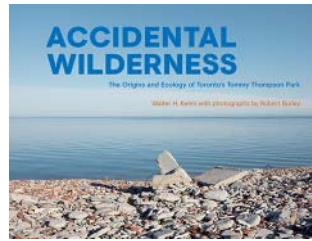


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BOOK REVIEW
BY RICHARD C. SMARDON



**ACCIDENTAL
WILDERNESS:
THE ORIGINS
AND ECOLOGY
OF TORONTO'S
TOMMY THOMPSON
PARK**

Walter H. Kehm,

with photographs by Robert Burley. University
of Toronto Press, 2020.

Richard C. Smardon

In one sense, *Accidental Wilderness* is a richly illustrated coffee table book and photography portfolio. In another sense, it is a compilation of reflective essays on the evolution, ecological meaning, and benefits derived from Tommy Thompson Park. This reviewer has followed a number of Great Lakes shoreline restoration projects, including the Chicago Wilderness (Greenberg, 2008; Sullivan, 2000), Duluth's Hartley Park (Berg, 2016), Milwaukee River area (Daniel, 2008) and Buffalo and Niagara Rivers, New York (NYS DEC, n.d.). Toronto's Tommy Thompson Park is somewhat unique within the urbanized Great Lakes because it is a newly created coastal ecosystem. *Accidental Wilderness* provides an account of how the park was created on the shores of Lake Ontario.

The text has multiple authors but is mostly written and edited by Walter H. Kehm, professor emeritus and former director of the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Guelph. Most of the photographs were taken by Robert Burley, who teaches at Ryerson University's School of Image Arts and has also published *An Enduring Wilderness: Toronto's Natural Park Lands* (Burley, 2017). *Accidental Wilderness* is organized as a series of essays by Kehm and contributing authors including Peter Del Tredici, Wayne Reeves, John Carley, Gavin Miller, Garth Vernon Riley, Gord MacPherson, Andrea Chreston, and Robert Burley. The essays are presented in three sections and are supplemented with three portfolios of Burley's photographs. The book closes with a poem by Chief R. Stacy Laforme.

In the book's introduction, Kehm presents the "accidental" history of how the spit landform came to be. Part I begins with four essays about the origins of Tommy Thompson Park, written by Del Tredici, Reeves, Kehm, and Carley. Del Tredici begins by

describing the “spontaneous” ecology springing from the newly created land. Reeves explains the process of transporting material to create the base lands, headland, embayment, wetlands, the endikement, and marina areas. Kehm’s essay describes the aquatic park options developed by Toronto’s municipal management authorities. Finally, Carley describes the Friends of the Spit advocacy group that challenged the municipal authorities’ plans and pushed for a “let the spit be” approach. To this reviewer, such advocacy is similar to the Friends of the Buffalo River, which pushed for the cleanup and restoration of the Buffalo River in New York State.

Part II details the development of the 1986 plan for the park, which Kehm calls “conservation by design.” This is the key essay in the book, which reveals Kehm’s planning and design vision for the park. This is followed by Miller’s essay on natural plant succession, Riley’s essay on bird colonization and usage, and MacPherson’s interview regarding mammal and fisheries establishment. Finally, Chreston outlines the habitat and management issues, including wetland creation, invasive species management, and the creation of the Tommy Thompson Park Bird Research Station.

Part III begins with an essay by Kehm on how Toronto residents use and benefit from the park—especially from a psychological perspective. In the final essay, Burley compares Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty earthwork in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the creation of the spit park. As he says in his essay, because of the park’s proximity to Toronto’s urban residents, its “strength lies in how it provides a perfect setting, for the tricky ‘pas de deux’ between nature and culture” (Burley 2020, 159).

For this reviewer, the book’s value is the detailed accounting of how the accidental creation of Tommy Thompson Park evolved in concert with Kehm’s park master plan. The planning and design process could be used as a framework for creating and restoring urban wildlands in Great Lakes communities and other coastal ecosystem areas. Such a framework is especially critical given how climate change is shifting weather-induced physical processes and temperature. Burley’s photography provides the reader with an intimate feel for the created park character. The book is recommended for those interested in more ecologically based planning and design processes.

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Richard C. Smardon is SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at SUNY-College of Environmental Science and Forestry.