

DEPARTMENT OF MINES  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

By V. T. Geraghty - Senior Warden

ANDAMOOKA AND COOPER PODY OPALFIELDS

A visit of inspection was made to the opalfields, leaving Adelaide on 10th October and returning on 20th October, 1961. R.W. Ingham was driver and general assistant.

The miners are, in general, complying with the Mining Regulations very well. There are 237 Precious Stones Claims now registered, 143 at Andamooka and 89 at Cooper Pody. The pegging in most instances is very good, being far better than on previous visits, but the direction trenches could still be very much improved.

Andamooka Opalfield

Andamooka Opalfield was reached on Wednesday, 11th October. A dugout was rented from Mr. P.V. Wake, an opal buyer, for use during the visit to this field.

All of the various parts of the field were inspected during the next three days. The pegging out of the claims and the maintaining of pegs and notices is really very much improved, but in many cases the trenches do not entirely conform with the regulations regarding length, width, or depth. This fact was pointed out to the committee of the Progress Association and to any individual contacted on his claim.

The production of opal at this field is very steady and (from information received from several sources) will most likely exceed the record production for last year (production for 1960 was valued at £183,000). The bulk of the present production is coming from the Stevens Gully workings where 65 registered claims are held, most of which are particularly well pegged out. Cooper Pody Gully is still producing useful quantities and Triangle Hill is the site of steady production. The Stevens Gully and Triangle Hill workings are gradually extending southward; and opal has been

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discovered at Black Boy Extension, an area about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the east of the Black Boy workings. Claims have been pegged out and some have been registered.

The owner of a percussion boring plant (Mr. O. Carlson, a former driller employed in this Department) has pegged out claims at Jubilee workings and is now using his boring plant (which he had in the district to carry out water-boring contracts, now completed) to hoist the "dirt" from the shaft. A small quantity of opal is being obtained.

Special Mining Lease No. 32 (Andamooka Enterprises Ltd.) is not at present being worked. The bulldozer is still on the lease.

The new schoolhouse has been commissioned, making two buildings in use, presided over by two young male teachers. There are between 100 and 150 children on the field at present.

The Andamooka Progress Association (Mr. E. Carter, president, and Mr. F. Schulten, secretary) has just completed the extension of the community hall (which now holds 150 people) and has purchased a projector and runs picture shows several nights a week, the profits to be used for further amenities. A privately owned picture show is also being operated by a local resident.

The present population, reported to be 600 persons, including about 50 or 60 aborigines, appears to be, on the whole, reasonably contented.

The water position at this field is still very acute. The wells and bores make very little water. The position is relieved by the Engineering and Water Supply Department transporting water in tankers from Woomera Village, a distance of about 80 miles. The distribution is controlled by the Progress Association and a charge is made for the water supplied. The E. and W. S. Dept., which controls the roads, is at present endeavouring to improve the tracks through the sandhills by carting and laying clay and rubble. The road is in fairly good condition.

Coober Pedy Opalfield

This field was reached in the evening of Sunday, 15th October, accommodation being obtained at the roadhouse located there.

The various sections of this field were visited and the claims inspected on Monday to Wednesday. The pegging out and the maintaining of the pegs on the claims is very much improved, although, as at Andamooka, the direction trenches require more and better attention.

A Warden's Court was set down for hearing Plaint No. 488 (Nicolas Macris and Constantinos Athanassopoulos v. Massimo Poduti) in the Community Hall on the evening of Monday 16th October. Evidence was taken from witnesses for both parties and the Court adjourned until Tuesday morning at the site of the ground in dispute (located at South Pacific Gully, about 7 miles west of Coober Pedy Post Office near the main road to Alice Springs). After viewing the claims included in the dispute, the plaint was dismissed for lack of conclusive evidence. This was the first Warden's Court held at Coober Pedy since early in 1920.

Opal is still being produced from this field at a steady rate, the bulk of the production is still coming from the 8-mile workings (Geraghty Hill), but opal in reasonable quantities is again being obtained from the Big Flat where the first opal was produced at Stuart Range. A number of bulldozers are operating, on properly pegged claims, on the Big Flat. The majority of the miners on the field raise objections to the use of this form of mechanized mining, and the writer is of the opinion that more harm than good is being done by the use of bulldozers on the opalfields. The machines, even though they remain on the claim pegged out, shove the overburden up on to portion of the land which is thus rendered useless for mining by ordinary methods, and they leave steep sides which can become a menace if, as is done by aborigines, the sides are undercut at

about the opal level. There are five dozers at Coober Pedy, although only one was in operation during the visit. No report of the operators of bulldozers having produced opal in quantity has been made.

A general meeting was called by the Secretary of the Coober Pedy Progress Association (Mrs. R. Ayton) and held at the conclusion of the Warden's Court on Monday night to give the miners an opportunity to ask the Warden questions on mining legislation. About 150 people attended the Court and remained for the meeting which lasted for about two hours, and many problems were cleared up. The erection of a new schoolhouse has been commenced by the Public Buildings Department on behalf of the Education Department. At present the school, conducted by two young male teachers, is held in the community hall. There are forty children attending the school. The Flying-Doctor Service is at present very busy treating and taking to hospital very young aboriginal children suffering from a form of gastric trouble.

The Progress Association has obtained two film projectors and pictures are shown in the hall at regular intervals.

The Aborigines Department has appointed a Welfare Officer who resides on the field and looks after the aborigines. At present, the estimated number of aborigines on the field is 350. There are about 300 white people resident in various parts of this opalfield. A new store has been opened in Bolshevik Gully.

Water is very scarce at Coober Pedy, the 500,000-gallon underground tank having been empty for a long time. Water for drinking purposes is carted for a distance of about 90 miles (from Mt. Willoughby Station) by the Engineering and Water Supply Department in tankers, the residents being limited by the Progress Association, which controls distribution, to 25 gallons per person per week. Water which is not potable is obtained from bores nearer to the settlement for use for purposes other than drinking.

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