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TO THE DIRECTOR OF MINES:

As instructed by you, the opalfields at Andamooka and Coober Pedy were visited in company with Inspector B.W. Sowry and Mr. W. Robert Moore, Chief, Foreign Editorial Staff, The National Geographic Magazine, leaving Adelaide on Tuesday, 28th January, 1958.

We arrived at Andamooka on the evening of 29th January. During the next two days various parts of the field were visited to enable Mr. Moore to obtain suitable photos. and interview various miners to obtain local information regarding mining, past and present. Mr. Frank Schulten, the Secretary of the Andamooka Progress Association, rendered very valuable service in conducting the party to the various points of interest and by supplying useful information.

At the present time there are only about twenty white men on the field, some of them with wives and families. It was stated that about 200 aborigines (including halfcastes) are on the field. This includes women and children. I interviewed most of the white miners and one aborigine (Daddy Higgins, an intelligent and fairly well educated man who has some influence with most of the blacks). The views of the Department regarding the correct pegging and registering of claims was explained to them. The claims were, generally, very well pegged, with pieces of tin nailed to each of the pegs showing miner's right number and date of pegging. Direction trenches at the pegs were, in most cases, quite good, although in some instances stone direction piles were used instead, the impression being that it was optional whether trenches were cut or stone piles used. No claims on this field are registered. I explained to the miners that later in the year a Warden would be visiting the field, accompanied by a Surveyor, and that all claims would be surveyed and the persons working on unregistered claims would be prosecuted. Many reasons, all ridiculous, were advanced as to why claims are not registered.

There are two stores, which supply foodstuff, on this field, together with an official post office.

Several persons asked whether it would be possible to have a geological survey made of the area. They consider that it would prove helpful to the prospector and the miner. One miner suggested that the Department obtain jarrah pegs for sale to the men on the field. Timber is scarce and it is sometimes difficult to obtain suitable posts for pegging claims.

Not one of the gougers interviewed admitted that he was getting very much opal. They seem to take it for granted that the Department of Mines supplies information to the Taxation Dept., and could not, in most instances, be persuaded that the information supplied to us in the form of statutory returns is regarded as strictly confidential and is not divulged to the Commissioner of Taxes. A "tax allowance", similar to that made to miners producing certain specified minerals (gold being tax free) might assist.

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The main camp of the Aborigines, situated on the western side of Treloar Hill, behind the main settlement, appears to me to be badly located. This area is part of the watershed for Opal Creek, in which the wells and bores supplying water for the community are located. The natives are notoriously difficult to persuade in regard to proper sanitation, and the usual method adopted by officers of the Progress Association (which is a live group on this field regarding general matters) to endeavour to ensure the erection of proper lavatories, built over disused shafts, is to threaten to report the matter to the Warden at the Dept. of Mines. These are not in general use by the native population. The encampment was in a most untidy condition. A resident Police Officer, to control Public Health regulations, appears to be necessary.

A Community Hall (a well-constructed timber and iron building) has been erected by the residents under the guidance and advice of Mr. Schulten. The Education Dept. has constructed a fine new school-house.

A new well has been sunk by the miners, near Barnes Bore, and a good supply of water obtained.

A dispute between two parties was settled by me on the understanding that the miner who had just repegged his claim would lodge an application for registration. Another gouger who was working in a shaft on the claim was instructed to cease operations. An application for registration has been received from Mr. Valer Mihala.

We left Andamooka on Saturday morning, 1st February, and, after having obtained permits, crossed the Woomera Rocket Range (a short cut with a 26-mile bitumen road) arriving at Coober Pedy at 9.30 p.m.

Two days were spent at Coober Pedy to enable Mr. Moore to take photos. of underground workings, inside of dugouts, and general scenic features, and to converse with local identities. I again explained fully the views of the Department on the necessity for opal gougers to properly peg out and register their precious stones claims, and informed the various people that a Warden and Surveyor would later in the year visit the field and that legal proceedings would be taken against those who do not comply with the regulations under the Mining Act, 1930-1955. Here, as at Andamooka, the miners consider that their own rules are sufficient without the Dept. of Mines coming in on the matter, and they have similar excuses for not registering claims.

At present there are between twenty and thirty white people at Coober Pedy. I was informed that there are approximately 200 natives in the area. The aborigines do not appear to create a similar problem on this field as they do at Andamooka, the diggings being scattered and widely separated, and residing on the intake area for the underground cement tank is strictly forbidden by the Engineering and Water Supply Department. This, of course, applies to any persons, black or white. A number of aborigines, particularly the lubras, earn money by "lousing" or "noodling" the dumps to obtain the small pieces of opal showing "colour" left by the miners, the same as they do at Andamooka.

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There are seven precious stones claims registered at the 8-mile workings (located on the main road to Alice Springs and west of the main settlement). Opal is being won from at least three of these claims. We were fortunate in seeing opal being taken out of the seam when we went down a shaft of Precious Stones Claim No. 2352, held by Mr. Guido Pezzotta and pegged by virtue of Miner's Right No. 6664. Photos. of the seam and specimens of high-grade opal were taken by Mr. Moore. The claims in this area were not properly pegged in accordance with the Mining Regulations in that a notice showing the number of the Miner's Right and date of pegging (written on paper with lead pencil and tied on with string) was attached to only one peg on each claim. The claimholders were instructed to rectify the matter by placing notices on the four corner pegs of each claim, preferably in a more permanent manner, using paint on the pegs or on tins attached to the posts.

The workings at the 12-mile, 17-mile, 11-mile, 9-mile, 6-mile and 4-mile diggings, located to the northwest of the main settlement, were also visited. There is quite a lot of activity at the 12-mile diggings, but at the 17-mile and 9-mile only one miner was at present working at each place.

The quantity of water in the Government tank appears to be satisfactory.

There is no school at this field, although there are quite a few aboriginal children there. Two stores are located on the main road at the entrance to the main settlement (the old original area which was first worked). One store is also the post office; the other, which is particularly well stocked with provisions and is also a boarding house capable of accommodating a dozen persons, is run by Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Brewster. These stores are situated on registered business claims.

The party left Coober Pedy on Tuesday morning, 4th February, and because work on rocket testing was taking place, we were unable to cross Woomera and had to proceed on the longer route via Kingoonya, and Pimba. We arrived at Whyalla at about 9.30 p.m.

During the cooler part of the year, from about March to November, there is usually 70 or more white opal-miners at each of the fields.

Wednesday, 5th February, was spent in an examination of the open-cut workings of The Broken Hill Proprietary Co.Ltd. on the Iron Monarch at Iron Knob. The boring plants (diamond drilling and percussion drilling) of the Department working in the Middleback Range were also visited. Mr. Moore did not take photographs of any of this work. He stated that he will make a report on the subject of iron ore production and steel-making to his principals when he returns to Washington.

VTG:AGK
17/2/58.(V.T. Geraghty)
SENIOR WARDEN.