

## Australian White Opal

### Rainbows in the Outback

Lightning flashes of color captured in stone! That can only describe precious opal, and 95% of precious opal mined today is found in the arid desert outback of Australia. Our story begins eons ago when a large inland sea stretched from the North of Australia down roughly two-thirds of the way across the continent. As the sea slowly receded, layers of sand and clay sediment were deposited until today the water is gone. As a result, the top one hundred feet or so below ground level consists of layers of shale, limestone and sandstone. Opals were formed when silica-rich water from weathered upper sediments trickled through the lower layers. A long, steady rate of deposition and evaporation results in the conditions necessary to form the consistent microscopic spheres needed for flashes of spectral color.

The first Australian opal with play-of-color was mined in 1863 in Victoria. A period of rapid discovery ensued with the enormous Coober-Pedy field opening in 1915. Coober Pedy is known for light or white-base opal that ranges from potch (opal with no fire) to highly desirable opal with vivid flashes in all colors of the rainbow. There are actually over seventy individual opal fields spread over an area of nearly 2000 square miles around the town of Coober Pedy. Some of the better known fields are Olympic, Eight-Mile and Seventeen Mile.

Today Coober Pedy is accessible by paved road or airplane, but as recently as the 1950s the only way to get to Coober Pedy

was to head out into the desert and follow the tracks. The mail truck went to Coober Pedy every Friday so miners would travel the day before to guarantee a ride out if their vehicle broke down! Prospectors lived in caves or holes in the ground to escape the blistering daytime heat. Even today, most residents choose to live underground. Conventional houses struggle to stay below 85 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer running air-conditioners, but underground the temperature stays at 77 degrees year round and at no cost. While some of these underground homes are simple old mines, some go to the other extreme and resemble underground mansions with up to twenty rooms and amenities like underground swimming pools!

Opals contain a significant percentage of water when mined and surface cracks referred to as crazing can be a problem that develops over time. We try to “season” rough, or let it sit for a few months to detect crazing prior to cutting. Since opals are relatively fragile it is best to wear them as pendants, earrings or special-occasion rings. Try to avoid extreme arid conditions and rapid changes in temperature.

***Pictured top to bottom:***

***Opal in Textured 22KT & 14KT Gold \$2200***

***Opal & Diamonds in 14KT Gold \$1200***

***Opal & Diamond in 22KT & 14KT White Gold \$800***

***Opal & Diamond in 14KT Yellow Gold \$1900***



Veberod Gem Gallery  
13023 Ridgedale Drive  
Minnetonka, MN  
952-595-8338  
www.vgems.net

