



COOBER PEDY is situated in Central Australia, 160 miles from the nearest railway. These photographs, taken by Mr. Gregory Sherman, who has been an opal specialist for the past forty years, give a clear indication of the nature of the country and the lives of the residents.

Where a TYPISTE Digs for OPALS

There are no doctors, chemists, dentists, nurses, or beauty parlors at Coober Pedy, Central Australia. Foodstuff comes in tins. There isn't even a house. Just caves cut into the sides of the hills!

ROMANTIC SEARCH IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Here, sixty people, living in most primitive conditions, spend their lives digging for Australia's national jewel . . . the opal . . . that strange stone with its ever-changing colors, its fires of passion, its psychic blues and its deep peaceful greens.

THE most interesting personality at Coober Pedy is a girl in her twenties. Formerly a typiste, she came to the opal fields from Kingsway, London.

With her brother of sixteen she left Adelaide seven years ago to accompany a travelling salesman's outfit, and, when the "caravan rested" at Coober Pedy, sister and brother decided to join the quest for opals.

She joined the other women, going down the shafts, digging and hauling the dirt.

The most popular visitor at Coober Pedy is the mailman, who arrives per motor lorry once a week.

He represents their only link with the outside world, and brings with him all their supplies from the nearest railroad, 160 miles away across a road cut through the gibber country. Woe betide the unwary wanderer who strays from the beaten track on to the gibbers; for gibbers are huge flattish pebbles of such unstable habits as would disconcert a tight-rope walker.

HOUSEKEEPING is simple. The meat supply comes in the form of carcasses of sheep slaughtered just before the mailman leaves. If he has room on the lorry he brings ten or twelve live sheep, but more often he silks the carcasses on top of the loaded van, and, when he arrives at Coober Pedy, the ravages made by the flies and dust during the twenty-four hour journey are removed!

Occasionally, too, he is able to bring out a limited supply of fresh fruit and vegetables, but menus are restricted mainly to the contents of tins.

The only means of cooking is by gathering firewood. As there is prac-

tically no vegetation round the settlement, the fuel consists of dried mulga, for which they are forced to wander sometimes six or eight miles.

The water supply is variable. Sometimes good, but again there is always a chance that there will be no rain for two years. This means that the water in the tanks becomes stagnant and ferments. After the process of fermentation, however, one simply skims the scum from the surface, and the water below, we are told, is as clear as gin!

nature is needed, for the climate is amazingly healthy, despite the acute heat during the summer.

THE winter is ideal, and the heat itself is dry and particularly bracing in the case of all chest complaints.

There has been one baby born at Coober Pedy. Living in a dug-out with her husband and five children, the mother was entirely alone when the babe arrived. The first tidings of the event were carried by a small four-year-old girl who, an hour or so later, wandered

across to a neighboring dug-out and remarked to the astonished occupant, "My mother's got an- n- u- v- e- r little baby."

There is a fascination in the beauty of the gems lying in the heart of the mines. It exercises a spell in no way comparable with that of the



WOMEN AT Coober Pedy are not snowed in with housework, so they help their men, going down into the shafts, digging and hauling the dirt.

—Photos by courtesy of Angus and Oote.

HOME decoration is a problem that just does not exist. It would not be possible to transport the timber for houses or live in them during the heat of the summer months. Hence the abodes of the opal seekers consist of dug-outs cut into the side of the hills. Furniture is made from petrol cases, and mattresses consist of sacks filled with dried grass and leaves.

Medical aid is contained in a square red box, distinguished by a white cross and provided by a benign Government. Fortunately, little assistance of this

THE COMMONWEALTH Savings Bank and General Post Office are built according to architectural tenets that date back to the stone age!

lust for gold that actuates the miners of precious metal.

Fortunes are rare in the opal mines, and life is primitive, but the gleaming, colorful gems, the emblems of hope, are their reward.

announcement