

Treasure In Your Own Backyard

By Jenifer Varecha

It often takes someone from the outside looking in to point out the treasures of where we live. This is just what happened on July 14 when a crew from the Discovery Travel Channel came to town in search of treasure for the series, Best Places to Find Cash and Treasures.

Upon arriving in Silver City, they enjoyed a meal at the Foothills restaurant and the evening production meeting and campfire at Mountain View Lodges before a full day of shooting on Sunday, July 15.

Cash and Treasures and the crew have traveled the country searching for various types of treasure. Sunstones, Megalodon teeth, morel mushrooms, emeralds, gold, turquoise, sapphires, and sunken treasure are fair game, What is your treasure? What were they searching for? Copper, of course!

Richard Whiteman, winner of the 2006 Carnegie Mineralogical Award, owner of Red Metal Minerals and mineral rights to the Caledonia Mine, hosted the treasure hunt. The Caledonia Mine is located in Ontonagon County in Rockland Township.

Kirsten Gum, host of Cash and Treasures, and the crews' most recent travels took them to Copper Harbor, Michigan and Duluth, Minnesota in search of agates, and then on to Ontonagon County in search of copper at the Caledonia Mine. The Caledonia Mine, consisting of two shafts and four adits, is Michigan's only active underground mine today. The minerals in the mine are now harvested for the collector. Some of the other minerals present in the mine are; brochantite, calcite, clinocllore, cuprite, datolite, epidote, quartz, silver and more. The Caledonia Mine has yielded about 3.1 million kg of refined copper.

Now the job was to see what Kirsten could find. Have you ever wondered what it takes to find copper or what goes into producing a television show?

It seems the crew works long hours without much time for being able to really enjoy the many areas around the locations of the shoot. They work as a well oiled machine. A team that feeds off the positive energy from one to another, it is easy to see why the show is a success.

The team consists of five people; Kirsten Gum, Host of the show; Stacy Waters, Producer; Luke Sauer, Photographer; Stephen Buckingham, Photographer and Mark Mostad, Audio Technician. Each has a specific role and they work as a solid team looking to each other for input on making it the best it can be.

Kirsten Gum studied Broadcast Journalism and Political Science in college and went on to do local news, sports such as NASCAR and Tour de France. She learned that she enjoys being in the field, part of the action and traveling. One year her travels took her to Europe 26 times! All of this combined with her enthusiasm for her work make her a great Host for Cash and Treasures.

Her constant sidekick is photographer, Luke Sauer. Luke studied film at University of California and has been a shooter on shows for the Travel Channel, History Channel and Court TV. He is the only one of the team that has been involved with the show since its inception. He has been deemed the lucky one, as he usually finds great treasure. Luke is an avid snowboarder and mountain biker. With these two adventure driven personalities, the biggest question seems to be, who gets to have more fun?

There are four producers who switch off to allow time for editing and putting the show together. Stacy Waters is the producer for the Caledonia Mine segment. Stacy has been a producer for over 20 years on a variety of different projects. She usually works on three shows and then heads home. She has a vision for each show and knows what she needs to make that happen.

Stephen is also a photographer on the show. He has worked in the business for a long time. He began in editing and realized he wanted to be in the field. He has worked on commercials, chasing tornadoes and Pirates of the Caribbean. When asked about the most obscure place he had been, he said the "Venezuelan Jungle" where he traveled to the highest waterfall in the world, Angel Falls, which took all day to reach by boat.

The team tries to find the audio tech locally from shoot to shoot. For this segment, the audio tech was Mark. Mark has worked on many projects that take him all over. In fact, he has traveled over 70,000 miles already this year!

No one could pin point a favorite spot or find as "there has been something special and a favorite part" of each expedition.

So how does this team of five come together to make what you see on TV? There first stop was Red Metal Minerals, located in downtown Ontonagon, Michigan to meet with owner Richard Whiteman. A tour of the facility, a brief education on minerals and mining along with samples of each and the interview begins on tape. First is to determine the best angles that will create the best shots. The interview is unrehearsed other than the knowledge of the points that need to be covered. The producer, Stacy, watches intently taking notes for things that still need to be brought to light. Photographers, Stephen and Luke, film the action as well as the surroundings and clips that may or may not be used in the final show. Mark follows silently donning earphones listening to be sure the message will be heard clearly.

In the interview, they learned there are many types of minerals to be found at the Caledonia Mine. And although the search is for copper, there is a good possibility they will find other minerals such as datolite. Copper in its raw form will be hackly or for us laymen "pokey". The eye must learn to distinguish between a green and aqua color to find true copper. And the pieces that you think are copper because of their color are actually feldspar. Due to oxidation, the copper is found by finding the aqua in the rock. It is not until the copper is processed that it begins to take on the luster and shine most of us associate with copper.

Watch the show this fall for more hints.

When the team was pleased with the shots, which took about two hours (and keep in mind this is a 30 minute show), it was time to move on. The balance of the show was shot at the Caledonia Mine site.

Richard Whiteman and the Travel Channel crew of Best Places to find Cash and Treasures traveled to the Caledonia Mine about 30 minutes from the Red Metal Minerals location in downtown Ontonagon, Michigan. The Caledonia Mine, Michigan's only remaining active underground mine, has yielded about 3.1 million kg of refined copper. Will Kirsten Gum and the crew find any copper in their search for treasure?

The rolling vista from the Flintsteel River Valley overlooking the dig site couldn't have been more perfect. A multitude of greens capped by blue sky, wispy clouds, sunshine and a cool breeze made for the ideal conditions for the copper hunt.

The crew was joined by some avid diggers, teachers and students of Michigan Tech and the younger set included Morgan Burnside and Karsten Varecha. This portion of the show will be shot outside the mine at the dig site.

Safety instruction provided by Richard in the pavilion set the tone of the day. Pick axe, buckets and gloves in hand, the digging commenced.

Digging for copper is not the job for the timid. It is a full day of moving rock, wetting the piles, and digging to find the most coveted specimens. Veteran rock hounders got right to work searching the piles for their treasure. The larger rocks on the outside of the piles were examined and removed first. Some chose the soaking then dig method, while others spread and meticulously moved small amounts at a time. Each time the hackly edge was felt or the blue green of the copper spotted, the ooh's and aah's could be heard all around the dig site.

Another mineral present in the mine is dato. This is another coveted specimen. While the crew was focused on the copper, Richard was also able to show them some other specimens, including datolite. Veteran rock hounds seemed more interested in the search for datolite. It is certainly more of a challenge. As a layperson, my best description is that it looks like a ball of cement, but darker in color. When you make your trip out to experience digging for copper, be sure to see if you can find the datolite!

As this 10 hour day is brought to a close, and remember this is only a 30 minute show, all are tired from a long day of digging. Copper and datolite of various values were found by veterans and newcomers alike. To find out what Kirsten found, stayed tuned to the Travel Channel's Best Places to Find Cash and Treasures this fall. If you can't wait, contact Richard Whiteman at Red Metal Minerals in Ontonagon, Michigan to schedule your own tour of the Caledonia Mine!

The crew still has one more day to go. The process of filming a 30 minute show is very in depth and requires many long days of work along with the travel from place to place. If you have ever considered this type of work, you need to work on your stamina!

The final day is spent touring the mine and doing some digging within the mine. The mine holds a temperature of about 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Caledonia Mine is the last active underground mine in Michigan and is a major hibernaculum for brown bats. Approximately one half million brown bats come from up to 200 miles away to spend the winter in the Caledonia Mine. Although they hibernate here in the winter, the crew will not have to worry about bats interrupting their shoot this time of the year.

Richard was able to provide the crew with history and geology of the mine site. The exploration was long, intense and fascinating. Now that the dig is completed, the next stage of the treasure hunt begins. It is time to learn the process of revealing the beauty that lies beneath the blue green color. The team took great care and became engrossed with the process and what they discovered. No more for now, watch for the show this fall to see what they found.

A meal for energy and to get the creative juices flowing, a production meeting, a bit of sleep, a ten hour day of shooting, another production meeting, another 10 hour day of shooting, another meeting and it's a wrap! Now the crew heads back to California to take over 20 hours of film and turn it into an exciting, informative 30 minute show, or is that 22 minutes after commercials?

It was a wonderful experience for our family to be able to witness all that goes into creating a television show. An experience we are not likely to ever forget. What did we learn? Making a TV show is long hours, not much rest, more than 75% of your work is not used and you have very little time to experience anything other than the show. We will take the beauty and serenity of living on Lake Superior and taking a day to dig for copper now and then over making a TV show any day! Treasure is truly in our own backyard! Hope you have enjoyed learning a little about the process of television as well as learning about copper and the Caledonia Mine. Be sure to stay tuned to the Travel Channel to see Best Places to Find Cash and Treasures and contact Richard Whiteman at Red Metal Minerals, 906-884-6618 or 906-884-2488 for scheduling a tour of your own!



Morgan Burnside, Kirsten Gum & Karsten Varecha on the set of Cash & Treasures.

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