

DEPARTMENT OF MINES
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

RB 54/150

INSPECTION OF ANDAMOOKA AND
COOPER PEET OPALFIELDS.

An inspection of the opalfields was made between 30th April and 10th May, 1962.

In general, the requirements of the mining regulations are being complied with in a satisfactory manner but there are many claims on which little or no work has been done. Pegging has greatly improved in recent years but in some places direction trenches are poor.

It seems likely, from information supplied by miners, that production of opal from both fields is less than at the same time last year but as I met only two buyers I was not able to confirm this.

ANDAMOOKA

Andamooka opalfield was reached on 1st May and all parts of the field were visited during the next three days. There are 165 registered claims on this field, 62 of them being on the Stevens Creek workings, 28 at German Gully and 27 at Triangle. In addition there were many claims pegged within 30 days and not yet registered. Pegs were removed from at least 74 claims which were not properly pegged or which had lapsed for non-registration within 30 days.

There are approximately 700 people on the Andamooka field, including women and children. Carting of water from Woomera ceased recently and the field is now dependent on the bores. The track through the sandhills has been covered with clay and is now no worse than the rest of the road.

Special Mining Lease No. 39 held by Andamooka Enterprises Ltd. is not being worked. It is said that the bulldozer was sold before Christmas. The workings look the same as when I saw them a year ago. Several enquiries were received from miners anxious to peg claims in this area and I recommend that action be taken to cancel this lease, which is not due to expire until April, 1963.

Mr. J. Buza and his partners are working a group of four claims at Stevens Creek by a method new to opal mining in this State. They have tunnelled into the hill for a distance of approximately 100 yards, using a second-hand Joy loader, as used in coal mines, jackhammers, and a "Roughrider" diesel dump truck fitted with an exhaust filter. The loader is worked by a 415-volt generator mounted on a large diesel truck. Their drive is about 6 feet high and 8 feet or more in width. They had difficulty with clogging of the chain conveyor belt on the loader and at the time of inspection were replacing it with a rubber belt.

Two complaints were heard in the Warden's Court and in each case the claim was cancelled and a Warden's Order issued to the plaintiff. Another complaint was withdrawn.

I investigated a complaint by J. Covelik that between October and December 1961, Sachs, Hervath and Zhura drove 21ft. into his claim and took at least £1,600 worth of opal. Sachs was the only one of the three still on the field. I sent for him and heard Covelik's complaint in his presence and Sachs said that they opened an old shaft and the drive complained of was already there. He said that they put in a new drive, away from Covelik's claim. He denied that they had ever mined in Covelik's claim. Covelik was not able to produce any evidence that the drive was not an old one, as stated by Sachs. As it was more than six months since the alleged trespass it was useless to inspect the drive. Covelik was informed that nothing could be done now because of lack of evidence.

There are no bulldozers on the Andamooka field at present.

Several buildings have recently been erected on the top of a hill near J. Collins' house. The erection of buildings above the opal level is likely to cause trouble in future. I suggest that the Andamooka Progress Association be asked to warn intending builders that if they build above the level they risk damage to their buildings.

COOPER PEDY

Cooper Pedy was reached in the evening of 5th May. Most of the least-worked areas were inspected on Sunday 6th May. These included the area now known as the 17-mile workings. This is the locality previously known (and shown in Departmental records) as the 20-mile. The old 17-mile workings

were not visited as I was informed that nobody is mining there.

The population of Coober Pedy is almost 700, including about 250-300 aborigines. Water is still being carted from a bore over 80 miles away. There are at least five bulldozers on the field but none were working during my visit.

There are 114 claims registered at Coober Pedy, most of them being at the 8-mile and South Pacific Gully. There is less work than usual at the 8-mile and some of the old claims in this area are probably almost worked out. South Pacific Gully is reported to be the best opal producer at present.

A Warden's Court was held on 7th May at South Pacific Gully to hear a plaint by N. Rapone regarding the non-working of P.S. Claim No. 3740, held by A. Zarogiannis. The claim was forfeited and granted to the plaintiff.

Two miners were found smoking while handling detonators and gelignite. They were warned that it was illegal as well as being dangerous. This matter has been discussed with the Chief Inspector of Mines.

Pegs were removed from at least 90 claims, 50 of them being at South Pacific Gully. Most of these claims had lapsed for non-registration but some of the pegs were removed because of extremely poor pegging or illegible notices. In one case a chair leg had been used as a peg.

After receipt of a telegram from the Senior Warden, I investigated a complaint that blasting had damaged a dugout (at Crowder Gully) occupied by A. Hamastl under licence from the Department of Lands. A separate report is being made regarding this matter.

GENERAL

The most serious trouble on both the Andamooka and Coober Pedy fields is trespassing underground on claims, either by driving in from adjoining claims, or in some cases, by going down a shaft without the owner's permission. I have received many vague complaints regarding this matter but so far have not found a case where any proof was available. However, I have no doubt that many of the complaints are justified.

I suggest that action be taken to have deliberate trespassing underground on claims (either by entering a shaft or driving) made an offence against the Mining Regulations, with a severe penalty. If possible it would

be an advantage if such an offence could be dealt with in the Warden's Court, as by the time the matter could be investigated and reported for police action, the offender would most probably be missing.

As far as I am aware it is not an offence to trespass on a Precious Stones Claim, under existing legislation, and probably the police could take no action unless an offender was caught in a claim with opal in his possession. However, persons making complaints have been advised to report the matter to the police if they have any proof of trespassing.

Trespassing is regarded very seriously by the miners and I think that if anyone is caught and it is discovered then that there is no penalty, it may cause violence.

Another complaint at both fields is that a person holds more than one claim. When details are available it is invariably found that the other claims are held in different names. It is said that some of the claims are registered in the names of persons not even resident in Australia. If a claim is not worked, it is liable to forfeiture in the Warden's Court provided a plaint is lodged and satisfactory evidence given. However, if some method could be found to regulate the pegging of claims, it would be an advantage and would save time.

I suggest that in the case of Precious Stones claims, the regulations be amended to provide that a claim can be ~~registered~~ only in the names of persons residing (or intending to reside) on the opalfields for at least seven months in each year. As a claim does not have to be registered for a period of less than 30 days this amendment would not interfere with people who go to the opalfields for holidays. Claims pegged for more than 30 days and not registered lapse automatically and the pegs are removed when a Warden visits the field. Many leases issued by the Department of Lands contain a condition requiring the lessee to personally reside on the land comprised in the lease for at least nine months in each year. I have suggested seven months as a reasonable time because of the climate.



WARDEN