



Geology Student Shares Research with Rusk County Hikers

RELEASED: Sept. 30, 2009

EAU CLAIRE — A University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire geology student, senior Audrey Mohr, New Ulm, Minn., recently shared her specialized knowledge of local geology with hikers participating in a Rusk County Tourism Bureau hike in the Blue Hills area during the Sept. 24-27 "Leaf it to Rusk" Fall Festival sponsored by the greater Ladysmith Area Chamber of Commerce.

The hike, which took place Sept. 26 and included 40 hikers, was led by Peter Olson, a Weyerhaeuser High School guidance counselor and trail advocate, and a Weyerhaeuser student group, The Outsiders. The student group, with Olson's guidance, used GPS to map the trails in the area and then produced "The Outsiders' Guide to the Blue Hills Natural Area," with funding from a grant provided by the Rusk County Community Foundation.

When event planners sought a geologist to accompany them on the hike and help explain the geological history of the area, Dr. Kent Syverson, UW-Eau Claire professor of geology, suggested Mohr. With the help of various students, Syverson has been researching the origin of the Blue Hills natural area for several years, and Mohr was one who most recently worked on the project. She and senior Isaac Orr conducted the research during the summer of 2008, and their research was presented in poster form at the North Central Geological Society of America meeting in April in Rockford, Ill. It won a best poster award there, as well as at UW-Eau Claire's 2009 Student Research Day, also in April.

"My research last year focused on one particular site, the Blue Hills Felsenmeer," Mohr said. "However, I am familiar with the area geology and offered to create a few educational materials for the 40 hikers."

The Blue Hills Felsenmeer State Natural Area was set aside by the state of Wisconsin to preserve an unusual boulder-covered valley. A felsenmeer is a geological feature that exhibits angular boulders of uniform size resting on low-angle slopes. Felsenmeers may indicate intense freeze-thaw processes during periglacial conditions. Mohr said the aim of the study was to determine if the site is a true felsenmeer, created from rocks frost-shattered in place, or if it is a

talus deposit, associated with falling rocks. She and Orr, with the assistance of Dr. Harry Jol, professor of geography, used ground-penetrating radar to show conclusively that the boulder-covered valley is actually a talus.

"The Blue Hills Natural Areas in the Rusk County Forest have been hidden treasures until recently," said Jana Murphy, board director of the Greater Ladysmith Area Chamber of Commerce and an environmental engineer with Flambeau Mining Company, which also helped sponsor the event. "Only a select group of folks knew how to reach these areas since there were no marked, designated trails. Now that The Outsiders' group of Weyerhaeuser High School has developed a guide to these natural areas, the public can enjoy the scenic beauty these areas have to offer."

Syverson was pleased that one of his students was able to serve as an expert and explain the geologic history and significance of the area to those eager to learn more by participating in the sponsored hike.

"This is a great example of how research at UW-Eau Claire enriches people outside the university as well," Syverson said.

"The group was very interested to hear about the local geology and really enjoyed having UW-Eau Claire students on the hike," Mohr said. "Visitors to the Blue Hills Felsenmeer often wonder about the geology but never get a full explanation for how it was formed. It was great for me to share my research with such an enthusiastic crowd."

-30-

NW/DW

UW-Eau Claire News Online

Find UW-Eau Claire news online at www.uwec.edu/newsreleases. You'll find news releases from today back through January 1997, the weekly University Bulletin, a selection of coming events calendars and a news tips submission form.