

GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1994

Thanksgiving is over, and this year's heavy foliage is dying, which means we can more easily view the land on the few trips we have planned before winter sets in. We have accomplished a great deal over the summer. The Steam Show in Caledonia was a real success. Some of our members offered their time and talents to man the booth with us. Special thanks go to Paul, Sanko and Harry for all the help with nailing together the booths. Our display attracted a lot of people, especially since it was our first display in this area. We gained new members and much valuable information on the mines, helping us solve the puzzle.

Ilse has much to report for the Outdoor Research Group because they explored nearly every weekend. Our aim is to get to know the area, find old unrecorded mines and to determine which should be included in our planned publication:

On August 23rd, we visited the elusive Cayuga mine, which operated during World War II until about 1956. The gypsum is of outstanding quality and pure white. The owner of the property gave us every encouragement and helped us with our research. The foundations are still visible, with piles of gypsum abundant everywhere. The ground is covered with wildflowers, some fairly rare. After lunch, we went to the Dry Lake area to look at the Oriskany sandstone outcrop. Mosses, ferns and other rare vegetation are found here, and we also saw a pure white heron. The sandstone was pure enough to make glass, and the ruins of many plants may be found here. We also discovered old lime kilns, deep mine shafts and tunnels, natural caves and disappearing lakes.

We did more research on the still accessible Torrence Mine. A miner showed us how to safely enter the mine by tapping the walls. Scuba divers from Bell Dive assisted us by searching for artifacts, but they found nothing but old nails. We found the tunnel to be 120 feet long, with a gypsum and selenite deposit at the end. We will take another trip to the mine with officials to determine how to make it secure from the public since it is so available to canoeists and hikers.

Another outing brought the research group to App's Mill area. Along a small, heavily flowing stream were dripstone and gypsum deposits. Story has it that gypsum was mined in this area. Since we did not discover the source of the creek, we will try again later.

Four outings took place in the Cainsville landslide area in order to assist the Environmental Assessment Liaison Committee. Along with Yellow Creeper Vine and Himalayan Balsam, we found Willow trees, Manitoba maples, apple trees and old cedars, but 75% of the trees were black walnuts, the largest measuring 13 feet around, four feet from the ground. We rediscovered old historic foundations, including the property of the Grand River Navigation Company, which had a busy dock in this area. No gypsum mines were found.

In later September, four of us went to tackle the App's Mill creek again. This is so overgrown it is nearly impenetrable, and we had to use the animal trails. It is a wild, beautiful area with huge, old trees, strange vines and plants. We followed the stream for a little way; then it branched off into three smaller creeks, one of which we followed to its source - a wetland in the high embankment toward Rest Acres Road. A lot of old roads meander through the high sandy area, all ending at the creek. Two pronounced Y-shaped ravines, heavily timbered, could be some mine workings, but it is doubtful. The embankment is too steep.

Our last trip to Blue Lake was an approach from the northwest end. We passed over fields prolific with purple asters. Rimming the edge of the field were Bitternut Hickories, Yellow Pignut Hickories, and red and black oak trees. At the bottom of a steep bank, we followed the bed of an old train track which eventually crossed through the swamp. Along the way, we found Sensitive Fern, Joe Pyeweed, a rare fine grass, Nodding Bur Marigold, Nodding Ladies' Tresses, Bulb-bearing Water Hemlock, Northern Willow Herb, Virginia Stickseed, Helleborine, Blue-stemmed or Reef Goldenrod (national rarity), and Moth Mullen. Paul Boulaine very carefully verified our finds using his guidebooks. On a nannyberry bush we spotted a large green *Crecopia* caterpillar with orange, yellow, blue and black spots on its body. We also observed yellow and leopard frogs.

The Archival Research group, as well, has been busy this summer. Jean has taken three trips to the Ministry of N. Development and Mines office in London, with Ilse accompanying her twice. They took notes and made copies of old photographs. There is still a lot of research to be done. Jean set up a three-month display in Edinburgh Square Heritage & Cultural Centre, using the old photos, copies of an old mine lease and deed, and paintings and drawings done by Mary Cassar and Aeron Kirby, plus a miner's helmet with an acetylene lamp and a carbide case loaned to us by Pat Smith. Ilse and Jean will move the display to Haldimand County Museum on October 20th. When you are there on our field trip, have a look at it!

Al Farquharson has twice visited the Ministry of N. Dev. & Mines Resource Centre in Sudbury to do research on the sandstone and limestone industries in the Caledon area. He has provided useful background information for us.

His enthusiasm was stimulated by our General Field Trip on September 11 to Belfountain. It was a gorgeous, sunny, clear day. We collected at the home of Ilse's daughter, Ramona, and drove toward the Forks of the Credit, passing the Terra Cotta brick works and many limestone quarries, over winding scenic roads and over and around the rugged Niagara Escarpment. We set up a base beside a stream in the Conservation Park, and the team proceeded on their rugged walk with cameras ready. The deeply bedded red sandstone was mined in the 1800's to be used as building blocks for Toronto City Hall, the University of Toronto and the Parliament buildings. The area is riddled with tunnels. Some are open, partly open or hidden behind a blind wall. We found old roads, dinky tracks, talus heaps, mine artifacts, and rare ferns such as the Walking Fern, a type of Maidenhair miniature fern and some Earth Star Mushrooms. The Mountain Maple is common in this area.

The miners blasted from the mines large blocks of sandstone, some as heavy as nine tons. A chimney, higher than the "mountain peaks" and fifteen draw kilns, known as the Hoffman Ring Kilns, 100 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 10 feet tall, are still there. These kilns could produce 400 bushels of lime each, using 7 cords of wood. The Outdoor Research Group has returned several times to do further research and to videotape the area.

After the hike we had a tailgate cookout and potluck dinner - lots of good food! On our way home we visited Limekiln, where ruins of several limekilns and chimneys are still viewable. There is also the ruin of an old mill that was built OVER a stream - interesting!

Our picture collection is growing. Ilse, Jean and Paul have collected many fine pictures and slides for our collection, and Sanko has been videotaping. We will use these for our presentations to other organizations.

Dorothy Crump and Jean Farquharson proudly represented the Mines Society at the ceremony designating the Grand River as a Canadian Heritage River in Cambridge at Mill Race Park on September 26th. It was a colourful, dramatic event with a parade of municipal officials carrying their colourful flags, piped in. Officials representing government ministries, native peoples, French Canadians and Peter Gzowsky participated. Jean approached the music group Tamarack after their performance to see if they would write a miners' song. They are interested.

Thanks go to Sanko for donating half the amount needed to print the 1000 brochures we have been distributing at various shows, museums, etc. We have made some valuable contacts.

COMING EVENTS

On October 29th, there will be an outing to the mining areas in the southern watershed. Merle Knight and Alf and Eileen Peart are arranging a tour for our members. Those in the Brantford area who wish to carpool, meet at 8:45 at Ilse's, 23 Kings Hill Lane, or phone to let us know. We will meet at 10 sharp at the Haldimand County Museum on Highway 54, at the north end of Cayuga (Munsee St. N.), behind the offices of the Town of Haldimand, the Board of Education, and the Court House. Wear comfortable, warm clothing, sturdy walking shoes and bring a big lunch. As ever, it will be a memorable trip! We will set a date that day to hold a meeting in the Haldimand County Museum in November.

On November 11th, we have been invited to speak about the history of the gypsum mines at the meeting of the Oxford County Geological Society, at 7:30 at Knox Presbyterian Church, 59 Riddell Street., Woodstock.

Dorothy Crump has kindly invited us to her home in Paris early in December for our Christmas party. We will book time for various work meetings over the winter.