

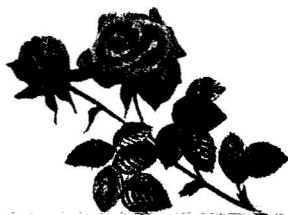


April 1984



Happy Birthday to:

Marcia Rogers - April 6
Dick Shanahan - April 14



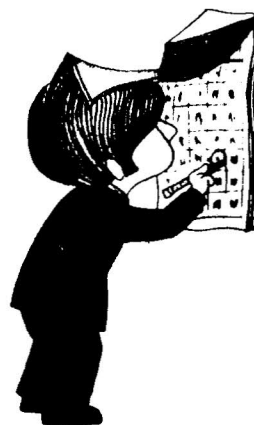
Anniversary Wishes

A special salute goes to Bert and Isabelle Hill who this month will celebrate their 55th anniversary. Congratulations and best wishes to our couple of the month.

Introduced by mutual friends, Bert & Isabelle were married on April 6, 1929. Bert enjoyed his occupation as a registered pharmacist and owned a drug store in Los Angeles until he contracted polio in 1934. His long term illness eventually caused financial devastation. Says Bert, "...We lost everything except the gold in our teeth...no welfare state then."

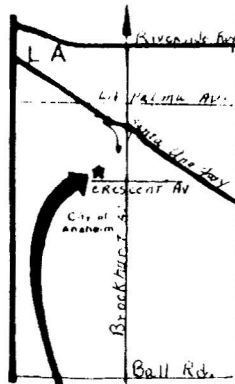
He later found employment with Sharp Dohme Pharmaceutical Co., which became Merck Sharp, and there he remained until retirement at age 65. Isabelle is a retired registered nurse.

The Hills have been members of the AOS for many years and love to attend our annual Show, which is a 60 mile trip for them. They still love opal and, in fact, are active in their business at home selling their own creations, opal and other stones in designed or cast jewelry.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR...
UP AND COMING EVENTS!!!!

The Searchers Gem & Mineral Society, Inc.
(A Non-Profit Organization)



25th Annual "SEARCHERS GEM ROUNDUP"

BROOKHURST COMMUNITY CENTER
2271 W. Crescent Ave. at Brookhurst
Anaheim, CA 92801

May 12, 1984 (10:00 AM until 8:00 PM)
May 13, 1984 (10:00 AM until 5:00 PM)
(MOTHER'S DAY)

Dealers Displays Demonstrations
Door Prizes Special Exhibits Food Served

• **FREE ADMISSION**

• **FREE PARKING**

MAY 18th - 19th & 20th

EARTH'S TREASURES

1540 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach
(Across from Surf and Sand Hotel)

presents a Display of

JADE and IVORY

FROM THE LARGEST PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
CARVED ORIENTAL ART IN THE U.S.A.

A Seminar will be held each day at 2:00 P.M. on the
"WISDOM OF JADE & IVORY AS COLLECTIBLES"

Refreshments - Be our guest
CALL 714/494-4193



THE LIGHTNING RIDGE OPAL FIELDS

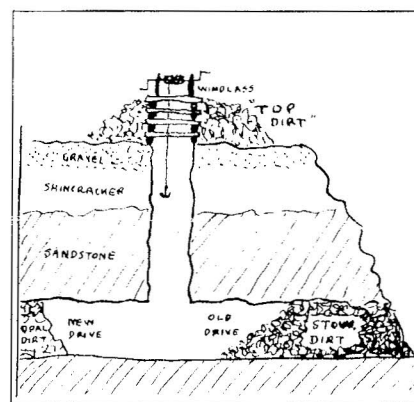
PART ONE — By Athol Jenkins

Rising out of the vast, black soil plains of north-west New South Wales are a series of low hills that are generally described by locals as the red gravel country. It is in these raised sections that opal may be found. In the beginning opal was found on the surface, where hills had eroded away to expose shallow opal levels, but most of the mining for opal has been done by sinking a shaft down to an opal level below the land surface. In the early days of mining the sinking of a shaft was a long and arduous job. Generally speaking, one digs from the surface down through one to three feet of red soil and gravel, through several feet of silicified claystone locally known as shincracker because of its habit of flying off the pick and hitting the miner in the shins, through several feet of sandstone of varying hardnesses to the clay level in which the opal is found. The early miners used only hammers, gads (rock chisels) and sinking picks to sink a shaft unless they were fortunate enough to be able to assist the process with a few sticks of gelignite. The sinking of the first shaft is generally attributed to Charlie Nettleton in the year 1902.

In 1969, when I first arrived on the opal field, I helped an experienced miner sink a couple of shafts. No hammer and gad for us as we had hired an air-compressor and jackhammer. By fitting a rotary drill into the jackhammer we were able to drill a one inch diameter hole several feet into the shincracker. Three holes across the proposed shaft area, the sticks of gelignite inserted and tamped tight, light the fuses in the correct sequence, scamper for safety, and wait for the big bangs. After counting the bangs, to see that all three charges had exploded, it was only a matter of waiting a few minutes for the fumes to clear and we could shovel out the broken rock. We were down another three or four feet. A couple of days or more of repeating this procedure and we would be down to opal level. Goodness knows how long it took the old-timers to sink a shaft with only a hammer and gad, but I did see one man doing this and he was only making three or four inches a day in the shincracker.

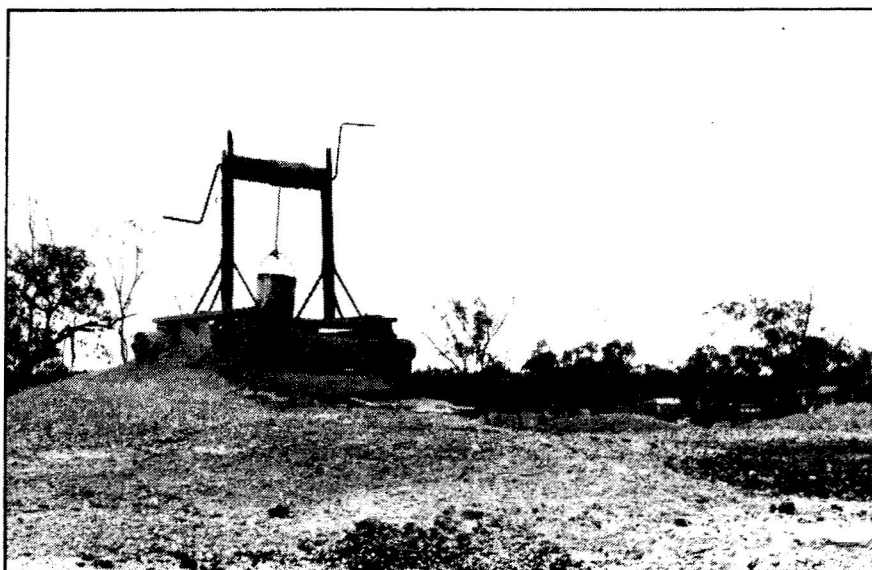
Once the opal level was reached the search would begin for the elusive

opals scattered all too infrequently through the opal clay. In the old days all miners used small, light picks, known as gouging picks, to search for opal where traces of its existence showed in the clay. If no traces of opal were in sight they would use a heavier, driving pick to dig drives (tunnels) through the opal clay in search of favourable signs. The only lighting they used was a candle or two. One of the big problems was the removal of the dug dirt. Two miners usually worked together as partners and, when the dug dirt was getting to be a hindrance to underground activity, one miner would go to the surface to operate the windlass and the other would fill the buckets down below. As soon as a bucket was filled, the underground miner attached it to the hook on the end of the long rope from the windlass, shook the rope as a signal to his mate, and the long grind of raising the bucket load of dirt to the surface would begin. On reaching the surface the dirt was tipped around the shaft and the empty bucket returned to the bottom for refilling. This long, tedious, slow procedure took up most of the miners time in opal mining. Depending on his weight and strength the miner used a four gallon tin, a six gallon lavatory can (they used a less elegant name for it), or a 13 gallon oil drum, to raise the dirt to the surface. When the dirt he had tipped out built up to a point where it threatened



to trickle down into the shaft again, the miner placed a few logs around the shaft and the windlass was relocated on top of them. This resulted in the many high dumps of dirt that could be seen all over the opal fields and were the favourite spots for tourists to look for opals or opal chips either missed or discarded by the miners.

It was a combination of the long, slow haul on the windlass, the fact that opals were often missed down below, and the underground dirt starting to be worked out, that brought about the beginning of the machine age in opal mining. In my next article I will tell you of the transition to the machine age.



Old timers used the windlass to raise dirt from underground to the surface. The bucket in this case is an old oil drum of four-gallon capacity. Unwanted dirt was tipped around the shaft.

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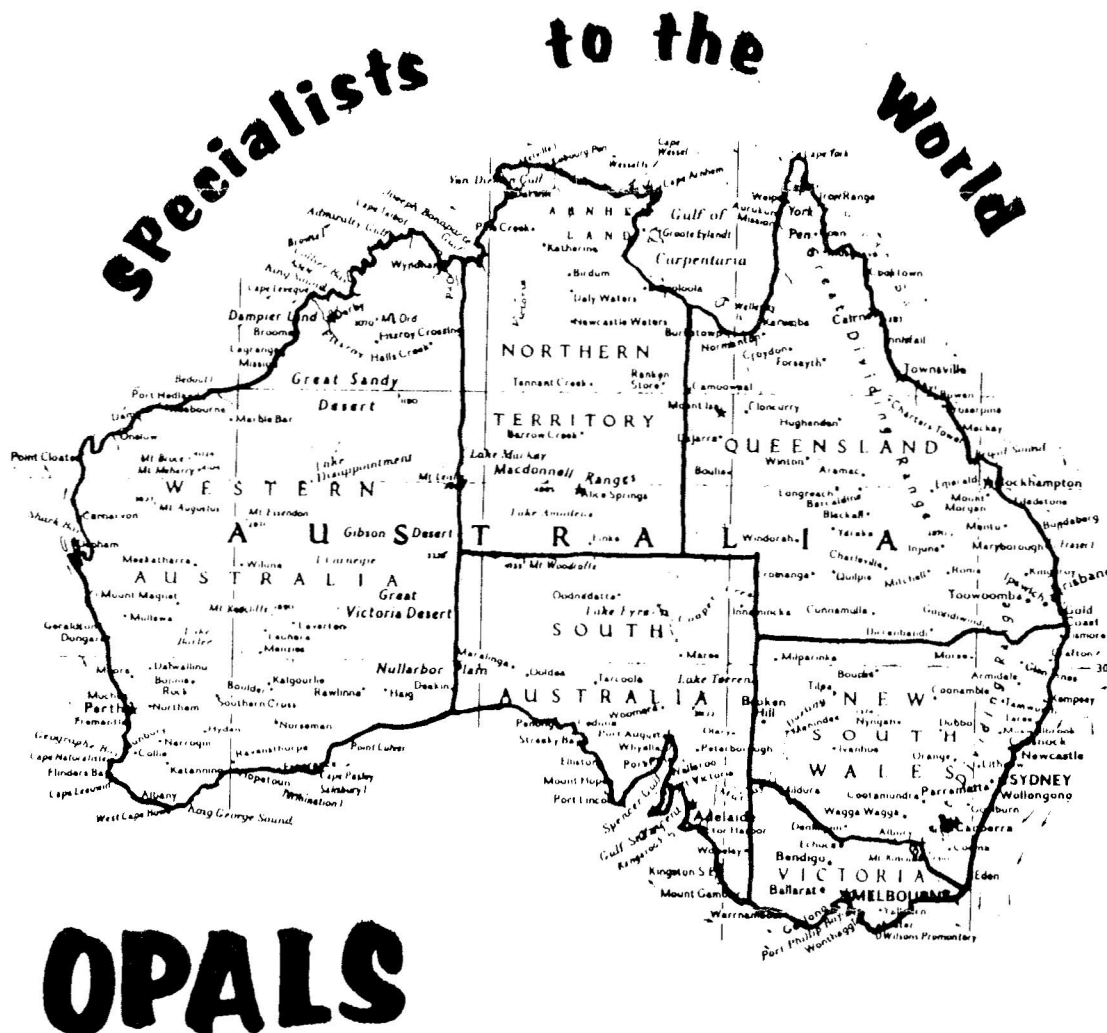
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SHOW UPDATE

The weekend of October 13 and 14 has been confirmed by the City of Norwalk for the AOS Annual Opal Show this year, again at the lovely Norwalk Civic Center. Show Chairman Jewett Pattee has started the ball rolling already by writing press releases for the media, ordering flyers and tending to dealer contracts, etc.

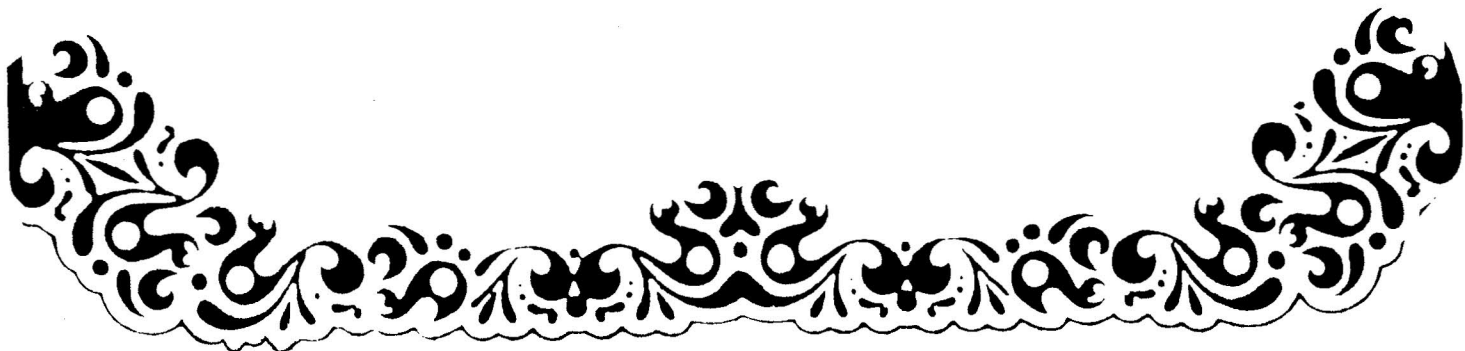
The jewelry design contest this year will be divided into two categories: student, and open. The student prizes will be scholarships, with cash prizes going to the other winners. Details are being worked out by contest chairmen Andy and Colleen Guerrette.

You will be happy to know that the old, green table skirting we've used over the years has finally met its inevitable demise; and the Board has voted to ask the dealers to furnish their own skirting. This should provide an interesting array of hues and fit in quite nicely with this year's theme, "OPAL--THE RAINBOW GEM."



1. False. It is composed of molten magma. 2. B 3. Geodesy 4. Diamond
5. True 6. True 7. True 8. False; Mauna Kea in Hawaii is 33,476 ft.
from the ocean floor to its peak. 9. C 10. You had to be there (it
seemed fairly credible in the film.)

Answers to quiz:

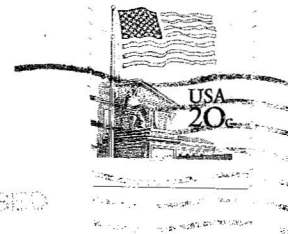


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*Next
meeting
Thurs.
Apr. 12. !!*



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Bob Halahan
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