FABRIC OF THE PATH: VIEWING A NOVA SCOTIA LANDSCAPE THROUGH A LONG-DISTANCE TRAIL NETWORK

by

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SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role architecture can play in structuring a shelter-to-shelter kayaking route in Guysborough County, Nova Scotia. Without the confines and linearity of a terrestrial course, the trail-less waterway invites the user to meander and define a unique and personal experience. With almost limitless physical trajectories over the site, the route is mediated through nodes of importance. It is through the recognition and design of these nodes that the structure of the waterway is defined and interpreted. By turning the attention of visitors towards the surrounding landscape, both built and natural, the trail infrastructure invites one to pause, reflect and inhabit. The traveller bears witness to the particulars of the route through the spatial, material and ambient fabric of the path.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family, for their support.

To my committee, for the long chats.

To my studio mates, for their late nights.

To my wife, Cate, for accompanying me through it all.

Thank you.

THESIS QUESTION

What role should architecture take in the development of a long distance trail that weaves between outports and the hinterland along a Nova Scotia coastline?

GETTING TO GUYSBOROUGH

I had heard that Guysborough County was at the end of the road, but I never imagined that the road would be this decrepit. It's downright frail. Chipped and cracked, it is riddled with potholes. Frost heaves have left this artery in an awful mess. Forsaken to time, the infrastructure of Guysborough County is not a priority of the province. These routes are akin to a body abandoned in a morgue. Her communities are tiny and shrinking and they're all that lie at the end of the road; there is nothing but the north Atlantic beyond this point. Our destination, the town of Whitehead, is astonishingly far away and isolated from Halifax.

Nonetheless, I find myself on this road, barrelling along for many reasons: the pace, the place, to bear witness, and to find myself in the rigor of the experience. Maps and photographs can only provide a glimpse toward this experience. I go to slow down. I walk to the end of the government wharves to see the fishing boats slip into the horizon's grip. I've been enchanted by the myth of Nova Scotia's Folk. I go to see how people live and tell myself that's how they've always lived. And then there is the sea, for coastal Nova Scotia was defined by the water route. For a night or two we look to the ocean in search of what attracted five hundred years of European fishermen and eons of Mi'kmaq. Exploration came upon the bow of a ship and settlements and villages developed because some of us hopped on shore. The communities that remain are old, decayed, and distinct from each other. There is no one singular object or destination along this coastline. In the end, the attraction, the reason I go, lies in the experience.
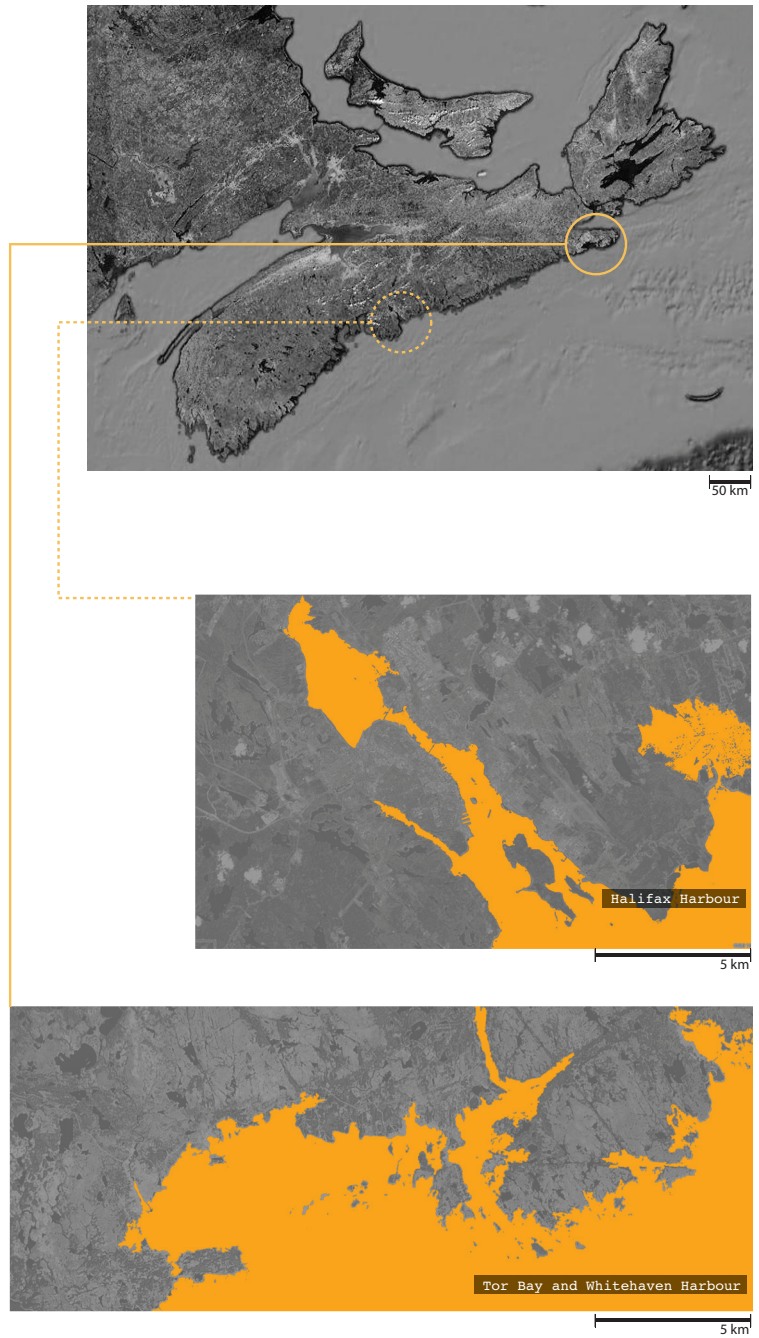
Area size comparison between Halifax harbour and the site in eastern Guysborough County, Nova Scotia. From maps.google.ca/maps.

TRAVERSING ROUTES (INTRODUCTION)

A long distance kayaking trail is not a story or a linear sequence of events. The foundation of a journey is in the perceptual experience of the route. The way we relate to an environment is conditioned by our impressions while moving into and out of that place. After all, trails do not exist as abstractions, but rather in the specificity of place, or to be more accurate, places. It is the particulars of trails that attract users. The remote shores of eastern Nova Scotia embody the finest particulars of coastal paddling. Along the south east coast of Guysborough County the shallow bays, protected inlets, tiny hamlets, remote locations, and a rich history present a landscape ripe for exploration. Visitors come to paddle in the wake of history and bear witness to the landscape. Recognized nodes, both landscape and architectural, compliment the experience along the chosen course by concurrently working together to enrich the composition of the route. It is through the design and discovery of these interventions that the structure of the waterway can be defined. By facilitating the grounds for interaction, the installations, both artifact or new, shape the way we physically inhabit place through framing a portion of the coast thereby creating, as Charles Moore states, "a metaphorically habitable [place], where we can go beyond where we actually are to wherever our imaginations will transport us" (Moore 1974, 49). By turning the attention of visitors towards the immediate landscape, the trail infrastructure invites one to pause, reflect and inhabit. Through the material assembly and spatial organization, they offer a connection to the elements of wayfinding and exposure or enclosure from grand and marginal events. The necklace of installations is not meant to be a story or a detailed catalogue of events, but rather, as a process of interconnected egalitarian associations. The route is ones own, but the nodes are for us all. The nodes become the social element. This thesis focuses on developing an architecture of place that defines a route and mediates the experience of landscape along a long distance kayaking trail in Nova Scotia.
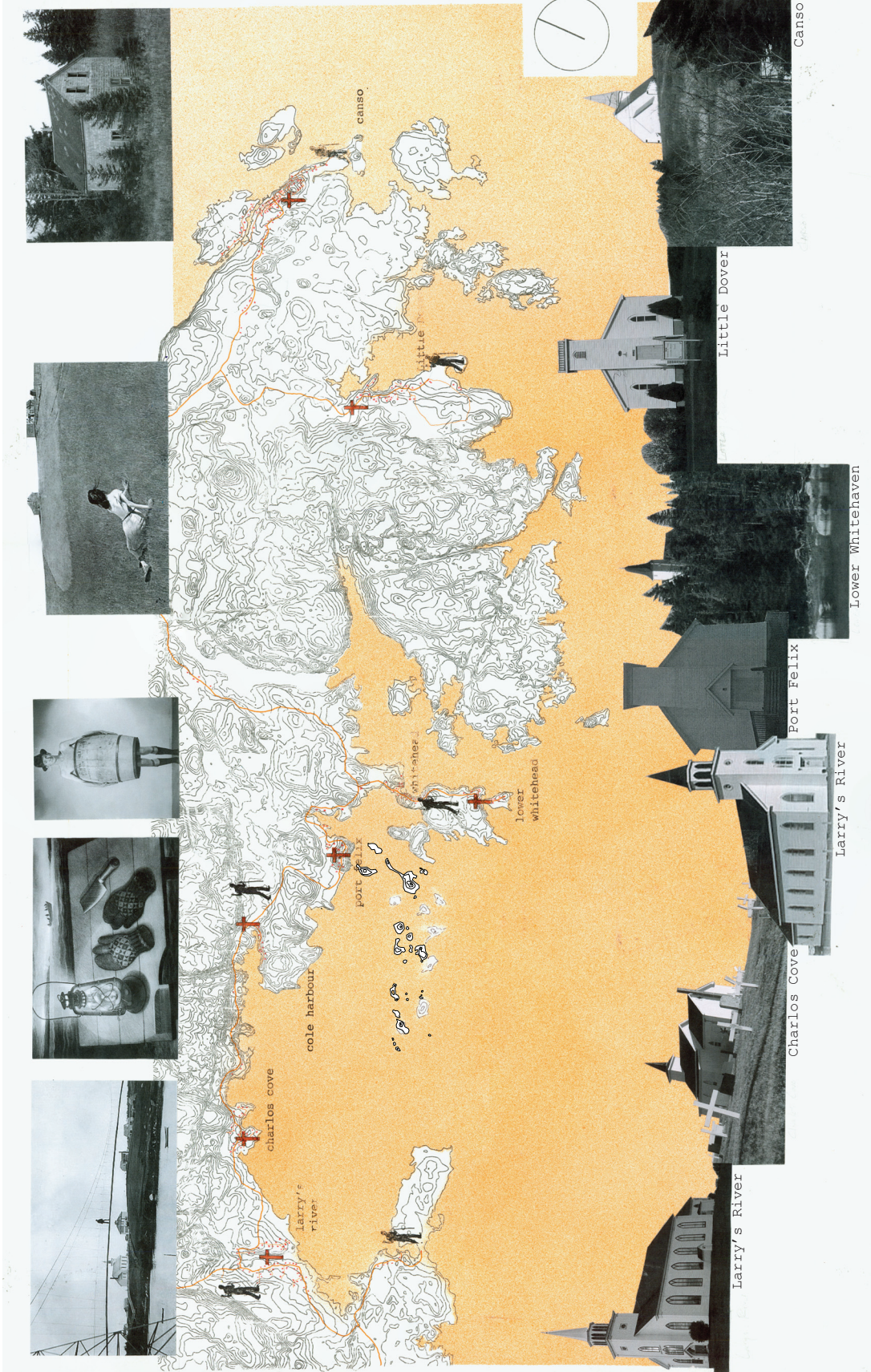
Collage of the social/civic idiosyncrasies of eastern Guysborough County: trails, civic structures, myths, associations.

ARRIVAL

A fire hall marks the junction. Situated on flat ground, it contrasts our route of twisting roads and rolling hills along the coast. We've turned off highway 316 to free ourselves from the hydrographic isolation of our vehicular promenade's drumlins, cliffs and vistas. Even the hiking trails along the way present the coast without ever giving it to you. We've come to get our feet wet and step into the edge of the ocean.

Clinging to a spit of land between harbour and hill, the town begins to appear before us. Driving around yet another drumlin reveals the homes, wharves and fish stores of Whitehead. While protecting it from the constant offshore breezes of the coast, the topography provides a natural frame for this tiny municipal landscape. By the time we're in the town, we've blown past the entrance to the trailhead; a wood and stone tower rises from a marsh in our wake. Slipping the car between the ruins of a fish store and a corrugated steel workshop we pull onto the government wharf to make a three point turn. Prudent fingers of stone gesture into the harbour, while two cribs reach unto the sky. Hmm... we've crossed a canal. It's time to slow down, for it seems that this town has latent conditions that can all to easily be passed by at the speed of a car.

View of Canal at high and low tide, Whitehead, NS.

WATER ROUTE (SITE)

Tor Bay and Whitehaven Harbour are two large bays in eastern Nova Scotia, actively promoted by the Nova Scotia government as a great place for remote kayaking treks (Trails Nova Scotia). This area embodies coastal paddling at its most enjoyable with hidden coves, small hamlets, narrow channels, and something different around each corner. Nevertheless, the regions recreational infrastructure remains underdeveloped. There are a few walking trails, but they have been neglected for years and are found today in a state of decay. With limited access to the coast, these trails curb ones ability to explore the islands, shoals, bluffs and beaches, which are the physical manifestation of the regions distinct geology. Between Halifax and the Whitehead peninsula the coastal bedrock is predominately a formation of folded bands of greywacke, quartzite, slate, shale and gneiss. In stark contrast, the surf crashes on white granite headlands in the eastern harbour; french explorers called it Tete Blanche, to the English it was White Head (Tor Bay Roots Web). Across the area, glacial erratics are perched in unusual places and positions, as if it was only yesterday that the ice sheet scoured the region.

Today the shore is lined with the artifacts of human occupation. The Sugar Islands of Tor Bay were the base of European fishing stations in the 1600's. During his 1607 journey from Port Royal to Canso, the French explorer Champlain stayed with Captain Savelette, a Basque fisherman active in the area since 1565 (Woodbury 1880, 19). To this day the shores of the islands and coastal barrens are scattered with the ruins of abandoned human occupation. Upon the mainland, wharves, fish stores, and a small fleet of fishing boats are still animated at dawn by the few remaining fisherman preparing to head out of the harbour to sea.

The small villages and towns along the coast do not creep into the hinterland or each other; they are framed by forested or barren boundaries. There are no pastures or agricultural expanses as the land was not fertile for farming. Whether carved into the forest (void in a solid), perched upon a cleared drumlin (objects in a void) or refabricating the coastal edge (special condition of void and solid), from the sea the towns are absolutely separate from one another (Moore 1977, 79).
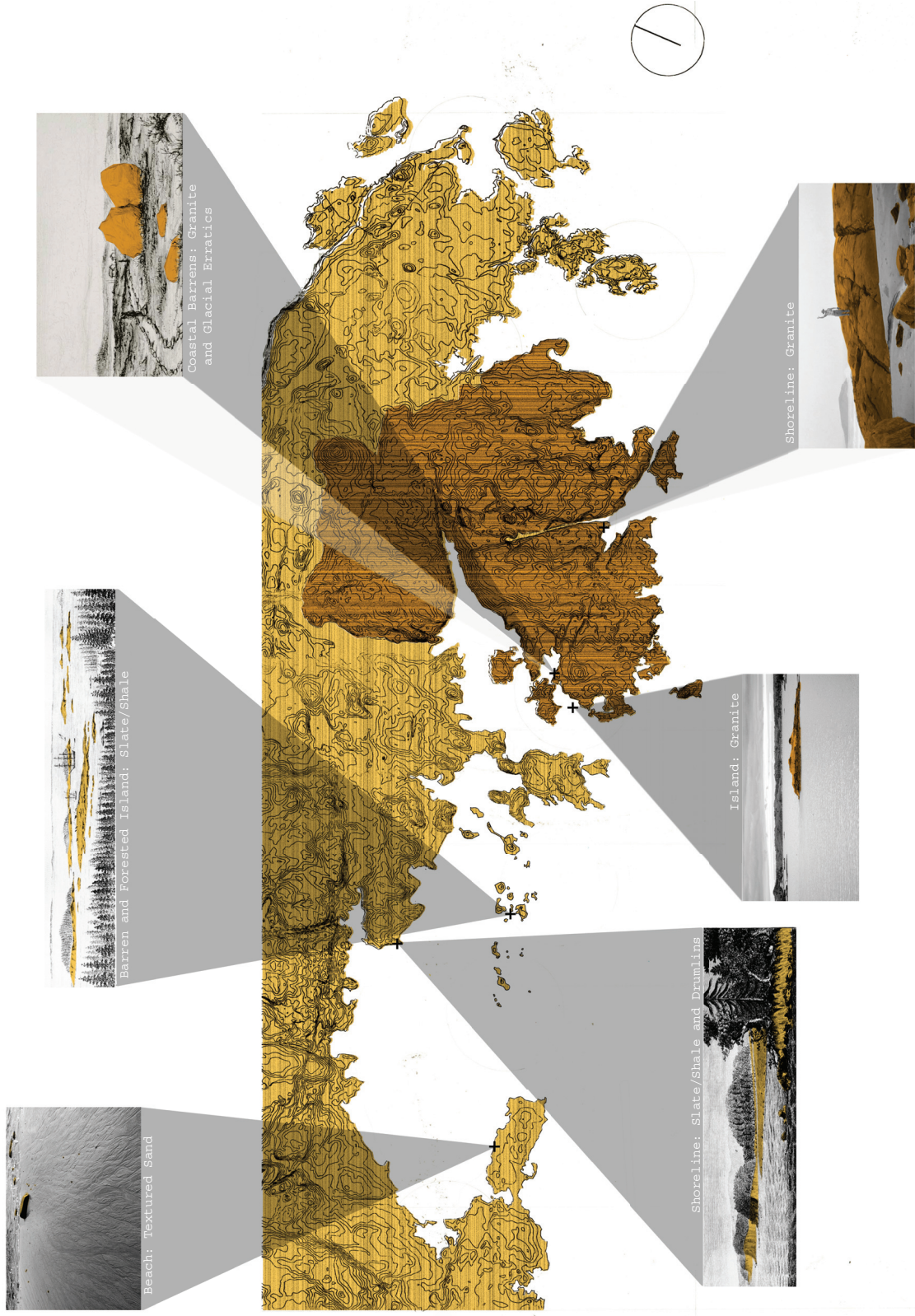

Texture of greywacke, et al. outcrop.

Texture of granite outcrop.

Coastal Barrens: Granite and Glacial Erratics

Shoreline: Granite

Barren and Forested Island: Slate/Shale

Island: Granite

Beach: Textured Sand

Shoreline: Slate/Shale and Drumlins

Collage of geologic idiosyncrasies of eastern Guysborough County: Confluence of bedrock formations. slate, shale and greywacke in yellow, granite in orange.

REEVALUATE INFRASTRUCTURE (ORDERS)

This thesis is an investigation into how we inhabit the infrastructure of a trail. While the infrastructure along this coastal trail must fulfil utilitarian and potentially hybridized programmatic needs, it also must provide a order to engage with the route. "Performance and event must assume conceptual precedence over appearance and sign" states James Corner (Corner 1999, 159). Visitors to the trail depart on afternoon, overnight or weekend trips without knowing what is to come. Each visit will produce a unique experience, nonetheless, through interacting with the clarifying pattern of each node, they will provide a communal experience. Charles Moore explains that the fundamental principle of architecture is territorial:

> [This idea] began with the premise that the architect particularizes. He discerns special patterns of human activity, and organizes movement. He develops a clarifying pattern, a design to which the whole process of building is subjected. Within this pattern there must be a controlling image that gives people the chance to know where they are – in space, in time, and in the order of things. People must have something to be in. (Moore 1974, 32)

John Patkau's ideas on the design process expand upon Moore's statement:

> Our intuitive starting point was to seek those things that are particular to the project in order to develop an architectural response around them... those aspects of site, climate, building context, program or local culture, for example, that will facilitate the development of an architectural order which is evocative of circumstance. (Patkau 1995, 8)

Architect George Descombes continues this line of thought in his argument that landscape and the individual objects it contains must be framed, not defined. Subtle designs rise out of long and careful observations of traces of past uses to shape user experience by "restructuring an imaginative sense of place as much as physical experience" (Descombes 1999, 80). It is crucial to move away from developing an image of place. By exploring the found potential of a site, an architectural order can be recognized and designed to invite and resist comprehension (Leatherbarrow 1987, 255). Nodes become the places along the route, filled not with objects, but with meaning.
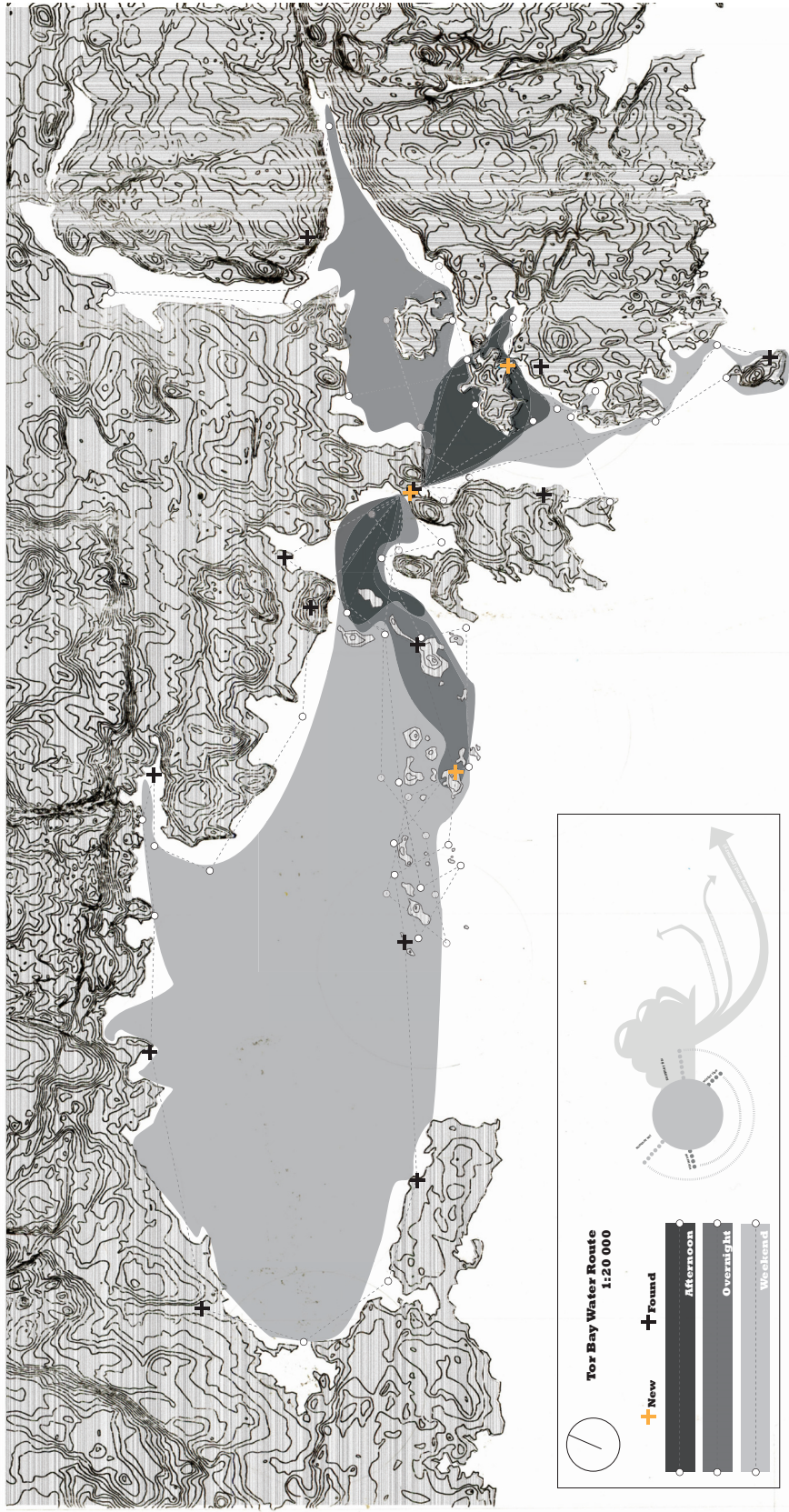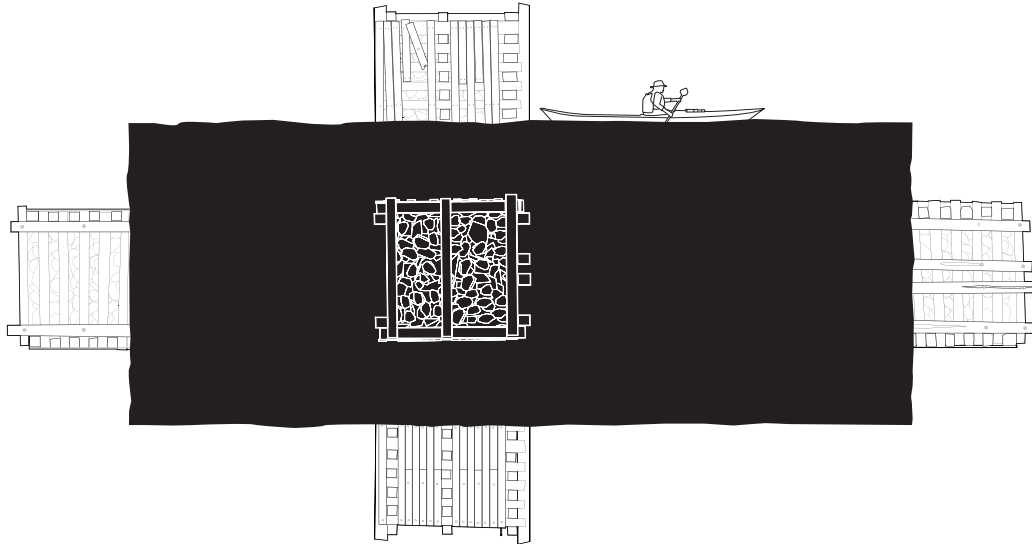
Diagram of the Coastal Water Route. Dashed lines represent multitude of possible routes. Black hatch represents existing nodes. Orange hatch represents new nodes. Grey clouds represent potential explorations of the area.

Tor Bay Water Route
1:20 000

New
Found

Afternoon
Overnight
Weekend

Infrastructural Orders: Pattern.

Bear Witness - Infrastructure along this route engages with landscapes of practice; landscapes as they are lived, embodied, built. Landscapes of practice contain elements of cartesian objecthood, tectonic assembly and spatial ambience, each which may influence design. These embodied elements relate to the body as the user experiences them, in and out of the kayak.

Infrastructural Orders: Place.

Representing Pause - Each node changes the dynamics of site. The site is not strictly scenic, the place becomes a space to be inhabited. These changes must be relished and expressed, whether permanent or ephemeral.
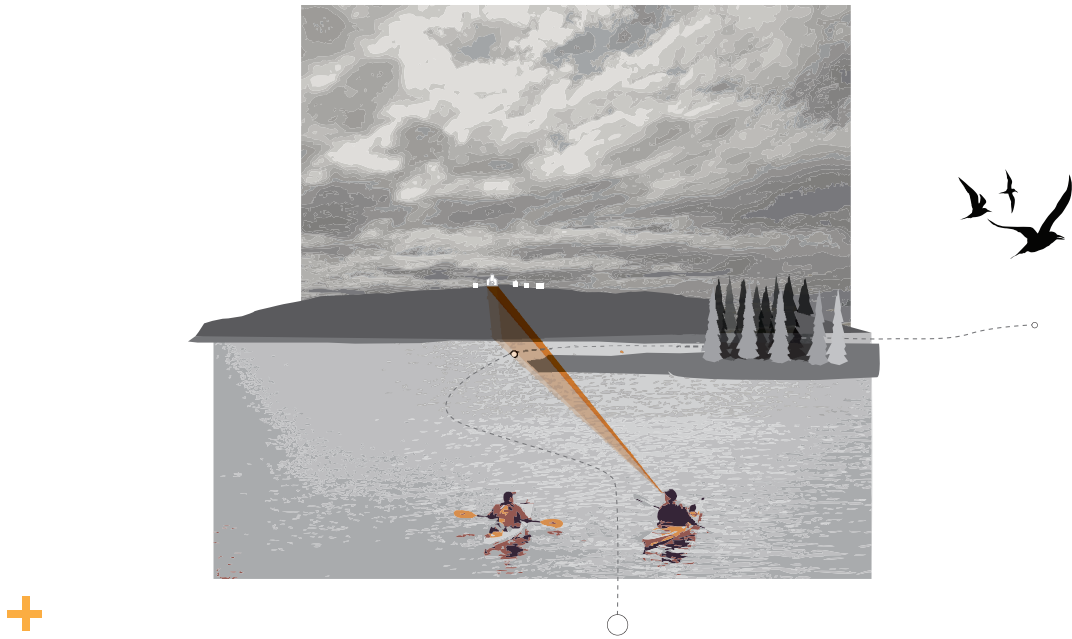
Infrastructural Orders: Path.
Influencing Space - Built elements can present a view and serve as a wayfinding device. Through articulating the ground, the prospect is presented with a pictorial tradition and ground the user to place, presenting a path for the imagination to travel before the body does.

Infrastructural Orders: Edge.
Transitional Landscapes - A node provides a venue for utility: to prepare supplies and equipment, change into a wetsuit, relieve oneself, rest, and to be physically positioned on the trail, ready to transition into or out of the water. Nonetheless, these nodes must also articulate and celebrate the transition from rigor to rest and rest to rigor.
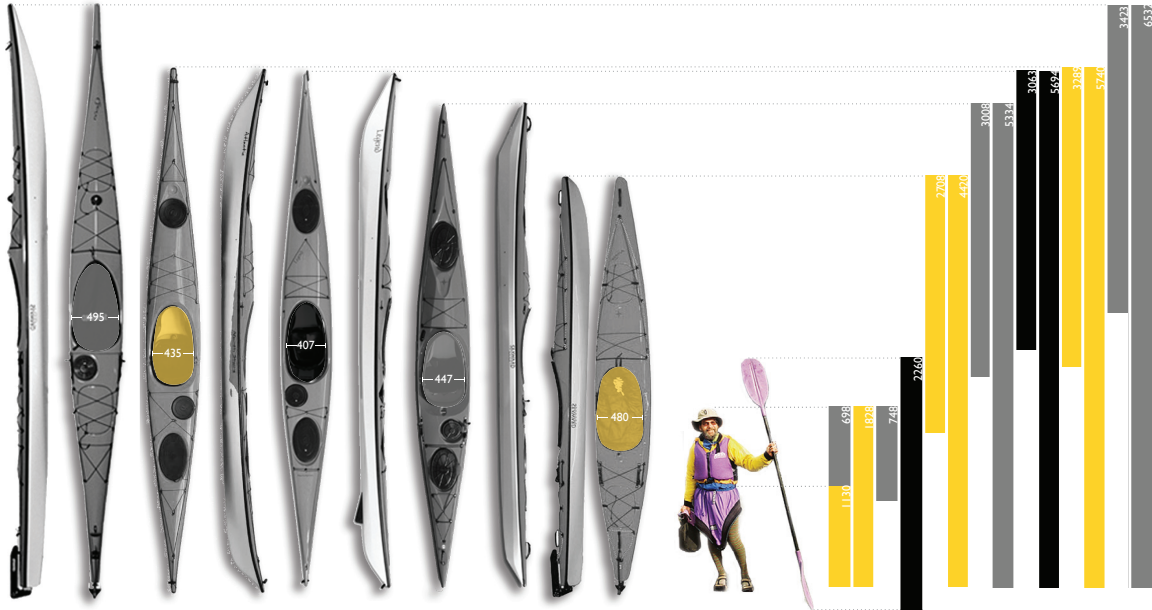
Geometric Reference: The kayak and the body. Relevant measures include the users seated height within the vessel, the position of the user with reference to the vessel, and the length of the vessel itself.

BEGINNINGS

Perched on the corner of the intersection is a cairn of sorts. This cubic monolith marks the trail, so we cut off Whitehead's main drag. After only a few hundred feet the forests splits open. Our truck squeezes through the earthen gates to enter a parking lot notched into the hill and protected from the road by berms, seemingly built up from the excavated lot. From our parking spot, North hill in Whitehead dominates the horizon. The retaining wall proudly holds the drumlin at bay. Leaving enough room to pull the boats off the rack I start racing through all the gear I need for two nights at sea. Trail shelters are no doubt comfortable, but rather cold if one forgets a lighter.

With clumsy efficiency we navigate our two boats out of the parking lot. Carrying a kayak is easy, but awkward. Slipping out through the same gate we entered, the sea feels so close. Our trek is finally beginning. Ahead lay a path towards the water; a trajectory with a hierarchy that supersedes municipal infrastructure and coastal topography alike, for it cuts right through the road and over the grassy wetland.

With the familiar weight of the kayak hanging from my joints I let out a sigh of relief at the sight before us. Splitting the path in two, is a doubled handrail sized to carry our boats. Kayaks firmly resting on the steel track, we effortlessly pull them closer to the sea as a flock of eider ducks disappears over the tall spiny grass constraining our view.

PATTERN (BEAR WITNESS)

> Tectonic – derived from the Greek word tekton, meaning carpenter or builder – signifies the fusion of technique with art, of construction with poetry... Tectonic suggests a preoccupation with materiality and the championing of craft that respects the traces of the hand and the expressive potential of construction... The radical tectonic finds its expression in the physical and material attributes of construction, enhancing the body's experience of space... (LeCuyer 2001, 16)

Tectonic architecture can be seen as the synthesis of concept and articulation. Seen as an image, an assembly is also experienced through smell, sound, touch and presence. As Annette Lecuyer describes in the passage above, tectonics is an illustration into the poetry of assembly in nature and imagination. This paced sensuality in architectural space is reflected by Julian Pallasmaa: "The haptic sensibility savours plasticity, materiality, tactility, and intimacy. It offers nearness and affection rather than distance and control. While images of architecture can be rapidly consumed, haptic architecture is appreciated and comprehended gradually, detail by detail" (Pallasmaa 2005, 191). Louis Kahn approached tectonics as a discussion of monumentality: "Neither the finest material nor the most advanced technology need enter a work of monumental character for the same reason that the finest ink was not required to draw up the Magna-Carta..." (Frampton 1995, 210). In seeking a tectonic expression of place and experience, the project is attempting to move beyond physical and material aspects of construction.

Within the spatial patterns of occupation and activity along a trail resides the potential for a tectonic architecture. Particular aspects of site can be expressed and articulated; users bear witness. Such an architecture offers a nearness to the experience, edges and places of the trail. Annete LeCuyer explains that poetic assemblies can reach to the collective:

Grist Mill, Canso, Nova Scotia.
From Grant, *Historic Guysborough: A Portrait of Home.*
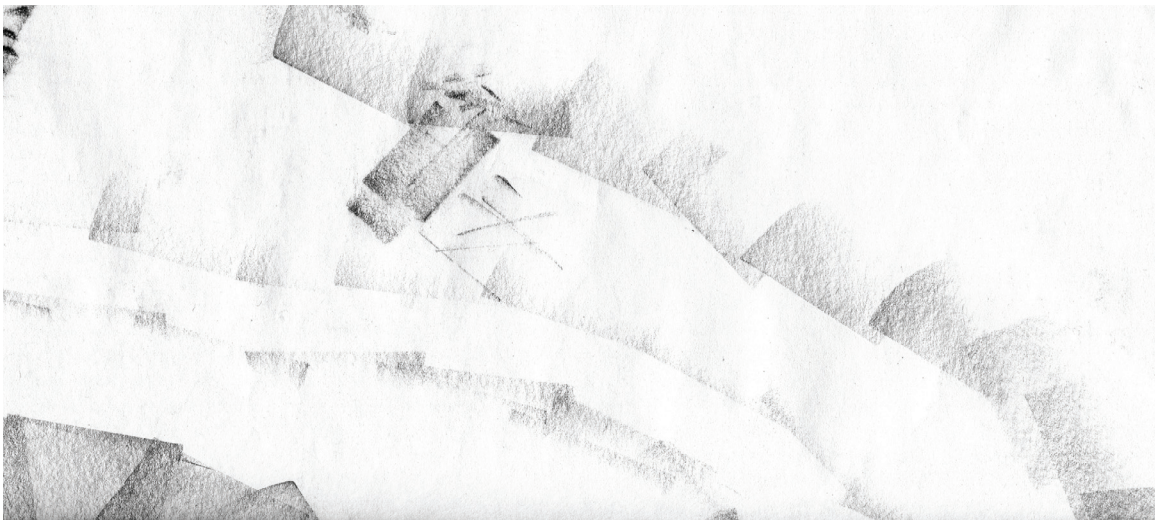
Fish Shack Study, Sugar Islands, NS.

> In addition to the enhancement of individual experience, this architecture is directed toward the creation of shared social landscapes: rather than being an esoteric private dialect of the elite, the richly expressive language of the art of construction is firmly engaged in the public realm. (LeCuyer 2001, 16)

This trail cannot be seen as 'a thing-in-itself'. It does not exist in isolation. We must recognize the potential for the tectonics of the route to be a process of ongoing associations – through our experiences the trail will becomes a 'thing-for-us' (Flam 1996, 160).

Port Felix
32 m

Charlos Cove
19 m

Larry's River
11 m

Cole Harbour
7 m

Canso
5 m

Lower Whitehaven
4 m

Meters Above Sea Level

Diagram of Churches of Eastern Guysborough County. Topographic elevation of primary entrance threshold noted on left. Across the site, village churches speak to a consistent tectonic language. Nearly identical, save a few recent renovations, the buildings reach beyond religious associations and become civic artifacts. Each town has responded separately to the structure, each deviating the design of the church, with a unique steeple approximately 36 feet above the threshold. From the water the churches act as wayfinding tools, standing prominently within each town.

NODE ONE
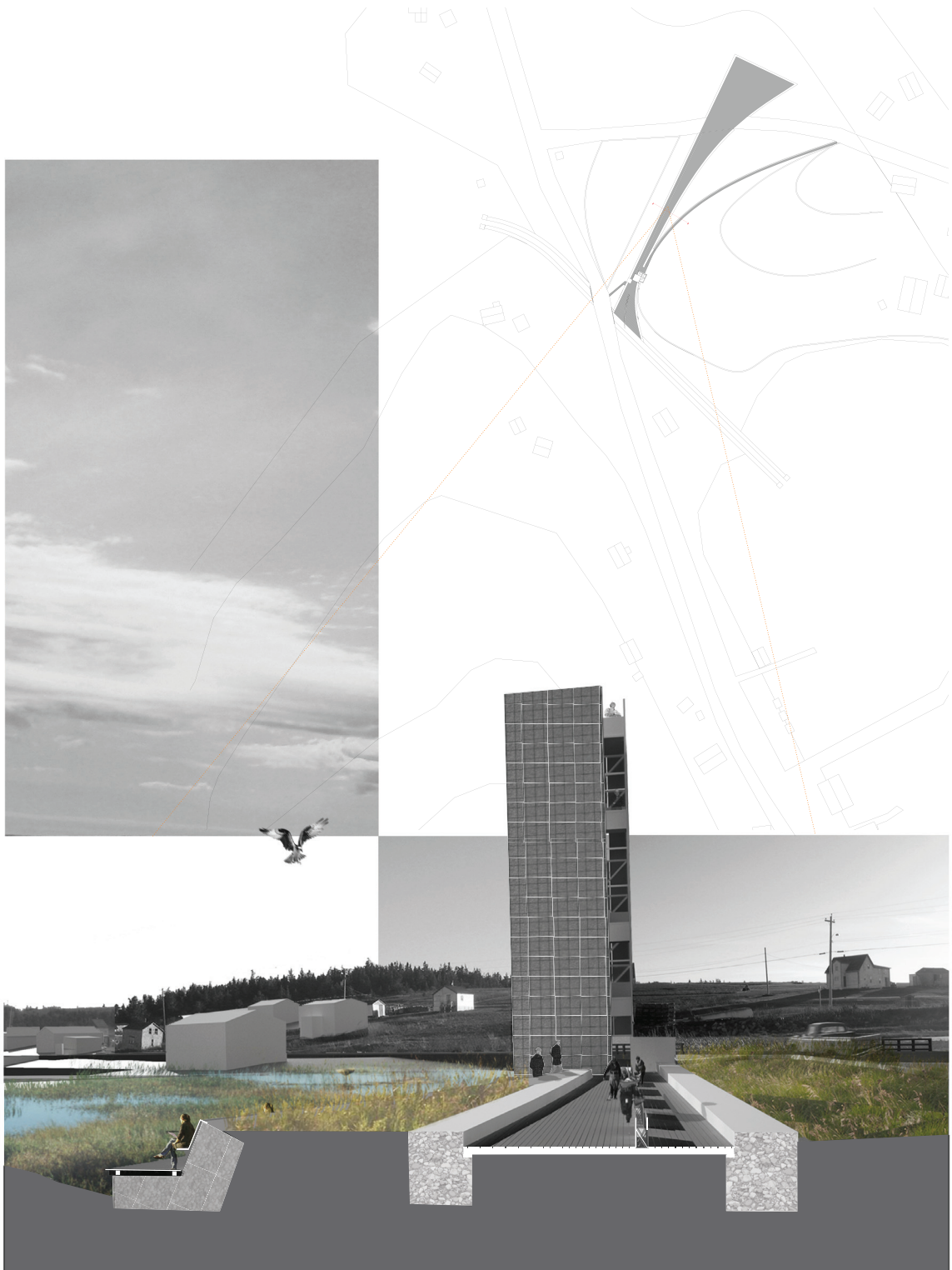
Collage of Trailhead: Site plan and viewing tower.

Trailhead

A trailhead in Whitehead provides a venue for utility: to prepare supplies and equipment, change into a wetsuit, relieve oneself, and to be positioned centrally on the trail before sliding into the water. Nevertheless, through parking, bathrooms, lookout towers and quays – elements of infrastructure that many would deem purely utilitarian – this thesis can challenge our interaction with the landscape. The trailhead presents a dramatic opportunity as a threshold; the visitor must pass through it. This space can create a distinct transition between the profane everyday world of roads and rest stops and the sacred realm of the kinesthetic route beyond.

Place (Landscape Recovery)

The site around the Whitehead canal is a neglected lowland area sheltered in a protected bay. Millions of birds are attracted to Nova Scotia's calm yet rich coastal wetlands to accumulate fat supplies for migration. Through recovery, this drosscape can be redeveloped into an intertidal wetland to attract waterfowl and create a dynamic zone for tourist, residents and kayakers to enjoy. Henry David Thoreau reflected upon such a recovery: "the turning a swamp into a garden, though the poet may not think it an improvement, is at any rate an enterprise interesting to all men" (Thoreau 2007, 36). The wetlands define the limits of the path through a relatively transparent screen of tall grasses which move and sway in the coastal breezes.

Edge (Civic Space)

Unlike trails in a park, far removed from civic life, the interventions of the coastal water route cannot be planned and located simply for recreation; this is a matter of the public realm, a matter of reminding, of making people think (Jackson 159). Infrastructure along this route engages with communities. Without a church in town, Whitehead is lacking a central civic space. Through creating a new civic presence, the water route benefits the town. It becomes a landscaped park for reflection, provide a small space for a picnic, and helps develop urban connectivity through paths.
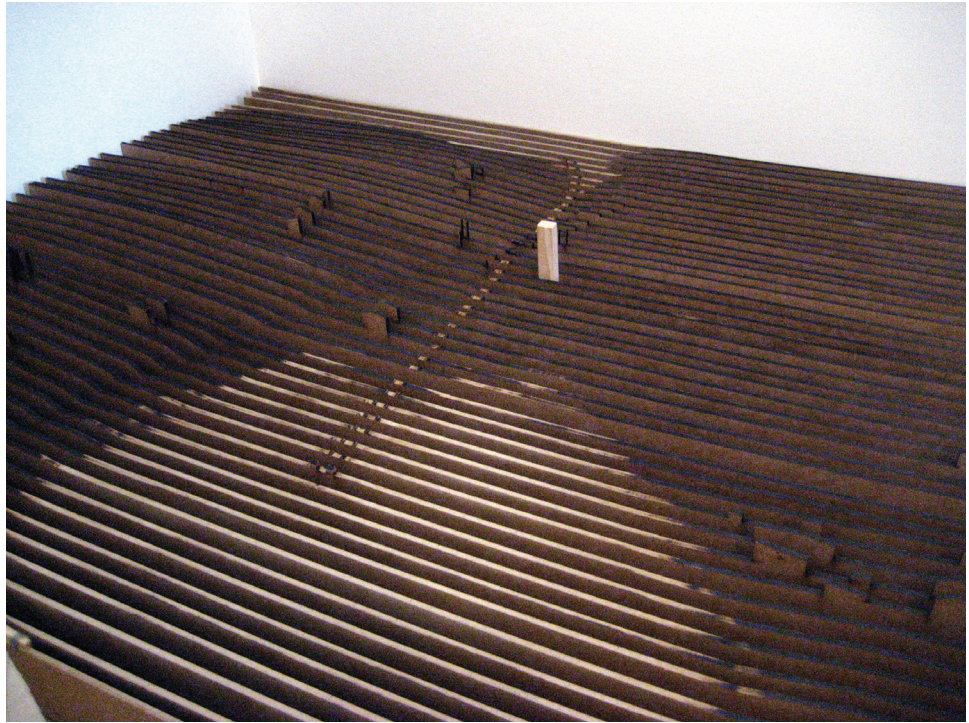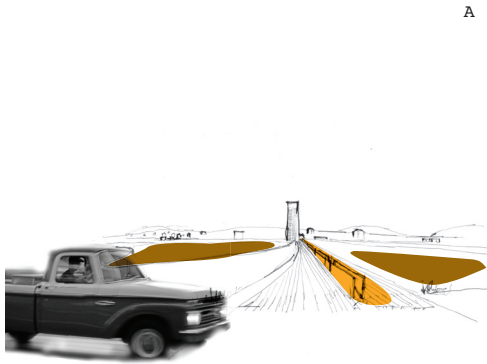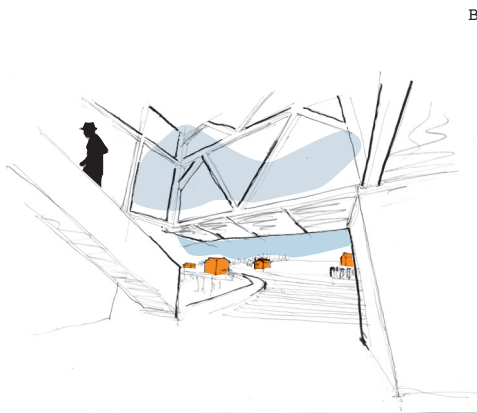
Massing model of trailhead tower in landscape.
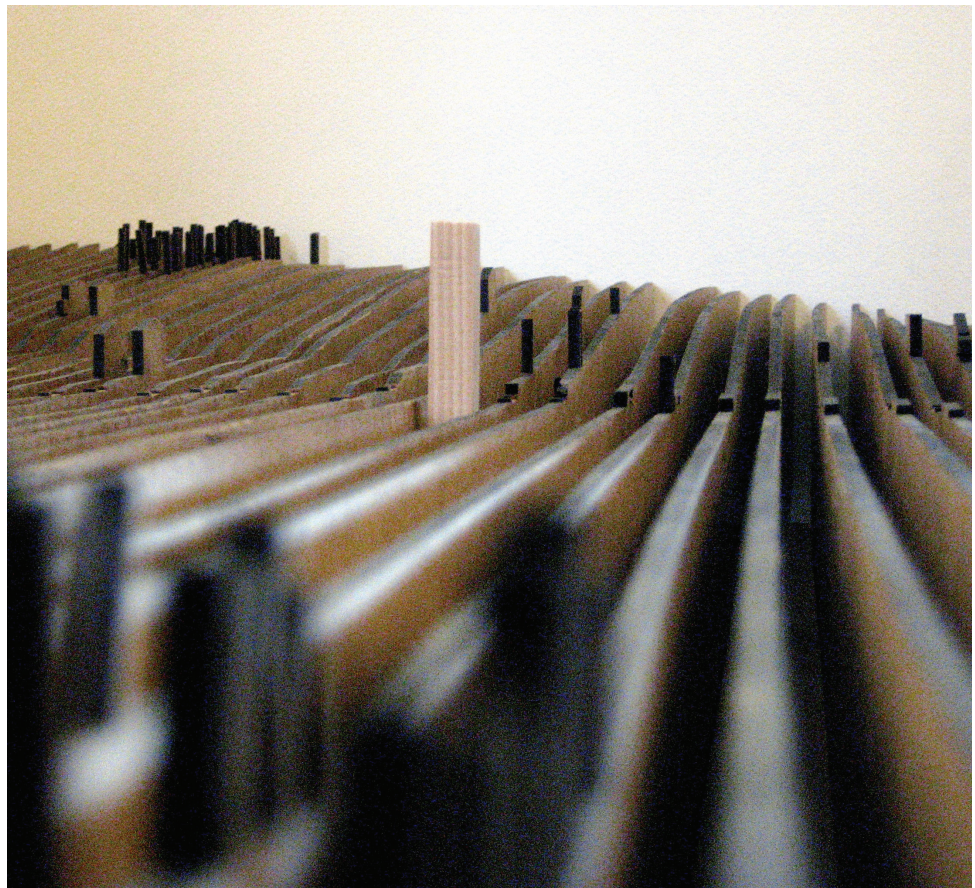
Massing model of trailhead tower in landscape.

A

a. parking

B

b. path

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.

Path (Viewing Tower)

The landscape is presented in a picturesque manor: the ground plane articulated and nature framed as a sublime backdrop. Nevertheless, the tower does more than simply present a vista. By engaging the user to reach the top, the tower becomes an armature for the kinesthetic experience of being launched into nature. By consciously involving bodily sensation, the look-out tower is hinting that the sublimity of the landscape experience no longer is located in the picturesque representation of landscape, but in the body and mind of the beholder through engagement.

c

c. tower

D
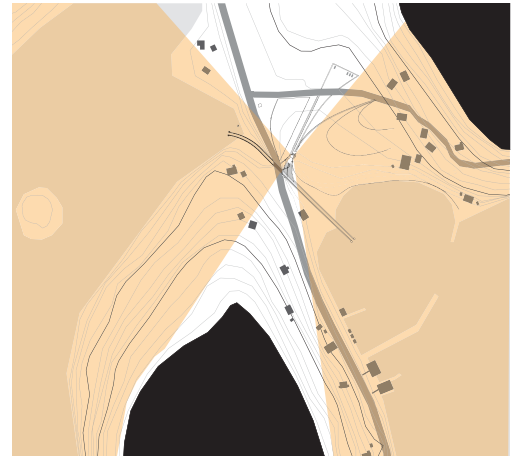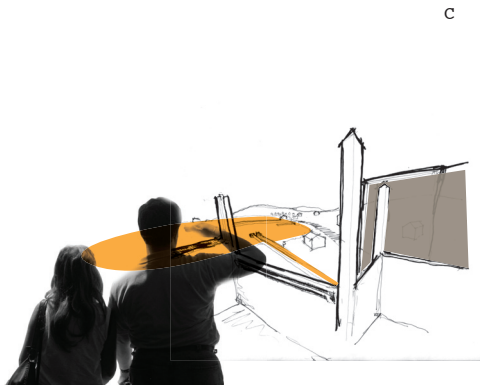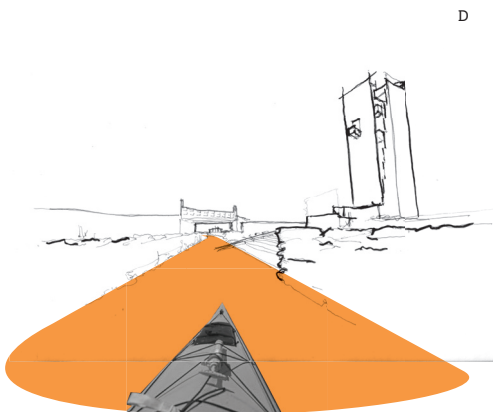
d. canal

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.

Pattern (Canal)

The path descends into the Whitehead canal through a flight of wide stone stairs; nosings are finished with greywacke to the West and granite to the East. Regardless of tidal conditions, the user has ample space to enter their vessel and paddle into the canal. It is in this manipulated landscape, the canal, a water path carved across the land, that the body embarks on the journey that the imagination has already begun.

Tower: Section and Plan. Clipped onto the frame, the shear plate-steel stair allows one to ascend the tower and see Whitehead filtered through the perforated steel cladding from a plethora of new angles.

Section through Tower. At approximately 36 feet above sea level the path of the stairs pierces the cladding and presents the town of Whitehead. Finally, upon reaching the top of the tower, views towards the best kayaking areas are framed through the extension of the stereotomic tower and tectonic frame and cladding.
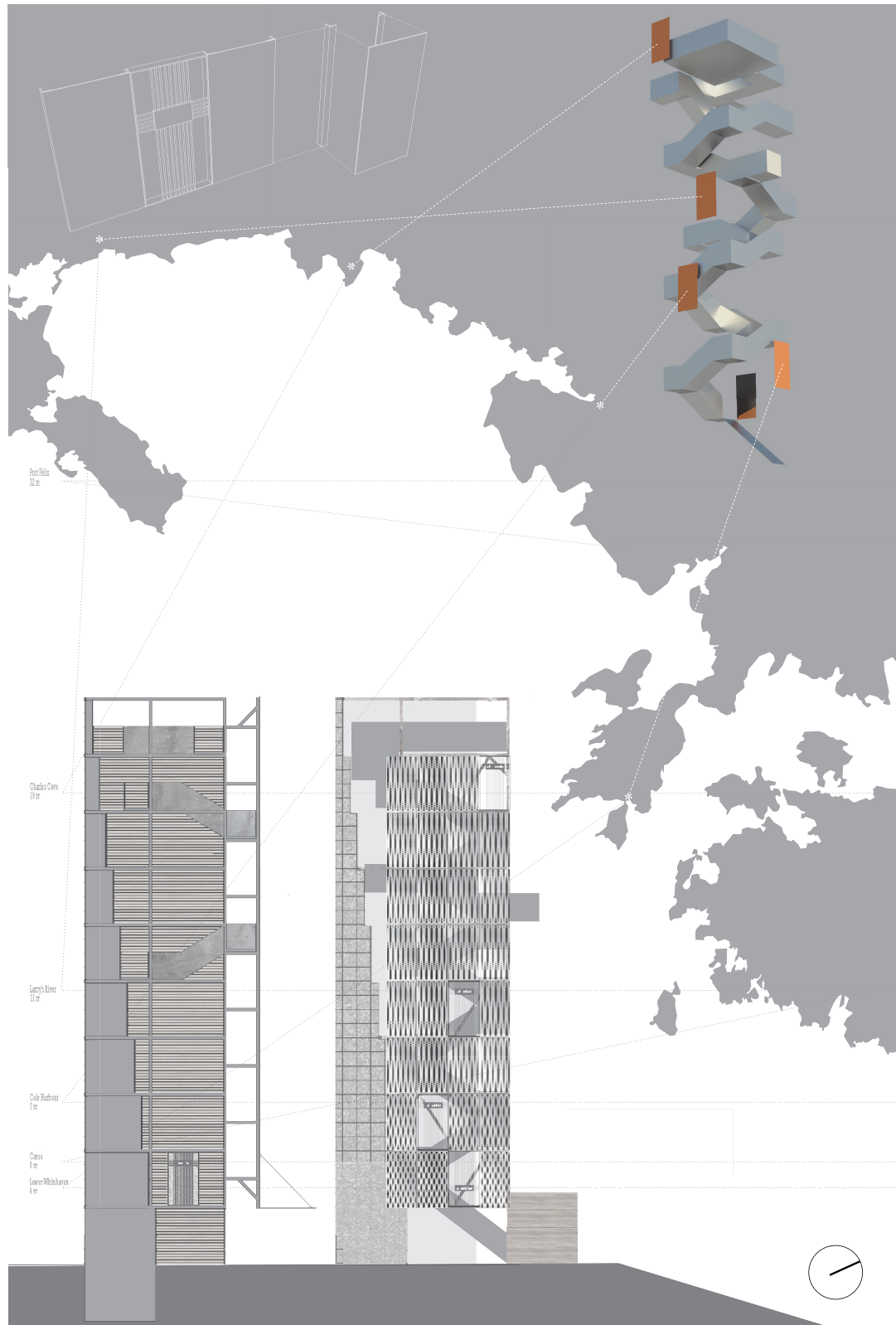
Section and elevation of tower and the relationship of fenestration to area towns. By slicing into the uniformity of the cladding at specific heights (equal to the elevation above sea level of the front door of area churches), the fenestration of the tower affords views that gesture toward the towns of the area. Each town is specified through a steel plaque suspended in the corresponding opening.

Section through transitional threshold between land and water.

Release: Exiting the Canal.

LAUNCH

It always takes a moment to adjust. The transition from land to sea is filled with possibility. I'm setting off, but what I will find, that's unknown. From the tower, white granite cliffs and the protected inlets of Whitehaven Harbour looked intriguing. The hills looming above these shores were bald. They seemed shaved of life, or at least plants. I will step on that land, but first to the archipelago. I feel like discovering the teeming life of those shallow bays and folded shoals of slate. I want to see the depths of those forested islands. So to the West, under the damp members of the bridge, I push myself through the kelp, stacked stones and incoming tide.
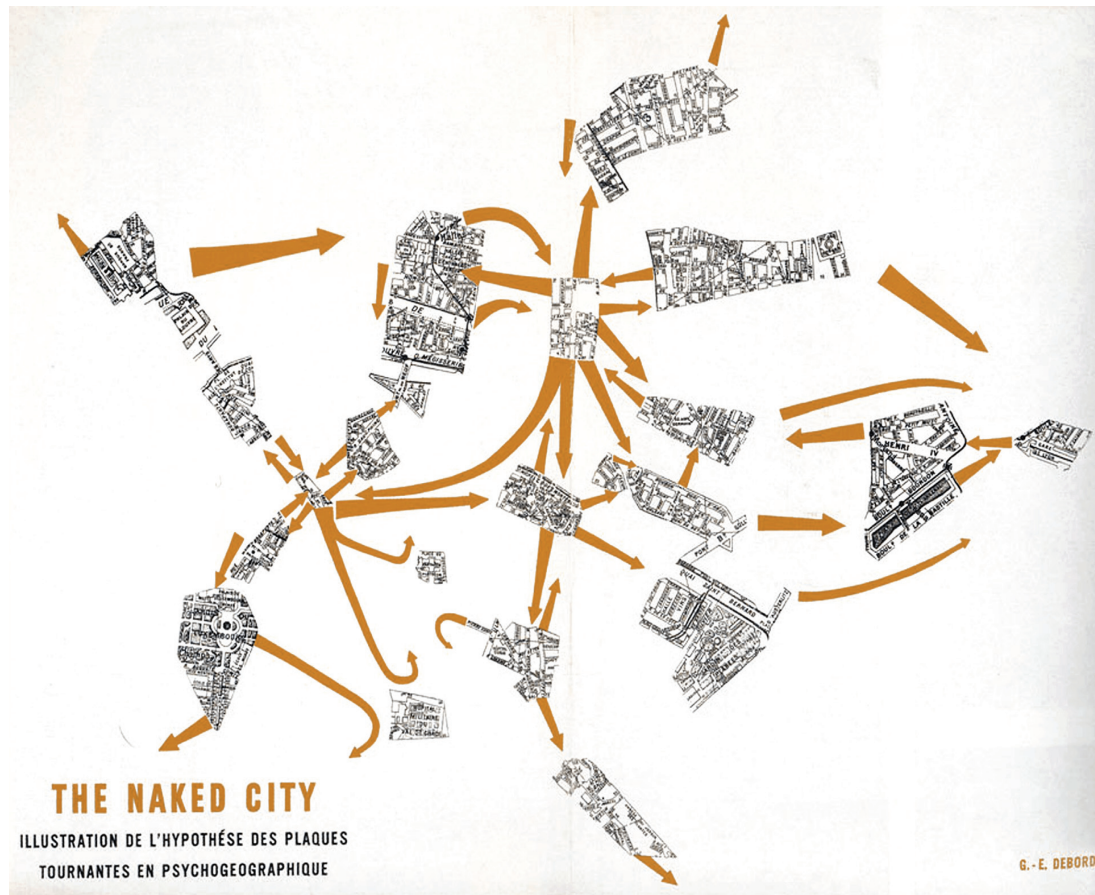
Guy Dubard , *The Naked City: Illustration de l'Hypothese des Plaques Tournantes en Psychographique*.
From Careri, *Walkscapes*.

PATH (INFLUENCING SPACE)

Traversal, the act of self-propulsion, leads us to understand precisely what is there, so that we can stop, respond and inhabit place. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan identifies this response: "If we think of spaces as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (Tuan 1977, 6). On a coastal water route location and place are charted intimately by the kayaker. They have few cues to help them follow the paths of others. Direction is determined by a shift in the elements, exhaustion combined with currents, a distraction on the shore, or the glint of light on the horizon.

Such freedom of movement creates a narrative, but it is personal, as this freedom fosters the individual experience. Like the Situationist International's experiential installations know as the *derive* experiments,

Paths for the body/paths for imagination: Giovanni Piranesi, *Untitled Etching ("The Drawbridge"), plate VII.*
From *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Battista_Piranesi.

the pathless waterway invites the user to get lost. In Guy Debord's *The Naked City: Illustration de l'Hypothese des Plaques Tournantes en Psychographique*, Paris is cut into nodes of importance floating in space without context. Routes represent all the possible physical trajectories and mental wanderings between nodes. Unity of place can only be achieved in concert with experiencing the void either through physical and/or imaginative movement (Careri 2003, 98-99). Charles Moore describes the path as a void set for human movement: "Being a void, it depends upon and unites the surfaces that front onto it, rather than suppressing or dividing them" (Moore 1977, 92). These elements can create paths for the body to traverse and the mind to occupy, or like the blind stairs in Piranesi's prison, open only to the mind. After all, this project seeks to develop formal, spatial, cultural, and programmatic nodes that unify the experience of the route.
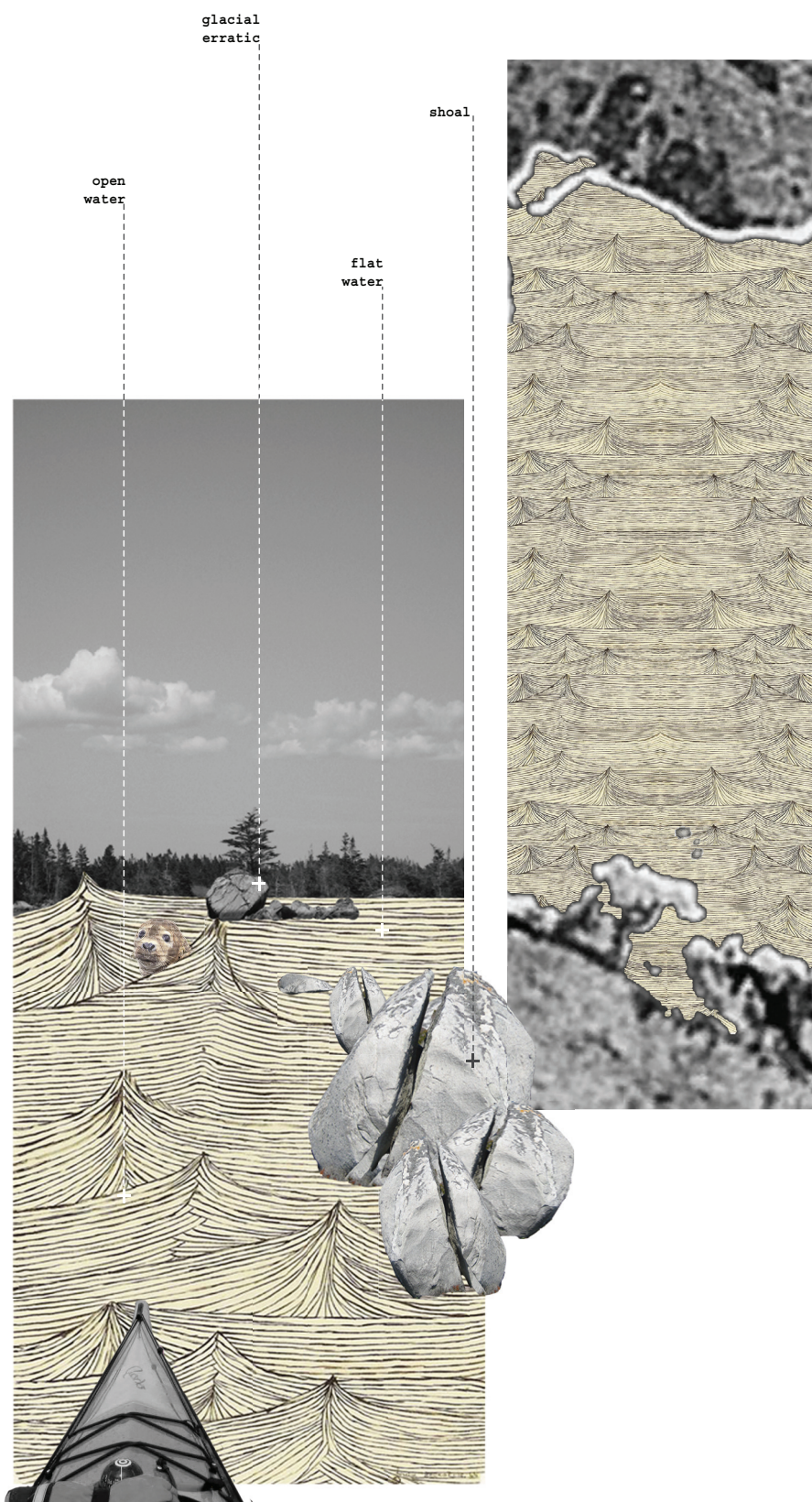
Aristotelean Theory on Movement

Since a path implies movement, the form of movement is important. Aristotle wrote that movement and time define each other in three distinct ways. The first case, locomotion, involves a moving perceiving subject. Therefore it is not movement of but within landscape: it is the procession of the kayaker along the trail, the approach to a shelter, a pierced threshold, a wall gesturing onward. Aristotle defined the second case as a movement of the landscape. Instead of distance travelled and the metering of stages, the state of the landscape can vary; landscape is not permanent. Time affects even the eastern shore's clear waters. Subsurface energy creates waves expressed on the surface of a once calm sea, crashing against rocks with a paced period and measured surf. Alteration, the final case of movement, occurs when environmental conditions shift the perceiving subject's understanding of space. One such case is the tidal forces and our corresponding perception of the shoreline throughout the day. Tides rise and fall causing the coast to shrink and swell (Leatherbarrow 2004, 215).

government wharf
launch
rear range light
front range

First case of the Aristotelean theory on movement: Locomotion.

glacial
erratic

shoal

open
water

flat
water

Second case of the Aristotelean theory on movement: Of landscape.

Spring High Tide

barnacles

Upper Shore

tide pool   rockweed

irish moss

Slack Tide 1.2m

Middle Shore

kelp

Spring Low Tide

Lower Shore

Third case of the Aristotelean theory on movement: Alteration.

NODE TWO

Collage of Island Shelter: Site plan and beach marker.

Island Shelter

At the end of the day, shelters provide a home for a night. They draw the kayaker in as a wayfinding tool in the landscape, while accommodating the boat and supplies of the kayaker. Positioned in the Sugar Islands, this compact group if islets and islands, both forested and barren, are close to the mainland and home to sea bird and seal colonies. Although the islands are public land, they have consistently been used to overnight. The ruins and remnants of huts peppered around their shores. As the sites are along the rough seas of the North Atlantic, the shelters act as retreats set back from the coastline. Paths into the refuges are a critical component of the architecture.

Place (Discover Alteration)

The islands are constantly changing. Longshore drift transforms the rock beaches and adapts the shoreline. With mysterious simplicity, four proposed large rock filled steel cribs sit as permanent elements on these ephemeral beaches. Placed to draw the user in, the crib is never experienced in the same way; beach aggregate may pile up one side, while a storm could blow the rocks onto the cor-ten top. There are an infinite number of conditions that the user may discover around the crib, but it is the permanency that marks and evokes the presence of the water route. Pin-wheeling off of the cribs are linear paths that begin at the forest edge and lead inland towards the shelter.

Pattern (Island)

Two paths mark the island, cutting straight across the ground, over hills and marshes alike. The trunks and branches of the dense forest create a place of height, linearity and expanse. The path is inhabited; the forest is only for our imagination to enter. Trees and canopy tightly frame views of the shelter ahead and the ocean behind. As a line, this path is drawn through the forest and across the island and is to be walked, explored, or even measured.
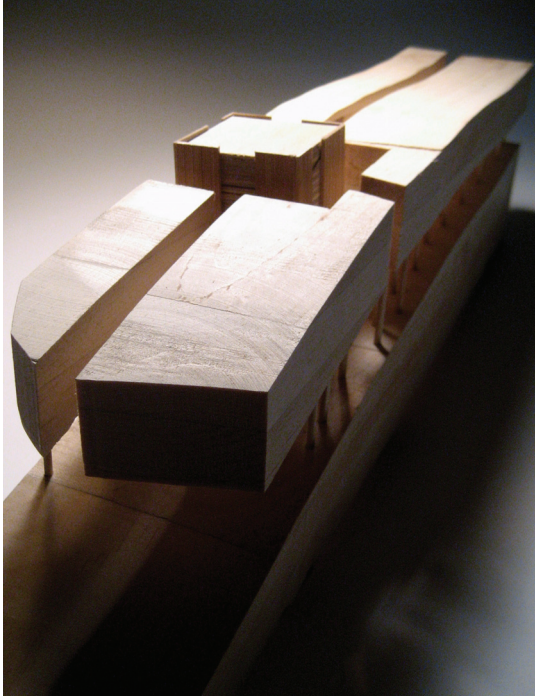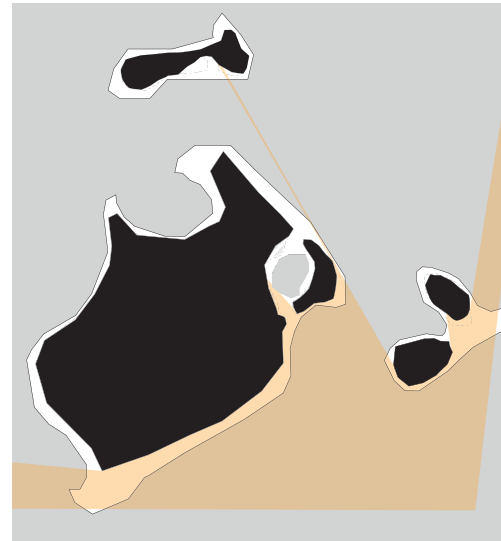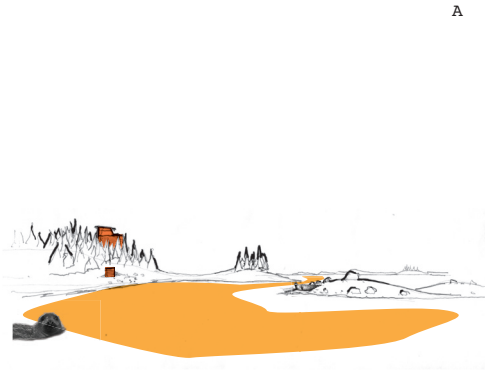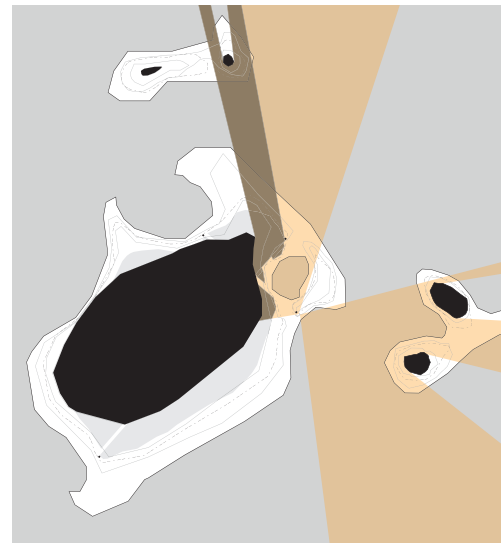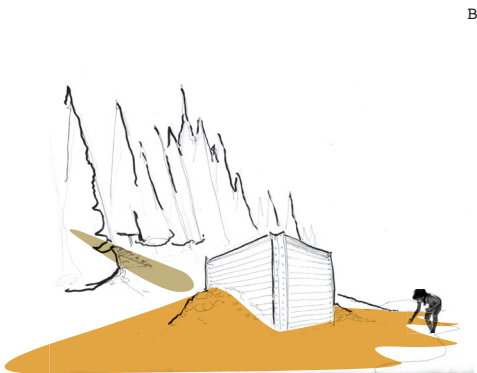
Model of Island Shelter: Path and shelter from above.

Model of Island Shelter: View to shelter along path.

A

B

a. kayak

b. shore

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.
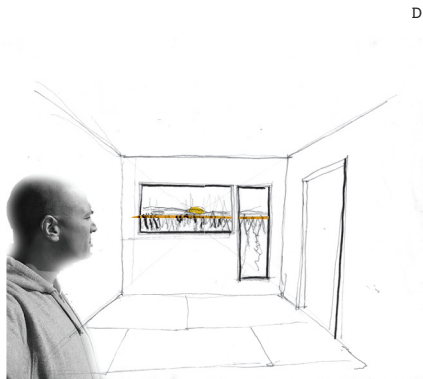
Edge (Forest Pavilion)

A shelter arises at the intersection of the paths. The paths continues through the doors, earth is tamped, stones rise and screens hang. A hearth connects the users through a collective warming bond, while a horizon line of island forest holds them tightly. From the drop beam above clings drying wet suits.

c
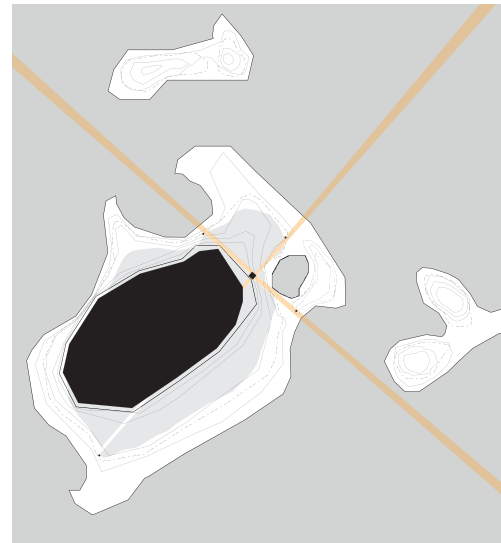
c. forest

D
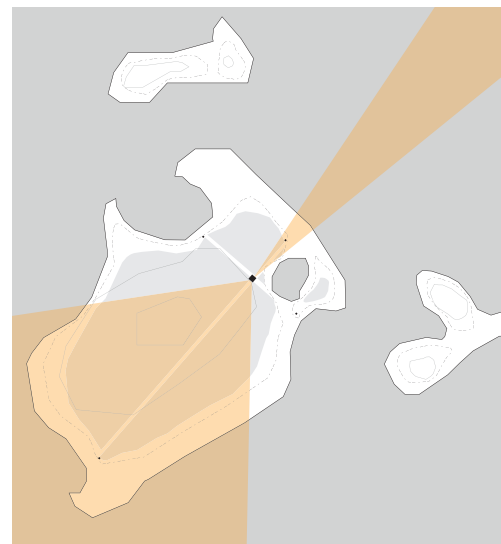
d. cabin

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.

Path (Shelter View)

The structure of the path - solid (trees), void (path) - frame second floor views of sea movement: waves, drifting flotsam, sea spray. Even in retreat the users are connected back to the rigor of the waterway. Above a prospect is provided through the loft and roof deck. Perched among the tips of the tree canopy, the island, the forest is transformed into a new plane. From this position a view is presented of the foreground, the tree tops, a region of the forest rarely inhabited, and the picturesque background that is the horizon and the setting sun.
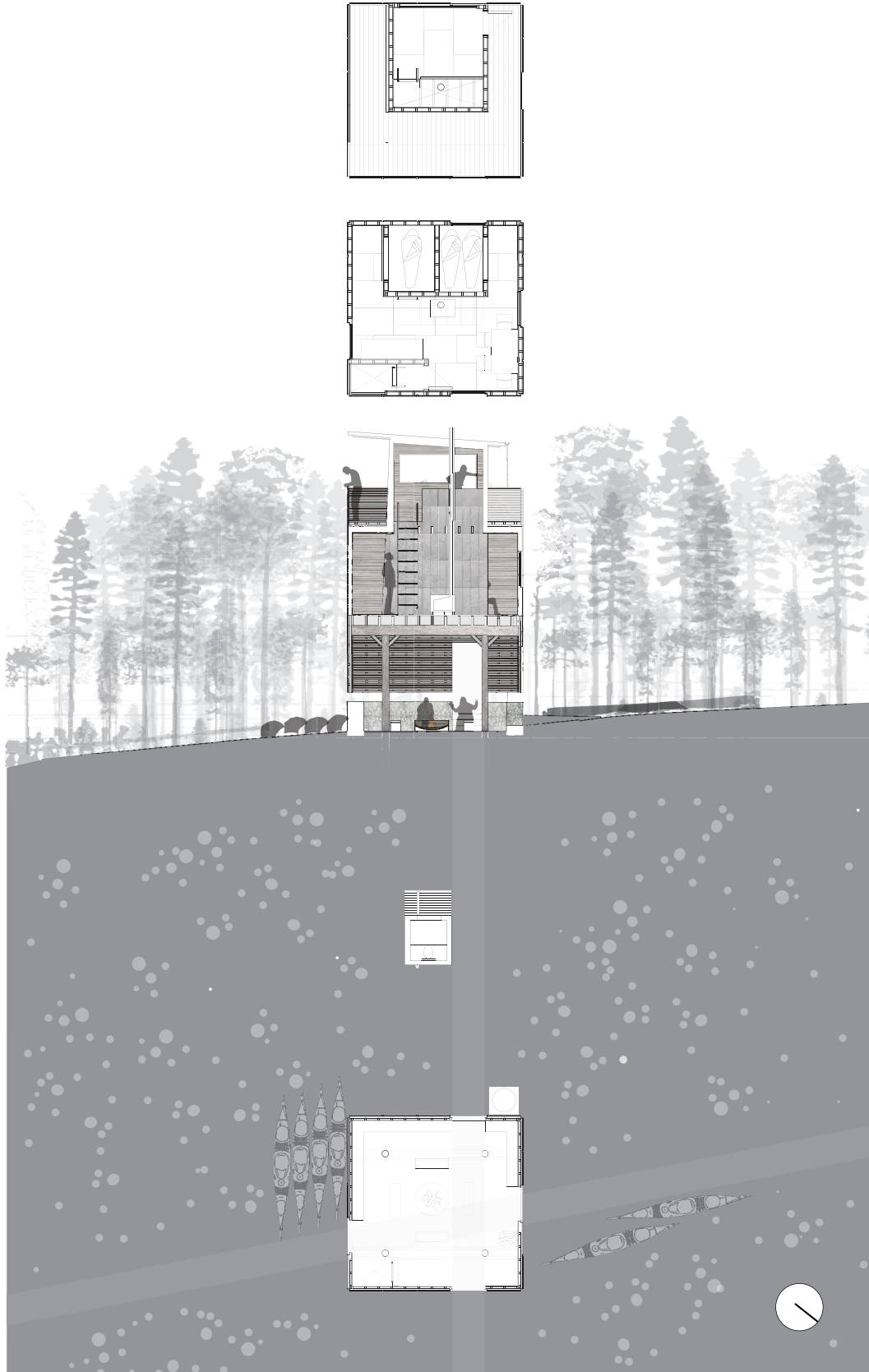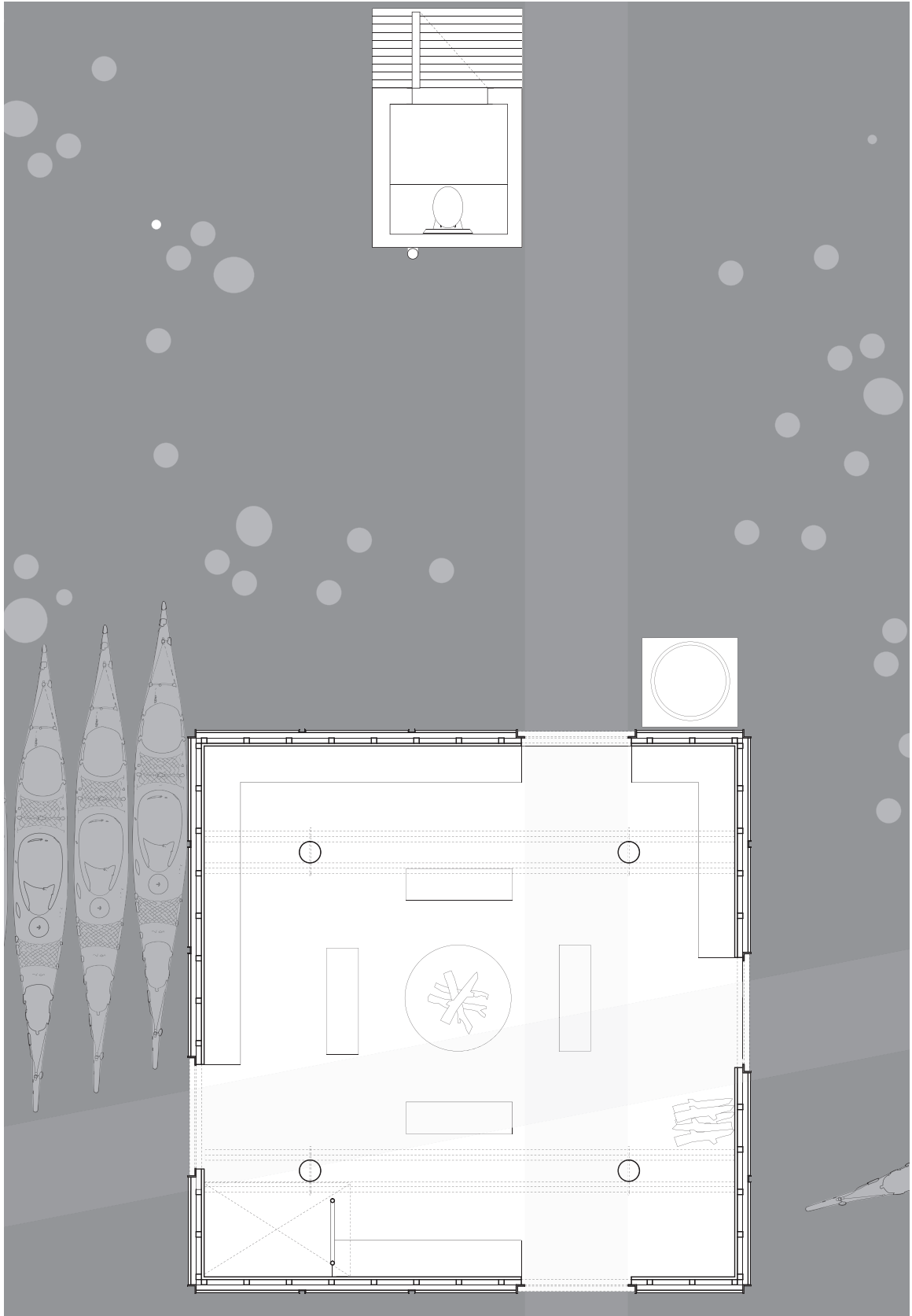
Plans and section through Island Shelter.

Section through Island Shelter. Above the drop beam construction, a platform framed structure provides housing for the night. Steel u-channels hang from the upper framing to provide a primary structure for the lightly constructed screen that encloses the ground level forest pavilion.

Ground floor plan of Island Shelter.
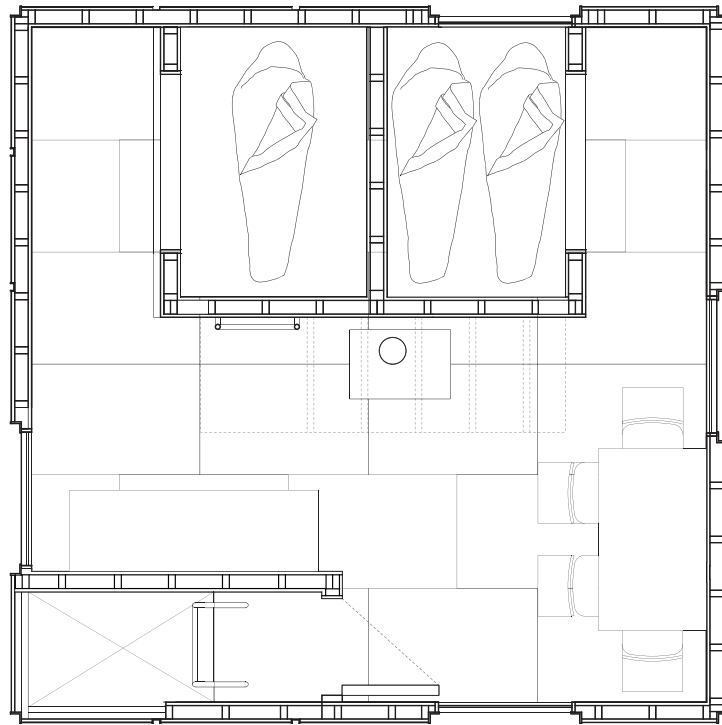
Second floor plan of Island Shelter.
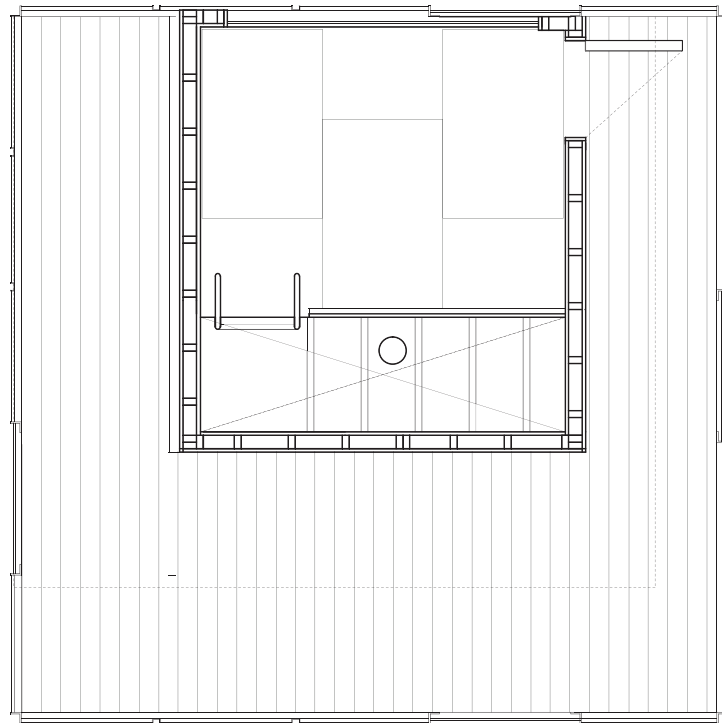
Loft/Roof plan of Island Shelter.

EDGE (TRANSITIONAL LANDSCAPES)

The dichotomy between natural and constructed landscapes is ever present along a coastal trail in Nova Scotia. Densely settled villages occupy the edges of the coast and front the expanse of the sea and hinterland. Mediating human settlement and open space is the reality of trail development in Nova Scotia as the province has a high percentage of privately held land, 69.6%, which is the second highest in Canada (Nova Scotia Public Lands Coalition). Urbanization is a process by which a natural space is transformed into a site capable of accommodating and organizing interaction between citizens. Urbanizing a landscape is to reshape the natural or rural area to promote social and commercial connectivity while creating public spaces for event and encounter. To Vicente Guallart, *rurbanizing* is to occupy the transitional space between urban and rural/natural without adopting traditional forms of the city. As an edge condition, *rurban* space could act as a connective or transitional place that contextualizes and conserves both urban networks and natural places (Guallart 2008, 23).

In physically moving along a trail, a user is constantly transitioning between spaces. From urban to natural, valley to sea, these transitions help define place. As a spatial configuration these transitional zones or thresholds separate and highlight the particularities of site. Not having a threshold would imply a continuous space, therefore a homogeneity to the site. In architect Aldo van Eyck's work, the transitional threshold is developed to promote the interaction between conditions, rather than their opposition. The threshold is not conceived as a border, but a zone that can be inhabited. He called for a "*science of the threshold*, which entailed the perilous art of inhabiting limits, being acquainted with [edges] and settling in the borderlines" (Herztberger 1982, 96-116). Along the infrastructure of the route there are many transitional conditions: trailhead, quay, canal, framed view, channel opening, bay. These borderlines must become occupied spaces that mediate contrasting worlds, direct attention and celebrate transition.

Occupying thresholds: Aldo van Eyck, Playgrounds, Amsterdam. From www.adrianaeysler.com.
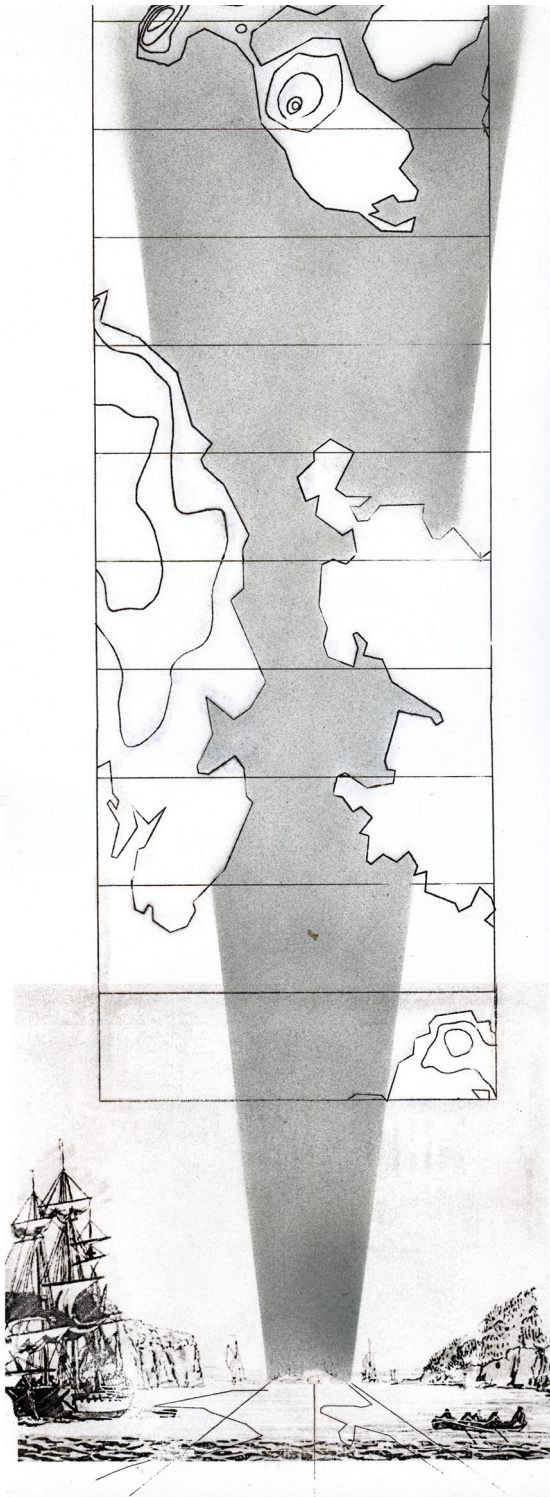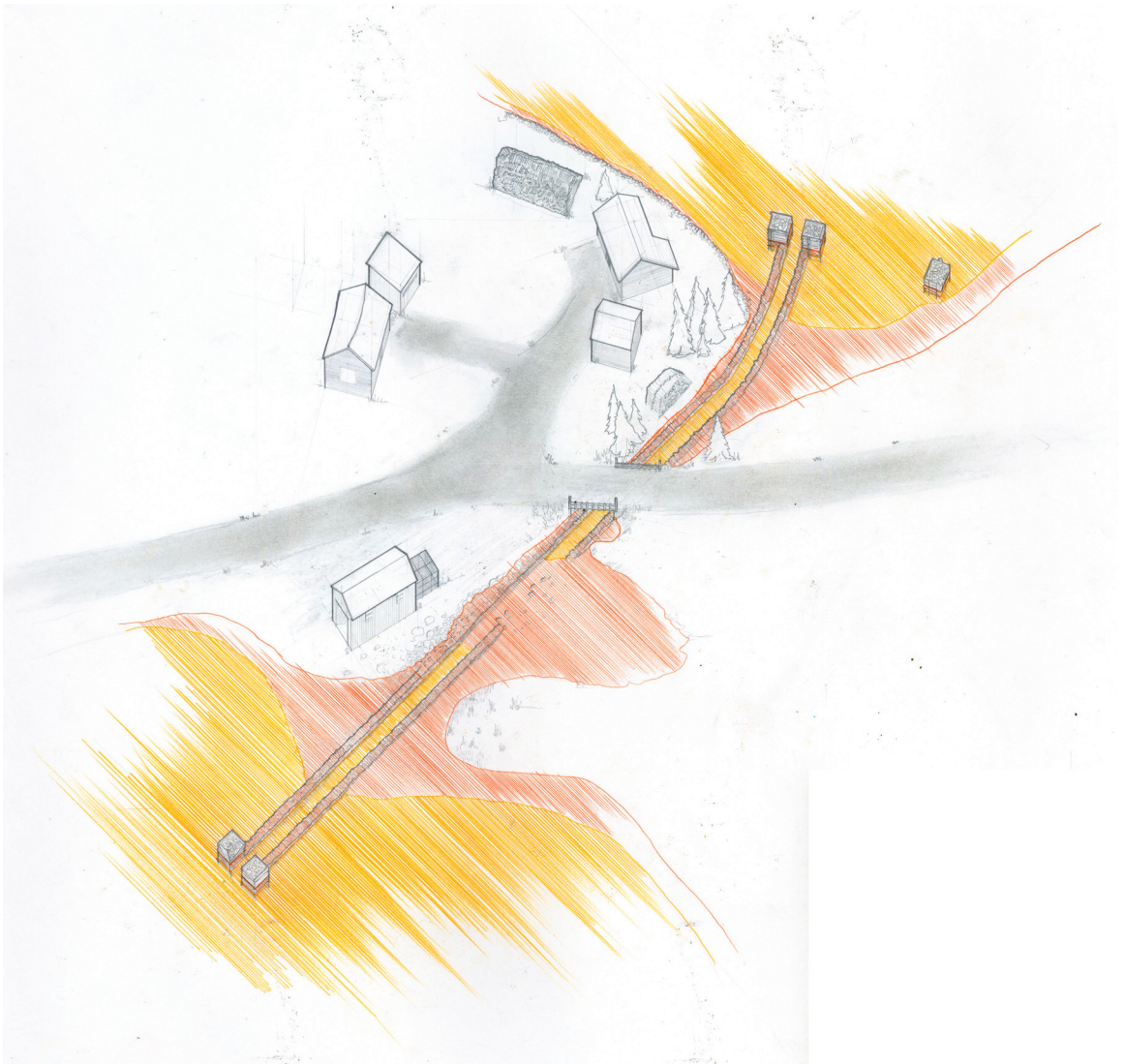
Collage of thresholds in landscape: Islands.

Collage of thresholds in landscape: Headlands.

Axonometric site drawing of threshold zone: Canal in Whitehead, Nova Scotia. Note the blown out edge of canal.
Yellow and red hatching represent low and high tides respectively.

Morning mist in a kayak.

WHITEHAVEN

Return, but only for a moment, for there's too much momentum to stop. I slide back into Whitehead, but the Barrens call to me. The hills are gates on the horizon that draw me in. Through the canal, if one can call it that at high tide, I glide by the quiet of the tower at dawn. Steam rises from the wetland. The village is resting and only a heron and this paddle dare disturb the stillness.

NODE THREE
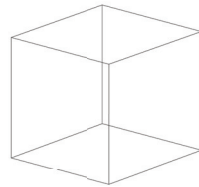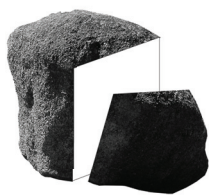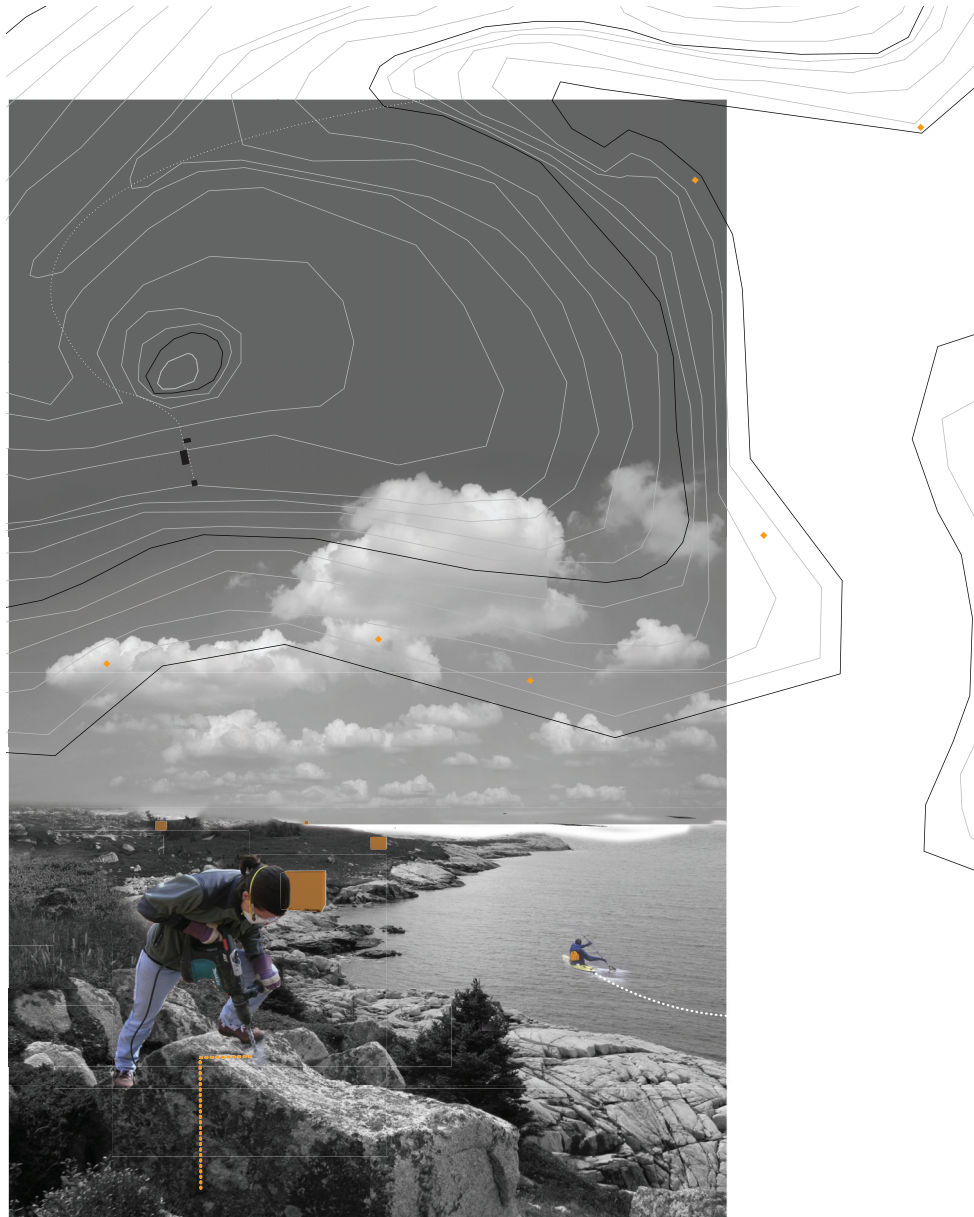
Collage of Hill Station: Site plan and trail marker.

Hill Station

Rising up from the rough and inhospitable edge of the sea is the peculiar landscape that houses the hill station. Trees are scarce and stunted, and there are numerous shallow lakes and bogs. Depleted soil levels have left the area with a unique coastal barren ecology – similar to tundra – where forest succession is held at bay and the wind reigns king. Nestled amongst this harsh climate remains a palimpsest of former occupation – the ruins of Yankee Harbour, abandoned in the mid-1960's.

Place (Inhabit Transformation)

Amongst the many protected inlets of the white granite headlands are a few sandy beaches, appropriate for landing or launching a kayak. Wayfinding markers that are populist in nature and highly visible are critical tools to guide users into the correct bay. Upon the barrens, the granite erratics that highlight the peculiar composition of this coast become these devices. First drilled, then filled with water, and finally split through the chill of winter, the weathered boulders become inexplicable and mostly inaccessible marks of the trail; massive cubes formed by man, glacier and the sky. Witnessing this in the grandness of nature has the potential to enhance the immediate world of the kayaker, sharpen their vision, and change the way they see things.

Following one folly to the next leads the kayaker into the appropriate inlet and out of the water. Above the high-water mark, the path weaves between two cubes. At last these interventions are presented haptically. After running fingers along the fissures left by the drill, the user leaves their kayak for the night amongst the off-cuts on the high side of the stone.

Pattern (Time)

Leading up and over a hill, the path brings the user through depleted vegetation and over exposed bedrock to the hill station. Boulders, placed and formed strictly by glacier, are scattered everywhere. Scaled to the erratics the various buildings are sited amongst, the hill station forms unique conditions between rock and shelter. With an understanding of the pace of geologic time, wood decking is cut to butt against the deviating edge of the rock. That rock thereby forms a wall. The path along the deck continues to weave between erratic and shelter. Installed along this path for it's durability and it's potential to weather, corrugated metal panels clad the exposed south-east face of the sleeping shelter. A thin vegetative layer patches over bedrock and the cold framed green roof of each building. Akin to the boulders that surround them, the structures are placed on the bedrock, lightly marking the surface with the weight of their foundations - deck footings and stones - alone.

A

a. kayak

B
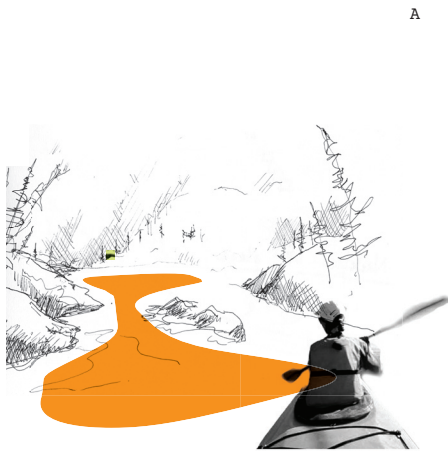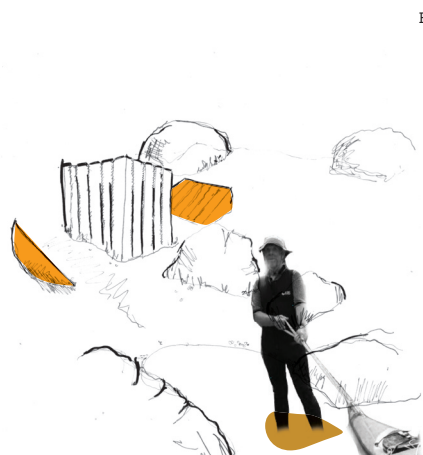
b. shore

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.

Edge (Exposed Ground)

Spending a night on this wind slope does not entail a great amount of time outside the shelter. More so than the Island Shelter, the Hill Station is internally focused. The public hearth here is a sauna, an event no user would miss out on after a day on the ocean. To take part in this ritual, the user steps from path, to step carved out of bedrock, to deck. The step is the symbolic and literal threshold between landscape and installation; it promotes the connection between conditions.

c
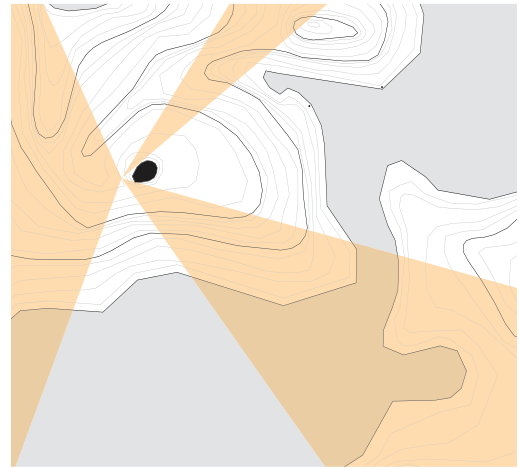
c. hill
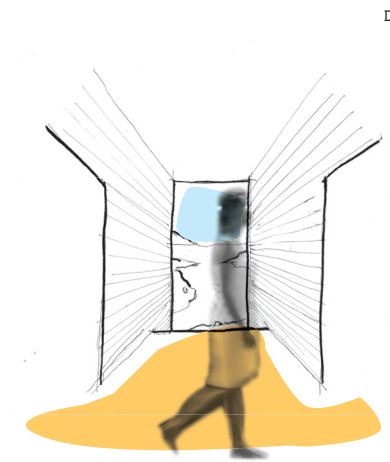
D

d. sauna

Viewing conditions: Diagram of procession through the site.

Path (Shelter View)

Along the procession to the Hill Station views constantly change. Opportunity for imaginative exploration, ascending the "blind stair" is presented twofold: through expansive views and the focus of framed fenestration. The users understanding of scale and position is refined through this transformation of place. With elevation the horizon slips into the distance and the land and sea grow. With direction the texture of light on the erratics can be articulated.
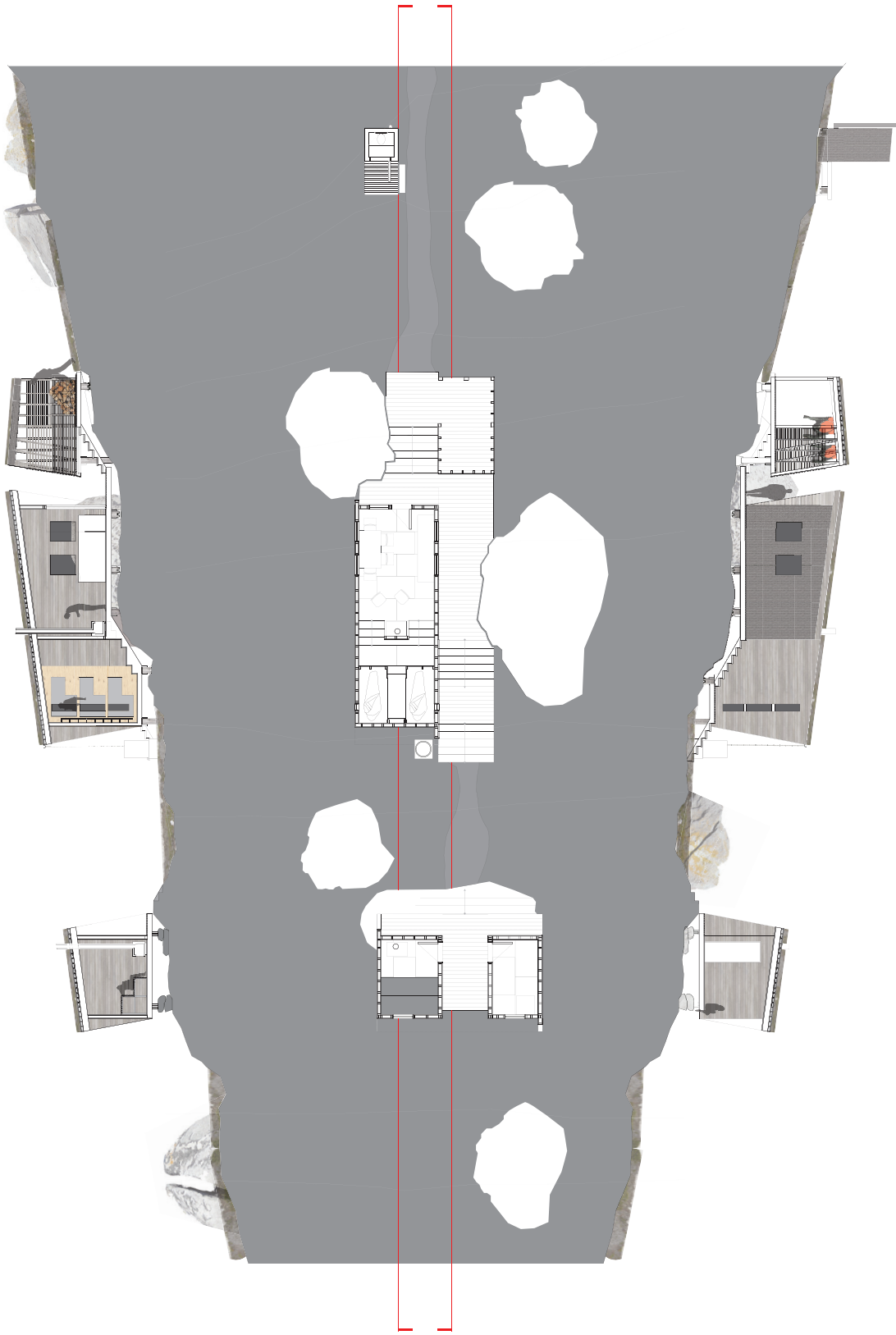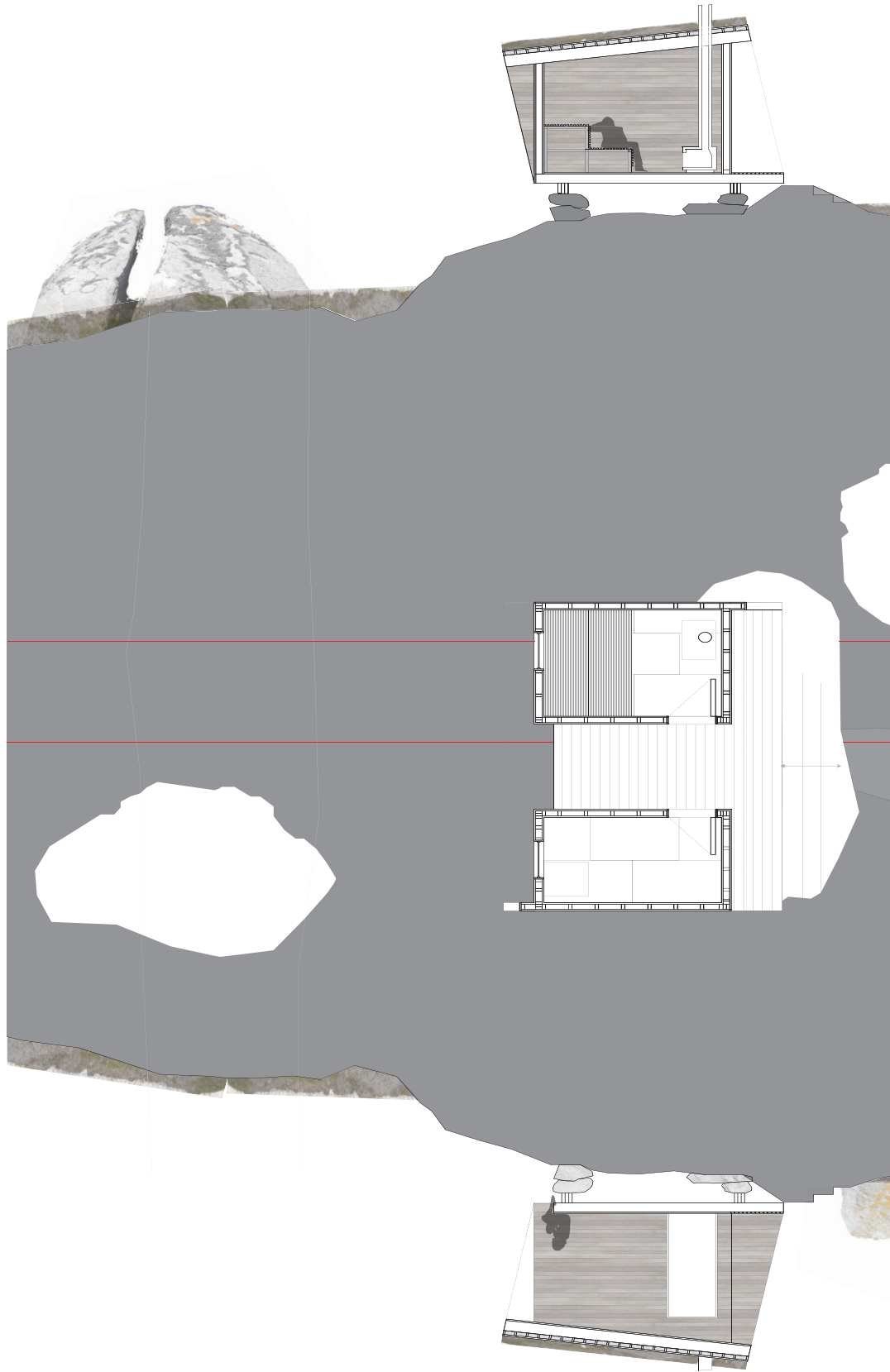
Plan, section, elevation of Hill Station: Glacial erratics, outhouse, drying hut, shelter and sauna.
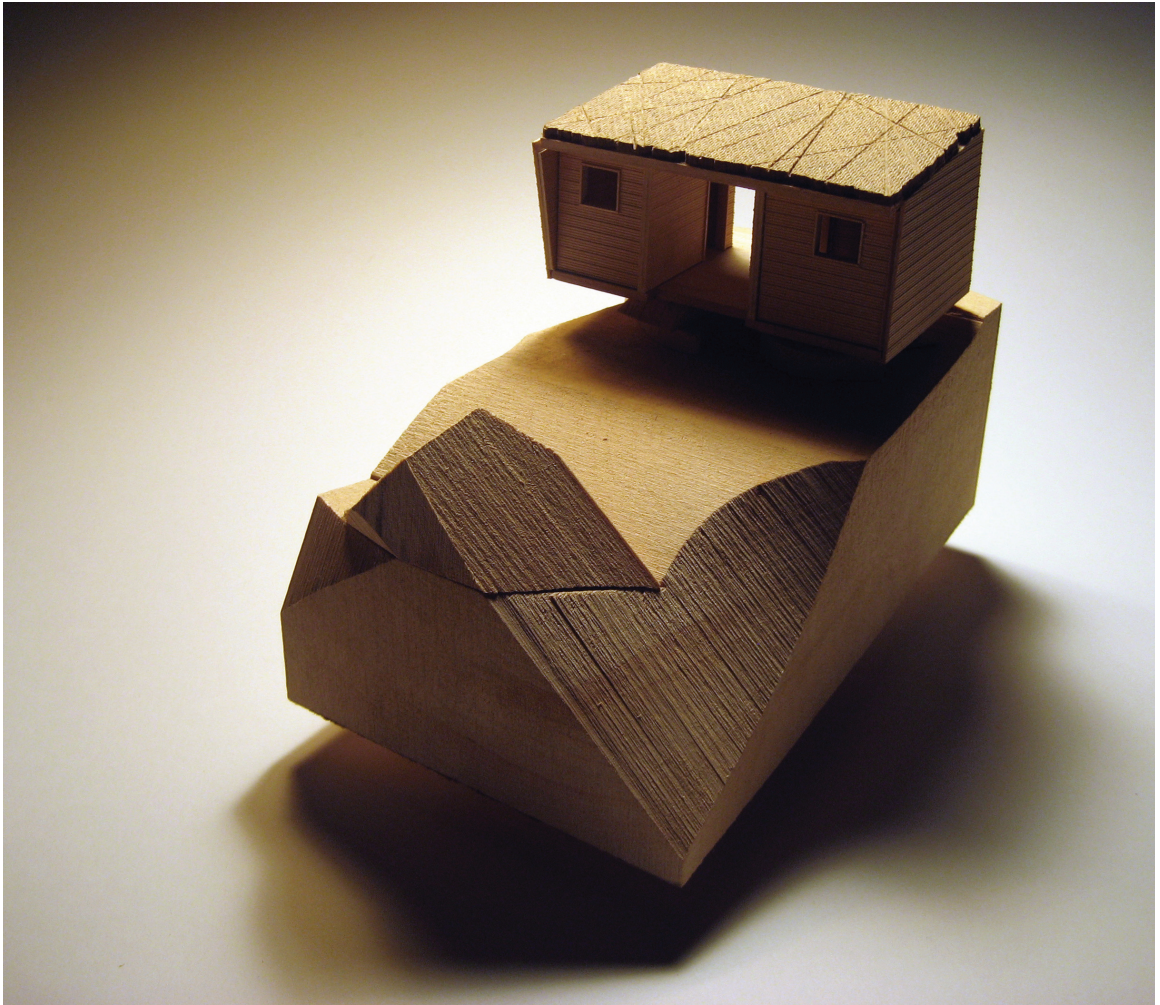
Plan and section of Hill Station: Shelter and drying hut.

Plan, section and elevation of Hill Station: Sauna.

Model of Hill Station: Sauna.

Model of Hill Station: Sauna Step and View.

PLACE (REPRESENTING PAUSE)

In the 1700's the English beautifully documented Nova Scotia's coastline as part of the Atlantic Neptune Charts to help their captains and sailors distinguish the world around them. The charts were created to record the artifacts, spatial perceptions, and phenomena of the coast. Although they were created to reflect the patterns of occupation, activity and space of their day, today these charts effectively frame a scenic view. Architect and theorist James Corner explains the role of these representations:

> Landscape and images are inseparable. Without image there is no such thing as landscape, only unmediated environment. This distinction can be traced back to the Old English term *landskip*, which at first referred not to land but to a picture of it, as in the later, selectively framed representations of seventeenth-century Dutch *landschap* paintings. (Corner 1999, 153)

Contextualized scenes of coastal edges help us measure progress and work as wayfinding tools, nonetheless they can withdraw the viewer from the present. "The net effect" of picturing and framing the scenic landscape, "is personal withdrawal and nostalgia for the presence of the past, both of which are rooted in an aestheticized – rather than productive, useful, or engaging – landscape experience" (Corner 1999, 156). For the purpose of this project, the examination of the coastal landscape must place transcend a scenic investigation of nostalgic space. While studying the topography and settlement of landscape, it is critical to represent the area's "process of formation, dynamics of occupancy and poetics of becoming" (Corner 1999, 159). The importance of this distinction can be drawn through the archaic German term *landschaft*, a concept that classifies landscape as a place with natural and cultural values. Corner describes how:

> Whereas the scenery of *landschaft* may be picturable (that is, to the degree that scenery is a valid or knowable concept in the deeply habituated *landschaft*), its deeper existential aspects circle more socially cognitive, eidetic processes. Spatial, material and ambient characteristics are still here, but their essence is not necessarily that of Cartesian objecthood; they are present in sometimes foggy and multiplicitious ways, structured but not immediately visible – structured, in fact, more through use and habit in time that through any prior schematizations. (Corner 1999, 154)

A small canal serves the peninsular community of Whitehead, Nova Scotia. Cutting across the land into both Whitehaven Harbour and Tor Bay, the canal functioned as a central threshold for the entire region. Today it is a nostalgic image of times gone past. The fishing boats of today no longer fit through its nimble dory sized passage. It is only a matter of time before the government digs it up to replace the bridge. Neglected in our times, it has become a subtle, static and scenic image within this fishing hamlet's quaint harbour. It has been reformulated as *landskip*. Nonetheless, hundreds of years of onshore waterways, long-distance

transportation, economic and communication networks and their eventual decline are still embodied in the canal. The canal is an instrument in the natural and cultural landscape that must be mined for the spatial, material, and ambient characteristics of place fundamental to the concept, *landschaft.*
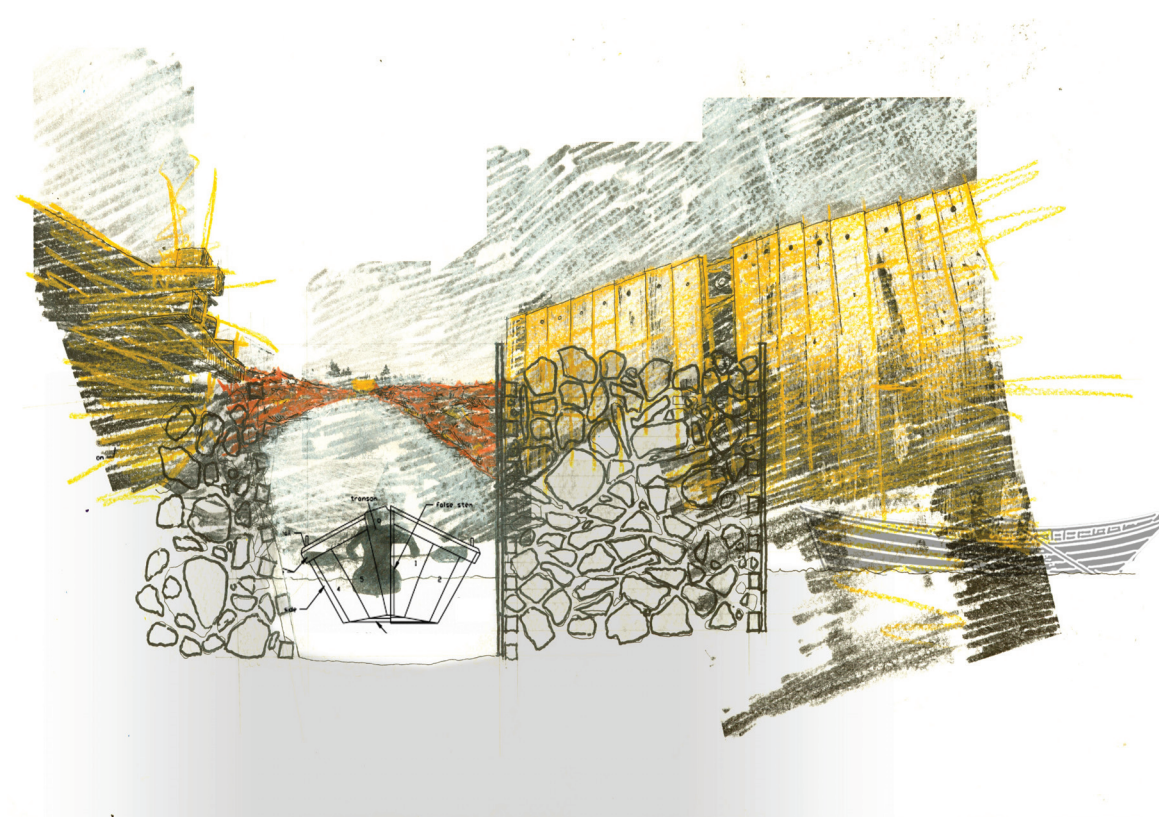

Landskip (Tor Bay, Nova Scotia in 1777): Scenic image and the shipping route.
From National Maritime Museum, www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/explore/index.cfm/category/90437.

Landskip (Tor Bay, Nova Scotia in 2010): Scenic image and the kayak route.
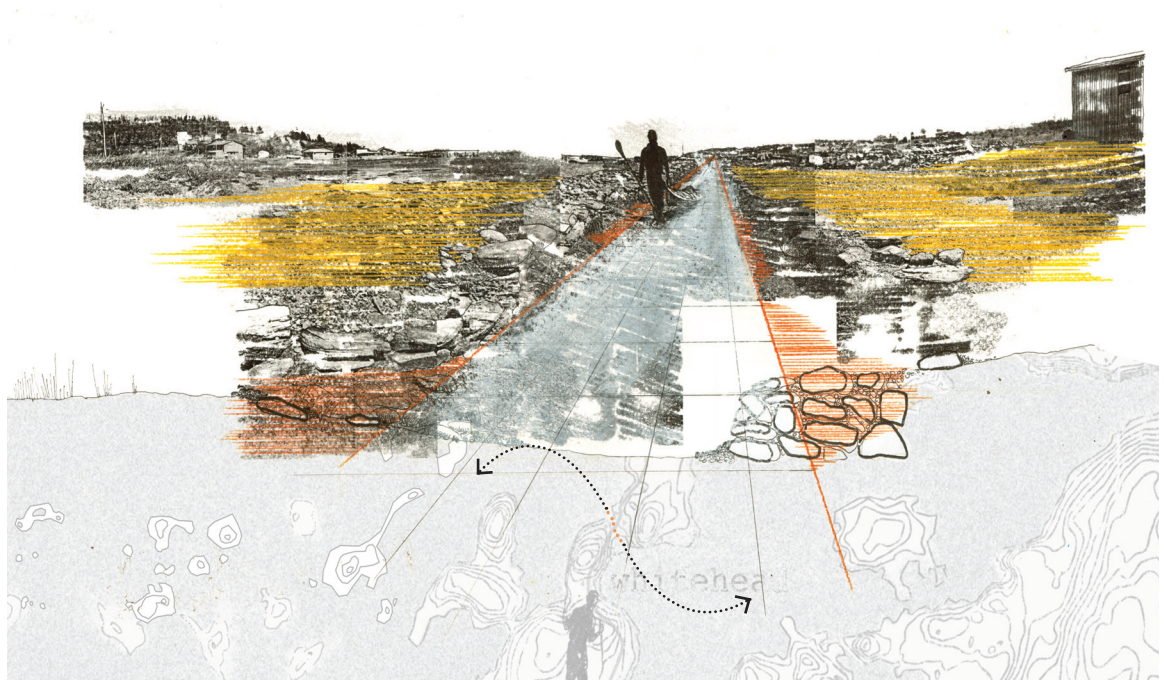
Landschaft: Activity relationship of Whitehead canal to Tor Bay and Whitehaven Harbour.

Landschaft: Activity relationship of Whitehead canal to the dory/kayak.
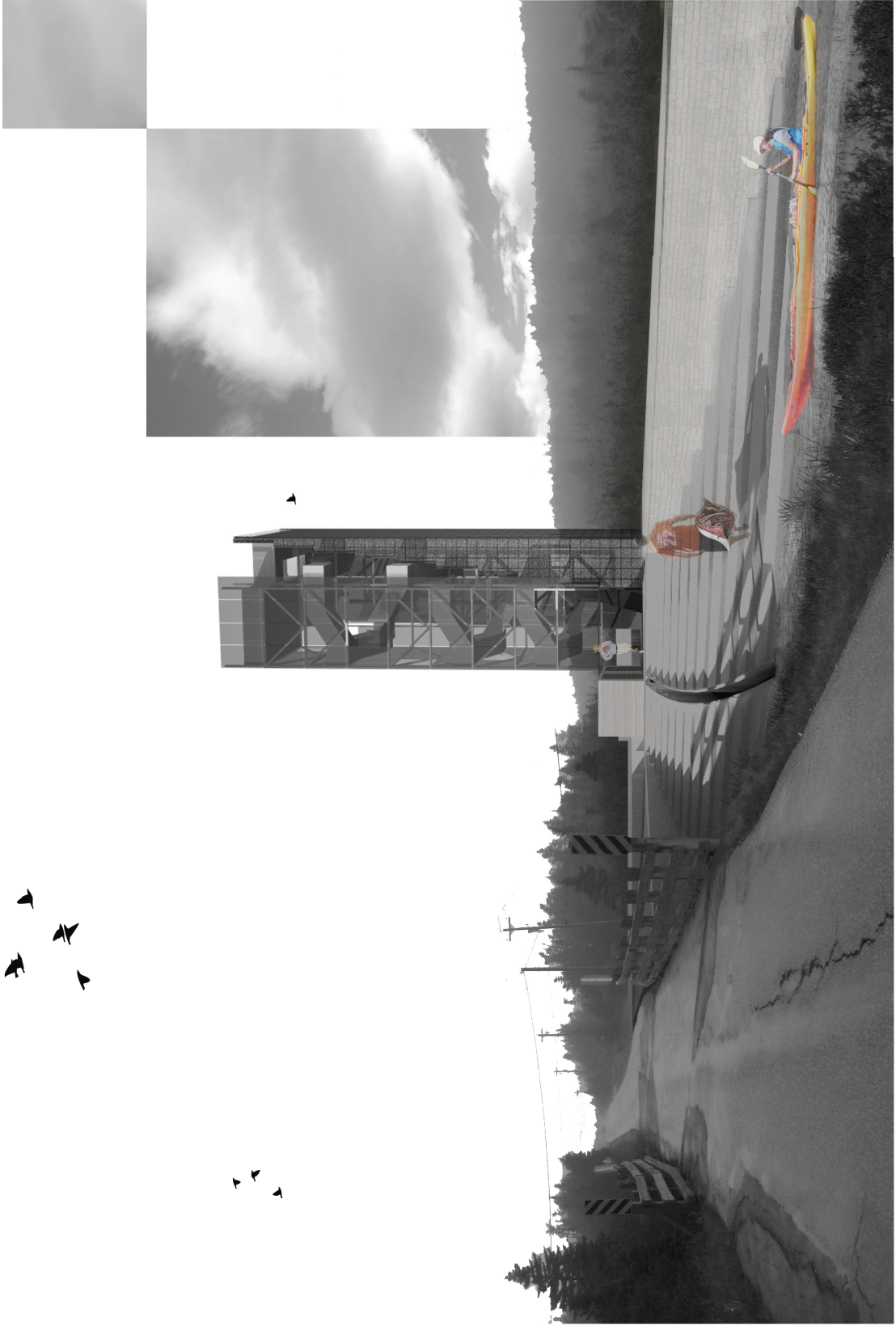
THE BEGINNING AT THE END

Exhausted, yet at rest. Completed but wanting more. I arrive and am here again, the beginning at the end. The loop has taken me far away. My body aches with the rigor of the expedition, but my mind is aware. The tired structure of the canal nobly holds the land at bay to welcome the sea and my boat into it's artery. Already in the midst of the land I leave the water. The steps out of the canal warm my feet through the thermal expression of the sun. I pull my boat up and think of the night in the barrens. An old man makes his way across the site and gives me a familiar and knowing nod. I need to get out of this wet suit. I need to get on the road.

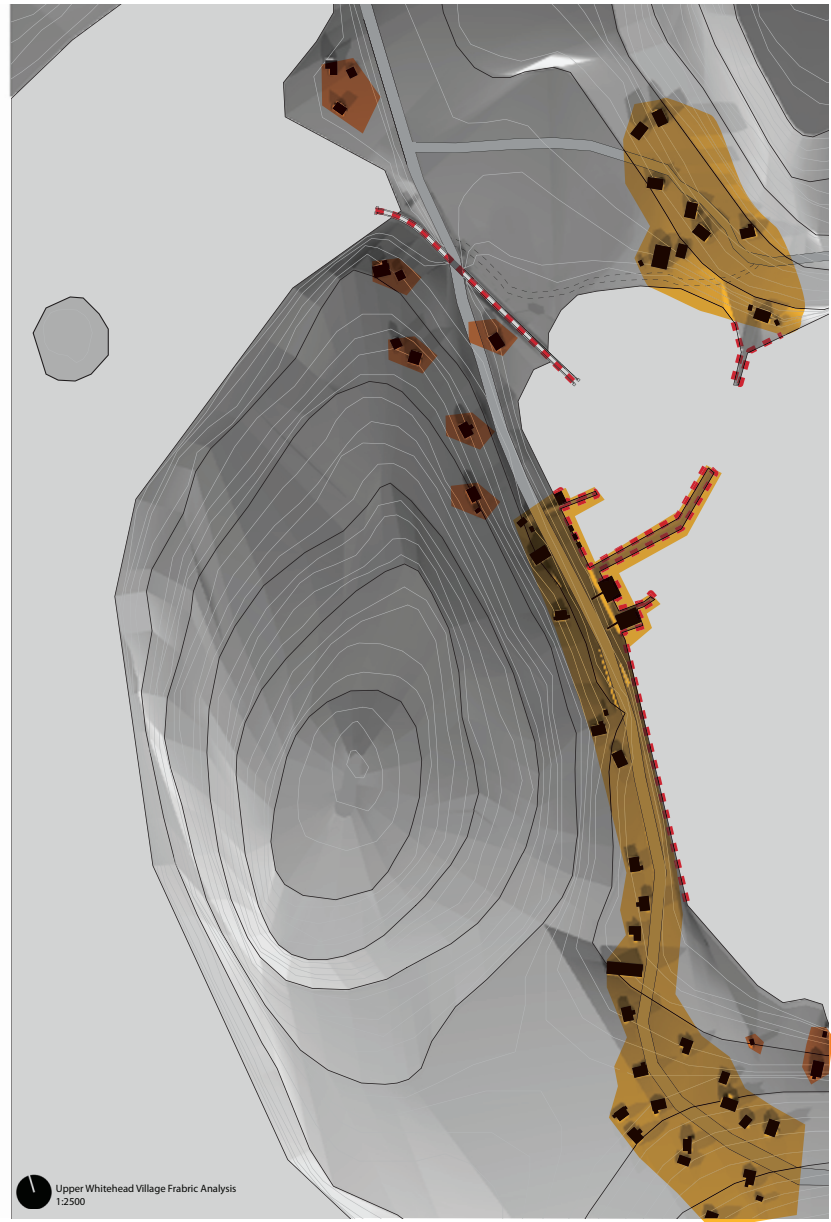Collage: Return to Whitehead from East.

Collage: The beginning at the end.

SUMMARY

The trail is traversed because of desire. Visitors thirst for the rigor of exploration. There is an aspiration to step on virgin land or be far off in the forgotten cradle of history. Whatever this desire may be - wilderness, fable or a combination of the two - moments along the trail become place through personal experience. Vast landscapes are transformed into inhabited sites because the trail's structure is an agency compelling users to pause, reflect, breathe or question. These moments occur as users are exposed to the built and found nodes dotted around the waterway. They offer the visitor a varied and subjective experience; they are there to be interpreted; they lead the user to see the coast, feel the environment, and put into perspective her impressions of traversal. Nonetheless, it is the new interventions that add substantial nuance to the experience of the trail. Constructed to be of the place, the pavilions of the path - trailhead, island shelter and the hill station - are built to act as tools for perception to help the kayaker understand the landscape. "The existential purpose of building," states the architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz, "is therefore to make a site become a place, that is to uncover the meanings potentially in the given environment" (Norberg-Schulz and Postiglione 1997, 18). With this understanding, building (architecture) is differentiated from the existing (found) because new interventions embody all of the ordering principles of the trail - pattern, place, path and edge. They unify these orders into a cohesive architectural composition: context is the canvas, ephemeral juxtaposes permanent, materials frame landscape, procession articulates transitions, tectonics mark land, movement engages body. All are designed with intention and built for the experience.

APPENDIX A
SETTLEMENT PATTERNS (WHITEHEAD, NOVA SCOTIA)

Objects (red)

Rural Fabric (orange)

Sea Fabric (red dash)

Upper Whitehead Village Frabric Analysis
1:2500

Settlement conditions: Three dominant conditions have factored into the settlement of Whitehead: street, sea and object. Orange - Buildings composing a rural fabric. Red - Buildings situated in the landscape as objects. Dashed red line - Coastal fabric of fish stores, wharves and workshops.
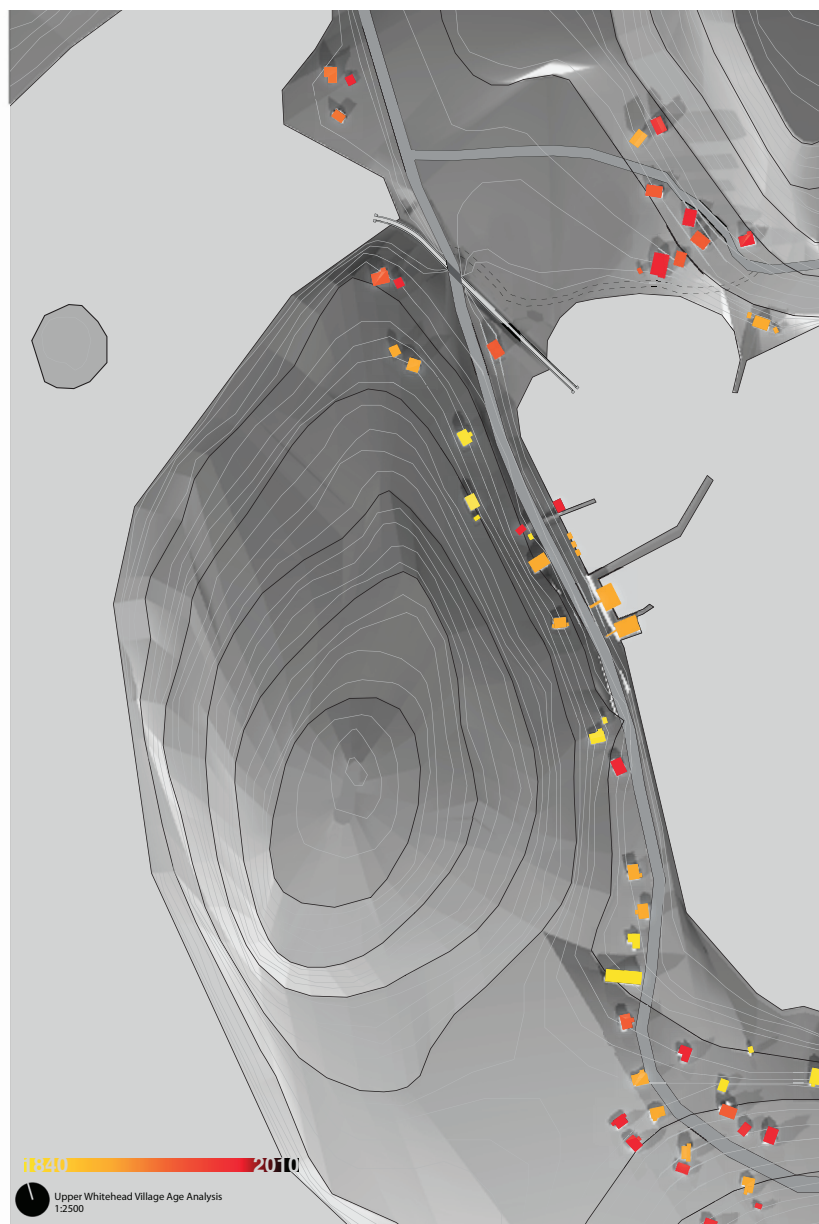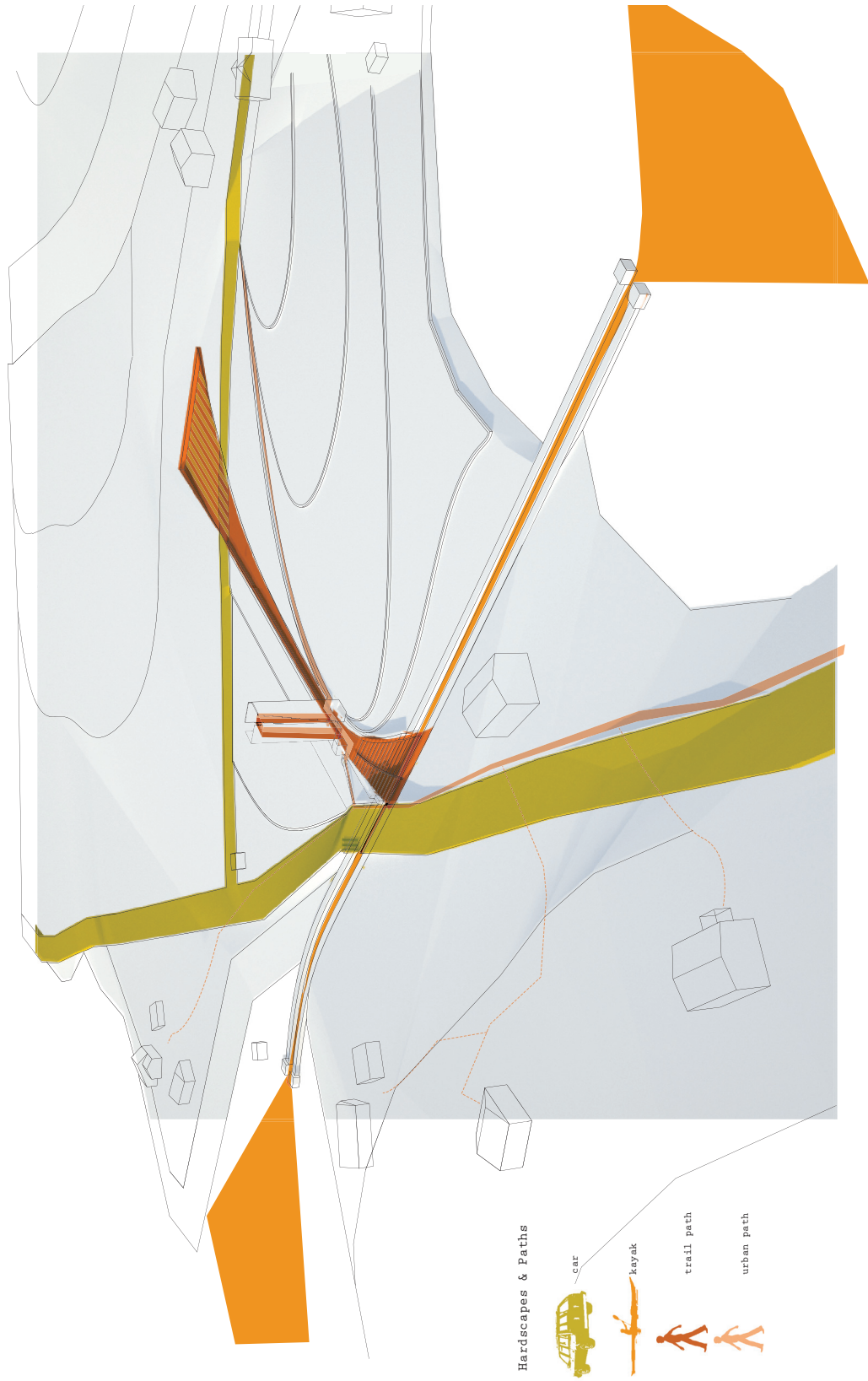
101-200 Years

26-100 Years

10-25 Years

1850   2010

Upper Whitehead Village Age Analysis
1:2500

Settlement conditions: The age of buildings in Whitehead is direct evidence of different eras of settlement. Buildings are represented from oldest to newest in a corresponding yellow to dark red gradient.

Settlement conditions with trailhead tower and landscape: Hardscapes and Paths.

Hardscapes & Paths

car

kayak

trail path

urban path
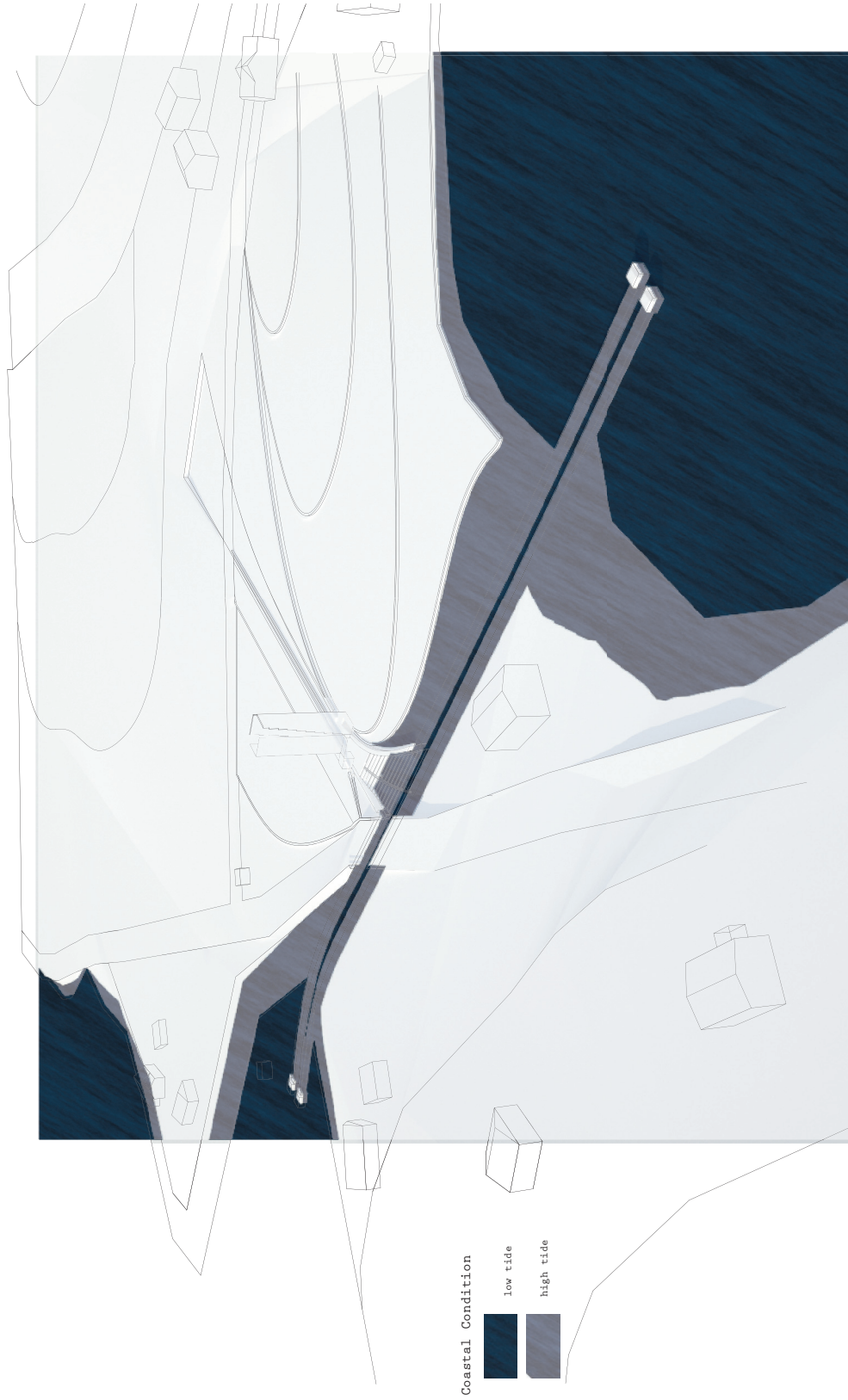
Settlement conditions with trailhead tower and landscape: Relation of structures to tides.

Coastal Condition

low tide

high tide

APPENDIX B
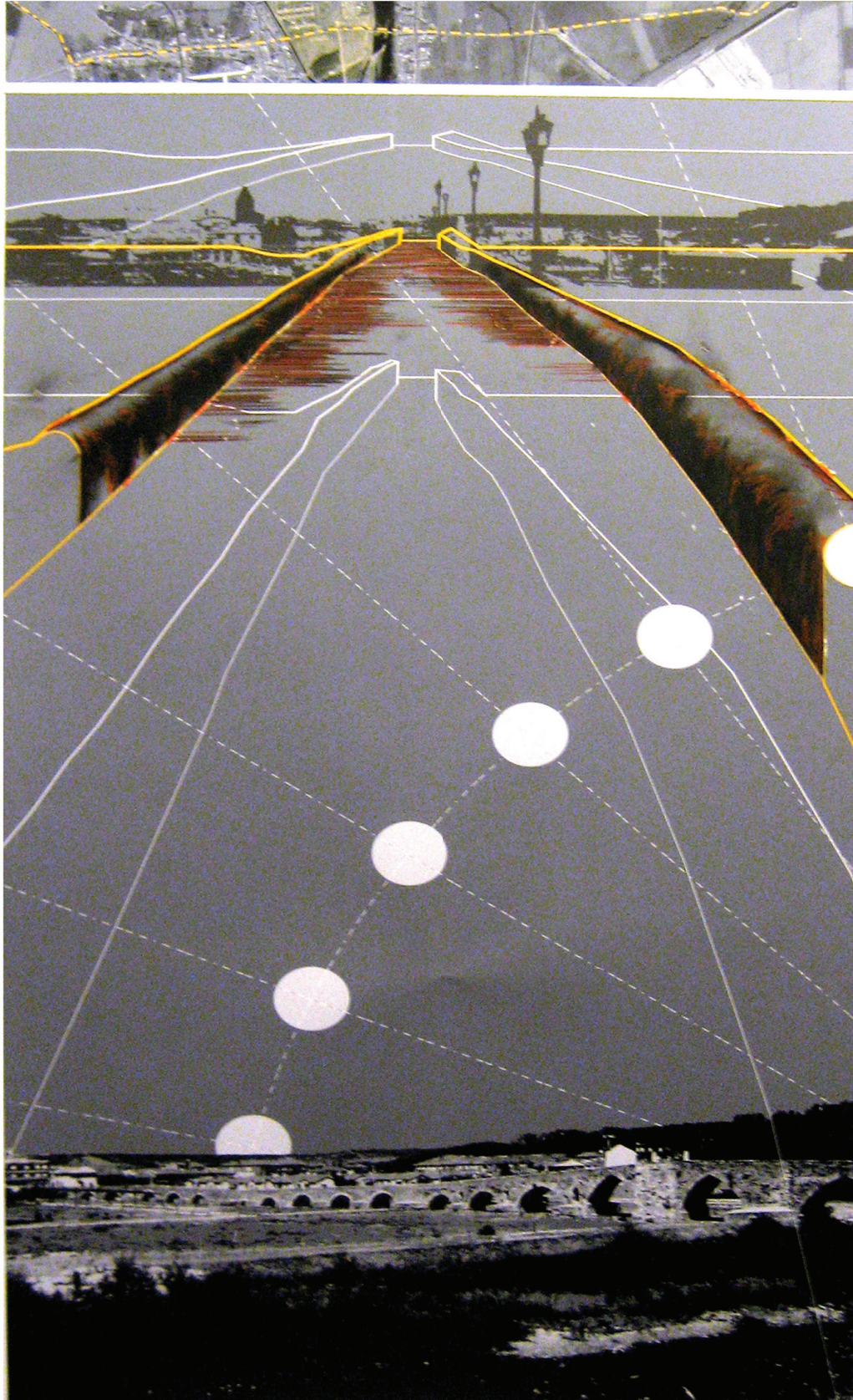## TRAVERSAL STUDY 1 (THE WAY OF ST. JAMES, NORTHERN SPAIN)

We slept in communities and walked in the country. Understood through the fabric of the path, the Camino stitches together traditions and modernity, the horizon with the haptic, the hinterland and urbanity. Dialectic in nature, the trails language of contradiction is formed through real materials and experiences. Realistically there is no continuity of form or installation because the path has embraced and is adapted by the urban, the landscape, the people that have settled along it's dusty path and those that have elected to walk.

As stated above, there is no single object or experience that can explain a trail. As the pilgrim continues along the route, village churches come often, the landscape slowly crawls on, the elements are very apparent, one will walk in the country and sleep in a village and trail markers or time leads the way. All that walk feel pain, but they all walk together. The fabric of the path is seen in the hostels, plazas, cafes, signage, statues, churches, villages, cities and even the pilgrims themselves. Speaking from personal experience this fabric is sparse, yet as needed. Programmatically it is enough. The pilgrim collectively understands what the fabric of the Camino will provide: place and community.
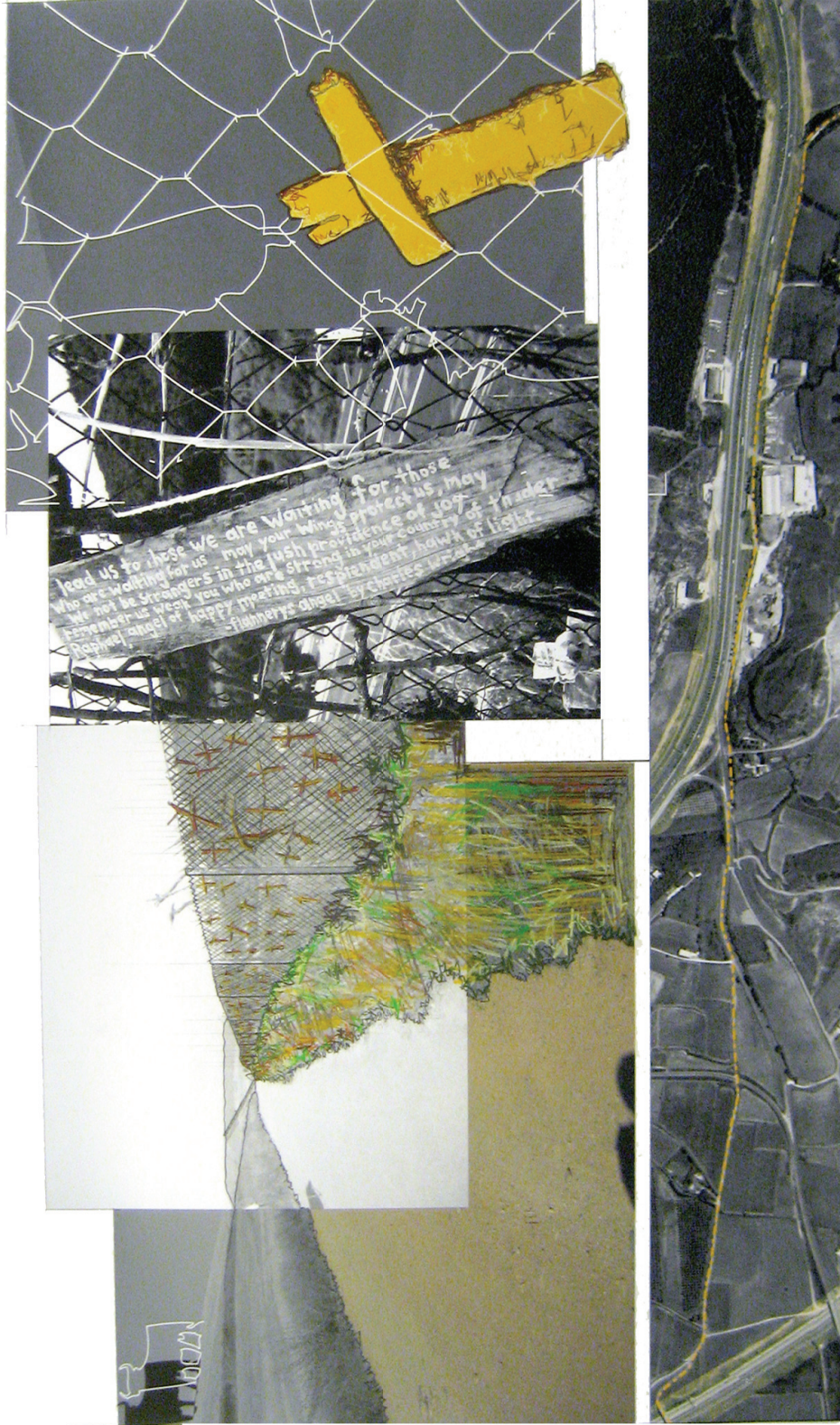

La Vache Qui Rit. Galicia, Spain. 3 August, 2009.

Collage of the approach towards village. Hospital de Orbigo, Spain 28 July, 2009.

Collage of the trail edge. Navarrete, Spain 17 July, 2009.

APPENDIX C
TRAVERSAL STUDY 2 (GASPÉSIE NATIONAL PARK)

As opposed to the Way of St. James, a cross-country ski trip is a journey into the wilderness. Nonetheless the found and built nodes of the trail - edge of the path, height of the canopy, strange formations of snow, expansive vistas and the retreat at the end - continue to structure the experience. The search for water and the need for warmth presented critical challenges in the snow swept conditions of the alpine. At the end of the day, after a few moments of blissful western sun, the shelters were internal retreats to cook, gab and sleep.

Path. Gaspesie National Park, Quebec, Canada. 3 March, 2010.
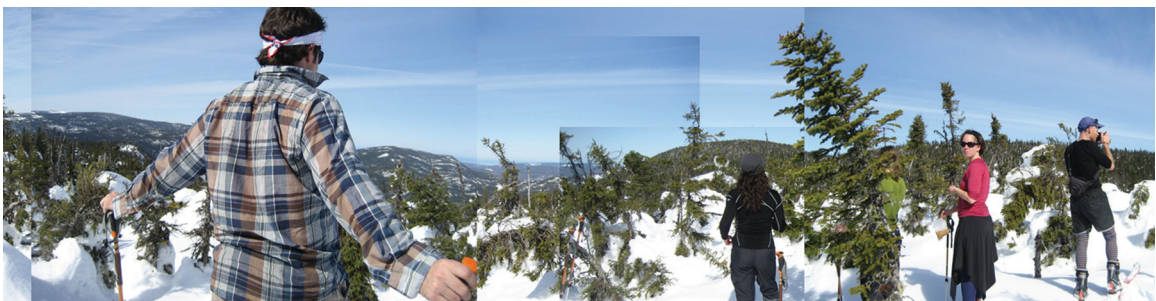
Prospect. Gaspesie National Park, Quebec, Canada. 3 March, 2010.

Snow Patterns. Gaspesie National Park, Quebec, Canada. 3 March, 2010.

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