

# Nova Scotia forests could hold key to hockey stick mystery

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The search for the key to solving the mystery of what could be the world's oldest hockey stick has been narrowed to several isolated stands of Nova Scotian forest.

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Submitted photo

Mark Presley, left, and Bill Fittell hold the Moffatt hockey stick in Kingston, Ont., at the International Hockey Hall of Fame in June 2008.

Tree-aging experts from Mount Allison University have scanned the potential hockey treasure and have discovered enough patterns in the wood to fix its age to within five years.

But to make a date verification, similar trees must be found.

Thanks to stories about the hand-carved stick, the scientists believe they will find their matching maples in the Pottle's Lake area, near Cape Breton. They're heading there in July to search.

"We have been in contact, from February onwards, with some of the local biologists and foresters (near Pottle's Lake) looking for some old growths of sugar maple," said Colin Laroque, who oversees the Mount Allison laboratory.

"We think we have found a few places."

The stick has an oral history dating it to the 1830s.

It came to national attention in February when its owner, Mark Presley, showed it off on a national hockey broadcast.

Presley, a Nova Scotian youth worker who purchased the stick from a barbershop in North Sydney, handed it over to the Mount Allison dendrochronology lab.

The lab, the only one in Atlantic Canada, can determine the age of wood by matching tree rings.

According to Presley's research, the stick originally belonged to the Moffatt family.

Hockey historians have discovered that members of the family were known to play shinny in Nova Scotia in the mid-1800s.

It also carries the initials "W.M." on the blade of the stick. Presley's research has found three Moffatt's with the first initial "W" dating back to the 1780s.

The stick has also been analyzed by a carpentry tool expert, who believes the stick was shaped in the 1800s.

Experts from the Society for International Hockey Research have also endorsed the stick as the real deal.

Presley told the Telegraph-Journal he is struggling to be patient as he awaits the results.

"I'm just kind of eagerly waiting like most everyone else," Presley said. "I guess it's just one of those things about patience."

"I have been going through my research and, you know, this is just my theory and while it could very well be correct it could also be dispelled."

Presley said over the past few months he has considered returning to school to pursue a master's in history, writing his thesis on Nova Scotia and its hockey heritage.

He is also planning a book detailing the journey of the old stick.

Laroque said the wait is coming to an end.

"It could be a long history mystery or it could be over by mid-July," he said. "The work is nearing an end."