



# GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1996

## FROM YOUR EDITOR:

We hope that summer has been good to you, and that you are ready for a busy fall full of activities for your Society. Mark your calendar with these dates:

**X Saturday, October 5th - 10 a.m. RAIN OR SHINE:** We will meet at **Alf & Eileen Peart's** to work again on the **Cook family cairn**. Pack your lunch. We have some other activities planned for the day, ending in a **pot-luck** at the Peart's Saloon in the old mining town in their bush. If you can't come for the whole day, don't miss our pot-luck. Bring a casserole, dessert or salad. We will eat at 5 p.m. The wood-stove will be roaring hot. To let us know you are coming, phone Ilse or Jean, or for directions, phone us or Alf at 905-765-2142.

**Thursday, October 10th - Norm Derrick**, Chairman of **Paris Heritage** (and also one of our members) cordially extends an invitation to us to attend a complimentary information evening on *Industrial Heritage* in the Board Room of the Paris Public Library, corner of William St. and Broadway St. W. **Chris Andreae** of *Historica Research Ltd.*, London, is a consultant on excavating, restoring and preserving heritage sites. Light refreshments will be served at 7:15 to allow for a short period of social mingling, and Mr. Andreae will speak at 8:00 p.m. Please tell us if you are coming and how many will be with you, so that we can give Norm a count.

On **November 30th**, at 6:00 p.m., we will have our **Christmas Pot-Luck** at the home of Ilse Kraemer, 23 King's Hill Lane, Brantford. Come and enjoy our camaraderie! Bring your spouse or friend, and your favorite casserole, salad or dessert. We will have a show-and-tell again this year.

We have lots to report, and as promised, a new, witty and talented contributor to our newsletter - Mike O'Byrne. Thanks Mike, for your contributions. Any other members are encouraged to contribute, too.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### THE GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY AND ABSORBINE JUNIOR

by Mike O'Byrne

I mentioned to Ilse that I would like to help with some of the work on the newsletter, and she suggested that I report about a recent trip to the Torrance Mine. The following is somewhat of a technical report which I hope is of interest.

I have had to use Absorbine Jr., the ache and pain reducer, on two occasions, May 16, 1961 and July 21, 1996. What does this have to do with our mining society?

On May 13, 1961, I exited the hallowed halls of a mining school to take up full-time employment as an underground miner. The mine was located in the bush approximately 80 miles west of Thunder Bay. After being cleared medically, I could breathe. On May 16th, I reported to my shift boss, Bill Charette, for my first shift. Bill was a veteran tramp miner and immediately noted that the person in front of him knew nothing about applied mining.

Bill told me that I was assigned to the grizzly on the 850 foot level. Not wishing to betray my ignorance, I said, "Great." I quickly stepped away from the wicket and prayed that one of the guys following in the line would also get the same assignment so that I could get some clue as to what I would be doing for the next eight hours.

Within a few minutes, another miner the size of a Mack truck received the same assignment plus this caution, "You got a new guy with you who knows nothing. Make sure he doesn't kill himself or wreck the level!"

My partner and I got off the cage on the 850 level and proceeded directly to the lunchroom where we had a

coffee and a sandwich. I asked him about the grizzly and how one grizzled.

Working on the grizzly is one of the more technically challenging and intellectual aspects of mining. The copper ore we were mining was loaded into 8-ton side-dump narrow gauge rail cars. A train pulled by an electric motor locomotive pulled between eight and ten loaded cars slowly past the grizzly where the cars dumped in succession.

The grizzly is like a big sieve above an orepass. Built out of huge I-beams and lengths of railroad track, the section over the orepass is horizontal and a part of it is inclined towards the railway track used by the ore trains. The unit is divided up into openings about 2 feet by 1.5 feet. The orepass below connects to an underground crusher station 600 feet below.

A train of loaded cars started dumping on the grizzly at which point my partner indicated it was time to start work. The train had dumped perhaps 80 tons of ore on the grizzly, the size of the pieces ranging from baseballs to pianos. Our chore was to clear all of the ore through the grizzly before another train came to dump. Our tools consisted of a couple of prybars, 12 pound sledgehammers and dynamite. One slid about 8 feet down the sloped section to the level part where straddling the openings you pushed and pried the pieces of ore to get them to fall through one of the openings. Those that were too large were broken up with the sledge or, as a last resort, blasted.

My first shift on the grizzly confirmed a number of things; I was a physical wreck! I should consider alternative employment. I had pains in muscles that I didn't even know were mine! At the end of the shift, I stopped by the local general store, and purchased several bottles of Absorbine Jr. and soothed my pain-wracked wrecked body.

Interestingly enough, I got to enjoy the assignment, got to be able to read the rock and break it fairly easily. I also learned how to blow out sections of the grizzly which created a bigger opening and made the work go faster but caused the crusher man some problems.

On July 21, 1996, I again had to resort to the Absorbine Jr. solution. Having been a member of the Mines Society for only a short period, I had been pestering Ilse to show me a real mine, something that looked like a mine as opposed to those sites which appear to have been victims of an earthquake or a landslide. In what I now suspect was an attempt to shut up me, the nuisance, she invited me to accompany her and Sanko to visit the Torrance Mine. Ilse cautioned me to travel light.

Being an experienced outdoors person by virtue of being lost for 2 days in the bush south of the copper mine, I packed my knapsack, then unpacked it, then packed it again. I needed my first aid kit, but did I need my compass? I needed my thermos, but how about my axe, extra socks, flashlight? What I really needed was to have my head read.

Arriving at the end of Powerline Road, I observed the Grand River 800 feet below and noted there were no stairs down. The descent was great; all sorts of flora and things I was not familiar with; wildlife in the form of mosquitoes and deer flies, spring water gushing out of the hillside which made it into something like a toboggan slide. It was a quick descent.

Proceeding north along the riverbank, we came upon a nice outcrop of selenite and pink gypsum. We obtained several beautiful, large and heavy specimens to load in the pack.. At this point, Ilse had more sense and proceeded back towards where our vehicles were parked.

Sanko and I then proceeded south towards the Torrance Mine, walking along what Sanko claimed was the riverbank. Up over immense boulders, deadfalls, wetlands, the packs getting heavier, until finally we reached the mine entrance.

For me this is what the Society is all about. It has been a few years since I visited any mining properties, and visiting the Torrance Mine was a thrill! If only those rocks could talk, what tales they could spin! One quickly gains respect and admiration for those who toiled in those dank, cramped workings. The skills required to hand drill the rock, probably illuminated only by candle light or oil lamp are today largely lost. It was for me a connection to a past occupation which for the most part I enjoyed.

More importantly, the site is a part of our understated industrial heritage which has been all too frequently obliterated, undocumented and unknown. I strongly believe that we owe it to these early miners as well as to future generations to identify, document and hopefully preserve that heritage. On July 21, 1996, I viewed an

old mine which I may never see again. For that opportunity, I am truly grateful.

The return trip up the bank was a challenge. Stopping on a trail trying to catch my breath beside a convenient tree, Sanko warned me that it was alive with wild bees. Bees and I do not get along well, so we quickly exited the area, eventually meeting up with Ilse who was most certainly in better shape than I was.

To conclude, I am applying Absorbine Jr. to parts of my body I didn't know I had. In lieu of get well cards, make a donation to the Society; the work has to be done, and it is important.

## REPORT ON OTHER FIELD TRIPS, by Ilse Kraemer

Besides the report which Mike made, we had several other trips this summer, but since very few phoned or showed up, the trips were mostly attended by Mike, Sanko and Ilse. We again visited the Augustus Jones tract east of Paris, at ColdSprings where, according to Professor Donald B. Smith, there was a settlement. We found some foundations, possibly of the unsuccessful mill built by Jones, which bankrupted him before he died.

We also went back to the Capron Mine, and explored along the Nith River where Cathy had sighted a mine behind Paris garbage dump.

On a return visit to the Forks of the Credit, we looked at the Hillis Mine from which the stone blocks were carried down to the train tracks, located a cable which allowed sandstone blocks to be lifted across the Credit from Big Hill Mine into railway cars at Brimstone. We also saw where the first spring water was bottled at a plant near Cataract.

To participate in fall trips, contact Ilse at 519-756-6634.

## REPORT OF RESEARCH DONE, by Jean Farquharson

From the Elderhostel Ilse and I taught in June at Five Oaks, we acquired a new member, Gordon Lapp.

From our outdoor research and digging into *Bureau of Mines Reports* and other sources, I prepared display panels on the **Cook Mine**, the **Excelsior Mine** and the **Old's Mine** in time for the **Golden Horseshoe Steam Show**. Again we shared the building with the York Grand River Historical Society, and enjoyed the company of Alf and Eileen Peart, Mary Nelles, Mary Martindale, and Seraphin Da Silva, another new member. Thanks as well to Paul and Gloria, Ilse, Sanko and Cathy for their assistance.

Later, in August, my husband Al and I were thrilled to finally visit the **mining museum** at **Bruce Mines** where the **first copper mine in Ontario** was founded in 1846 by the Marquess of Queensbury. The ore was shipped all the way back to England to be processed. I would guess that it provided ballast on the return trip for the ships delivering goods from England to Canada. In July, a Mine Tunnel Tour was begun. A mining shack serves as the museum, where there are many displays set up and a gift area. One of the keepsakes they sell is puddingstone. They also sell copper post cards. We were amazed that the people in a village of 600 could organize their community so well that they have a museum, a mining museum, a marina, a park, etc. It just goes to show you what a few dedicated people can do!

Thank you's also go out to Art MacKenzie for donating three pamphlets: "The Story of Gypsum in Canada," by L.H. Cole, "Gypsum (Science in Canadian Industry Series, No. 1)," sponsored by GLA Canada Ltd., and "Gypsum Blocks for House Construction," published by The Ontario Gypsum Company Ltd., Paris, Ont., (a subsidiary of the Alabastine Co. of Paris, when they still operated the mine at Lythmore; an article, "Cobalt Blooms Again," by Carson Brown (1953), was donated by Mike O'Byrne. Paul Boulaine donated a book on geology.

In September, to prepare for the display at the International Ploughing Match, I decided to research the agricultural aspects of gypsum, and thus visited the Library of the **Ontario Agricultural Museum** near Milton. I picked almost the rainiest, foggiest day in September, but somehow found the place over twisting hilly roads. I copied pages from the sections in the *Ontario Agricultural Commission Report* of 1880 regarding the uses of gypsum and other products on the crops, with evidence from many farmers, including Andrew Telfer and Daniel Perley from Paris area, George Brown of Bow Park Farm, near Brantford, and producer, William

Hamilton Merritt of the Grand River Plaster Company. I took notes from several books available on the history of fertilizer, and I was excited that I could peruse the Farmer's Advocates of 1880, 1881, and 1882, from which I could photocopy advertisements showing pictures of fertilizer spreaders/ seed broadcasters used to spread gypsum on the land, also advertisements for land plaster from **Gill and Allan** of Paris, and the **Grand River Plaster Company** of Gypsum Mines. From this information, I was able to prepare 4 new panels for the Match. Michael and I and Barbara set them up on Sunday, and Barbara helped me to take them down on Saturday. Thanks, folks. Thanks also to Alf Peart who, I hope, removed our display board and tables to store until we could retrieve them.

And now Mike will tell you all about our adventures at the Ploughing Match, in his own inimitable style.

## **THE PERILS OF A MINING SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP - September 18, 1996,**

by Mike O'Byrne

It is 9:00 p.m. and I have just hosed down my rubber boots. As a new member to the mining society, I am trying to do most of the right things, to make a contribution, to make a difference.

Jean Farquharson called me a few days previously and advised that the group was going to put a display in at the International Ploughing Match. Having most of a truck and being retired, I volunteered to assist her in moving the display materials down to the site near Selkirk. This was scheduled for the morning of September 15th.

As most of you are aware, the area was hit in succession by Hurricane Ilse, Jean, Barbara and Cathy. Jean and I arrived at the matchsite and found it to be a pool of mud. This wasn't ordinary mud like Brant County mud; it was clinging, sticky stuff that sort of tried to eat your rubber boots and steal your socks.

We unloaded the truck on the pavement and loaded the display materials onto a farm haywagon, pulled by a big tractor. At this point, I was introduced to one of the members, Barb, and her two daughters who were going to help set up the display. We clambered onto the hay wagon, and proceeded to the tent where the various historical groups were to set up their displays. I sailed one season on the Great Lakes, and nothing compared to the wagon ride to the tent. There was mud, there was water, there was gumbo that would make the Everglades envious. At one point, I noticed two alligators wallowing in the mud.

We arrived at the tent and put up the display. At that point Alf Peart showed up and some assistance was provided to him in getting some of the York (Grand River) Historical Society display set up beside ours.

After a couple of hours, Jean and I left the site and headed back to God's country, Brant County. Since I had little else to do, Jean dragooned me into going back to the Ploughing Match on September 18th. All of the hurricanes had happened and it was bright, warm and sunny. We hit Selkirk, and guess what? There was mud, there were alligators, there were people with trench foot. We travelled to the site via tractor, then sloshed our way to the historical group tent. [Ed. note: There really was an alligator = an amphibious boat.]

What does it all mean? From my perspective as one interested in history and mining, I guess we publicized the activities of our group to some extent, we met some very friendly people who seemed interested in the group. We expanded a few peoples' horizons - "What do you mean? Are there mines in this area?" Perhaps, most importantly, we met a lot of people like ourselves who have an appreciation of history and are doing their best to preserve it. Alf Peart and Pam representing the Caledonia Mill project and the York Grand River Historical Society, the pleasant gal from the Town of Haldimand L.A.C.A.C., the woman from the Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford group who has some stuff on gypsum mining - all good people, and all volunteers trying to make a difference.

My sincere thanks to Jean for all of her work on the displays, to Barb and her two girls for helping out; to Alf Peart for his help, his humour, his enthusiasm. It was fun and worth the effort.

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