

**Review: L'île aux Pommes en héritage (Island of Apples)**

Edited By Linda Croteau and Gaston Déry

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Croteau, Linda and Déry, Gaston (eds.). *L'île aux Pommes en héritage*. Québec: Les Éditions GID, 2014. 225 pp. ISBN: 9782896341894. CAN\$ 69.95; hardback; color photographs, in French.

The “*Île aux Pommes*” (“Island of apples”) is located on the St. Lawrence River near its confluence with the Saguenay River in a Québécois region where rivers can be many miles wide, similar to a sea. Even on English language maps, the site bears its French designation (“*Île aux Pommes*”). Privately owned and therefore unknown to most Canadians, this isolated island near Trois-Pistoles and L'Isle-Verte is now dedicated to nature and contemplation. There is no house on the island, only a single shack.

Some chapters are scholarly in nature while others are more like narratives or remembrances. Among the texts dealing with historical geography, the opening chapter by Professor André Fortin explains how the unique vegetation of this island has changed through the centuries and why some plants (such as the “*airelle vigne d'Ida*” variety) have even disappeared (pp. 58-64). Among the many interesting times was when the island's vegetation was totally destroyed by fire, in 1962; all the remaining plants and grains on this island have grown since the year 1962 or thereafter, as confirmed by the analysis made by Professor André Fortin (p. 60). The second chapter investigates the island's history since its Amerindian presence, the passage of Basque fishermen during the middle ages and French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1535 (p. 68). The following chapter traces the previous owners of the island since the French colony.

Many chapters explain and retell the numerous challenges and duties faced by the owner Gaston Déry (also the coeditor of this lavish book) who wanted to reintroduce the genuine varieties and species that had disappeared from the island many years before (p. 131). Other Québécois biologists and environmentalists have tried the same thing with other islands on the St. Lawrence River with the same wish to protect the marine environment from degradation, hunting, and pollution. The remaining chapters explain how they organized themselves into not-for-profit institutions and how they gained their expertise and authority in sustainable restoration of islands.

A luxury book written in French, *L'île aux Pommes en héritage* is really about the cultural and natural heritage of this beautiful site. About half of this over-sized book is dedicated to the observation of birds including six varieties of migrating ducks, plus gulls and eiders (see the list of 135 birds observed on *Île aux*

*Pommes*, p. 160). Richly illustrated with 330 images, it shows countless close-up photographs of the types of wild birds that are typical of the Québec fauna. Other photos show belugas and whales around the island. Some aerial images are included (pp. 44, 50, 51) as are maps, both old and recent (pp. 54, 67). A few older documents and vintage photos provide an historical context. Undoubtedly, *L'île aux Pommes en héritage* is a marvelous book, arguably the most beautiful book published in Canada this year. Canadian books are not easy to find outside Canada, but this publisher offers them through direct sales on its web site. It is a treat to read, even for persons who have a limited understanding of French; it provides a look at a fascinating microcosm of the beauties of Canadian nature.

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