

Soundside Learning

This Week On Core Sound

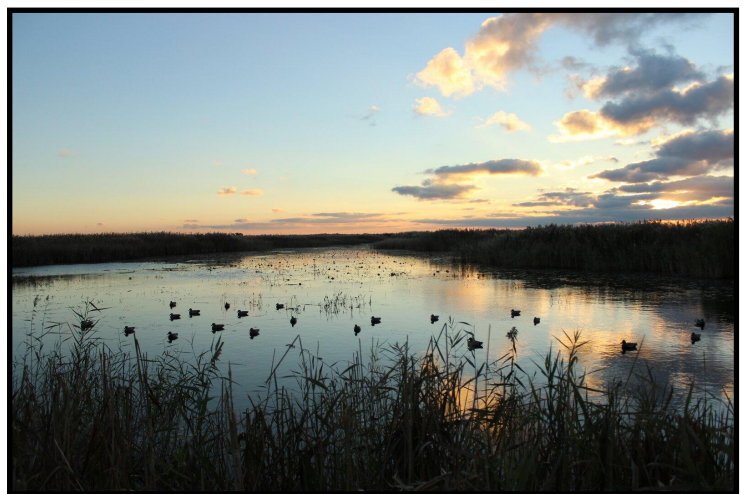
Core Sound Grieves Loss

For generations of children growing up in the communities of Down East, the waters of Core Sound have beckoned. An almost inexplicable magnetism exists with the sound's waters, marshes, and grass lumps for those whose families have plied these same waters for generations. This relationship has been forged by centuries of dependance on the sound's bounty as a life source.

Today's young Coresounders grow up in a much different world than their ancestors before them who fled the hurricane ravaged communities of Shackleford Banks to take refuge along the soundside communities that make up Down East today. Roads, bridges, and modern technologies now link the Down East communities with the outside world, putting an end to the days of isolation that marked the the first half of the 20th century. Still, the strength of tradition radiates through our young people.

More than a century after their ancestors settled along the shores of Core and Pamlico Sounds in communities like Cedar Island, Atlantic, Stacy, Williston, Marshallberg, and Harkers Island, their descendants still carry on their long-established traditions in a new millennia. Thus, Core Sound is still a place where our young will learn to steer, dock, and pull up a skiff long before learning to handle a car or truck. This is a place where rows of trucks with boat trailers will line the sides of the highway near the Salter's Creek bridge on a freezing January morning as scores of teenagers head out in pursuit of a mess of redheads to take home for grandma to stew. A place where the pride associated with a boatload of fall roe mullets far outweighs any financial gain to be had from it. This is still a place where centuries old traditions are still as exhilarating for today's youth as they were for their ancestors so many years ago. This was very much the case for the four young men that Core Sound devastatingly lost in the afternoon hours of Sunday, February 13th, 2022.

Returning from a youth hunting excursion in Hyde County, these young men were chasing redheads, black ducks, and wood ducks; *tradition*. They knew and had felt that inexplicable magnetism that draws the children of Core Sound *homeward*. These young men were the future of Core Sound, the next generation to carry the torch of heritage who would one day pass the baton to *their* children. To the parents, role models, community leaders who were sharing the traditions *they* so knew and loved with these young men that fateful day, your work was not in vain. We will forever cherish the photos of their smiling faces, teeming with excitement at the prospect of a bountiful hunt to close out the season.



A Core Sound sunset
Photo: CSWM Collection

Seaside Science with Dr. James Morris

The recent tsunami caused by the eruption of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano in the South Pacific on January 15, 2022 reminded me of a story told to me many times by the late Tommy W. Hancock, Sr. of Harkers Island. The year was around 1946, Tommy was 11 years old and found himself that day in the hook of Cape Lookout where he was fishing sink nets with his uncle, father, and brother on a mid-April day. They had anchored up around midday for lunch at Catfish Point, which back then was between the Coast Guard dock and the breakwater (now known as the Cape Lookout Rock Jetty). When suddenly the boat came tight on the anchor as the water began to rush out to sea. Soon the boat reached the bottom and listed to the side as it rested on its keel and chine. Curious as to what was happening, Tommy and his brother jumped out of the boat and onto the muddy bottom, which only seconds earlier was more than 10 feet deep. Alarmed by what was happening, Tommy's father announced that a "seasuck" was occurring and, concerned for their safety, ordered the two young boys to immediately get back in the boat just as a large incoming wave could be seen rapidly approaching from the westward. Within seconds the sea rushed back into Cape Lookout returning to the same depth as before.



Dr. Morris & Mr. Tommy Hancock, circa 2017.
Photo: Dr. James Morris Collection

After sharing about this dramatic experience with a few community members around Harkers Island, I was surprised to learn of another seasuck at Cape Lookout that occurred on July 4, 1997. This time the event occurred at night sometime between dark and eleven o'clock. Ken Brennan of Straits and Kenny Bryan Chadwick of Harkers Island and their families were aboard a large shrimp trawler, which they had anchored in the hook of Cape Lookout for the night to enjoy the holiday. As the families were enjoying the evening, suddenly the trawler began to list alarming all on board. With flashlights in hand, the crew checked the bilge for fear that they were sinking and then the anchor to see if it had come loose allowing the boat to run aground. Much to their surprise the bilge was dry and the anchor was steadfast. The trawler was sitting firmly on the bottom and had listed heavily as it rested on its chine. Similar to the seasuck that occurred some 50 years earlier, the water came in as quickly as it had disappeared much to the surprise of everyone aboard.

Is it possible that these observations document tsunamis in North Carolina? It is interesting that Tommy's father had a name for the phenomena (a seasuck), a term that may have been passed down through the generations before. So, what could be the explanation for these North Carolina tsunamis? According to Dr. Thomas Pratt, Ph.D. a research geophysicist with the United States Geological Survey "there are two possible seismic explanations, earthquakes and offshore landslides." Earthquakes are rare in the Atlantic as there has only been two or three tsunami causing earthquakes ever recorded in the Atlantic ocean. Offshore landslides occur when, like on land, a large amount of underwater earth breaks off the side of a cliff and slides downward into the depths of the ocean. Given the rare nature of both of these in the Atlantic ocean, Dr. Pratt is unsure what might have caused the seasucks observed at Cape Lookout.

While the cause of seasucks is not clear, the evidence is strong that they do occur. So stay alert! One day you might find yourself in a North Carolina tsunami!

Click here to listen to the seasuck story told by Tommy Hancock.

