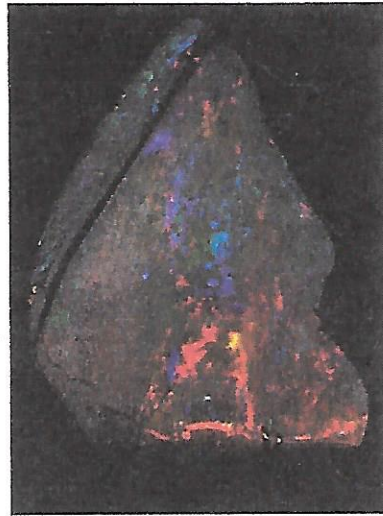




Dagbjorn Johnson, Opex Opal

Dag Johnson mined opalized shell clusters in June, 1956, at Shell Patch, about 22 miles from Coober Pedy. Found at the six-foot level, the chunk consists of nine *Cyrenopsis australiensis* shells and one sand snail, *Euspira ornatissima*. This two-pound specimen measures approximately 9 x 4.25 x 2.75 inches. Most such clusters have long since been broken apart and polished for individual gems (see page 28).

Unearthed at White Cliffs, weighing 204 carats, a fossil jawbone (above right) exhibits opalized capillaries and cell structure of a Mesozoic plesiosaur, a small-headed long-necked marine reptile. Fossil vertebrae (below) come from one of the same creatures.



Burton's Gems and Opals



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Shell Patch, near Coober Pedy, and several areas at Andamooka probably contained the world's greatest concentrations of opal fossils. Opal pipes are intriguing because each Australian mining area has a different explanation for the usually stubby, cigar-shaped opals. In South Australia, they are said to be replacement products of extinct shellfish related to squids, cuttlefish, and octopi. Queensland miners believe they are mainly replacements of small tree limbs. Others think that they are from wormholes. Any cylindrical void could have produced them.

