





I've guided groups up to Piggy's Mountain to hold somber Remembrance Day Ceremonies overlooking the harbour that so many never returned to.

I've taken international visitors there to explain the significance of the harbour and how the city developed as a result. I've shown other groups the foundations of the batteries that protected the harbour during war time. I've also taken them through areas of mature pine forest and over stark granite barrens. No matter where it is I always get the same reaction. I didn't know this was here, I'm so glad you showed us this.



I love to hike but find it especially rewarding when I can show people history. The Backlands are particularly important to the development of Halifax. Without the granite from Queen's quarry (begun 1793) the Citadel would not exist. Below - the workings as seen today.



Without the Citadel the mediocre defences of the earlier settlement would easily have fallen to the French or perhaps later to the Americans. The fortress and supporting fortifications such as York Redoubt provided the necessary deterrent. The industrial workings of the quarry were very modern for the time using the first steam locomotive in Atlantic Canada.

One can walk through history by following the track of the original rail line. It's quite overgrown now but you can easily see the cut stone used to build up the rail bed.



Quarrying was not limited to The Queen's Quarry site. I've seen evidence of workings in many different locations. Several are scattered through the land between Oceanview Dr. and the Queen's Quarry which is situated on the cliffs above Purcells Cove. Although some workings seem to be randomly located if you look closely you can see bits of road used by military quarries in more modern times. The last operation was the Couglan quarry which closed in 1957.

The backlands support many types of wildlife and the globally rare jack pine/broom and crow berry barrens. Many types of songbirds call it home as well as deer, bobcat, and coyote. There is also evidence of two former beaver colonies that hopefully will be repopulated someday soon.

The predominant granite geology shows the scars from the glaciers that advanced in a southerly direction. Those exposed granite ridges allow one to explore the eastern side of the Backlands even though there are no recognized paths. I've taken a small but determined group on a full seven hour hike from Lake Williams Rd to Herring Cove using the mountain bike trails on the west side and the granite ridges on the east. During that hike you encounter what is known as the Old Military Rd. Today it runs from the end of Princeton Ave eastward across the Backlands to Purcells Cove Rd. It's not recognizable as a road in many areas, but originally it was part of a vital link from Halifax through Spryfield to Fergusons Cove and York Redoubt because it existed many years before the last part of Purcells Cove Rd was completed near today's Dingle Park. The photos below show the road as it existed in the mid 1800's. This is taken from what's known as the Town Planning Scheme No.1. It's a series of 10 large maps



that can be viewed at the NS Archives. The particular map is sheet 7 identified by the the reference number V2.21.

Sorry for the quality, the size of the maps was a bit too much for my cell phone.

Fergusons Cove is where you see the word COVE on the right of the map with York Redoubt just below. If you follow the road to the left you can see where it joins Herring Cove Rd. just above the capital L and capital D.



The geological formation on the northern portion of the backlands (Shaw Wilderness Park) is mainly metamorphic. There is a high outcrop that is easily climbed, it provides a 360 degree view to the north and east overlooking Williams Lake. The following is the easterly view.



Towards the southern end of the Backlands is an interesting dumping ground of carved granite building blocks. Judging by the intricacy of some of the carving it would appear they were from different historical structures.



Most people enjoy exploring the Backlands on the McIntosh Run mountain bike trails either on bikes or on foot. The trails run almost the entire length from the Governors Brook subdivision in the north to the Norawarren subdivision in the south and can be enjoyed year round.



The Backlands are a natural wonder within our city. To carve out any portion, big or small, for development would be a travesty. They must remain one environmental unit so that we can learn of our history, enjoy the recreational potential, and explore its wild side. I offer myself willingly as a guide to show some of the hidden gems and help people discover its beauty. I'm quite sure after a hike there you will agree with my fellow hikers by saying, I had no idea this was here, I'm so glad you showed us.