



WELFLEET  
CONSERVATION  
TRUST

## Box Turtle Woods and Marsh Conservation Area

### Area Description:

As the name suggests, this small trail system first goes through woodlands where the Box Turtles were once so noteworthy that the old mailing address for the old farmhouse was simply “BTH” for Box Turtle Hollow. It then skirts the shores of Loagy Bay Marsh and provides views of Mill Hill Island, Lieutenant Island and, on a clear day, looking beyond Mill Hill Island, a view of the brilliant sands of Great Island, the land mass that defines the western boundary of Wellfleet Harbor. The marsh, historically known as Harding’s Meadow, provides habitat for generations of Diamondback Terrapin as they make their way from Loagy Bay onto the shores of Mill Hill Island for their yearly nesting.

### Location:

South Wellfleet, off Lieutenant Island Rd.

### Directions:

Turn West on Lieutenant Island Rd. which is 0.3 miles south of the Marconi entrance and 1.5 miles north of the Wellfleet/Eastham town line. Follow this road for approximately 0.6 miles and turn right on the first Compass Hill Rd. (a dirt road). After 0.1 miles turn right onto Box Turtle Lane. Proceed downhill to a T-intersection. Take a left and drive 0.1 miles to the parking area on your right.

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The wooded section of the trail consists mostly of Pitch Pine, Black Huckleberry, White Oak and Black Oak. As you enter the woods from Box Turtle Lane, keep an eye out for native Box Turtles which frequent this enclave and seem to have adjusted to human habitation and remained in these woods over time. The lore surrounding this property includes one specific box turtle that was found walking the property for over 60 years by three generations of the Ernst family. This turtle was rumored to have the initials of the original owner of the property carved in its bottom shell. In an undisturbed and friendly habitat, it is not unusual for box turtles to live 70-100 years. Please leave them undisturbed to enjoy their elderly bliss.

The trail through the woods leads to the marsh edge where one has an excellent vantage point to contemplate the many roles the marsh has played in the history of this area. The marsh provides a protective buffer for upland properties. It also filters runoff to insure clean healthy coastal waters. Healthy marshes are factories for the production and breakdown of organic material. They can give off an odor, like this healthy marsh, to let us know that the bacteria are doing their job.

The marsh provided the route of transport for the old farmhouse to the east of the conservation property. While some homes in the first two centuries of Wellfleet’s development were “flaked” and transported in pieces, this farmhouse was actually built in Plymouth and floated in one piece across Cape Cod Bay on log rafts. Horses then dragged the house onto land, and rolled it overland on the same logs that provided the floats for its journey.

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Mill Hill Island, as the name suggests, had a place in the industrial history of the area dating back to the 1700s. Artifacts such as mill-stones with square holes have been found along the shores of the marsh, remnants of the old tide mills that braced the shores of many creeks entering Wellfleet Bay.

Offshore across Loagy Bay, lies Lieutenant Island, a name adopted from a 17th century resident, an American Indian named Lieutenant Anthony. According to Durand Echeverria’s **A History of Billingsgate**, Anthony claimed to be the sachem of the Punonakanits, a tribe historically located in Billingsgate, lands that are part of present day Wellfleet. Local lore has it that he was the last of the American Indians in this area, and had contact with an English Lieutenant. Observing the respect the lieutenant received, he named himself Lieutenant. When asked who owned the land, he said: “I own it, I am a Lieutenant”.

**Please stay on the trails** to protect fragile plants in the area and to respect private properties.

Total Length of Trails: 0.4 miles

Extent: 6.4 acres surrounded by approx. 43 acres of intertidal marsh conservation land.

The trails pass over land owned by the Town of Wellfleet subject to a conservation restriction held by Mass Audubon.

Thanks to the Ernst family for their generous cooperation as landowners.

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# BOX TURTLE CONSERVATION AREA

