

Rockhound Trip To Virgin Valley Proves Interesting, Worthwhile

Two hundred and ten miles south-east of Klamath Falls lies Virgin Valley. And within the boundaries of this geographic area along

Thousand Creek lie the opal mines that are every year attracting thousands of rockhounds to the area.

Last week a couple of rockhound aficionados and their families from the Herald and News took the trip to the sun-baked land and

came home loaded down with various specimens of the hydrated amorphous silica known as opal. The trip is an easy one for ex-

perienced drivers with good roads all the way at this season of the year. To get to the mines you go to Alturas, then turn east for Cedarville, continue east and cross over into Nevada where you take Highway 8A for the Sheldon Antelope Reserve. After leaving the pavement the roads are good gravel ones with no bad spots. But it is hot and dusty and service stations are few and far between out on the high desert. Be sure and take along plenty of water and make sure the car has a sufficient supply of gas. Cedarville is the last spot where you will find all these items in good supply.

Camp is made at the old CCC camp adjacent to the mine property itself. Here is shelter of a sort and ample water. The old bath house, featured on the cover this week, is still there and in working order. The showers are fed from the impounded water which flows through the pipes at a comfortable 65 to 70 degrees. Outside on an average summer day the temperature will soar much higher.

The mine itself, now owned by Keith Hodson, is named the Rainbow Ridge and is the producer of the world's largest opal, a monster weighing seven pounds. This stone, valued at \$50,000, is nine and a half inches long, has a circumference of five and a half inches at one end, four and a half at the other. Most of the opals don't come that large.

Legend has it that the property was discovered by an obscure Miller and Lux cowhand back in the wild and woolly days who came across a cache of "pretty rocks" one day while riding after cattle. Word spread and a Mrs. Lockheed, at that time working for a San Francisco newspaper, came up to look around and ended up owning the mine. Harry Foulkes of Stockton bought the mine and in turn sold it to the Hodsons in 1949.

The mine shaft itself (see accompanying pictures) is worked by Hodson where he digs out stones for use in his mineral shop in Scottsdale, Arizona. He spends the winters in the south, his summers working the mine. The surrounding mine property is open to the public for a daily charge and visitors can dig their own shafts, usually not too deep in view of the brittle ground and the pounding heat, or scratch through the dirt in search of the collector's stones. Hodson goes out every so often and turns up an area of dirt with a bulldozer, thus making the scratching considerably easier.

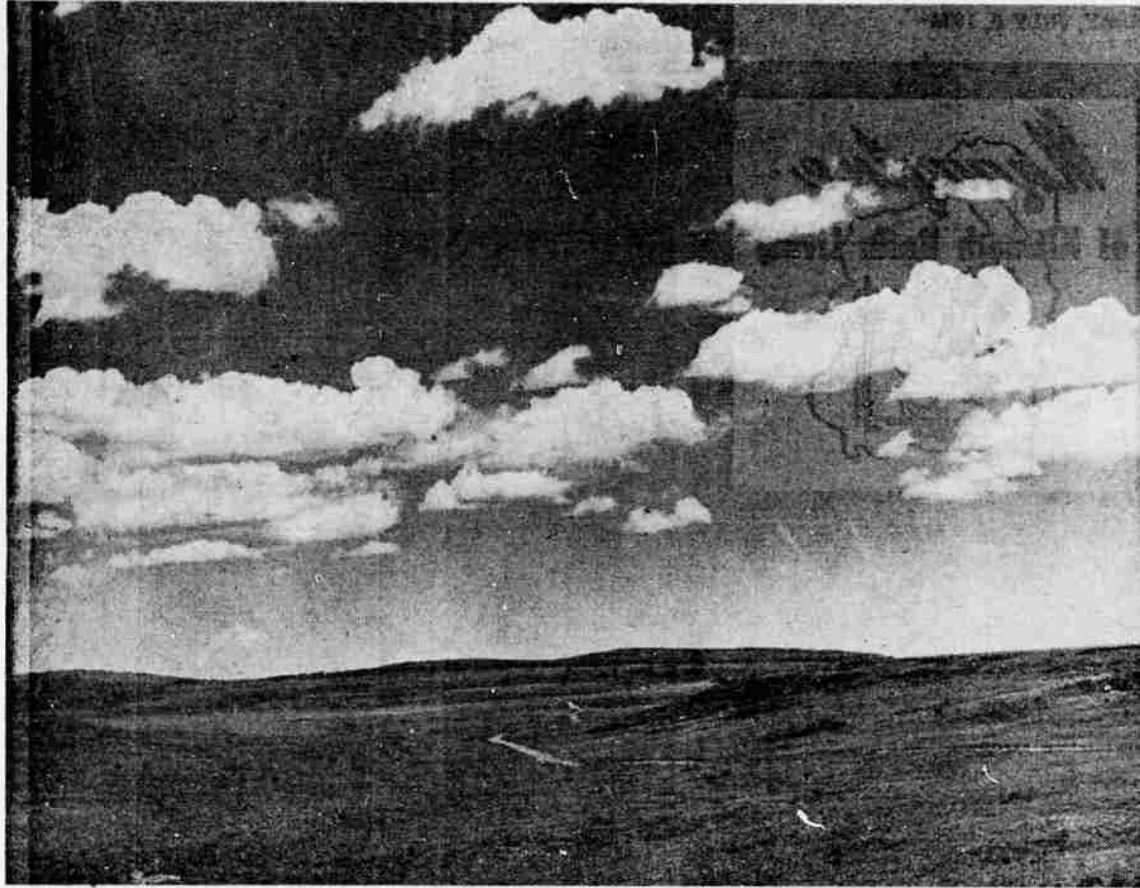
You pay your money and takes your chances with finders keepers being the only rule.

Travelers to the opal grounds should carry with them the normal equipment for any desert trip. Stout shoes are a must because of the rocky terrain. Comfortable clothing including sun hats and dark glasses is recommended. A snake bite kit is not a bad idea although the area is not infested with snakes. As for digging equipment, suit yourself. A long bladed knife will come in handy as will a pick and shovel and a screwdriver to be used in prying bits of opal loose from the clay formation called montmorillonite in which they are found.

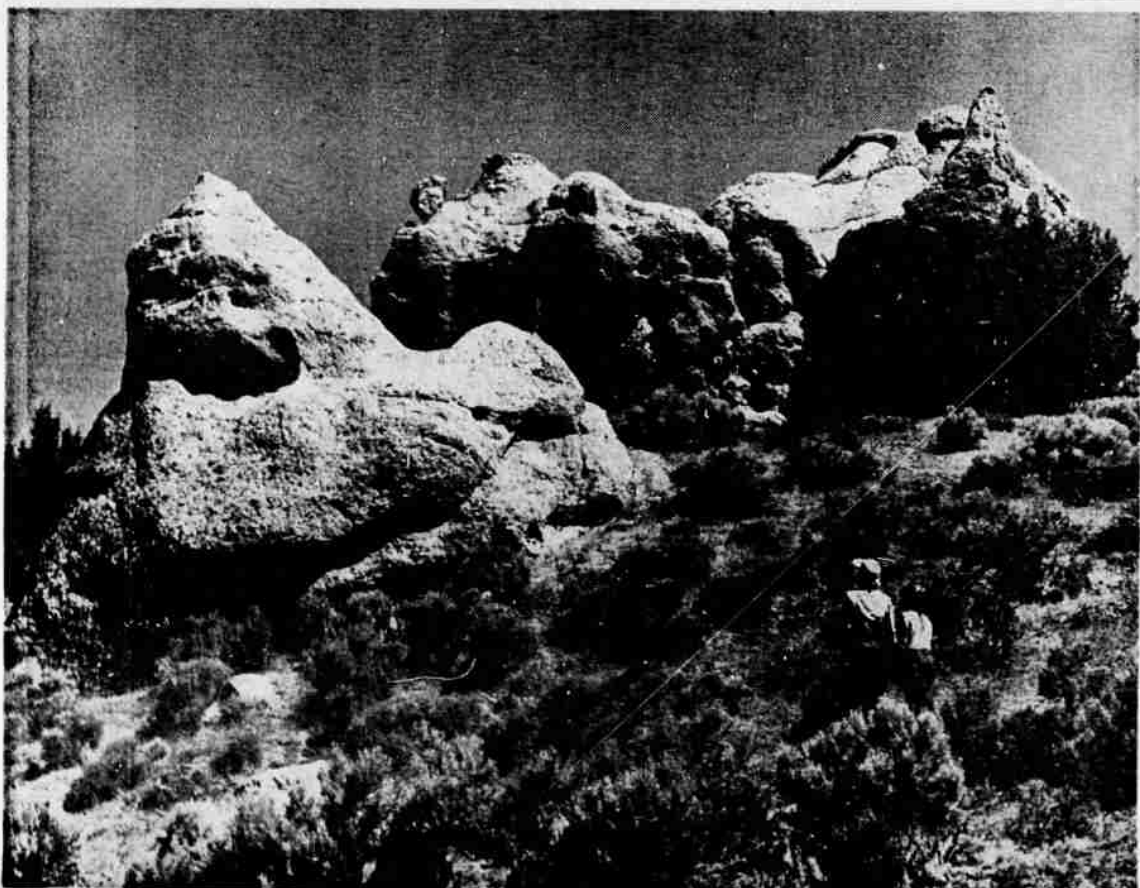
Take along your camera and plenty of film. Particularly at this time of the year there is plenty to shoot and the color picture enthusiast will find myriads of wild flowers showing off to their best advantage. The sandstone formations on Forty Niner Pass are spectacular enough to warrant a camera stop. Along the way you'll find antelope in occasional bunches, deer in the draws, sage hen by the hundreds.

In addition to the Rainbow Ridge there is another mine in the area, the Green Fire. Our roving rockhounds didn't have time to visit this one on this trip.

But maybe next time. And it looks very much like there will be another time.



HALFWAY POINT ON THE TRIP to Virgin Valley finds the rockhounds in typical desert country, the gentle loops of land rolling on for mile after dusty mile through sagebrush, rabbitbrush, rocks and distance.



FORTY NINER PASS leading into Virgin Valley features spectacular sandstone formations such as this one shot by Herald and News photographer Don Kettler. Visitors to the area should by all means take their cameras and plenty of film.