

EERILY QUIET, QUIRKY, HUMBLING IN ITS BEAUTY,

# All quiet on the Lower Cape



The wind is a near-constant companion at the National Seashore's Race Point Ranger Station.

# CAPE COD IN WINTER IS PERFECTLY WONDERFUL

## By Donna Zucker

The signs begin after Labor Day: “Thanks for a great season!”; “See you next summer!” Doors lock. Windows are boarded up. I drive a few miles to my favorite coffee shop on Route 6 for a late-night pastry (late night on the Cape is 8 p.m.). Closed. The café was open yesterday!

I drive back to my parents’ house in North Truro, the small, two-story house by the bay with blueberry-colored shutters. The only sign of life on November nights may be the lone fox trotting across the dark street. If I’m lucky, the expanse of sky will be clear, and the legions of stars will brighten the darkness, giving me pause to brake. The fox

often looks at me defiant, as if to say, “I’m not going any faster. In fact I may stop in the middle of the street and make you wait.”

I love winter on the Cape. Blizzards mean something: prepare or die! Perhaps not that dire, but it may be a few days until a plow clears the road. Stocking up at the local Stop & Shop (the place for everything, including my weekly writing group in a room above the check-out lanes) is a must. The power will go out; the restless wind will wake you at night as it rattles doors and windows. In the darkness, I wonder if the house will blow into the ocean. Most likely, the screen door will rip from the hinges again, not quite reaching the water but landing in a neighbor’s property.



Courtesy Donna Zucker

**Donna Zucker, a New York City writer and editor, works for Time, Inc., Entertainment Weekly and Budget Travel Magazine. She has spent the last couple winters in Truro.**



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It's shortly after the Wellfleet Oyster Festival in October that I feel the first real clutches of winter. Restaurants and stores close in a fury, leaving me to wonder if I will be last one left on the Cape.

November begins, and night sets at 4 p.m. A half-hour earlier, the colors of sunset arrive—pink, violet and gold. The first time night shuts in, I drive to Fanizzi's, a tavern in Provincetown.

"What's going on?" I ask the bartender. Perhaps there was an apocalypse I was unaware of?

"It's November," she tells me.



Mornings begin with a chill in my feet. I use the thin ropes to raise the blinds and hope for a peek at the dark-blue bay in the distance. Snowflakes the size of quarters wisp across the deck outside my bedroom window.

This morning the sky is clear and stoically blue. I race down the stairs to brew my coffee from Wellfleet, a neighboring town. I open all the curtains and wait for the chime. The rich smell fills the kitchen, and I pour a cup into a white mug with blue letters that spell: TRURO.

I look out the back window: Hopper-like houses dot the flat landscape. I walk into the dining room and sit on a chair by the window — my feet in thick woolen socks, a blanket draped over my shoulders — and wait for the entertainment.

They arrive one after the next: red crowned beauties, some sapphire-gray or spotted white and brown. The birds of the Cape are magnificent. They perch a few feet from the window on the weathered wooden gate. I never know who will appear.

7 a.m. Time to write. I open my computer and for a few blissful hours I am in the moment, perfecting sentences, writing furiously. I am a writer here. When I'm finished, I know. I shower, eat, get dressed Cape-style: layers, hats, sturdy boots, jewelry, jeans. I'm comfortable, casual—of myself. But enough dilly-dallying! It's almost 10 a.m. Only a few more hours of daylight.

9:45 a.m. First stop: Ten-minute run to the beach. When I'm nestled in Truro, I go

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to Head of the Meadow Beach. On Route 6, there may be a car or two coming in either direction, but it's doubtful. I easily cross the highway and enter the five-minute drive along the tree-lined road until the forest ends and it's just the sea.

I'm alone as usual. If it's too chilly I may only have a moment to catch the smell of dank seaweed and forest pines as I open my window. I listen to the rolling surf, the gulls caught gliding in the unmerciful wind of the National Seashore.

This time of year, whales by the hundreds may gather. Occasionally a humpback can be seen from the shore (or parking lot), but more often it's the endangered right whale. I lean back in the seat, take off my shoes, drink coffee, eat a bagel from Savory & Sweet café and stare at the rolling surf. I expect to hear the whales as they slap tails and fins onto the waves, but they are too far away.

10 a.m. Time to work. On the Cape, the libraries are my offices. Each one is unique and mirrors the character of the town. In



Merrily Cassidy/Cape Cod Media Group

**Days' Cottages in Truro are boarded up for the winter.**

Truro, the library is secluded, quiet. In the wintertime, a large conference room is available to work in. I ask the kind librarians if I can use that space. "Of course," they say, smiling.

The room, enclosed on three sides by windows, juts out over the forest. I close the double doors, take off my winter gear and arrange the chairs to accommodate my belongings. I plug in my laptop, put on headphones, take out files. There is no need to be in my office in Manhattan. As long as I have electricity (which can be tricky), as a

freelance writer I can work from any location. It's difficult not to be momentarily distracted by birds, trees and the desire to explore, but I keep my focus and wait for lunch.

1 p.m. I pack up and drive to the house: a left, then right. I make a turkey, cheese, avocado wrap; grab some grapes and head to the next beach. I take the longer, more scenic route towards Provincetown, passing a minimal, one-story row of white cottages with pale green shutters bayside on Route 6A. Along the road are patches of unblocked views. The low tides offer intense visuals of light reflecting from the sky into the bay.

Past Provincetown, I drive into the National Seashore and arrive at Herring Cove. There is a handful of cars in the long parking lot. I turn off my engine, lean the seat back, crack the window open and, like everyone else, eat my sandwich and watch the ocean about 100 feet from the steering wheel. Between the parking lot and the water is a long stretch of beach. Seagulls

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line up on the shore in perfect formation. It's a strange site: two species staring at the sea in silence.

2 p.m. Back to work, but first, my favorite drive: Herring Cove to Route 6. If I'm lucky, the road is empty. I put on the classical music station, 104.7. At the top of a small hill, a view of the National Seashore opens up, the lighthouse in the distance. Every time I arrive at this spot, it feels like I have driven into a painting – the Atlantic sweeping out away from me for miles.

The road weaves through the park, leaving the ocean behind and entering the canopied forest. Gold-colored dunes give way to deep reds and silver streaks found on the rocks, shrubs and beech trees. When the forest is only in my rearview mirror, I arrive on Route 6, passing the yellow signs warning of 'turtle crossing.'

On to the next library! Which to choose? Wellfleet or Orleans? The library in Wellfleet is bustling. I arrive at Snow Library in Orleans and set up my computer in the back, at a rectangular table that I will most likely share with at least one other person and "work."

3:30 p.m. Sunset! I quickly pack my things and head to JoMamas coffee shop for an iced coffee and a gigantic muffin top, toasted and dripping with butter. But which beach for sunset? Difficult question indeed! Coast Guard Beach has breathtaking views. Bonus! There's a short drive over a wooden bridge, with the ocean to my left and salt marsh to my right. But it's a long drive out there. I choose instead First Encounter, bayside, between Orleans and Eastham.

I race to make it. Like most sunsets, First Encounter's has an audience. There are half a dozen cars in the parking lot. I turn off my engine, pleased for a front row seat. The red ball falls. Light pink streaks up the walls of the extended skyline. Blues and violet take over until the stars emerge, and night is upon us.

4:30 p.m. Back to work. At Snow Library, I quickly plug back in and stay a few hours. It's a brisk walk to my car and a long drive home. Occasionally I stop in at The Bookstore in Wellfleet for a bowl of clam chow-



Jim Preston/Cape Cod Media Group

The sun sets off Herring Cove Beach in Provincetown.


der or a drink at the Wicked Oyster bar, also in Wellfleet. If I have writer's block, I book a 90-minute massage with Erin, her calming voice helping me to center, release and find a breakthrough with my work. Most days though, I go home, change into a black shirt and jeans and head to Fanizzis.

7 p.m. If it's not too crowded, I grab a stool at the wooden bar facing the ocean, which is not possible to see this time of

night. I open up my Charlaire Harris book, occasionally chat with a person next to me — a tourist, artist, fishing boat captain — or, more likely, the bartender. I drink my beer slowly until the kitchen is about to close and order a chicken potpie to go. I say good-night and drive back in darkness. The fox will most likely be waiting for me. I hope to see lights from a neighbor to remind me I am not alone on this Earth.

10 p.m. The wind is merciless as I run to the front door and hold the screen with my foot so it won't blow off. Inside, I place the food on a coffee table, change into layers of warm, soft clothes, put on the TV, checking first for a storm report, eat, wash up, lie in bed and listen to the wind.

Sleep comes quickly when you can't wait to wake up again. Yup, a typical Monday on the Cape. ■




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