

The Hay Pooks

While chatting to Skipper Hubert Oldford last weekend (July 8, 1972) about this year's cod fishery at Elliston he related an interesting story about a well-known fishing ground off Elliston called Hay Pooks. The story of the discovery of this favourite fishing ground was handed down from father to son. His Grandfather, William Oldford was one of the fishermen who found it, and fished on it about one hundred and five years ago. This favourite fishing ground lies off Elliston, and is four miles wide and one mile long. It is about nine miles off Elliston. There are eighteen good fishing rocks on the Hay Pooks. Not all of them were found the same time. They were found down through the years and on special occasions. They have special names and meanings, all of which are related in this story, as told, by Skipper Oldford. All the words may not be the same as he told them, but they are as close to the real ones as I could get. They convey the meaning he intended to reveal while chatting with him, and I think they will be meaningful to the reader.

For years my grandfather and other fishermen of his time had noticed large seas breaking and big swells in the water many miles off Elliston. It occurred after every large storm, but no one bothered to find out why this was happening.

One summer about one hundred and five years ago while Grandfather and a few other fishermen were fishing on the inshore fishing grounds, fish became very scarce. Grandfather spoke to a few other fishermen about going further off shore and fishing other fishing grounds. They talked about trying to find fishing ground where they saw the seas breaking and the big swells out in the bay.

They prepared their bullies [large two masted, three sailed, boats about 25 feet long] and set out one morning to find better fishing grounds off shore. Seeing large swells out in the bay they sailed and rowed to it. When they got there they found out the water was not very deep in places, only three, four or five fathoms, while in other places it was deeper. They also found out that fish was plentiful, and each boat returned home with a full load.

The large swells out in the bay, where they had fished for the first time resembled large pooks or piles of hay and Grandfather named it Hay Pooks.

The first rock on the Hay Pooks was found by my grandfather William Oldford about one hundred and five years ago during his first trip out there. He called it Outside Rock because he could not find any bottom outside of it. The water is 10 fathoms deep. The marks for this rock are a notch in Fisher's Ridge and Flower Hill, south of Spillar's Cove on the southern part of Northern Island. It is nine miles from Southern Head.

Chris' Rock was named after Skipper Christopher Chaulk who found this rock during the same summer that Hay Pooks were found. The water is 8 fathoms deep. Marks for this

rock are the Anglican Church Elliston, over the middle of Southern Island and a hummock on Melrose Ridge over Northern Island.

Hill's Rock was named after Skipper Arthur Hill, also of Elliston. He found this rock about a couple of summers after grandfather found the Outside Rock. It is twelve fathoms deep. Marks for this rock are a hummock over Northern Head [Catalina] and Job Coles House Elliston, over the southern part of Northern Island. This rock is just about nine miles from Northern Head.

North East Rock is the most north eastern rock on the Hay Pooks, and was named so because no other fishing rock has ever been found north east of this one. It is twelve fathoms deep. It was found about one hundred years ago by one of the old skippers fishing out of here, but I do not know his name. Marks for this rock are a hummock on Fisher's Ridge over Northern Island and John Burk's house open over the Northern part of Southern Island.

William Coles' Rock is named after Skipper William Coles who found it about the same time North East Rock was found. The water on this rock is fifteen fathoms deep. Marks for this rock are the same marks that are used for North East Rock, except you go a little further towards land.

Joe Martin's Rock bears the name of a very well-known fisherman of Elliston, Skipper Joe Martin. I do not know the exact date this rock was found but it was about the same time grandfather found the Outside Rock. These old fishermen were all about the same age and fished on the same grounds. This rock is 12 fathoms deep. Marks for this rock are a high hummock on Northern Head and Job Coles house open with the northern end of Southern Island.

Joe Martin's Rock is named after Skipper Joe Martin, a brother of John Martin. Their father was one of the best boat builders here. He found this rock about the same time his brother found John Martin's Rock. He found this rock one day while fishing in the fog. When the fog cleared up he used these marks; Anglican Church Elliston, over the northern part of Southern Island and a notch on Melrose Ridge over Northern Head. The water on this rock is 20 fathoms deep.

Charlie Chaulk's Rock was found about the same time as the Martin Rocks by Skipper Charlie Chaulk. The water on this rock is from 15 to 20 fathoms deep. Marks for this rock are the last notch in on Northern Head and William Martin's house open with the northern part of Southern Island.

South West Rock was also found by my grandfather two or three years after he found Outside Rock. He called it South West Rock because he could not find another fishing rock South West of this one. It is seven miles from Elliston. It is also the shallowest rock on the Hay Pooks. The water is only three fathoms deep. The marks he used are the

ones I still use. They are Job Coles house, open with the northern part of Southern Island and the United Church tower, open with the southern part of South Island.

Field is the largest rock on the Hay Pooks. Up to twelve boats can fish there at one time. The water is from eight to twenty-five fathoms deep. It was not named after any particular fisherman, since two or three fishing skippers found it. Because the ground was so big one of them named it Field, resembling a large field. Marks for this large piece of fishing ground are a hummock resembling a broom on Northern Head and Job Coles house open with the southern end of South Island. I do not know the exact day it was found but according to what I learned from my father it was about one hundred years ago.

Steer south west from Outside Rock and you will come to Murphy's Rock. It was named after Skipper John Murphy of Catalina, who found it about the same time Hill's Rock was found. This is the deepest rock on the Hay Pooks. Water is from twelve to thirty fathoms deep. Marks used for this rock are the same marks as the ones used for Outside Rock, except you steer a little to the south west.

Large and Small Gannet are two rocks on the Hay Pooks that were found by Skipper Samson Cole of Elliston about the same time that I was born. Also with Skipper Cole was my father Skipper John Oldford. They got caught in the fog while fishing on one of the other rocks. They pulled up anchor, drifted towards shore, and with their lines overboard accidentally came upon Big Gannet, and later, Little Gannet. They named it Big and Little Gannet because when the fog cleared up near them was a bird called a gannet. The marks for Big Gannet are the United Church tower open with the southern part of South Island and a notch in land on Northern Head. Marks for Little Gannet are the same except you steer a little to the north of the big one.

North west on the Hay Pooks there are two deep rocks called John Murphy's Rocks. They were found by Skipper John Murphy about 100 years ago. This is why they are called Murphy's Rocks. The water is from 12 to 25 fathoms deep. Marks for these rocks are Rich Coles House open with the southern part of Northern Island and a notch on Melrose Ridge open with Northern Head.

I do not know who named the rocks Locker Board, but I know there are two, an inside rock and an outside one. It was named Locker Board because when an old fishing skipper was fishing on this rock, the fish were so plentiful that he accidentally lost one of his locker boards overboard and he wouldn't pull up his anchor and try to get it, so he lost it. Ever since that time it has been called Locker Board. The water on these two rocks are from twelve to thirty fathoms deep. The marks for the southern rock are the lighthouse on Green Island, Catalina, open with Northern Head and Tom Crewe's house, open with the middle part of South Island. The marks for the northern one are the same except a little further north. The rocks were found about 95 years ago and are located about 3 miles off.

Finger Stall is the smallest of the rocks on the Hay Pooks. It was found by Josiah Hobbs about forty years ago. The water is from 15 to 25 fathoms deep. He got lost in the fog, and accidentally came upon this piece of ground. He also found the fish plentiful, and while fishing lost one of his finger stalls over board. Marks for this rock are a hummock on Northern Head, open with a notch in Spillar's Cove Ridge and southern part of North Island.

Hay Pooks is still a favourite fishing ground for fishermen fishing out of here and nearby places. It is not used as much as it was thirty or forty years ago because fisherman have found good fishing grounds nearer to land. Many fishermen here and in nearby places including Bonavista and Spillar's Cove fish there occasionally when the weather is suitable.

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Information from an interview conducted by Mr. Samuel Ryan with Mr. Hubert Oldford (1972)