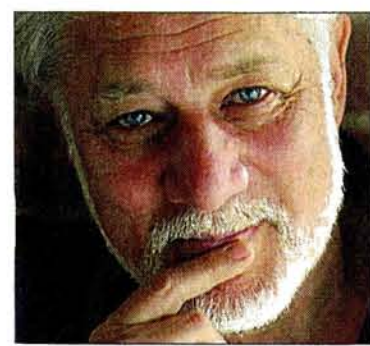


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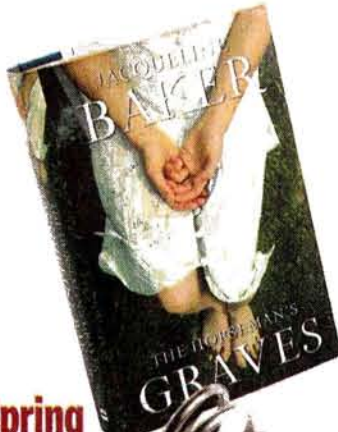
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## III FORESTRY

**Sarah Hart, a 22-year-old environmental science student, takes a core sample from Nova Scotia's oldest tree.**

## Student finds 418-year-old tree

**Eastern hemlock ranks third-oldest  
of its kind in Canada, 11th in the world**

BY CAROLINE ALPHONSO, HALIFAX

A Nova Scotia eastern hemlock that was around when William Shakespeare began writing, before Galileo popularized the use of the telescope, and well ahead of Canada becoming a nation has been named the oldest tree in the province and the third-oldest of its kind in the country.

Situated in a remote part of southwestern Nova Scotia, the 418-year-old tree was discovered by a university student who volunteered last summer on a provincial government project to assess pockets of the forest to determine whether they should be protected from logging and development.

"We knew when we sampled it that it was an old tree. But it wasn't until I brought it back to the lab that I really knew how old it was," said Sarah Hart, a 22-year-old environmental science student at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. Still, it took a while for Ms. Hart to be convinced of the tree's age.

When she first counted and measured the rings of the tree sample under a microscope, she couldn't believe her eyes. So she measured it a second time, and then, just to make sure her eyes weren't deceiving her, she followed the whole process once more.

She then called in her supervisor to make sure what she had seen was accurate. "He was in disbelief too," said Ms. Hart, adding that the two

immediately rifled through the record books to look up the ages of other old eastern hemlocks.

The tree ranks as the 11th-oldest eastern hemlock to be found in the world, and the third-oldest found in Canada. The two other older Canadian eastern hemlock trees are in Southern Ontario.

Despite its age, the tree is smaller and thinner than others in the forest. From the centre of the tree to the bark, it is only 26.5 centimetres, shorter than a common ruler.

Ms. Hart couldn't reveal her find until this week because the Nova Scotia government was negotiating with a company to secure the land she and others were surveying — 29 parcels in total — for conservation.

But her discovery both surprised and delighted government officials. "We knew there were old trees there. We didn't realize how old they were," said Robert Cameron, an ecologist with the protected areas branch of the Ministry of Environment and Labour.

Ms. Hart's interest in this area was piqued after she learned that by studying old trees, researchers can understand more about things such as climate changes and the age of forests.

Ms. Hart and her team were asked to determine the age of trees on two of the plots the government was seeking to buy. They took samples from about 20 trees. To do this, they used a tool that looks like a hand drill to take a small core out of

each tree. The samples were then taken to the lab where the rings were measured and counted under a microscope.

"It's really good to know that research can have such a practical application to conservation," she said.

Colin Laroque, director of the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory and a geography professor at the university, said the discovery is remarkable because the Maritimes have undergone extensive logging and have had several forest fires over the years.

"It's unusual. When you drive along the highways around here and see the trees . . . the majority of those trees are barely a hundred years old," he said. "And if you find something that's 200 years old, you've found an extremely old tree in the Maritimes."

Prof. Laroque said the forest may have even older trees. But that would take time to research. Further, he said: "There's a fine line between going in there and taking enough information to describe the site well . . . and going out there and plugging a hole in every tree and starting to harm the forest."

For Ms. Hart, who is doing her fourth-year of undergraduate studies before heading off to graduate school in the fall at the University of Victoria, the discovery is a great culmination to her degree.

"It's especially amazing for Nova Scotia because I can tell you having looked for old-growth all summer long that there just isn't very much any more," she said. "Logging has had a tremendous impact on Nova Scotia forests so it's quite impressive [to have a tree this old]."