

WORLD OF DISCOVERY AWAITS CRAWFORD LAKE VISITORS

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ings abound," said Catherine Tàmmaro, a Wendat/Wandat Women's Advisory Council member, Elder in Residence, Indigenous Arts program manager at Toronto Arts Council and Indigenous artist of the Fire Over Water art exhibit at Crawford Lake. "There is resonant and lively energy everywhere, space to just be with the lake, sit in the longhouses and dream about what it was like when The People were here during that time."

Situated in Milton and operated by Conservation Halton, Crawford Lake offers area residents an immersive look into Indigenous history right in their own backyard.

"This space and others like it help our children to broaden their understanding of all that is and has been around them. It is the real history and not the one presented by settlers, which generally expresses white European male voices that have traditionally presented Indigenous people in unfavourable ways," said Tàmmaro.

When she drove up the slope of the escarpment to the Longhouse Village, a unique reconstruction of the 15th-century Wendat/Attawandaron settlement before colonization, Tàmmaro said her heart was gladdened.

"This is the place of my



Graham Paine/Metroland

Left: The Crawford Lake Iroquoian Village features three reconstructed 15th-century longhouses. Right: Catherine Tàmmaro is a regular visitor and strong supporter of Crawford Lake's Iroquoian Village.

ancestry. This is my homeland," said Tàmmaro a frequent visitor and contributor to Crawford Lake, which features an active medicine garden, as well as regular arts shows and education workshops. "The village is a pre-contact space where there was no evidence of conflict or warfare. That alone makes it super special, and that vibe of the good mind persists today at the site."

Brenna Bartley, Conservation Halton's education manager, also believes Halton residents have a rare opportunity to explore Indigenous history.

"The village provides a glimpse of what life was like in this region around the year 1400 for approximately 300 ancestors of the Wendat or Attawandaron people," she noted.

"The lake is meromictic, which means that the water column does not mix as

it does in a typical lake and allows the bottom to remain relatively undisturbed. This unique feature causes sediments to be preserved in perfect annual layers at the bottom of the lake."

In 1971, researchers from the University of Toronto made an unusual discovery at the lake. They detected corn pollen in the layers of sediment, which suggested people had been farming near the lake periodically throughout the 13th and 15th centuries.

Then came a more remarkable breakthrough, as they discovered the archeological remains of a longhouse village nearby.

"The evidence of agriculture found in the lake allows for an unusual level of accuracy in placing the village in time, and helps provide more information about what life was like," said Bartley.

One of the longhouses contains a display of the archeological discoveries, demonstrating the murky depressions in the soil caused by the old wooden posts.

"The longhouses help park guests to understand the rich Indigenous history of the land, particularly prior to colonization. As Canadians, acknowledging and celebrating this rich history is an important part of decolonizing our understanding of history and our relationship with Indigenous Nations," said Bartley.

Tàmmaro said the village allows visitors to do a bit of time travel.

"It is possible to visualize all of the history through the marvellous work of the Longhouse builders, the fabulous staff and the Indigenous placekeepers who have helped revitalize this space by



Catherine Tàmmaro photo

riculture at the Three Sisters Garden and Mashkiki Gitigan, operated in partnership with Ojibiikaan Indigenous Cultural Network and Miinikaan Innovation and Design.

Crawford Lake also allows visitors to taste Indigenous cuisine that is authentically prepared by NishDish, an Indigenous quick-service restaurant owned by Chef Johl White-duck Ringuette.

Open Friday to Sunday (11 a.m. to 6 p.m.) until October, the restaurant is built on traditional Anishnawbe fare, with menu items like elk sausage and wild rice wild blueberry pudding.

"The park also offers various educational events throughout the year and is looking forward to partnering with Grandmothers' Voice on an educational installation to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirited people in the fall," said Bartley.

Visit conservationhalton.ca/events/ for upcoming events at Crawford Lake.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: In an effort to better understand Halton's Indigenous history, we examined the unique lands at Crawford Lake Conservation Area and what discoveries there tell us about the area's past.

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