

From the Mineral Inventory Files

The Sibley Mountain Slate Quarry

An obscure, but nonetheless significant slate quarry once operated along the west bank of McLean Brook, which drains the western flank of Sibley Mountain, Colchester County (Fig. 1). The quarry dates from the late 1770s, so it's likely one of the oldest known mine sites in the province; only the early Acadian coal mines at Joggins (for Fort Beausejour and Port Royal) and Port Morein (for Louisbourg) are known to be older.

The quarry was built on land owned by John Olemixon, a close friend of John Wentworth, who prior to his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia in 1791, served as Surveyor General of the Kings Woods for Nova Scotia. Wentworth commissioned Olemixon to build a slate quarry on his land to provide shingles and flagstone for buildings in Halifax. Olemixon brought in experienced quarry manager Jonathan Bulgin and quarrymen from England to construct a quarry along McLeans Brook, which at that time was raw wilderness. A two-storey manager's house and workers' cabins were built, and the quarry produced shingles that were taken by ox cart over a very rough road to Fort Ellis

on the Stewiacke River. From there they were taken by barge and schooner to Halifax and overseas to England.

Sibley Mountain is underlain by the Glen Brook Formation, uppermost formation of the Cambro-Ordovician Halifax Group (Fig. 1). The Glen Brook Formation consists of interbedded, greyish metasiltstone and slate, which typically has little or no sulphide content and is well suited to making shingles and flagstone. Currently, Scotia Stone Limited produces its fine stone products from the same Glen Brook Formation rocks at East Gore, roughly 30 km west of Sibley Mountain. Production continued from the Sibley quarry until the early 1860s when the operation closed, in large part because the quarry lost all its workers to higher paying positions in the province's newly discovered and developing gold mines.

Today the site is heavily overgrown but several interesting features remain. Most prominent is a 2-3 m high, 30 m long slate retaining wall that follows the west bank of the brook. The wall has partially

collapsed in recent years. The quarry itself is higher on the bank and has a narrow, gorge-like entrance, which opens into a 10 m wide and 40 m long quarry. Foundations, waste piles and a few open cuts surround the quarry. About 250 m to the northwest is the substantial fireplace and foundation of Mr. Bulgin's two-storey house (Fig. 2).

A visit to the quarry site is an interesting trek back in time. It's easy to imagine the rough conditions and hardships that workers endured living and working in what was such a remote area. The remnants of the fireplace in particular evoke a feeling of awe. If you do venture into the location the sights are impressive, but please show respect and be aware that this site has a municipal historical designation.

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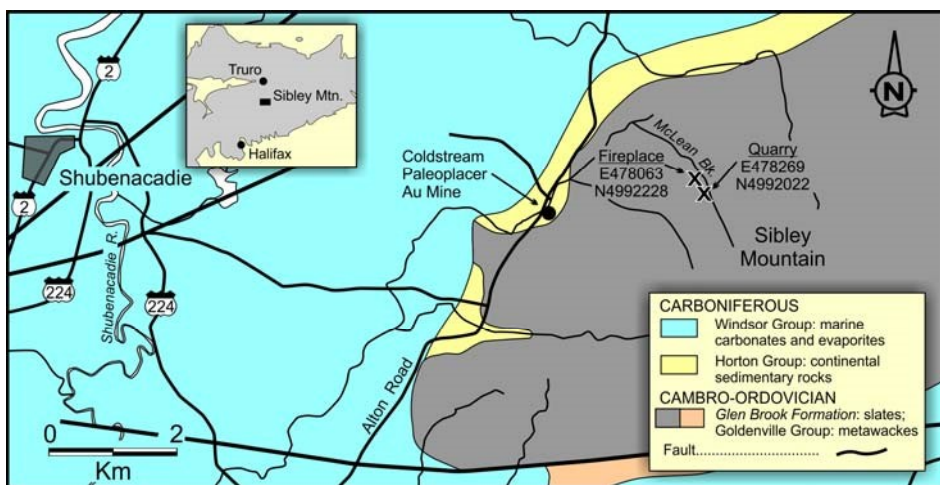


Figure 1. Geology of the Sibley Mountain area, southern Colchester County, showing the location (and NAD83 UTM coordinates) of the Sibley Mountain slate quarry and the fireplace of the manager's house.



Figure 2. Remnants of the fireplace of the two-storey manager's house at the Sibley Mountain slate quarry; rock hammer for scale.