

The Opal Express

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President's Message

Happy Valentine's Day, Opalholics!

Well we made it back from Quartzsite! The show all-in-all was pretty good. Attendance was down a bit, but you never know from year-to-year how it's going to be. Sales were pretty good.

Weather-wise we were very lucky for four of the five days of the show. On Sunday, it rained sporadically, but we had a pretty good show in spite of the sprinkles. Going home on Monday was another story entirely! It poured the entire way, but we made it home safe and sound!

It was good to be back after a three year absence and we're looking forward to next year!

Stan McCall

AOS President

Custom Creative Gem Cutting



Who Is Cupid?

Cupid is often portrayed on Valentine's Day cards as a naked cherub launching arrows of love at unsuspecting lovers. But the Roman God Cupid has his roots in Greek mythology as the Greek god of love, Eros. Accounts of his birth vary; some say he is the son of Nyx and Erebus; others, of Aphrodite and Ares; still others suggest he is the son of Iris and Zephyrus or even Aphrodite and Zeus (who would have been both his father and grandfather).

According to the Greek Archaic poets, Eros was a handsome immortal who played with the emotions of Gods and men, using golden arrows to incite love and leaden ones to sow aversion. It wasn't until the Hellenistic period that he began to be portrayed as the mischievous, chubby child he'd become on Valentine's Day cards.

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day-2>

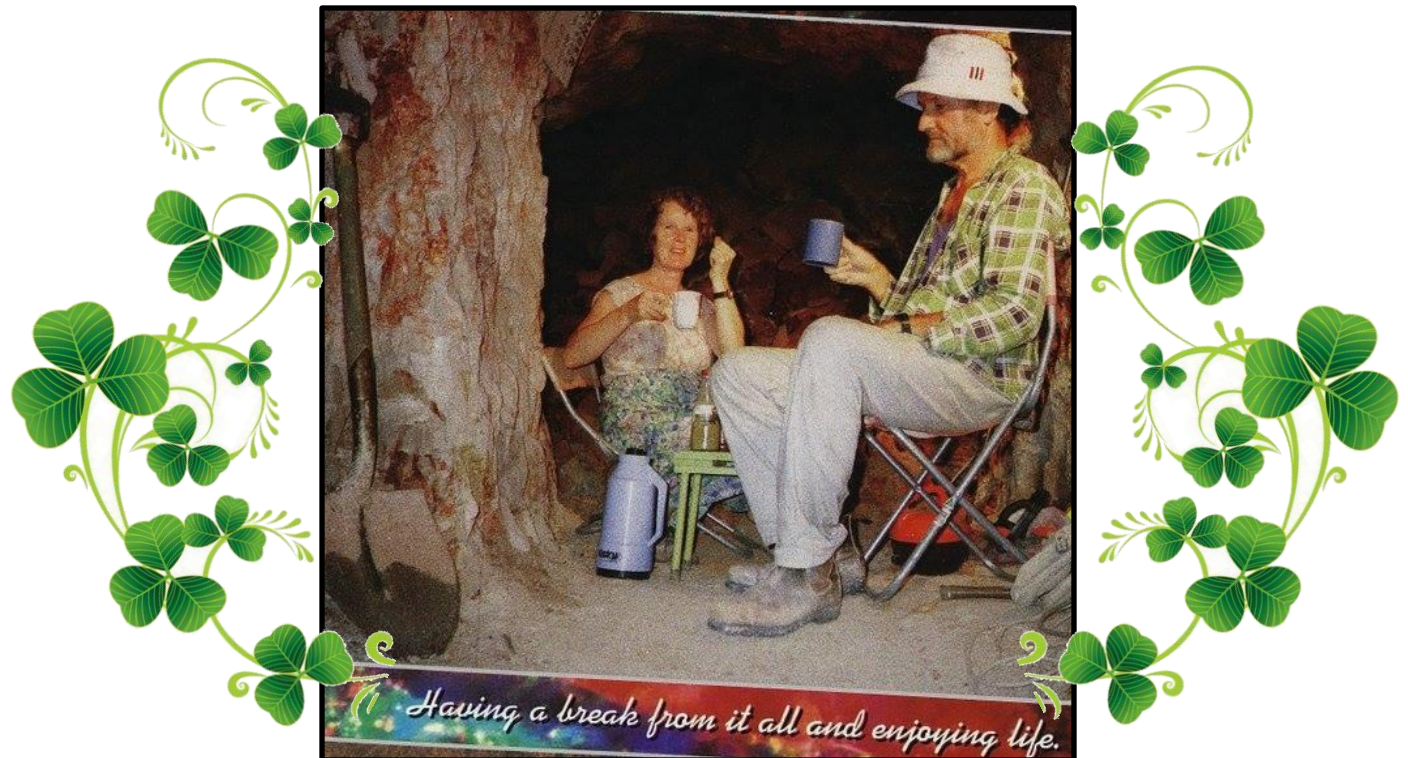
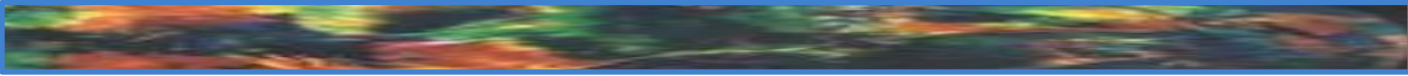
Australia's Irish Rose

by Kathleen James, Editor

It is with a very sad and heavy heart that I tell you about the passing of Mary Aracic. Her husband, Stephen called Mary his Irish Rose. After a brief illness, she left this world on 16 December 2023. Her passing is a great loss not only to her family and friends, but to all of Lightning Ridge. She and Stephen mined opal in Lightning Ridge for over 50 years, wrote many, many books on the subject and helped to tell the world about Black Opal.

I first became friends with Mary and Stephen when I reprinted one of their stories in the January 2020 issue of The Opal Express. Mary sent me a hand-written letter thanking me for reprinting the story and asked would our readers like to hear more stories from The Ridge. I told her absolutely! And so began a three year friendship with the most delightful woman I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. I regret that I never had the opportunity to actually meet Mary and Stephen in person. It has been my absolute pleasure these past three years to share Mary and Stephen's stories about life on The Ridge. I will miss very much texting and long-distance cuppas with Mary. Rest assured, I will continue to reprint their stories in future issues of The Opal Express.

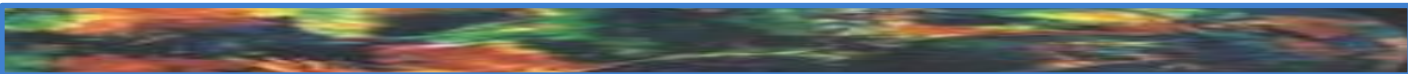
Good-bye my dear Irish friend from Down Under. You will be greatly missed. This world is a better place for having had you in it.



How History Is Changed

by Stephen and Mary Aracic

And here is the story that started my long-distance friendship with Mary and Stephen Aracic. I hope everyone enjoys it and as Mary so often said, "Color our world with opal!"



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

For instance, if you turn to p. 11 of a recent book, "Opal: The Phenomenal Gemstone", a picture of a specimen of Queensland boulder opal is incorrectly classed as Lightning Ridge opal. The caption states, "Layers of precious and common dark opal formed in this 12 cm long section of opal seam from Lightning Ridge, New South Wales, Australia. New research indicates that the type of opal seen in each layer reflects changes in the viscosity of the opal gel. The specimen is courtesy of the California State Mining and Mineral Museum: Photo by Jeff Scovil."

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

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

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

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

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

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

But how do we put The Pride of the Hills Mine back into its rightful location, on Glen Valley property when, according to a beautifully illustrated book, "A Journey with Colour – A History of Queensland Opal – 1869-1978", published in 1998 by Len Cram and as evidenced by a picture on p. 31, he puts The Pride of the Hills conveniently, albeit incorrectly, beside the road to Duck Creek.

Continued on Page 4

The same picture features again on p. 4 of “Beautiful Boulder Opal: the Exquisite Gem” released in 2003, also by Len Cram under the heading “The Pride of the Hills. Australia’s oldest opal mine, first registered in 1871.” it goes on to say on p. 7 “For those who appreciate historical sites, this original lease is well worth a visit, as it’s perfectly situated along side the Quilpie to Duck Creek road. The ideal plan would be to make a day’s outing to Duck Creek opal field and back, and as a bonus, stop over at Price of the Hills. You can’t miss it; it’s the only big mine on the road. Remember it’s a mine, so use a lot of common sense, otherwise, don’t stop.”

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

Now according to the Jackson Report (featured in my book, “Rediscover Opals in Australia”, p. 365) The Pride of the Hills is located 12 miles NW of Duck Creek or 13 miles E of Toompine. And Lushington’s Mine is 6 miles N of The Pride of the Hills. Surely a government geologist like C.F.V. Jackson wouldn’t get locations wrong when he visited the fields back in 1901.

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

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

We also went to The Pride of the Hills on another occasion with friends from Lightning Ridge, access being gained this time from the Toompine via Glen valley property having

first asked permission from the manager to visit the mine and take a few pictures for our book, “Determined”, (2003). We got as far as the first deep creek when we baulked at our chances of negotiating it. So returning to the Homestead, we humbly asked the manager to take us there in his sturdy land cruiser. Having loaded us aboard, Mary and Marcia in the front, Don and I in the back, we took off on what was to be an exciting journey.

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

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

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

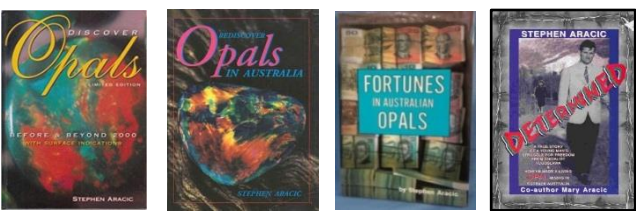
What could we do but laugh at our predicament. It was something to tell the family back home.

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

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

See p. 276 in “Rediscover Opals in Australia” for an actual picture of The Pride of the Hills Mine. The view is fantastic.

The AOS would like to thank Stephen for writing this article for our newsletter. Stephen Aracic is a well-known author who lives in Lightning Ridge, Australia. He has written a number of books on opal and the outback, including Rediscover Opals in Australia, Fortunes from Australian Opals, Discover Opals: Before & Beyond 2000 with Surface Indication.



You’ll find more opal stories from Stephen and Mary in these books.

The Australian Opal Fields

The major outcrops of opal in Australia occur along the shoreline of what was once The Great Inland Sea. The new Australian discoveries created great world interest in opal. Pioneers like Tullie Wollaston and E.F. Murphy helped develop these fields by marketing opal internationally and inspiring many to try their luck at mining. Miners worked and died in the harsh outback in the hope of making their fortune.

The important opal mining areas in Australian opal production over the last century have been White Cliffs, The Queensland Fields, Lightning Ridge, Grawin & Glengarry, Coober Pedy, Andamooka, Mintabie and Lambina.

White Cliffs

Commercial mining commenced in the late 1880’s at the White Cliffs Field in New South Wales. The opal mined here excited the world and the town soon developed, by the 1920’s it had a population of more than 3,000. White Cliffs produced fine quality seam material in such volumes the world had not previously seen. Sadly, the main run was worked out by 1930 and the field all but died out.

Queensland Fields

The Queensland fields are spread across 1,000km and produce almost all the world’s supply of boulder opal. This opal is produced from scattered locations in the vicinity of Yowah, Eromanga, Quilpie, Jundah, Opalton and Winton.

Almost all the opal is won by open cutting. Large and small ironstone boulders are split in the search for that illusive opal vein.

Lightning Ridge

This field was discovered in 1905 by kangaroo shooters. The Ridge produces almost all of Australia’s sensational black opals and today despite a recent decline in production it is still the largest producer of opal by value. In the late 1980’s the Corcoran field 30 km to the west of the township produced stunning black opal in great quantities. The population soared to over

Continued on Page 6

8,000 people. At this time opal sold for record prices sometimes at more per carat than good quality diamond. Lightning Ridge opal is typically found as nodules or "nobbies". Grawin & Glengarry, The outlying areas of Grawin, Glengarry, Sheepyards, and Mulga Rush predominantly produce opals in seams.

Andamooka

Andamooka is in the harsh desert and located near the edge of Lake Eyre. It was discovered in 1935 and is famous for producing brilliant crystal seam opal. It reached its peak in the 1960's when the population reached 3,000. Unfortunately this field is worked out with very little commercial production since the 1970's. Today much of Andamooka's population is employed at the nearby uranium mines of Roxby Downs.

Coober Pedy

The bulk of the Worlds' light seam opal was mined at Coober Pedy. Mining extended over an area 50 kilometres long, running approximately north south. It was here that Andrew Cody's opal affair commenced: as a 12-year old school boy on a school excursion. In 1964 opal miners found it difficult to sell lower grades and often threw the opal away in disgust. Walking down Coober Pedy's main Street he filled his pockets with this opal, took them back to Melbourne and made a tidy sum!

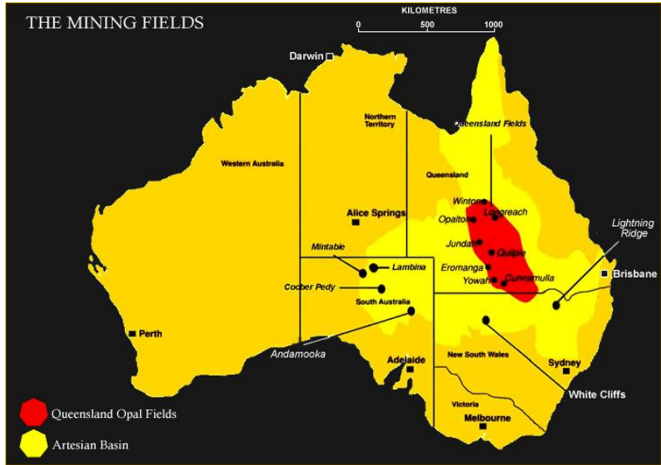
The town reached its peak in the 1970's when enormous quantities of opal were being produced and world demand was high. Illegal gambling joints were prolific-some with dozens of tables and thousands of dollars changing hands. This dusty hot outback town is home to over 4,000 people representing more than 50 Nations. Unbearable summer temperatures have resulted in most living underground in "dugouts". In 2002 Coober Pedy's production has fallen to 25% of its heyday.

Mintabie

The fortunes of Mintabie came and went within a decade. In 1978 a group from Coober Pedy found nice quality black opal. Within a few years the population grew to 1500. Large powerful equipment was needed to rip the hard sandstone. More than 75 large bulldozers and many scrapers, excavators, etc quickly mined out this very rich outcrop. Mintabie produced fine quality light and black seam opal. This material was extremely hard, some able to scratch agate! Today there is only very limited mining activity.

Lambina

This field grew quickly when a scheme of arrangement was agreed to by the farming landholder in 2002. Around 300 miners worked the fields producing opal at comparatively shallow levels. Sadly today there is little production from this area.



Source:
<https://www.nationalopal.com/opals/australian-opal-fields.html>

~ 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

NO-MAR PLIERS

by Brad Smith

Pliers can often leave nicks and scratches on your work. If this is giving you a problem, first take a close look at the plier jaws. New tools can be a little rough. I typically relieve any sharp edges, sand away any tool marks, and give working areas a quick polish.

If that doesn't solve the problem, you probably need to cover the jaws. Plastic electrical tape provides a quick fix but can leave messy adhesive on the jaws, and dips don't seem to last very long.

A quick and easy solution is to slip a length of 1/8 diameter vinyl tubing over each jaw. It works well and leaves no sticky residue. The tubing can be found in a store that sells aquarium supplies. Note that this will increase the size of the plier jaws a bit, but I haven't found that to be a problem.



PROBLEMS WITH SMALL DRILL BITS

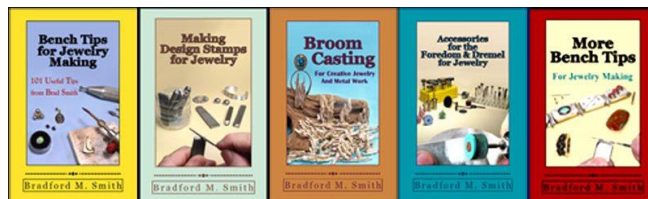
by Brad Smith

Drilling small holes can be a problem. With drills bits that are less than 1 mm (18 gauge or .040 inches), some chucks will not tighten down well enough to hold the drill bit securely.

The problem is easily solved in either of two ways - with a chuck adapter or by buying your small drill bits with a 3/32 inch shank size. Either way you have a large shank to be gripped in your drill press, Foredom or Dremel, so changing bits is fast and easy.



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.

February 17-18, 2024 – Antioch, CA

Antioch Lapidary Club

Contra Costa County Fairgrounds, 1201 West 10th Street, Antioch, CA

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 10 AM-5PM
Jewelry, Gems, Findings, Supplies, Auctions, Grab Bags, Exhibits and hands on projects for kids. Admission \$6.00, Children 12 & under, scouts in uniform and Active Military Free. \$1.00 off admission with show flyer.

Contact: (510) 693-9075, kellyplumb900@yahoo.com

Website: <http://antiochlapidaryclub.com>

February 24-25, 2024 – Vallejo, CA

Vallejo Gem and Mineral Society

Solano County Fairgrounds, McCormack Hall, 900 Fairgrounds Drive, Vallejo, CA 94589

Hours: Saturday and Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

Vallejo Gem and Mineral Show: We host vendors offering gems, geodes, fossils, raw rocks and minerals, carved stone animals, beads, findings and minerals from around the globe. The Vallejo Gem and Mineral Society invites you to discover lapidary and related crafts through our educational displays and live demonstrations. There is something for everyone, for crafters, jewelry lovers and science enthusiasts. We have a silent auction, geode cuttings, drawings for beautiful hand-crafted pieces and games of chance and discovery for kids!

Contact: (415) 254-1506, dduhonvgms@gmail.com

Website: <https://vjgems.co>

March 1-3, 2024 – Newark, CA

The Mineral and Gem Society of Castro Valley

Newark Pavillion, 6430 Thornton Ave., Newark CA

Hours: Friday 11 AM – 5 PM, Saturday 10 AM – 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

75th annual Mineral Gem and Jewelry Show and sale. 40+ dealers selling everything used in the lapidary arts, exhibits, demonstrations, minerals. Live auction on Saturday

Website: <http://mgscv.org>

March 2-3, 2024 – Ventura, CA

Ventura Gem & Mineral Society

Ventura Co. Fairgrounds, 10 W. Harbor Blvd., Ventura CA

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

Dealers and exhibits, demos, gold panning, kids activities, raffle & silent auctions, Country Store an plant sale, free resources for teachers. A SoCal tradition for 60+ years.

Contact: (805) 312-8467, info@vgms.org

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

March 8-10, 2024 – Victorville, CA (Stoddard Wells area)

Victor Valley Gem and Mineral Club

Stoddard Wells Tailgate. Take I-15 toward Barstow EXIT #157 stay on Stoddard Wells Road. Follow the signs 7 miles to Tailgate. GPS 34.671852347,-117-117133037

Hours: 9 AM – 5 PM daily 48th Annual Stoddard Wells Tailgate.

This annual event is Free to vendors and visitors. Vendors offering slabs and cabs, findings and equipment, minerals and fossils, faceted and handcrafted jewelry, and lots of rough material. A family field trip to marble collecting site on Saturday from 9 A to 1 PM.

Contact: (760) 243-2339, president@vvgc.org

Website: <http://vvgmc.org>

March 9-10, 2024 – Turlock, CA

Mother Lode Mineral Society of CA

Stanislaus County Fairgrounds, 900 North Broadway, Turlock, CA

Hours: Saturday and Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

Mother Lode Mineral Society presents the 58th Annual Turlock Rock & Gem Show. Our theme this year is JADE.

Also featuring Mizzie the Velociraptor, Rocks, Minerals & Fossils, Gold Panning, Big Fluorescent Room, Touch and See Table, Kids Activities and shopping from the wonderful Vendors. Admission \$8 – 12 and under free with paid adult. Free Parking.

Contact: see web site

Website: <http://www.turlockgemshow.com>

March 16-17, 2024, San Jose, CA

Santa Clara Valley Gem & Mineral Society

Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, 344 Tully Road, San Jose, CA 95111

Hours: Saturday and Sunday 10 AM – 5 PM

Educational exhibits, rocks that glow in the dark, how to make arrowheads and other demonstrations. Free to active duty, retired military, military dependents and first responders with valid ID. Children under 12 free with adult. Adults \$8. Save \$2 when you buy on-line at <http://www.scvgms.org>. Free parking.

Contact: s(408) 265-1422, info@scvgms.org

Website: facebook.com/santaclaravalleygemandmineralsociety or <http://www.scvgms.org>

March 16-17, 2024 – Lemoore, CA

Lemoore Gem & Mineral Society

Trinity Hall, 470 Champion St., Lemoore, CA 93245

Hours: Saturday 10 AM – 6 PM, Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM

Lemoore Gem, Mineral and Jewelry Show – We have vendors from California and several other states that are selling jewelry, fossils, lapidary rough rocks, carvings, and kids activities involving rocks. An excellent show for anyone who is interested in rocks and jewelry.

Contact:

https://facebook.com/events/999726084444006/999726087777339/?active_tape=about

March 17, 2024 – Fallbrook, CA

Fallbrook Gem and Mineral Society

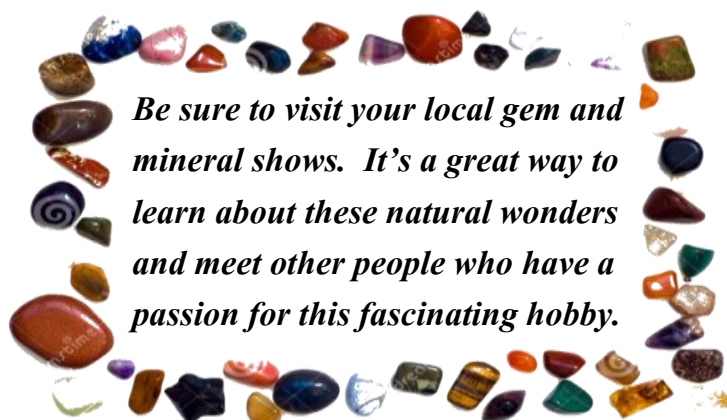
123 West Alvarado St., Ste B, Fallbrook, CA 92028

Hours: 12 Noon – 3 PM

Annual Rough and Cut Club clearance sale of specimen, lapidary and misc. garden rock.

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.

NAME	
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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
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Volume 57, Issue 2

— GENERAL MEETINGS —

3rd Thursday of the Month
6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

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



TO:



**Meeting – Thursday, February 15th
at the Anaheim Community Center**

Social Time: 6:30 p.m.

General Meeting - Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.



General Meeting Location at:

Anaheim Downtown Community Center

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

**Next meeting will be Thursday, February 15th, at the
Anaheim Downtown Community Center**

**→ Social Time: 6:30 p.m. ←
General Meeting - Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.**

American Opal Society

Website: <http://OpalSociety.org>
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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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Russ Madsen
Kathleen James
Bart Gampe
Veronica Purpura
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