

Talking Treaties Keep Talking Exchange

These activities are starting points, suggesting possible directions for lines of questioning and investigation. Arts-based research is a quick way to start the conversation. Take what you've done here and use it. Teach others. We'd like to keep the conversation going through programming to share treaty guide exercise outcomes and art. To find out more and join future conversations, visit talkingtreaties.ca

Figure 1. Map of the High Park, 2022.

Figure 2. Map of Black Oak Savannah stump and core sample locations in High Park. Illustration reworked by Roxanne Fernandes, referenced from Dinh, Theresa, Hewitt, Nina, and Drezner, Taly Dawn (2015). Fire History Reconstruction in the Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*) Savanna of High Park, Toronto. *Natural Areas Journal*, 35(3): 468-475. <https://doi.org/10.3375/043.035.0310>.

Figure 3. Original photo referenced from Paul O'Hara, Field Botanists of Ontario Newsletter, 24(3): 8. ISBN: 1180-1417.

TORONTO BIENNIAL OF ART

Your

Tkaron:to

Companion

Guide

BOOKLET 2:
Day Trip to
High Park

Mobile Arts Curriculum

Travelling through Toronto/Tkaron:to, revisit all your favourite places through the living history of the city.

"Your Tkaron:to Companion Guide" is a passport to place- and arts-based explorations of the complex and contested ways the city of Toronto was established. The activities in this guide will take you on field trips that

invite hands-on learning and inspire critical reflection through embodied understandings of land-based relationships; learners will explore Indigenous geographies and how colonialism has impacted both human and non-human connection.

Toronto/Tkaron:to roughly translates from Mohawk to "over there is the place of the submerged tree" or "tree in the water."

Location:



Figure 1. Map of High Park, 2022.

Here are some actions:

How might you utilize/offer your land (i.e., front yard, backyard, or park space) to benefit Indigenous Peoples and organizations in Toronto? How might you partner with Indigenous Peoples to better steward these lands upon which you live (whether you are a renter, an "owner," or a visitor)?

If Indigenous People are granted land stewardship to areas in Toronto, what kind of support can you give to let them do what they want with it, freely?

Where can we find direct action on the land, by Indigenous People? Where are people "reclaiming" land, practicing ceremony, and actively being on the land? Hint: consider such activities as planting corn on the Tumber or undertaking cultural burns in High Park. Consider the research you have done today!

What is your relationship to these sites and actions? Do you feel it is your place to take part or to step back?

ACTIVITY 5:

Land Back

Archaeological evidence suggests that “High Park,” named by English settler John Howard in the 1800’s, had been travelled and inhabited by thousands of Indigenous people since the last ice age, 11,000 years ago.

Today, Toronto is estimated to have an Indigenous population of at least 70,000 people, the largest Indigenous population in Ontario and the fourth largest in Canada. Indigenous residents come from across Turtle Island, but roughly half are Anishinaabek, and there are also large numbers of Haudenosaunee, Métis, and Cree or Oji-Cree residents.

Imagine giving the land back to the original stewards.

...the matter of land back is not merely a matter of justice, rights or “reconciliation”; like the United Nations, we believe that Indigenous jurisdiction can indeed help mitigate the loss of biodiversity and climate crisis. In the Canadian context, the practices and philosophies profiled here as case studies contain answers to global questions. Canada—and states generally must listen.

—Pasternak, Shiri, & King, Hayden (2019). *Landback: A Yellowhead Institute, Red Paper*. The Yellowhead Institute. redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org.

High Park

Plan a visit to High Park to look for indications of Indigenous stewardship of the land.

Visitors can traverse High Park through the remaining 399 acres of a Black Oak Savannah that once stretched from Lake Ontario through the Humber River Trail, eastward to Roncesvalles, and northwards to what is now Highway 401. Here, one can encounter a still-wide array of medicinal plants, birds, pollinators, and small animals.

Here in Tkaron:to, a rich biota/natural world abounding with medicines and life was consciously sustained by the various stewarding nations through practices that included polyculture (cultivating a variety of crops in order to mimic the diversity of natural ecosystems), mindful hunting and harvesting, ceremonial observance, and controlled burns that managed the regeneration of forests and prevented devastating wildfires. By these means, these nations maintained the health of this land, ensuring that it remained neepawaa – a place of plenty – for thousands of years.

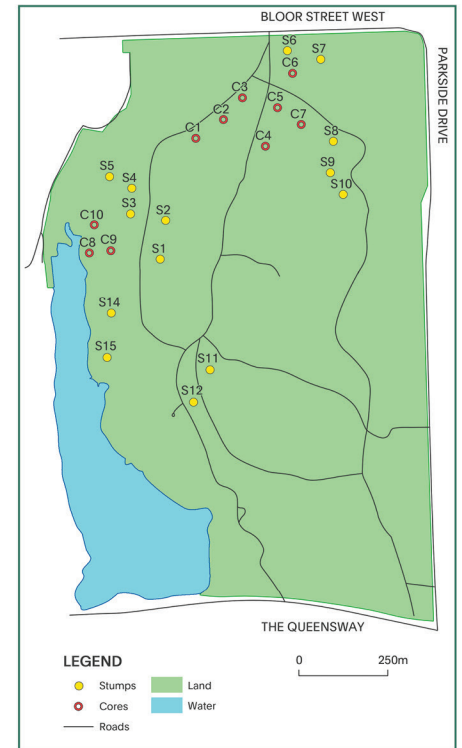


Figure 2. Map of Black Oak Savannah stump and core sample locations in High Park.

Did you know?

Mino Bimaadiziwin is the Anishinaabe term for Custodial Ethic, original instructions, walking in beauty, the good life, and Indigenous knowledge.

ACTIVITY 1:

Marker Trees

Find signs of
Indigenous
stewardship
in the park!

We are all looking for signs in life. *Which way do I go? What is my calling? Where should I live?* Though there may not be explicit signage to guide your way, Indigenous stewardship is still visible through human-made landscape features.

Marker trees were made by bending and shaping a sapling to form a distinctive shape. When you find a marker tree, they can indicate trails, shelter, caves, spiritual access points, hunting camps, and significant events.

Look for marker trees at High Park. Indicate on the map it's approximate location. Then sit down below or near the marker tree and reflect on your interaction with it (if you can't find a marker tree with its distinctive L-shape, find a tree that speaks to you).

Take direction from the branches of the tree and make notes.

Figure 3. Image of a Marker Tree in Southern Ontario.

How do you declare your intentions to the tree?

What are your physical impulses? To sit beneath the tree?
To walk away? To maintain distance?

How do you think this encounter will change your
relationship with this land, and your stewardship for it?

BLACK OAK SAVANNAH HIGH PARK TREASURE HUNT

NAME	SKETCH IT	PARTS USED	USES
maple			
oak			
cedar			
beech			
pine			
dogwood			
cherry			
sassafras			
sumac			
milkweed			
jewelweed			
nettle			
bee balm			
columbine			
cone flower			
lichen			
woodland fern			

What lessons do the plants and animals you've observed have to pass down to us? How has this treasure hunt of all the gifts found in High Park's Oak Savannah supported this idea for you?

Go on a treasure hunt! Look for the following nature finds through High Park, consulting an app or field guide book if you have one. Fill in the chart with notes, sketches and ideas. You can select from the following word guide to help you fill in the chart.

Which parts of the tree were used?	
Bark	Leaves
Sap	Roots
Seeds	

What were they used for?
Food
Ceremony
Medicine
Tools/utility

Sketch the marker tree and sketch your intentions around it here:

In its broadest sense, stewardship is the recognition of our collective responsibility to retain the quality and abundance of our land, air, water and biodiversity, and to manage this natural capital in a way that conserves all of its values, be they environmental, economic, social or cultural.

—The Centre for Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Inc., (2009). *A Stewardship Roadmap for Canada, A Report of the Strengthening Stewardship... Investing at Every Step Conference Calgary, Alberta, July 8–11, 2009.* The Land Stewardship Centre of Canada.

Sense-Based Research

A visit to Grenadier Pond

Stand at the shoreline of Grenadier Pond and reflect on what is required to walk softly and live well. Notice the living beings that depend on the wetland. Traveling through the park, what have you learned about good stewardship practises?

Start at Grenadier Pond and write the first 5 words you think of that describe each of the 5 senses:

I hear...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I taste...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I touch...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I see...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I smell...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

ACTIVITY 4:

High Park's Black Oak Savannah

A savannah is an ecosystem of grasses and trees that are widely spaced so that the canopy of trees does not close. The open canopy allows light and air to reach the ground to support the plants and animals below. High Park's Black Oak Savannah stretches from Lake Ontario through the Humber River Trail, and eastward to Roncesvalles. As far back as 4000 years, this ecosystem was maintained by the original stewards of this land through controlled and sustained fires. The judicious management of burning stimulated the growth of plants and tall grasses, inviting animals and discouraging insects.

It is still an intact ecosystem today, though it has diminished greatly in size. As you walk through High Park's Black Oak Savannah, and throughout the park, go on a treasure hunt to see if you can find these plants and medicines. Try to make notes of the various uses and properties of each of these plants:

NOW ZOOM IN!

Zoom in on the details of something in nature you have found near Grenadier Pond – the vein of a blade of grass that carries water to its roots, the swirl design of an empty snail shell, a petal of a flower.



This is your sense-based research. What does it tell you without a shadow of a doubt? What has this reflection told you about the pond's history, life, and its needs?

ACTIVITY 3:

Sacred Spaces

Wildlife and plant life were managed across the park, providing readily available medicines including willow bark, rosehip, and goldenrod. A 1921 report includes a story of finding a red ochre burial of ten humans, seated, some young, north of Grenadier Pond. The remains were not properly excavated and the site is controversial. There have been claims made that the park is home to ancient mounds.

Torontonians call Bear Mound “Hawk Hill” (next to Grenadier Restaurant) and climb to its top to better view the many species of birds who make use of its convenient updrafts as they turn westward along the shoreline on their great migration journeys. Whether Bear Mound is a burial mound, an effigy mound, or a place of ceremony, it remains sacred to the Elders who protect this and all the earthworks in High Park – and to the Indigenous denizens of this area.

As you travel through the park, filled with hundreds of visitors each day, reflect on good stewardship practices. You may also want to reflect on sacred spaces (and the respect they are owed) and issues of consent:

How do you approach the land?

How do you communicate your essence and intentions?

How do you listen for consent from humans or non-humans?

How do you know if or when consent has been granted?