

On Devil's Foot

John Buck

We sail into the little sheltered cove,
Round to the wind,
And, when the way is off,
Toss in the anchor and pay out the line,
Furl up the jib and main,
Board the dinghy with our grub and towels,
And row the few feet to the strand.

Each year we make this happy pilgrimage,
A family picnic on this little isle.
A boulder pile it is, left by the glacier,
Then drifted slowly up, over the centuries,
With powdered rock and then a toe-hold snarl
Of poison ivy, plum, rugosa rose and bay
To hold against the hurricane.

To make the isle the land encroached the sea,
And ever since the sea has worked away
At getting back its own, leaving the visitor
But a patio beach or two, in which the sand
Shares our esteem with tiny, tiny shells,
Warm sun, far blue eastern view, wide sky,
And the rushing foamy foreground flood.

We come here to watch terns wheel and dive,
The lighthouse, the tide swirling past the buoys,
The ferry passing to and from The Islands,
A fisherman or two, drifting down-current,
Or mayhap a trawler or a tug and barge,
But mostly we watch sailboats in the waterway,
Struggling slowly up the urgent tide.

You see, our island fronts a choking channel,
Between a sailor's Bay and sailor's Sound,
A crooked strait through which the Bay, each day,
Tries hard to join the Sound, or Sound the Bay,
The water rushes by, faster than man can walk,
Testing the straining sails and heeling hulls,
Even when the wind is right.

We sit or lie and watch the clustered crews,
Masts bobbing with the chop, and the tall sails,
Once through, spread out upon the Bay or Sound.
It's good to loaf here on this vantage point,
Sharing sandwiches, or dipping in a book,
While working mates toil up or down the gut
To merge at length with distant clouds or shore.

John Buck has been a lover of Woods Hole
and sailing since 1931.



Taken on Devil's Foot, 1954. Knockabout race and Woods Hole village in background.

Photo by Paul Ferris Smith