



A Day on Nantucket

In Season

Option 3 (East/ Northeast side of the island – The Loop)

Updated 7/10/23

If you do not have a car, there are other ways to explore the east side of the island. Options include riding bikes, renting a car or hopping on the NRTA Wave bus. Buses to Sconset are frequent on the Old South Road and Milestone Road routes, but not as often on the Polpis Road route. Bike paths run parallel with the Milestone Road and Polpis Roads.

Head to the beginning of the **Milestone Road**. This road is so named as painted mile stones were placed along the road all the way to ‘Sconset, seven and a half miles from downtown Nantucket. The **1st milestone** can be found at the **Rotary** at the intersection of Orange Street, Sparks Avenue, Old South Road and Milestone Road. The rock is just to the left of the **Lola Burger** restaurant.

A round the 3.14 mark, somebody with a sense of humor placed a **Pi Stone** here about 25 years ago.

At the 4th milestone, park and look for the trailhead to walk to Altar Rock. This 1.5 mile long trail opened in the summer of 2019. It is not for the fainthearted as the beginning third of the trail is rough as you may have to dodge tree roots that were cleared/ ground down to make this trail. On the last third of the trail you are going up and down steep hills before you finally make it to Altar Rock. Enjoy the view.

Just past the 4th **milestone** on both sides of the road, the land is owned by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation. This land and more than 40% of the island is permanently undevelopable. The land on the north side of the road between the 4th and 5th milestones is nicknamed the Serengeti because it looks a lot like the land of the same name in Tanzania in East Africa. Sometimes, depending on the time of year, a mystery person puts out wooden animal shapes of lions, gazelles, rhinos and elephants.

The 5th **milestone** is just past the Tom Nevers’ Road turnoff to the right. At the top of Bean Hill on the left is a parking area that overlooks the moors and the **Milestone Cranberry Bog**. This cranberry bog is the largest bog in North America. In September and October, water from nearby Gibbs Pond floods the bog making it red from the harvesting of the berry which grows under the surface. Going down the east side of Bean Hill you will find a large rock with 220 etched into it. This is the entrance to the cranberry bog. It is a private road but is open on the Saturday of Columbus Day weekend for the Annual Cranberry Festival.

In the village of ‘**Sconset**, the last milestone can be found about 500’ from the rotary on the right (south) side of the street. “7 ½ **M to T 1824**” is painted on the face. There is much to see in what once was a small fishing village. *Be sure to pick up the Map of Sconset at the NRTA Bus shelter, outside the ‘Sconset Market or at any of the Visitor Services offices/ kiosks in before you leave Nantucket Town.*

The center of 'Sconset is the rotary. Here you can find the post office, a general market, several restaurants including **Claudette's** and the '**Sconset Café**. The tennis courts behind the bus shelter belong to the '**Sconset Casino**, which is a private tennis club. You can see a clock on the side of the main structure of the casino just behind the courts. The name 'Sconset is a shortened version of "Siasconset" which is a native word meaning "Near the great bone." In the summer, many of the buildings have roses blooming on the sides and the roofs. Many older cottages along Shell, Centre and Broadway date back to the late 1700 and early 1800s.

Nantucket Preservation Trust offers walking tours of Sconset on Thursdays (late May to early October) at 3:00pm. The tours begin the 'Sconset Trust offices located at 1 New Street.

Be sure to find New Street. Public restrooms are located at the corner with Shell Street. Just to the west and on the south side of the road, the main entrance to the Sconset Casino is here and across the street is the arched entryway to the **Chanticleer** restaurant. In the courtyard is a horse from a merry-go-round.

The '**Sconset Market** has ice cream and there is a small park next to the market to rest in. From here you can explore the **Bluff Walk** which can be found at the northern end of Broadway on the corner or walk behind the park over a foot bridge that takes you to Ocean Avenue and down to Low Beach Road. Be sure to look behind you when you are crossing over Gully Road at the **Sundial** on the side of the house.

If you look to the east, you will see the Atlantic Ocean. Up and down the coastline you might see breaking waves. These are just a few of the many sandy shoals that protect the island on the east and southeast side of the island.

Just about 2 miles north of the center of Sconset at the end of Baxter Road is the **Sankaty Head Lighthouse**. Built in 1850, the light which flashes every 7.5 seconds can be seen up to 24 miles at sea. It warns mariners of the hazardous Nantucket Shoals. In 2007, the structure was moved 405 feet to its current position because the bluff it was standing near was eroding. On the path to the lighthouse you can see the marker where it originally stood.

Just to the left of the lighthouse is the 5th fairway and the front nine of the **Sankaty Head Golf Club**. Across the Polpis Road is the clubhouse and the back nine. This private course opened in 1923 was the only 18 hole course on the island until the Nantucket Golf Club opened in 1998 and the 9 hole Miacomet Golf Course (1963) expanded from 9 to 18 in 2003. Miacomet and the 9 hole Sconset Golf Course (1894) are public courses.

In the distance on the northeast shore of **Sesachacha Pond**, the village of **Quidnet** is about 2.5 miles straight as the seagull flies, but actually it is about 4.5 miles by bike, car and foot. This little village is quiet and noted for its scenery (You can look back at Sankaty light across the pond). Swimmers have a choice here as a barrier beach separates the quiet pond water from the wilder Atlantic Ocean. The pond is also a popular spot for windsurfing, paddle boarding and sailing.

At the stop sign at the intersection of Quidnet Road and Sesachacha Road, **Squam Road** heads north towards Wauwinet. This road is all dirt and can be rutted at times. Eventually it will lead you into **Wauwinet** which includes the inn, restaurant and houses that straddle the **Haulover** which separates the Head of the Harbor from the Atlantic Ocean. Wauwinet is the name of the Indian sachem that ruled the east side of the island in the late 1600s at the start of the English settlement.

The haulover was a shortcut for fisherman heading to fishing grounds on the east side of the island. Using this shortcut saved time and distance avoiding going around the long, narrow **Great Point** stretching 5 miles to the North. The dirt road that parallels the harbor passes thru **Coskata**, just north of the harbor. The land that stretches to the west and back towards Nantucket Town is **Coatue** a sandy barrier separating the great harbor with Nantucket Sound to the north. Vehicles with 4 wheel drive are the only way forward as a normal car would easily get stuck and bottom out in the sand. Just before the Wauwinet Inn, there is a gate house operated by the Trustees of Reservation. The staff in the gatehouse sell the Oversand Permits required to drive north.

Head back down the Wauwinet Road. Almost halfway on the left before the Pocomo Road turnoff is the entrance to **Squam Swamp**, one of the many walking trails maintained by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation. This 1.7 mile walk takes you thru a wooded area surrounded by rocks, bogs, pools and swamps. There are many varieties of flora, fauna, birds and trees.

Once back out on the road, continue south and turn right onto the Polpis Road. About 2.5 miles along, turn right onto Altar Rock Road. This dirt road leads to an unusual looking round building with a top. This is the navigation beacon for the Nantucket Airport. Continue up to the hill on your left. At the top of the hill is a collection of boulders and one rock that has a plaque on it. This is **Altar Rock** hill which is 108' above sea level and the 2nd tallest point on the island. Just down the hill and up the next rise to the east is Folger Hill which is 109' high. From the top of Altar Rock, you can see much of the island. Nantucket Town is located west/northwest, Great Point is to your north, Gibbs Pond and the Milestone Cranberry Bog are to the southeast with Sankaty lighthouse and 'Sconset beyond.

Back on the Polpis Road and a mile west on the right is the **Shipwreck and Lifesaving Museum** which sits adjacent to the scenic Folger's Marsh. The museum has an extensive collection of rescue boats, tools, ropes and other materiel that tells the story of rescuing people and supplies from shipwrecks that occurred all around Nantucket before electronic navigation was developed in the 20th century. The building is a replica of the 4 lifesaving stations that were located around the island. In the front yard, is the original lens cap of the Great Point Lighthouse which was destroyed in a storm in March 1984. The lighthouse was rebuilt in 1986.

In Season, the museum operates a free Shipwreck Shuttle from the corner of East Chestnut and Federal streets next to the Visitor Center. Departure times to the museum are at the bottom of the hour between 9:30am and 3:30pm.

To get back to the Rotary, turn right on the Polpis Road. In about 2.8 miles, the road meets the Milestone Road. Turn right and the rotary is about 1/4 mile beyond.