

## Relief block print

The study *Pukaskwa driftwood beach* was created from a combination of three hand carved linoleum block surfaces that were printed with ink onto a paper surface. This image began as a rough sketch made on paper. I then coloured it using pencil crayon and the pencil lines of the original sketch were darkened with fine point black marker. This colour rough helped to determine the number of separate blocks that would be needed to print each colour of ink to recreate the sketch as a colour print on paper.

The next step was to trace the black marker outlines of objects in the study that included driftwood logs, a dark tree line behind the logs using a fairly transparent sheet of tracing paper. This would serve as the basis for making the key block from which all other additional blocks and colours would be defined.

The keyblock would also be the last one printed in the darkest colour of ink.

*An important point to remember is what one visualizes in one direction will always print as a mirror image (in the reverse direction).*

I cut a piece of battleship gray linoleum to the same size of my sketch. Using little pencil cross marks I marked corners on the tracing where they would match the corners of the block. I flipped the tracing paper over and set this on top of carbon paper which was placed with the coated side facing down onto a piece of linoleum block underneath. Both the tracing paper and carbon were fastened to the block using pieces of masking tape placed over two edges and fastened underneath the block.

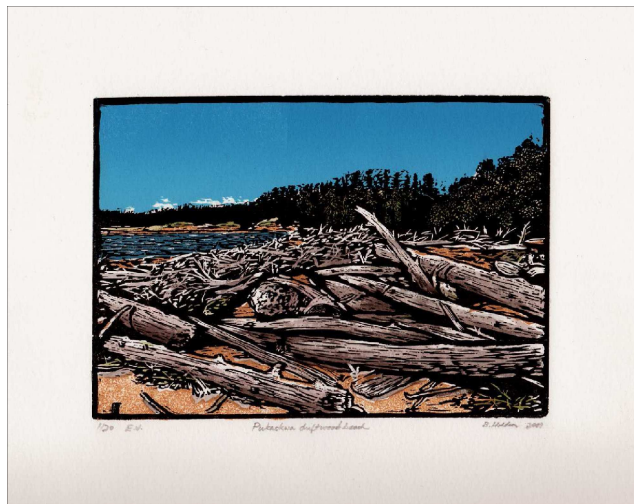
Using pencil I retraced the lines once more (this time they faced in a reverse direction). Then the tracing paper and carbon were removed. Using the dark line left on the surface of the linoleum from the tracing I added more shading using waterproof marker to areas I wanted to remain as solid black. I carved into the surface of the lino using a variety of sharp tip blade cutting tools. One of the tools had a fine v groove tip for clearing away small shallow line areas of the linoleum material (known as a liner). Another had a broader blade tip ideal for clearing away deeper large areas of linoleum.

*One trick I used to check on the progress of the cutting and see what type of image it would leave when printed was to periodically place a piece of newsprint over top and rub a piece of conte or graphite stick over a cut area. This would reveal the positive and negative areas of the cut away block surface.*

The cutting of the additional blocks for each colour was made once I had carved my key block.

But first I rolled water based ink onto the key block, and placed a piece of drafting film over top, and using the back of wooden spoon and circular hand rubbing of the tool I transferred ink onto the underside of the film.

I then took an equal size piece of battleship linoleum block and very carefully by eye positioned the inked side of the drafting film (facing down) onto the surface of the block (matching the corners of print and block as these were visible through the film). I rubbed the surface of the film again using the back of the wooden spoon. This transferred the wet ink to the block surface and it printed in the same direction as the keyblock image. The ink was allowed to dry and then I used this as a cutting guide to determine the area where the light peach/tan colour in the sand would be printed from this particular block. The dried water based ink was then wiped off the surface using a damp sponge. The same process was repeated onto the third equal size block of lino and that block was carved from the black ink impression to become the block that would produce the blue of the sky and water.



### ***Pukaskwa driftwood beach***

Relief print - multiple block

2009

edition of 20

Brian Holden

Once all the blocks had been cut away the next step was to figure out how to align them all in the same position so that each one would print in exactly the same place on the paper to combine to form the colour image.

To achieve this I constructed a registration board system. This board was made by taking a long piece of clear plexiglass and securing a flat three hole punch (pin system) to the top edge of the board using packing tape. You could also bond it with epoxy but I find the tape method works well and keeps it secure. The printing paper is held in place by the pins and closed metal flap of the punch during the printing process.

I then determined where to center the block in relation to where it would leave the printed image on the underside of the printing paper. This was achieved by first setting one of the blocks onto the plexiglass base and taping down three narrow strips of matboard around two sides and the bottom of the block. This U shaped area would act as a registration brace. All of the blocks would be positioned in this exact same spot for printing stages.

A small amount of oil base ink was squeezed onto the surface of a piece of plate glass which served as an inking plate slab. Using a rubber cylinder brayer (roller) the ink was rolled out in many directions until it achieved an even tack and thin even coating on the brayer. This was then rolled across the surface of the block, applying it in several applications the block surface until it was evenly coated. I could tell by looking at the shininess on the block surface and if all flat relief surface areas were equally shiny in appearance.

The end of a sheet of printing paper was set into the three hole punch and secured. It was folded back and held in place with a small weighted object (in my case a small stone). Then the first block with the lightest colour (peach/tan) was set into the brace area, the paper was folded back and carefully laid over top of the inked block. Using a flat smooth tool known as a baren I rubbed the back of the paper giving it a little hand pressure. You could also use the back of a spoon, a rounded door knob, or even run the registration bed under the top roller of an adjustable type etching press to transfer the ink from the block surface to the paper underside. Each colour of ink was rolled onto it's associated block and this helped the image to develop as the inks were deposited on the paper in order from lightest to darkest. Once the key block (black) was printed the paper was removed and hung to dry on a flat.

I decided to add a little shading to the driftwood and colour into the open marks in the trees and watercolour was painted into these areas once the prints had dried. The oil base ink repels water so it allowed the watercolour pigment to absorb into the white of the paper between the black.

Once they were printed the prints were hung to dry on a interior line using small bulldog spring clamps.

You can also get more information about various types of relief printing and view photos illustrating the start to finish processes by visiting my blog at:  
[www.myprintmakingjourney.blogspot.com](http://www.myprintmakingjourney.blogspot.com)