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Geography student goes to Ottawa

Oct 30, 2006



SACKVILLE, NB — Fourth-year Mount Allison geography and environmental studies double major Ben Phillips is making preparations to fly to Ottawa to address the annual general meeting of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS). The Moncton resident was selected as the recipient of the Anthony Harrison Memorial Grant, established in the memory of

Anthony (Tony) Harrison. Ben is the first recipient of the prestigious undergraduate award that will fund an all-expenses paid trip to join in the national society's formal meetings on November 2 and 3 in Ottawa.

"It's pretty exciting really," said Phillips, "I've been invited with my supervisor to the RCGS's Fellows dinner when they will present the society's highest awards. At the Fellows dinner I will be rubbing elbows with dignitaries from across Canada. As the Governor General of Canada is the Society's Patron, you never know who you might be seated with. The next day, I get to address the executive board and the public at the annual general meeting, where I'll speak about my research, and more importantly about how the RCGS funding allowed me to conduct my research," he said.

Last year Ben's discovery of a 454-year old red spruce tree started a media blitz in Canada as it is the oldest red spruce tree ever recorded. The Geographical Society was the main contributor to Ben's MAD (Mount Allison Dendrochronology) Lab research and this extra recognition of his achievements by the Society will allow Ben to face his funding agents and thank them in person. "As an undergrad, this trip presents a great opportunity to not only represent Mount Allison on the national stage, but also to gain valuable experience as a presenter," commented Phillips.

Michael Fox, head of the department of geography at Mount Allison, sees this event as a capstone activity for Ben's past accomplishments. "Ben, as well as several other Mount Allison undergraduates working in the MAD Lab, has received an entirely different dimension to his undergraduate education — the ability to conduct field research in locations across the country, as well as the experience of primary data collection, discovery, and the presentation of scientific conclusions." Fox notes that Ben has become very comfortable in front of an audience and has found him to be a powerful ambassador for the University. Fox says, "Ben has

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devoted a huge amount of his own time visiting public schools, presenting at academic conferences, and being profiled in the national media. I think his discovery of the red spruce allowed all of us to discover the value of fieldwork and the need to disseminate our research. Presenting to the Royal Canadian Geographical Society tops that list.”

The Anthony Harrison Memorial Fund, which provided this grant, was established by the parents of Anthony Harrison who was a geography student, and died tragically in an accident.

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Photo caption: Fourth-year student Ben Phillips is headed to Ottawa this week to speak at the Royal Canadian Geographical Society’s annual general meeting.

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