

Masses of Mist That Loomed Like Clouds or Snowbanks.

WINTER'S STORMS STRIKE MAINE COAST

Close-Up of a Roaring Southeaster--Bombardment of Rocky Ramparts by Gigantic Waves Vividly Depicted

By ALFRED ELDEN

THROUGH a dripping December night a sixty-mile gale poured its wrath on the New England coast. Late afternoon of the day before a numbing zero temperature and a bitter north wind gave way to one of those sudden changes that make coast weather an ever-fitting subject for conversation. The mercury soared thirty degrees in three hours—but the barometer dropped to the bottom of the cellar!

By early evening the chill, damp breath of a southeaster enveloped all outdoors. It started in the Bay of Fundy and as its dynamics increased it seemed to centre its attention on the Maine coast. By midnight the instruments in the Portland United States Weather Bureau recorded a wind velocity of a mile a minute.

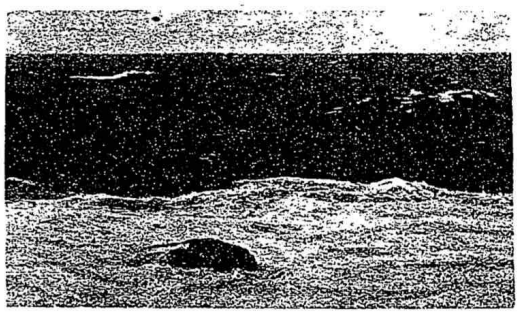
The Storm King Attacks

Out on the tip end of Cape Elizabeth, where stand the Two Lights and the Coast Guard life-saving station, the full brunt of the Storm King's attack was felt. In the east tower, 130 feet above the level of the sea, the 140,000-candle power light flashed futilely against the Stygian gloom of fog and rain. A year and a half ago Uncle Sam, pursuing an economic policy of doing away with twin light stations, dismantled the west light after one hundred and twenty years of service. As a compensation, however, the power of the beacon in the east tower was increased from a clear-weather visibility of seventeen miles to one of thirty-five.

Of little use this night was an aid to navigation! Even the hoarse twice-a-minute bellow of the steam fog whistle down on the shore was equally impotent. Its ordinarily penetrating voice was no more than a child's tin whistle against this titanic song of the elements. God help any mariner seeking a harbor through the welter of the angry waters!

Although they could not be seen through the impenetrable murk, lights other than the one in the lofty east tower blinked dully around the Government reservation. Upstairs in the life saving station men fully dressed lay in their beds. Below, the young Captain paced nervously backward and forward. The weight of responsibility rests heavy in the hearts of coast guardsmen on such a night.

Under the bombardment of the breakers the whole end of Cape Elizabeth trembled. Everytime an old grayback dropped its crushing weight of sea water on the rocky ramparts of shore all the houses in the settlement shook.



Dark as the Styx, Yet Caps of Snowy White Were Everywhere.

Inside the big Government wireless station, too, lights gleamed. The steady bzz-bzz-bzz of code rasped above the crash of almost incessant static. Men were wakeful here.

On the bank just under the light tower, exposed to the full force of the gale, stood the tiny, single-roomed radio compass station. There, ear phones fast to his head, sat another faithful guardian of the night. Keeping watch with the customary 800 meters employed to call and work such stations, he occasionally tuned his receiver to pick up if he could signals not usually on the compass frequency.

Once or twice during the night the coast guard patrolman staggered in to get his breath. Particularly difficult to navigate was the narrow mile and a half trail that wound thread-like at the brink of the steep cliffs. The blinking rays of his lantern were scarcely more effective against the gloom than would have been those of a glow worm.

Then, too, the sting of the fine rain, the howl of the wind, the cannonading of the breakers were all disconcerting. Frequently in his lone vigil the patrolman had to stop and feel cautiously with a foot to see that he was not too near the edge when he lost the path. It was easy to make a misstep on a night such as this and at many points along his dangerous beat a misstep meant death.

Morning found the storm unabated in fury. The tide ebbed in the night and had turned around 4 o'clock. It was now on the flood. All forenoon the huge rollers mounted higher and higher. Familiar as they were with such scenes, even the families of the light keepers and the coast guardsmen gathered near the fog signal station to gaze awe-stricken at the might of the ocean.

What a foeman the angry Atlantic—but what a fortress the rock-ribbed shore! Here at the tip end of the cape the geologists have long marveled over its formation. Running through the irregular, solid bed is a stratum of peculiar variety and arrangement. It looks as if some unknown power had cut a great defile through this rocky mass. What it took from such a Gargantuan gash, it must have tossed around in promiscuous picturesqueness.

How this great cut came to be filled in again with a totally different kind of stone paralelling its course is one of the mysteries of creation. Or, at least, one of the prehistoric changes in the earth's surface caused by the upheavals from interior forces which are hidden from mortal mind even as the beginning of all things is hidden.

Now the rain has stopped. Two or three miles offshore, because of the gray of the day and the mist of the storm, the range of visibility ceased. Looking away, over the tumbling expanse, the waters were dark as ink, yet caps of snowy white were everywhere. Nearer the shore the hues were green—gray-green and bottle-green.

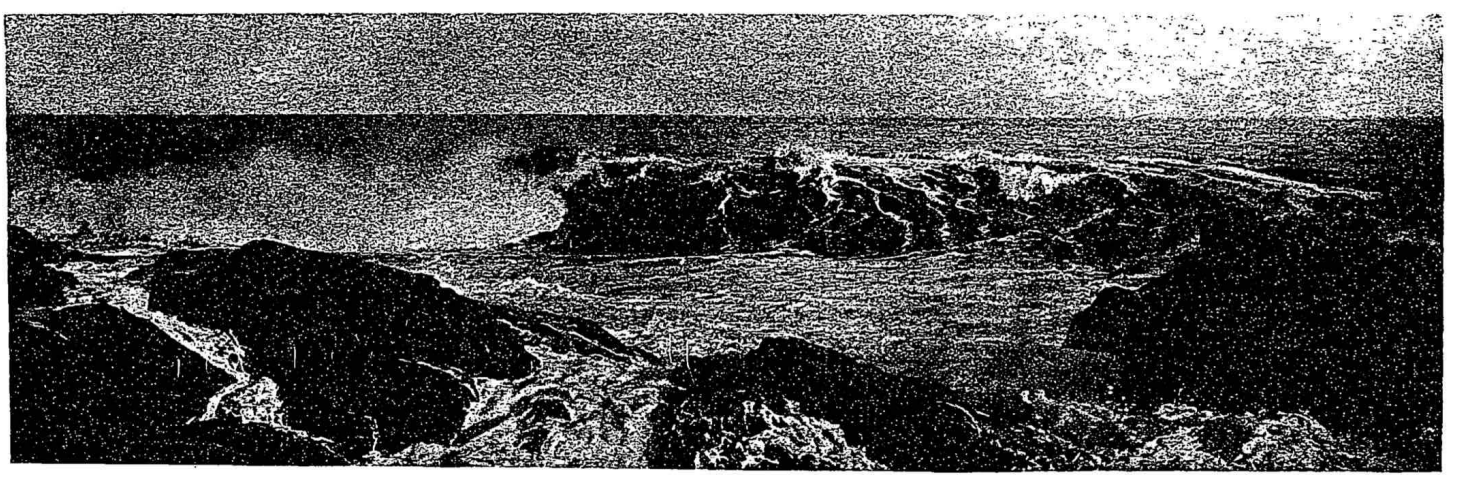
A Grayback Rolls In

As the merciless rollers surged steadily in, no two broke alike. One heavy swell a few hundred yards distant would seem to rise, to take on bulk, to thrust forward a whitening crest, when suddenly it would be overtaken, overwhelmed, amalgamated with a more rapidly moving wave. Onward, onward — nearer, nearer this would sweep, rising to a height of at least fifteen feet and looking twice that. Here, indeed, was a grayback!

Now it was at its zenith. It was curling—cresting. One end had already fallen with a crash and was coming for the shore, a racing, irresistible white bore of foam. In the centre of the wave at the very point of its greatest arc, the light from behind gave it a beautiful transparency.

Through the green mirror of water

(Continued on Page 18)



One Could Create Odd Designs in the Curve of a Wave—Rivers, Lakes, Even Mountains.

(Continued from Page 7)

one obtained a momentary glimpse of quantities of small flotsam and jetsam. Bits of seaweed, driftwood, a lobster pot buoy, the snake-like outline of a few feet of rope—all these things held there in suspension for a mere second or two were imprinted so indelibly on the mind that a close observer could enumerate many of them.

So, too, in looking into the curve of the approaching breaker, one might create all sorts of imaginary designs. The streaking lines of foam against the dark background of the solid wall of water stretched out into little white rivers, streams, lakes—even snow-capped mountains were there. In fact, the wonders of that fanciful tracery were limited only by one's keenness of vision and powers of imagination.

Then the spindrift—what is that? The dictionary says: "The spray blown from the crest of waves." Isn't there a more specific definition? Why, there was spray everywhere. It filled the air; the wind carried it with stinging force into one's face. It clung moistly to all with which it came in contact.

There were layers of it a foot thick and in pathways ten feet wide quivering along the dripping rocks just clear of the live water. An egg-white, frothy sea meringue.

Originally spindrift probably was spray, but here in its accumulated state, ephemeral as it was, it had acquired a certain substance unknown to spray that gave it at least a short period of endurance. Just shaded with yellow, it made a distinctive border to the foaming blanket of white surf continually rushing up toward it, yet just failing to reach and wash it away.

Every few moments an overwhelming, stifling blast of wind would sweep up masses of the evanescant, foamy drift and whisk it over the jagged rocks. At such times the flecks seemed like unthinkably huge snowflakes, sent scurrying in all directions by the gale.

Frequently the wind would blow with an intense velocity that gave a new phase to the breaking seas. Instead of rolling in majestically, irresistibly, rhythmically, arching, cresting and then falling with crushing impact, the waves would be swept along at such race-horse speed that when they reached the rocks they were picked up and hurled twenty-five feet in the air, masses of mist. Looking at them through half-closed eyes, they assumed the appearance of fleecy snowbanks, or even of white clouds against the dark gray skyline.

It is a storm like this that makes one realize the infiniteness, the might of the sea. Such a spectacle comes to those who live away from the coast only as the reward of many fruitless pilgrimages and much patient waiting.

Unfortunately for the artists who would paint, and for the photographers who would record on film, all gales do not result in surf scenes. It is only the easterlies and the southerlies, or a combination of the two, that roll up the old thunderers.

Occasionally the Storm King outdoes himself, as he did in this marine onslaught on the battlements of the land. Given a wind just a bit east of south, a flood tide and a full gale, one may then be brought face to face with the mightiness of nature's forces. And to a realization of man's infinitesimal part in the scheme of things.