

Travelling Vinks visit Vernon

By LYNN DEWING

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A Dutch family on the adventure of a lifetime made a stop in Vernon a slice of their fun.

Klarin, Fabian and Mighalle Vink spent a few hours happily digging, hammering and peering at little stones in the hills west of Vernon.

They were on an expedition along with 10 other hopeful weekend miners with B.C. Opals to their mine site. Owner Bob Yorke-Hardy led everyone there and hovered to offer encouragement and advice.

Klarin Vink was one of the more experienced rock hounds present and he was in Vernon with his wife, Clara, and two children precisely for this opportunity.

"I became interested as a child in Switzerland," said Vink. "Then I moved to the Netherlands where there are no rocks at all. But I worked close to stone quarries in Germany where there were amethysts. It's an addiction for me. I left a collection of 50,000 specimens at home."

The Vink family is eight months into a two-and-a-half-year exploration of the Americas.

They sold their shares in an IT company where Klarin works as a Project Manager and their house in Roosendaal to finance the trip and flew to a base in Texas where they bought a truck and fifth-wheel.

The visas and insurances were very difficult to get and expensive, but the Vinks are no strangers to extended travel and the idiosyncrasies of bureaucracy, which they regularly encounter and find ways of dealing with – without losing sight of their objectives.

Even leaving the country with a school age child (Fabian is seven) required special permission. Carla teaches him according to correspondence guidelines along the way and he has exams to write every three months.

From headquarters in Houston, they headed east where they stopped for three weeks in Florida to learn the routines of life in a fifth wheel. There they bought a bread-maker to

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avoid the sweet American bread.

They've travelled to Louisiana, Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas (known for quartz crystal), Oklahoma, Colorado and Alberta.

They wanted to be in the central part of the U.S., according to Clara, because it is not so touristy. They never cease to be amazed at the wilderness here compared to what they are accustomed to in Europe.

"The U.S is not one country, but 50 states," said Vink. "In Alaska they call the rest of the U.S. 'South America.'"

They have just returned from the northernmost tip of Alaska at Prudhoe Bay where there are oil fields. They were surprised at the sophisticated food that was available there because of the oil money, but the scenery was "desolate."

"There is a new road slated to be built there but none of the locals want it. They don't want more people coming in," he said.

The Vinks said they find Canada and our food more like Europe than the U.S. They were persuaded to stay a second day in Vernon to swim at the recreation centre, go to the rodeo at O'Keefe Ranch and visit with locals, who had such enticements

as green grapes, plums and chickens.

From here they will establish a base at the Dutch community of Lyndon, Washington, from which they will visit Vancouver and Victoria. By Christmas they will be in Los Angeles for a visit with Klarin's mother, who is flying in.

They keep in close touch with family and friends all along through an e-zine, which now has more than 200 subscribers, and voice mail.

On this trip the Vinks have a loose itinerary only and a guideline of 1,000 kilometres per week and \$100 per day.

"People were shocked that we would sell our house," said Vink. "But I said to them 'what is that compared to the memories in our minds?'"

He and Clara have spent one year in Australia, Indonesia and China and six months on a motorcycle in South America, which they are eager to revisit.

They will fly from Panama to Peru and meet up with their things there three weeks later. "Columbia would be too dangerous," he said. But they love Chile and Argentina for "the people, the atmosphere and the climate" and they intend to be in Tierra del Fuego December 2006.

Travel like this is not a holiday, as they are quick to point out, but a lifestyle. They self-published a book once before but have not decided if they will do so this time.



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Klarin, Mighalle and Fabian Vink explore the B.C. Opal site.