



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 1995

1994 is nearly gone, and with Christmas just around the corner, the Steering Committee wishes all of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

LOOKING BACK by Ilse Kraemer

The first 15 months of the GRHMS was more than successful. Looking back, I can only say we accomplished more than we ever thought or anticipated. It was a busy year for the Archival Research Group, and especially for the Outdoor Research Team. We had outings most of the weekends, and even now, at the end of November, we are out nearly every Saturday and most Sundays too. Now it's mostly Sanko and I, trying to relocate forgotten places. This is one time of the year when it is much better to see - weeds are down, trees are bare - ideal for research in the field.

During the year we invited a lot of guests on our trips. We had talk-shows, displays in some local museums, exhibits of pictures and gypsum samples at many places. All were well received! Thanks to Jayne Hall, we found out about an old container from Gypsum, Lime and Alabastine Company for sale in Burgessville, and thus acquired another artifact for our museum.

What have we worked on since the last newsletter? Sanko is working to build up a video library of the old mine sites. Some of the research members travelled back to Forks of the Credit to the Crow's Nest Mine. We had not expected such a vast area of mines; nearly every few feet is a tunnel into the limestone. The tunnels are not very deep, and some are only test tunnels. We encountered five small dinky train track beds, some roads, old dams, a lake with the rare creek otter (under protection) playing in the water. The dam was built out of huge limestone sections without the use of cement.

Our yearly outing into the mining areas south of Brantford was kindly arranged by members from this area - Merle, Betsy, and the Pearts. All our thanks goes to them. Betsy let us see the old Gypsum Mines schoolhouse which she owns and is trying to restore. This time, lots of members and some guests took part. All were amazed about the hidden history in this area. Then we went up the road to the Anthony Mine; very little is known about it up to now. Walking over the hundred acre farm, we saw sinkholes and indentations from collapsed and collapsing tunnels. On a high spot of the property, overlooking the Grand River, was the small burial plot of the Anthony family, with some gravestones dating to the middle of the 1800's. We then went back to the Pearts for lunch in their antique kitchen. A warm fire was burning in the huge fireplace. Alf Peart walked with us to his woods past the old make-believe mining village, along the dinky track bed, and through a karst and sinkhole area of the old Martindale Mines. These karst holes have literally sucked the mud from above down underground. Next came a visit to Herb Martindale's. Many mine tunnels are located on his property, one opening right next to his home. We plan to come back later on to see other areas of mining activities on his property. This was the end of our tour, and very tired but excited members went home.

Most weekdays, Cory, my canine partner went with me in search of other unknown mines or bedrock outcrops in our area. I found out that we have a very thick outcrop of gypsum a few metres higher than that in the river level shale beds. Up to now, we had only looked at the lower beds. Now we have to start to look over old mine sites again. The Capron plaster beds and mines at the Paris dam, are located nearly halfway up the steep embankment. A more than seven foot thick layer of nearly pure white gypsum is exposed in this area. The homes on top of this bank have had problems with cave-ins, etc.

Four members of the research group went to the Capron mine the next weekend, north of the train bridge. We found some switchback roads and an old open-pit plaster bed. Nature used this alkaline soil area for another hanging fen, with rare plants.

On another outing, we visited the Wright and Hymer plaster beds, near the Torrence Mine. The opening is again half way up the embankment, with pure white gypsum in large chunks all over the place. This tunnel shows signs that it had once collapsed, and now is on the verge of re-opening itself again.

Sanko is working on a video of all the mines in the Paris area. On November 19th, with member Howard Parkhill, we tackled the deep hollow below Mile Hill again. By looking for a higher-up gypsum deposit, we found the entrance 15 feet below Mrs. Jones' property. We found remnants of a foundation and some pipes sticking out of the earth (a possible compressor?) on the way to the four big sinkholes, and for the first time we found some rock with gypsum embedded in it. Three of the sinkholes were dry, and one, as before, filled to the rim with water, but this time as white as milk. On closer look, we found some ruins of foundations - the headframe? The rim of the round hole was lined with old wood. We believe it to be an old shaft. It is bottomless - a long stick poked into it just disappeared. Going around the pit, we were overcome by a horrible stench of rotten eggs. Later on a hydrologist told me that there is always sulphur present in a gypsum deposit, and where one finds sulphur; one finds a sulphur-eating bacteria. This process produces hydrogen sulphide, a deadly, highly explosive gas (H₂S).

The next day we went back to Paris again, this time to videotape the Torrence Mine from across the river, from Jean's place. We discovered a small waterway on Jean's property, disappearing into the earth - another karst? There was once a ford across the river to the Torrence mine. The old wagon ruts are still visible on the west side on the Hammond's property. The gypsum may have been transported across the river to be calcined at the Hammond's place.

Follow-up research was done into Brantford's North-West area by myself and Cory. There are four collapsed mine tunnels. Then we went on to the disappearing creek. This time I found the old, now dry creek bed. It must be a karst formation (it's certainly not a mine) because the creek disappears underground. Up on the hill we were watched by the big, old timberwolf. We have seen him off and on over the years. Some small suspending fens, with a wealth of rare plants, are in this area.

We hope to have many more trips if the weather stays the way it is now.

COMING EVENTS

CHRISTMAS PARTY! Where? The home of Dorothy Crump, 7 William St., Paris, near the Public Library

When? Friday, December 9th, at 6:30 p.m. We'll eat at 7:00.

What to bring? Either a casserole, dessert or salad. For info. phone Jean at 442-7000.

WORK MEETINGS - Indoors, at Brantwood on Bell Lane, in Brantford

Dates - Saturday Mornings, 10:00 a.m., Jan. 14, Feb. 11, March 11, 1995

We will plan for 1995 and also work on compiling research information to prepare our booklets/displays.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Membership renewals are now due for 1995.

Membership fees: Individuals - \$10 Families - \$15

Students/Seniors - \$5 Corporate - \$20

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