

Hikers get rare glimpse of minerals

BY ROSANNE VAN VIERZEN
Staff Reporter

John Etches stands in the woods, caressing rocks, excitedly talking about the special minerals found on Greenmantle Farm in Wilberforce.

The Gems Beneath Your Boots hike was just one of more than 30 hikes in the Haliburton Hike Festival over the weekend. The hike was a special glimpse at the property owned by Mark and Sandra Bramham, which is rich in rare minerals.

The property, now littered with beautifully coloured leaves from the countless trees in the surrounding forest, is home to an occurrence of the viewed once-in-a-lifetime brand of minerals including fluorrichterite, apatite, hornblende, tremolite, actinolite, orthoclase and quartz.

Etches said the Greenmantle Farm Mineral Occurrence has never been disturbed by modern man and there is even evidence to suggest the site was never touched by native North Americans.

The Bramhams purchased the land about 30 years ago, at first not knowing what lay under the soil in their forest.

Upon closer inspection, crystals began appearing in soil under uprooted trees.

"This property is amazing in terms of never being touched, no one has been picking through this. What we see here are the results of a long geologic history," said Etches. "Everything we look at here, everything you touch, has a story behind it."

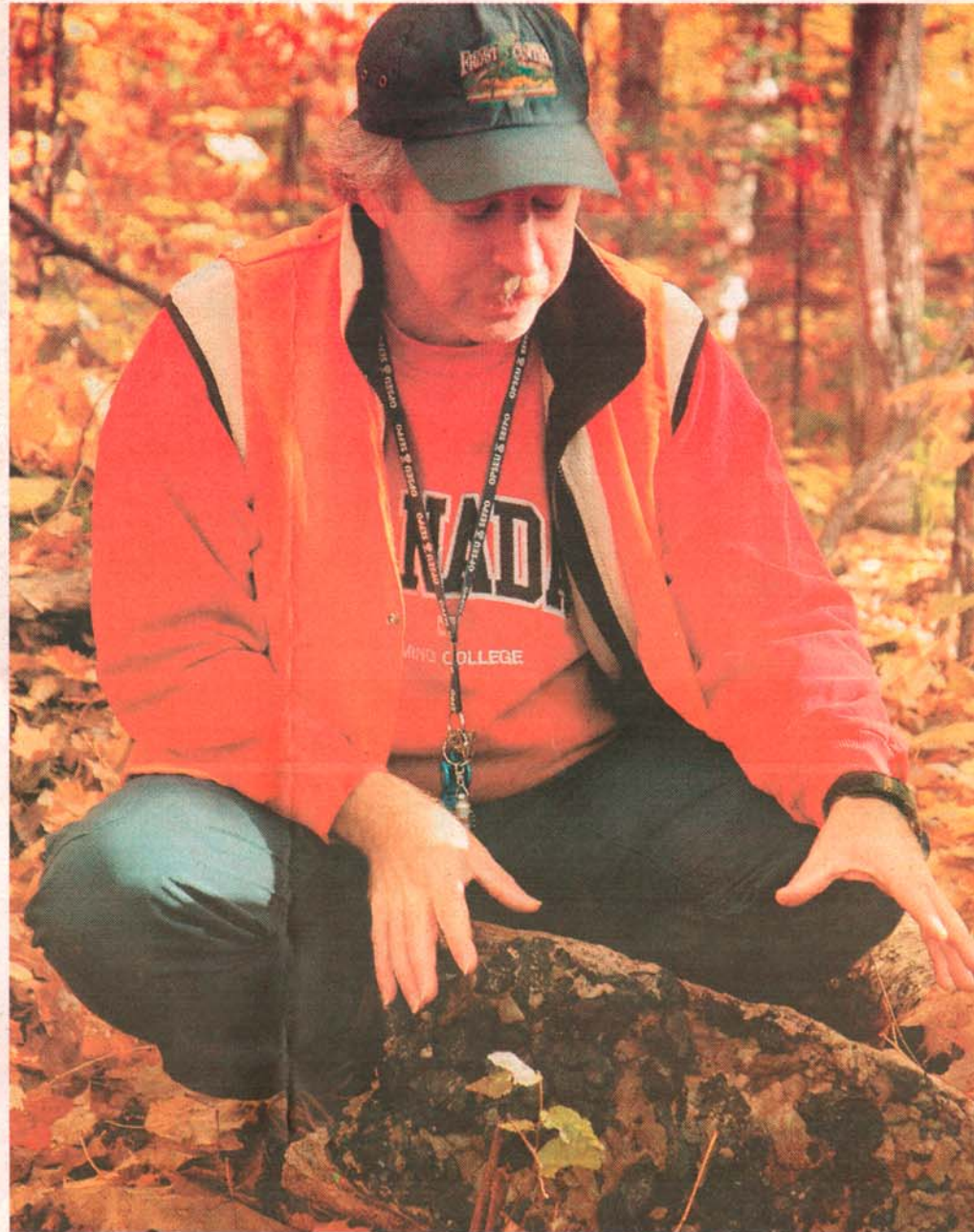
Indeed, the property has an air of surreal mystery surrounding it, knowing that with every step the hikers take, they are walking over gems harboured in the soil.

Sandra Bramham explains the natural occurrences of the rare rocks like she's found treasure. With both Bramhams being retired educators, she said they harbor a feeling of appreciation for what occurs on their property and want to preserve the site to share its beauty.

In fact, she told Bancroft This Week she feels that they have unearthed a valuable natural wonder — whose limits they haven't yet uncovered. The more research they do on the site, the more they find buried beneath it.

"It's unusual because this area is known for "grunge rock" so when you hit something like that wonderful green as is found in apatite, it feels really special," she said.

A stream in the spring washes through deep cavernous caves and pours out the light green gem onto a property that is home



John Etches talks about the rare rocks and minerals found on Greenmantle Farm in Wilberforce during the Haliburton Hike Festival Saturday.

to spoiled beauty.

In fact, Etches said the rocks and minerals below can even influence the plant life above, with certain plants doing best with combinations of minerals lending to their growth. Sandra agreed, saying wild leeks grow best in the calcareous soil, which she said is an example of how the living world depends on what's below.

However, both Etches and the Bramhams said preservation

of the site is key.

"This is a marvel because it's been undisturbed for so long and the owners are interested in preserving it that way," said Etches, noting that the only thing to be taken from the site were photographs.

For more information on the site, click on www.mineral-tours.net.