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Good show
More MMA cards could be staged locally
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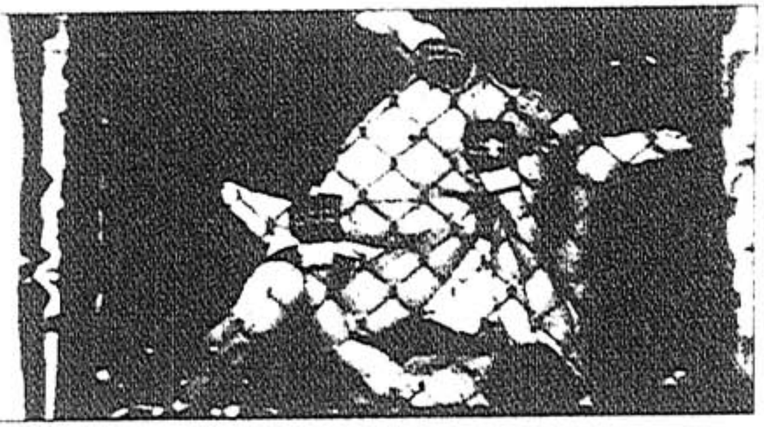

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009

Science and history go hand-in-hand at MAD lab

AMHERST DAILY NEWS

SACKVILLE, N.B. – At Mount Allison's Dendrochronology Lab, or MAD lab, science and history go hand in hand.

Trees can relay a wealth of historical information, according to dendrochronologist Dr. Colin Laroque. You just have to know how to read them.

"Dendrochronology is tree-ring analysis," explained Laroque.

"Most tree species add one ring every year and that ring incorporates its entire growing environment. If it was a good growing year, it will make a wide, fat ring, and if it was a poor growing year it will make a little ring; that's what I read."

One of the most important things dendrochronologists can learn from reading tree rings is past environmental conditions. Dr. Laroque says this is especially relevant in areas such as the Sydney Tar Ponds, which have been drastically affected by human activity.

"If you ask what it was like in 1989, 1968, 1929, nobody has a clue. If you take a sample from the tree, we can see what it was like in 1929 and that's really cool," Laroque said.

The MAD lab is in possession of a piece of 4,000-year-old wood that might hold some answers about climate change in the region.

"Because the climate is warming up again, we are starting to see conditions similar to 4,000 years ago. We can infer from what's already happened what the climates are going to be like in years to come and how things are going to be growing," said Laroque.