

Sydney Mines

Fossil Interpretation Project

The community of Sydney Mines is working towards the establishment of a regional fossil interpretive and ecotourism centre for the Sydney coalfield.

Sydney Mines is the site of a classic exposure of the once great forests of the Coal Age. In the cliffs at Sutherland's Corner are exposed ten horizons of fossil forests, buried some 300 million years ago and now exposed through the erosion of the coastline. The great fossil trees of the Coal Age stand like pillars as if supporting the town above - a fitting metaphor for the heritage of this former coal mining community.

First described by Richard Brown in the 1840s to the prestigious Geological Society of London, the site fell into obscurity until it was rediscovered only recently. It was here, at Sydney Mines, that Brown first established that such Coal Age trees in fact represent fossil forests, entombed where they once grew on the peaty soils that would millions of years later be mined as coal.

The site at Sydney Mines is equally steeped in the social history of Cape Breton: here was the first coal mine on the north side of the Sydney Coalfield, opened in the 18th Century by Des Barres, French Governor of Isle Royale. The 19th Century colliery office of the General Mining Association stands at the entrance to the site, while on the hill above, the home of Richard Brown watches over the cliffs ...

The community, through the initiative of *New Deal Development*, has seized the opportunity of this rediscovery to realize long term, sustainable economic benefits from their geological heritage, which has shaped the social and mining history of Cape Breton.



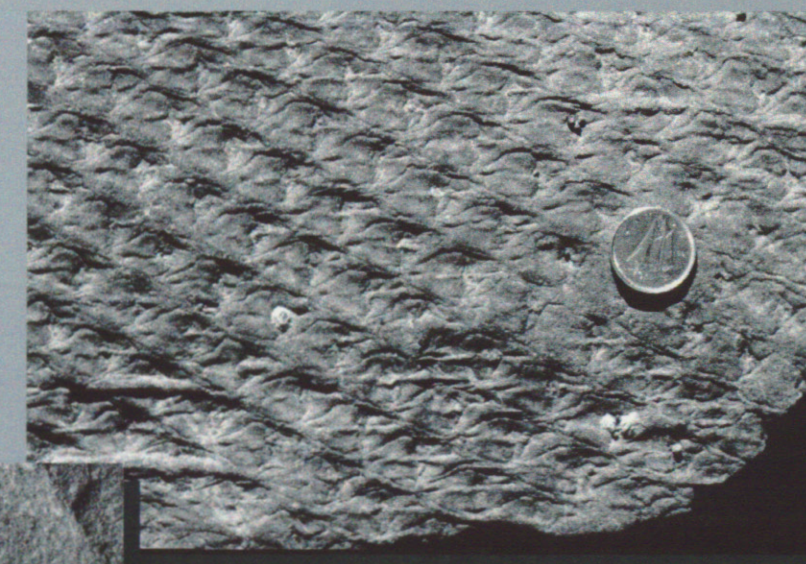
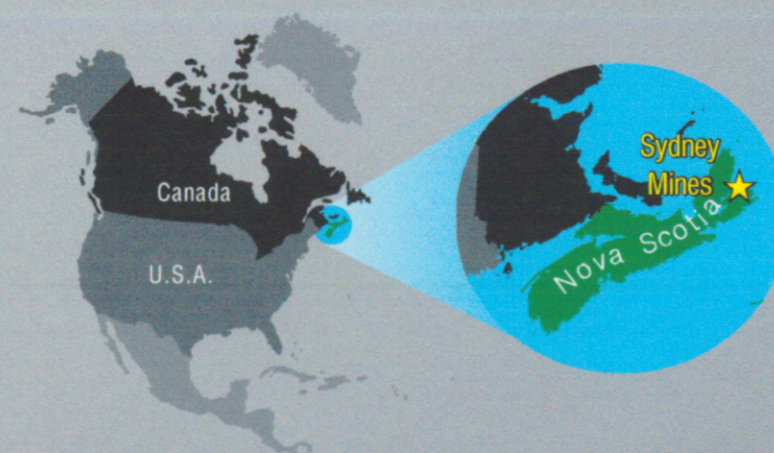
Nova Scotia
Natural Resources
Minerals and Energy Branch

Illustration ME 1998-3

J.H. Calder



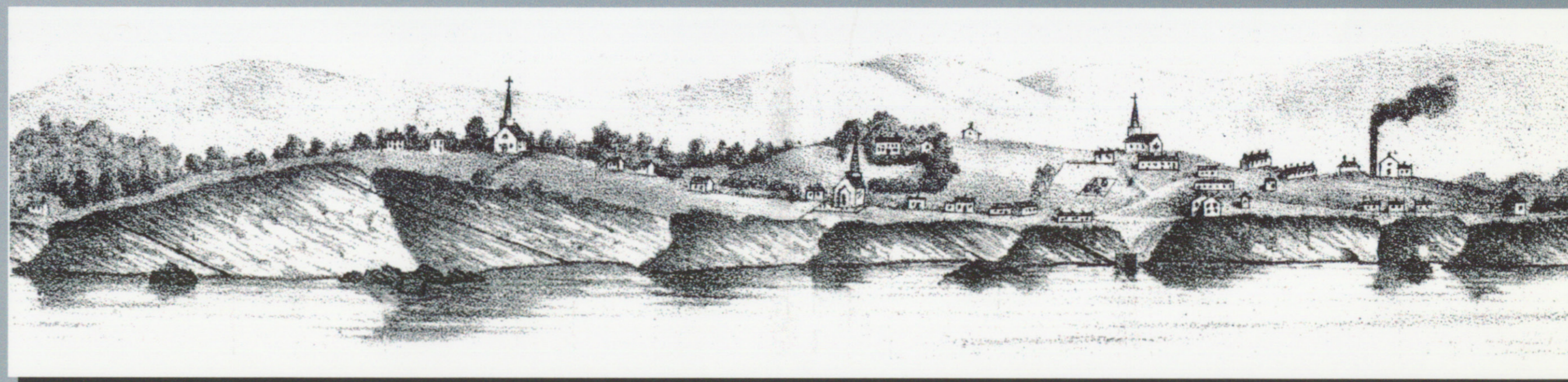
The site at Sutherland's Corner as it appeared in 1994: erosion of the sea cliffs provides an ever changing vista of the fossil forests.



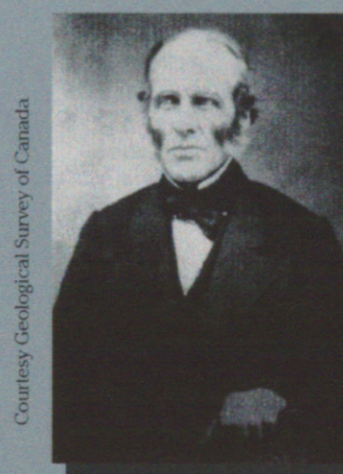
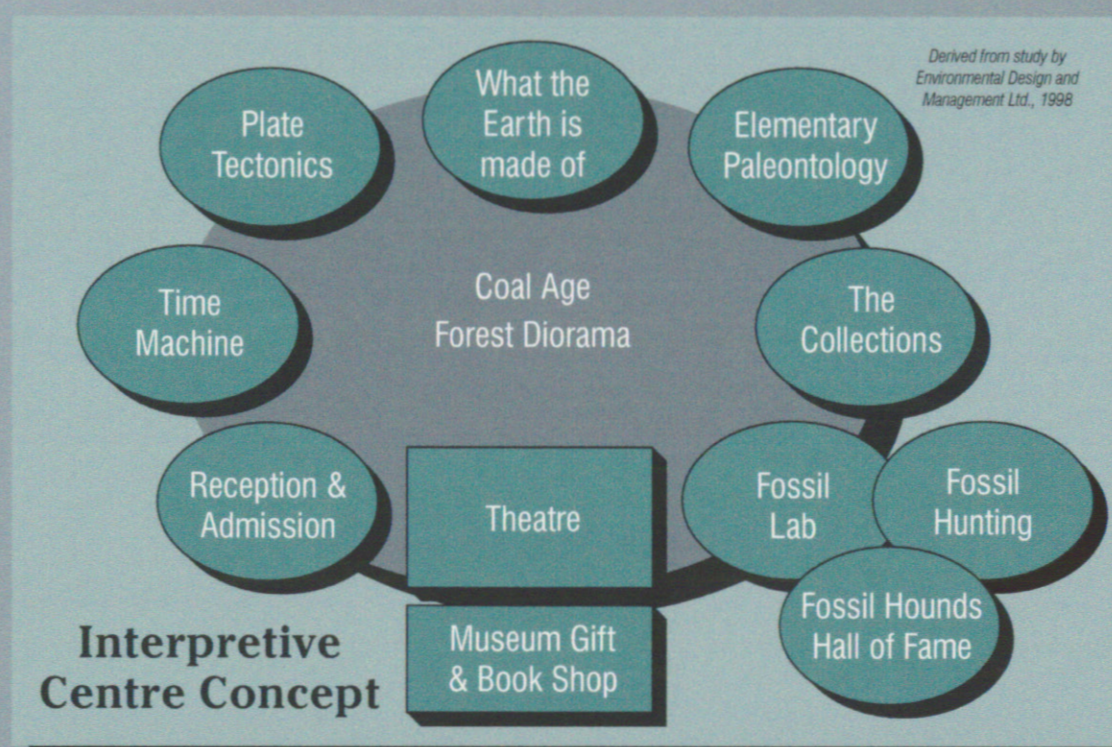
Impression of the bark of *Lepidodendron*, one of the great Coal Age trees



Delicate foliage of the scrambling plant *Sphenophyllum oblongifolium*.



The north shore of Sydney Harbour at Sydney Mines; detail from Brown's *The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of Cape Breton Island* (1871).



Richard Brown

Richard Brown (1805 - 1882), manager for the London based General Mining Association and pioneer of Nova Scotian geology, who first described the fossil forests of Sydney Mines in the 1840's.