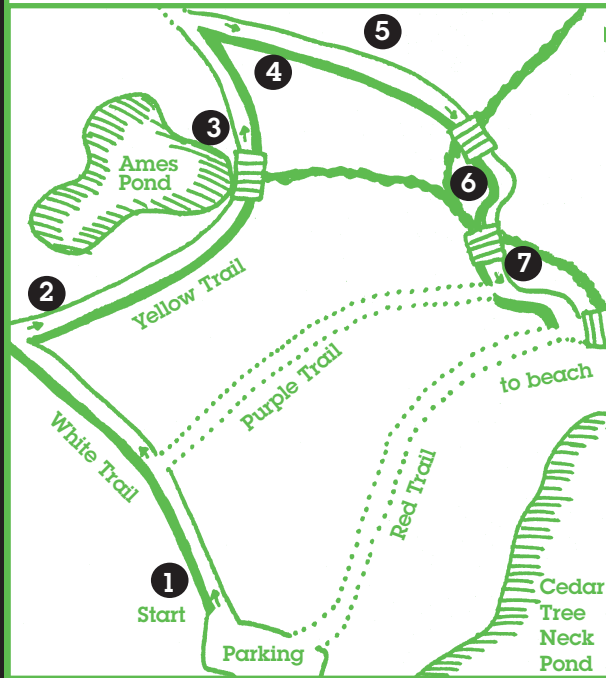


THE BRUCE IRONS TRAIL GUIDE

This trail is dedicated to R. Bruce Irons, III (January 14, 1942 - July 14, 1988), because he loved kids, he loved nature, he loved teaching kids about nature and he loved the Vineyard.



CEDAR TREE NECK SANCTUARY



SHERIFF'S MEADOW FOUNDATION

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Early in his life Henry Beetle Hough began a love affair with Martha's Vineyard. In 1959, when questions arose about the preservation or development of Sheriff's Meadow Pond behind his home in Edgartown, Henry and his wife Betty acquired it to preserve forever one of the precious small places on this Island. Thus was Sheriff's Meadow Foundation born.

Successfully launched, Sheriff's Meadow Foundation grew dramatically over the next two decades. Perhaps the simplest explanation for this growth is that an increasing number of people who may have received or acquired property on the Vineyard shared Henry's concern to protect natural areas "to serve as a living museum." Although other, larger conservation organizations were readily available, Sheriff's Meadow was Island-based and had a brilliant spokesman in Henry Hough.

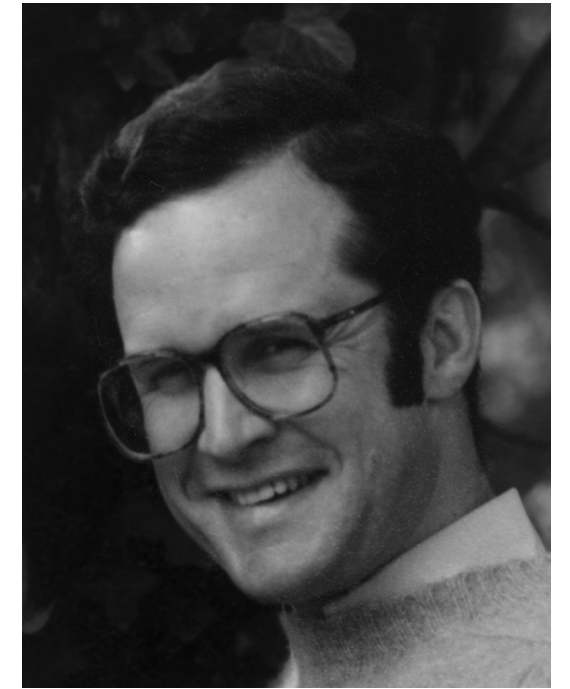
Today, Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, guided by the vision of Henry Beetle Hough, has preserved over 2,600 acres in over 160 parcels ranging in size from a half acre to one hundred fifty acres.

These properties span the Island from Chappaquiddick to Gay Head, and are located in all six Vineyard towns. Several of the larger properties have walking trails which invite public use: Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary (West Tisbury), Nat's Farm (West Tisbury), Brightwood Park (Tisbury), West Chop Woods (Tisbury), Middle Road Sanctuary (Chilmark) and The Caroline Tuthill Preserve (Edgartown). All offer the opportunity for walking or nature study in an unspoiled natural setting. These and other Sheriff's Meadow Foundation properties showcase Martha's Vineyard at its best, and we hope you will take the time to become better acquainted with one or many of them.

CEDAR TREE NECK SANCTUARY

Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary provides excellent examples of the habitats and vistas which make Martha's Vineyard such a special place. Tumbling streams and freshwater ponds, sandy beaches and rocky cliffs, tall oaks and cool beech groves, all can be found in an easy morning or afternoon walk. The one-time visitor to Cedar Tree Neck can get a sense of the wonderfully varied natural endowment of the Vineyard; the serious naturalist could easily spend a lifetime pursuing the secrets of the diverse flora and fauna or pondering the geological history which is written in cryptic form throughout the sanctuary.

The fact that Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary exists in its present natural state is testimony to the generosity and persistence of many people. Henry Beetle Hough, one of the co-founders of the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and Allen H. Morgan, at the time the Executive Vice-President of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, orchestrated a fund-raising campaign to buy 100 acres from the Daggett family. The Daggetts, who were only the second family to own the property since 1700, assisted by selling the land at a very generous price, well below market value. At the same time the Hough family donated 70 acres of the family homestead known as Fishhook, including over a quarter mile of shoreline. A gift of nearly 40 acres in the memory of Alexander S. Reed, which now makes up the bird sanctuary bearing his name, soon followed. Additional gifts and conservation restrictions eventually increased the Sanctuary to its current size of 312 acres. The process is still continuing today, and through the generosity of its neighbors and supporters Sheriff's Meadow Foundation hopes to expand the Sanctuary even further.



R. Bruce Irons III

R. Bruce Irons III was an educator from Charlotte, North Carolina. He loved the Vineyard and cared deeply about protecting and conserving it. He and his family visited here as often as they could and tales of their Vineyard adventures became an important part of their family lore.

When Bruce died unexpectedly of cancer at age 46 in July 1988, his wife and children decided that one way to memorialize him would be through a gift to conservation efforts on the Island. In response, the Vineyard Conservation Society and the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation have dedicated this trail to his memory.

Because Bruce cared so much about children and enjoyed teaching them about their natural environment, this trail is designed especially, although not exclusively, for use by school children.

MARKER

1

Take a close look around you, on both sides of the trail. In this small area there are many different types of plants — maple trees, oak trees, shrubs, ferns and flowers. If you are lucky you may also see or hear a mouse, chipmunk or gray squirrel. Even if you don't see or hear them, you can be sure that there are many birds and small animals waiting quietly to go about their business once you leave.

Every kind of plant and every kind of animal is different, with its own special ways of staying alive and producing young. But everything is connected: plants and animals, wind and water, all affect each other in countless ways. Ecology is the study of the ways that plants and animals connect with their environment, including each other. As you walk this trail use all your senses. Look closely at the different types of plants and where they grow, listen for the rustle of small animals and the songs of birds and think of each one as special but connected to all the rest.

MARKER

2

By now you have seen many different types of plants, of all sizes and shapes. All green plants have one thing in common: they all capture and store energy from the sun in a process known as photosynthesis. This stored energy is the basis of all the food we eat, whether we get it directly by eating plants or by eating the meat of animals that eat plants. In the process of capturing the sun's energy, plants also produce the oxygen we breathe. The oxygen you are now breathing may have been released by one of the oaks in this woods, or it may have come from a tree in a

tropical rainforest thousands of miles away. But this is only half the story, for when you breathe out you release carbon dioxide, which plants need for photosynthesis. Thus neither plants nor animals could exist without the other: animals get food and oxygen from plants while plants need the carbon dioxide produced by animals.

Take the right fork here, and then the right fork onto the yellow trail in about 50 feet.

MARKER

3

This beautiful body of water is Ames Pond. If you are quiet and watch carefully, you may see or hear some of the animals which live in or near fresh water. Painted turtles often sun themselves on the logs sticking out of the water, their black shells allowing them to absorb as much warmth as possible from the sun's rays. Small insects called water striders scoot over the pond's surface, their small size and specialized feet allowing them to actually walk on water. Geese, muskrats, snapping turtles, green frogs and pinkletinks (spring peepers) also spend at least part of the year here, and at night bats feast on the many flying insects.

Go straight for about 140 feet, then turn right and continue on the yellow trail.

MARKER

4

Acorns, the seeds of oak trees, are a good source of food for squirrels and other animals. Did you know that some acorns are buried by squirrels and never dug up, and these

may sprout and grow into a new tree? Squirrels get a good source of food and the oaks get help in producing new trees.

The oak in front of you has been dead for several years, but it is still important to wildlife. The hole at the bottom of the tree makes a good home or hiding place for small animals such as mice, chipmunks or shrews. Beetles and other boring insects live under the bark and in the wood. Woodpeckers find these insects quite tasty, and you can see where the birds have pulled the bark away and drilled into the wood to get at them. Both the insects and the birds help break the tree apart, speeding the return of the tree to the soil where it can be used by other plants. Nature is the ultimate recycler. Everything is used and reused, changing form but never disappearing.

MARKER

5

Notice that all the trees in this area are of one type, beech trees, which have developed special ways of keeping out other trees and plants. Their roots are very close to the surface, often sticking out of the ground, which makes it difficult for other plants to get started. Young beech trees also sprout from these roots. Since they can get food directly from the parent tree, they can grow very quickly and shade out the other small trees. In addition, when beech leaves decay they make the soil very acidic, which prevents many other plants from growing.

About 20,000 years ago huge sheets of ice a mile thick moved down from the cold Arctic region. These huge glaciers made it this far south before melting and beginning a slow retreat. The huge piles of rock and sand which were left behind form much of

Martha's Vineyard. The rocks you see scattered about this beech grove, as well as the many other large rocks at intervals along the trail, were dropped here by the last glacier and are reminders of that ancient time.

MARKER

6

The two streams which join here are formed by rainfall from a wide area collecting and slowly working its way toward the sea. In a short distance the stream empties into Cedar Tree Neck Pond, and from there the water travels underground into the Sound. At the same time, water is constantly leaving the Sound and ocean as water vapor formed by the heat of the sun, similar to steam from a boiling kettle. Eventually this water returns to earth as rain or snow, completing the cycle and beginning the long journey back to the sea.

MARKER

7

To the right, the trail goes uphill to the parking lot. To the left it leads out onto the beach. If you continue on to the beach, please be sure to stay on the marked trails. Walking on the dune grass kills the roots which spread underground and hold the sand in place. When the dune grass is damaged, wind and waves cause blowouts, large patches of open sand which can lead to increased erosion. Without the dunes and dune grass, the beach is in danger of being washed away. The dunes are still recovering from past misuse and the affects of Hurricane Bob. Please stay out of marked areas and allow the process to continue.