

Sackville's Quarry Park – An Historic Woodland and Wetland Park in Residential Tantramar

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View of the Quarry Park from the east, showing the Quarry Lane water control structure (bottom), Dominican Drive and Charlotte Street (left), and West Avenue (top). Photo by AN Media for the Municipality of Tantramar.

Introduction to the Quarry Park

The Municipality of Tantramar acquired the former Sackville sandstone quarry site in 2022, which provided an opportunity to develop this area as a low-impact, residential woodland and wetland park. Several local groups have worked together to improve access to the quarry for Tantramar residents and visitors, while protecting this unique property and interpreting its cultural and natural history to park users.

The Quarry's Industrial and Cultural History

Pickard Quarry was once a source of high-quality red sandstone for buildings constructed in Sackville, at Mount Allison University, and across Eastern Canada, periodically from the 1880s to the early 1970s. Charles Pickard founded the Sackville Freestone Company here in 1901 to quarry this stone. He invested

in many large industrial buildings, several huge derricks, and a network of steam-powered drills, mostly focused on the area now flooded by Pickard Pond. Huge blocks were extracted with explosives, and moved by tall cranes to be shipped out or cut into smaller building stones on site. In the early years, quarried stone blocks were removed by twelve teams of horses, and later by railway on a spur line of the Intercolonial Railway that reached into the quarry itself.

In 1899, 15,000 cubic feet of stone was quarried in a 50-day period, and at peak operations, 7-800 tons were extracted daily, with up to 8000 tons/year. This resulted in a huge open pit in an area that had previously been open farmland, extending about 150 m (500 ft) from west to east and about 180 m (600 ft) from north to south, and reaching down over 20 m (65 ft) deep.

Sackville red sandstone was used in building Centennial Hall and many other buildings at Mount Allison University, the Royal Bank in Sackville, the Bank of Montreal in Moncton, and several buildings in Saint John, Truro, Wolfville, and Halifax. This sandstone was also used in building the National Observatory in Ottawa and the Ontario Legislature Building in Toronto, and pre-cut fireplace stone was shipped as far away as Vancouver.

The demand for sandstone decreased in the early twentieth century, as buildings were increasingly built of concrete, and the quarry was largely unused by the time it was purchased by Mount Allison University in 1930. Most of the buildings constructed on campus from the 1930s through the 1960s incorporated sandstone taken from a new site slightly further northeast, now flooded by Mount Allison Pond. Roughly cut sandstone blocks were hauled by truck to Shediac to be cut and trimmed as building stone. The quarry was last active in the early 1970s, when stone was quarried for repairs to university buildings, and to restore parts of Ontario's legislature.

Learn more: *For more details on the history of quarrying sandstone by the Pickard family and Mount Allison University, please see the accompanying article published by Paul Bogaard in the Tantramar Heritage Trust Newsletter The White Fence, issue 111 (November 2024), entitled "The Quarry: Sackville's Only Quarry Was Opened Three Times".*

The Naturalization of Sackville's Quarry

Nature has now taken over this area, particularly in the half-century since the quarry was last active, and the Park has evolved into a naturalized woodland and wetland area in the heart of Sackville. It encompasses two large water bodies which are up to 4 m (13 ft) deep, with the more northerly Mount Allison Pond separated from Pickard Pond by a narrow shrubby causeway. Pickard Pond is further divided into a U-shape by a narrow peninsula jutting northwards. Bowser Brook, which drains a broad area south of Charlotte Street, enters Pickard Pond from the southwest over a small waterfall. It flows out again through the flood-control structure to the east, parallel to Quarry Lane. High bluffs and cliffs serve as reminders of the quarry's past, as do large blocks of sandstone carved from the cliff and remnants of the heavy cables that once supported huge derricks.

The Quarry Park now offers a range of natural habitats that provide a sheltered refuge for a diversity of wildlife throughout the year. It provides an unusual combination of still and running fresh-water; small regenerating clearings; rock outcroppings, low sandstone cliffs, alder and willow shrubs along the banks of the ponds; and stands of coniferous and hardwood trees on wooded slopes and uplands - all tucked within this settled corner of Sackville.

Records kept by volunteer naturalists and environmental assessment reports have enhanced our understanding of the birds, mammals, and plants of the quarry. About 90 species of birds regularly occur here, of which 50 species likely nest in the park. About 23 species of mammals are likely to occur here, of which 18 have been confirmed through sightings by local naturalists or by the presence of their tracks. A 2019 survey recorded 282 vascular plant species here, including 124 (42%) not native to New Brunswick, and two species that are provincially significant. Others, such as the invasive Multiflora Rose, now limit use of the trails because of their dense growth and prickly stems and are the subject of ongoing management efforts.

Learn more: *For more details on the wildlife and plants of the Quarry Park, please see the accompanying articles on the Birds and Mammals of Sackville Quarry Park, and the Vascular Plants Recorded in Sackville Quarry Park.*

The Quarry Park Today

Mount Allison University donated the land immediately surrounding the quarry to the municipality in November 2022. It forms part of Tantramar's extensive flood-control system that minimizes impacts of periodic flooding caused by severe rainfall events, now increasing in intensity and frequency with our changing climate. In June 2023, a 3.1 m (10 ft) high flood control structure was built at the end of Quarry Lane, to enable water levels in the quarry ponds to rise during major storms and then be gradually released into outflowing Bowser Brook and the municipal drainage system downstream, with little impact on quarry habitats and wildlife.

Ownership of the quarry by the municipality of Tantramar provided an opportunity to make this unique area more accessible to town residents and visitors. Sackville's Quarry Park opened in 2025 as a part of Tantramar's public park system, a naturalized park and wetland nestled within a residential neighborhood, crossed by safe, low-impact trails and pathways. Its value is heightened by informative interpretive signs highlighting its former importance as a sandstone quarry and its current natural history value, and Tantramar's unique status as a North American Ramsar Wetland City, while protecting and enhancing its ecological integrity.

The Trail Network and Interpretive Vignettes

The Quarry Park covers an area of about 4.7 hectares (11.6 acres), with a network of over 1.1 km of trails and footpaths. Although some trails are relatively rugged, most have been improved by grading, addition of gravel, and building of steps in steep areas. The main trails are colour-coded to indicate their relative difficulty of use, and all are easily accessed by walkers with appropriate footwear, aided by hiking poles, as necessary.

The 90 m wheelchair-accessible Green Trail is a leisurely walk for those with limited mobility, sloping gradually up from the Charlotte Street parking area and then down to the ramp to the viewing deck overlooking Pickard Pond. It links there with the moderate-to-difficult Blue Trail which makes a rambling 500 m loop around Pickard Pond, with views of diverse habitats and quarrying artifacts. The Blue Trail crosses the causeway between the quarry ponds, with look-offs from the south-facing cliff and grassy picnic knoll, and links to the Quarry Lane parking area. The moderate-to-difficult Red Trail traverses 220 m of steeper ground as it circles around Mount Allison Pond to the north through open and heavily-wooded habits, with sweeping views from several high points. Smaller pathways link these trails and lead to informal entry points to the park from surrounding residential areas.

Bowser Brook enters the quarry from the south and spills into Pickard Pond over an attractive 3 m (10 ft) waterfall. The Blue Trail crosses over the brook on a sturdy wooden footbridge high above the waterfall, providing a safe crossing and destination for visitors to the quarry, with dramatic views north across the pond.

Benches and picnic tables along the trail network encourage visitors to pause briefly to enjoy views, picnic, observe birds and other wildlife, or engage in other pursuits such as artwork and science studies. Discreet interpretive panels at key locations highlight unusual aspects of the quarry's natural history. Other interpretive signs provide vignettes of its cultural history, showing how sandstone was quarried, and describing the considerable infrastructure once found here to quarry, extract, cut, and transport the sandstone blocks.

Built on the Power of Partnerships

Development and maintenance of the Quarry Park has relied on the expertise and resources of many non-government organizations (NGOs), together with local government partners. Many Tantramar residents belong to several of the following organizations and institutions, and continue to contribute to the future of the Quarry in many ways and from many perspectives. We acknowledge the contributions of many individuals from the following organizations who have helped to make the Quarry Park possible.

- **Tantramar Outdoor Club (TOC):** This local organization is focused on outdoor recreation, primarily the development and maintenance of over 20 km of cross-country ski trails in the Walker Road and Beach Hill areas of Tantramar. The TOC has served as the overall NGO lead in coordination, planning, and trail construction, and based on their considerable experience in maintaining the celebrated ski trail system, its members continue to provide ongoing trail maintenance.
- **Chignecto Naturalists' Club (CNC):** This club has celebrated over 50 years of bringing naturalists in Tantramar and Amherst together in the appreciation of local natural history and outdoor recreation. It contributed this expertise to the development of trails and natural history signage, and CNC members continue to assist in trail maintenance.
- **Tantramar Heritage Trust (THT):** This historical trust is devoted to the preservation of heritage resources in Tantramar through its two museums, research centre, and publications. This unique source of personal, published, and unpublished information and photographs of the industrial history of the Quarry served as the basis for historical interpretive signage along the trail network.
- **Municipality of Tantramar:** As the landowner of the Quarry Park, Tantramar served as the main project lead, planning the operational and administrative aspects of the project and its connections to other Town initiatives, and supporting and helping to fund infrastructure construction, trail improvement, signage, access, and parking, and related security and safety aspects.
- **Southeast Regional Commission (Plan 360):** The land planning division of the Regional Commission contributed the expertise of the Regional Trails Coordinator, who brought familiarity with trail network design, risk assessment, safe trail construction, and permitting requirements to help ensure effective planning and project completion.
- **Other funding organizations:** Through the many efforts of these partners, welcome financial contributions were provided by supportive agencies and organizations, including Blue Cross – Medavie, and the Province of New Brunswick.