

OLD TOWN TORONTO

Heritage Landscape and Resources Guide

Historical Overview

Natural History

The Old Town is situated on terrain that has undergone considerable natural evolution over many millions of years. The following chart illustrates the major geological changes that have taken place in the Toronto area (Key Sources: Bring Back the Don, pp. 21-26 and Special Places: The Changing Ecosystems of the Toronto Region, p. 11-27)).

Period	Landscape Evolution
450 million years ago	The region was covered with shallow seas; sediments from the seas became blue-grey shale.
150,000 years ago	Bedrock became buried under glacial dn'fc made of till and clay.
12,000 years ago	<p>The Don River Valley was covered with a body of water called Lake Iroquois. A The old shoreline that period can still be seen today: at the top of the Scarborough Bluffs, around Lake Ontario and at Toronto (the Davenport hill, visible along Avenue Road - Casa Loma stands on the Lake Iroquois shoreline).</p> <p>' At that time, the Don River carried sand and sediment into Lake Iroquois, resulting in the existing baymouth bar from the Scarborough Bluffs west to the Lower Don Valley,</p>
10,000 years ago	When Lake Iroquois drained, Lake Ontario began to be formed, the Don River curved to flow around the sand bar. Since then, ithas continued to carry sediment which helped form the Toronto Islands (which were once a peninsula).

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The diaries of early travellers such as Mrs. Elizabeth Simcoe, the wife of Governor John Graves Simcoe who arrived in 1793, provide some details about the natural environment at that time: the Don River was full of salmon and other fish; the valley was thickly forested with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees; wolves, deer, wolverine, lynx, bear, and various migratory birds flourished in the area¹.

¹ For those with a strong interest in natural heritage, the following recent publication is an excellent source: Roots, Betty L., Donald A. Chant and Conrad E. Heidenreich, eds. 1999. *Social Places: The Changing Ecosystems of the Toronto Region*. University of British Columbia Press: Vancouver, BC.