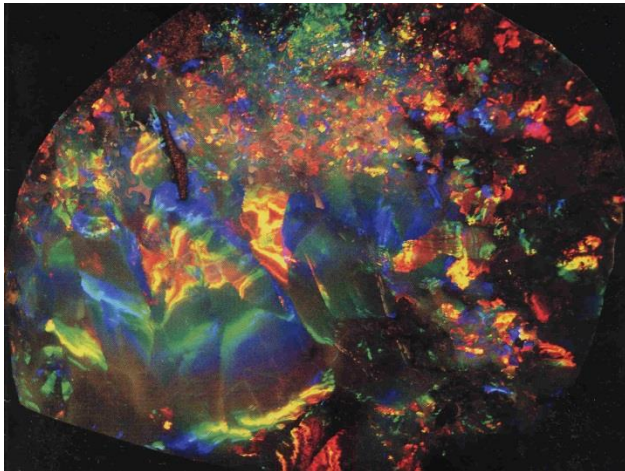
From:

<http://www.maggiwallace.com/cooberpedy.htm>

Famous Opals: The Galaxy Opal

by Joan Milton

The spectacular cover photo on Autumn 2006 issue of Metal Stone & Glass magazine is one of the most exciting covers we have had. It was taken by Hans de Boer of Tasmania, and for our readers, this will most likely be the only opportunity you will ever have to see THE GALAXY OPAL. The Galaxy Opal is one of the largest and finest quality boulder opal ever mined. It has a complete spectrum of colours, making it one of the most highly prized opal ever seen.

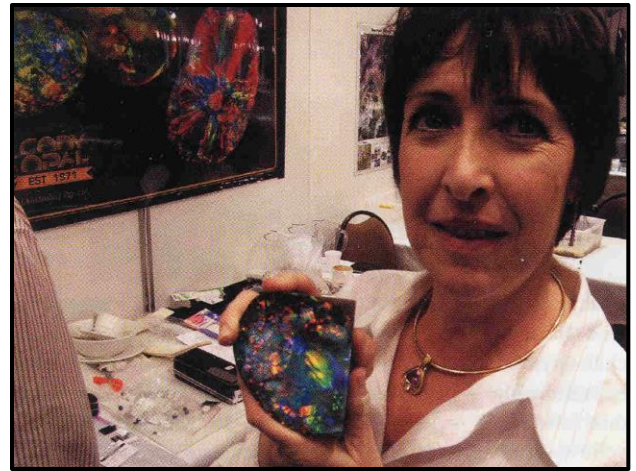


The Galaxy Opal

In October 1989, opal miner, Joe Grguranic unearthed one of Australia's most significant opals, at the Opalville Mine, Lease no 135 near Jundah, Central Queensland, (approximately some 1000 kilometers - of Brisbane), this boulder opal specimen weighed just over 700 grams and measuring 97x 81 x 57 mm (roughly the size of a man's hand).

It was sent to Europe, (still in its partly rough form) and was purchased by a Swiss Goldsmith. The Opal was then

taken to Australia on consignment, but the dealer only returned the stone after legal action was taken against him. Whilst in Australia the stone was re-cut by Michael Walsh, of Oplex Natural Gems in Melbourne. It took Michael several days to study and very carefully polish the stone and in doing so he brought out its most spectacular display of patterns and colours, weighing 2765 carats, and then named it The Galaxy.



Close-ups of the Galaxy showing the amazing depth, range and play of colour, and showing the sheer size of the gem in the hands of Robyn Menzies

Export Award winning opal company, Cody Opal (Australia) Pty Ltd was appointed by the Swiss Goldsmith as the marketing agent for the stone and it was sold by Andrew and Damien Cody at the Bangkok Gem & Jewelry Show in 2004 to Robert & Robyn Menzies, who purchased it for an undisclosed sum.

The stone is now for sale with a value worth in excess of \$1,200,000. Details available from MS&G magazine.

From Metal, Stone, & Glass, Autumn 2006 Volume 34

~ 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

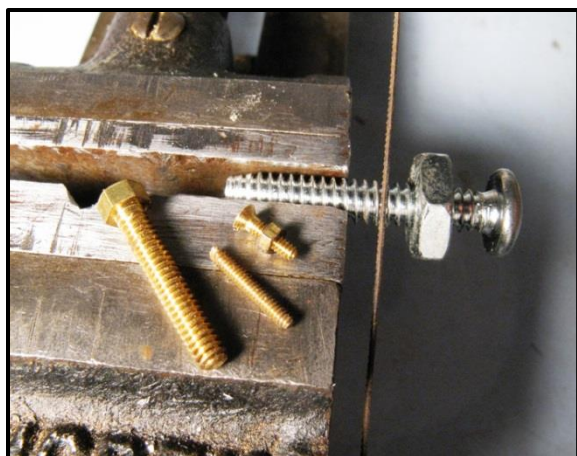
CUTTING A BOLT

by Brad Smith

Whenever you have to cut a threaded bolt shorter, it's often difficult to get the nut to thread back onto it. And the smaller the bolt, the more difficult it is to restore any distorted threads. The problem is easily solved with the use of a nut. Here's how I do it.

First, screw a nut onto the bolt before cutting it. Grip the bolt by the threaded section that is to be sawed off. Then saw the bolt to the desired length, taper the end with sandpaper or file, and unscrew the nut from the bolt.

Unscrewing the nut over the freshly cut end of the bolt will straighten out any damage that sawing and filing did to the threads. Gripping the bolt by the piece to be sawed off localizes any crushing damage to the piece that will be thrown away.



DEPTH GAUGE FOR DRILLING

by Brad Smith

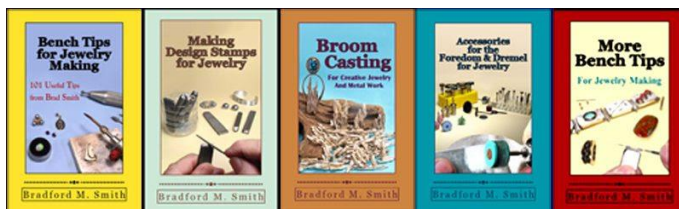
Sometimes you need to drill a number of holes all to the same depth. One quick and easy way to do this is to wind some tape around the drill bit so that the tape just touches the part surface when the hole is deep enough.

You can set the depth either by measuring from the tip of the drill to the tape or by drilling to the correct depth, leaving the bit in the hole, and wrapping tape around the bit at the surface level.

Note that a little extra tape left free on the end will blow away debris from the drilling.



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.

January 21-22, 2023 – Exeter, CA

Tule Gem and Mineral Society
Exeter Memorial Building, 324 North Kaweah Ave., Exeter, CA 93221
Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Tule Gem and Mineral Society Gemboore
Contact: (559) 799-6034, margaretbu03@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.tulegem.com>

February 18-19, 2023 – Antioch, CA 94509

Antioch Lapidary Club
Contra Costa County Fairgrounds, 1201 West 10th St. Antioch, CA 94509
Hours: 10 AM to 5 PM Saturday and Sunday
Jewelry, Gems, Findings, Supplies, Auction, Grab Bags, Exhibits and hands on projects for kids
Contact: (925) 301-6957, edysnyder@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.antiochlapidaryclub.com>

February 25-26, 2023 – Vallejo, CA

Vallejo Gem and Mineral Society
Solano County Fairgrounds, McCormack Hall, 900 Fairgrounds Drive, Vallejo, CA 94589
Hours: 10 AM-5 PM
Gems, geodes, fossils, beads and minerals from around the globe. Discover lapidary and stone crafts from vendors and live demonstrations. Something for everyone! Silent auction, geode cuttings, and games of chance and discovery for kids!
Contact: (415) 254-1506, ddahonvgms@gmail.com
Website: <http://vjgems.co/>

March 4-5, 2023 – Ventura, CA

Ventura Gem & Mineral Society
Ventura County Fairgrounds, 10 W. Harbor Blvd., Ventura, CA 93001
Hours: Saturday 10 AM-5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
50 exhibits of gems, minerals, fossils and lapidary arts; ongoing demos of lapidary and jewelry making; raffle prizes & silent auctions; a Second-Hand Treasures Store & plant sale; 15 dealers; children's activities and free resources for teachers. A SoCal tradition for 6 decades and counting!
Contact: (805) 312-8467, info@vgms.org
Website: <http://www.vgms.org>

March 3, 4 & 5, 2023, Newark, CA

Mineral and Gem Society of Castro Valley
Newark Pavilion, 6430 Thornton Ave., Newark, CA
Times: Friday and Saturday, 10 AM – 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM
MGSCV Annual Show. 40+ dealers, display cases, demonstrations, door prizes. Sunday auction of donated items from society members. Fluorescent displays and dealers. Free parking.
Contact: Showchair@mgscv.org
Website: <http://MGSCV.org>

March 10-12, 2023 – Stoddard Wells

Victor Valley Gem and Mineral Club
47th Annual Stoddard Wells Rockhound Tailgate
Time: Friday, Saturday & Sunday – 9 AM – 5 PM
Come visit us and our vendors for Handcrafted and Faceted Jewelry, Slabs and Cabs, Findings, and Equipment, Minerals and Fossils. TONS of Rough Material and More
Contact: (909) 657-7200, marklantz53@gmail.com
Club Address: 15056B Seventh St., Victorville, CA 92395
Phone: (760) 243-2330 and leave a message. Email: president@vvgmc.org
Website: <http://vvgmc.org>
[Tailgate-2023-Info.jpg](#)

March 11-12, 2023 -Turlock, CA

Mother Lode Mineral Society
Stanislaus County Fairgrounds, 900 N. Broadway, Turlock, CA
Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM
Admission: Adults \$8, 12 & under free w/paid adult
Parking: Free
Activities: Jewelry, Beads, Tools, Educational Exhibits, Demonstrations, Fossil Exhibit, Sharks, Fluorescent room, Speakers, Geode Cutting, Dinosaur Walk-about, Gold Panning, Gem & Mineral Identification. Chat with Paleontologist Neal Larson, Large Fluorescent Room, Kids Activities, Rock Sale – old collections, Earth Science Tables, Food Court, Gemstone & Fossil Dig bags, Raffle, 45 Dealers
Website: <http://www.turlockgemshow.com> or <http://www.motherlodemineralsociety.com>

March 18-19, 2023 – Lemoore, CA

Lemoore Gem & Mineral Club
Trinity Hall, 470 Champion St., Lemoore, CA
Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Featuring gems and minerals from around the world! Fossils, Jewelry, Beads, Stone Carvings, Lapidary Rough, Geode Cutting, and Artesian Jewelry.
Website: <https://facebook.com/AndLemoore>

March 18-19, 2023 – San Jose, CA

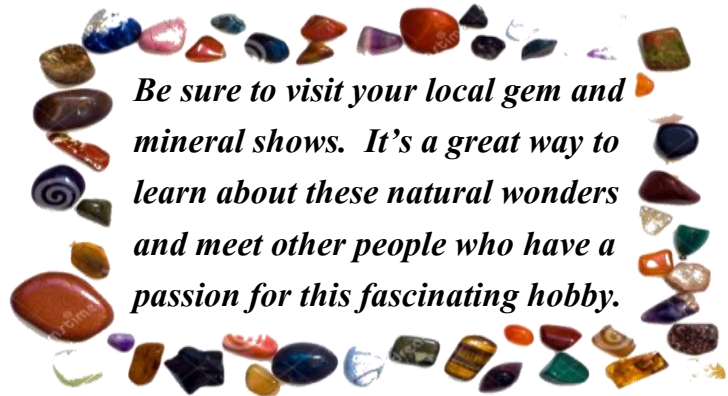
Santa Clara Valley Gem & Mineral Society
Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, 344 Tully Rd, San Jose, CA 95111
Hours: Saturday & Sunday 10 AM-5 PM
Fun for children of all ages. Free Parking.
Active Duty, Retired Military, Their Dependents & First Responders
Free with Valid Military ID or First Responder ID

March 24-26, 2023 – Clovis, CA

Fresno Gem and Mineral Society
The Clovis Rodeo Grounds, 748 Rodeo Dr., Clovis, CA 93612
Hours: Friday & Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Central Valley Gem and Mineral Show: Showing Crystals, Gems, Jewelry, Minerals and Fossils. There will be Silent Auctions and Door Prizes. Free Parking and Free Admission
Website: <https://www.fgms.online>

March 25-26, 2023 – Angeles Camp, CA

Calaveras Gem and Mineral Show
Calaveras County Fairgrounds, 2465 Gun Club Road, Angeles Camp, CA 95222
Contact: clairemathison1@gmail.com
Website: <https://calaverasgemandmineral.net/>



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.

NAME	
BUSINESS NAME	
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
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Volume 56, Issue 1

— 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



TO:



Next meeting will be
Thursday, January 19th at
7:00 p.m. at the Anaheim Downtown
Community Center.



General Meeting Location at:

[Anaheim Downtown Community Center](#)

250 E. Center Street
Anaheim, CA 92805

Next meeting will be Thursday, January 19th, at
7:00 p.m. at the Anaheim Downtown Community Center

American Opal Society

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