

# Opalholics

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## OBSERVATIONS FROM TUCSON

The show(s) is incredible. Each motel is filled to overflowing with dealers from all over the U.S. and from many other countries. They are in ballrooms, in lobbies, in hallways, in motel rooms with the beds pushed aside, in tents on the lawn, and even in the open outside the tents. In addition to all those who have paid to show their merchandise, there are those who sell out of their briefcases. It is most entertaining and very educational. It is also large. Ten motels with over 100 dealers each, all available only to identified retail dealers. Then there was an entire parking lot with mineral dealers. And, of course, the delightful club show. We can only hit some of the highlights here.

**OPAL** - We saw several varieties of opal we have not seen before.

Precious blue opal from **ARIZONA**. The opal is an unusual and rare variety with a pale to deep blue background color. Displaying a wide variety of "fire" from broadflash, pinfire to rolling flash, its unique color and delicate to brilliant fire pattern make it extremely beautiful. Discovered by Jim and Cheri Saunders in 1969, the mine is operated by Cheri and her partner Mike Anderson. The opal is available in very limited quantities in rough and in cut stones from the Jay-R Mine. We have a couple of pieces for sale and others on display. More on this opal in a future edition.

**LOUISIANA** - Would you believe precious opal? I had heard of this from several people, but the rumors were unconfirmed until now. At Tucson I talked briefly to the man who discovered it and have seen one piece. It was a broadflash blue/green in a grey/brown mottled matrix. It is hard to tell much from one sample, but it appeared to be more of a novelty than a commercial stone. Thanks to a fellow dealer, I now have a display stone.

**OREGON** - Precious opal is found on rare occasions in the center of thunder eggs. The piece I saw was a light orange base color with red fire. Quite rare. I have no hope of obtaining any of this for you to see. I have heard of another precious opal occurrence in Oregon, but have not seen any of it yet.

**NEVADA** - Not new, but a correction. Keith Hodson tells me it was material from the back of the Rainbow Ridge that people were finding opal in this summer, not Bonanza tailings as I wrote last issue. He opened up the back of the mine and piled up the *unmined* opal bearing material. He then let the rockhounds mine it. They found some large logs, as good as any Keith had found. Water was still high on the road when he left in October so you should plan to drive in from the California end next spring.

**YOWAH NUTS** - This is a variety of ironstone opal from Queensland, Australia. It was available in the 1960s but seemed to have disappeared from the market. The miner, Uwe Barfuss, showed up at Tucson. It was his first time in the U.S. He had been selling primarily in Europe, but he will be back to the U.S. again. The opal fills small cracks in a roughly round concretion of brown ironstone that looks like a nut. Sometimes, the center of the "nut" is pure precious opal. It is usually crystal in broadflash, although we saw a number of pinfire pieces. One truly spectacular specimen was split down the middle with a large pinfire crystal opal in the center of each half. Another looked like a black opal because the matrix was very dark. Mostly, they look like a brown stone with specks and lines of opal throughout. I have only one of the cut stones left and some sample pieces of rough.

**JAVA OPAL** - A new find from Indonesia. This opal comes in two base colors. The orange base color crystal stones look like good Mexican material with bright multicolor pinfire. The black opal is really a dark brown crystal with color throughout. It looks very much like the Nevada black. The cut stones I saw were very beautiful and expensive, so I have none to show you. They apparently are stable. We may be seeing more of this opal in the future.

**BRAZILIAN OPAL** - A new supply which is really old stock, mined in the late 1970s was available. This is a very bright crystal opal with a full range of colors in well defined lines. Colors include some subtle pastels not available in Australian material. I have various grades and will give you some practice material when you buy a bottle of the other grades. This is stable material and somewhat harder than the Australian so it makes good rings. There is no new material available, so there is only one way the price will go, especially the high quality crystal of which I have a good supply.

**AUSTRALIAN OPAL** - All the large American and Australian opal importers were in town. The stories on prices and supply were generally that lower end rough was reasonably plentiful and the prices remain about as last year. However, the better grades are even more scarce and very expensive. There was no dark base Mintabie around, but the medium grey was available, as was a large variety of white base from Coober Pedy. Also, there are rumors of a new field near Mintabie which produces white and crystal but not black.

## MORE ON OPAL SUPPLY

A recent issue of Coober Pedy Times reproduced an article on "The Opal Industry in South Australia" which contains a wealth of information on mining activity. As the following table shows, the stories my miners have been telling me of reduction in mining activity and output are born out by the statistics:

AUSTRALIAN OPAL OUTPUT IN RECENT YEARS					
No. of Miners	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
COOBER PEDY	1000	1000	1000	900	620
MINTABIE	180	180	180	90	120
ANDAMOOKA	<u>60</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>60</u>
Total	1240	1300	1300	1090	800
Opal Production (\$M/Aust)					
COOBER PEDY	32	33	31	28	20
MINTABIE	7	6	5	3	6
ANDAMOOKA	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
	42	44	41	34	29

Source: Coober Pedy Times, March 1985, p.31

There has been a marked downturn in the value of production, from \$34.22 million in 1981 to \$28.76 million in 1982, well below the record of \$43.3 million in 1979. In addition, there has been a substantial decline in precious stone claims, number of miners, and capital investment.

The total number of miners at Coober Pedy far exceeds the other fields. There were 35 fields being worked at Coober Pedy in 1982. The Olympic field was the most active, accounting for more than 1/4 of all active claims. There was a rush to the new Southern Cross field and to the western portion of Olympic toward the end of 1982.

Mintabie had a bit of a slump in 1981, but came back in 1982. Stories of some spectacular finds in 1983 and 1984 which attracted miners from Coober Pedy will probably show up in future statistics.

Surprisingly, Andamooka is still fairly active although the "boom" of 1979-1981 seems to have reversed. It is interesting to find that Andamooka is still producing so much opal. The number of active claims in 1982 was about half of the 1974 level but still not "almost nothing" as some suppliers have claimed.

**NEW JADE GRADING SYSTEM**

There is a new chart available which provides a grading system for Jadeite cut stones. It consists of very accurate color photographs of cut Jadeite cabs arranged by grade, type and color from "exceptional" to "acceptable". There are seven types of green color (1 being most valuable and 7 least), plus lavender, brown (orange) and an "other color" group. There are five color grades for any one color type, making a total of 50 possible classes. Color grade is determined by laying your stone next to the photographs until you find the closest match. That is your color grade. For example, you might have a stone of 8D color which would be a "lavender" stone of "fair" color grade. The most valuable color is 1A which is the best Imperial or Emerald green. In addition to color, stones must be graded on *tone*, *translucency*, and *texture*. Grading jade is more complex than I thought, but this simple chart makes it much easier. It is available from us for \$2.50 plus \$.50 shipping. A new book, *JADE FOR YOU* by John Y. Ng & Edmond Root, incorporating the grading system and discussing the character and beauty of quality jade jewelry is now available from Jade N Gem Corporation of America, 610 S. Broadway, Suite 615, Los Angeles, CA 90014, at a cost of \$45.00.

**THE AMERICAN OPAL SOCIETY**

If you are not a member, you should consider it. The Society has monthly instructional meetings in Downey, CA; a membership highly interested in opal and willing to help as much as possible; a monthly newsletter, *The Opal Express*, which is worth the \$6.00 per year membership, and the annual October show in Norwalk, CA. You can join by sending \$6.00 annual dues and a \$10.00 one-time initiation fee to: The American Opal Society, P. O. Box 3895, Downey, CA 90242.

**ON THE ROAD AGAIN**

As you can see from the show schedule below, we will be all over the country again this summer. This gives us the opportunity to do one of the things we love to do....meet old friends and make new ones. If you can, please come to see us. If we will be in your general area and you would like us to visit your club, let us know as soon as possible and we will try to work it into our schedule.

We are planning our trip to Australia and Hong Kong in August, and we are excited about it. We will spend almost two weeks on the fields gathering information and hunting opal. Then we go to Hong Kong to select carvings. Upon our return, we have very little time to relax before the fall shows start. If there is something special you are looking for, please let us know.

**UPCOMING SHOWS**

(Other Fall Shows Pending)

April 27-28	Aiken Gem & Mineral Society	Aiken, South Carolina
May 2-4	Century Plaza Gem & Mineral Show	Birmingham, Alabama
May 11-12	Golden Spread Gem & Mineral Society	Amarillo, Texas
May 17-19	G&LW Regal Gem Show	Orlando, Florida
May 25-27	**Chicagoland Gem & Mineral Association	Chicago, Illinois
June 7-9	G&LW Gem Show	Santa Monica, California
June 11-12	G&LW Gem Show	San Francisco, California
June 16-17	G&LW Gem Show	Portland, Oregon
June 19-20	G&LW Gem Show	Seattle, Washington
June 27-30	Mile-Hi Rock & Mineral Society	Westminster, Colorado
July 18-21	Georgia Mineral Society	Atlanta, Georgia
July 25-28	*G&LW Gem Show	Franklin, North Carolina
August 1-25	AUSTRALIA & HONG KONG	

\* designates Wholesale Show, \*\*Wholesale Section

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