



Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

YOUR PASSPORT TO GREAT BAY

A GREAT NEW GUIDE FOR EXPLORING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S AMAZING ESTUARY

BY KELLE MACKENZIE



Exploring the natural wonders of New Hampshire's Great Bay Estuary has never been easier, with the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership and other community partners working hard to protect local lands and waters for wildlife and the public. This remarkable estuary, which got its start when the last glacier retreated some 15,000 years ago, is rich with a diversity of habitats – acres of salt marsh, freshwater wetlands and second-growth forests. These are home to many species of wildlife, both common and endangered, and can be explored with the new “Passport to Great Bay,” available for free at the Great Bay Discovery Center on Depot Road in Greenland, New Hampshire.

The Passport is your guide to many of the lands within the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, a state

and federal partnership between the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Currently, 10 properties are featured in the Passport packet, which includes directions, site descriptions, activities to try and points of interest. The packet also reminds visitors to protect against poison ivy, ticks and mosquitoes, and to be aware of the tides – you don't want to get caught out on a mudflat!

If you're looking for new places to explore along New Hampshire's seacoast, stop by the Discovery Center, pick up your Passport and make your way to the lands of Great Bay. To whet your appetite for adventure, following are three of our favorite Passport places.

~ SPARTINA POINT ~

This special patch of land on the shore of Great Bay was first used by Native people, and became a homestead during the Colonial era. The land includes a diversity of habitats, such as an oak-hickory forest, salt marsh, tidal creeks and a natural forest edge, all of which make excellent homes for wildlife such as deer, turkey, waterfowl, fish and wading birds.

The trail straight ahead from the parking lot will take you through the forest and out to the Bay. To the left, you'll see the Weeks Family Homestead, a private residence. Taste the salt in the air as you stroll around this property. Listen to the water trickle through the creeks and the wind whisper through the grasses.

Oak trees form a high, leafy canopy over the path leading to where the Winnicut River empties into Great Bay. At left is a salt

marsh with small tidal channels and salt pannes, a perfect place for waterfowl and shorebirds to feed and rest. Salt marshes are habitats that are as functional as they are beautiful; serving as nursery grounds for fish and shellfish, providing the fuel for estuarine food webs, recycling and exporting vital nutrients, protecting shorelines and acting as water purifiers.

On the marsh, the tall plants you see growing closest to the water's edge are smooth cordgrass. Just behind them grows salt marsh hay, waving in the wind like a rolling meadow. Salt marsh hay was once cultivated and harvested by European settlers to feed livestock -- you may see old fence posts that delineated each farmer's plot of marsh. The grasses provide important nesting and feeding areas for a variety of birds, especially Nelson's



sharp-tailed sparrow, northern harrier and saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows. Be careful here – some areas have deep ditches or pools of water.

While at Spartina Point, discover the “shaggy” hickory trees; bring your bird book and binoculars and look for red-bellied woodpeckers; or listen for the call of the American toad on a hot day.



EXPLORATION LOGISTICS: Spartina Point

Directions: *By road:* Heading east on Route 33, turn left onto Bayside Road in Greenland. Drive .7 miles and look for a Great Bay Wildlife Management Area sign on the right to access a small parking area. *By water,* use only kayak, canoe or other shallow-draft boat, and watch the tides.

Terrain: Fairly level, easy terrain out to Great Bay. Uneven terrain to homestead view.

Exploration Time: Allow at least an hour.

~ CROMMET CREEK ~

EXPLORATION LOGISTICS:

Crommet Creek

Directions: From Route 108 in Newmarket, take Dame Road, 2 miles. Park on right in designated lot.

Terrain: Universally accessible trail to viewing platform, to be completed this summer. Remainder is self-guided exploration on fairly difficult terrain.

Exploration Time: Allow at least 1 hour.

Part of the Crommet Creek watershed, this parcel is within the largest unfragmented block of natural vegetation around Great Bay. From the parking lot, follow the short trail to the new observation platform. Begin your journey at the pond, which is teeming with wildlife year-round.

For centuries, New Hampshire’s fields and forests have been evolving. One furry resident that has played an important role in this changing landscape is the beaver (*Castor canadensis*), and you can see evidence everywhere of its presence at Crommet Creek. Think for a moment what the surroundings here may have looked like 50 years ago, before a colony of beavers arrived and began to change the face of the land. Likely a stream bordered by mature trees and undergrowth once dominated the landscape at Crommet Creek. Today, the main features are the long and carefully constructed dam to the east, and the impounded water with a beaver lodge rising out of it.

Explore the waters and look for signs of beaver

feeding – if you go in early morning, you may even be lucky enough to see a freshly cut sapling, dripping with moisture from within. Look for “scent mounds” at the water’s edge, politely informing potential transients that this part of the watershed has already been claimed. If you happen upon a busy beaver toward dusk, don’t be surprised if you hear a loud “crack” on the water. This is just a beaver’s way of telling you to back off.

Notice the dramatic boulders, or “erratics,” left when the last glacier retreated. A closer look in spring will reveal thousands of bullfrog tadpoles jetting about the pond. Listen for the sounds of migrating songbirds or the drumming of the pileated woodpecker searching for insects in the dead trees.

Sit by the pond at dusk during a warm spring rain and listen for the first peepers of the season; bring a sketchbook and capture the changing light on the water; or watch for great blue herons gliding to nest in the lower marsh.

~ ADAMS POINT ~

Adams Point is the gateway to Great Bay! For hundreds of years, people have accessed the bounty of the Piscataqua Region from this strategic point of land dividing Great and Little Bay. On this 82-acre peninsula, once an island called Mathes Neck, you will find a variety of upland and estuarine habitats to explore. A well-worn trail through fields, forests, tidal marshes and rocky shores provides spectacular views of the estuary. Named after the prominent local family that owned it from 1835 to 1960, this land carries a rich cultural and natural legacy.

Begin your exploration from the parking lot adjacent to the N.H. Fish and Game boat access site. Follow the paved road up the hill toward the Jackson Estuarine Laboratory and take a left onto the Evelyn Browne Trail. As you approach the shoreline, you will notice a classic “shingle beach” with rocky outcroppings. Strong tides and currents dictate what species of plants and animals can survive here.

Loop back onto the road and stop at the kiosk near Jackson Lab. Pick up a copy of the Evelyn Browne Trail

brochure for a detailed description of Adams Point. Make your way toward Great Bay through open fields edged by sumac and dotted with aging apple trees and shrubs. Furber Strait, the deepest part of the Estuary, divides Great and Little Bay to your left. Anglers on shore or in boats often catch striped bass and bluefish from this 58-foot-deep channel.

A trail runs around the perimeter of the point, passing the Footman Islands, and leads to an Appalachian oak/pine forest. Stop at a spectacular vantage point on a rocky outcropping for a great view of Great Bay. An expansive salt marsh to your left leads you back to your car. Look for waterfowl, secretive songbirds, and ospreys along the way.

If you are at Adams Point in winter, watch for bald eagles flying and perching on trees that line Furber Strait. At other times of year, look for Native American shell middens tucked into the hillside along the Bay, or kayak from the launch around the point to the south.

EXPLORATION LOGISTICS: Adams Point

Directions: From Route 108 in Newmarket, take Bay Road, 3.8 miles to Adams Point Road/Jackson Estuarine Laboratory. Follow Adams Point Road .9 miles to parking area on left. From Route 108 in Durham, take Durham Point Road, 3.6 miles to Adams Point Road/Jackson Estuarine Laboratory. Follow Adams Point Road .9 miles to parking area on left.

Terrain: Easy to moderate hike. Avoid areas adjacent to steep drop-offs along the western edge of the peninsula.

Exploration Time: Allow one to two hours.

We hope you'll use the new guide to discover and enjoy these properties and others around Great Bay. The natural resources of the estuary have drawn people to the area for thousands of years, and today make us realize that this special place must be protected for future generations.

Kelle MacKenzie is the Education Coordinator at N.H. Fish and Game's Great Bay Discovery Center in Greenland, N.H.



NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

The lands highlighted in the Passport lie within the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, established in 1989 to promote informed management of the Great Bay estuary and estuarine habitats through linked programs of stewardship, public education and scientific understanding. Since that time, the Reserve has grown from 6,353 to 10,236 acres, and includes all of Great Bay and Little Bay, as well as the tidal portions of the Bellamy, Oyster, Lamprey, Squamscott and Winnicut Rivers – one of the richest and most diverse ecosystems in the state. The Reserve's work is guided by a management plan that identifies current issues and sets goals and priorities for action, including land protection. To learn more, visit www.WildNH.com/marine or call Peter Wellenberger at (603) 868-1095.