

## Sterling Hill Super Dig 2016

by: Tina League



On April 23, 2016 SMRMC members Tim, Joe, Paula, Al, Carole, Harry, Tina, and SHMM members Bryant, Reid and Jack (Tina's brother and nephews) ventured to Ogdensburg, New Jersey for the annual Sterling Hill Super Dig. The "glowhounds" were there to collect fluorescent minerals such as Willemite, Franklinite, Gahnite, Calcite, Mimetite, Wollastonite, Esperite and Aragonite; just to name a few of the minerals that were produced from the 70 years of zinc ore mining at Sterling Hill.

Tim got to the mine early and began collecting in the pit area. After everyone signed in and donned their required safety equipment: hard hats, gloves and UV glasses, and completed orientation it was time to start the tours. The first tour for our group (minus Tim who was determined to collect as much material as he could during the day), was of the museum and lower mine. The museum has an outstanding collection of minerals from the mine and all over the world. We were given a brief history lesson on the life that the miners had to endure and of the types of minerals that were produced from Sterling Hill. There are many pictures and artifacts documenting the operation of the mine. The fluorescent mineral display room was very well laid out and educational.



After visiting the museum it was time to tour the lower mine. We marched up to the opening of the mine and prepared to go "underground". This part of the mine has been used for tours for many years and is very safe and well lit. Our tour guide was very enthusiastic and informative. She led us through several chambers including the Lamp Room, the Shaft Station, the Blasting Demonstration and others and explained in great detail what the miners lives were like working in the 35 miles of dark tunnels. The "floor" that we were on was at ground level and the only one that wasn't under water. We

were able to peer down a shaft and see the glassy water that was so still it looked like frozen ice in the chamber below us. We spent over an hour walking through the mine and learning all we could. One small "room" had a beautiful "rainbow" display when lit up with large UV lights.

Upon completion of the lower mine tour we had an hour before the next tour. We spent the time collecting in the mine dump area near the registration tent and gift shop. We grabbed a snack at the car before the upper mine tour where I ran into Tim who had come up for air and was taking a load of rocks to his car. I talked him in to going on the upper mine tour with the rest of the group. I didn't want him to miss out on the fun! I sat that tour out due to the stomach flu that I had that day...ugh. Paula was kind enough to stay back and hang out with me while the rest of the group went up the hill to the upper mine. The upper mine and mill tour consists of a long hike up stairs to the top of the mill and a very long way along the conveyor belt where you can pick a specimen off of the belt from that last day of production. It is quite a sight when you look out of the windows on the platform several stories above the mine and get a birds eye view of the area.



When the group returned from the upper mine it was time for the door prize drawings. Well over a hundred people gathered in front of the registration tent anxiously awaiting their lucky number to be drawn. "Way Too Cool" company donated several UV lamps for prizes. Jack and Reid both won nice prizes from the children's tickets. At that point it was dinner time, so Joe, Paula, Carole and Al went into town to get some dinner and a break before the nighttime collecting. Bryant, Reid, Jack, Harry and Tina geared up and went down to the mine to start some serious collecting. Tim was there working hard and having a great time.



The boys learned how hard the rocks were when they began to chisel away at the boulders all around them. They got their exercise breaking rock and then hauling their buckets up the hill to check them in the blackout tent with UV lights. The rest of the group arrived back at the mine collecting area just before dark. Joe had his large UV light ready to go. I had a large UV light for Bryant and the boys to carry around and check rocks once it got dark. As soon as it got dark enough for the UV lights to show the colors in the boulders, everyone got very busy breaking rocks and filling their buckets. The "wall" was lit up around 9:00 p.m. There was only a small section that actually lit up (technical difficulties with the extra large UV lamps). Everyone gathered around to see the "rainbow wall" ..oohd and awhd...and went back to collecting. Well after 10:00 p.m. it was time for the weary glowhounds to pack up and check out for the evening. The temperature had dropped enough to chase the boys back to the warmth of their car. I had already gone back to the car earlier due to chills from the flu fever. We said our goodbyes and headed back to the hotel.

The next day Carole, Al, Joe, Paula, Harry and Tina went to the NJESA Gem & Mineral Show in Franklin, New Jersey. There were many vendors inside and outside of the Elementary School. There were plenty of local specimens for sale and many more from all over the world. We spent several hours at the show and then headed out for the long drive home.