



Crawford Lake: Layers in Time

Travelling Exhibition

Available from Fall 2026

ROM

The Exhibition

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

ROM is thrilled to create and tour the exhibition, *Crawford Lake: Layers in Time*, 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 opened at ROM in September 2025 and will be available to tour starting in Fall of 2026.



Close-up of the Crawford Lake core layers, or "varves".

Thematic Organization

The exhibition is organized around the extraordinary Crawford Lake sediment core.

Reading the core

A central column in the space introduces visitors to the core, teaching them about why the lake is so special, and inviting them to explore its history with a digital interactive interface. A nearby audio-video installation immerses visitors into the experience of visiting the lake.



Still from immersive video installation "A Year at Crawford Lake".



Original microscopic imagery of historical microorganisms, pollen, and other records captured in the lake's sediments are incorporated into digital interactives, revealing timelines of change.

Core Stories

Exploring the space, visitors engage with cases where the history recorded in the lake sediments comes together with objects illustrating what was happening at that time.

Indigenous Agriculture (1290s - 1500):

The core reveals crop pollens transported to the lake by Canada geese, evidence of human farming activity at Crawford Lake by Indigenous Ancestors beginning in 1290.



Canada goose with poop



Photograph of lumber in southern Ontario, late 1800s/early 1900s (Crawford family)

Sawmill (late 19th Century): In the late 1800s, the Crawford family from England built a sawmill near the lake. The record of the lake captures this event, paired with broader regional clearcutting by settlers.



Close-up of fungus causing Dutch Elm Disease

Great Acceleration (since 1950s): The mid 20th century acceleration of social and economic drivers resulted in a massive increase in the burning of fossil fuels, as well as ecological changes associated with introduced species, all captured in lake sediments.



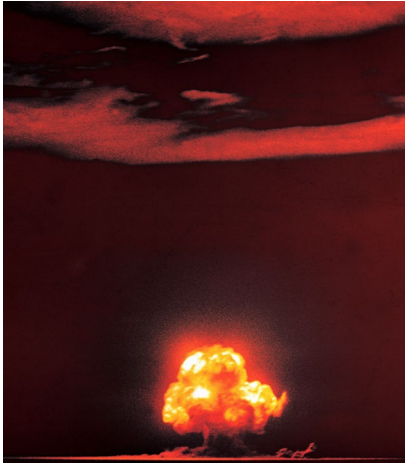
Replica of Dish With One Spoon Wampum belt

Changing Course (1960s to Present)

The lake records do not only show the negative impacts of human decisions, but also positive changes in response to environmental destruction. Here is evidence of our ability to change course, for the better.

The Anthropocene Debate

With Crawford Lake being selected as the leading “golden spike” candidate of the proposed Anthropocene epoch, part of the exhibition introduces visitors to the concept of the Anthropocene, and the value of research in helping us make sense of, and enrich, our relationship with our planet.



Trinitite (fused silica), created with the first nuclear explosion (Trinity Test, Los Alamos, NM, 1945, photo on far left)

Research beginning in 1970 with a museum curator and his students laid the groundwork for the Crawford Lake designation as a site of global significance. More recent work by Dr. Francine McCarthy and “Team Crawford” colleagues is showcased in a video installation by the acclaimed documentary production studio, Mercury Films. ***We can inspire the next generation of scientists and demonstrate the role museums play in the world today.***



ROM Curator Jock McAndrews reading Crawford Lake core



New core being inspected and processed by Team Crawford scientists and students. Photo: Patterson Research Group, Carleton University

Lead Curators

Dr. Soren Brothers

The Allan and Helaine Shiff Curator of Climate Change

Dr. Brothers' 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. He has been a member of Team Crawford since 2023 and is expanding curatorial research on the lake.



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 Field Guide 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 and select Ontario loans
- Graphic files (Eng/Fr) in digital format
- Select graphics on substrates (Eng/Fr)
- Digital experience files (Eng/Fr)
- AV equipment

Fees:

- Please contact
- Fee includes all content, packing/crating
- Venue responsibilities: casework, some graphic production, insurance, inbound shipping, local costs, costs associated with ROM couriers for de-/installation.

Crawford Lake sediment core (CRA23-BC-1F-A)
Photo Credit: Carling Walsh, Patterson Research Group,
Carleton University

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