DIGGING DOWN UNDER

To miners, Australia is a treasure chest of precious minerals. For centuries, miners have dug, burrowed and blasted their way into the ground trying to get at them. Massive machines have mostly replaced muscle power in today’s vast new mines but the dusty prospectors of old are not dead. They live on in Australia’s opal-mining towns. These towns are Australia’s answer to the Wild West. They even have old-fashioned villains – the dastardly thieves they call ‘ratters’!

Opal fever
Opals were once thought to bring bad luck. In the town of Coober Pedy, they bring fever – opal fever. Anyone can stake a claim and start digging. But watch out for ratters, who sneak down the mines at night and steal other miners’ opals. There are tall tales of ratters meeting a sticky end at the bottom of a disused mineshaft!

The world’s biggest opal was found at Coober Pedy. It weighed 3.45kg (7.61lb)!

HOSTELS ROCK!
Bed, breakfast and bedrock – that's what you get when you stay at Coober Pedy. That's pretty cool. Particularly when you consider that the surrounding landscape is so hot and bleak that it's a favourite film location for movies about the end of the world.

Bedrock

No greens
Players at the Coober Pedy Golf Club have to cart around a piece of turf so they can tee off. At least they don't have to worry about 'Keep Off the Grass' signs!

Bound for the underground
Some opal miners don't just work underground, they live there too. Many locals in Coober Pedy have built their homes in caves and old mines to escape the boiling heat outside. You can even shop, visit a cafe or go to church underground! That sure is life 'down under'!

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