



Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth

The newsletter of the Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Project

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THANKS

to our supporters:

Walgett Shire Council
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Hotel Motel

and others who help
in so many ways.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE MAY 18:

Henk Godthelp
will give an
illustrated talk
about his fossil
finds in the mines
of Lightning Ridge,
his methods, and
implications for
opal geology.

*

DON'T MISS IT!
Thurs. 18 May
7.00pm
Lightning Ridge
Bowling Club

NSW MINISTRY for the ARTS BACKS OPAL & FOSSIL CENTRE

NSW Ministry for the Arts has awarded Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre grants worth a total of \$21,330.

A grant of \$14,000 will support the development and care of the centre's nationally-significant collection. The grant money will allow the purchase of collection management software, equipment and supplies necessary for proper curation of collection items, and the services of specialist consultants to oversee the work and provide training for local personnel.

"The Arts NSW Museums Committee considered the Centre's Minor Capital Works project (Collection Development and Documentation: Phase 1) to be a strong and worthwhile project, with the application showing that the project was both well-planned and well-documented," said a Ministry for the Arts spokesperson.

The Ministry granted a further \$8,000 for development of public programs including an education program; a revamped web site; upgrading of the centre's Morilla Street display and project office; and production of information sheets on subject areas such as Opal, Opalised Fossils, Geology of the Opal Fields, Opal Mining, Life on the Ridge's Opal Fields and the Flora and Fauna of Lightning Ridge.

"The museums committee noted that both projects are aimed at audience development, which is vital for any new museum," said the Ministry's spokesperson. "The planned museum will be an important cultural landmark for this remote community."

As with most government funding programs, the grants were made on condition that LROFC provide matching funds, the bulk of which were allocated from Walgett Shire Council's existing commitment to the Opal and Fossil Centre. Paid workers on the project have volunteered to donate back a proportion of their fees; money raised by the LROFC steering committee during

...AND SO DOES NSW DEPARTMENT OF STATE & REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Department of State and
Regional Development

First for Business

NSW Department of State and Regional Development has granted \$7250 to assist with preparation of the Opal & Fossil Centre's business plan and revised strategic plan.

Peter Hiscock AM has been appointed to develop these important documents. Peter has a wealth of experience in planning for cultural projects and tourism. He is a former chairman of Tourism Victoria and for 22 years was Director of Sovereign Hill in Victoria.



Peter Hiscock.

A rigorous strategic and business plan is one of the last elements to be completed before LROFC's major fundraising campaign commences.



Volunteer Doris Cooke with some of the opalised fossils she is registering for the Opal and Fossil Centre collection.

the last 12 months will be allocated to this work; and the steering committee will conduct fundraising and seek tax deductible donations to make up the balance.

These grants will enable the centre to establish best-practice standards of curation for its precious collection; and to expand its services to the local and wider communities.



WHAT'S HAPPENING Highlights of current LROFC project activities

The year's most exciting development to date is completion by architects Glenn Murcutt and Wendy Lewin of initial drawings for the Opal and Fossil Centre. The building is on two underground levels, with an astonishing roof that simultaneously insulates the building and collects rainwater and solar energy, while allowing sunlight and cool air into the building.

The design will now be refined in consultation with environmental, structural and electrical engineers. Meanwhile, Freeman Ryan Design is continuing work on the exhibition spaces within the building.

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Ken Dale has been doing research into a discovery centre at Lightning Ridge, to be established in association with the Opal and Fossil Centre. This facility will provide accommodation and learning programs for local and visiting groups, including school and tertiary students and special interest groups..

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EVENTS

A public meeting was held in Lightning Ridge in January to present drawings for the new Opal and Fossil Centre building, and LROFC members with an email address were sent a scan of the drawings.

Thank you for your responses by word, email and post. The feedback was fantastic and included some excellent suggestions that have been implemented by the architects.

*

Sydney-based film makers Chris Rowell and Roland Beckett have finished a short DVD commemorating the August 2005 excavation of a large petrified log by five Lightning Ridge opal miners, with assistance from the Opal and Fossil Centre (see newsletter 1(3)).

Titled 'Boys With Wood,' the DVD is presently in very limited release (copies for the guys and one for the Opal and Fossil Centre).

Warmest thanks to Chris, Roland, Bev and Maria who donated their time, expertise and materials to travel to the Ridge, record the occasion then produce the DVDs in Chris's studio. The team is keen to continue documenting Lightning Ridge.



'Boys With Wood' will be screened at an upcoming community film night.

*

LROFC has been awarded a bursary to enable project manager Jenni Brammall to attend the Museums Australia national conference at Brisbane in May this year. The bursary was generously funded by the Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts.

*

UPDATE: ENDANGERED OPAL FIELD HERITAGE

State heritage listing for the famous Lunatic Hill open cut opal mine is now under consideration by the NSW Heritage Office. Meanwhile, however, the need intensifies for protection of other items of heritage significance on opal fields in the Lightning Ridge area.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (Mineral Resources) is conducting a rehabilitation program in order to address its responsibilities for public safety and environmental repair. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the removal or destruction of objects and sites of heritage value, including square-sided mine shafts painstakingly dug by hand up to a century ago.

Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre is communicating with other local groups and with the Department of Primary Industries, urgently seeking ways to protect these irreplaceable treasures of our opal mining heritage.

HISTORIC TREASURES

Gwen and Athol Jenkins of Lightning Ridge attraction Kangaroo Hill have donated a windlass that belonged to opal miner George Loewe. George was a well-known identity on the opal fields from 1920 until his death in the mid-1970s; Lightning Ridge Historical Society holds further information and artefacts associated with his life. Gwen has wonderful stories about George that will be recorded and kept along with his windlass.

Doris Wilkinson of Chinchilla designs and makes tapestries. The very first piece she designed depicts a scene on the Three Mile opal fields, near the site of the Opal and Fossil Centre and including the famous Black Hand landmark. Doris has offered to donate this tapestry to the Opal and Fossil Centre and will deliver it to Lightning Ridge later this year.

Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Opal and Fossil Centre's growing collection. If you would like to know more about how to donate items, please contact us and we will be happy to advise you.

MEDIA WATCH

Opal & Fossil Centre attracts media interest

Recent coverage of the project includes *The Daily Telegraph* (a half page with coloured pictures - December 1, 2005), *The NCJV Valuer* magazine (Vol.23 No.4, December 2005 - see above), *The Grossii Age* (newsletter of the Age of Fishes Museum), the newsletter of The Australian Mining History Association, and continued coverage by local newspapers *The Ridge News* and *The Black Opal Advocate*. Regional radio has carried stories about the project; announcement of the building plans was also picked up by Australian and Italian web sites focusing on architecture and design.

WANTED

STILL WANTED: photos, film, video or sound of Lightning Ridge, Glengarry, Grawin, Sheeppark etc.

*

Do you have a piece of our fast-disappearing opal mining heritage?

Old or interesting mining or cutting equipment, home-made gadgets,

relics of camp life, photos or souvenirs from times past? *Why not immortalise them in the Opal & Fossil Centre?*

If you can help with a 'Wanted' item, please speak with any LROFC committee member, call 02 6829 1667, or email opalossil@wj.com.au

HOW TO VALUE OPALISED FOSSILS

Valuing opal is difficult; even more tricky, though, is the valuation of opalised fossils.

The NCJV Valuer has published an article titled 'Valuing Australian Opalised Fossils,' by Robert A. Smith, Jenni Brammall and Elizabeth T. Smith. This quarterly magazine is published by the National Council of Jewellery Valuers.

Opal valuer Ralph Pownall encouraged Bob, Liz and Jenni to write a piece for *The Valuer* after seeing their presentation at the Fourth National Opal Symposium, hosted by Lightning Ridge Miners' Association in July 2005.

After outlining the legal framework applying to sale and trade in opalised fossils, the article describes the criteria by which opalised

fossils should be valued. Photographs by Robert Smith illustrate examples of the valuation criteria.

The Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Project is also introduced to Australia's valuers.

The NCJV Valuer has given permission for LROFC to reproduce the article. Contact us if you would like a copy; they're free, but we would appreciate donations to help cover the cost of colour copying.



GET YOUR OWN PIECE OF DINOSAUR BONE

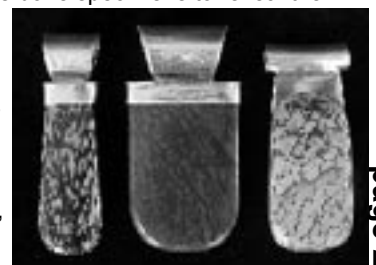
The Opal and Fossil Centre is selling beautiful petrified dinosaur bone from Moab, Utah, to raise funds for its building project - including dino bone cabochons, polished specimens and dino bone set in handcrafted sterling silver pendants by Moab craftsman Jim Haas.

Jim and his wife Cathya Savage are excited about the Opal and Fossil Centre project. They have generously donated jewellery-grade dinosaur bone to the centre to sell as a fundraiser for the LROFC project.

In North America it isn't uncommon to find large pieces of petrified dinosaur bone that can't be identified beyond, "it's from a dinosaur" or, "it's from a BIG dinosaur". Occasionally, the internal structure of the bone is preserved in richly-coloured jasper, quartz or other semi-precious stone. When the bone lacks scientific value, it makes a wonderful material for lapidary and jewellery.

Local opal cutter and carver Daniela L'Abbate has kindly volunteered to polish the bone specimens to reveal their glorious colours and intricate internal structure.

These special gift items will be available when the centre's Morilla Street display reopens later this year; however, members are welcome to contact us to make a pre-launch purchase.



Available: silver jewellery by Jim Haas, set with polished dinosaur bone.