



Above: Banff high school students Sarah Riordon, Jackie McKay, and Nicki Adamson (l-r) and teacher Irv Semenok work on BNMI's Locative Learning project. Photo: Shawna Wheatley.

## Banff e-history goes mobile

by Heather Belot

"Wooooooo... I am the ghost of the Reverend Robert Terrill Rundle," Emily Stauffer moans into her computer microphone. Emily is one of 60 grade 7 students from the Banff Community High School who are working with the Banff New Media Institute (BNMI) on a locative media project about the history of Banff.


When Banff high school teacher Irv Semenok came to The Banff Centre for a Learning Through The Arts (LTTA) program last winter, he had an opportunity to experience an interactive media tour created by BNMI using cell phones and global positioning system (GPS) technology. As Semenok tested the tour on Banff's Hoodoo Trail, he wondered if he might be able to integrate similar technology into his grade 7 students' projects about the history of Banff. After discussing the idea with BNMI researcher Angus Leech and LTTA's John Scully, the Locative Learning project was born.

The project began in September. Working in pairs, students from two grade 7 classes researched a Banff historical figure or place. Each pair then chose a location or "hot spot" related to their story, marked it with a GPS unit, and wrote and recorded a script based on their research. Located throughout Banff, the hot spots will trigger the students' audio clips to play automatically on a cell phone. Later this spring the students will showcase their work for their parents and the Banff community when they launch the tour.

"This project recognizes that students are already active producers of knowledge and information outside the classroom via PCs, cell phones, and the web," says Susan Kennard, director of BNMI. "It connects creative opportunities using new media with formal education."

The students are gaining technological skills working at the school in an eMac lab, and walking the trails and town of Banff with GPS units and cell phones. Along with guidance from numerous teachers assisting with the project, they have also been mentored by BNMI research staff like Jeff Bolingbroke, and Calgary filmmaker James Reckseidler, who helped the students write their scripts and create audio.

What do the students think about the project? "I like to do the voice," says Lianne Pettigrew who is working with Emily on their project about the Rundle Memorial Church. "It's fun when we get to go hiking and play with GPS," says Aliza Carroll who is researching the lives of Elizabeth Parker and Oliver Wheeler, co-founders of the Alpine Club of Canada.

According to Semenok the project has been a success and the students are "having a blast." He was surprised to discover early in the research process that some of the students can trace their family history to the discoverers of Banff's hot springs. "They not only learn about the history of where they live, but they'll experience it in years to come through wireless technology," says Semenok. "It's important to learn about where you live. Behind every place there is a story." 

*The Locative Learning project is a partnership between the high school, the Banff New Media Institute, Learning Through the Arts, and the Evaluation-Mobility-Usability Group, and received funding from the Inukshuk Fund, a community outreach initiative of Inukshuk Wireless. Public tours of the students' projects will be presented in June 2008 as part of the Banff Summer Arts Festival 75th Anniversary celebration.*