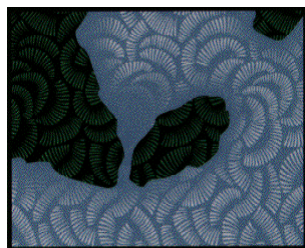
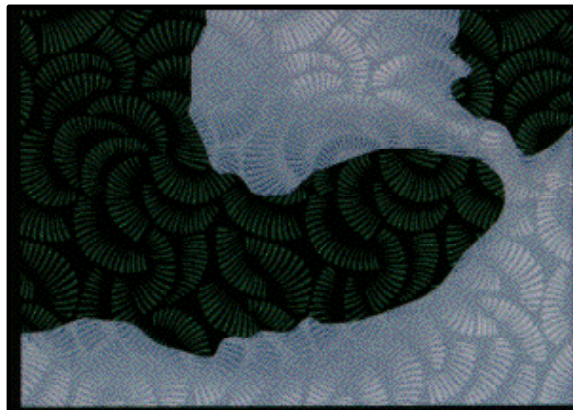


Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Ocean Explorer
Vol.4, No.3 March 1995

Georges Cape... Georges Island... Georges Bank

A Brief History of the Past 26,000 Years

Once, when thick sheets of ice covered North America, the sea was much lower than it is today. Then, the area we call Georges Bank was part of the mainland. It stretched into the Gulf of Maine from the end of what is now Cape Cod. Geologists call that early form of the Bank Georges Cape. Twenty-six thousand years ago, the ice that covered Georges Cape began to melt. After about 1,000 years, the surface was fully exposed. But the air was so cold that the only life that could survive there was tundra. Georges Cape measured 53,000 square km, a little more than one-third bigger than the area Georges Bank encompasses today.



About 11,500 years ago, the sea rose high enough to flood a lowland area at the southwestern end of Georges Cape. The Great South Channel was formed, and Georges Cape became Georges Island. Its surface had shrunk to 22,500 square km. Temperatures were now warm enough to support many forms of life, including pine and spruce trees, and later oaks and other plants. Mammals made their home on Georges Island as well, including walruses, mammoths,

mastodons, giant moose, musk ox, giant sloth, tapir, and man, who lived and hunted for giant prey on Georges Island 10,000 years ago. Today, fishing boats sometimes haul in remains from this distant era.

Henry David Thoreau wrote in his book *Cape Cod*: "Every Cape man has a theory about Georges Bank having been an island once, and in their accounts, they gradually reduce the shallowness from 6, 5, 4, 2 fathoms to somebody's confident assertion that he has seen a mackerel gull sitting on a piece of dry land there."

About 6,000 years ago, the level of water rose high enough to submerge Georges Island. It became Georges Bank, as it is today. Giovanni da Verrazano discovered the Bank by bumping into it in the early 1500s. He named it Armelline Shoals, after an evil papal tax collector. Later, in 1605, English colonists renamed it for St. George.

