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Imagine a summer spent among seabirds and scientists on a tiny island in the Atlantic.

STORY & PHOTOS BY EMILY WEYRAUCH

Start by driving six hours up the coast of Maine, crossing over the border into Canada. Catch a ferry from Blacks Harbor to Grand Manan Island. Once there, drive across the island, passing at least five churches, until you get to Seal Cove. Hop onto a lobster boat for a choppy hour-long ride through the dense fog. Drop anchor, jump into a tiny dinghy, and ride it to shore. Finally, trudge through knee-deep mud for twenty minutes before arriving at the actual ‘dock,’ since it’s low tide and the boat can’t make it all the way in. Almost a full day after setting out, you’ve arrived.

Located in the Bay of Fundy, Kent Island is less than two miles long, with Nova Scotia visible to the east on a rare clear day—the island is wrapped in heavy fog one in three days of the summer. I arrive on Kent’s shores with 12 other students, a duffel bag full of rain gear, and a stack of poetry books, for two months of research and writing at The Bowdoin Scientific Station.

INTO THE WILD

Every day, I hike the rough path past overgrown grassy fields where Savannah sparrows build their nests. Through a lush forest and ferns tangled by morning dewy spider webs, I wend my way to the rocky shore of the North End.

Here I sit and write, scribbling down disjointed lines of poetry in my waterproof notebook and sketching watercolor landscapes. From my spot on the North End I spy Hay Island, smaller and more overgrown, accessible only at the lowest tides by scrambling over slippery rocks covered with seaweed. Spilling time, I watch the tide ebb and flow, exposing rocks that connect Kent to Hay, then covering them again. The ocean is a heartbeat, picking up gulps of water along the shore and releasing them, punctuated by the squawking of herring gulls. The island is loud with sounds of the Earth; the once-familiar hum of human life—honking cars and whirring machines—are conspicuously absent. In many

Bowdoin student Emily Weyrauch isolates the extraordinary during her sophomore summer on Kent Island, a stone’s throw over the border into Canada. An important ecological research site, Kent Island houses visiting students and scientists in stark surroundings. Emily shares her science and solitude on this unique isle.
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Out There

ways Kent Island is surreal in its detachment from the real world. For one thing, the only mammals are bats and muskrats. Instead, Leach’s Storm-petrels populate the soil, living in monogamous pairs in burrows they build in mossy wooded areas.

These birds live only on offshore islands in the Atlantic and Pacific where large land mammal predators are nowhere to be found. Here on Kent, the petrels are the study species of a ongoing 62-year project led by scientists and student researchers who make the long pilgrimage every summer to collect data on the behavior of these unique birds.

Island Life

Living conditions in the research station startle in their simplicity: wooden dwellings with one cold-water sink and two outhouses near the main kitchen and lab area. Electricity is only available by charging batteries daily from the solar panel found at head of the main trail. We have what we need. If we don’t, we get creative. The island is cold even during the summer, and we frequently wear more than five layers of clothing at a time. Showering happens rarely, as it’s complicated by an ordeal involving a solar water heater, a bucket, some smaller yogurt containers, biodegradable soap, and a private corner of an old shack by the outhouses.

Summer deepens, and our motley crew of students and Canadian researchers who arrived as strangers solidifies into...
a makeshift family. Nighttime brings everyone together in their pajamas and layers of sweaters to read old books from the island’s well-stocked bookshelf or play a guitar and sing familiar songs. Stirred by the silence, we stand in the kitchen baking bread past midnight, listening to whatever radio station we can pick up. We are connected by our intimacy with nature, our shared detachment from the real world, and a love of the strange beauty of it all.