

# THE OUTER CAPE

A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY



THOMAS F. SWEENEY, JR.

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This book is dedicated to Abby and Carrie for allowing me to drag them to places they would rather not go; Rosie and Julius who were up for anything. Special thanks to Mike and Nanette for their friendship and support.

Cover Photo: Bound Brook Island, Wellfleet  
Back Cover Photo: Marconi Station, Wellfleet

## FORWARD

Outer Cape Cod has two distinct personalities. The open Atlantic on one side is tempestuous, petulant, wild and unpredictable, while the sheltered Cape Cod Bay on the other is calm, amenable, comforting and dependable. The “back beach” has large waves and deep water, while the bayside has extreme low tides that reveal the largest tidal flats in the United States.

The Outer Cape is losing up to 3 feet each year to the ocean. On some years it can lose as much as 20 feet. The bay side is eroding at a slower rate. The beach I walked on as a child is now a couple hundred feet offshore, a playground for seals. In the not so distant future the kettle ponds in north Wellfleet will outwash into the ocean. The Lower Cape will become a series of islands as the sea level continues to rise. The Pamet River will permanently bisect it's width in Truro. Nauset Marsh will become a small bay that will eventually connect to the larger Cape Cod Bay. The gradual disappearance of the shore is a harsh, sad reality. Many of the places depicted in this volume of work no longer exist. But here in these outermost lands destruction is a part of the process of creation. The Outer Cape: A Photographic Essay, is a collection of photographs celebrating the towns that make up the tip of the Cape Cod peninsula in all their spectacular, unique, and fragile glory. How fleeting this time is.



Ballston Beach, Truro - 2010



Ballston Beach, Truro - 2023



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# WINTER

Ballston Beach, Truro

The average natural erosion rate on the Atlantic Ocean side of Cape Cod had been 3.8 feet a year. However, in the area of Nauset Light, the average for the period 1987-1994 has accelerated to 5.8 feet. There may be little or no erosion in some years, and more than fifteen feet in other years.

Coastal erosion, sand transport, and deposition are the natural processes that are responsible for the Cape as we know it. Without these processes there would be no beaches, no barrier islands or barrier spits, and no sea cliffs. Without them there would be fewer sheltered harbors, bays, lagoons, and salt marshes. The dunes of Provincetown and Sandy Neck, near Barnstable, would not exist.

-Bob Oldale, Geologist, USGS, Emeritus



Horseshoe Crab (*Limulus polyphemus*)

Links:

Geologic History of Cape Cod, Massachusetts  
<https://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/capecod/>

Atlantic White Shark Conservancy  
<https://www.atlanticwhiteshark.org/>

IFAW  
<http://www.ifaw.org/united-states> | <http://youtu.be/D53zwVANOEk>





North American Right Whale, Race Point Beach, Provincetown







Wellfleet Drive-In Theatre, Wellfleet













Cliff Road, Wellfleet







Moon Pond, North Truro



























Provincetown Harbor





Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, Provincetown









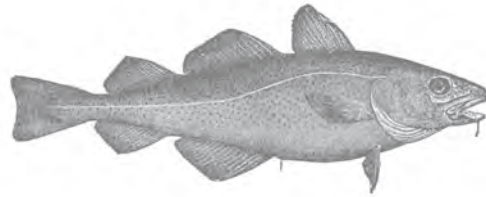
2

# SPRING

White Crest Beach, Wellfleet

But regardless of such gains, or the pains taken by humans to stem the loss of land to the sea, the Cape is inevitable losing more than it is replacing. Oceanographers estimate that for every five acres of shoreline lost to erosion, only two are replaced with new land in the form of barrier beaches or sand hook. there is little doubt that the Cape's ultimate fate is to return to the sea that spawned and shaped it. At current rates of sea-level rise, Cape Cod has at best only another five to six thousand years before the Puritan preacher Cotton Mather's prediction comes true, and "shoals of codfish be seen swimming on its highest hills."

-Robert Finch, Cape Cod: Its Natural and Cultural History



Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*)

Links:

Cape Cod National Seashore  
<https://www.nps.gov/caco/index.htm>

Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary  
<https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/wellfleet-bay>

NOAA'S Stellwagen National Marine Sanctuary  
<http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/>









Pamet River at Ballston Beach, Truro











Captain Jack's Wharf, Provincetown



















Charley Cook's Wharf, Provincetown















Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, Provincetown





Atlantic White-Sided Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*), Provincetown Harbor













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# SUMMER

Cold Storage Beach, Truro

My sister lives down here now and I'm visiting for the first time in half a century. *Welcome Home!* This is beautiful, just beautiful. As children we spent many summers here. I've only just now realized how much I've missed this wonderful place. And I love it that we have a hurricane!

-Overheard Conversation at Lecount Hollow, Hurricane Earl 2010



Great Spider Crab (*Hyas araneus*)

Links:

Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (CCS)  
<http://www.coastalstudies.org/>

Whale Watch, Dolphin Fleet of Provincetown  
<http://whalewatch.com/dolphinfleet/>

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute  
<https://www.whoi.edu/>





Indian Walk Road, Wellfleet















Lecount Hollow Beach, September 4, 2010. Remnants of Hurricane Earl









Sunken Meadow Beach, Eastham























Homer/Kelly Camp, North Beach Island, Chatham







Carnival Parade, Provincetown





Herring River, Wellfleet







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FALL

Sunken Meadow Beach, Eastham

It is a land where the wind-whipped sand of the shore bites and stings, the beach grass cuts, and the facts of life are hard; but where the sky is blue, the air soft, and the harshness of life is tempered by faith- it is where the real and the unreal meet, and the impossible becomes probable. One can believe anything on the Cape, a blessed relief from the doubts and uncertainties of the present-day turmoil of the outer world. If in truth there is a sea serpent, sooner or later it will be cast up on the shores of Cape Cod. If there are mermaids- when I am on the Cape I believe in them devotedly- it is there they will be found.

-Thornton W. Burgess, Striped Whales



Atlantic Bay Scallop (*Argopecten irradians*)

Links:

Cape Cod Modern House Trust  
<http://ccmht.org/>

Cape Cod Museum of Natural History  
<http://www.ccmnh.org/>

A Cape Cod Notebook  
<https://www.capeandislands.org/tags/a-cape-cod-notebook>











Paragliding, White Crest Beach, Wellfleet





Coast Guard Station, Eastham















Cold Storage Beach, Truro





Night Sky, Eastham











Winthrop Street Cemetery, Provincetown























PHOTOGRAPHS

Front Cover: Bound Brook Island, Wellfleet

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5. Wellfleet Drive-In Theatre, Wellfleet
6. Snowy Owl, Eastham
7. Wellfleet By The Sea
8. Winter Dune, Truro
9. Cooks Brook Beach, Eastham
10. Coast Guard Station, Eastham
11. Cliff Road, Wellfleet
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13. Moon Pond, North Truro
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15. Harmes Way, Eastham
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20. Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, Provincetown
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1. Horseshoe Crab (Limulus polyphemus)
2. Atlantic Cod (Gadus morhua)
3. Great Spider Crab (Hyas araneus)
4. Atlantic Bay Scallop (Argopecten irradians)

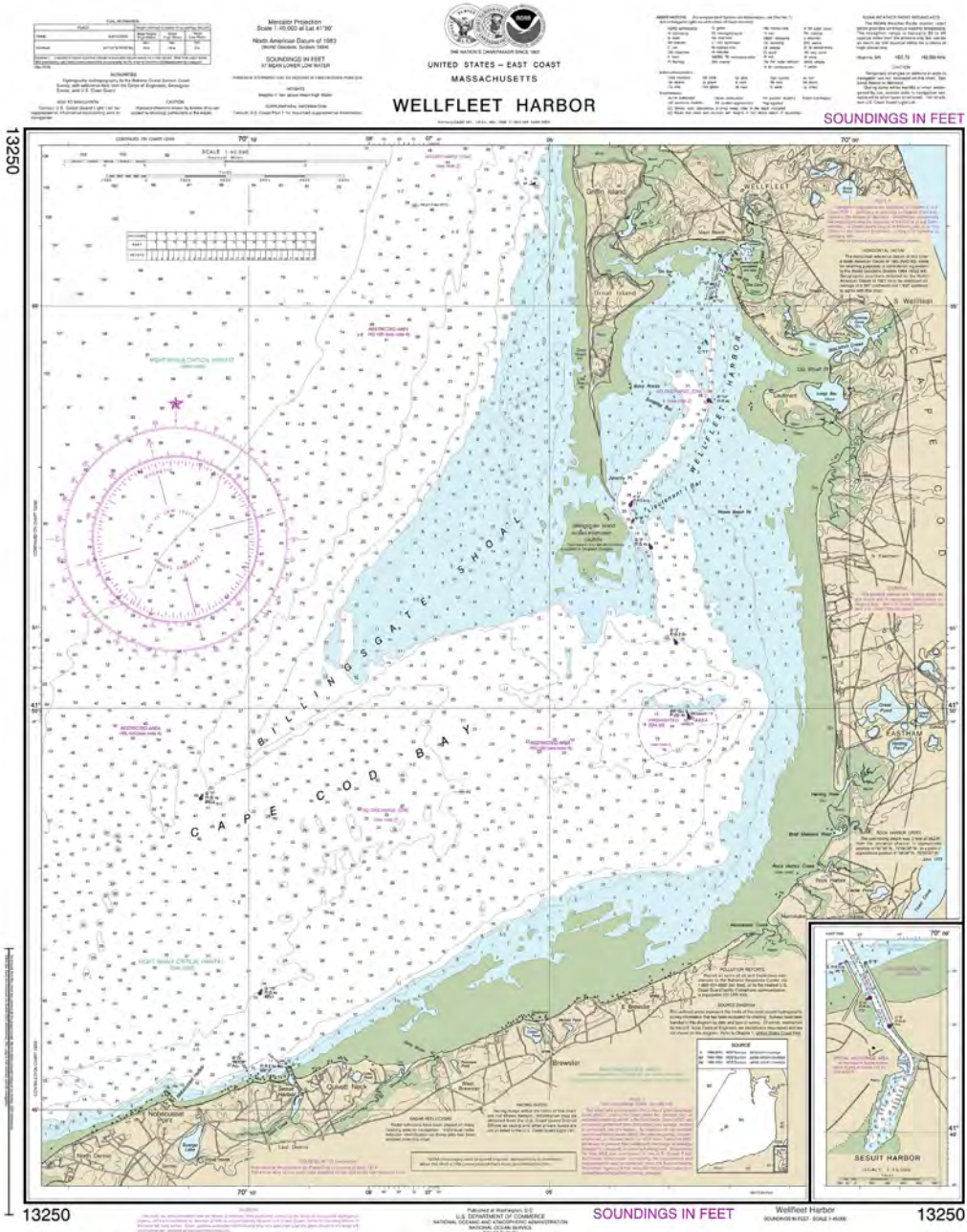
QUOTES

1. Bob Oldale, Geologist, USGS, Emeritus, The Geologic Story of Cape Cod
2. Robert Finch, Cape Cod: Its Natural and Cultural History
3. Overheard, Lecount Hollow, Hurricane Earl 2010
4. Joseph C. Lincoln, Cape Cod Ballads and Other Verse

NAUTICAL CHARTS

1. Wellfleet Harbor, 11/25/2016
2. Cape Cod Bay, 8/1/2017
3. Provincetown Harbor, 1/25/2017

Back Cover: Marconi Station, Wellfleet



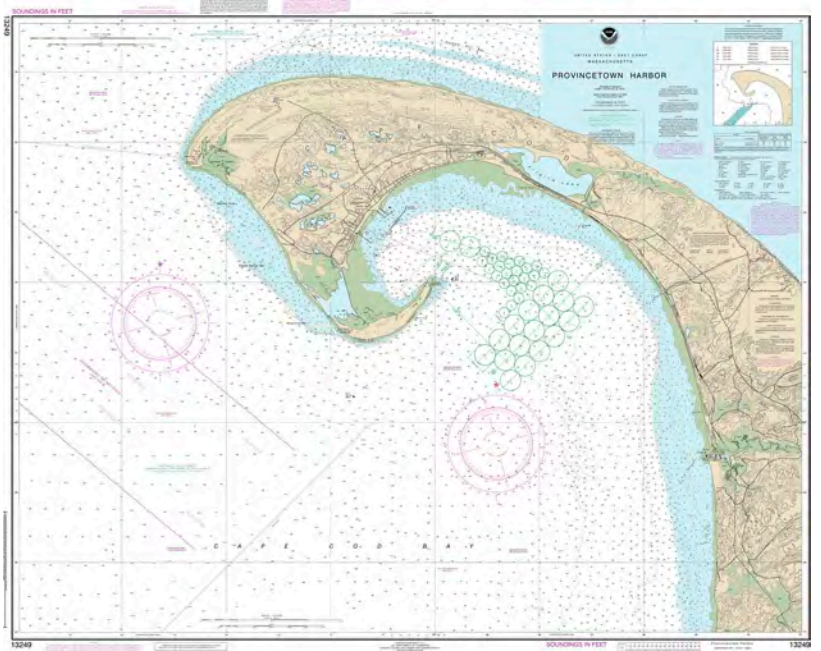
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**SOUNDINGS IN FEET** Wellfleet Harbor SOUNDINGS IN FEET SCALE 1:10,000



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