

Fabulous Fog

Text and photography
by John Sylvester

It surrounds us & defines us

Fog, fabulous? Who on the East Coast hasn't had a beach day cut short by grey, wet murk rolling in off the ocean—or experienced a white-knuckle drive along a winding coastal road in thick pea soup?

What's to like about fog? It's cold, it's wet and it obscures the view.

But as a photographer, I've come to embrace the opportunities fog presents to create exceptional images. On a foggy morning I grab my camera gear and head out the door to see how the swirling vapours have transformed the landscape.

Fog is formed when a moist air mass is cooled to its saturation point, or dew point, causing fine droplets of water to be

A thick bank of radiation fog is backlit by the rising sun in New Glasgow, PEI.

suspended in the air close to the earth's surface. In Atlantic Canada, two types of fog commonly occur.

Advection fog develops when warm air passes over cold surfaces, such as the ocean. This is the familiar "pea soup" fog experienced along the Atlantic coast in much of Nova Scotia, the Bay of Fundy and especially Newfoundland and Labrador, the foggiest part of the planet. In fact, the *Guinness World Records* names the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland, as the world's foggiest place. On land, Trepassey is probably the foggiest town, with more than 200 obscured days a year.

Advection, or coastal, fog can be difficult to predict and capture effectively with a camera. I've experienced many occasions when

it was just too thick to see much of anything. The term advection, however, means the horizontal movement of air; in other words, this fog moves with the air. So while it may be "pea soup" one moment, it could change at any time with the wind direction—and this is when photographic opportunities arise.

A few years ago, I stood on a hill overlooking the village of Trinity, NL, and watched as a fog bank drifted out to sea, slowly undressing the scene below.

And a couple of summers ago, I peered into the grey gauze from a cliff on Quirpon Island, NL, trying to see the icebergs that I knew were floating just offshore. I was eventually rewarded when the sun began to filter through the fog, and an iceberg's outlines appeared in an ethereal light.

Of grey gauze and moody mist....
Below: A fog bank slowly drifts out to sea, revealing a traditional saltbox house overlooking Trinity Bay, NL. Right: A soulful paddle on Nictau Lake in Mount Carleton Provincial Park, NB.



Top 3 fog photo tips

1. Look for a foreground subject, especially with advection fog of the "pea soup" variety. It could be a rocky shoreline, a fence or a boat. A strong foreground is a visual anchor, leading the viewer into the mysterious vapours beyond.
2. With radiation or ground fog, try photographing into the rising sun, so the image is backlit. The mist will turn golden, and you may get "god's rays" streaming through the image.
3. Coastal fog contains salt—not healthy for sensitive electronic camera gear. When you get home, fill a small bowl with warm water and add a drop of dish detergent. Moisten a clean linen dishcloth (no lint), and carefully wipe all non-glass exterior surfaces of your camera; use lens cleaner and tissue for glass surfaces. Let the gear air dry before putting it away.



Fog shrouds the spires of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic (foreground) and St. Paul's Anglican churches, in Trinity, NL. Newfoundland is famous for its fogginess.



"Mist in the hollow, fine day to follow"



Soft reflections on a riverside view in Wheatley River, PEI. Above: Sunlight filters through coastal fog, gilding icebergs near Quirpon Island, NL.

The other type of fog common to Atlantic Canada is radiation, or ground, fog. It occurs inland on calm, cold, clear nights when the temperature dips, cooling the moist air near the ground to its dew point, causing it to condense into fog.

"Mist in the hollow, fine day to follow," is a common expression in Prince Edward Island.

This type of fog is a favourite of mine. It's sometimes still present in the morning when the sun rises—on clear mornings I can usually count on the sun rising through, bathing the mist-softened landscape in a golden glow. As the sun rises higher, I may capture its rays streaming through fog-shrouded trees. It is ephemeral, however. The vapours soon burn off under the warming air.

Elusive, mysterious and beautiful, fog is a unique ingredient that rewards the patient landscape photographer and, with luck, can result in a few fabulous photographs. 🐾

John Sylvester is a three-time winner of Canada's Northern Lights Award for Excellence in Travel Journalism and Photography. His latest book is *Wild Island: Prince Edward Island's Hidden Wilderness*. He lives in PEI.