

Koroit Opal

Nature rocks with Australian modern art

The fantastic patterns found in Koroit boulder opal from Queensland, Australia evoke images more frequently found in a museum of modern art. The opal is formed in cracks within the dark ironstone matrix and, when cut through, reveals itself as flashing seams and swirls of color.

The conditions in the Koroit region can be very harsh. It is a desert area, and water is not readily available. Four out of five of the most deadly snakes in the world live in this region. Traveling is often by dirt roads with many hard sharp stones that often slice tires, and a broken down car could strand you for many hours or even days. In the winter daytime temperatures can be nearly 80°F with temperatures dropping below freezing at night, and in the summer temperatures can soar to over 120°F.

The creation of opal in the earth is quite involved. In a simplified description, opal is a silica gel deposited as a filling in rock fractures by seepage of seasonal rains into the ground. During the long dry spells that follow these rains, the gel hardens by evaporation of most but not all

of the water content. Because the gel is composed of countless tiny stacked spheres, it diffracts light into distinctive prismatic color patterns—provided these silica spheres are the same size and arranged in orderly rows. The more precise the arrange-

ment of these light-diffracting spheres, the better the color play. Of course, colors stand out even more when the host rock in which the opal forms is dark rather than light.

The spaces in ironstone that the opal fills could be relatively large and flat, which result in flat, clean-faced opals, or the spaces could be very small and scattered in a pattern throughout a nodule, which could result in typical Koroit or Yowah-nut patterns.

In general, mining is either done by making an open-cut or by digging a shaft and tunnels. An open-cut is a mine that is dug using an excavator and sometimes a bulldozer. Such a mine can resemble a small canyon and be very time consuming and expensive to dig. A shaft and tunnel mine consists of a mine shaft, which can either be dug by hand or by a large drill, and tunnels which extend horizontally from the vertical mine shaft. Mines average about 30 feet deep, however they can be anywhere from just a few feet to over 100 feet deep. Opal mining is difficult and very expensive. Fewer than ten percent of mines prove to be successful.

Koroit is an opal field (opal mining area), not a town. There is neither electricity nor running water. This rough was extracted from an underground shaft and tunnel mine located about 25 miles west of Coongoola, Queensland where the tunnels are about 42 feet below the surface. Mining takes place from June to August using a jackhammer to remove the seam of ironstone from the clay below and the sandstone above. The rest of the year is spent cutting the ironstone exposing the art created eons ago in nature.

Koroit Opal in 22KT Gold and Silver Earrings \$1200

Koroit Opal in 18KT Gold and Silver Ring \$950

Koroit Opal in Silver Ring \$400

Koroit Opal, Blue Zircon and Gold in Silver Platypus Brooch \$850

Koroit Opal in Silver Bracelet \$1900

