

# Coastal Waterways in Winter

DCR State Parks South Region

## TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE

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### Welcome

Explore the coastal waterways of Cape Cod this season. This DCR Trip-Tip self guided adventure features three locations within 15 minutes driving time of one another in the Cape Cod area. This adventure features:

**Winter Estate Tour at Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Falmouth**

**Quashnet River Trail Adventure at Quashnet River in Falmouth**

**Beach Exploration at South Cape Beach State Park in Mashpee**

Trip-Tip gives you information and some fun ideas to explore the great outdoors at DCR Massachusetts State Park and Watersheds. With a little preparation and a sense of adventure, people of all ages can safely enjoy our outdoor spaces during our coldest months.

Look through this guide to help plan your outing. Choose one park, two parks, or make it a multi-day adventure. Visit them in any order; you decide. Challenge yourself to visit all the parks with your family during February Vacation Week, or anytime this winter. We hope you enjoy this Trip-Tip tour.

This guide introduces you to some of the trails and water features within the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve that preserves 2,800 acres of valuable land and water habitats within the towns of Mashpee and Falmouth on Cape Cod. It is also one of 29 National Estuary Research Reserves around the country where scientists do research about coastal environments and how people impact them. Doing research helps us understand and solve environmental issues here on the coast. Within a few miles you can enjoy views overlooking the bay and estuary, hike in the woods along a river, and beachcomb at the shore.

### Share Your Adventure!

Share your Trip-Tip adventure with others through word of mouth, or on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtriptip**. Other options?

### Things To Know, Before You Go

Remember, at all DCR parks and watersheds:

- Carry-in, carry-out all of your belongings, including trash.
- Stay on designated trails.
- All pets on 10-foot maximum leash, attended to at all times. Clean-up after your pet and dispose of waste off-site.

- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate.
- Even though it's winter, please be aware of poison ivy and check for ticks after your walk.

## Winter Estate Tour

### Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

131 Waquoit Highways (Route 28), Falmouth, MA 02563

**Phone:** (508) 457-0495

**Website:** <https://waquoitbayreserve.org/>

**Hours of Operation:** Dawn to dusk.

**Parking fees:** No parking fees.

**Restrooms:** Currently, the Visitor Center and restrooms are not available at any of the listed sites due to COVID protocols.

Your winter tour of this former waterfront estate begins at the bluff in front of the Visitor Center. Park your car and walk behind the Visitor Center, an historic Victorian mansion, to find amazing views overlooking the bay and an indigenous style dwelling or weekuw. As you explore the campus, keep in mind that this valuable public resource exists on the ancestral lands of the Wampanoag people. It is also the site of many ongoing research projects on water quality, climate change, and coastal habitats. Visit our website for further information on these projects.

### What Can You See from the Bluff?

At the split rail fence overlooking the bay, locate the sign with a drawing of the area. Find the compass rose set in the lawn near the sign to help with directions. The weather the day you visit will affect what you are able to see. Look out over the water and try to find different features in the landscape such as:

- Washburn Island (wooded area to the west)
- South Cape Beach State Park (Directly south)
- Martha's Vineyard Island (Look further south beyond South Cape Beach)
- What other features can you see?
- Are people clamming today?
- Are there boats in the water?

### Experience 2 Name (optional)

Now that you know your directions after seeing the compass rose, follow the trail to the west that overlooks a small salt pond and marsh, stay to the right and follow signs to the historic "Bay View Cemetery." Here you will find names of the early settlers of Waquoit village, including many sea captains. Look for family names you know from local landmarks, such as Child's River and the Bourne Bridge. There is even a memorial stone, known as a cenotaph, honoring a local sailor who died on a Pacific Ocean voyage and was buried on remote Pitcairn Island. See if you can find this tall stone monument to Mr. Tobey (hint: it is to the right of where you entered). What year was he born? This is a sacred spot. Please keep this in mind as you explore these beautiful grounds. Many of the

grave markers are old and extremely fragile. Please be aware that grave rubbings are strictly prohibited.

## **Birds of the Bay**

A wide variety of birds use this area because of the different habitats. Take a stroll around the campus, checking out fields and woodland edges. Count how many different types of birds you see. Include any nests and nesting boxes you see, too. They are used by seasonal residents like the osprey, a large fish-eating raptor that returns each spring. Can you find the large nest on the visitor center chimney? Can you find another one near the circular drive? Don't forget to look for ducks and sea birds on the bay too.

## **Quashnet River Trail Adventure**

### **Quashnet River Trail**

Martin Road, Falmouth, MA 02536

**Phone:** (508) 457-0495

**Website:** <https://waquoitbayreserve.org/>

**Hours of Operation:** Dawn to dusk.

**Parking fees:** No parking fees.

**Restrooms:** No public restrooms at this location.

From the Waquoit Bay Reserve Visitor Center parking lot, take a right onto Route 28 and head south for 1.5 miles. Turn left onto Martin Road and follow the road to the small parking area. Read the map and area history at the kiosk before hiking. Dogs on leash welcomed here. Please pick-up after your pet.

Enjoy a moderate 2.7-mile loop along this restored waterway that empties into Waquoit Bay. The kiosk provides a brief history of this small but important river that has provided food and economic opportunities for centuries. Wildlife includes native brook trout, American eel and river herring that travel upstream from the ocean to spawn. The area is also home to the rare New England cottontail rabbit. Be aware that once you cross to the other side of the river at 1.5 miles, the return trip follows a narrower path with some hills.

## **Quashnet River Trail Adventure**

1. Find the **old mill foundation** near the kiosk then use the steps to see where the river was dammed in 1832 to provide waterpower to grind corn, and later, to manufacture shingles. In the early 1900's the dam was reinforced to flood the area for cranberry farming. How would a dam affect fish in the river?
2. Take the **2.7-mile round trip hike** along the river. The trees provide shade and act as water filters. See if you can find both pitch pine and white pine trees along the route. You can tell them apart by looking closely at how the needles are bunched together; 3 for pitch pine and 5 for white pine. Are there other differences? Which type of tree is most common here?
3. Along the trail edges, look for a low, evergreen plant, with thick, shiny green leaves. Tear off a leaf and sniff; do you recognize the **wintergreen scent**? Wildlife like to eat the red berries.

4. Stop for a **picnic** half-way through your hike. About 1.5 miles down, the trail turns right and there is a bridge over the river where you can sit in a sunny spot to look for fish below and birds above. What else do you see here? The rusty looking shoreline shows where iron rich groundwater is bubbling out in this spring-fed stream.

## **Beach Exploration**

### **South Cape Beach State Park**

668 Great Oak Road, Mashpee, MA 02649

**Phone:** 508-457-0495

**Website:** <https://waquoitbayreserve.org/>

**Hours of Operation:** Dawn to dusk.

**Parking Fees:** No parking fee in the winter.

**Restrooms:** No public restrooms at this location in the winter.

From the visitor center, turn right onto Route 28 and head south for 1.5 miles, take a right onto Red Brook Road (across from Martin Road). Follow for 2 miles to the stop sign and turn right onto Great Oak Road. Go 2 miles then turn left at the sign for beaches. In winter, follow the beach road to the end and take a left to park in the Mashpee Town Resident lot.

## **Beach Exploration**

**Sage Lot Pond Trail** starts on the right, just behind the dunes as you face the water, and extends one mile to the jetty at the mouth of Waquoit Bay. The soft sand here makes this a strenuous walk but also a great spot to look for animal tracks. Take a round-trip hike down the trail and you might see coyote, racoon or even otter tracks. Do you see any bird tracks? Are they webbed or not? Are they large like a great blue heron? How many toes do you see?

The **saltmarsh and salt-pond** are connected to Waquoit Bay. Stop to view this wetland from the wooden bridge. Ducks and geese often gather here when their freshwater ponds freeze over. How many birds can you count here today? Are they diving for food?

As you head back along **the beach**, see how many different types of shells you can find. They may be from crabs or from animals that live in one shell (like snails) or two shells (likes clams and scallops). Can you tell the difference?

Don't forget to check-out the views of **Martha's Vineyard Island** across the water. You can visit by taking a short ferry ride from nearby Woods Hole.

**Windy day?** Park and walk a short distance back down the access road you entered the parking lot to explore the more sheltered Flat Pond Trail with boardwalks, fresh-water wetlands and viewing platforms overlooking marsh and pond habitats.

Take a **winter greens hike**. How many different shades of green you can find as you locate different types of "evergreen" plants here, including holly, inkberry, pine and wintergreen to name a few.

**Thank you for joining us for this Coastal Waterways in Winter Trip-Tip!** Cape Cod is more than just a summer destination. Visit on a winter day to explore the coastal waterways of Waquoit Bay, the Quashnet River, and South Cape Beach!

During your next Trip-Tip, perhaps you'll visit a park that you didn't know about before. Maybe you'll meet a new bird or try a new spot. Winter wanderings bring you opportunities to experiment with ways you can embrace winter. We hope that you will be invigorated to take even more Trip-Tip outdoor adventures all year long!

### **Image Credits:**

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The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR's mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.* For more information visit: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-conservation-recreation>.

### **Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation**

251 Causeway Street, 9th Floor

Boston, MA 02114

617-626-1250

