

## *The Coast Walk*

By Jennifer Booher

In January of 2015, I set out to circumambulate the shoreline of Mount Desert Island. Hiking below the high tide line wherever possible, scrambling up and down cliffs as necessary, I've traveled from the Bar to Seal Harbor Beach. I study the history, geology, and living things of the places I encounter along the way and write about them on the Coast Walk Project website.<sup>1</sup> I also gather bits of debris which I bring back to my studio and arrange in still-life photographs.



A close-up of sand taken during “Coast Walk 8: Great Head to Sand Beach,” part of a circumambulation of Mount Desert Island by the author. *Photograph by the author*



The remains of the schooner *Tay*, wrecked on Sand Beach in 1911. *Courtesy of the Jesup Memorial Library*

The shoreline condenses unique habitats and human uses into a narrow border fringing the island, full of points of intersection between natural history and local stories. For example, in 1911, the schooner *Tay* was driven onto Sand Beach by a storm and wrecked. The timbers of her hull lie just downhill from the modern stairs to the parking lot. I've been told that the most severe winter storms will sometimes uncover them, but I have never seen them myself.



A boathouse built at Sand Beach by the Satterlee family. Sand Beach was part of their estate at that time. *Courtesy of the National Park Service, Acadia National Park, William Otis Sawtelle Collection*

At the time, Sand Beach was part of the Satterlee estate, and the Satterlees took in the crew of the wrecked ship. They later built a boathouse (above) near the stream running out of the wetland.



Left: A promotional poster for the silent film “Queen of the Sea,” filmed at Sand Beach.  
Right: Annette Kellerman played Merrilla, Queen of the Sea.

In the summer of 1917, the Fox Film Company filmed “Queen of the Sea,” starring Annette Kellerman, on Sand Beach and the surrounding ledges. Watching the filming was a popular excursion for the rusticators that year. You can see them in the background of the photo above, sitting on the ledges.



The “Cavern of Despair,” part of the set created for the film. *Images on these two pages are from the Jonathan Silent Film Collection, courtesy of the Frank Mt. Pleasant Library of Special Collections and Archives, Chapman University*

One of the sets, the ‘Cavern of Despair,’ (above) was built just below the existing stairs, more or less on top of the remains of the *Tay*.

The actors and film crew were plagued with the traditional summer ailments of sunburn and seasickness, but also with deep cuts and scratches because the ledges that Annette Kellerman and her mermaids posed on were just as covered with barnacles then as they are now. When I crossed them in early May, the barnacles had been busy maintaining that tradition.



Mature barnacles and cyprids. *Photograph by the author*

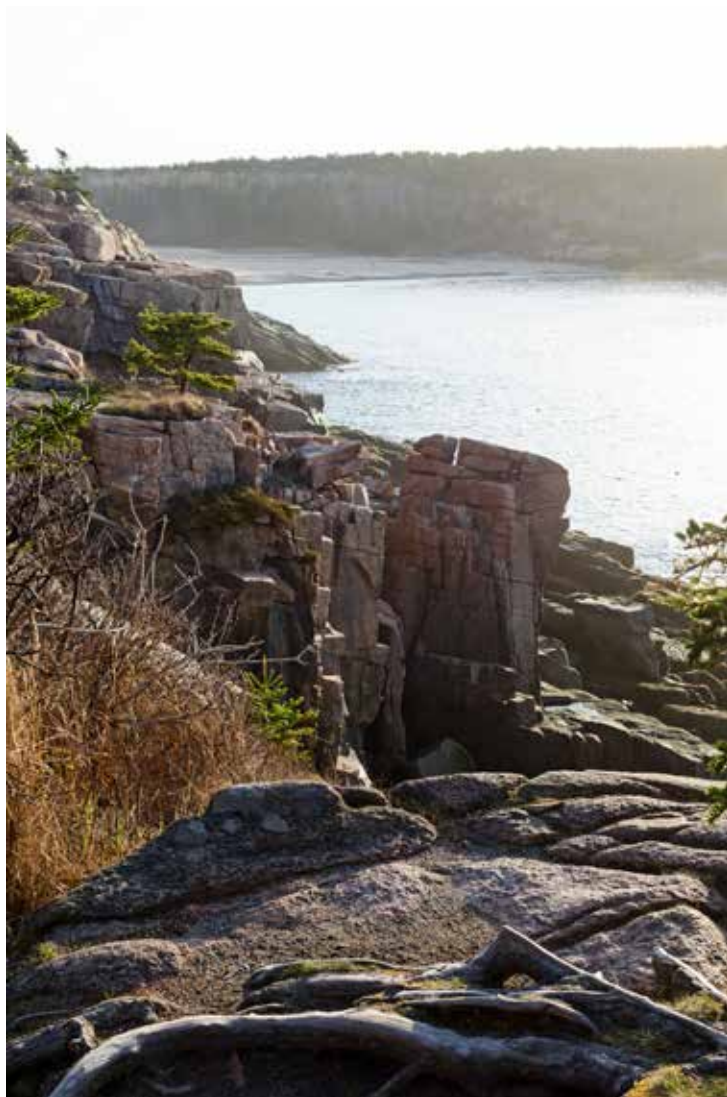
A barnacle begins as an egg, which hatches into a tiny larva that goes through five moults and becomes a cyprid. All those tiny things that look like grains of rice in the photo above are cyprids. The cyprid's job is to find a good place to settle. When it finds a suitable spot, it will glue its forehead to the rock or shell and begin to form a shell around itself. The little brown ovals scattered over everything in the photo are cyprids that have glued themselves down. After three or four days, they will have built up enough shell to look like tiny barnacles and to start scratching the unwary.



Rock in the shatter zone at Sand Beach. *Photograph by the author*

Cadillac Mountain is the remnant of a volcano that erupted 420 million years ago, and at Sand Beach, you can see some of the violence of that ancient eruption. On the east side of the beach, the ledges of Great Head are part of a shatter zone, an area of older rock that was cracked and shattered when the volcano erupted through it. In the photo above, you can see chunks of the older stone floating in the matrix of the new granite. Somewhere under the beach, the shatter zone gives way to the pink Cadillac Mountain granite forming the ledges that run from the beach to Otter Cliffs.





Ledges near Sand Beach. *Photograph by the author*

When I talk about the density of the layers of use and story along the shore, this is what I mean: the rocks that play home to marine species also split open the Tay. The ledges where mermaids and Vikings picnicked with rusticators are themselves the remains of a prehistoric volcano.

All this research is a starting point: I think about all of those stories as I compose the still life for each coast walk. In these photos, my walks on the beach become a poetic transect of the intertidal zone, and the items I pick up are points of intersection between myself and the life of the shore—the intersection between me and the fisherman who cut a piece of rope, or the bird who dropped a feather, and the winds and wave patterns that left them next to each other in my path. The still lifes plot all these points of intersection, loosely graphing the data. And I hope one day that the coast walk itself will become another layer of story on Mount Desert Island’s coastline



A still life of objects collected during “Coast Walk 8: Great Head to Sand Beach, April 28-May 3, 2015.” *Photograph by the author*

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<sup>1</sup> The website for the Coast Walk Project is <http://jenniferbooher.com/wp-walking/>.

### *Notes on the text*

The story of the *Tay* can be found in Catherine Schmitt, “The Wreck of the *Tay*,” *Chebacco* volume 14 (2013), 107-110; reports on filming of “Queen of the Sea” at Sand Beach are in the *Bar Harbor Times*, July 21 through September 1, 1917; information on the shatter zone can be found in Duane Braun, “The Shatter Zone: A Physical Borderland from 420 Million Years Ago to Present and a Conceptual Borderland from 1837 to Present,” in this volume of *Chebacco*.

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