



Time for Nature



Nature's fragile pottery

Flowerpot Island at Fathom Five National Marine Park of Canada

Flowerpot Island is a well-known attraction at Fathom Five National Marine Park of Canada. Tens of thousands of visitors come to see this striking feature whose unusual shape gives it its name. However, the flowerpot rock stack is inherently unstable, and the same processes that created it will eventually erode it into the lake.



Flowerpot Island is a well-known attraction at Fathom Five.
© Bruce Peninsula National Park, Ethan Meleg, 2002.

Sculpting the flowerpots

Flowerpot Island is part of the Niagara Escarpment, which runs across southern Ontario from Niagara Falls to Manitoulin Island. Millennia ago, a tropical sea covered this part of North America. The weight of the water compressed the sediments of the escarpment into a rock called dolomite.



Flowerpot Island is part of the Niagara Escarpment, which runs from Niagara Falls to Manitoulin Island.
© Parks Canada, D.A. Wilkes, 1992.

Long after the sea dried up, glaciers exposed the bedrock. The waves and storms of Georgian Bay sculpted the dolomite to create the cliffs and caves that we see at Fathom Five today. Flowerpot Island's distinct formation resulted from this erosion. A top cap of harder rock was more resistant to the waves, which scoured out the sides and left the freestanding rock stack.

Halting the advance of time

When Parks Canada acquired Flowerpot Island in 1930, the fragility of this striking formation was a concern. The structure was top-heavy and potentially unstable. Water collecting on the island's top percolated down through cracks in the rock surface. In winter, the water froze and the cracks widened. If the damage continued, the rock would



crumble and the flowerpot feature would be lost. Parks Canada stabilized the structure, capping the top with concrete and adding brickwork to support its sides.

Letting nature take its course

In recent years however, Parks Canada's thinking has changed. The agency still aims to protect natural features, but it also protects natural processes. Rather than trying to freeze time and protect a temporary natural phenomenon, Parks Canada decided to let nature take its course. Georgian Bay will decide the ultimate fate of the flowerpots, over the next few hundreds or thousands of years.



More than a flowerpot

In the years since Parks Canada acquired Flowerpot Island, it has discovered other natural features that are every bit as interesting as the flowerpot shape. The island is a wonderful place to find wild orchids.

Old growth cedar trees grow on the island's cliffs.

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It's also a refuge for several snake species, which are protected from predators by the island's isolation from the mainland.

And on the island's cliffs, researchers from the University of Guelph have found old-growth cedar trees. One specimen was over 1800 years old, making it the oldest known living tree in eastern North America!

These natural wonders show that Fathom Five has many stories to tell. Flowerpot Island reminds visitors of the powerful natural processes that are continually shaping and re-shaping our environment. The geologic features we see today may be a visual spectacle, but the drama is still unfolding. The great forces that mold the landscape are always at work.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/fathomfive