



Northern Reflections

By Barbara Green Parker

PDAC Mining Matters has extended its program throughout Ontario's far north with the Aboriginal Outreach program to First Nations communities. November 2007 marked the commencement of a focused effort to deliver workshops to the north. Over the course of the school year I visited 11 communities, delivering workshops to students, teachers, and members of the communities.

For my first excursion, Program Coordinator Laura Clinton accompanied me for a four-day visit to the Sachigo Lake First Nation, where we presented to the Grades 4, 7, 8, and High school students. Near the end of the visit, teachers and community members also attended a workshop and then enjoyed a wonderful chicken dinner provided by our hosts. During that trip, I had the good fortune to experience ice fishing by moonlight on beautiful Sachigo Lake. As our generous host, Eli Pivnick, expertly caught pickerel from his axe-chopped hole in the lake, I marvelled at the beauty of the terrain and enjoyed the entire experience in -30 degree weather.

The second excursion, made on my own, included the communities of Long Lake #58, Ginoogaming, Aroland, and Rocky Bay in December 2007. Despite severe winter weather throughout the region and scheduling issues due to community events, this trip proved to be an enormous success. On my trip north to Long Lake #58, I stopped at an Amethyst mine outside Thunder Bay and had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Yesno, a seasoned miner of 45 years. Although the snow was three and half feet high, he insisted he shovel our way to his collection of mineral samples, so that I could view his beautiful black amethyst. After a short visit, I set off on the road north to Long Lake #58 and Ginoogaming, with the gift of a small sample catching the sun's warmth on the dash of my rental car.

Aroland FN proved to be extremely enjoyable with the provision of warm hospitality in the home of Grade 7 teacher Valerie Hoy and her grey hound "Ming." I and the staff at Johnny Therriault School enjoyed a sumptuous spread of food after the workshop. The next day, I loaded up my SUV and headed through a storm to Rocky Bay where I would deliver my last workshop before heading back to Toronto.

My final trip of the school year was a two-week, six-community journey that took me to Wabaseemoong, Grassy Narrows, and Shoal Lake #40 First Nations in the Kenora Region, and then to Eabametoong, Webequie, and Neskantaga First Nations fly-in communities north of Thunder Bay. Again, I was met with the same degree of kindness from hosts in each community. The workshops were always fun, and I taught several classes of various grades in the majority of schools. Despite the brevity of my visits, I had the privilege of learning about the individual character of each community. In Webequie, Shari Goodland graciously offered her house for me to stay. The Webequie staff workshop was the largest group, totalling 15 participants.

"Very helpful and informative. Hard to believe we get so much support and so many resources for so little cost."

"Thank you so much. This was an amazing session which has helped me in huge ways. The resources will be a great help."

“Great hands on activities. The material is very relevant to recent activities in the community.”

“I learned something that I haven’t seen/heard before.”

“Are you coming back again to teach us more things for young and old?”

Neskantaga First Nation was the last community on my two-week journey. Principal Shirley Kielly had prepared for my visit by advertising the workshop at the Northern Store. Shortly after the workshop began, a gentleman entered the classroom and took a seat. He listened closely as we discussed the various mineral samples, rock types, and opportunities in the mining industry. Mid-way through the workshop, I introduced myself and he explained he was a geologist working locally for Superior Diamonds. He’d seen the posted flyer inviting all community members to attend and was curious to know what the workshop included. He willingly answered questions related to his area of expertise, which was of tremendous interest for all. The last night, I enjoyed spending the evening sharing a delicious dinner, great conversation with Shirley and her husband, and a warm bed in their home.

Since my return, I have spoken to all schools that I visited to ensure there are no questions or other concerns regarding the resource kits or subject material. In all 11 communities, there have been no further requirements. I will continue to be available for any future assistance should there be a need. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Again, thank you to all that so generously offered their warm hospitality, assistance, and kindness. It was truly a memorable first year! Meegwetch!