

Crawford conservation area unique in Ontario

Halton residents are sitting on the edge of one of the province's "unique ecological gems".

Crawford Lake in the Crawford Lake Conservation Area near Milton provides a very accurate record of the type of civilization and plant life surrounding its shores in the past 15,000 years.

The Halton Region Conservation Authority acquired the land in 1969 as part of its Niagara Escarpment Acquisition Program. The lake, located on the east side of the Guelph Line, 2 1/2 miles south of Highway 401, is one of the region's environmentally sensitive areas and required a plan of development to protect it and ensure its best usage.

The lake itself formed about 15,000 years ago, so the theories say. Water from melting glaciers flowed through the escarpment in the vicinity of the lake, creating underground cavities in the soluble dolomite which underlies the whole area. When these cavities reached considerable size the surface material collapsed to form a sink or karst hole. The high water table and remaining springs filled the hole and created the lake.

What makes it so special is the lake's thermal and chemical properties. It is meromictic which means that there is only a partial turn over of water during the fall. This is caused by the lake's small surface area (7 acres) and extreme depth (80 feet). The lack of annual turn over means that there is little oxygen below the first 40 feet and thus the bacterial breakdown is lessened. The annually laminated sediments at the lake bottom remain undisturbed and can therefore give a very accurate record of what was happening around the lake during the past 15,000 years.

Indian corn pollen was discovered in a sample taken from the lake in 1971 by the Royal Ontario Museum and this indicated that an Indian village must have been located close by. A village site was discovered on property which the Halton Region Conservation Authority purchased recently just north of the lake. While many Indian villages are known to exist in southern Ontario the fact that this one can be dated so accurately by means of the corn pollen makes the site especially valuable.

The village was populated by the Middleport tribe, a tribe that practised a shifting type of agriculture. They moved every 10 to 20 years as the productivity of the soil or the availability of firewood diminished. We learned about the Indian's daily life from the village; whether he had a balanced diet or poor nutrition, for example, and what kind and quantity of

corn was needed to supplement his search for food. Most important of all is the hope that we can learn what effect the Indian had on the area's ecology. Then they can be related to our own lives.

The discovery of the Indian site and the wealth of other material which has been taken from the lake makes it a

unique geological formation and important for scientific study. For this reason the Authority has banned several recreational uses of the lake such as fishing, scuba diving and swimming.

Crawford Lake is open to the public, however, for hiking, nature study and quiet relaxing.



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