

# THE BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE

NEWSLETTER OF THE HOUSTON GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY



## THE ALPINE GEM & MINERAL SHOW

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### BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

*Articles are due on the 15th day of the month before the date on the BBG issue.*

*Copy is due for the next issue by the 15th of this month. Email content to [editor@hgms.org](mailto:editor@hgms.org)*



*The*

# BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE



*The Newsletter of the Houston Gem & Mineral Society*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*by Nancy English*

I love March in Houston. I loved it in Kansas, too. The weather is just as unpredictable (unless you are the local meteorologist) in both places. There are eight significant birthdays for me to celebrate in March. I call it the Birthday Season. Daylight Savings Time disrupts my "space-time continuum," but once I am used to it, I enjoy the extra hour of sun.

If you have not been to the Club in March, you may not know the Mask Mandate has been lifted by the Board of Directors. I urge you to take care of yourself and others by staying home if you have symptoms of any kind.

Retirement can be busy when you like what you are doing. Besides being President I participate in three HGMS committees. Since my last message two of those Committees met.

The Club Safety and Policy Committee (CSPC) met. Three months into 2022 and we are moving towards a better HGMS Clubhouse little by little. The HVAC company, Lee Thompson, Co. made their first quarterly inspection of our two A/C & heating units and twenty-year-old A/C-only unit. Now we have new filters and soon we will have clean coils. Decisions to repair or replace the old A/C will be made by the Board in April. Reliant Roofing will schedule its annual inspection in April. HGMS will need to replace the stained ceiling tiles. Do we have a volunteer who is brave to go up on a ladder who will do that for us?

The Show Committee met and plans for the 2022 HGMS Annual Show are in motion. Set aside a half-day to volunteer at our Show on November 10-13, 2022. November 10 is set-up day.

Other volunteers work on the Field Trip Committee, the Website Committee, the Publicity Committee, the Education Committee, the Donations, Sales, and Auction Committee (the DSAC), the Volunteer Committee (my third), the Display Case Replacement Committee, the Membership Committee, the School Kit Committee, the Clubhouse Committee, and the Scholarship Committee. There are seven Section Chairmen providing programs and projects for their Sections once a month.

Six Shop Supervisors take turns overseeing the people working in the shops on the days the Club is open. And Neal Immega oversees those supervisors and makes sure the Lapidary Shop equipment is running and does a myriad of other things to keep the Clubhouse humming. There are twelve members of the Board of Directors. The Board,

committees, supervisors, and Sections represent fifty volunteer positions that about twenty-five people manage by doing double duty. Many committees have only one member doing it all.

I am so proud of the work that gets accomplished to run HGMS. Each month a call for volunteers is posted in the weekly news eblast. Next time you see it SIGN UP to donate an hour or two once or regularly per month. You will get to work with like-minded rock people having fun doing what needs to be done. Join us! Then put the Volunteer Appreciation Party on your calendar for November 19, 2022.

## **VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

*by Sarah Metsa*

Our next Hybrid/In Person General Meeting will be on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, 7:30 p.m. "The EHK Mine" will be presented by Will Heierman, an HGMS Member. The EHK Mine is a group of placer gold claims in the Helena National Forest owned by Will Heierman and two partners, Gloria Edden and Amos Knapstad.

## **UPCOMING SHOWS**

### **Fiesta of Gems**

April 2nd-3rd, 2022, Saturday 10-6, Sunday 10-4

Morris Center @ Joe Freeman Coliseum 723 AT&T Center Parkway, Gate E

San Antonio TX 78219 Adults \$5, Senior/Military \$3, Kids \$1

SWGMS.org Southwest Gem & Mineral Society on Facebook

KRBOTX@GVTC.com

### **Texas Mineral and Fossil Show**

April 22nd (10am-6pm), 23rd (10am-6pm) and 24th (10am-5pm)

Lone Star Convention & Expo Center, 9055 Airport Road, Conroe, Texas 77303

<https://www.rmgmpromotions.com>

Free Admission

### **Waco Gem & Mineral Show**

April 30th and May 1st from 10am-5pm

Waco Convention Center - McLennan Hall, 100 Washington Ave, Waco, TX 76710

<https://www.wacogemandmineral.org/>

Admission: Adults 18 + \$5 ea, Kids 7 thru 17 \$3 ea,

Kids under 6 and uniformed Scouts Free

## **SECTION REPORTS**

As always, please see the [Upcoming Programs](#) section under Events on the HGMS website to learn more about planned future meetings.

### **BEADING SECTION (3RD SATURDAY AT 12:30 PM)**

Bring your beading mat, scissors, wire and wire cutter, round nose and needle nose pliers, thread and beading needles if you have them.



On March 19th, we tried something different, a craft project! We will make small flower pot flower arrangements out of egg cartons. See at left.

On April 16th, Ann Money will teach us how to make a fantastic, 2-wrap leather wrap bracelet with chain as taught by Beadshop.com. RSVPs are now closed for this class so that Ann can purchase the materials in time for this class. You can always work on your own project.

NOTICE: Do you have a bracelet or necklace that needs restringing? The Beading Section will carefully restring your piece at an hourly rate of \$15.00 + materials. Contact [beading@hgms.org](mailto:beading@hgms.org) to make arrangements. All funds will go to the Beading Section.

Want notifications about upcoming Beading Group activities? E-mail [beading@hgms.org](mailto:beading@hgms.org) to be added.

### **DAY LIGHT SECTION (1ST WEDNESDAY AT 1:00 PM)**

On March 3rd, Section members made wire wrap earrings.

At the April 6th meeting of the Day Light Section, participants will be making a combination glasses or mask holder that can also be worn as a necklace. It makes a lovely gift.

The cost is \$5 to be paid at the meeting. To register please email Nancy Searle at [Daylight@HGMS.org](mailto:Daylight@HGMS.org).

### **GEMSTONES AND FACETING (2ND THURSDAY AT 6:30 PM IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM)**

For our March meeting we discussed a number of items. NEW MEETING TIME!

Having members at the club house and going us via zoom has been a great success and we have been able to include members that haven't been to a meeting in a very long time and invited a number of guests that wouldn't have been able to make it otherwise. I (LT) am attempting to up our tech game and have plans for some interesting advancements to get more people engaging in group activities.

We are currently inventorying the facet group cabinets and setting up kits for checkout and classes. Anything extra outside of the kits including Dops, Laps and Tools that don't go with any of our equipment will be up for sale to anyone interested in the future.

A vote was called to see if meetings could be moved to the second Thursday from 6:30-8:30pm with everyone in agreement. We decided that April 14th will be our first meeting happening on the new day.

We had 3 new members who had a ton of questions and enthusiasm about learning from our collection of well vetted Faceters. We are hoping



It is still in the works, however it has been discussed throughout the group about starting beginner and refresher classes on Thursdays (2 attendee limit and based on signup) Randy and Logan (Sr) have both said they would teach the sessions based on availability. Once we have finished Inventory and have a few kits ready for check out we will announce more information about classes.

Randy has been going through our Gemstone inventory and we will have that available for purchase soon for Facet group members. There's a very top tier selection of gemstones to choose from in the group's collection picked out by Randy, Glen and a few other members from various Gem shows.

### **LAPIDARY AND SILVERSMITHING SECTION (3RD MONDAY AT 7:00 PM)**

At the March 21st meeting, we carved obsidian with diamond burs to inlay with crushed abalone shell. We still have some materials left and this is a quick project, so you can still participate in April.

In April, we will complete grinding down the carved obsidian that we inlaid with crushed abalone shell in March. We will choose new projects for the coming months at the April meeting.

### **MINERAL SECTION (3RD WEDNESDAY AT 7:30 PM VIA ZOOM)**

On March 16, the Mineral Section met via Zoom meeting. The first discussion topic was the Clear Lake Gem and Mineral Show, and what a success it was. Members talked about what they saw and what they acquired. They also discussed the Fluorescent Exhibit at the Houston Gem & Mineral Show. Diedre Prince and Burton Dworski gave an amusing and informative talk on field collecting safety.

Work is in progress for the April topic.

### **PALEO SECTION (3RD TUESDAY AT 7:30 PM)**

On March 15th, Paleo had a terrific presentation by Jeanean Slamen on the Jacksboro spillway and the Pennsylvanian fossils she found there. Everyone wanted to know when the next field trip would be. Jeanean has her presentation on a google product and you can reach it with this link:

<https://1drv.ms/p/s!AveJX6aOZuPcgqBASTlyDYTmgKcv7A?e=QUFoaU>

The April Paleo Meeting is going to be on the development of intelligence and I have several experiments that you might try and report the results back to me. I know that all you dog and cat owners think that your animal is smarter than many humans you know (co-workers in particular).

The classic test for intelligence is called the Mirror Test and it is simple. Put a mirror in front of your animal and see if they see an interloper or themselves. Here are some examples:

For dogs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMq6w8HaGqM>

For cats, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8fu6xDmfOU>

and one where a cat passes the test:

<https://madlyodd.com/smart-cat-figures-out-how-mirrors-work/>

BTW, the big cats all fail the test.

Of course, many animals are just going to ignore the whole thing. I expect that Sharon's dog, Lady, will just lay down and ask for a belly rub. Do we score this a pass or a fail?

If you have a pre-school human, you might try the same test on them and tell me how old they are. Pass your results back to me at [nealimmega@gmail.com](mailto:nealimmega@gmail.com).

## **YOUTH SECTION (1ST AND 3RD SATURDAYS FROM 10:00 AM TO 12:00 PM)**

We will continue our regular activities working in the shop.

## **NEWS FROM NEAL**

I am going to buy some 8" sintered wheels for about \$206/each for the shop. My source also offers 6" sintered wheels for about \$158. This is a multi wheel price. Advise if you want to get in on this purchase.

Oil - remember that I have oil to sell at \$13/gallon. Bring your own container. Ask for help.

Ask for training on the TIG Welder! It is particularly good for jewelry repair. You can weld while stones are in place.

I noticed that the sprayer on the Titan grinder stopped working. I found that I could only get one of the air pumps to work. Logan T. Wilcox fixed it Thursday and now it works much better. Thanks, LT.

Hardening stone: Logan and son have been working on a means to harden turquoise and repair fractures in chrysocolla. They have been using sodium silicate and our vacuum system to impregnate the rock. It seems to work well. They are going to offer training in this.

I visited the commercial processing plant in Kingman, Az (run by the Cavanaugh family) and they soak their turquoise in sodium silicate for 6 months in children wading pools. The Logans get faster result by using a vacuum to get deeper penetration.



Fascinating stuff shows up in the Shop! Finally, someone brought in a HUGE megalodon tooth, 7+ inches, worth about \$1000. This was much better than the usual meteor-wrong.

Recoating of Sanding Wheels - many of the wheels have been recoated with diamond and epoxy. This process is very useful because it fills in the trough in the center of the wheel caused by people only sanding in the center. You can see this on old wheels because I change the color of the coating each time. Many of the wheels have been recoated once or twice a year for the last 20 years. Instead of replacing wheels for \$170, I can recoat them for about \$10. I use the best epoxy I can find, Loctite 9430. I actually have more money in the epoxy than the diamond. This process was originally developed by

Gary Anderson. I used to spend more than \$2,000 a year on sanding wheels. Recoating significantly reduces the shop fees that are charged. Ages ago the HGMS board established the policy that the shop is not a profit center and just has to cover its costs.



I do not know of another shop that charges so little. For example, the Gem and Mineral society in Deming, NM has coin operated trim saws!

Can you see the coin slot on the right of the machine?

## UPCOMING CLASSES

### GENERAL EDUCATION UPDATES:

We are seeking teachers to expand our class selections. Specifically: PMC, Dichroic Glass, Enameling, Mosaics, and bead weaving instructors are needed. Contact [Classes@HGMS.org](mailto:Classes@HGMS.org) for more information on teaching or taking classes.

### CLASS POSTINGS:

**SMALL TORCHES FOR JEWELRY MAKING CLASS (ST-033122-JS)** On Thursday, March 31st from 1 PM to 3 PM Jeanean Slamen will teach this class for “torch curious” students who want to make jewelry using small butane torches to anneal, fuse, melt, and solder fine silver and sterling silver. The instructor will discuss torch safety, demonstrate torch techniques, and discuss how to set up a soldering station at home. A range of jewelry projects suitable for butane torches will be shown and discussed. Students will visit a series of stations to learn specific torch handling skills, use a variety of torches and create elements for a pair of silver earrings. Tools & materials included. Registration closes at noon on Wednesday, March 30th. No Walk-ins allowed. Member cost is \$55.00; Non-member cost is \$70.00 (all tools & materials included). Maximum 6-students; minimum is 4-students.

**WIRE WRAPPING – TREE OF LIFE PENDANT (WWTOL-040322-JL)** Joy Lester will teach you to make a beautiful Tree of Life wire design on a semi-precious gemstone cabochon. Class meets on Sunday, April 3rd, 2022 from 1 PM to 3:30 PM at the Clubhouse. Registration closes at Noon on April 2nd. No walk-ins allowed. Member Cost \$50.00; Non-Member Cost \$65.00; Minimum 2-students/Maximum 6

**SMALL TORCHES FOR JEWELRY MAKING CLASS (ST-040722-JS)** On Thursday, April 7th from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM Jeanean Slamen will teach this evening class for “torch curious” students who want to make jewelry using small butane torches to anneal, fuse, melt, and solder fine silver and sterling silver. The instructor will discuss torch safety, demonstrate torch techniques, and discuss how to set up a soldering station at home. A range of jewelry projects suitable for butane torches will be shown and discussed. Students will visit a series of stations to learn specific torch handling skills, use a variety of torches and create elements for a pair of silver earrings. Tools & materials included.



Member cost is \$55.00; Non-member cost is \$70.00; Minimum 4; Maximum 6-students

**BEGINNING WIRE WRAPPING (BWW-042422-JL):** Joy Lester will teach the basics of wire wrapping. You will create a wire wrapped pendant. Materials & tools provided. Class meets on Sunday, April 24th at the Clubhouse from 1 PM to 4 PM. Member cost \$45.00; Non-members \$60.00; Minimum 3-students; Maximum 6.

**CASTING CLASS (CST-050322-TL)** Tony Lucci will teach a series of 5-casting classes from 7 PM to 10 PM on Tuesdays & Thursdays evenings May 3, 5, 10, 12 and 17th. He does a fantastic job of teaching various wax carving and casting methods using silver. I highly recommend this class if you want to learn casting. You will cast multiple items in this class. Tools provided. Students may bring their own wax molds and silver (sterling silver grade or better); or, you may purchase directly from Tony. Tony has been casting for over 30 years professionally.

Member cost \$250.00; Non-Member cost \$280.00; 6-students maximum; 3-students minimum

3D Printing Class has been cancelled; however, LT Wilcox is at the Clubhouse on Thursdays and he will answer questions and provide direction related to 3D printing if you wish to visit with him there. No appointment is needed.

## **ALPINE SHOW**

You could say that the Alpine Gem & Mineral Show is the best little show west of the Pecos! The 31st Annual Show will held on April -15th-17th at the Alpine Civic Center, Friday and Saturday 9-6, Sunday 10-4pm. Like HGMS, they are a member of the South Central Federation of Mineralogical Societies. The sponsors are the Chihuahuan Desert Gem & Mineral Society, a very small club to run a show like this.

Many of the members are owners of local jewelry and rock shops:

- Judith Brueske, the current president of the Society, has the Ocotillo Rock Shop in Alpine.
- Suzanne Franklin of the Balmorrhea Rock shop is another member and serves as their dealer chairman and treasurer.
- Paul Graybeal, another member, has a jewelry shop in Marfa called Moonlight Gemstones.
- Two members live part time in California and Telingua and come to help with the show.
- 

They hold a dealer dinner on Thursdays, something that HGMS no longer does. The show features about 20 inside dealers, and tables outside as well.

As befits an agate-rich area, rough material is very popular, along with minerals and beads. Outdoors there are usually tables of Mexican minerals, as well as local finds. Sul Ross University usually puts in a display too.

Virginia Brotherton and Margie Errikla, two dealers at the Alpine Gem & Mineral Show, also sell jewelry at the Catchlight Gallery in town. Margie is the resident silversmith and Virginia does wire-wrap. A few of the dealers would be familiar to HGMS readers. In 2019 HGMS' own Rick Rexroad was there as "Rocks Rock".



*Rick Rexroad at the Alpine Show, 2019*

The ranches on which so much agate has been found, like the Woodward, Walker, Ritchie, Larremore, Singleton have helped drive interest in this show. Virginia expects to see material from the new ranch on the line-up, the Kokernot o6, at the show. You can read reports from members on Kokernot field trips in this issue.

Visit their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Chihuahuan-Desert-Gem-Mineral-Club-300125913343720/>

*Margie Errikla and Virginia Brotherton, two dealers shown at the Alpine Show in 2019.*

*They look forward to the return of the Show after the cancellation of the show for the last two years.*



## **REPORTS FROM THE KOKERNOT O6 RANCH FIELD TRIP**

### **REPORT #1**

*by Daniel Rodriguez*

As I sit here on my living room floor with a bowl of muddy water and a scrub brush, cleaning my rocks [as one does] I wanted to take the time to reflect on the last few days on the HGMS field trip to Alpine, TX.

For those not familiar with West Texas, it's exactly has you might have seen in old spaghetti westerns that cycle through on the television channel Grit, but these theatrics do not do the scenery justice.

The O6 Kokernot ranch sits within the range of the Davis Mountains, a beautiful desert landscape scattered with thorny shrub, dry rocky mesas, arroyos, and boundless forms of agate. Wile E. Coyote would have a field day here. Each gentle scrub of my brush reveals a new color combination, like piles of Turkish delight in an Istanbul market, glittering on my floor.

The towns nearby – Alpine, Fort Davis, Marfa, the people, all show a kindness and warmth that seems to have been forgotten in the major cities with the events of the last

few years – it was a level of emotional refreshment I didn't know I needed. Each rock shop proprietor or rockhound I met, an expat from afar, was delighted to share their craft and knowledge.

It truly was a wonderful trip, a fantastic adventure, and I can't say enough how well received the dry heat is by someone used to Houston's muggy atmosphere.

I would go back in an instant, who knows where the next adventure may be. If choosing was an option, the idea of digging for opal in Nevada or fire agate in Black Hills of Arizona certainly stirs something deep inside of me.

There is a profound level of group gratitude towards Stephen Blyskal and Sigrid Stewart for doing everything they could to set us up for success and share their collective knowledge, had they not done so I strongly believe we would not have been able to fully enjoy the experience as we did. Thank you to Stephen and Sigrid as well to the HGMS for the wonderful expedition.

## REPORT #2

*by Mike Cothran*

To All: I just returned from a trip to the Kokernot06 ranch Monday. About 30 folks from Houston, Austin, San Antonio and the DFW area descended on Alpine Texas for the agate and geodes that are found there. Many thanks to Sigrid Stewart and Steve Blyskal for helping put this thing together.

The outing would not have been as fruitful if our guides Aaron Thomas and Roy Saffel had not been available. I particularly enjoyed Roy's stories, especially the one about him and Jerry Jeff in Luckenbach not being able to find their way home. They spent their time educating and coaching and pointing out the best hunt spots on the ranch. Saturday we hit Happy Hill and Sunday Sagenite hill, both great spots. Much great material was gathered by all.

Kudos to Steve Blyskal who showed us the Treasure Scoop, which took a lot of the back bending out of back bending. It would also be nice for keeping snakes at arm's length although I didn't hear of anyone coming across one. I got all the maps from the Bureau Store of the UT Geology school. Perhaps we can go over the maps later.

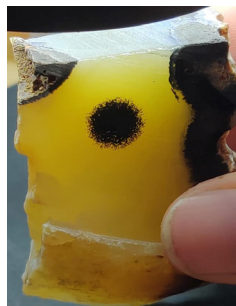
On the way out I explored Hovey Road for agate and found an abandoned RR track next to the Southern Pacific rail still in use. Got some really old spikes. All in all, a great outing. I was glad to be part of it.

## REPORT #3

*by Quentin Boyer*

I had a great time with Aaron Thomas and Roy Saffel, our guides, HGMS folks and other rockhounds at the Kokernot 06 Ranch. I got to go to Happy Hill and Sagenite Hill, and got 90 pounds of material, including carnelian. I had so much fun collecting. I know there is even better stuff I have yet to clean up.

More pics on the next page!





*Plume agate*



*Carnelian*

To see more from  
the Kokernot 06, join Texas Rockhounds on Facebook.

## BENCH TIPS FOR MARCH

*by Brad Smith*

### COLORING EPOXY

There are two ways to add color when you are using epoxies. The first is to add a powdered material such as colored chalk, charcoal, or powdered colors from an art supply store. One that I particularly like is a set of pastel glitter powders. A second way is to add a liquid pigment like nail polish, model airplane paint, or tinting pigments from a marine supplies store. In preparing epoxy for use, the important things are to use exactly equal parts of the two components and to mix them together thoroughly. Coloring material can be added at any time. If I am making just a small amount, I squeeze out equal-sized droplets onto a piece of scrap paper or aluminum foil and mix thoroughly with a toothpick. To mix larger amounts of epoxy, I use a gram scale to weigh the first component. Then I zero the scale and weigh out the same amount of the second component, add coloring if needed, and mix.

If you are using 5-minute epoxy, the mixing needs to move quickly. But, I like to work carefully when adding color. So I squeeze out equal-sized droplets side by side on the scrap paper. Then I work with just one of the droplets to add the colors. The 5-minute clock starts only when you mix in the second droplet.



More smart solutions for your jewelry making problems can be found in my metal arts books on Amazon at <http://amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith>

And if you enjoy these tips on jewelry making, take a look at the sample chapters from:  
> Bench Tips 1 - <http://amzn.to/1Z6hQ06>  
> Bench Tips 2 - <http://amzn.to/2KCygh4>

**TRY A TOOTHPICK**

The round, stronger toothpicks have a multitude of uses on the jewelry bench. I use them for mixing epoxy resin, for applying paste solder, and with Zam for polishing in tight spots. Toothpicks are also handy for holding a small faceted stone while setting it. Just break off the sharp tip, mold a little beeswax over it, and press it onto the table of your stone.

**SMART SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR JEWELRY MAKING PROBLEMS:**

[Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith](http://Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith)

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM BRAD'S BOOKS



**DEMING NEW MEXICO ROCKHOUND ROUND UP REVIEW**

*by Burton Dworsky*

If you should ever find yourself passing thru southern New Mexico the 2nd weekend of March then do yourself a favor and check out the Deming Gem & Mineral Society Rockhound Round Up Show. That's what we did! A few details about the show: this year was the Deming Gem & Mineral Society's 57th annual Rockhound Round Up, March 10th - 13th at the Southwest New Mexico Fairgrounds in Deming, New Mexico, back from a year's hiatus because of COVID. Admission and parking are free.

The show offers vendors, field trips to one of the club's claims, daily door prizes, food vendors, silent auctions, live auction plus a metal detecting contest.

We attended on Thursday, so not all the vendors were there yet, but the program listed 102







*Activity in Building #2*

vendors and the local newspaper claimed 120 vendors. These were distributed between two indoor buildings and outdoor spaces. While the crowd was light, it seemed like a good turnout for a Thursday. The vendors are heavily agate- and cutting rough-oriented, but there were some jewelry, fossils and minerals also. Vendors we spoke to seemed happy to be back. There were also many club displays waiting for their contents, which we would have enjoyed viewing.

As this is a fundraiser for the Deming club, we bought a t-shirt, some printed materials, and bid on several silent auction items to support the club's efforts. The weather was great, cool and windy with clear skies. Remember: this is the desert, so drink extra water. You don't want to negotiate the price of that killer piece while dehydrated and fuzzy-headed. Food included typical fair selections, like burgers, hot dogs, donuts, etc.

One very interesting aspect of this show is the Field Trips to one of the club's claims to collect onyx, agate, geodes & other gemstones. But, be warned, get there early on Thursday to sign up, when we arrived around 11am the Friday and Saturday Field Trips were already full, and it sounded like the Sunday trip was well on its way to capacity.

The 2023 show will be March 9th thru 12th, 2023 and if we are in the area at that time we would gladly visit again. Hope to see you there!

## **UNCOVERED: THE TRUTH ABOUT OPAL FORMATION**

*by Amy Middleton June 3, 2013*

*Reprinted from the April 2022 Breccia  
Santa Clara Valley Gem and Mineral Society*

New research has explained the mysterious formation of opals, found in abundance in Australia's red center, and the information could shed light on the environment on Mars. Australia produces over 90 per cent of the world's precious opals, but before now



scientists have never been able to explain precisely how the gemstones formed. "Before this we did not know [opal's] origin, why it forms at such shallow depths or why it can be found in central Australia and almost nowhere else on Earth," says lead researcher Professor Patrice Rey, a geologist at the University of Sydney.

Opals formed by acidic weathering. Patrice says the findings, published this week in the Australian Journal of Earth Sciences, reveal that opals formed during "an extraordinary episode of acidic weathering, during the drying out of the central Australian landscape." Between 100 million and 97 million years ago, a vast sea that covered 60 per cent of Australia – from Coober Pedy in South Australia to the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Australia – began retreating.

This drying out of Australia's center increased the acidity levels at shallow depth, releasing silica through the weathering of sandstone. Further weathering then lowered the acidity to a level at which precious opal can form in the silica-rich gel.

Central Australia is believed to be the only place on earth where acidic weathering of this scale has ever taken place, although similar conditions have been observed on the surface of Mars. Nonprecious opal deposits were discovered on the Red Planet by NASA in 2008.

"If you look at Mars and the Red Centre, they share similar characteristics," says Patrice. "Similar rocks went through similar weathering processes, so potentially precious opals might exist there." Patrice says central Australia offers a "unique natural laboratory", where researchers can study biological processes that could potentially be present on Mars.

Mike Snow, a minerals expert at the South Australian Museum, says the findings are compelling, and may well provide a glimpse into the landscape on Mars. "The landscapes of Mars and the Red Centre both have large amounts of red oxidized iron," says Mike. "This is part of the opal story. Perhaps opal may well occur on Mars if it is similar to the Great Artesian Basin."

## **INTRODUCTION TO SMOKE-TREATED WELO ETHIOPIAN OPALS**

*Reprinted from the April 2022 Breccia  
Santa Clara Valley Gem and Mineral Society  
from Konju Opals*

Smoke treatment for Welo Ethiopian opals begins when the preformed opals are placed into a box with a small wood chip fire underneath. This set up allows only the smoke to pass through the opals and not the heat. Setting up the perfect smoking box system took us a long time to figure out the right distance to keep the opals from the fire to ensure the best yield of finished smoke treated opals without cracks from the heat of the fire. We lost many opals to heat cracks fine tuning this treatment.

Welo Ethiopian Opals are [hydrophane](#), thus making them very porous, so allow time for them to deeply soak in the smoke. The time frame for the treatment process normally takes around 2 hours sometimes longer and is a permanent treatment.

It is amazing to see this treatment done because you can start out with Welo opal pre-forms that all look to be the same base color and after the treatment will end up with all

the pictured mixture of base colors mixture from green, tan/brown, yellow, dark black. Normally only about 25% turn yellow or green base color. Majority turn tan/black base after treatment.

After the treatment process the fire color play is very much enhanced. Most all smoked



*Untreated Welo Opals*

Welo opals end up with fire play brightness of at least 4/5-5/5.

A lot of people have never seen or heard of smoke treated Welo opals. Some people that do know of this treat-ment think it is horrible for the Welo opal business because of people not disclosing whether a opal has been treated.

The major concern is the mixing up of the natural base color Welo Opals with the treated. Natural Untreated Welo opals are found in a variety of natural base colors, some of which include clear / silk / brown / tan / green / dark crystal / white/ grey / purple / red / yellow / lavender / blue crystal / pinkish white.

To see smoked Welo opals:

<https://www.opalauctions.com/auctions/ethiopian-opal/smoked-opal-stones/>

**HOW TO GET A KID ADDICTED**  
**REPRINTED FROM THE PICK AND SHOVEL, MARCH 2022**  
**LINCOLN GEM & MINERAL CLUB, INC.**  
*by Jayne Beer*

How do you get a kid to be hooked on rocks for life? Give him his own rock grinding machine for his 10th birthday!

Here is the story of the blue "GEMSTONE" machine in our family. When Corey was about to turn 10, Roger Pabian and I started planning to give him a particular "blue machine" with all new wheels. Since the wheels were kind of pricey, several family members went in together to buy the wheels, and Roger put the machine together.

When the wheels were on the machine, I "borrowed" several rocks from Corey's col-

lection, thinking to just wrap up the rocks and then bring in the machine as a surprise. Well! The funny thing about it was that as Corey was opening the boxes of rocks, he was getting more and more confused and a little upset. He kept saying, "THESE ARE MY ROCKS. WHY IS EVERYONE GIVING ME MY OWN ROCKS!?"



Then we brought in the "blue machine". He was so excited to have his first very own diamond rock machine. He has been hooked ever since.

So, when grandson Ja-zeil turned 10 in February, it was Corey's idea to pass the machine on to the next generation. So we cleaned it up and put a couple new wheels on it and proceeded to wrap up several of Ja-zeil's rocks from his collection.



*Corey hands off his old machine to Jazz*

We began by giving him the gift of all of his rocks along with a few new ones. He was not nearly as emotional about opening his rocks, but he was confused. And then Corey brought in the "blue machine" and gave it to Jazz.

We couldn't find a good table to put it on that first night, so we set it up on a plastic box and he cut his first cabochon at his house. We look forward to watching his interest grow with the help of Brett in the Juniors club, and many moreshows and field trips to come.

And another child learns the fascination of working with lapidary machines and stones. What a great way to support the hobby in your family!

# AFMS LAND USE POLICY

MARCH 2022 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MINERALOGICAL SOCIETIES

[www.amfed.org](http://www.amfed.org)

1. Adherence to the AFMS Code of Ethics assures compliance with most statutes and regulations governing collecting on public lands and encourages respect for private property rights and the environment. Clubs are urged to read the AFMS Code of Ethics in at least one meeting every year, to publish the Code frequently in the club newsletter, and to compel compliance on club field trips.
2. Individuals and clubs are urged to write their elected representatives and land use management agency supervisors regarding issues of rule making, legislation and enforcement affecting field collecting of minerals and fossils.
3. Individuals and clubs are urged to join and support activities of the American Lands Access Association (ALAA), a sister organization with responsibility for advancing the interests of earth science amateurs with legislatures and land use management agencies.
4. The AFMS will receive a report from ALAA at its annual meeting.
5. The AFMS endorses the principle of multiple use of public lands as a guarantee of continuing recreational opportunities.
6. Wilderness and monument designations are inconsistent with the principle of multiple use. In view of the vast amount of public land already designated as wilderness and monuments, future such designations should be minimal, taking into account the increased demand for recreational opportunities, including rockhounding, created by a growing population.
7. In furtherance of the principle of multiple use, the AFMS believes that laws, regulations and rules established by relevant governmental authorities should be designed to allow freest possible access to all public lands, coupled with minimal restrictions on the recreational collection of minerals, fossils, gemstone materials and other naturally occurring materials.
8. A right to collect minerals and fossils on public lands should be protected by statute.
9. The AFMS urges its members to work with any or all government authorities to achieve a good working relationship in order to improve the public image of recreational collectors.

## AFMS CODE OF ETHICS

I will respect both private and public property and will do no collecting on privately owned land without the owner's permission.

I will keep informed on all laws, regulations or rules governing collecting on public lands and will observe them.

I will, to the best of my ability, ascertain the boundary lines of property on which I plan to collect.

I will use no firearms or blasting material in collecting areas.

I will cause no willful damage to property of any kind—fences, signs, buildings.

I will leave all gates as found.

I will build fires in designated or safe places only and will be certain they are completely extinguished before leaving the area.

I will discard no burning material—matches, cigarettes, etc.

I will fill all excavation holes, which may be dangerous to livestock.

I will not contaminate wells, creeks or other water supply.

I will cause no willful damage to collecting material and will take home only what I can reasonably use.

I will practice conservation and undertake to utilize fully and well the materials I have collected and will recycle my surplus for the pleasure and benefit of others.

I will support the rockhound project H.E.L.P. (Help Eliminate Litter Please) and will leave all collecting areas devoid of litter, regardless of how found.

I will cooperate with field trip leaders and those in designated authority in all collecting areas.

I will report to my club or Federation officers, Bureau of Land Management, or other authorities, any deposit of petrified wood or other materials on public lands which should be protected for the enjoyment of future generations for public educational and scientific purposes.

I will appreciate and protect our heritage of natural re-sources.

I will observe the “Golden Rule,” will use “Good Outdoor Manners” and will at all times conduct myself in a manner which will add to the stature and public image of rockhounds everywhere.

**AMERICAN LANDS ACCESS ASSOCIATION**

We are members of the American Lands Access Association! Here is a link to the first newsletter!

[https://mcusercontent.com/9a8bc1214a03335044816a2ce/files/5b8a1445-4d38-6da2-0a83-baed275a75b5/ALAA\\_Newsletter\\_1st\\_Qtr\\_2022.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/9a8bc1214a03335044816a2ce/files/5b8a1445-4d38-6da2-0a83-baed275a75b5/ALAA_Newsletter_1st_Qtr_2022.pdf)

**HOUSTON GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES**

March 1, 2022  
*by Sharon Halton*

X	President— Nancy English	x	Beading— Maggie Manley
X	1st Vice President—Sarah Metsa	X	Day Light—Fred Brueckner
X	2nd Vice President—Beverly Mace	X	Gemstones & Faceting—Randy Carlson
X	Treasurer—Michele Marsel		Lapidary & Silversmithing—Richard Good
X	Secretary—Sharon Halton	X	Mineral—Ray Kizer
	Past President —Sigrid Stewart	X	Paleontology—Mike Dawkins

President Nancy English called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. A quorum was present. Richard Good and Sigrid Stewart were not present, and there were no non-voting members in attendance.

**PRESIDENT’S COMMENTS**

Approval of Minutes: On February 11, 2022, Michele Marsel moved via email to approve the minutes of the February 1, 2022 Board of Directors’ Meeting. Beverly Mace seconded the motion. It was voted on via email and passed on February 13, 2022.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Michele Marsel sent the Financial Report to members on March 1, 2022.

- Michele Marsel addressed questions on the financial report. Paypal fees were discussed and are listed on the report with the expectations for this year. The deposit account was discussed as a line item. The Liability account is the amount that the club will have to pay to taxes and is carried forward each month in the budget as Sales taxes.
- A correction to the spreadsheet needs to be updated for the current month for utilities.
- The Treasurer sent 2021 Show Actuals to Nancy English, Maggie Manley & Randy Carlson on February 26, 2022.

The Annual Report was discussed and additions were made to our Key Accomplishments about our Clubs' Mission Statement which included the reopening on June 1, 2021, new classes being resumed at the clubhouse, and the numerous accomplishments held live at the HGMS Annual Show at the Humble Civic Center in November which included:

- Seven beading and wire wrap classes
- Sections educational programs
- 760 students participating in our Friday program for Private and Homeschool students
- Ninety Scouts participating in the Saturday Scout Program Day
- Thirty-five School Education Rock Kits were distributed to the teachers of Katy ISD

Additional accomplishments for the year are requested for the Annual Report including the number of dealers and attendees, Youth Participation, and attendance will be added. Income and expenses are also listed on the Annual Report. Considering the Club was only open six months for operation due to Covid, the numbers demonstrate that we are maintaining the benchmark of Non-Profit groups to have funds for the maintenance of the Club.

2021 Show Budget Actuals were reviewed by Nancy English, Randy Carlson and Maggie Manley. Randy reported they reviewed all of the Show expenses and no concerns were found. All of the expenses were explained and specific expenses enumerated.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

BBG Editor: Sigrid Stewart is working on the BBG but it is not ready. Beverly Mace will notify members when the online version of the March BBG is available on the HGMS Website.

Donations, Sales, Auction Committee (DSAC) - Michele Marsel:

The remainder of the Saxman donation from 2019 is still being evaluated by Ray Kizer and he will ask Neal Immega to look at the Paleo items. When a final value is determined for the remainder of the collection, the Donations Committee will offer the items for sale.

Education Committee:

Sharon Halton suggested that a class be offered to new members to help train new members to use the wheels to help prevent damage from uninformed members. Sharon will work with Maggie to see if a formal class will be offered. Fridays were mentioned.

Jeanean Slamen will be conducting a class for butane torches and will conduct it at 6:30



p.m. Concern for the safety of this class was raised and it was explained that this class will be conducted in the garage and Sharon Halton, who wants to take the class anyway will attend so that two shop steward trained people will be in attendance.

Health Safety & Environmental Committee – Sarah Metsa: another meeting will be held soon. The representative from the insurance company would like to do another walk-through but this will be postponed until more of the proposed changes have been completed.

HVAC Service Contract – Nancy English: On February 1, 2022 BOD voted to accept the HVAC service proposal from Lee Thompson Co. – this contract was signed on March 1, 2022. They have stated that they will be in the building in the early part of March.

Resolute Roofing – Nancy English: the BOD asked Nancy to go back to Resolute and ask about including an interior walk-through for leak detection in the annual service. Nancy reported that after many attempts to contact them, they have not responded.

Cleaning Contractors - Nancy English: was in the process of getting final estimates from 3 companies. She said she would put the three quotes in an Excel spreadsheet and send that to all BOD members ahead of the March 1, 2022, BOD meeting. Note - the BOD wants to see the actual final estimate documents, not just the Excel comparison. Due to busy schedules, this has not yet been completed.

Membership Committee: Beverly Mace reported new and renewed memberships in February.

Member Counts	New	Renewed (February)	Not yet paid for 2022
Singles	5	20	114
Couples	1	8	27
Families	1	5	13
Youth	4	2	0

Four memberships or renewals were taken at the CLGMS Show.

Scholarship Committee: Mike Sommers: Nancy English spoke to Mike on Sunday at the CLGMS Show. He will start sending invites to the schools soon. Daniel Rodriguez enthusiastically agreed to be on that committee.

Show Committee: Scott Singleton/ Sigrid Stewart: Nancy English complimented the volunteers who represented HGMS at the Clear Lake Gem and Mineral Show, to promote the HGMS 2022 Annual Show.

Website Committee: Scott Singleton – There are no immediate changes planned for the BBG.

SECTION REPORTS

President English asked Section Chairmen or Representatives to limit their comments to news about the Section and problems the BOD needs to know about, since the meetings are posted on HGMS.org under programs and calendar, and on the weekly eBlast.

Beading Section: third Saturday, 12:30 p.m., March 19, 2022. Maggie Manley stated that she closed out the Wells Fargo bank account with a check made out to HGMS for \$2399.86. This money will be put into a new account when it can be opened in the name of the HGMS-Beading section.

DayLight Section: first Wednesday, 1:00 p.m. No report.

Gemstones and Faceting Section: second Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., March 9, 2022. Hybrid, In-Person and Zoom. Randy Carlson reported that a class was held with Theo Blanton, who was very excited about the class. Other participants were there who were getting a “refresher” class. Randy states that he should only have two students per teacher due to the required personal attention. He stated that Logan Wilcox will begin offering refresher classes on Thursdays when he is shop foreman. Randy thanked Fred Brueckner for the donation of quartz that was given to the Faceting Section.

Section Chairperson LT Wilcox will present hybrid meetings (in person and via Zoom) for now.

Lapidary and Silversmithing Section: third Monday, 7:30 p.m. No report.

Mineral Section: third Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., March 16, 2022: Quick review of the Clear Lake show.

Paleo Section: third Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., March 15, 2022 No report.

Youth Section: first and third Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to Noon., March 5 and March 19, 2022. Seven new members from one family became members on Saturday, February 19.

## OLD BUSINESS

Mask Mandate – Discussion of determination of whether to wear masks was held. Sarah Metsa moved to drop the mask mandate and leave the use of masks up to the individuals involved. Parents are to determine if children should wear masks. BUT if you are sick with anything; cold, flu, sinus, strep throat, anything contagious: STAY HOME. Sharon Halton seconded the motion, there was one abstention, and the motion passed. Sarah will complete the sign and send it to Michele for posting on the doors. Sarah will send the decision in the next eBlast.

Display Cases status – Sigrid Stewart reported via email that Kris Dingfield should be back from Tuscon. She will get with him.

Prosperity Account - Signatory updates were completed.

Lapidary Chase Account – Richard Good: Phyllis George was removed and Michele Marsel was added as a signatory; there is still a need to make an appointment at Chase with Richard, Michele, and Sharon present to close the old account (erroneously opened as Lapidary Section as an entity) and open a new one properly tagged to HGMS - to be done in March.

Beading Account – Maggie Manley: Wells Fargo was very cooperative. Maggie is now a signer on the Beading account. She and Sharon need to meet at Chase to open the new Beading account and close the Wells Fargo account.

ALAA Membership – Mike Dawkins: A motion was passed at the February 1, 2022, BOD meeting to rejoin as members. Mike Dawkins will complete the membership application and forward a signed, scanned copy to Treasurer Marsel for payment.

New Dog Policy – Michele Marsel: This should be published in both the BBG and the eBlast. Policy statements should be sent as a separate email by MailChimp to reach all of our members. The motion stated that “All dogs, including service dogs and emotional support animals, are to be leashed and by their owner/handler’s side at all times.” This policy will be sent out to all members of the club by email.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Annual HGMS Policy Communications: It was decided that the Conduct Policies like the clarification of the dog policy and respectful member conduct will be sent out by MailChimp to all members twice a year.

A motion was made by Ray Kizer and seconded by Randy Carlson to begin sending out the Club’s Conduct Policies twice a year to all club members starting in March and again on December first in 2022 and for following years in June and December. The motion passed unanimously.

The next Board of Directors Zoom meeting is scheduled for the first Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., April 5, 2022.

The next General Meeting is scheduled for the fourth Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., March 22, 2022. Sarah Metsa volunteered to bring refreshments to the March General Meeting and will present her Dickieville presentation at that meeting if she is not able to secure someone else.

Michele Marsel moved to adjourn. Mike Dawkins seconded the motion and it passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

## **HOUSTON GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY GENERAL MEETING MINUTES**

March 22, 2022

*by Sharon Halton*

President Nancy English called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. She welcomed fourteen attendees in person and six by Zoom. There were no new members or guests in attendance.

## **PRESIDENT’S COMMENTS**

At the March 1, 2022 Board meeting the Board moved to lift the mask mandate. President English encourages you to take care of yourselves. Mask up if you are concerned about being in a crowd. **DO NOT COME TO THE CLUB IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF ANYTHING.** She also stated that she owed the Club an apology. Last month she expected to have the contract with a cleaning service completed. She expects to have it done by the next General Meeting on April 26, 2022.

She reminded members that the speakers used for the hybrid meetings are very sensitive. If you feel the need to have a personal conversation during the meeting or the program, please move to the garage.

Approval of Minutes: Ray Kizer moved to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2022 General Meeting as published in the March BBG. The motion was seconded by John Mitscherling and it passed.

## COMMITTEE/SECTION REPORTS

Please look for reports of future Section meetings and programs in the BBG calendar, on the Website <https://hgms.org/events>, or by reading the weekly e-blast from Houston Gem and Mineral Society.

If you are a member and not on our email list, please contact the Publicity Chair at [News@hgms.org](mailto:News@hgms.org), using the Subject Line: "New Member to be added."

President English invited other Section Chairs and Standing Committee Chairs to make any additional announcements.

Volunteer Committee: Nancy English thanked the volunteers for their work at the Clear Lake Gem and Mineral Society Annual Gem Show which was held February 26-27, 2022. These volunteers are now eligible to join us at the November 19, 2022, Volunteer Appreciation Party.

Membership Committee: Beverly Mace Time to pay your dues. Members who have not renewed by the MARCH 31 deadline are going to be dropped from the roster list, weekly eblast list and will lose shop privileges. Once your dues payment has been received you will be reinstated to full membership privileges.

Donations, Sales, Auction Committee (DSAC): Michele Marsel (via email) states that the donations committee is planning another equipment sale in April. The equipment that will be sold are in the garage bay area if you want to see them.

Scholarship Committee: Mike Sommers via email sent the following: HGMS is proud to offer three scholarships that will be awarded in 2022. The deserving students should be majoring in Earth Science and entering their third year of study at a university or transferring to a four-year curriculum from a two-year college. Successful candidates will receive awards of \$2,500 applied to their tuition. Please help spread the announcement of these awards to any student who may benefit! The deadline for applications is Friday, May 6. Winners will be announced in June.

Notices are going out to Texas colleges and universities this week. We will be following up with a select group of targeted schools to encourage more applicants.

## OLD BUSINESS

President English asked members to look for the progress of Old Business items in the Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes in the latest Backbenders Gazette (BBG) on the HGMS Website <https://hgms.org> under Publications.

Building Issues: Nancy English reported that Lee Thompson Co. has made their first quarterly maintenance inspection of our heating and cooling systems. Most significantly, they changed the filters. Also, the Resolute Roofing maintenance contract has been negotiated and signed. They will be coming out to inspect the roof.

## NEW BUSINESS

President English asked for any New Business.

The next Board of Directors meeting will be via Zoom on Tuesday, April 5, 2022, 7:30 p.m. The next Hybrid General Meeting will be on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, 7:30 p.m. "The EHK Mine" by Will Heierman (HGMS Member). The EHK Mine is a group of placer gold claims in the Helena National Forest owned by Will Heierman and two partners, Gloria Edden and Amos Knapstad.

Show-n-Tell: President English asked for presenters to limit items to three  
Sharon Halton showed a cabochon that she recently completed from blue Tiger's Eye.

Drawing: Sara Metza won the door prize, which was a chert from Dalton Mountain, Helena National Forest south of Lincoln, MT which was collected by Will Heierman in 2021.

Before we Adjourned: President English announced that Refreshments were provided by Sarah Metsa. Feed the Kitty! Your donations go to offset the cost of the snacks. Sarah Metsa has volunteered to bring refreshments next month. Nancy English encouraged the audience to thank the volunteers who made tonight possible.

Adjourn: James Wark moved to adjourn. Sharon Halton seconded it. The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

President English introduced the Program: A Virtual Tour/History of the Grotto in Dickeyville, WI. Sarah Metsa presented a PowerPoint program about the Grotto in Dickeyville WI. The Dickeyville Grotto and Shrines were erected in the Village of Dickeyville, Wisconsin on Holy Ghost Parish grounds. They are the works of Father Matthias Wernerus. His handiwork in stone was built from 1925-1930. The shrines were constructed without the use of blueprints and using stones and materials from all over the world.

## PARTING SHOTS FROM THE MARCH 2022 KOKERNOT FIELD TRIP



*John Cooper scores!*



*The remaining rockhounds late Sunday afternoon.*