

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cape Cod National Seashore



Pamet Area Trail System



Aerial photograph, Pamet River Valley, Truro

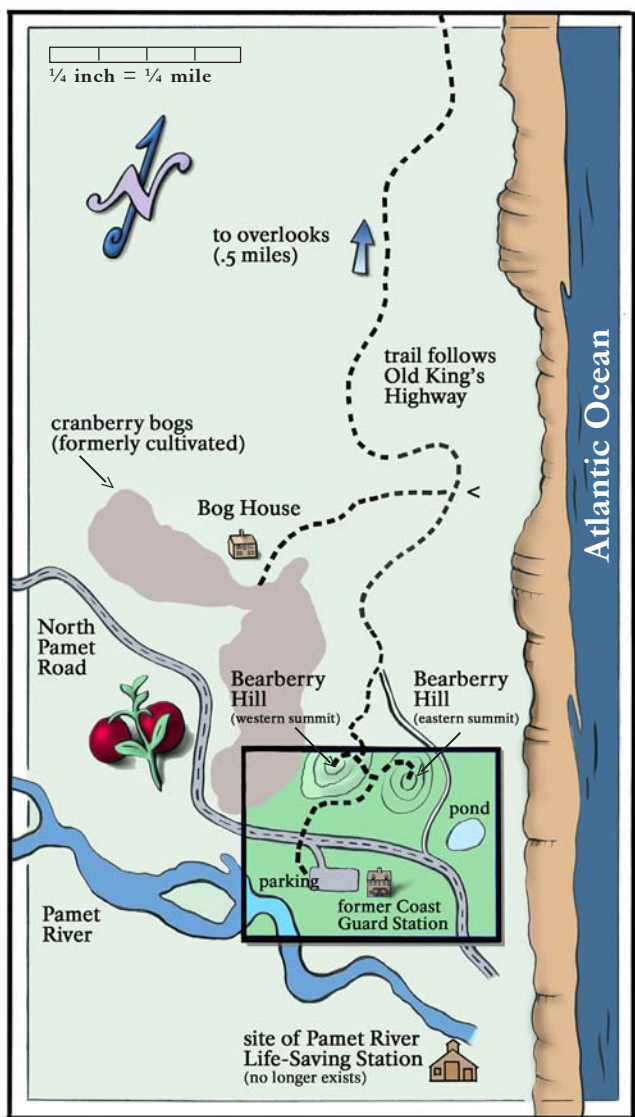
Welcome!

Welcome to the Pamet Area Trail System! This trail showcases dramatic geology, rare plants, and breathtaking vistas. From seafaring, to cranberry cultivation, to the tourist business, you will discover how this land sustained the livelihoods of Cape Codders over the centuries.

This steep .6 mile trail ascends both summits of Bearberry Hill. From this trail you can also access a .7 mile one-way trail to the Pamet Cranberry Bog House and a 1.1 mile one-way trail through the Truro hills to two overlooks with benches and ocean views.

Note: Trail markers are keyed to numbers in this trailguide. Some markers are used for more than one stop.

Pamet Trail System



Remain on designated trails to prevent damage, and to reduce exposure to disease-carrying insects, poison ivy, and other natural risks. Observe trail conditions while walking, and be aware of tree roots, stumps, and other naturally-occurring hazards.

1. AN ICE AGE FLOOD LEADS TO SETTLEMENT

Your drive to the trailhead traversed Cape Cod's widest and deepest valley which cuts from the Atlantic across to Cape Cod Bay. The Pamet River Basin was likely scoured by floodwaters when a dam holding a glacial lake burst. Did you notice the many 18th-century homes along the road?

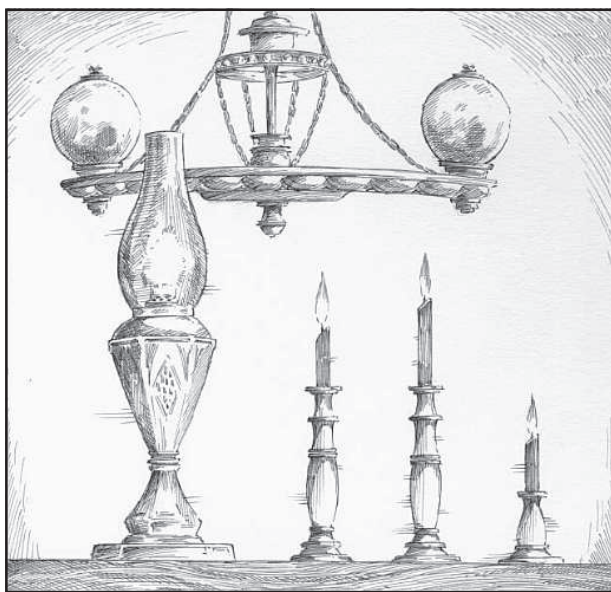


Beginning in the 1660s, farmers and fishermen settled the valley for its good soil, freshwater, sheltering topography, and easy boat access to Pamet Harbor via the river.

As you ascend the trail, dramatic views of the valley will open up.

2. LIGHTING THE WAY

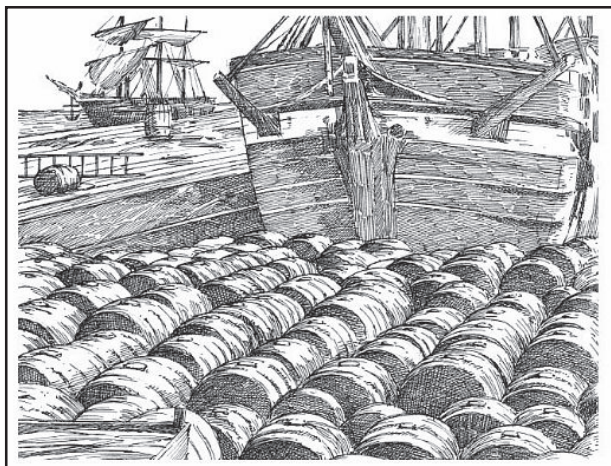
Rub a leaf on the bush in front of you. Then quickly smell your fingers. Do you recognize the spicy aroma? A waxy coating protects bayberry, *Myrica pensylvanica*, from damaging salt spray. Settlers boiled large quantities of the tiny blue berries to render wax for candles.



The fragrant aroma of bayberry candles was a vast improvement over smoky whale oil lamps.

3. JACK TAR

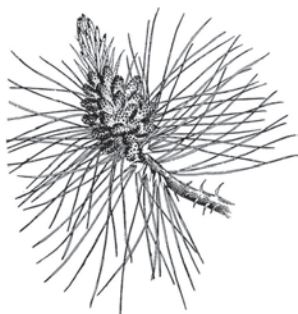
Look for sticky, fragrant pitch on the trunks of the pitch pines, *Pinus rigida*, surrounding you. For centuries, people boiled the wood to make tar. They used pine tar to seal cracks on boats and barrels of whale oil. They painted whole boats, including the rigging, with a protective layer of pine tar which turned a dark brown. Old-time sailors were referred to as “Jack Tar,” because they would be covered from head to toe with tar from climbing the rigging.



Pine tar sealed cracks on boats and barrels of whale oil.

4. PITCH PINES: FOREST FORM

Look for green around you. It can mostly be found in the upper branches of the tall pitch pines where green needles capture the sun's energy to produce food. Down here in the shade, the trees do not produce needles and the forest floor is bare. As you step out into the open, observe how the pitch pines and ground cover change.



Pitch pine *Pinus rigida*

5. A COASTAL HEATHLAND

A globally-rare community of coastal heathland plants survives in this environment of barren sand and salt spray. Like bayberry, other heathland plants are protected by a coating of wax. Most heathland plants grow close to the ground and produce tiny, compact leaves. Before you is an immense field of bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, one of the finest remaining coastal heathlands in the eastern United States.

Look for broom crowberry, *Corema conradii*, and beach heather, *Hudsonia tomentosa* along the trail.

Please protect these rare plants by staying on the trail.



Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*

6. SHORELINE HEROES

The view before you is the Pamet Valley. The Pamet River Life-Saving Station was built just across the river in 1872. Twenty-one years later, despite valiant efforts, the lifesavers were unable to rescue the crew of the *Jason* from a violent blizzard. A sole survivor from the original crew of 25 floated to shore on a bale of jute, a natural fiber rope that the *Jason* was transporting from Calcutta, India. The wreckage lies just offshore in 30 feet of water.

In 1933, the Pamet River Station was replaced by the Coast Guard Station you see today. Today, the station is a hostel and environmental education center.



***Jason* shipwreck survivor Samuel J. Evans with a bale of jute.**

7. PITCH PINES: FIELD FORM

Out here, pitch pines grow low to the ground in response to the harsh salt spray. The whole tree is covered in needles. It even sends branches out along the ground, a process known as skirting.

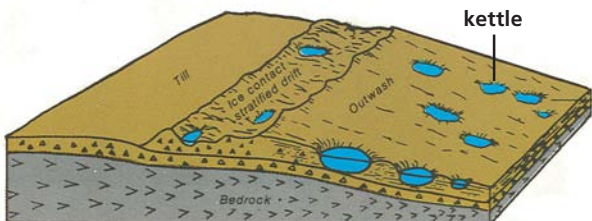
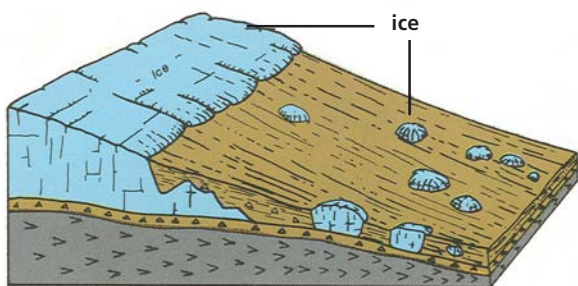


Salt spray damage to pitch pine that results in “skirting” occurs in other environments as well, such as the Province Lands in Provincetown.

Take right fork of trail.

8. SCULPTED BY GLACIERS

This area was once covered by glacial ice and debris. Large chunks of melting ice left holes (kettles), and piles of debris trapped in the ice became hills (knobs). The hilly terrain here is referred to as a knob and kettle landscape.

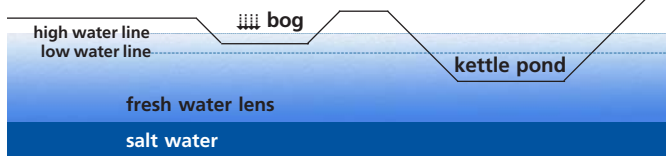


Drawing which shows relationship of buried ice to a collapsed zone of an outwash plain and kettles (from USGS publication *Geologic History of Cape Cod, Massachusetts*)

9. FRESH OR SALT WATER? (Eastern Summit)

Have you stood at the edge of the sea at low tide and noticed the cold water that oozes out of the sand around your feet? This cold water is fresh groundwater floating on top of the denser saltwater beneath. Fresh groundwater fills deeper holes year-round forming kettle ponds. Shallower depressions are only filled seasonally during the rainy months, sometimes creating freshwater bogs suitable for cranberries.

Seasonal Water Table



10. A ROAD THROUGH HISTORY

(same stop as 8)

The path across the valley follows a trail used by the Wampanoag people. Later, settlers drove the cattle that grazed these hillsides along it, bound for markets in Boston. By the early 1700s, this road was designated a King's Highway, and became the route for the stage coach from Boston to Provincetown. Before crossing the Pamet River, drivers switched the coach to one with wider wheels, and the horses to large draft horses for the strenuous journey northward through the sand. You can follow this historic road, by taking the 1.1-mile one-way trail through the Truro hills to two overlooks with benches and ocean vistas.



**Harper's New Monthly Magazine, June, 1885,
"A Village on the Cape"**

Take right fork of trail and continue to the western summit of Bearberry Hill.

11. A WAMPANOAG LEGEND: THE FIRST CRANBERRY

In the Great Marshes, between solid ground and the swampy waters of the old marsh where the First Cranberry was born, lived Granny Squannit.

Granny had cut her finger, and she cried out to her brother Maushop the Giant, “The water is pouring out of me! Soon I will be no more.” Maushop, knowing that his sister had no blood with which to stop the wound, pricked his finger and stretched his arm across the swamp. But the wind caught the drop of blood and blew it into the cattails.

Maushop sealed Granny Squannit’s wound with a second drop, but that first drop of blood took hold in the boggy soil and became the First Cranberry.

For thousands of years, cranberries have grown wild in moist swales among the dunes.

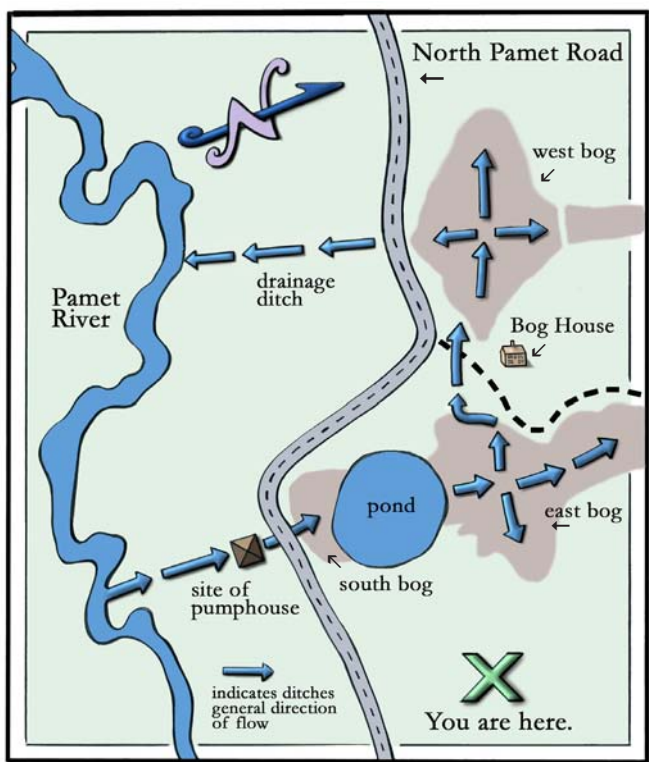


American cranberry *Vaccinium macrocarpon*

12. A WET BUSINESS (Western Summit)

To flood the bogs, water was pumped from the Pamet River through a small bog to the holding pond in front of you. You can still see the irrigation ditch where the water was pumped from East Bog across to West Bog, before draining back to the river. In later years, a machine was used to agitate the vines to loosen the berries remaining after harvest. They floated to the surface of the bog and were corralled for sale as cranberry juice and cranberry sauce.

This is the farthest point of the self-guided trail. Continue back the way you came.



**13. BALLSTON COTTAGES, \$2.00 PER WEEK
(same stop as 6)**

The arrival of the railroad brought the first wave of tourists to Cape Cod. In 1891, Sheldon W. Ball established the Grand Old Ocean at Ballston Beach Resort on the barrier dune at the head of the Pamet River. In summer, wealthy families traveled from Boston and New York City to escape the heat, noise, pollution, and tuberculosis-plagued cities. Ladies wandered down to the beach in ankle length bathing suits, complete with stockings and swim bonnets. Today, the shoreline continues to erode and the site of the cottages, bowling alley, and two-story inn featuring a dining and dance hall, is covered with water.



**Grand Old Ocean at Ballston Beach Resort,
Truro, circa 1918**

14. A VANISHING LANDSCAPE

(same stop as 5)

Today, no cows graze the hillsides, and no harvesters arrive to pick the cranberries. Instead, shrubs, pines, and oaks are slowly taking over the once-open bogs and hillsides. Natural resource managers at Cape Cod National Seashore remove some of the vegetation encroaching on Bearberry Hill to protect the heathland and historic views.



Shrubs, pines, and oaks are encroaching on heathland vegetation.



You've seen how the area's unique geology, water table, plants, and proximity to the sea have supported the livelihoods of Cape Codders for centuries. Whether you came here for nature, history, or vistas, we hope you found inspiration at this special place.

Help us go "green" - To reduce paper consumption, we've produced this trailguide in a reusable format. Please return it to the trailhead box for others to use. Text and graphics from this guide are available on our website: www.nps.gov/caco.