



The natural

Jenna Boon wants the world to know the secrets of the amazing Joggins fossil cliffs

The surging tides of the Bay of Fundy continually rasp against the cliffs of Joggins, N.S., carving a massive window to a past that dominated the Earth 350 million years ago. The cliffs are the world's premier place to study the Carboniferous Period, when the fuel that powers today's world had yet to begin its metamorphosis from lush forests and swamps to coal and petroleum.

Jenna Boon, the director of the Joggins Fossil Institute (below, jogginsfossilcliffs.net), spent a good deal of her childhood in Joggins and knows the wonder of the area's unique



geography. "We have a beautiful resource in 14 kilometres of coastline that's basically untouched," she says. "Whenever I came home as an adult, the first thing I had to do was go down to the beach. It's inspiring; the tides and the cliffs are so powerful."

The Joggins Fossil Institute and Interpretive Centre initiative began in 1996, when community groups, the scientific community, and all levels of government began working to protect and enhance the cliffs with the ultimate goal of being named a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. The Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA) brought all parties together, and in 2004, when Canada put the site on its tentative list, the formal work of preparing the nomination dossier began. In

2005 Boon was hired to join a dedicated team and worked closely with John Calder, a senior geologist with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (www.gov.ns.ca/NATR). The dossier was formally submitted to the World Heritage Centre in February of 2007, and a decision will be made when the committee meets this July in Quebec City.

While all fingers are crossed for the official UNESCO designation, the centre, situated on the reclaimed site of the old Joggins No. 7 coal mine and overlooking the cliffs, is a stunning model of environmentally friendly architecture and one of the greenest buildings in Atlantic Canada. It boasts a 50-kilowatt wind-turbine generator, a solar-heating system, harvested rainwater, and a green roof. It's ironic that a building devoted to the Coal Age, and with an extensive interpretation of the town's early dependence on coal, is in the vanguard of structures dedicated to reducing its carbon footprint. But Boon sees no disconnect. "Coal was certainly an important part of the town's past," she says, "but it's a new era."

Boon's passion for the area prompted her to leave a secure position as a manager of the engineering, trades, and technology department of Holland College in Charlottetown. "One of the reasons I wanted to work on this project was to have a hand in the future of Joggins," she says.

There were also tremendous opportunities to develop professionally. "I've learned so much at this job," says Boon. "To go through that process [of putting together the UNESCO nomination dossier], having to exceed world standards to get that designation was a huge challenge, but it was also a huge opportunity." During her time in the college system, Boon worked in Kenya, El Salvador, and all over Europe. Her skill set, combined with her ability to move comfortably in international circles, made her a perfect fit for UNESCO's mandate.

The Fossil Institute also gave Boon a chance to restore some of the vibrancy she remembers from the Joggins of her youth. "In the summer, people would visit Joggins because of its scientific significance," she says. "But I'm ashamed to say, as a resident of Joggins and as a Nova Scotian, that as a youth I had no idea that the first true reptile, *Hylonomus lyelli*, was found here, or that it's mentioned in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. That's part of our heritage. I'd like the younger generation to be able to say, 'I'm from this wonderful community' and have a chance to learn about it."

Boon's roots in the area were an invaluable asset when she assumed the job as the institute's director. "The combination of Jenna's international background in education and training, and a real appreciation for the Fossil Cliffs on an academic level, was important, but even more so was her connection to the community," says Rhonda Kelly, the executive director of CREDA (www.creda.net). "That connection is paramount in any community-development project. Joggins is a small rural place, and when you're looking at something of this magnitude, the people need to be able to work with someone they can trust. Jenna is that person."

In September of 2007 the institute and CREDA were recognized for excellence in collaboration at the Celebrating Communities Conference, which was held in Sydney, N.S. "The people [of Joggins] have always been good stewards of this resource," says Boon. "At the onset, the community identified things they wanted and things they didn't want, and we kept going back to that. That empowerment permeated through all our partners and the politicians." With a common vision and deep reserves of community spirit, the new era in this part of the province promises to be powered by a clean, green fossil fuel.

— JOE FITZGERALD



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