Resources at the Center

Marine Laboratory
The Marine Lab provides state of the art facilities for coastal research and teaching. Running sea water is available for sixteen aquaria as well as two flow tanks. Biology, geology and environmental studies departments use the lab both for classes and student research.

Terrestrial Laboratory and Art Studio
This building is nestled in the northeastern fields and was designed for multidisciplinary uses, providing a lab for science classes as well as a studio for visual art classes. The facility is solar powered, reflecting the center’s commitment to low-environmental impact.

The Farmhouse
The ground floor of the farmhouse provides two large rooms, one with a fireplace and large conference-discussion table and the other provides a cozy space for small group discussions. Students are encouraged to study at the center—a nice break from the bustle of the campus library.

For More Information

General Information: 833-8018
Bowdoin Security: 725-3314

☒ Please remember to recycle this guide by returning it to the kiosk if you choose not to bring it home with you. Thank you!

Interpretive Trail Guide

Bowdoin College Coastal Studies Center

“The magnificence of the evergreen forests,... the rich intermingling ever and anon of groves of birch, beech, and oak, in picturesque knots and tufts, as if set for effect by some skillful landscape-gardener, —produce a sort of strange dreamy wonder; while the sea,... seems to flash and glitter like some strange gem which every moment shows itself through the framework of a new setting.”

—from The Pearl of Orr’s Island
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE 1882

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Bowdoin College
Coastal Studies Center (CSC)

In 1981, previous owners Irma and William Thalheimer deeded the property — 118 acres with 2.5 miles of shoreline — to Bowdoin College, to be protected in its natural environment and used as a research and teaching resource for faculty and students. Opened in 1998, CSC serves as a field station for Bowdoin classes and research projects representing a wide array of academic disciplines. As you walk the property please respect the research and historical integrity of the site.

Through its trail system, the Center encourages its visitors to actively experience its beauty and develop an appreciation for its natural and cultural history. As you walk the CSC trails, your footsteps trace the storied history of the land’s previous occupants: the indigenous inhabitants; colonist Joseph Orr, for whom the island was named; the Wyers and the Hansons, New England farming families; the Winnewisser brothers; and Thalheimers, who for the second half of the 20th century enjoyed its beauty during retirement.

This trail system will take you through a diversity of ecosystems and highlight how past inhabitants shaped the land. Please enjoy your visit and remember to respect the land’s beauty and diversity.

Guidelines for the CSC Trails Use

1. Please stay on the designated trails (you play an important role in protecting the natural habitat)
2. Many ongoing research projects occur at the CSC, please respect any flags, markings, or other scientific equipment
3. Please do not collect anything from the Center.
4. These trails are designed for foot traffic only (no bicycles or motorized vehicles)
5. The trails are open dawn to dusk
6. Dogs must be on a leash and stay on the main trails Please carry out any waste left by pets
7. Hunting is strictly forbidden on the property
8. No camping, smoking, or fires are allowed on the property

CSC Trail Legend

- Spruce-Fir Forest Trail .5 mile
- Dipper Cove Path .6 mile
- Historic Farm Walk .2 mile
- Pine Needle Path .3 mile
- Brewer Cove Trail .8 mile
- Long Cove Loop .8 mile
- Stone Wall Walk .4 mile
**Spruce-Fir Forest Trail**  .5 mile

1. This trail ventures through the most common forest type in Maine. The Spruce-Fir Forest forms a dense canopy dominated by red spruce (*Picea rubens*) and sub-dominates balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Little light filters to the understory, preventing shrub establishment. This stand contains some of the oldest trees on the property.

2. **Dipper Cove Path**  .6 mile

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)  
It's always ourself we find in the sea.  
— e. e. cummings

Many local fishermen have lobster pots in Harpswell Sound – keep an eye out for their buoys! Many shore birds can be seen on this path. Look for great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and black-backed gulls (*L. marinus*), and common tern (*Sterna dougallii*). If it is low tide, choose to get your feet wet along the Dipper Cove Path. As you walk, your feet meet thousands of shells: periwinkle (*Littorina spp.*), blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*), soft-shelled (*Mya arenaria*) and quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) clams. Elgrass (*Zostera marina*) commonly covers the intertidal zone. Low tide is every 12 hours, so be sure to check a tide chart before choosing this route. Use caution when walking on the rocks and seaweed.

3. Surrounded by the glistening waters of Harpswell Sound lies Wyer Island. This harsh environment characterized by high winds, full-sun, and constant ocean spray affects its vegetation, dominated by poison-ivy (*Rhus radicans*) and thick rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*). A few white birch (*Betula papyrifera*) and balsam fir survive, competing for sunlight and nutrients.

When Mr. Lewis Hanson lived on the farm at the turn of the 20th century he commonly crossed frozen Harpswell Sound with his wagon for supplies. Legend claims that he buried his two prized white horses on Wyer Island below the rubble of an old stone foundation after a fatal fall through the ice.

**Historic Farm Walk**  .2 mile

4. In 1900, the Hanson family dismantled the original farmhouse and organized a barn-raising party to construct the current house. Some of the original foundation and wide floorboards were used in the new construction. You can see the floorboards, still in prime condition, in the sitting room on the west side of the farmhouse. Using the power of a windmill, the Hansons dug a new well and installed running water in the house and barn. In 1946 the Winnewissers settled on the farm. They winterized the farmhouse (adding a furnace and insulation), drilled a deeper well, and added indoor plumbing. Irma and William Thalheimer bought the farm in 1953 and added a living room and bedroom to the farmhouse.

5. These white walnut or butternut trees (*Juglans cinerea*) were planted from seed by Mrs. Irma Thalheimer.

6. The barn was built by the Wyer family for their livestock (dairy cattle, oxen, sheep, and swine). Mr. Hanson may have added to the barn boards from the original farmhouse for his horses and numerous dairy cows that supplied the island with fresh milk and dairy products.

7. To the west, hidden behind a dense cluster of lilac, lies the foundation of the original farmhouse built by James Wyer (son of Robert Wyer, second owner and stepson to Joseph Orr). The house became home to James' wife and children who contributed to the family income by farming, trading and fishing. The Wyer family greatly changed the land throughout the 100 years that it was their home. They cleared the land, farmed, and raised livestock. The archaeology and land-use history of the property is currently being researched by Bowdoin faculty and students.

To the east, beneath thick pioneering dwarf juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*), previous owners deposited their rubbish at this selected dumping area. Food and yard waste, broken tools and other discarded materials account for generations of refuse.

**Pine Needle Path**  .3 mile

To me a lush carpet of pine needles... is more welcome than the most luxurious Persian rug.  
— Helen Keller

8. As you look through the conifers, an apple orchard planted and enjoyed by previous families continues to remind us of lasting environmental changes.

As you continue your hike, notice the change in the forest composition. Both jutting peninsulas' forests are more diverse than the spruce-fir forest along Dipper Cove.
Co-dominate species red spruce and white pine (Picea strobos) share the canopy with red maple (Acer rubrum), sugar maple (A. saccharum), white ash (Fraxinus americana), and American white birch (Betula papyrifera).

Fishing has been an important economic security to Harpswell Island’s communities for centuries, often having rescued a farmer from a poor harvest. By 1878, approximately 224,000 lbs. of fish were caught annually on Orr’s Island alone.

Mackerel was one of the most abundant fish sold to market, but tuna fish (then considered a “trash fish”) were their top predators and therefore a threat to the fishermen’s bounty. Many islanders enjoyed watching the harpoon-armed local fishermen chase their blue-finned natural competition.

Today, Harpswell fishing communities are actively engaged in fishery management, which continues to be one of coastal Maine’s major conservation priorities.

On the eastern edge of the point, an osprey (Pandion haliaetus) has nested in a pine top. Ospreys are admired for their graceful and precise predation on fish, please respect their space while enjoying their beauty.

Stonewalls mark the border of fields once used by both the Wyer and Hanson families. Stonewalls are common throughout all of New England. They provided a practical use for unwanted “field-stones” serving as property markers and creating a durable fence that either kept animals in or out of designated fields. The stonewalls of the CSC are a tangible reminder of past human connection with the land.

As you continue to the next marker, notice the combination of hardwoods (red and sugar maple, ash, and white birch) and softwoods (red spruce and white pine) to the east. The most common shrubs are striped maple (Acer pensylvanicum), maple-leaved viburnum (Viburnum acerifolium), and beaked hazelnut (Corylus cornuta).

These northern white cedars (Thuja occidentalis) have gained dominance in a past pasture or field. Intermittent streams drain the stand of trees and continue flowing through the fragile watershed.

As you walk the southeast border of the fields and stonewalls, the forest composition provides clues to its past. Tree cores indicate that a relatively new forest grew from old agricultural fields. Now, maple and poplar, two hardwood pioneer species, fill this ecosystem.

The existing fields are mowed in the late fall, to maintain a meadow habitat. This field habitat provides homes for small mammals, migrating butterflies, other insects, and grassland-nesting songbirds. Low blueberries (Vaccinium angustifolia) dominate the fields south of the house. To the east and southeast of the house, native grasses and wildflowers have become over-run with an invasive knapweed species.

Brewer Cove Trail

So many hours were spent picking berries, braiding sweetgrass, weaving baskets, chopping wood or shovelling snow, and in return I gathered many a tale of my people.
— Molly Spotted Elk (1938)

Much of the CSC shoreline is composed of mudflats which creates a comforting habitat for shore birds, segmented worms, crabs, shrimp, blue and horse mussels, mud dog weed, and soft-shelled clams (harvested for centuries).

In the valley feeding into Brewer Cove, a natural spring supplies fresh water to many small mammals and white-tailed deer. The Hanson family capitalized on this resource by selling five-gallon jugs of fresh-water to summer vacationers and passing ships.

As you follow the stone wall, notice the forest canopy dominated by red oak (Quercus rubra) and white pine. The high elevation and dry shallow soil favor these species.