

Rockhounding in the Madawaska Valley

By Sarah Vance

Madawaska Valley Geology Rocks - a mineral installation at the South of 60 Visitor's Centre - is delighting tourists and locals, who are participating in summer workshops and excursions to abandoned mines.

In fact, a recent report prepared by Anya Gansterer, Tourism and Culture Coordinator at the South of 60 indicates that approximately 3368 patrons have visited the centre during the month of July alone.

Once thriving mining hubs, North Hastings and Madawaska Valley boasted some of the largest mineral excavation operations in the country.

MacDonald Mine, near Bancroft, was at one time the region's largest feldspar producer and continues to be an accessible site for collecting crystals such as quartz, despite the fact that the quarry itself was filled in 2013.

Some local mines are popular destinations for 'ghost town tourists', like Craigmount, near Boulter, which is set atop Mount Robilliard, along the municipal boundary between Brudenell, Lyndoch, Raglan and Renfrew county.

In the early 1900's Craigmount boasted over 600 working-residents, and was considered to be the world's largest corundum producer, before a fire seared the booming mining town to the ground in 1913.

Despite the fact that many of these attractions are abandoned, they nonetheless contain what is known as tailings - or the waste rock from a quarry or mine which is of little economic interest and which has been left behind. Apatite, beryl, rose quartz and amazonite are gemstones which can be found and easily extracted, in abundance, by rockhounders at local sites.

The South of 60's mineral installation is complimented by a detailed and comprehensive brochure produced in partnership between the Valley, Ontario's Highlands, and the province. It provides descriptions about fifteen different mines and caves, along with detailed maps to these destinations, and rockhounding tips.

The four page brochure, offers a succinct crash-course for hobbyists which can be downloaded from the Madawaska Valley municipal website or the South of 60 website.

On July 5 approximately thirty children participated in a Geology Rocks Kids workshop, presented in partnership with the Madawaska Valley Library.

Rockhounders should be aware that, in Ontario, mineral collection - even recreational rockhounding - falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

There are statutes, such as the Mining Act, which state that, 'mineral collecting is a privilege offered by the Province and is not a right.

Hobby mineral collectors have no legal right to collect or extract minerals on Crown land or on land where title, an interest or right is held by a person or company, who is not the mineral collector.?

The Mining Act provides a specific threshold, which should serve as a guideline for rockhounders and which states that hobbyists 'can excavate with hand tools only' and can only take as many minerals as can be carried 'unassisted, from a specific site or location.?

This limit is allowed only once per year, per site.

For more information about Geology Rocks visit the South of 60 Visitor's Centre in Barry's Bay or go to the Combermere farmers market, any Saturday morning, where a community outreach kiosk is set-up.