

# Mario Pagnon

By Mario Pagnon

Mario arrived in Coober Pedy in 1969 with a tunnelling machine he designed and built himself. Previously, he had spent twelve months in Andamooka mining. On the way to Coober Pedy he parked his truck and equipment out at Seven Mile. He picked up the sandstone and thought that it was much lighter than the ground in Andamooka and could be mined through vacuum mining. Mario also found that the Coober Pedy sandstone was chalky that is, not abrasive and the weight was half that of hard rock.

One Greek man, Bill and one French guy said that they had spent a lot of money with different mining machines and came up with nothing efficient and effective. However, Mario believed that something could be done so he went back to Melbourne. This led to Mario designing and building a blower with a diesel motor and special blades in Melbourne and consequently bringing it back to Coober Pedy.

When Mario returned to Melbourne, he did his homework to build a more economical, safer and quicker way of mining in Coober Pedy. At the time, diesel was extremely cheap (ie, \$7.50 for a 45 gallon drum). Mario found that it was easier then to progress with prospecting because of the cheap diesel cost and a more efficient mining system. He made a high pressure vacuum fan (which in Coober Pedy is called 'a blower') with special hardened blades and a wearing plate. Mario also put a 120 hp 6 cylinder ford diesel motor with a V belt pully to drive the fan at 2900 rpm and this was mounted on a 7 tonne truck using a 9 inch PCV pipe. Mario did not put the 'hopper' or 'cyclone' attachment because the tunnelling machine cuts the sandstone finely. (Today the Coober Pedy blower is exactly the same as what Mario had designed and built but without the hopper.)

When Mario mined the 10 mile farm area, Murray Joynt was looking on from a distance. Murray asked if he could have a look at this new machine. Mario called him over, stopped the working 'blower' and gave Murray all the measurements of the new fan. Mario told Murray that if you work with large sandstone lumps, the blower needs to have an additional 'hopper' or 'cyclone' attachment.

After a while in 1970, there was a complaint from the Mine Inspector that Mario's machine created too much dust and therefore couldn't work too closely with miners working with winches. Therefore, Mario went back to Melbourne and created a better version that had a ten-staged turbine that emitted no dust. After Mario arrived back in Coober Pedy with this updated designed blower, he noticed that everyone had a blower and there was dust everywhere because they were using his older design.

Mario tunnelled Umoona Mine. He was the only one who could do that job as his blower made no dust in town. Mario's mining equipment was considered to be one of the safest in Coober Pedy and due to this in 1971 he had two important visitors that came to look at his mine and mining equipment. At the time, Sir Mark Oliphant, the Governor of South Australia, and Major General Sir Rohan Delacombe, the Governor of Victoria, had a tour of Mario's mine. Mario winched them down the mine and as they stood on either side Mario said: "I'm all the way from Venice... 70 foot underground ...this should be free of tax because we this is quite high risk and we were exporting opal around the world". Sir Mark Oliphant told Mario that he was twenty years ahead of everybody else in his field.

All other miners that came to Coober Pedy after 1970 did not know me because I was in Melbourne rebuilding tunnelling machine and blowers in 1970.

Mario wants it to be known that IVAN VANAJEK has been the most successful in commercially building the best blowers, fans and hoppers in Coober Pedy for the locals and West Australia based after Mario's model was redesigned.

When Mario arrived in Coober Pedy there were approximately 700 people. Because of Mario's blower, the mining industry was revolutionized and the population increased. Coober Pedy was the fastest growing mining town in Australia for ten years from 1971 to 1981.

In 1977, Bob Corro, the owner of Coober Pedy's Hotel, at the Italo-Australian club presented the following award to Mario Pagnon for his outstanding achievement and contribution to mining. (refer below)



