

Federation of
Nova Scotia
Naturalists

NEWS

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The FNSN purpose is to further communication and co-operation among naturalists and natural history societies in Nova Scotia. We also work towards a co-ordinated effort on the provincial level to protect our natural environment.

- We promote the enjoyment and understanding of nature by our members and the general public through education via publications, lectures, symposia, field trips, and other activities; through fostering the creation of nature centres and education programs; and by defending the integrity of existing facilities and programs.
- We encourage the establishment of protected natural areas, as represented in parks, nature

reserves, wilderness areas, heritage rivers, and other such protected areas.

- We defend the integrity of existing sanctuaries by exercising constant vigilance against pollution and habitat destruction.
- We promote and engage in funding and research needed for protecting the integrity of all natural ecosystems.
- We encourage and engage in the protection and restoration of threatened and endangered species, with special attention to the preserving essential habitats through: working for the inclusion of all major habitats in a system of protected areas; encouraging and facilitating the reintroduction of extirpated flora and fauna to their former ranges in the province; and

FNSN is affiliated with the Canadian Nature Federation and is a member of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

Visit our website at <http://chebucto.ns.ca/Environment/FNSN/hp-fnsn.html>
or call Doug Linzey at (902) 429-5997 for more information.

FNSN

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§

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Nova Scotia



**Sport and Recreation
Commission**

From the editor

Timing, if not everything, is a pretty big factor in the natural world. Most species do whatever they are programmed to do, regardless of our human preparedness. Which brings me to Plantwatch, the now-annual wide-scale recording of spring flower blooming across the province. By the time you read this and the short piece on page 13, some of the species will already have done their blooming. That's not to say you can't participate to some extent this year, but we can certainly all become well-briefed and ready for next year's survey.

Naturalists have been recording their observations as long as there have been people. According to the the Plantwatch newsletter, Henry David Thoreau noted in his journal the dates of flowering of various plants, subsequently compiling lists of his data. Eventually, he was able to determine the approximate dates by which species in his part of the world would reach each developmental stage. This sort of survey is known as "phenological." Phenology, from the Greek *phaino* (to appear or show) and *logos* (to study), is the study of seasonal appearances and the timing of life-cycle events.

Nova Scotia had its own 19th century phenologist in the person of Alexander MacKay, superintendent of schools from 1892 to 1926. His data for eight of the 12 species studied by Plantwatch over the last two years are available for your perusal. Now, through the wonders of modern communications, we have an opportunity to form a province-wide phenological community comprising hundreds of individuals.

We salute those who work so hard to preserve our natural and historical heritage. Appearing in this issue are Tony Lock (on behalf of Sable Island), Deannie Sullivan-Fraser (with her me-

Sable Island Wisdom

by Richard Peckham

Tony Lock is a marine issues biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He spoke to the 1997 FNSN annual conference about Sable Island: strategies for conserving a damaged ecosystem.

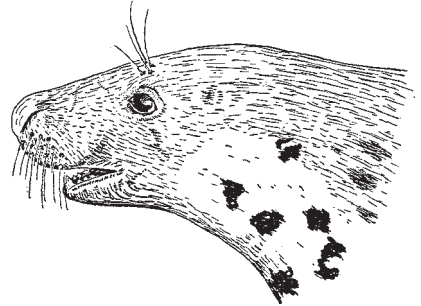
Tony began by asking us to don a “wise farmer” hat in the search for a sustainable conservation strategy for Sable Island. His presentation continuously tested this naturalist’s soft (appreciation for nature) versus hard (management) consciousness for balance. Considering the well-being of the entire ecosystem is more difficult than having to deal with a single species.

Sable Island has provided legends of fascination and horror for nearly half a millennium: the notorious shipwrecks on the shallow, shifting sand bars; the extinction of the Atlantic race of walrus; and the many other species introduced to the island, most of which have not survived.

It is the only island on the edge of the North American shelf, located in the centre of a gyre of ocean current, and a part of Halifax Regional Municipality. It resembles coastal Nova Scotia, with marram grass and beach pea behind the beach; heaths, with sandwort, sea rocket, and cranberries; and, furthest from coastal influence, the most highly evolved areas – freshwater ponds containing salt-intolerant sundews. The entire landscape is sand blasted. Sand

moves when vegetation is removed – by human activity and by the grazing of horses. In dramatic comparison, a photograph showed the normal growth of fenced-off vegetation surrounded by grazed ground.

Tony drew from his unique experience as a biologist on Sable, beginning as a graduate student

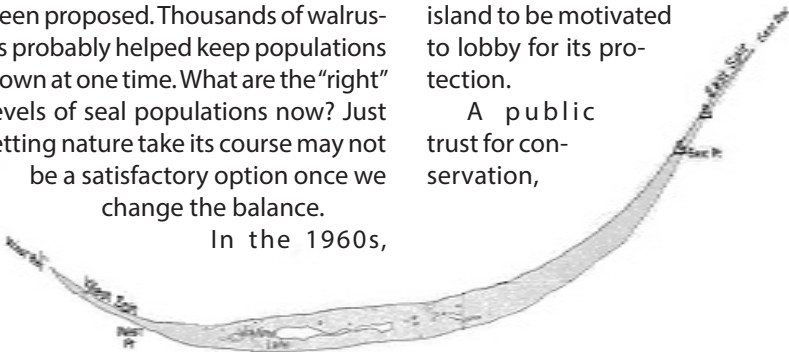


in the 1960s. The island boasts a population of 15,000 Ipswich (Savannah) sparrows, 5,000 of which return to nest. Gulls were almost nonexistent on most offshore islands, including Sable, at the turn of the century. Humans lived where gulls nested, and ate the eggs. Gulls were also mobbed by the millions of resident terns at that time. The gasoline engine liberated coastal islands from human habitation, resulting in redistribution of gulls and tern populations, the gulls get-

ting the upper hand. There are now only 1,000 pairs of nesting terns on Sable Island, under stress from hungry gulls (there is little food on the intertidal, exclusively sand beach), and horses, which trample the open nests. The population of horses ranges from 200 to 400, sometimes crashing in winter. They starve from January to spring, mares prematurely abort, and the old have teeth worn down from the sand. How would the wise farmer manage these three species, whose ecology is so intertwined?

And then there are the seals: harbour seals (the “cute” ones, which are down to 200 breeding pairs) and as many as 45,000 grey seals. More than 18,000 grey seal pups are raised annually on Sable, compared to about 1,000 in the 1960s. Sharks, including the great white, are increasing, drawn by the abundant pups. Grey seals carry the cod worm (yes, that unforgettable slide was of an infested seal stomach), which fish processors must remove from cod fillets. Birth control and anti-worming compounds have been proposed. Thousands of walrus probably helped keep populations down at one time. What are the “right” levels of seal populations now? Just letting nature take its course may not be a satisfactory option once we change the balance.

In the 1960s,



the west end of Sable “looked like downtown Dallas” with acres of oil pipe racks (a classic slide of a huge bulldozer ploughing the sand despite protests from Tony, the bird researcher).

What about human presence? It costs the federal government \$650,000 annually to maintain weather service facilities on the island. Environment Canada plans to leave. But travel becomes much more expensive once the place is abandoned. The only way to get people or equipment on and off Sable is by air. A return trip by helicopter costs \$10,000, but only \$2,000 by light plane, which requires a human presence for safe landings. Fisheries has an interest in the seals. Sable provides important beach surveys of all types: birds, warm water oceanic species, oiled birds, dead whales. Anything that floats can end up on Sable, and does. Managed tourism might be a partial answer. It cannot pay for environmental management, but the public needs to experience the island to be motivated to lobby for its protection.

A public trust for conservation,

Richard Peckham is a member of the Halifax Field Naturalists and an active proponent for the greening of suburbia.

A garden of medicine

by Hugh Kindred

Early in the morning of Saturday, 14 June 1997, 14 hardy souls ventured into the foggy wilds of the City of Lakes Industrial Park in Dartmouth to visit a different kind of garden. Our interpreter, Deannie Sullivan-Fraser, is a student of the folklore of native Nova Scotia plants.

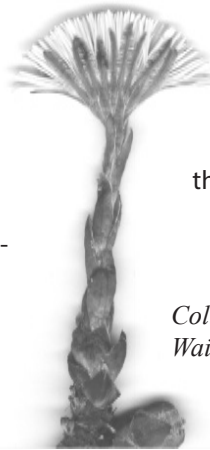
Around its new headquarters, the Medical Society of Nova Scotia has established a medicinal garden of (mostly) native plants. The building is situated on the edge of an industrial park in a wilderness setting close to Spectacle Lake. The society has taken advantage of these circumstances to establish a short trail around the property and to mark local species of plants that have histories of medicinal uses.

We discussed the plants at the twenty marked sites, as identified in an accompanying brochure, plus many other unmarked species. We examined them all – from the mundane coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara* – in truth, and alien) and the modest bristly sarsaparilla (*Aralia hispida*) to the mighty American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). This last must have been an imported specimen since it had two beautiful pure white trilliums blooming from its root ball.

Deannie amusingly described the folklore of these plants' healing and other helpful uses. She explained how

many have astringent or restorative qualities when applied to wounds or swellings, while some were thought to have healing effects because they resembled parts of the body (lungwort: *Pulmonaria*, for example, another alien). She told us fanciful stories about the naming of the trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and warned us against enjoying elderberries (*Sambucus canadensis*) to excess because of their laxative effects.

This garden is a fine



*Coltsfoot cough candy?
Wait for the leaves.*

Deannie Sullivan-Fraser has been working on a study, "People and the Wild Plants of Lunenburg County." Her observations are always interesting.

There were 19 local names so far, three of them for *Centaurea nigra*: German clover, Cat's Piss (hard to forget that one) and Rawden knockers (from Sarah Pelley, who says this is known only in the New Ross area). There were a few that haven't been

identified to species as yet – so I have names only – perhaps your readers may be able to identify these: Toad lily, Iron grass, Island grass.

There are over 70 medicinal uses and some very interesting old traditions that had to do with plants. I received numerous children's games played with plants. There is a lot of knowledge and interaction with our flora in the countryside. However, it is mainly the experience of the elderly,

and some very knowledgeable people had already died before I could interview them.

If anyone is interested in volunteering time to help with this study, I would be grateful. It is a huge undertaking. However, the data from Lunenburg suggests there is a great deal out there to collect. Any dynamo fund raisers interested in such a project?

Insuring the naturalists

by Jill Comolli, director FNSN

The FNSN board was asked recently by several member clubs to check out liability insurance for members. Because club memberships, activities, and forms of directorship vary considerably across the province, an umbrella policy through the Federation is not a practical or economical solution. However, an excellent alternative is available to individual clubs through the Recreation Association of Nova Scotia (RANS).

The RANS policy, through A.J. Bell and Grant Ltd, offers one million dollars liability insurance to non-profit groups, protecting the group staff and volunteer leaders should they be named in an action for bodily harm or property damage to a third party. The cost of the policy is determined by the number of members in your organization and is very reasonable compared with individually obtained coverage. Paid membership in RANS is

required. The insurance year with this policy is October through September, and cannot be prorated.

RANS also offers a comprehensive special-events policy that gives one- to ten-day coverage for liability, tenants' legal liability, participants' liability, non-owned auto coverage, and accidents (optional). This special insurance is available to both members and nonmembers of RANS at a small cost. FNSN expects to obtain special-event insurance for all future AGM weekends.

FNSN member clubs already holding insurance through RANS have expressed satisfaction with this policy and their relationship with RANS. For further information, contact Brenda MacDonald:

Recreation Association of Nova Scotia
5516 Spring Garden Road, Suite 308A
PO Box 3010 South
Halifax, NS B3J 3G6
Phone: 902 425-1128
Fax: 902 422-8201

The Barrens are back: area again off limits to mining

The following is based on a Halifax Herald 30 October 1997 article by Dean Jobb, staff reporter, assisted by provincial reporter Amy Smith and Jocelyn Bethune in Baddeck.

Jim Campbells Barren is once again off limits to mineral exploration. The 1,700 hectares of bog, forest and barren in northern Cape Breton has been restored to a list of crown lands designated for protection, Premier Russell MacLellan announced.

"We must protect a priceless piece of our natural endowment rather than risk its loss to the uncertainties of exploitation," the premier told a news conference in Halifax. "Once a decision is made to protect lands and spaces from development, such decisions (must) be unrevokable."

He also announced a shift in responsibility to prevent conflicts within government on issues pitting resource development against wilderness protection.

The announcement ended close to a year of controversy and drew applause from members of a coalition of some 50 environmental, sportsfishing and conservation groups that fought to protect the barren.

"Putting Jim Campbells Barren back is saying that a promise made to the people counts," said Colin Stewart of the World Wildlife Fund. "It restores

a bit of faith in the integrity of the process."

The barren, home to several species of rare plants, joined 31 other areas on a protected list in 1995 after extensive public hearings and consultation. But a few weeks of backroom lobbying from mining interests in the Cheticamp area prompted the government of then-premier John Savage to reopen the area to exploration last fall.

While mining promoters held out the possibility of hundreds of jobs if a mine were developed, he noted exploration would create only about a dozen jobs – not enough to justify risking environmental damage. He promised to explore job opportunities for the area in tourism, eco-tourism "and other sustainable industries," but offered no details. He was also vague about when Natural Resources would be restructured and the number of employees affected. Five other provinces already manage their parks through their environment departments.

Government records show the parks division of Natural Resources lost an internal tug-of-war over the barren to the minerals branch, which favoured exploration.

Parks division must have the staff and resources to carry out its mandate after the transfer, Mr Stewart said.

Mining opponent Marie Aucoin, of the Concerned Citizens of Cheticamp

called the decision “a step in the right direction.” Officials of the Cheticamp Development Commission, which lobbied for access to the barren, could

The court decides

by Colin Stewart

As many of you are aware, Regal Goldfields went to court in Nova Scotia in an attempt to quash the government’s return of Jim Campbells Barren to protected status. The company was unsuccessful, though appeals are still possible. Following is my non-legalistic understanding of the events that transpired.

- On 29 October 1997, Premier MacLellan announced that JCB would be returned to the list.
- On 31 October, the province notified Regal that the company’s land access permits were no longer valid. Government lawyers had advised that there was no way of revoking the exploration license, so the government simply disallowed access. (Regal did hold a permit from June 1997, valid for one year and renewable.)
- On 3 December, the government introduced Bill 17, the Wilderness Act, to protect all 31 sites.
- In March 1998, the moratorium

on JCB was reinstated to the end of 1998.

- In March, the election writ killed Bill 17.

Regal contended in court that 1) there were no legal grounds for revoking the access permit; 2) there were no legal grounds for reinvoicing the moratorium, or, if there were, it couldn’t apply to existing licences; and 3) in reinvoicing the moratorium, the government was acting in bad faith (i.e., singling out Regal). Regal also interpreted the Mineral Resources Act as insuring security of tenure once a licence is acquired, and emphasized that the Whitehorse Mining Initiative supports this belief.

The Judge ruled that the Mineral Resources Act was about more than just security of commercial interests, and that the legislators intended to ensure retention and

control of the balance of interests. In effect, section 21(1) of the Act gives the government the ability to halt the mining process at any stage. This means that the moratorium can be used to suspend exploration or extraction licenses either permanently or for a given period.

The judge noted that the Whitehorse Mining Initiative postdated the legislation and thus had no impact on its interpretation. He also noted that, although it does support the security of mining tenure (page 21), the initiative also supports a system of representative protected areas for a host of values (page 19). In effect,

Colin Stewart is the endangered spaces coordinator for FNSN

the Whitehorse Mining Initiative acknowledges the same conflict the government had been required to resolve.

Even valid legal actions can be overturned if they were made for reasons other than those of the legislation - that is, actions made in bad faith. In his ruling, the judge reconstructed the consultative process that led first to the protection of the 31 sites, then subsequently to the relisting of JCB. He cited these decisions as demonstrating that the government was taking seriously its responsibility to balance the economics of mineral interests with a broader public interest. Thus he dismissed the bad faith argument.

Another relevant aspect of the same argument was whether the premier or the minister made the decision. (The Act says, "The Minister may . . .") The judge ruled that it was appropriate for the minister to consult, and for such decisions to be made in a broader context of government policy.

Finally, on the removal of access rights (there was an argument about under which act access rights were granted), the judge ruled that, regardless of which act was used, and whether or not property rights were involved, the government's action was a breach of contract and therefore illegal. However, this decision in no way affects the validity of the moratorium, and is therefore moot; as long as the moratorium is valid, Regal cannot explore, and the status of the access permit is irrelevant.

What's next?

Regal can seek to appeal some aspect of the ruling, an action that, if successful, could lead to invalidation of the relisting. That would require convincing a judge of some error in process. Even given a successful appeal, a Regal lawyer has pointed out that the government could use the Expropriation Act, which apparently triggers specific compensation

Volunteers, please

Scientists and Innovators in the Schools (SITS)

Our program aims to find volunteer presenters and workshop leaders for Nova Scotia classrooms. Teachers often seek experts to visit their classrooms to add to a given unit of study. For example, we have had several requests from elementary schools for hibernation presenters.

Any volunteers to speak to school students on various ecological and nature topics would be very welcome.

Please contact Karen Rockwell:

SITS, Centre for Marine Geology
Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS B3H 3J5.
phone: 902 494-2831
or 1 800 565-7487
Website: <http://is.dal.ca/~sits>

Leatherback turtle conservation

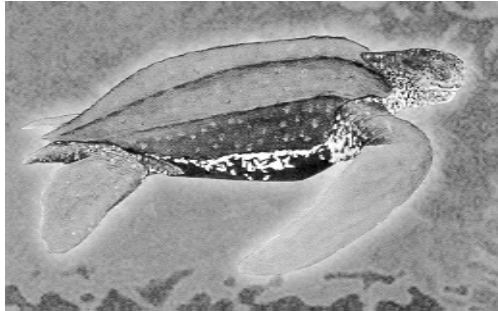
Michael James is co-ordinator of the Nova Scotia Leatherback Turtle Conservation Program. The following is from a letter Mike wrote to the Federation in January.

I would like to introduce our project and enlist your organization's support in helping us learn more about endangered leatherback sea turtles in Nova Scotian waters.

Despite their great size (up to 900 kg), leatherback turtles subsist entirely on jellyfish and range as far north as Norway in search of prey. Leatherbacks sighted from June to November each year around Nova Scotia are migrants that have followed the Gulf Stream from their southern breeding areas.

The North Atlantic Leatherback Turtle Working Group was formed in October 1996. It includes research scientists, museums, aquariums, wildlife rehabilitators, and fishing community members interested in better understanding the seasonal presence of leatherback sea turtles in Atlantic Canada. Several Nova Scotia members of the working group volunteer their time and abilities to promote leatherback turtle conservation across the province. I coordinate these efforts as part of the Nova Scotia Leatherback Turtle Conservation

Program, which has three main objectives: 1) to collect biological data from and tag entrapped and stranded leatherbacks; 2) to educate the public in Nova Scotia about the biology of northern sea turtle populations and the need for their conservation; and 3) to encourage detailed reporting of all leatherbacks to the project's



toll-free phone line.

Our organization recognizes that Nova Scotia naturalists can be instrumental in promoting and supporting wildlife conservation efforts such as the leatherback program. You can contact me by calling toll-free: 1 888 729-4667. I look forward to hearing from you.

Mike will address the FNSN annual conference on Sunday, 7 June.

Smart Ravens

British filmmaker Zoe Heron sends this request to our readers .

I'm currently producing a wildlife film on animal intelligence and would like to include some fun, clever raven behaviour. In particular I have heard tales of ravens pulling up fishing lines. In terms of filming, we'd be looking for behaviour that was happening currently and frequently (and predictable enough to film).

Animal Minds is a three-part wildlife documentary series for the BBC in the United Kingdom and for PBS in the United States. The first program looks at animal intelligence, the second at the emotions of animals, and the third at the question of animal consciousness – to what extent are they aware of themselves and the world around them? It's part classic natural history, part science documentary, and part fun anecdotes and clever pets. It's being filmed on Super16mm film for wide-screen transmission.

Green Umbrella Ltd is an independ-

ent production company specializing in science and natural history films. The series is being produced by Paul Reddish, whose most recent credits include *Spirits of the Jaguar*, *Attenborough in Paradise*, and *Parrots – Look Who's Talking* for the BBC.

We're looking for smart raven stories to film. Our first program looks at intelligence and problem solving.

If you don't feel you would be able to help, is there anyone else you could recommend I contact? Or perhaps there is a local fishing organisation I could contact?

I would be very grateful for any help or advice you could give in this matter.

Zoe Heron
Assistant Producer Animal Minds

Green Umbrella Ltd
The Production House
147a St Michael's Hill
Bristol BS2 8DB

... and Pat Kehoe of Whitehorse just might have a story for her

Nikki, Mild Dog of the North, and I were walking a long route along the Yukon River bank, from south of McIntyre Creek mouth to the Porter Creek sewage lagoon. The trail is quite good on the shore because the snow is still fairly firm and the remnants of the Yukon Quest dogsled trail are solid. At the big bend in the river just beyond

Croucher Creek, I saw a raven high on a ledge on the steep escarpment on the far side. It was sitting on what I had always thought was a golden eagle's nest, since I have often seen one hanging around there in late spring. But the raven was lying low in the nest – presenting that profile so distinctive of brooding! Then, as if hearing my

thoughts, another raven flew over for a changing of the guard ceremony. Raven number one took off and Raven number two immediately took her/his place on the nest and assumed the low-profile incubation position. I've been back a couple of times in the last few days and there has always been a bird on the nest. After 28 years in the Yukon, I think I have finally seen a nesting raven!

Just to cap it off, a mature bald eagle flew over the scene yesterday with a large escort of playful ravens. And now I know how they get bald! So much to learn.

But the day wasn't over. Just a couple of kilometres later, I noticed

funny marks on the steep snow banks along the river. It took a few such findings before I realized I was looking at raven bobsled runs! Well, bobsled maybe isn't the right word. The birds fly up to the top of the hill and then tumble and somersault to the bottom, wings folded, and then take off. The marks couldn't have told the story better: a clump of snow at the top with footprints and wing-prints, a mess of clumps all the way to the bottom, and then – usually – a single set of footprints and two or three wing impressions in the snow . . . and the trail ends. There were several of these marks along a stretch of about 300 metres. It was enough to make a

1998 third year for Plantwatch in Nova Scotia

"A great way to study spring," says Plantwatch promoter Heather Drope

Plantwatch is a phenology study of fourteen common plants and shrubs. This study needs representation from all over the province, and we ask spring plant watchers to join us in this study.

For paper forms to be mailed to you, please contact Liette Vasseur at liette.vasseur@stmarys.ca, or find them at our colorful and informative Website: www.cciw.ca/eman-temp/ecowatch/nsplant/intro.html. Our Web pages are hosted by the Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN)

The plants

Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)
Mayflower (*Epigaea repens*)
Trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)
Red maple (*Acer rubrum*)
Weeping forsythia (*Forsythia suspensa*)
Tamarack/Larch (*Larix laricina*)
Bluets (*Houstonia caerulea*)
Star-flower (*Trientalis borealis*)
Clintonia (*Clintonia borealis*)
Rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*)
Purple lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*)
Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)

Abandoned cemeteries in Nova Scotia: a call to action

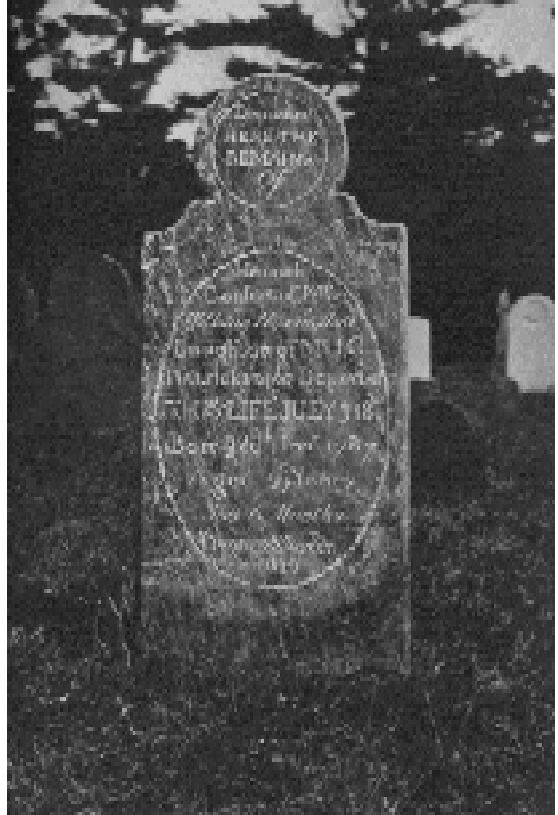
In late January 1998, the Nova Scotia Museum made public some concerns about abandoned cemeteries in the province.

The discovery of a single gravestone deep in someone's private woodland in Annapolis County might be startling to some, but not for Faye Charlebois of Dartmouth. Happy to have traced her family to this spot, she was distressed to see the condition of the overgrown gravesite of her great, great, great, great grandparents. Their gravestone lay broken, the grave overgrown, on the land that had been their 18th-century homestead. Faye and her mother would like to tidy the area and repair the 183-year-old marker, but what if the landowner said no? Who owns these ancient graves in 1998?

For heritage-minded people, abandoned and forgotten Nova Scotian gravesites and cemeteries mean important information has possibly been lost forever. Overgrown, sometimes with gravestones crumbling, these sites are often the target

of vandals. Or they are at risk of being ploughed under during re-development by unsuspecting or unscrupulous landowners.

Deborah Trask, curator of buildings with the Nova Scotia Museum,



has been studying Nova Scotia's gravestones for more than two decades. A recent study identified nearly 1,000 burial sites in Cumberland County alone, many of them unrecorded, many on private property, and many abandoned. With a possible 20,000 burial sites across the province, protecting them could be important to our heritage.



More and more people are interested in preserving their family history and gravesites. "In addition to the historical information cemeteries can provide, graveyards are traditionally sacred places," says Trask. "People want abandoned and neglected gravesites protected somehow for posterity."

Trask is interested in introducing protective legislation for abandoned cemeteries in the province. She would expect such legislation to do three things:

- Make it clear that once a piece of property has been used for a human burial, it cannot be used for anything else;
- Make it possible for a group interested in maintaining a graveyard to do so through a permit system, with certain limits and requirements. This would include reasonable provisions for people to cross private land to visit a graveyard. (This is not currently a right in law, although

deer hunters are permitted to cross private land in hunting season.)

- Make it a crime to damage or disturb a grave or gravestone without having a permit to work on it.

Under current law, these things are either not clear or are not covered. Once legislation is passed, Trask says, the next task will be to take inventory of abandoned sites, which would probably involve calling on various historical, genealogical, and volunteer groups to help. And, certainly, naturalists are in an excellent position to discover and report such sites.

The Nova Scotia Museum would like to find out more about Nova Scotians' interest in the identification and protection of abandoned cemeteries. Trask still needs to prove to the government that there is public support for such legislation, and so would welcome further expressions of concern.

Do you know of abandoned cemeteries in your community? If you

Come to the
1998 FNSN AGM
and annual conference

Antigonish, June 5-7

Take a few moments now:
Read all about it and
send in your registration form.

