



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July, August, September, 1999

Tid Bits, by Jean Farquharson

Apologies, for getting this newsletter out a bit late. I have been working hard on an O.M.B. Hearing. I represent neighbours opposed to a proposed truck stop near Mile Hill, not far from where the gypsum mine tunnels were located. Our main concern has been to protect the water of our neighbours and ourselves, both quantity and quality. As agent for our group, I have been allowed to sit in on the meetings of expert witnesses - engineers, hydrogeologists, geologists, planners, etc., and have learned a great deal from the experience. After more reports and expert witness meetings, we go to arbitration in September and the hearing in late September and October. It will be great to get back to normal after four and one half years.

On May 13th, gave a talk to the Burlington Gemini Gem and Mineral Club. Ilse, Al and Mike accompanied me. I showed our slides and brought several display panels with me. They were very interested in our work, and gave our society a cheque for \$100 as well as an honorarium to me. My honorarium will help to pay for display materials.

By the time you receive this newsletter, our next exhibit will be completed at **Heritage Mount Pleasant's 200th year celebration on July 17th and 18th**. Our display was located in the Mount Pleasant Community Hall. The organizing committee planned a lot of exciting things - a parade at 11 a.m. on Saturday, displays, a model boat show, garden party, Indian dances, and many other activities. We congratulate Mike and his committee for their hard work in organizing the weekend.

We will have a very small display at the **Golden Horseshoe Steam Show** this year but will bring out a better display next year. Since the theme this year is agricultural, we will show my panels on gypsum as land plaster as part of the history of the fertilizer industry and the implements used to spread land plaster on the farmers' fields. The date for the show is Civic Holiday weekend as usual. We hope you can attend and drop into the booth of the York Grand River Historical Society where our display panels will be shown. All our members from Haldimand County should be there.

We have given Mike a respite from his column in this issue since he has been so busy with his Heritage Mount Pleasant activities. However Mary Cassar willingly contributes to our newsletter with her report on our trip to the Paris Dump, a trip full of all kinds of surprises. We

have known for a long time that there were traces of mine tunnels in that area; Cathy McArthur having reported to us (with photos) her findings, and passages in the local history books referring to gypsum being hauled down the Nith River to the mills in Paris. We became very excited as we descended the embankment into a shaded area with beautiful old cedars clinging to the hill, and discovered a fast flowing stream pouring out of a large hole in a formation of rock beneath the Paris dump (a mine tunnel?) It formed small waterfalls as it flowed down the rocks and into the ravine below.

Ilse is trying to make arrangements for a field trip in October to the **Sandstone Mines at Blair**.

Some Membership Renewals are still overdue. If you wish to get the newsletter, please pay Ilse.

.....

Hazy, Lazy Spring Days - 1999, by Ilse Kraemer

What a gorgeous spring we had -- hot, sunny and dry, just right for field trips. Sometimes maybe too hot.

Our first trip was to the famous “suspended fen” in the Northwest area of Brantford. This area is slated for a large industrial development, and a large stormwater retention pond was planned just below the fen. After some long talks with city engineers, and a field trip with city engineers and consultants to this area, I was able to convince them to relocate the pond and make a larger setback above the fen. To our field trip we invited environmentalists and City Council so that they could have a good look at this precious area. Around the fen are at least four strong-flowing streams which disappear all of a sudden into the ground, never to be seen again. We pointed them out before tackling the difficult walk through the fen. The first plants were visible, such as Sweetgrass, Hoary Capoon, Calamint and some other rare plants. The going was slow with some 20 people to lead through this treacherous area. We heard underground streams gurgling, had to step over deep holes, and with every step could feel the instability of the ground. We even discovered an old water ram used by farmers long ago. The high embankment behind the fen was once an oak savannah. There are still a lot of black and other oaks, but they are really shaded out by other encroaching undesirable vegetation and trees. It is planned to clean this up and restore it to what it originally was by having a burn every five years.

Yes, the fen and surrounding Carolinian forests will be saved thanks to many people, especially one of the discoverers and researchers of the fen, Wasyl Bakowsky, ecologist of the Natural Heritage Resource Centre of the Ministry of Natural Resources in Peterborough, the Grand River Conservation Authority, the City of Brantford’s Engineering Department and Weslake Environmental Engineering Consultants. At the moment we are planning to start a wilderness garden in order to save this environmental treasure for generations to come. This will

be a first when the environment and industry can exist side by side.

After our trip to the Paris Dump which Mary Cassar has written about, our last spring trip was planned for May 30th to do more research on the Holstein Mine near Caledonia. The weather was extremely hot and subsequently nobody came, and the meeting became a solo trip for me. There are even more mine tunnels than we originally discovered. Some are partly open and some are collapsed. I expect that there may be much more in this steep embankment. The bushes are extremely dense and it is very difficult to see. Very early or late in the year will be a much better time. We have to attempt it again this fall.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who contributed to the present for me, the beautiful native tulip tree or yellow poplar. It is growing beautifully and likes its new home close to my house. Thank you all, especially Joe Clark.

Walk Near Paris Dump, Sunday May 16, 1999, by Mary Cassar

Of all places -- the environs of the Paris Dump to discover beauty! But this is where the Grand River Heritage Mines Society went on May 16th. Partaking in this walk were Ilse Kraemer, Bronte Kraemer (dog), Mary Cassar, Paul and Gloria Boulaine, Harry Frishette, Jean Farquharson, Cathy McArthur and her Jack Russell terrier, Terry.

The scenery at the commencement of the walk was not pretty -- the wasted remnants of a 1950's gravel pit. And yet, even there lived hope. A stream, originating from the Watts Pond area, formed a pool inhabited by minnows.

Biennial mulleins were sporting their soft, grey-green, woolly leaves. Their yellow candelabra flowering stalks appear in the second year. Although this is an alien from Europe, it's an amazing plant historically. Its stalks soaked up oil or tallow and served as flaming torches for the Romans. Our colonial ancestors were taught by the native peoples how to line winter footwear with the warm woolly leaves. Mullein has also been touted as a cure for leprosy. I'm glad that this plant has a deep tap root so it can endure our hot dry summers.

We carried on past mounds of mulch shavings and down into a shady wooded ravine where columbine with its orange-red, drooping bell-flowers flourished. Columbine is a member of the Buttercup family.

Around a hair-pin turn on the path lay several interesting shady patches of Meadow Rue, Wild Ginger, native ferns, and Trillium. Meadow rue is also of the Buttercup family.

Wild Ginger should **never** be picked because it is steadily declining due to urban sprawl. Its heart-shaped leaves shield a cup-shaped reddish flower which nestles close to the ground. Wild ginger's rhizome has a spicy flavour and is safe to eat but, I repeat, do not pick.

A short distance away a stream gurgled forth from a rocky wall ledge, beautiful to behold despite its contaminated state, originating from the dump above. Stands of Skunk Cabbage and tufa flourished around the stream.

A steep climb and wild raspberries gave way to grassy dykes and ridges which Cathy told us were handy deer trails. Cathy, who knows this area well, told us about the resident cougar; however, there was no sign of the resident cat on May 16th.

We passed the deserted Flowering Crab in full pink bloom (planted by human hands?) And Cathy explained how the vultures enjoy riding the warm thermals on summer days.

Surprisingly, the most amazing star of our walk was a common alien weed: Cyprus Spurge! This plant's yellow-green "petals" really are bracts supporting tiny odd-looking flowers which I studied closely under Paul Boulaine's portable magnifying glass. These tiny flowers lack sepals and petals because Cypress Spurge is a Euphorbia. In the Euphorbiaceae family either stamens or pistils rise on short stalks from supporting cups and all Euphorbias have an acrid, milky juice. Our Christmas Poinsettias are members of this mainly tropical family. From the same ridge was a splendid wetlands view supporting acres of tawny brown grasses.

A flowering white Honeysuckle, Wild Strawberry, and Staghorn Sumach towering alongside an abandoned cement structure of unidentified origin rounded out our walk.

Before departing, Ilse handed me an Absinthe Wormwood. Scores of these whitish, silky-leaved plants, which resemble little "mops", grew along the path leading to our cars. I took my wormwood home, planted it and it's thriving. What an interesting reminder of a lovely walk!

To conclude, I wondered as a child what lay behind the dump and that old gravel pit. Nature did not disappoint me, I assure you.

This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. We are not responsible for errors. We are looking for more information about the mining industry in Southern Ontario. Submissions are welcome. Please send **correspondence** to Jean Farquharson, R.R.3, Paris ON N3L 3E3. Phone 519/442-2156. Fax 519/442-2373. For **membership inquiries**, contact Ilse Kraemer, 23 KingsHill Lane, Brantford ON N3T 6A3. Phone 519-756-6634.