

# Welcome to Thompson Island

# Historical Overview

Native Americans have utilized Thompson Island for the last 8,000 years for hunting, fishing and digging clams, as well as for recreation.

David Thompson, the island's namesake, came to Boston from Scotland in 1619 to establish a trading post. But it was not until 1626 that Thompson succeeded in erecting one of the first permanent settlements in Boston Harbor, antedating Boston by several years. Native Americans came to Thompson's trading post to exchange their beaver-furs and fish for European goods and early colonial sundries.

In 1833, an educational institution was established on Thompson Island, which became the Boston Farm School for Indigent Boys the following year. Over the next century, other educational facilities were located on the island, including the Farm and Trade School (established 1907) and Thompson Academy (established 1955).

Thompson Island Education Center brought experiential education to the island in 1975. Since 1988, Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center has owned and managed the island. In 1996, the island became part of Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, and today hosts hundreds of Boston-area school children in day and overnight field expeditions.

## Using the Trails

There are two self-guided trails on Thompson Island. The Northwest Trail is comprised of unnumbered stops along a 1-mile trail, which departs from the north-side of the dock. The Southwest Trail has 14 stops along an approximate 1.5-mile trail, which departs from the south-side of the dock.

# Northeast Trail

## Beach Walk

On the north side of the dock, observe the buildup of sediments along the beach: notice how the rocks vary in size and weight. The northern tip of the island receives the brunt of waves and wind. These forces hit the shore and carry lighter particles southward toward the other end of the island, where some of the sediment is re-deposited. Expect to see large cobbles and boulders at the northernmost portion of the beach.

## High Tide Line

The major line of beach debris holds things that have traveled long distances. The straw-like material is eelgrass, an underwater sea grass. Eelgrass debris is home to crabs, insects and other tidal biota. On the larger stones, look for faint white winding lines. There are the dried slime trails of periwinkles.

## Beach Rocks

As a major land glacier that formed Boston Harbor during the last Ice Age (10,000 years ago) advanced over North America, it dragged rocks from many different geographical regions. Thus, the glacial debris—or till—of this beach contains a large variety of rocks and cobbles with great ranges of size, color and markings. The large granite blocks comprising the breakwater were quarried from Quincy. The rocks in the breakwater are not till, but bedrock formed 450-million years ago and exposed by glacial erosion during the last Ice Age.

## Erosion

As you round the northern tip of the island, observe how the eroded cliffs differ from those seen up to this point. The till here is sandy with little clay, and is poorly lithified. Here, heavy wind and waves transport small sediments from these bluffs to the sand spit at the southeastern tip of Thompson Island.

## Intertidal Flora and Fauna

Living in the area between the high and low tide levels—or the intertidal zone—are many highly adapted plant and animal species. Plants and animals living in this intertidal zone must be able to survive for several hours at a time without water as the tide rises and falls.

## Dune Plants

Along this trail, look for small, sandy dunes. Wormwood and jimsonweed are two plants that tolerate the dry, salty dune environments. The plants found here help stabilize the dunes and prevent erosion.

## Seabirds

The water offshore of this end of Thompson Island is a favorite haunt of migratory and year-round seabirds. Take some time to observe the water and you may see other waterbirds such as the American Oystercatcher, Double-crested Cormorant and Least Tern.

## Trees

The oak, maple and linden grove on your left is one of the few remaining at Boston Harbor Islands. Because of private management, Thompson Island has been spared radical clearing for institutions and military installations during the last century. Most of the mature trees on the island were planted by the Farm and Trade School students and benefactors in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Tamaracks

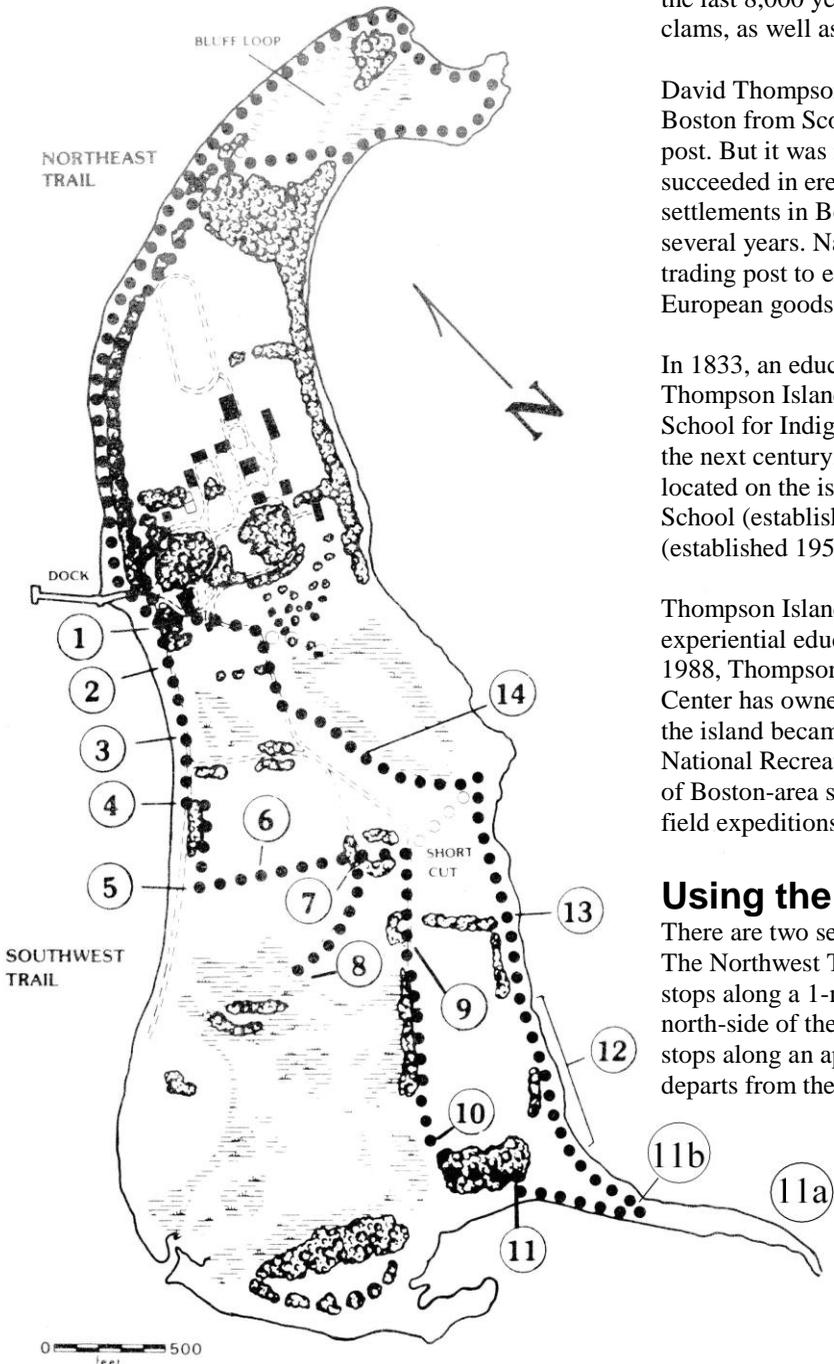
The feathery pine-like trees along the bluff are the only local trees with needles and cones that shed their leaves in the winter. Tamaracks are extremely cold tolerant—able to live in temperatures as low as 85-degrees Fahrenheit—and very durable.

## Cottage Row

In the summer of 1888 some of the Boston Farm School boys erected a row of tents as a play area. Charles Bradley, Headmaster at the time, saw an opportunity to help teach civics, and the boys built twelve elaborate little cottages. They developed a mock city, complete with City Hall and elected officials. No trace of the cottages remains today, but photos are on display in the first floor exhibits of Bowditch Hall.

## Wooded Road

The canopy of maples, oaks and birches gives this road a country feeling, and is an effective windbreak for the buildings. Chokecherries dominate the shrub layer. Watch for wildlife such as rabbits, catbirds and thrushes.



# Southwest Trail

## 1: Begin at the foot of the hill.

The information sign will help familiarize you with the past and present of Thompson Island. *Head toward your right on the road.*

## 2: The Barn Site

Now the Niles Operation Center, this was the original site of the barn that burned down in 1963. The barn housed livestock, farm supplies and equipment for the Farm and Trade School.

## 3: Skating Pond

The skating pond is the lowest point on the island and is currently a fresh-water marsh.

## 4: Compost Shed

The foundation of the Farm and Trade School’s compost shed. Manure was composted here daily, eventually to be used as fertilizer. Thompson Island currently has an active compost pile.

## 5: Weather Station

At this official “United States Co-operative Station,” students from the Farm and Trade School recorded data and made a local forecast each morning.

## 6: Glacial Kettlehole

This land depression is a glacial kettlehole, formed when a large, half-buried block of ice was left by the receding land glacier. The block melted slowly, leaving a hole. Boston Harbor Islands has several of these unique glacial features.

## 7: Farmhouse Site

The original farmhouse stood in this grove when the Boston Farm School for Indigent Boys started in 1833. Note the row of trees.

## 8: 40-Acre Salt Marsh

This pristine salt marsh is a very fertile habitat, serving as a nursery for ocean fish and shellfish. This is the largest salt marsh in Boston Harbor Islands.

## 9: Root Cellar and Hotbeds

The stone foundation of this root cellar could hold 5,000 bushels of vegetables. It was an important source of food during the winter for school residents.

## 10: Salt Marsh Hay

Farming students gathered “salt hay” as bedding for farm animals. Salt hay grows in marshes where water inundates at high-tide. Salt hay is an excellent habitat source for mollusks and birds, and serves as a major source of nutrients for the entire marsh.

## 11: Graveyard

Here lie the victims of two Boston Farm School boating tragedies. In April 1841, 23 students died on an excursion that was a reward for good conduct. In April 1892, 8 students were lost when the school’s sloop capsized in a sudden squall.

## 11a. Squaw Rock

From the end of the spit, look across to Squaw Rock. Geologists believe the Squaw Rock bedrock was formed from the compression of glacial debris 300-million years ago.

## 11b. Dune Vegetation

The dune grass, rose hips and jimsonweed growing here can tolerate this dry dune environment. The roots and shoots of these plants help stabilize the dune and reduce wind erosion.

## 12: Easterly View

Here is the first full view to the east. To the left of Squaw Rock, you will see a causeway, Moon Island, the Long Island Bridge and Spectacle Island—in that order. Other harbor islands are in the distance. The mudflats exposed at low tide were one of the richest and most popular clamming areas in New England.

## 13 Thompson’s Trading Post

David Thompson’s home and trading post were reported to be in this general area near though no evidence remains to indicate the exact location.

## 14: Restored Salt Marsh

In 2007, the channel of this small salt marsh was restored to permit the tidal flow to restore the ecological system of the marsh to its natural conditions.

# Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center

## FREE PROGRAMS FOR BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

**Connections** (*middle school students*): A multi-year sequence of hands-on science infused with Outward Bound’s unique approach to character development.

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**Outward Bound Professional:** Customized professional and corporate adult programs focusing on team building and leadership development.

## ISLAND GUESTS

**Thompson Island Conference Center and Signature Events:** A unique, visually stunning and convenient venue for conferences, retreats, weddings, clambakes, corporate and social gatherings. Proceeds from this social enterprise support of free youth programming.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

A generous and loyal network of individuals, foundations, and corporate donors fund our youth programs. Our two annual fundraisers include the 4K Trail Run and Evening Expedition Gala.

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LOVELLS ISLAND

MIDDLE BREWSTER ISLAND

MOON ISLAND

NUT ISLAND

OUTER BREWSTER ISLAND

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# Thompson Island

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