

# Cougar scatters proof

FORENSIC analysis on an 8-inch (20 cm) piece of dung might finally prove the existence of cougar in Ontario.

The feces, found northeast of Kenora, "is the first solid, or semi-solid, proof," said Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) biologist Neil Dawson.

MNR technician Lil Anderson collected the still-warm scat while tracking the animal in March, 1998.

Alberta Natural Resources Service biologist Tom Packer then compared it with those of native western cougars. "Based on the results, scat sample, and footprint photos, it seems conclusive that a cougar made that scat," he reported.

"We might have the return of a predator or just found proof of something that's always been here in low numbers," Dawson said. "As with everything dealing with

cougars, there's little hard information."

The province's last-known cougar was shot near Creemore in 1884. Hundreds of inconclusive sightings have been reported since. While southern Ontario sightings might be escaped pets, Dawson said this animal was probably wild.

A native cougar was shot on the other side of the Ontario-Manitoba border in 1973, and another captured in Minnesota in 1991.

-Ray Ford



Blair Dawson photo

## Firearms amnesty extended

A SIX-MONTH extension to a firearms amnesty, to have ended May 31, was announced in June.

Owners of unregistered restricted firearms were given the extra time to obtain Firearms Acquisition Certificates required to complete registration because "We didn't think enough people heard about the amnesty announcement in December," said Justice Department Public Affairs Officer Janet Long.

Restricted firearms include handguns, except those already prohibited. A separate amnesty for owners of short-barrelled .25- or .32-calibre handguns ends December 1, 1999.

Firearms owners not wanting to go through licensing may turn them in to police. Compensation will not be paid.

-John Daxds