

The First Southern Illinois Mining In Society Merit Badge Workshop

Ten Boy Scouts from southern Illinois and the St. Louis metro area spent two Saturdays in September 2014 earning the new Mining in Society merit badge. The workshop was sponsored by the Illinois Mining Institute and hosted by Rend Lake College's Coal Mining Technology Department and Knight Hawk Coal Company. The workshop was organized by Dr. Joseph Hirschi, a member of the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration's Content Development Team that established the merit badge requirements and wrote the handbook. Mining professionals who served as merit badge counselors during the workshop included Don McBride, an instructor at Rend Lake College; Mike Tarlton, an engineer with Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Tim Kirschbaum, an environmental engineer for American Coal Company; Joseph Hirschi, a project manager with the Illinois Clean Coal Institute; Rick Schellinger, a mine engineer with Knight Hawk Coal Company; and John Sweet, safety director for Knight Hawk Coal Company.



Don McBride shows how to wear a breathing apparatus.



Mike Tarlton taught the boys to stay out of dangerous abandoned mines.



Tim Kirschbaum led a discussion on mining in space or on the ocean floor.



Joseph Hirschi showed how to read underground coal mine maps.



Rick Schellinger led the surface mine and reclamation site tour.



John Sweet provided safety training and led the underground tour.

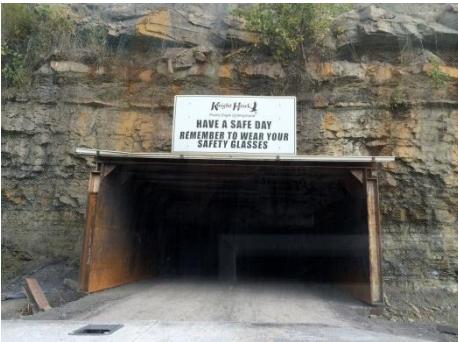
The first Saturday included learning about important minerals and how they are used. Boy Scouts learned "If it can't be grown, it has to be mined" and how even the pizza they had for lunch is a product of the mining industry. They discovered that mining operations exist all around them, whether they live in the big city or in a rural area.



After lunch, the boys donned hard hats, cap lamps, and gloves and entered Rend Lake College's simulated mine tunnels where they constructed a crib, a wooden structure used to support the mine roof; and a stopping, a concrete block wall used to control mine ventilation air. They also received training in how to wear a self-contained breathing apparatus used by mine rescue teams in an emergency and wore one while they traversed an escape route through the simulated mine.



The second Saturday was a tour of underground, surface, reclamation, and preparation plant operations at Knight Hawk Coal Company's Prairie Eagle mine complex. The boys were trained on mine hazards and personal protective equipment and shown the personnel tracking system that would monitor their whereabouts while they were underground. Then they went three miles into the Prairie Eagle underground mine where they saw all of the highly mechanized equipment used to produce coal.



Following pizza for lunch, the tour continued with a visit to the highwall miner and the Black Hawk surface mine. Reclamation operations in practice all around the mine property were pointed out throughout the tour. The mine tour ended with a visit to the preparation plant where rock is "washed" out of the coal before shipment to the marketplace.

