Moses Mountain– A Colourful Autumn Hike

BY PETER WALLACE

There are very few look-offs from promontories along the edge of the South Mountain as good as the two at Moses Mountain, just south of Windsor, off Highway 14. The highest point is 210 m in elevation, and the views are greatly appreciated after a final short and relatively steep climb to get there. It is beautiful in the autumn when the hardwoods in the vistas provide an impressive collage of colour.

At the first look-off to the southwest (see photo below), one can see Falls Lake, the source of the water for the hydroelectric works at Mill Section on the Avon River. Running north from Mill Section is a ridge line with windmills, a testament to green energy production in Nova Scotia. The second and highest look-off is to the northeast on the other side of the hill, and if it is a clear day, you can see out over the Windsor Valley to the Avon and Kennetcook River estuaries. The walk between these two views passes through infant pioneer forest. The trail is fine in all four seasons, but be aware that in the winter there may be a lot more snow up here than in the Valley. Rainy days are a bit of a slog and you'll likely miss the view.

Directions: South of Martock, just off Highway 14, is a small parking area controlled by NS Power. It is a bit tricky to find the turn off from Highway 14. Approximately 6.8 km past Ski Martock on Highway 14, look for the blue municipal address sign number 2955, and turn right here onto a small dirt road. 2955 is the number of the house on the left once you turn into the dirt road. Across from the house, turn right into the small parking area. Straight ahead a short distance are gates across the dirt road, which is managed by NS Power. Park in the small lot even if the gates are open, because they might get closed and locked while you are hiking. As always, respect others, keep dogs leashed, and carry all your garbage out.

Description: The trail is a 3.8 km in-and-out hike that starts as a NS Power forestry road and ATV trail, and is quite wide, rocky and rough (see map on page 19). From the parking lot, take the immediate right fork and go through what appears to be an equipment storage area. This is followed by a bridge over the Avon River. The road branches again. Take the left branch and go up the hill alongside the river for about

800 m. Take the foot trail that goes off to the right here. The trail is quite evident and is the only foot trail in that area, but watch for it. Follow this trail up to the first look off, which is a rounded knob-like promontory or bald hill to the right with a great unobscured view to the southwest. From here, continue up to the second look-off with a view to the northeast that is somewhat obscured by trees. Down off the summit there are some small areas with grasses, bushes and small windblown trees (including beech and oak).

The trail leading up goes over and around a multitude of granite boulders of varying sizes. Some are large monsters that are lichen, moss, and fern covered (see photo). The promontory is rounded granite and lichen-covered. The most common lichens here are crustose

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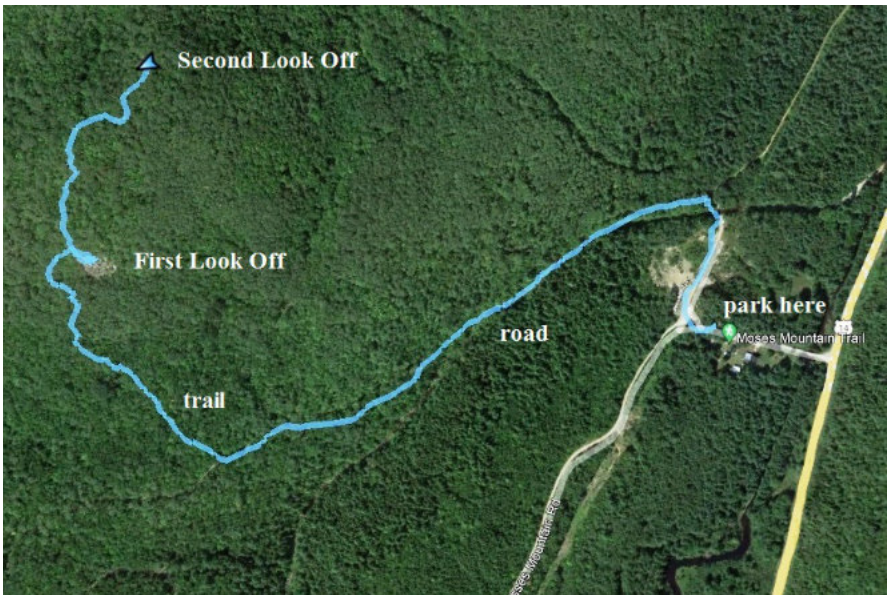
lichens, which form a thin crust over surfaces. If you must walk on a lichen, tread carefully on the crusty ones. Foliose lichens (leafy and anchored at the centre, such as target lichens) should be avoided because they take years, if not decades, to regrow when they are damaged. In the grassy areas, try not to disturb the fruticose (upright) lichens such as reindeer moss, which are equally fragile.



There are a few wet spots on the trail, but there is little need to worry about getting your feet wet. The summit is quite open with smaller trees (lots of oak and beech), while the trail up is more densely treed and boulder strewn. The gradient and the boulders give the trail a moderate rating, but regardless, children will love the trail because it is short, interesting, and fun. There are interesting dead trees with lots of woodpecker holes, and the usual understory of flowering herbaceous plants, ferns, and fungi. Keep your eye out for interesting plants, birds, and if you are lucky, a mammal or two (deer, hare, etc.).

To return, just walk downhill all the way! If you have children with you, stop and play poohsticks at the bridge (drop sticks in the water on the upstream side of the bridge and watch to see which stick comes out from under the bridge first). This is a hike where one feels a sense of accomplishment when finished!

Peter Wallace is a retired geologist who lives on the South Mountain and leads a weekly hiking group of retirees to areas of natural beauty and interest in the region. Peter contributed the photos and map specifications.