

~~Despite these glitches, the authors provide honesty, pragmatism, and straightforwardness regarding policy discussions. While it is not stated explicitly, it is generally clear where the authors believe that their recommendations and ways forward are supported by unambiguous science and where the available science might not be good enough for policy, so other policy formulation approaches are needed. That provides a refreshing and solid starting point for debate on action, including the authors' sensible discussion regarding economic impacts, costs, and benefits of different coastal management approaches.~~

~~Again, the policy discussion is highly American. Nevertheless, enough internationally relevant comments are made to extend interest beyond U.S. institutions and institutional difficulties. More explicit input into the recommendations from social science would have balanced the obvious input into the recommendations from physical science.~~

~~The final recommendation given (p. 181) is perhaps the book's thesis: that sea level rise poses opportunities as well as challenges. It is not inevitably a catastrophe, but it is up to us to make the right choices to avert disaster. That is a powerful statement framed by the book's continual message that working with nature to permit the sea to take over parts of coastlines is an inevitable solution deserving of more proactive attention and implementation.~~

~~Overall, *The Rising Sea* is worthwhile, important, and needed, covering a topic that might define the future of many island cultures. With a little more effort, the book would have been essential reading and a highly impressive reference.~~

*Ilan Kelman*

*Center for International Climate and Environmental Research (CICERO)*

*Oslo, Norway*

[islandvulnerability\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:islandvulnerability@yahoo.com)

---

Victor Suthren (2009) *The Island of Canada: How Three Oceans Shaped Our Nation*, Toronto ON, Thomas Allen Publishers, 337 pp + index. ISBN: 978-0-88762-406-3. Can\$34.95.

For someone like myself studying islands from a Canadian university – itself located on an island province - I met news of this book with boundless optimism. Finally, here is somebody with enough imagination to realise what is staring at Canadians in the face all along. At last, we can return to privileging Canada's history, heritage and emerging destiny as a maritime nation. We can confidently start re-orienting our gaze from the powerful neighbour down south (and north-west) and the increasingly tense terrestrial border that divides the two countries. We can start reminding ourselves that we share marine borders, and interests, with countries like Denmark, France and Russia (and not just the US). And we can shift confidently away from necessarily seeing our economy and identity as driven by the export of terrestrial-based mineral resources, themselves the outcome of extractive, often polluting, industries.

This part of the book I enjoyed. Canada is a country surrounded by three oceans. The Atlantic, and then the Pacific, have been crucial platforms for fishing, conquest and settlement during the period of European discovery, and for the millennia of indigenous occupation that preceded it. The Arctic, home of most of Canada's indigenous people, and location of the world's largest indigenous jurisdiction, the territory of Nunavut, is creeping fast into the country's focus as a strategic frontier, as hinterland, as a steward of an increasingly ice-free lucrative north-east passage. Not to diminish the importance of trade relations with the US: but the grip of this particular relationship remains too strong and paradigmatic on the Canadian psyche. Hence, it is good to remind ourselves, as Suthren does so well: Canada has the largest coastline in the world; the largest fresh water lake system in the world; the second largest continental shelf area in the world; 7 million Canadians live on its coasts; all but two of its ten largest cities – Calgary and Edmonton – are coastal. Indeed, the latter observation, coupled by the fact that the current Prime Minister hails from Alberta, along with the bad name that Canada has now earned for itself in climate change talks, may all help to explain why this book's publication is so strategically timed. Canadians need an especial reminding of their geography and history these days. Indeed, Prime Minister Stephen Harper (in 2006), and Finance Minister John Flaherty (in 2008), have both gone on record to remind us that, after all, "Canada is not an island".

This book begs to differ. It offers a primarily marine and maritime history that has "... made Canada an island of perceptions, values and commitments, and has helped shape a unique national character", argues Suthren (p. 1), thus framing his book not just as a project for a reclaiming of forgotten history, but for the forging of a national identity. And this is where I think the project disappoints. The author falls victim to a fake romanticism which purports to engineer a 'Canadian nation' within the borders of a state whose federal constitution belies that, indeed, we are not, and perhaps should not be, a single nation. The accidents of geography have often been recruited by elites in the construction of national narratives – and islands offer various examples - and this is exactly what Suthren unashamedly tries to accomplish.

Thus, Suthren's island of Canada is not so much a geo-political one, not even a symbolic representation, but a mythic and heroic construction, much like Benedict Anderson's "imagined community": a piece of land surrounded by water that is meant to be unitary; as much as its citizens should have a strong sense of self derived from their strong sense of place. Ironically, some of the subject matter of his chapters – especially Chapter 6: *The Great Struggle for Empire 1700-1763* – witness the changing fortunes of primarily French and English powers, and the political accommodations that followed from this lies at the heart of the Canadian federal project. Indeed, Canada is perhaps best seen, and accepted, as a state of various nations, rather than a wannabe nation state, as Suthren proposes. Canada's promise of prosperity and growth (p. 337) need not be framed in suspicious nationalistic fervour.

For those who wish to read briefly and sparingly – and shorn of citations that may hinder the flow - about the expeditions sent out to seek the north-west passage; privateering exploits along the Atlantic seaboard; Anglo-American conflict over the Pacific coast; or the history of the Royal Navy in Canada, and eventually, the Royal Canadian Navy, they should enjoy this book. The running thread is the aquatic connection. Even in describing that iconic terrestrial development, the Canadian Pacific railway, the emphasis is on maritime communications, introduced by CPR both within Canada (across the Great Lakes) and within the British Empire, as in shipping lines from Vancouver to British India. The author, a former director of the Canadian War Museum, has a penchant for the history of ships: he has a special index dedicated to ships in the book.

When Europeans crossed the Atlantic to settle in the New World, their destination was not just virgin territory (pardon the presence of the local inhabitants); North America was initially conceived as a material assemblage of islands, but also a symbolic archipelago of bounty and liberty. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was probably much inspired by Amerigo Vespucci's enthusiastic description of the New World... Suthren appears hell bent to resurrect this sense of hope and dynamism: even, ironically, as Canada's population becomes increasingly racially, linguistically and ethnically diverse; and as populations gravitate towards urban cores; as fishery industries wind down following glaring stock mismanagement. Ironically, as he seeks to deflect our land-based, continental frame of reference, Suthren attempts to hoist instead an imagining of the country that is more comfortable in the (in its own way, mythical) cultural fabric of the USA.

All in all, this is a text aimed at a popular audience; it is an enjoyable light read, driven by a refreshing and innovative perspective; but straddled with a rather uncomfortable twist.

*Godfrey Baldacchino*  
Canada Research Chair (Island Studies)  
University of Prince Edward Island, Canada  
[gbaldacchino@upei.ca](mailto:gbaldacchino@upei.ca)

---

~~Louis Brigand (2009) *Besoin d'îles*, Paris, Stock, 252 pp. ISBN: 978-2-234-06024-1. €18.00.~~

~~Louis Brigand is a French academic geographer who has spent the last thirty years studying islands – mostly those around France, but also some as far away as Sakhalin and the Galapagos archipelago. In the spring of 2008 he was given permission to spend five weeks on the small and usually uninhabited island of Beniguet, off the west coast of Brittany in the Sea of Iroise, to take stock of his life and research. The result is this charming book, whose title translates as “The Need for Islands” but could more appropriately be rendered as “The Yearning for Islands.” It contains reflections on roughing it on a tiny isle (Beniguet covers 60 hectares), meditations on why some people are so attracted to small islands, a review of past research undertaken or supervised by him, as well as a few chapters on particular themes such as tourism and music.~~

The Island of Canada: How Three Oceans Shaped Our Nation. By Victor Suthren. Thomas Allen. 384 pp.; \$24.95. The author "an Ontario historian, novelist and former director general of the Canadian War Museum" has a passion for marine adventure, detail and accuracy, and this book is about as comprehensive as it gets. It's the working in of plausible yet imaginative detail that keeps it from bogging down under a heavy cargo of fact. But Canada an "island"? That we are a nation shaped by oceans, lakes and rivers there is no doubt, and chapters adroitly chronicle that shaping, from the Ice Age on The Island Of Canada book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Canada has the longest coastline of any nation on earth, together wit... Now, Victor Suthren, one of Canada's most articulate historians and an expert on maritime history, has written the first history that shows how the oceans and lakes of Canada have shaped our nation. From the earliest days of Inuit and Aboriginal hunters, the Norse, Basque, Spanish, and French adventurers and fishermen to the explorers of the Pacific coast and the Arctic, the royal fleets of Britain and France, privateers, pirates, and merchantmen, the fur trade, and the great Age of Sail, here is a sweeping history that traces the development of the Canadian psyche as it has been shaped