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This Week

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COMMUNITY

Sackville Tribune-Post

Oldest Tree in Nova Scotia discovered by Mount Allison student

Environmental science major finds 418-year-old eastern hemlock

Imagine volunteering for an obscure job only to find something that no one else has ever found before. Imagine that once you found it, you were not allowed to tell anyone about it . . . until today. This is the scenario that an undergraduate student from Mount Allison University found herself in this past year.

During the previous summer, fourth-year environmental science major Sarah Hart led a team from the Mount Allison dendrochronology laboratory (MAD Lab) into a remote location in Southwestern Nova Scotia and volunteered to help out the Nova Scotia Protected Areas Branch.

She was sent in to assess a stand of potential old-growth forest and she discovered that one area harboured the oldest tree ever documented in Nova Scotia. The tree is over 400 years old.

"I was helping out Rob Cameron, the ecologist at the Protected Areas Branch, assess various pockets of forest for possible inclusion to be protected," said Hart. "They wanted us to go to a few sites and to let them know how old the trees were. I completed the volunteer project during my spare time on weekends last fall and I was working away in the lab by myself

when I aged the old tree. I had to re-measure the tree three times before I finally believed that we had found a 418-year-old eastern hemlock tree," she said.

Hart's find was the oldest tree she had ever measured before and beat the previous record in Nova Scotia by 20 years. The eastern hemlock, like many of the oldest trees in the world ever found, was not very large. From the centre of the tree to the bark, it is only 26.5 cm - shorter than a common ruler.

"The trees in the forest were quite small in diameter compared to most of the trees that we commonly see," she explained, "but this is probably why they had been overlooked and likely what kept them from being logged in the past."

"I think it will be quite a feather in the cap of Sarah's team to think that they were able to be a major part in protecting this extremely rare and fragile piece of the environment in Nova Scotia," said Colin Laroque, director of the MAD Lab and geography professor at Mount Allison.

The southwestern Nova Scotia area where the tree was found is part of a recent land exchange between a logging company and the provincial government.

"Sarah had to remain quiet while negotiations were ongoing and I am very happy that she got the news of the land finally being protected before she graduated in May," said Laroque.

Her tree ranks as the 11th oldest east-



Mount Allison student Sarah Hart has found the oldest tree ever documented in Nova Scotia. The tree, an eastern hemlock, is 418 years old.

ern hemlock ever found in the world and is the third oldest ever found in Canada. The two older eastern hemlock trees were both located in southern Ontario.

Hart's discovery of Nova Scotia's oldest tree marks the second major find for

MAD Lab researchers. In 2005, Mount Allison student Ben Phillips made international headlines with the discovery of the world's oldest red spruce tree (445 years old), found in New Brunswick.



Oldest Tree In N.S.

A Mount Allison student recently discovered the oldest known tree in Nova Scotia, a 418-year-old eastern hemlock PAGE 18