

Driftway Park

Location: Driftway Park is located on the river and marsh side of the Driftway, about 0.8 miles from the traffic circle at Rt 3A, and about 0.6 mile from the Greenbush Train Station. It is across the street from Widows' Walk Golf Course.

Parking / Launch Ramp: Parking is available in an asphalt parking lot on the river and marsh side of the Driftway, in a lot for about 20+ vehicles and a few boat trailers. A launching ramp for small craft is provided.

Acreage: 334 acres

History: The Driftway has a long and varied history. Scituate was seasonal home to nomadic Native Americans of the Wompanoag tribe who moved between coast and inland depending on the availability of different types of food. They fished, farmed, and hunted game during the warmer seasons in Scituate, leaving little trace of their existence.

The Men of Kent inhabited the area in the 1630s. The salt marsh grasses were an important economic resource, used by settlers for roof thatch, wall insulation, and forage for animals. The character of the salt marshes has changed over time. The Portland Gale of 1898 resulted in the North River's "New Inlet" between Third and Fourth Cliffs, lengthened the South River by two miles, and increased the salinity and tidal cycle on the previously valuable marshes. The increased salinity changed the mix of grasses in the salt marsh, and the increased floodwaters at high tides twice a day made harvesting the marsh grasses nearly impossible. The New Inlet's opening was ironic. Boat-builders and fishermen had struggled to create an opening at the same location to alleviate the difficult and time consuming three-mile course to Rexham, where the North and South Rivers had opened to the Atlantic. The New Inlet was opened less than 30 years after the last ship was built along the North River.

Description / Unique Features:

Lookout Hill (Also known as the Ant Hill): As the highest point in the Park, Lookout Hill provides a stunning panorama from Third Cliff, to Fourth Cliff, over Wood and Bear Islands, and along the North River. Steps are provided to the top of the Hill. Near the base of the steps are several picnic tables.

Viewing Deck / Old Pier: The A.J. McEachern Memorial Trail accesses a viewing deck close to the salt marsh and the Herring River, affording wonderful views of the surrounding area. It also connects to the other trails on the site (see the Driftway Park Map).

There is also an old pier, which was formerly used for loading barges of sand and gravel. It is still used for fishing and as a viewing area.

Trails: Mostly sandy, level walking trails. Some trails are through woodlands, while others are along shrubland or open sandy areas. Connects to paved multi-use pathway along the Driftway from James Landing to Scituate Harbor Village.

Social Trails: There are a number of "Social Trails" shown on the Driftway Park Map as white dashed trails. These trails are not maintained. In one case, a social trail (dotted white line) parallels the yellow trail and is under water at high tides. It is very wet and muddy underfoot the majority of the time.

Geology: The 40-foot high glacial deposits are now gone, much of it used for fill under Boston's Logan Airport. What remain are foundations of the Boston Sand and Gravel operations (1909-1963) and old pilings for the docks. The complex burned on 18 July 1943, after removing 14 million tons of sand from the area, formerly called "Coleman's Hills."

Flora / Fauna: The woodland is less than 65 years old, and is undergoing ecological transition. Some areas are in the first stages, with trails in the former open pit mining area still revealing a very sandy substrate. Plants such as earth stars, wooly beach heather, little bluestem grass, and northern bayberry are all found on open sand.

Other locations are further along in the natural change sequence, and exhibit larger upland shrubs and trees. The list includes: highbush blueberry, northern arrowwood, pussy willow, the shrub form of poison ivy, eastern red cedar, black cherry, American holly, crabapple, northern red oak, eastern white pine, quaking aspen, and red maple.

The salt marsh ceases at the woodland, where elevations rise. Plants found in the marsh include black grass and spike grass, sea lavender, seaside goldenrod and the annual glassworts that can be noted in the spring and fall as the red-colored succulent-stemmed plants in and near the salt pannes (pools of open water) in the salt marsh. Towards the end of summer, "circular cowlicks" appear in the high marsh salt meadow cordgrass.

The straight ditches in the salt marsh are said to perform two functions: in historic times, they provided boundaries among land ownership. Now they drain the marsh and function as mosquito-control ditches. They also provide habitat for the fish, shellfish and a wide variety of smaller prey that inhabit the ecosystem of the ditches and salt marsh creeks.

Waterfowl, migratory, and indigenous birds make heavy use of the salt marsh, the Herring River, the North River, and the upland woods. There are 78 species found in the area. The list includes ducks, terns, brants, cormorants, egrets, plovers, gulls, sandpipers, herons, hawks, ospreys, woodpeckers, owls, sparrows, nuthatches, robins, mockingbirds, warblers, catbirds, wrens, finches, cardinals, chickadees. Eagles have also been noted in and near the Park.

The coastal salt marsh has a variety of functions, in addition to providing wildlife habitat and forming the base of the saltwater food chain. It is known as one of the most productive ecosystems in the world. It functions as flood protection, guards against saltwater intrusion into fresh groundwater with built-up peat, exports nutrients in the form of plant material and silts to nearby waters, and it traps and breaks down waterborne contaminants.