Crawford Lake: The Golden Spike

Travelling Exhibition (in development)

Available 2026 onwards

ROM

The Exhibition

In 2023, international scientists selected the bottom of Crawford Lake in Milton, Ontario, as the **"golden spike"** to mark the start of a new proposed geological epoch – the Anthropocene. Crawford Lake is considered the best place on Earth to chronicle the impact of humans on the planet.

ROM is thrilled to create and tour the exhibition, *Crawford Lake: The Golden Spike,* exploring why this Canadian location has been granted such a critically significant global designation. Visitors will be invited to "read the core", revealing the story of humankind's relationship with the land. Objects, media, and graphics explore our understanding of the Anthropocene, engendering a sense of stewardship for our fragile planet.

The exhibition will open at ROM in September 2025 and be ready to tour in Fall of 2026.

ROM's Crawford Lake sediment core

Thematic Organization

The exhibition, divided into three sections, will be organized around the extraordinary Crawford Lake sediment core.

Formation and Natural History
Why and how is the formation of Crawford's landscape and lake so unique? Visitors will see 1,000 years of history layered in the Lake's core before human engagement with the land.

Images of the Escarpment and illustrations of the region demonstrate the progression of the landscape from glaciation to human settlement.

Objects like this ancient cedar tree stump reveal the age of the land. The rings on this tree demonstrate the years 1172 to 1986.

Anthropocene Markers, *The Evidence*

Using a replica of the sediment core as a guide, visitors will discover the evidence of the four key markers that scientists use to identify the Anthropocene: Agriculture, Transposition, Radiation, and Climate Change.

Agriculture: The core reveals evidence of human farming activity at Crawford Lake by the Attawandaron / Pre-Wendat peoples beginning in 1290.

Pottery fragments and traditional maize

Transposition: The spread of invasive species, such as ragweed and the leaf beetle, around the world was facilitated by human patterns of settlement and colonization.

Leaf Beetle specimen

Radiation (940s-1960s): Plutonium in lake sediments increased with nuclear weapons testing through the 1940s and 50s, followed by a sudden drop in 1963 with the signing of the nuclear weapons test ban treaty. This is visible in the Crawford Lake core.

Alomogordo glass formed by Trinity nuclear test, 1945, New Mexico

Anthracite coal

Climate Change (1940s to Present)
Fossil fuels are seen as evidence for climate change resulting from human action. Crawford Lake sediments contain excellent records of fly ash, a bi-product of burning fossil fuels.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, past and present, visitors will have an opportunity to consider ways to improve our relationship with our planet. This section of the exhibition will also examine the global significance of research and the role museums play. Objects, contemporary art, and photography will engage visitors in dialogue.

Dish with One Spoon Wampum represents a local treaty emphasizing the importance of living peacefully with the land, taking only what is necessary and always leaving enough for others and the land to thrive. It informs the ways our society is addressing climate change drivers.

ROM researchers and scientists harvest the core that forms the basis for the Crawford Lake designation. We can inspire the next generation of scientists and demonstrate the role Canadian museums play in the world today.

Core extraction.
Photo: Brenna Bartley

Tree coring notebook

ROM Curator Jock McAndrews reading Crawford Lake core

Lead Curators

Dr. Soren Brothers

The Allan and Helaine Shiff Curator of Climate Change

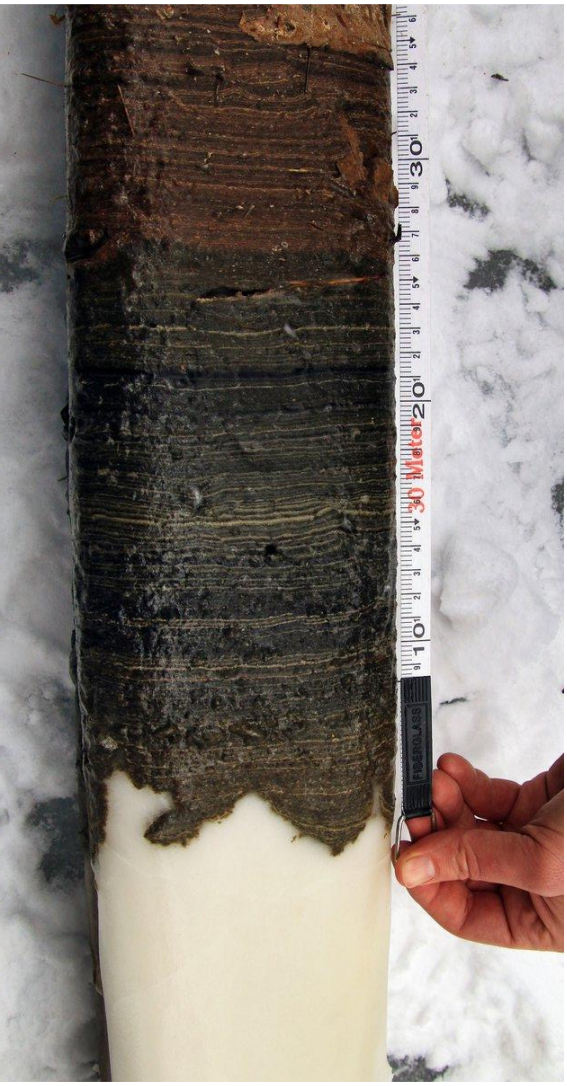
Dr. Brother's research examines the effects of climate change on lakes, and how changes in aquatic systems can influence greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere. More broadly, he is interested in understanding how feedback loops and the transdisciplinary study of lakes can help us better understand and predict global tipping points that may accelerate anthropogenic climate change.

Deborah Metsger

Assistant Curator, Botany and Acting Curator of ROM's Green Plant Herbarium.

Ms. Metsger's research and collection development activities document plant systematic relationships, biodiversity, and floristic composition in Ontario. She has broad interest in plants as the intersection of science and culture, and in promoting plant awareness through accessible plant identification tools such as the *ROM Fieldguide to Trees of Ontario* (2023), for which she is co-author. Her affiliation with Crawford Lake research dates to 1981.

About the Exhibition



Availability: from Fall 2026

Size: 1,000 -1,500 ft² / 100 - 150 m²

Content:

- Objects from ROM's collections, select Ontario loans, and Indigenous artworks
- Sediment core replica
- Graphic files (Eng/Fr) in digital format
- Select graphics on substrates (Eng/Fr)
- Digital experience files (Eng/Fr)
- AV equipment
- Tactile/touchable objects

Fees:

- Please contact
- Fee includes all content, packing/crating, in-transit insurance
- Venue responsibilities: casework, some graphic production, onsite insurance, inbound shipping, local costs.

*Note: all objects and images are representative

For more information contact:
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