



Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth

The newsletter of the Australian Opal Centre, Lightning Ridge, NSW, Australia

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LIGHTNING RIDGE TO CREATE FIRST UNESCO OPAL GEOPARK?

Lightning Ridge will explore the possibility of becoming part of the global Geopark network, following a recent visit by Dr Susan Turner, Australia's geological adviser to UNESCO (the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation).

The Geopark concept began more than a decade ago in Europe, underpinning the sustainable management of geologically significant places to promote geotourism, education, research, job creation, health and well-being, while protecting geological heritage. Worldwide there are dozens of Geoparks in 25 countries - mostly in Europe and China - of which 25 have qualified as UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Since 2002, Dr Sue Turner has worked to establish a Geopark network in the Australian-Pacific region, particularly in areas that could be candidates for Geopark designation. Lightning Ridge, Wellington and Canowindra are three such places in New South Wales. In May 2007 Sue visited each of those towns.

In Lightning Ridge Sue spent an exhilarating day touring opal fields, above-ground opal mining operations and the area's idiosyncratic built environment, seeing the town, its opal, and examining opalised fossils (Dr Turner is a palaeontologist specialising in fossil fish).

Sue met with interested people including representatives of the Australian Opal Centre, Walgett Shire Council, Department of Primary Industries, Rotary International and Lightning Ridge's Miners' Association, Historical Society, Tourist Association, Transcultural Community Council and Opal Advisory Board.

Geoparks have boosted local economies 10- to 100-fold and now form a massive global network "The word 'UNESCO' has a magic," said Dr Turner. "People will get



Elizabeth Smith and Sue Turner at Three Mile opal field.



Dr Susan Turner (left), Australia's geosciences advisor to UNESCO, visits the Australian Opal Centre site at Lightning Ridge with the Centre's Elizabeth Smith (centre) and Jenni Brammall.

involved who wouldn't otherwise.

"Our closest links are with the Chinese. China had 138 Geoparks last September. Middle-class Chinese are used to going to Geoparks on their days off; they're very keyed in to landscape and geology."

Australia's first Geopark, Kanawinka, has been established in the Western District Volcanic Province of Victoria and South Australia, where volcanoes were active as recently as 2000 years ago.

In the Lightning Ridge area, rare geological conditions permitted the formation of black opal and opalised fossils near the margins of what was once an inland sea. This geological heritage is unique in the world and is the basis of rich living industrial and cultural traditions, as well as economic activity and scientific research.

"Lightning Ridge could be the world's first opal Geopark," Dr Turner said.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Highlights of current LROFC project activities

Our Morilla Street premises have been a hive of activity in the past few weeks, with renovations underway in our office, storage and display areas. Among other improvements, the changes will allow us to bring more of our collection onto display.

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June 2007 saw completion of the strategic and business plan for the Australian Opal Centre. Our thanks to the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, to consultants Peter Hiscock and David Fetterplace, and to many local businesses - as well as museums and attractions around Australia - for their assistance in developing this important document.

From top: opal mining; film set on the Four Mile opal field; Elizabeth Smith, Sue Turner and David Lane at the beer can camp; the Astronomers' Monument; Artesian Hot Water Baths; Sue inspects opal and opalised fossils.



EVENTS

YOU ASKED FOR IT, SO HERE IT IS: **THE FOSSIL SLIDE NIGHT!**

Members and friends are invited to a slide night celebrating additions to the Australian Opal Centre's collection in the past two years.

Join us at Lightning Ridge District Bowling Club at 7pm on Thursday 9 August 2007 for an hour of beautiful photographs of items from our collection. If you have any questions about donating to the collection, this will also be the perfect chance to ask them.

Supper provided - everyone welcome!

DYNAMO DONNA JOINS THE TEAM

Donna Lund has joined the Australian Opal Centre team, as admin assistant in our Lightning Ridge office.

Donna has lived in Lightning Ridge since 1994. She is a whirlwind of energy and is excited to be working on the Opal Centre project.



Donna Lund.

OPAL JEWELLERY DESIGN AWARDS & OPAL FESTIVAL

Lightning Ridge's annual Opal Trade Show and Gem Expo will be held on July 26-29.

This year's festival features the biennial International Opal Jewellery Design Awards. It's a great opportunity to view works by contemporary jewellery designers working with opal, as well as enjoying the excitement of the opal trade show. For more information contact IOJDA on (02) 6829 4488 or email ojd@bigpond.com

P.S. During Expo we'll have a display and fossil identification service in the foyer of Lightning Ridge Bowling Club - drop in and say hi!

MORE TREASURES ADDED TO THE COLLECTION

The Australian Opal Centre's collection of opalised fossils continues to grow, with three donations recently accepted through the Cultural Gifts Program and a piece acquired thanks to the Community Development Support Expenditure Program of Lightning Ridge District Bowling Club (more on that in a later issue).

While mining at Holden's Four Mile in the 1970s, Graeme and Christine Thomson amassed a wonderful collection of opalised fossils. In 2006 Graeme and Christine decided to donate their fossils to the Centre, to take their place among other remarkable relics of the opal fields.

The Thomson collection features the first opalised monotreme mammal vertebra to become part of a publically-owned collection; part of the jaw of a hypsilophodontid dinosaur; a fine large lungfish toothplate; several



Opalised mammal backbone donated by Graeme and Christine Thomson.

series of associated reptile vertebrae; and numerous other important and beautiful specimens. Graeme and Christine also intend to donate photographs taken during their time living and mining at the Four Mile.

Over the course of 10 years mining at Lightning Ridge, David Sanders accumulated a small but exquisite collection of opalised fossils, including an unusually large mussel shell, two plesiosaur teeth, a dinosaur vertebra and some beautiful snail shells. David had intended to keep the fossils to enjoy with his wife Tracey and their daughters. On reflection, Dave and Tracey decided it would be better for the fossils to be somewhere they would be displayed, studied and enjoyed regularly, rather than sitting in a safe and only being taken out for a few minutes once in a while.



Large mussel shell and plesiosaur tooth, donated by David Sanders.

WENDY LEWIN HONOURED

Australian Opal Centre architect Wendy Lewin has been honoured with the 2007 Marion Mahoney Griffin Prize for her contribution to the architectural profession over 27 years. The jury cited Wendy's "distinctive and multi-faceted contribution, delivered through the practice of architecture, involvement in architectural education and service to the architectural profession."

This year the Royal Australian Institute of Architects declined to award either its Sulman Award for public architecture, or the Sustainable Architecture Award. Seems the time is ripe for construction of Murcutt and Lewin's Australian Opal Centre in Lightning Ridge, a project mentioned by the RAI jury.



Wendy Lewin in Lightning Ridge.

Congratulations Wendy! * * *



Plant fossils donated by Clytie Smith.

Clytie Smith spent many of her childhood years on the Three Mile opal field at Lightning Ridge. After several years working in circus, theatre and film, Clytie still returns to

Lightning Ridge frequently to visit her parents Robert and Elizabeth Smith and to hunt for opal and fossils. Clytie's exceptional talent for locating fossils has resulted in two collections being donated to museums under the Cultural Gifts program. Her most recent donation to the Australian Opal Centre contains delicate opalised plant material of a kind that rarely survives the mining process.

Sincere thanks to Graeme and Christine, David and Tracey, Clytie and our other donors, and to the Federal Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

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LIGHTNING RIDGE LIGHTS UP MPs

Four members of NSW Parliament visited the site of the Australian Opal Centre in May this year, following a meeting in Lightning Ridge about drought and water allocations.

Barry O'Farrell (Leader of the NSW Liberals), Andrew Stoner (Leader of the NSW Nationals), Andrew Fraser (Deputy Leader of the NSW Nationals) and Kevin Humphries (Member for

Barwon) relaxed during their opal field tour and were enthusiastic about the future of Lightning Ridge.

After a tour through the Chambers of the Black Hand, the MPs visited Lunatic Hill open cut heritage site and the Three Mile opal field, stopping at the Australian Opal Centre site for refreshments, a briefing on the project and a spot of specking.



ABOVE: Andrew Stoner (Leader of the NSW Nationals), Andrew Fraser (Deputy Leader of the NSW Nationals), Kevin Humphries (Member for Barwon) and Barry O'Farrell (Leader of the NSW Liberals) in the Pharaohs' room at Chambers of the Black Hand. LEFT: Kevin Humphries, Danny Hatcher (President, Lightning Ridge Miners' Association), Maxine O'Brien (Secretary/Manager, Lightning Ridge Miners' Association), David Lane (President, LROFC Inc), Barry O'Farrell, Andrew Fraser, Dick Estens and Andrew Stoner on the site for the Australian Opal Centre.

All four seem to have been bitten by the opal bug; indeed, it was difficult to drag them away in time for their scheduled departure.

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Andrew Fraser and Andrew Stoner search for opal.