

GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
SANDY HOOK UNIT
SELF-GUIDED
DUNE/HOLLY NATURE TRAIL

Welcome to Sandy Hook. This finger of land, called a PENINSULA or BARRIER BEACH, has long been an Army base. In recent years portions of the Hook have been set aside as a State Park. Today Sandy Hook is part of the new Gateway National Recreation Area, which is administered for your enjoyment by the National Park Service.

Sandy Hook is unique for the wilderness qualities it has retained in a growing urban area. Even though sixteen million people live within an 80 mile radius of this peninsula, Sandy Hook's marsh, dune, and forest areas are relatively undisturbed. .

While Naturalist guided walks are available, many nature enthusiasts prefer to walk and observe at a more leisurely pace than such a guided walk would allow, and this trail is provided for that purpose.

THIS SELF-GUIDING TRAIL BEGINS TO THE LEFT OF THE BATHHOUSE AND CONCESSION BUILDING IN THE SECOND BEACH PARKING AREA. A SIGN MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL.

SELF-GUIDED DUNE/HOLLY NATURE TRAIL

This small booklet is your guide to the Dune/Holly Nature Trail. This is a self-guided nature trail; you are your own guide. Along the trail you will find posts with numbers. Stop at each post, find its number in the guide and read what the guide says next to the number. Please do not litter or smoke while on this trail. This trail is for everyone to enjoy and not for a few to destroy. Please stay on the trail; there is a large amount of Poison Ivy and some barbed wire just off the trail.

1. The bushes on either side of you are called BEACH PLUMS. In May they are covered with small, white blossoms. In late August and early September, they bear cherry-sized, purple fruit called BEACH PLUMS. Please do not pick. We reserve these fruits for birds and other animals.
2. Notice the tall, dead trees around you. These are EASTERN RED CEDAR trees. They have been killed by salt spray carried to them by the wind. As you face the post, look over your right shoulder and notice how the plants in the distance have grown to one height. They have no leaves above a certain point. This has been caused by salt spray and it is called the SALT SPRAY HORIZON.
3. Look at the small tree directly behind the post. Notice the leaves and branches. Along the branches between the leaves, a small amount of leaf-like material can be seen. This green material is called the winglet. The plant is called the WINGED or SMOOTH SUMAC. This is not like Poison Ivy but some Poison Ivy does grow in the branches.
4. This is a living Eastern Red Cedar tree. It has been blown over by strong storm winds. If it had remained standing, it would have been killed by salt spray.
5. This tree bears many small fruits which the birds like to eat. It is the WILD BLACK CHERRY TREE. Its wood is used in making fine furniture. Please do not eat the fruit - it is reserved for our wildlife.

6. You are now standing on top of a sand dune. These dunes are very fragile and are formed by blowing sand trapped by plants and other things. Large and furious storms with high winds and strong wave action can wash away large portions of beach and dunes. The roots of dune plants may then become exposed and they may eventually die. Under normal circumstances, the beach and dunes will be rebuilt. The normal cycle is: winter storms wash the beach and dune sand away and gentle summer waves bring it back again. Much of the dunes have been lost in this area over the last 10 years; in fact this trail was formerly located farther east on dunes which are now gone. Beach nourishment projects will be required to rebuild this beach and dune area.
7. This is a grove of WILD BLACK CHERRY TREES. Look at how rough the bark is. Feel it and notice its color.
8. Be very careful when near this plant. It is POISON IVY. In Spring, Summer, and Fall it has three shiny, green leaves in clusters. In the Winter, it bears white berries. If you can remember this jingle you will be safe: Leaves of three, Leave it be!
9. These low greenish-gray plants growing in the sand are GOLDEN HEATHER. They are like plants growing in the desert. Why is this area like a desert?
10. What kind of trees are these growing all around you? If you do not know, see number 7. The vine growing on the old stump is often mistaken for Poison Ivy. It is called Virginia Creeper. If you look closely, you can see five leaves in a cluster instead of three in a cluster which Poison Ivy has.
11. Do you know what kind of tree this is? If you don't, look at number 2 for the answer. Notice how all the other trees in this area are dead. This is a ghost forest. The salt spray has killed all of these trees.
12. In the warmer months you see many birds looking for food in the ocean. At low tide a rock is exposed to your left. Gulls and Terns are seen feeding there.

13. What are these familiar plants? Look to Number 1 for the answer. This area is ideal for rabbits. Look for their tracks in the sand.
14. This is the TREE OF HEAVEN. It was first found growing in China, and now it grows wild in America. What is the tree growing next to the fence? If you don't know, look to number 3 for the answer.
15. The area beyond the fence is called a HEATH. The main plant growing in the heath is the Golden Heather. The Golden Heather gets its name from the small, yellow blossoms which they bear in the Spring.
16. This is the NORTHERN BAYBERRY. They have small grey-colored berries in the summer. The berries disappear in the early fall when the migrating Tree Swallows eat them. The outer surface of the berry is coated with wax. The early colonists used these berries for candle scent. When burned, bayberry candles give off a pleasant aroma.
17. The plant is PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS. Be careful; like other cacti, they have small spines which can be very painful. This plant has a large yellow flower in June and July. In September, it gets an oblong-shaped fruit called the PRICKLY PEAR or the INDIAN FIG. What other familiar plants do you recognize?
18. You have seen this bush before. Its berries are used for candles. What is it?
19. This rock is called LIMONITE or PEANUT BRITTLE STONE. It is very important in this area. The ridge of land behind the Nature Center (the building with the tower) is capped with a layer of this rock. This rock cap has prevented erosion of the hill.
20. This REST STOP is shaded by Wild Black Cherry Trees. You may see some Sparrows, Mocking Birds, Chickadees, Catbirds and even a Sparrow Hawk in this area if you are quiet. Please be careful on the steps. The tree at the base of the steps is an AMERICAN HOLLY.

21. The large Cedar Tree is now dead. The vines growing in its branches are Poison Ivy. The green vine with sharp spines is GREEN RIAR. This is a very common plant on Sandy Hook and the spines are very sharp.

22. This shrub is called GROUNDSEL. This plant only grows above the high tide line. If you wanted to build a home on the beach, how would this plant be helpful?

23. If you were to dig down four feet in this area, you would reach fresh water. This layer of fresh water allows the plants on the trail to live. Without this water, all the plants would die and the sand would blow away.

24. What is the name of this tree? See number 5 if you don't know. What is the three-leaved plant behind you? See number 8 if you don't know.

25. The main trail goes to the left. Several bird watching areas lead off to the right and this separate loop is marked with the posts A, B, C, D & E.

A. This is a female American Holly. Notice the red berries. Only the female plant has red berries; the male plant does not bear berries. This tree is very easy to recognize as it has sharp points on the leaves. Feel these points with a finger tip and also the smooth slick surface of the leaves. The Holly is a very slow growing plant. It takes ten years to grow one inch in diameter. How old do you think this tree is?

B. This tree has small dark fruit which the birds eat. It is called the SHAD BUSH. It blooms when the Shad fish are "running" up the rivers in May to lay their eggs.

C. This is an Apple tree. A Woodpecker, the YELLOW BELLIED SAPSUCKER, made all the holes in the trunk. He drills the holes with his bill, leaves the tree for a while, and then returns to eat the sweet oozing sap and the insects it has attracted.

D & E. These small paths lead to Bird Watching areas. You will be able to see many birds if you are quiet. These paths are dead ends and you must return to the main trail.

26. The small Holly behind you is 15 to 20 years old. Do you remember its name?

27. This plant has fruits called Indian Figs. Do you remember its name?

28. This is a HIGH BUSH BLUEBERRY plant. Its berries make great pies.

29. The thin plants on either side of you are called PRIVET. Many people use this plant to make hedges around their homes. This plant has escaped to the wild here at Sandy Hook.

30. This is a very common, sweet-smelling vine. It grows near almost all fences and along highways. It is called HONEYSUCKLE.

31. This post marks a special loop that goes away from the main trail. Please follow the lettered posts which will return you to the main trail.

A. This plant's berries make great pies. Do you remember its name?

B. Look where the bark has been rubbed smooth by wind-blown branches. We have already seen this tree before. It is called Shad Bush.

C. This is a wild Black Cherry Tree in front of the post. There is a small hollow in its base. Whenever it rains, water is trapped here. Mosquitoes and other insects lay their eggs in this miniature pool. Animals, like the deer mouse and birds, may also drink from this small water hole.

D & E. These small lanes lead to special bird watching areas. You can relax here and take in the beauty of the forest and sky. If you are really quiet you may see some of the many birds that frequent this area.

32. How many plants in this area can you identify? Try to find: Cactus, Beach Plum, Holly, Wild Black Cherry, Poison Ivy, Eastern Red Cedar and Shad Bush. There are abundant cactus in this area. Can you figure out why this area is similar to a desert?

33. As you have already seen, poison ivy can grow in many different shapes and forms, and it can grow to be large vines. Try to find the Poison Ivy vine in this Holly tree; it resembles a large snake.

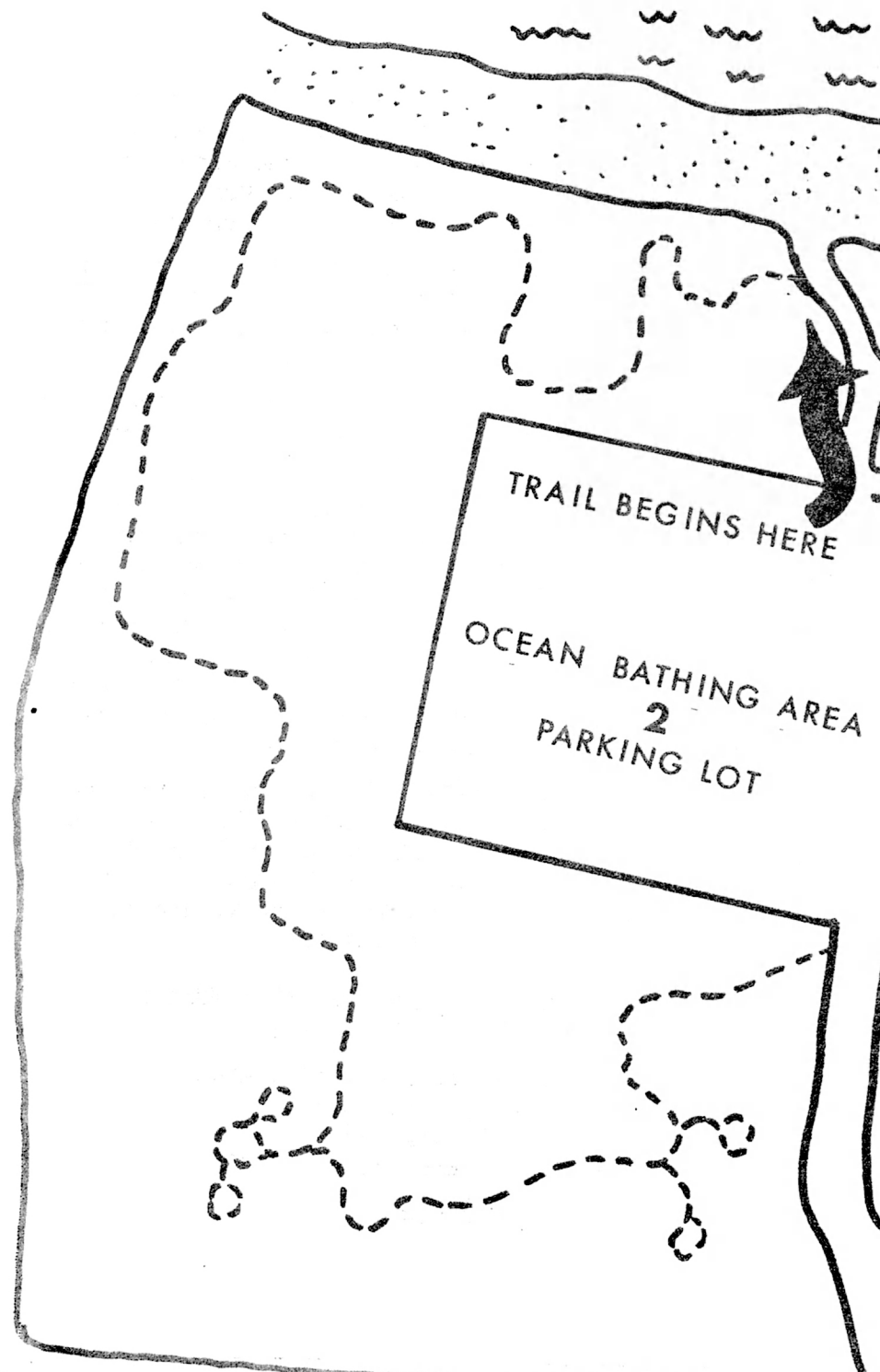
34. Look to the left and find the two Holly trees which have grown together. What do you think might have caused this?

35. Many visitors to Gateway - Sandy Hook are content to remain in their cars. After they have left the park they feel that they have seen Sandy Hook and that they know this place. However, the best way to really know the park is to step from the car and walk into and through the park, as you have done on this trail. The sights, sounds, and smells of the modern world grow dim in the distance, as the natural world expands before you. We hope you have enjoyed your walk.

You have now ended your tour. Please come again. Be careful in crossing the parking area to the beach zone. Please make use of the other guided and self-guided walks available in the park. Give this guide to another interested person or save it and return in another season to see Nature's changes.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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A hand-drawn map showing a trail and a parking area. The trail is indicated by a dashed line that starts from a solid line on the right, loops around the top and left, and then branches into two paths at the bottom. A large arrow points to the start of the trail. A rectangular box contains text identifying the area as an ocean bathing area and a parking lot.

TRAIL BEGINS HERE

OCEAN BATHING AREA
2
PARKING LOT