



Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth

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

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FRONT ROW: Glenn Murcutt and Wendy Lewin (architects), Peter Matthews (Shelmerdines - electrical and mechanical engineering), Elizabeth Smith (Vice President LROFC Inc) and Vicki Drackett (Treasurer LROFC Inc); **BACK ROW:** David Lane (President LROFC Inc), Richard Wesley (Museum Planning Services Australia), David Wallace and David Wong (Northcroft Pty Ltd - quantity surveying), Roger Butt (Shelmerdines - air movement), Roger Chance (SEMF Pty Ltd - hydrology) and James Taylor (James Taylor & Associates - structural and civil engineering).

THANKS
to our supporters,
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FORGING AHEAD: MEET THE AOC BUILDING DESIGN TEAM

It takes a great team to make a great building. In the case of the Australian Opal Centre, a truly stellar cast is gathering to create a building that is shaping up to be nothing less than extraordinary.

On 2 November, LROFC Inc representatives met with leading engineering consultants to discuss the Australian Opal Centre building, designed by architects Glenn Murcutt and Wendy Lewin in response to a brief from Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre Incorporated.

The Australian Opal Centre will be housed in a remarkable two-storey underground building on the historic Three Mile opal field at Lightning Ridge. The

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Highlights of current LROFC project activities

In September 2007 LROFC Inc prepared and submitted two papers to NSW Department of Primary Industries, documenting items on the opal fields that require protection for their heritage, scientific or opal industry values: *Historic sites of the Three Mile Opal Field, Lightning Ridge and White dirt, tailing heaps and lively ground: Early Cretaceous fossil sites of Lightning Ridge*. We are encouraging the DPI to take a leading role in preserving these precious assets.

*

In the past few weeks we've also been busy with new members and membership renewals, work with partner organisations, processing new donations of opalised fossils, compiling grant applications, hosting a range of visitors and preparing a fundraising campaign for the Australian Opal Centre.

building will collect and recycle its own water, generate its own electricity, be insulated by the earth and be ventilated using passive mechanisms driven by air temperature and pressure differentials.

Though underground, the Centre will be a place of light and fresh air. It will even contain a Gondwanan Garden: metres beneath the ground's surface, Wollemi Pines will grow alongside ancient sediments containing the opalised remains of their dinosaur-aged relatives - a cool contrast to the heat and dust of the opal fields.

James Taylor and Associates are to provide civil and structural engineering services to the project. David Wallace of Northcroft (Australia) Pty Ltd is being engaged to estimate the likely cost of the building, including the savings that can be achieved by using local (Lightning Ridge) labour, materials and expertise.

When structural parameters of the building have been determined and costing estimates refined, further expertise will be brought to bear on the building's ventilation, security and data cabling systems, solar energy generation, electrical and water supply, gardens, landscaping and internal fitout.

The Australian Opal Centre building will be worthy of its nationally- and internationally-significant public collection of precious opal, opalised fossils and relics of opal field life. Its innovative design will minimise running costs and will itself draw thousands of visitors every year - as well as generating new paradigms for energy-efficient construction in semi-arid Australia.

EVENTS

July has come and gone again, and with it the Lightning Ridge Opal Festival. Volunteers from the Australian Opal Centre staffed a display at which they identified fossils, answered questions and sold memberships, books, posters and postcards. As always we saw some fabulous fossils!

A highlight of the Opal Festival was presentation of the International Opal Jewellery Design Awards, at which State MP for Barwon Kevin Humphries announced his intention to work with the NSW Government to have black opal declared the gemstone emblem of New South Wales. It was on the site of the Australian Opal Centre (see *Harold Hodges' Opal Teeth* Vol 3(2)) that Mr Humphries was first inspired to promote black opal as the state's gemstone emblem.

In August it was off to the Gold Coast for the Australian Opal Exhibition. Representatives of the Australian Opal Centre recruited new members and briefed the board of the National Opal Miners' Association on the Australian Opal Centre project and its upcoming fundraising campaign.

Recent visitors to LROFC include Lori Modde (Outback Regional Tourism Organisation) and Wendy Greenhalf (Tourism Australia). Lori and Wendy spent a couple of hours being briefed about the Australian Opal Centre and are excited about its potential for tourism in Outback NSW and Australia.

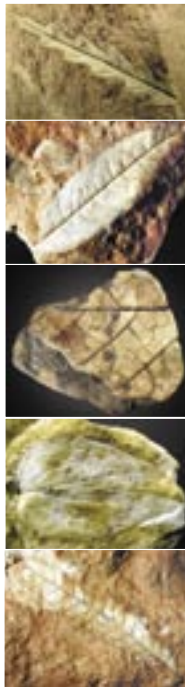
WANTED
Volunteer, 6-8 hours per week, to assist with the Australian Opal Centre's collection of opalised fossils. Attention to detail essential; training provided. Interested? Please call 6829 1667 or email us at opalfossil@wj.com.au

LEAFING THROUGH THE BOOK OF TIME AT GRAWIN

The village of Grawin, about 40km from Lightning Ridge, is best known for its seam opal and frontier lifestyle. Less widely known is another of Grawin's treasures: a silcrete deposit containing fossilised leaves from the Tertiary period, around 40 million years ago.

In September this year palaeobotanist Dr Raymond Carpenter of the University of Adelaide visited Lightning Ridge and Grawin. Ray spent time with LROFC members Matthew Goodwin of Lightning Ridge and Karola Kanold of Grawin, both of whom have studied the Grawin flora for some years - Matthew as a keen amateur palaeontologist and Karola as part of her studies through the University of New England.

On 22 September Ray gave a well-attended public lecture in Lightning Ridge about the Grawin leaf fossils and how they relate to the bigger picture of environmental change in inland Australia. Ray has already identified more than 20 species in the Grawin flora - including two unusual species, until now quite rare in the fossil record. We look forward to updates on work by Ray, Matthew and Karola on the Grawin leaf fossils. ***



Tertiary leaf fossils from Grawin.

PHOTOS: MATTHEW GOODWIN

THE OPAL IN THE Paddock: A NEW HITCHCOCK MYSTERY

Victoria is not known for its opal deposits, so when Harry and Gwen Hitchcock visited Lightning Ridge with a 60mm long piece of opalised wood from their farm, it caused quite a stir.

Harry ploughed up the opal 25 years ago, in shallow topsoil on the Hitchcocks' property at Stanhope, Victoria. He and Gwen kept the piece for a quarter of a century before finally making the journey to Lightning Ridge in August 2007, to show their treasure to the experts.



Harry and Gwen Hitchcock with their opalised wood.

PHOTOS: ROBERT A. SMITH

On arriving in Lightning Ridge, Gwen and Harry were sent all over town, showing their treasure to locals amazed by the apparent Victorian opal occurrence.

Close examination of the specimen by the Australian Opal Centre confirmed its identity as opalised wood, but suggested that its origins were actually in Queensland.

How did the piece end up in Harry's paddock? We don't know, but it's possible that some time last century - say, during the 1940s - an itinerant worker from Victoria headed north to look for

work and landed on the boulder opal fields of western Queensland. This smooth,

palm-sized opalised fossil is just the kind of piece a person might keep as a memento of their time on the opal fields....and that might fall from the pocket of a farm worker returned to southern climes, not to be found again until decades later.

Our thanks to Harry and Gwen for sharing their opal and their story with us.



The opalised wood at the heart of the mystery.

IN-DINO-GESTION

For some months now, red, blue and purple dinosaurs have been happily swallowing coins for the Australian Opal Centre project.

We hear that Cody Hudson of Lightning Ridge is a dedicated dino feeder, so we're sending Cody a free one year membership of LROFC Inc to say thank you. Thanks Cody! Thanks also to Margaret Bubner, for rolling thousands of coins.



Kids like Saxon Thomas just love to feed our dinos!

The dinos have taken residence in shops around Lightning Ridge and as far afield as Dubbo and Tamworth (thank you, Steve Dowle!). They've already swallowed \$1600....but those tummies are rumbling, so save your coins and feed our dinos.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING!



Opal: The Phenomenal Gemstone is undoubtedly the best book currently available on the opal of the world. Published in 2007; great photography and authoritative text, including contributions by LROFC members. A must-have! 209mm x 296mm, soft cover, 108 pp. \$45.00

MEMBER ONLY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL: Members, order two or more copies of *Opal: The Phenomenal Gemstone* and receive free postage!



LROFC Inc has produced two fantastic posters - one featuring historical views of life in Lightning Ridge and the other a colourful array of opalised fossils. Available laminated or unlined....worth framing! 594mm x 420mm

Poster unlined: \$7.70
Poster laminated: \$18.80



The *Age of Dinosaurs* yearbook is a brilliant Australian magazine:

entertaining, informative and richly illustrated. The 2007 issue makes a great gift for people of all ages

- fantastic pictures and hours of easy, enjoyable reading. Or for a gift with some real weight, why not buy all 5 issues for just \$80!

2007 AOD: \$19.95
2006 AOD: \$19.95
Back issue bundle (4 issues): \$60.00
AOD - THE LOT (5 issues): \$80.00

Great gifts for friends, family and colleagues - and all proceeds go towards building the Australian Opal Centre!

If you live in Lightning Ridge, see us at 3/11 Morilla St (the yellow door beside Tom's Lapidary) to make your purchases.

For mail order, call 02 6829 1667 or email opalfossiladmin@wj.com.au to place your order and obtain a quote for postage.