

Mineral tours attract ?Rockhounds?



By Nate Smelle

An excited pack of 50 plus rockhounds assembled in front of the tennis courts at the North Hastings Community Centre early each morning over the 51st annual Gemboree weekend, before heading out with guide and student geologist Corey Lablans on daily expeditions to some of the area's most popular mineral collecting sites.

On Friday, Aug. 1 there were 52 rock-hungry prospectors who took part in the tour to the Bear Lake Diggings site in Tory Hill. After registering the group, Lablans began his passionate presentation on the geological history of the Bancroft area.

?What makes Bancroft so unique is that here there are more minerals in a 100 kilometre radius than anywhere else in North America,? Lablans said.

Leaping up onto the picnic table to help his voice reach everyone he explained to his audience that if they were standing where they were now 1.2 billion years ago they would have needed a boat or scuba gear since this area was underwater at that time.

Lablans said it was during this period of the earth's history when a massive upheaval of land took place in this area which forever changed the landscape.

?The Himalayas and Mount Everest are nothing compared to what was formed when this massive upheaval occurred,? he said.

?The land crushed in and created the largest mountains ever to exist on the planet. These are referred to as the Grenville mountains. These mountains ranged from seven to 10 kilometres high, towering above us. We are actually now standing at the base of where these mountains would have been.?

Over time these gigantic mountains have been worked over and eroded away by rain, wind, ice and glaciers that have scoured back and forth across the continent and worn these lofty peaks down to their roots.

?It is because of this process that we are able to access so many minerals in Bancroft,? said Lablans,

?Sure you can find some of these minerals in other places like the Himalayas, but you have to dig down three to four kilometres into the mountain to find them. Luckily there has been so much time for the mountains here to be taken down these minerals are more easily accessible.?

Finishing the first segment of his educational presentation he rounded up the dig party into their caravan of 23 vehicles and set out towards Tory Hill. After arriving at the Bear Lake Diggings site Lablans prepped the group on dig safety and described to the diggers what they might find. When he was done with his presentation the group dispersed into the forest to start digging.

Vanessa Rondeau from Montreal and her partner Mark Phillips from Ottawa were two of the first rockhounds to get their shovels in the ground. This was Rondeau's third time visiting the Gemboree and Phillips first.

?I love it here,? said Rondeau.

?Everyone is so nice, and it is very beautiful. There is so much to see that you can't see it all in one visit. Every time I come here I add some amazing minerals to my collection.?

The pair of avid rock enthusiasts planned to go out on as many of the digs as possible while they were in the area.

?When you think of the history that is under your feet here it is really mind blowing,? she said.

?It changes your whole perspective on the world around you. It makes you think of everything in terms of billions of years.?

?It is so far beyond human comprehension when you think about it,? said Phillips's.

Over the weekend Lablans led tours to a digging site in Craigmount, the Beryl Pits and a rose quartz quarry. The mineral tours run for the rest of the summer on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday until Aug. 30 leaving from the Bancroft Railway Station at 9:30 a.m. Cost is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children 16 and under, or \$40 for families of five. For information visit bancroftdistrict.com.