



## *The Melancthon mega-quarry application was withdrawn last year due to public outcry. Here are the landscapes and faces behind the headlines*

Photos and captions by Jason van Bruggen

Late last year, The Highland Companies withdrew the application for a “mega-quarry” in Melancthon Township near Shelburne. The prospect of such a quarry, which would have eviscerated over 900 hectares of Ontario’s richest farmland, spurred people from all walks of life to voice concerns about the possible far-reaching effects not only on the food supply but also on the water table. Two key food-and-music protest events – Foodstock in 2011 and Soupstock in 2012 – drew tens of thousands of supporters to the cause.

The announcement of the proposal’s cancellation came as a surprise to many who believed the multi-billion-dollar U.S. hedge fund backing the Highland Company would provide the resources for a long war of attrition. Even more surprising was the gracious-in-defeat statement released by a Highland spokesperson: “The application does not have sufficient support from the community and government to justify proceeding with the approval process.”

Jason van Bruggen’s photographs offer a multifaceted view of the people and landscapes behind the mega-quarry opposition. ■

*–Ned Morgan*

**Right page (top to bottom starting from top left)**

❶ Danny Beaton, a Mohawk activist, helped organize a five-day walking protest from Queen’s Park to Jim Black’s farm, 200 feet from the proposed quarry site. This walk was one of the first events to garner widespread media coverage of the mega-quarry protest. ❷ Singer-songwriter Sarah Harmer spent years fighting against a similar development near her home in the Mount Nemo Escarpment region, which recently ended in the abandonment of plans for a quarry. ❸ Blaine van Bruggen of communications firm Dot Dot Dash is an activist and apiarist who helped create the media and publicity campaign that brought the issue of this mega-quarry to the attention of many Canadians. ❹ Singer-songwriter Colleen Hixenbaugh at Foodstock. ❺ Brad Long, of Cafe Belong, has been a strong advocate for local and organic produce in the Toronto area for years. He is one of the many celebrity chefs who helped create these epic epicurean events. ❻ Like so many people who learned of the proposal, Second World War veteran Sam Garnett was concerned that a mega-quarry could be allowed to destroy this bountiful region. ❼ Troubadour Hayden broke a three-year performing hiatus to play at Foodstock. ❽ Area resident Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo lent his voice to this struggle for a number of years, playing numerous benefit concerts to support awareness of the issue. ❾ Dutch Academic Evelien Boonstoppel was visiting the Hills of the Headwaters when she heard about the mega-quarry proposal. ❿ Local organic farmer Brent Preston, who together with his wife Gillian, runs the New Farm. Brent is an eloquent advocate for this precious landscape and helped articulate just how rich is its “Honeywood silt loam” soil. ❾ Ron Sexsmith, one of Canada’s most critically acclaimed songwriters. ❿ The David Suzuki Foundation, along with the Canadian Chef’s Congress, organized Soupstock, which saw 40,000 converge at Woodbine Park to share a bowl and make themselves heard.







I took this in the garden at our Melancthon farm. We plant enough vegetables to feed our family for much of the year. It gives us a lot of satisfaction as a family to be able to grow our own food and know exactly where our food comes from.



Ralph Armstrong and his wife Mary Lynne run a 200-acre mixed farm in Melancthon Township. Their family has worked this piece of land since 1853. They ended up forming the unlikely heart of community resistance to the mega-quarry.

Looking north on Prince of Wales Road in Mulmur Township on a typically misty fall morning. The unique topography and elevation of this region creates unusual weather patterns in what is often called “the Rooftop of Ontario.”





This is a photo from late in the season when the potatoes have been harvested, leaving only a few stray pumpkins to add a splash of colour to the landscape. We refer to these unplanned (but not unwelcome) inhabitants as “volunteers.”





A early snowfall frosts the rim of a cow  
trough in Mulmur and transforms the  
muddy pasture into a white world.



My daughter enjoying the daily ritual of jumping into one of the well-fed ponds and lakes in the region. The source water, which oozes out of this landscape in so many places, is wonderfully clean and pure.