

A Walk on the Edge – January 18, 2025

My Imperfect Beach

Cardigan North, Prince Edward Island

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Islandness Culture, Change & Identity on Small Islands – Dr. Laurie Brinklow

It was a bitterly cold early in the morning when my husband and I started on our beach walk outside our home in Cardigan North. But it had been so long since the tide had been out far enough, we were committed to taking the plunge (as it were) and walk while we had a beach to walk on. This beach which I've walked on hundreds of times was scattered with memories spanning 60 years. In the photo below, I am standing by a birch tree that once stood on the bank of the river. The picture to the right is of my parents next to the same tree some 35 years ago when it (and they) were still alive. The bank has retreated

about 15 feet in the past 35 years.



Erosion is one of the prices we pay to live so close to the edge. We still have a good 70 feet to go, so with some care, we should be able to weather another 100 years or so. Our remedy is to allow nature to be the barrier it has always been. That is, the fallen trees, brush, rocks and driftwood are left to make up the natural protection from the waves and tide.

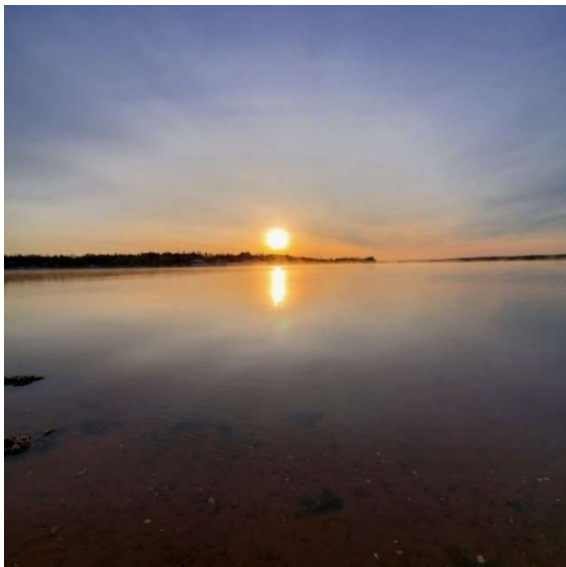
Not everyone has the same idea.

Our next-door neighbour has taken a less subtle approach to shore protection. His method uses a concrete barrier that instead of utilizing nature in the distribution of the



waves, he sought to deflect them in a much more aggressive way. The vertical sea wall does not absorb the force of the waves but diverts them both under and around it. As seen in the photo, it is only a matter of time before the ocean will erode under the wall resulting in its eventual collapse. Nature will always win.

Everywhere I look, the stark beauty and the variance of nature can be seen. On this chilly, still morning, I was able to capture the snow crystals on the plants and rocks on the beach. The sun was just rising, and the river inlet was calm.





Seabirds were calling and we could hear them splash as they fished in the channel. Now and then, a plump grebe would fly overhead, its wings making a squeaking noise as the wind blew through its feathers. Farther down the beach, a house stood in an open field, neglected for many years. There are no trees between it and the beach, but it is set way back from the dangers of the surf. It may have 150 years before the sea reclaims the land.



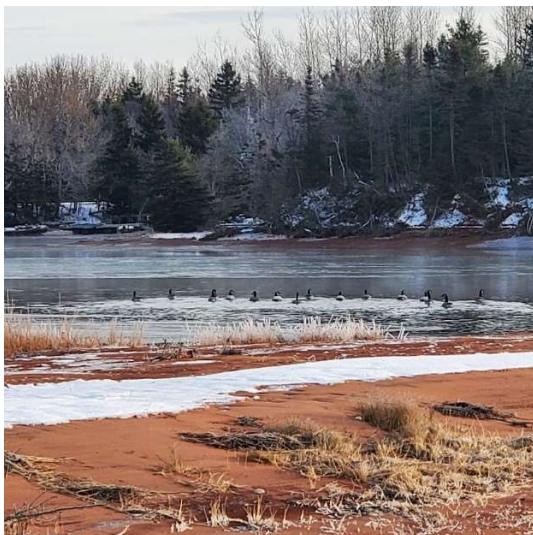
The freeze-thaw cycle that PEI is subjected to every year is evident in the rock splitting in the picture below. My beach is not the soft, white sand kind found on the north shore of PEI. Rather, it is a red sand beach with many rocks, shells, driftwood and deadfall. An imperfect beach. My imperfect beach. One that has provided me with a lifetime of memories. Clam digging as a child with my brothers and cousins, swimming in the warm summer water so different from the January slush of today. Children. Grandchildren. Continuity. Change.



A short distance down the beach, there is a sandy beach, much more attractive to those who seek the pleasure of reclining in the sun with a good book and a cold drink. A perfect beach? Perhaps...for some.



Still further on, I come upon a flock of geese that are wintering over in the open waters of the river. Some 30-40 are gliding around in the water, wary of my intrusion. They congregate toward the middle of the small bay; confident, safe.



The house by the bridge has enlisted the help of island stone to protect their shore. This method blends the red island sandstone with the landscape of the beach making it more esthetically pleasing and a more effective way to protect the shoreline. The distribution of the waves dissipates the energy more effectively than a vertical barrier. And the Province has taken a still different tactic to hold back the sea. Imported stone from the mainland reinforces the nearby bridge. I wonder which method will weather the wind and tides?



My husband left earlier for the warmth of the kitchen and the coffee that awaits, leaving me to my wanderings. After about 45 more minutes of walking, the sun is rising higher in the sky and with it, the wind is picking up from the northwest. I face that direction and stride purposefully toward my warm home and hot coffee.



My face is almost frostbitten by the time I reach home. My walk on the edge is over for today. Another pocketful of memories. Until next time, my imperfect beach.

