

NNEC Fall Tour



On October 28, 2006, six members braved the rainy and windy conditions to tour the Vermont Plywood and Vermont Verde Antique stone quarry site.

The Vermont Plywood LLC manufacturing plant is located in Hancock in central Vermont. The plant first opened in 1925 and has been producing hardwood plywood for many decades. Once owned by Weyerhaeuser and running three shifts around the clock, the plant at some point was sold to Chesapeake Hardwoods which was eventually forced to close the plant three years ago due to competition from China, which currently provides 40% of the hardwood plywood used in kitchen cabinets and wall paneling.

Only six months after closure, Vermont Plywood LLC reopened the plant with 35 employees and began producing high quality hardwood plywood. The plant no longer turns and peels the hardwood logs for veneer. Instead, the company purchases the veneer, core and backing in 4ft. x 8ft. sheets, then assembles them together to produce 3-ply hardwood. The plywood can be produced in widths of 5/32", 3/16", 1/4", 1/2", and 3/4". The veneer is primarily from Vermont and Canadian mills and includes oak, maple, cherry, birch, walnut, poplar, cedar, butternut, mahogany, and occasionally pine. The hardwood plywood can be made with a single- or double-beaded surface. The core material is either particleboard, fiberboard, or lightweight wood imported from Africa or China.

Steps in manufacture include gluing the veneer, core, and backing together. The sheets sit for 20 minutes, allowing the glue to thicken before putting 40 sheets in a press for 20 minutes. The next step is placing them into a hot press at 230 degrees F for one and a half minutes. The sheets are cut to exact dimensions

with saws utilizing bicycle wheels on the plywood. They are then run through a three-headed sander for three sandings, starting with 120, then 150, to the finer 180 grit. The hardwood plywood is shipped to cabinet manufacturers and lumberyards in the Northeast. A large volume is also shipped to the previous plant owner, Chesapeake Hardwoods in Virginia, for finishing. This consists of staining the veneer and applying a clear finish.

Under knowledgeable and experienced management, the company is looking to expand, despite the competition from

imported kitchen cabinets found at the large retail stores. A cheese cutting board made by Vermont Plywood LLC was handed out to all members on the tour.

The next stop was Rochester to see the Vermont Verde Antique quarry. This quarry opened in 1952 and runs for 5-6 months each year. The quarry has a small ground surface area, but runs deep vertically due to the nature of the rock formation, which was described as a "bubble" within the surrounding rocks. By the spring a large volume of water fills the quarry, which has to be pumped out before the mining operations can resume. The green serpentine stone has marble-like flowing veins, but it's not a true marble. The hardness and durability are similar to that of granite.

The stone is cut with diamond cable saws into blocks of 10 x 5 x 5 feet, each weighing between 20 and 25 tons. This is the heaviest weight that can be hauled on the trucks leaving the quarry. Each year about 40 of these blocks are cut from the quarry. Blocks that have damage or uneven faces are cut into slabs at the quarry, which takes six hours per slab. It's estimated that 10 to 15 years remain for the quarry to continue to mine vertically before the surface area would need to be expanded.

The hardness of the stone makes it suitable for countertops and flooring, as well as exterior building stone and monuments. We were all invited to take samples of the stone from the quarry area. A short annual meeting of the NNEC-SIA, with election of officers, followed the tours at the Forest Service Ranger Station in Rochester.

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