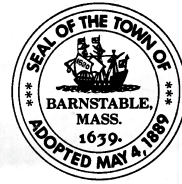


CROCKER NECK CONSERVATION AREA

INTERPRETIVE TRAIL



Barnstable
Conservation
Commission



THE STORY of CROCKER NECK

This 97-acre town-owned conservation area was assembled from three adjacent parcels. The southernmost 35 acres was purchased for \$3 million in 1985 to prevent an 18-lot subdivision from being constructed along the waterfront.

Located at the southwestern corner of the village of Cotuit, Crocker Neck is named for the old Barnstable family that owned much of it. The Neck is part of the outwash plain, sands carried south off the melting glacier 12,000 years ago. Habitat types found here include pine/oak forest, salt marsh, freshwater marsh, shrub swamp, beach, and estuarine flats.

A total of 1.5 miles of walking trails are maintained on Crocker Neck. A leisurely stroll of the property takes less than one hour, but more time is recommended to soak in the rich tapestry of life to be found. Parking space is provided at the northern gate on Santuit Road and inside The Lane. Picnic tables are available at the white pine grove and overlooking the cove. Enjoy your visit!

Questions, comments for us? Call Barnstable Conservation Commission at 508-790-6245.



WELCOME TO CROCKER NECK!








TRAIL STOPS

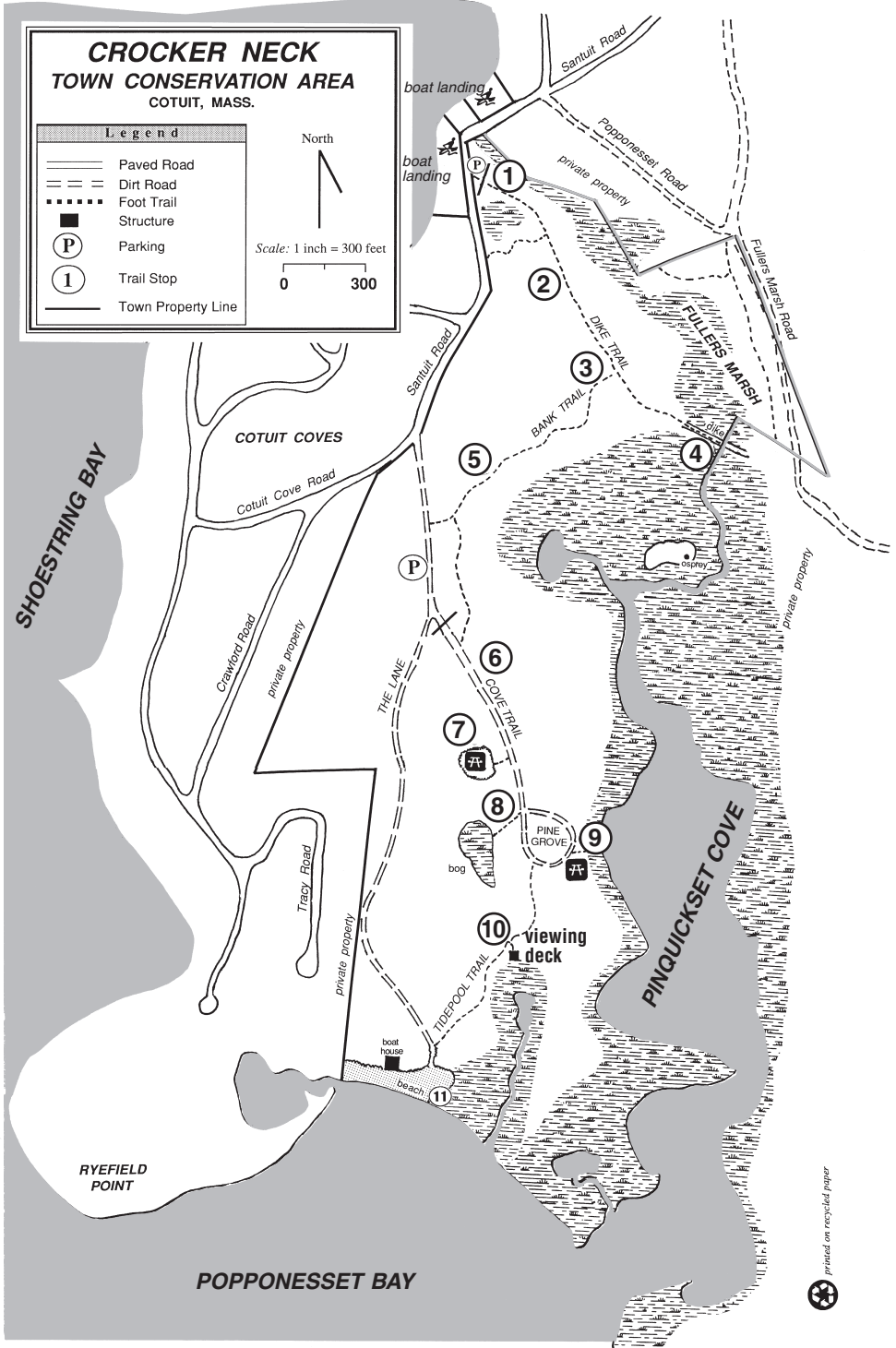
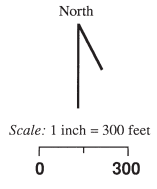
1. Just off the trail is the dark green scouring rush, the most uncommon plant to be found on Crocker Neck. Not actually a rush at all, this species is more accustomed to alkaline wetlands in western Mass. Perhaps this stand is growing over an old shell heap or midden. Colonists scrubbed their pans clean with the plant's abrasive stalks: an early brillo pad!
2. Hugging the ground is the mayflower, or trailing arbutus, our state flower. Its flowers' early arrival in March of 1621 encouraged the Pilgrims in Plymouth that spring had not abandoned them after their harsh first winter. Get on your knees and smell the delicate pink, waxy flowers. Just don't pluck 'em. The adjacent lowbush blueberry is for picking.
3. This open, sandy area was probably scooped out as a borrow pit a century ago to provide sand for the cranberry bogs nearby. Now, vegetation is creeping in from the sides, recolonizing the disturbance. Gray lichens, such as reindeer moss, and poverty grass enjoy the dune-like, poor soils. Lichens are a mix of fungus and algae: what a partnership!



4. The salt marsh originally extended upstream, but this dike prevented tidal flow to convert it to a commercial cranberry bog. The bog was abandoned and the ten-foot tall phragmites reed has taken its place. Reed is an aggressive plant from Europe, pretty to look at, but of little food value to our wildlife. Native Americans are said to have eaten the starchy root. Look over the salt marsh for the osprey on its nesting pole on the left side of the island. The osprey is our fish hawk. Watch out for poison ivy on the dike.
5. This trail runs along the steep coastal bank rising up from the marsh. Vegetated, stable coastal banks like this one protect the marsh from stormwater runoff and collection of sediment. In turn, banks buffer the upland from tidal flooding. The pits were probably dug by hunters of marsh ducks years ago. Look for the deer run or path crossing our foot trail at right angles just beyond the post. Deer enjoy browsing the salty marsh grass.

CROCKER NECK TOWN CONSERVATION AREA COTUIT, MASS.

Legend	
	Paved Road
	Dirt Road
	Foot Trail
	Structure
	Parking
	Trail Stop
	Town Property Line

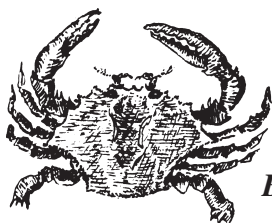


6. The waist-high shrub all around you is black huckleberry. It is a common companion to the pitch pines and oaks which comprise a typical Cape Cod forest. The dense thicket gives good cover for rabbits and mice trying to hide from predators like fox and Crocker Neck's great horned owl. Go ahead and eat a huckleberry. Teaberry, or wintergreen, is the shiny green leaf groundcover beneath the huckleberry. Its bright red berries taste like mint. Try one!

7. Enter the white pine stand for some solitude. When the wind is high, the treetops make a soothing, whishing sound. When the sun is warm, the fallen needles give off a toasty smell. White pines have smoother bark and more wispy needles than the typical pitch pine. Also, needles are in clusters of five on white pine, while the pitch pine has three.

8. Down the side path is a kettle swamp or bog. Because this depression in the land is low enough to meet the groundwater table, it is saturated much of the year and freshwater wetland plants and trees, ones that like their roots wet, such as the red maple, highbush blueberry and sphagnum moss, can grow here. Listen for the wood frogs and peepers making an amphibian chorus in the spring.

9. Pinguickset Cove is a fun name to say. It probably means "on the bank of a river," which is "*punukquékontu*" in the native Algonquian language. The Cove is very shallow and muddy, but a favorite wading and fishing place for great blue herons and egrets. Blue-claw crabs scuttle under the silt if you get too close. The brown, ribbed mussels are not the eating kind.



Blue-claw crab

10. Sit on the viewing deck and observe the secret treasures of the tide pool. The rising tide pushes water and fish up the creek to the pool. Minnows bubble on the surface. Fiddler crabs dart into their burrows along the creek edge. The tall, coarse grass along the water's edge is salt cordgrass, while the short, tousled type is salt meadow grass. These *Spartina* plants are building blocks of the salt marsh. A ring of woody shrubs called marsh elder divides the marsh from upland.
11. The summer southwest breeze blows sea foam up onto the beach edge. This foam is not pollution, but actually the remains of millions of plankton, microscopic marine plants and animals. Rockweed is the rubbery brown seaweed attached to the marsh bank. It has air bladders that kids like to pop. Popponeset Bay is shared by the towns of Mashpee and Barnstable. Popponeset Spit, in the distance, is managed by the Mass. Audubon Society as a shorebird nesting area. The woodland across the bay to your left is Meadow Point, preserved by the Barnstable Land Trust.

CROCKER NECK MONTH-by-MONTH

There's always something to seek here. Can you find them all?

January - After a freeze hardens the ice, explore Fullers Marsh.

February - By month's end, redwing blackbirds are in the reeds.

March - Ospreys return from wintering south.

April - Listen for spring peepers after a rain. Mayflowers bloom.

May - White shadbush blossoms along marsh edge. Many ticks.

June - Lady slippers & starflowers in bloom. Salt marsh greens up.

July - Get the blueberries before the birds do! Sea lavender blooms.

August - Greenhead flies bite. Mushrooms sprout.

September - Goldenrod blossoms. Beach plums ripen.

October - Swamp maples and glasswort turn red.

November - Pick your wintergreen berries for Thanksgiving.

December - Buffleheads and mergansers flock in cove.

Credits:

Trail Guide: *The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, Inc., Barnstable MA, 1995.*

Illustrations: *Outermost Graphics, Edgartown MA ; & Abigail Rorer*

Imagesetting: *Express Type, Hyannis, MA*

WARNING!

Deer ticks may carry lyme disease. Wear light colored clothes, tuck pants in socks, and check yourself after walking.

Poison ivy is scant throughout Crocker Neck, but "leaves three, let it be."