Presque Isle, literally translated “almost an island,” is a superb geologic example where you can see the interaction of waves and sediment. The landform is a “spit”—a narrow tongue of sand and gravel attached to land. The action of the longshore current to the northeast turns the spit landward making it a “recurved spit.” Its existence can be traced to the Ice Age, when Lake Erie was a valley occupied by a glacier pushing southwest. Vast amounts of rock, sand, and debris were dumped as ice melted and retreated to the north. The Presque Isle area is the southern end of a ridge of sediment that extends across Lake Erie (now about 30 to 50 feet below the water). This sediment became the source of spit sand and gravel as the water levels of Lake Erie rose. Currents pushed sediment across a platform on the southern side of the lake, and continue to drive sand and gravel northeast. The tendency for Presque Isle is to migrate northeastward and form a real island, as has happened before.

Looking southwest across Presque Isle beach. The growth of the spit can be seen in the pattern of sand ridges. Photo courtesy of Commonwealth Media Services.

Recommended Reading


Visit the Presque Isle web page of DCNR.