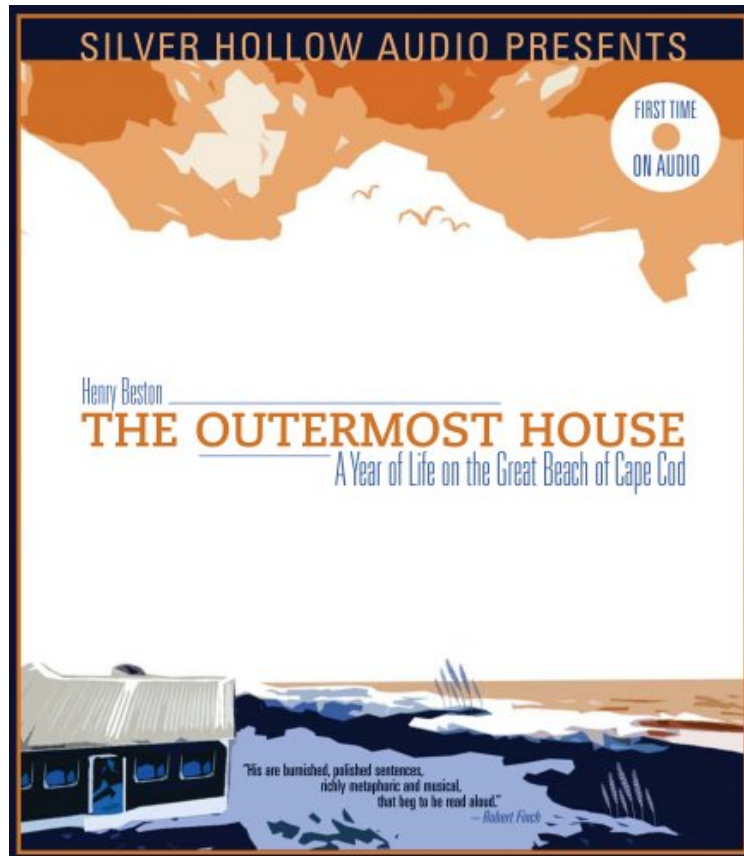


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# The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod

Henry Beston

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**Henry Beston : The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Celebration of the Cape Cod Seaside in the Tradition of ThoreauBy R. SchultzThis near-classic account of the author's year alone in a self-built cottage on Cape Cod's shore, sometimes dips a little into purple prose. "Then time gathered like a cloud, and presently the stars began to pale over an ocean still dark with remembered night." These descriptions often sound lovely and poetic, but they might tend to roll off your back like water off a duck, just because they contain no sharp particularities to stick in your mind.Nevertheless, this is undeniably a stirring account of the ritual of the seasons that Beston observed from his solitary outpost on the beach near Eastham, Massachusetts. And in among the occasionally too general sonorities, there are many, many truly telling metaphors, as when he describes a wind that was "a thing to search the marrow of one's bones."I initially felt a little frustrated reading his descriptions of his sand and sea surroundings. I wanted to turn

the page and find a big glossy picture that would immediately convey the details to me. But then I realized that such a longing was a laziness, and that it was actually better to have to create the picture myself, to build it slowly from Beston's words. This made my experience of nature more interactive and ultimately more satisfying. I was forced to use my imagination. It was like listening to radio, rather than having the completed pictures of TV always there - bam - in front of me. Ultimately my having to create the scene myself in my mind's eye made me concentrate more and appreciate better the beauties being described. However, I do think that a better map of Beston's location might have been helpful to orient the reader at the outset. I remained a little confused about the juxtaposition of the different features of the sea, the beach, the dunes, the marshes, the runnels and inlets, around him. The small, cramped picture supplied at the front of the book doesn't suffice. Comparisons between Beston and Thoreau are apparent on every page. The way Beston usually capitalizes the word "Nature" reflects the Transcendentalists' pantheism. But when Beston was writing in 1926, he didn't quite seem to grant equal divinity to all living things. He has a remarkable feeling for the beauty of the lives of birds, but he doesn't always seem to be as awake to the miracle of fish. When he receives the gift of a live cod that a member of the coastal patrol found on his doorstep, Beston views with equanimity the struggling fish as it's hung on his clothesline, its continued puffing a testament to its freshness for dinner. Modern sensibility might be veering a little more to a realization of the suffering of fish as well as birds and mammals. In other areas though, Beston's words might have been taken from today's headlines. He deplores the oil slicks that were killing so many birds. The main source of the slicks in 1926 was oil refineries. Many refineries then were simply loading the dregs of their refining process onto tankers that then took the greasy cargo out past the shoals and spilled it into the ocean. Beston becomes uncharacteristically a little more specific and scientific in his writing when he describes how birds that got coated with this oil almost always died, in part because of the way the oil created big separating creases in their plumage, exposing their bodies to the frigid air and water. Beston is prematurely optimistic about the way in which these spills were being curtailed. He said the situation was much better than it had been some years before, and he had every reason to believe that there would soon be no more oil slicks on the oceans to despoil Nature of its glories. In some other uncharacteristically analytical passages, Beston explains how one incredible night of strange phosphorescence marking his footsteps along the beach might have come about. On the whole though, you won't garner much scientific information about the species that Beston observes in his seashore retreat, nor about the geological processes that form the landscape there. This no Discovery Channel exposition. But you will come away from this very personal essay of a book with a heightened sense of the beauty, complexity, and mystery of one of Nature's most awe-inspiring ecological niches.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A vicarious experience of life  
By Diane Schirf  
The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod by Henry Beston. Highly recommended. In his chronicles of a year spent in a tiny house on Cape Cod's great beach, on a dune between ocean and dunes and marsh, Henry Beston recognises something of which many of us are no longer aware - the cyclical nature of life. Even the beach itself, embattled between land and ocean, wind and wave, is the result of a cycle. Beston vividly describes the many others that take place during his year, for example, the advance and retreat of the varied plant life upon the dunes and the corresponding changes in colour and tone. Even when the dunes seem dead, Beston finds life lurking in the development phase of its cycle; of the insects he says, ". . . yet one feels them here, the trillion, trillion tiny eggs in grass and marsh and sand, all faithfully spun from the vibrant flesh of innumerable mothers, all faithfully sealed away, all waiting for the rush of this earth through this space and the resurgence of the sun." The cycle of night and day had been lost to most by 1925, the year of the outermost house, as Beston notes. He says, "Primitive people, gathered at a cave mouth round a fire, do not fear night; they fear, rather, the energies and creatures to whom night gives power . . . having delivered ourselves of nocturnal enemies, [we] now have a dislike of night itself." On the beach, however, Beston can experience the "poetry of night" - beach-combing skunks, frolicking deer, stranded skates and dogfish, and great tempests and storms that ground boats and ships and drown or carry off their crews. Of course, life and death are part of the cycle, eloquently illustrated through tales of shipwrecks (past and present), but perhaps most poignantly shown after a great summer storm, when all that Beston finds of a least tern colony is an eggshell fragment, then, upon further exploration, discovers the song sparrow determinedly sitting on her nest, which is now only inches above the wind-piled sand. Like the Lord, the sea giveth and the sea taketh away, a way of life that is most clear when predators drive in schools of fish to feast on, only to find themselves stranded by the relentless surf. Immersed in all these cycles and rituals - the seasons, day and night, life and death, migration and hibernation - Beston, perhaps unconsciously, creates his own, including not only the practical such as weekly visits to town for supplies, but also the equally necessary - the regular seeking out of the Nauset light and the companionship of the Coast Guardsmen who man it and who patrol the coastline. These human contacts become the ritual of Beston's own human life, when it is not involved in observing the world and the life around him. Beston did not write *The Outermost House* with a purpose, other than to please his fiancée; that is, his intent was not to preach or persuade but to observe and chronicle. At times, the passages ramble accordingly, but at other moments they sing, as when he says of animals, "They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth." Given the constant flux of the world, where a thriving colony of terns may be replaced by a storm-tossed sand dune in the course of one night, it seems appropriate

that the Fo'castle, the outermost house, along with its beach, was reclaimed by the ocean during a winter storm in 1978. Knowing the ocean and the land as he did, Beston may have been surprised that the house survived as long as it did. Beston does not have to resort to preachiness for the outermost house-and its fate-to make a point about our tenuous connection to our frail world and its rhythms. The outermost house is gone. Discover, explore, and preserve what remains. Diane L. Schirf, 18 September 2005. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Close Look at Nature By John Frey Beston does a terrific job of describing the plants, animals, vistas and sounds of Cape Cod. At the time, he was able to live remotely away from others. This couldn't be written today with all the swarms of people everywhere. This book made me want to go back to that era where a person could enjoy solitude and nature.

In 1926, Henry Beston spent two weeks in a two-room cottage on the sand dunes of Cape Cod. He had not intended to stay longer, but, as he later wrote, "I lingered on, and as the year lengthened into autumn, the beauty and mystery of this earth and outer sea so possessed and held me that I could not go." Beston stayed for a year, meditating on humanity and the natural world. In *The Outermost House*, originally published in 1928, he poetically chronicled the four seasons at the beach; the ebb and flow of the tides, the migration of birds, storms, stars, and solitude. The landscape was his major character, and his writing provides a snapshot of the Cape, a place physically changed yet as soulful 80 years later. Like Henry D. Thoreau before him, and Rachel Carson after him, Beston was a writer of stunning beauty, importance and vision. Robert Finch once wrote of him, His are burnished, polished sentences, richly metaphoric and musical, that beg to be read aloud. *The Outermost House* is a classic of American nature literature. It is now available, for the first time, on audio. \*Including an interview with Beston biographer, Dr. Daniel G. Payne \*Unabridged on 5 CDs / approximately 5 hours \*Narrated by Brett Barry

\*Starred review\* Echoing Henry David Thoreau's life at the edge of Walden Pond, Beston's year on the beach of Cape Cod results in a classic record of a naturalist's encounter with an environment still unspoiled. Though Beston lives that year by himself in a small house built on the edge of the beach, he is never alone. Surrounded by a large variety of migrant birds, he delights in watching their habits up close and muses on the forces impelling them. Members of a nearby Coast Guard station offer occasional human company as well, but Beston's main focus stays on the rich variety of life around him. He describes the minutest detail of this world in thrilling language. He sees the full spectrum of colors in the waves, the sky, the topographical features of the Cape, the vegetation, and, of course, the fish and birds. While maintaining a respectful distance, he communicates an appreciation of the environment that is vitalized by his superb prose rhythms and a vocabulary that captures every nuance of his meaning. Brett Barry's narration is ideally suited to Beston's principal work, and Daniel Payne's interview ... though relatively brief, enhances the book's message. Highly recommended. --Library Journal Silver Hollow's audio version of *Outermost* is a thoughtful, impressive presentation of Beston's timeless book ... Brett Barry's voice is warm and inviting. His smooth narration allows you to see the beach, smell the salt air and hear the wind whipping through the sand and the waves crashing against the shore. His voice combined with Beston's clever and revealing use of words transports you to the Fo'Castle, where you can actually smell the coffee brewing on the stove in the tiny kitchen. --Cape Cod Today Silver Hollow's audio version of *Outermost* is a thoughtful, impressive presentation of Beston's timeless book ... Brett Barry's voice is warm and inviting. His smooth narration allows you to see the beach, smell the salt air and hear the wind whipping through the sand and the waves crashing against the shore. His voice combined with Beston's clever and revealing use of words transports you to the Fo'Castle, where you can actually smell the coffee brewing on the stove in the tiny kitchen. --Cape Cod Today About the Author Henry Beston (1888-1968) was the author of many books, including *Herbs and The Earth and Northern Farm*. His Cape Cod house was declared a National Literary Landmark in 1964, but was destroyed by a winter storm in 1978. From AudioFile In 1925, Henry Beston built a small house on Cape Cod and spent a year there with minimal human contact. His reflection on the experience, *THE OUTERMOST HOUSE*, is a revered part of Cape Cod's literary history. Brett Barry shines as the voice of Beston, a naturalist. Barry's narration captures the poetry of Beston's lyrical passages, in which he expresses views on wildlife and conservation that are decades ahead of their time. While some of Beston's descriptions are in the vein of a field guide, others are wise and moving. This production is best listened to during a walk through one's own favorite natural retreat. D.B. AudioFile 2008, Portland, Maine-- Copyright AudioFile, Portland, Maine