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A Description of Cape Cod, &c.

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DESCRIPTION

OF THE

EASTERN COAST

OF THE

COUNTY OF BARNSTABLE,

FROM

CAPE COD, OR RACE POINT,

IN LATITUDE $42^{\circ} 5'$.

TO CAPE MALEBARRE,

OR THE

SANDY POINT OF CHATHAM,

IN LATITUDE $41^{\circ} 33'$.

POINTING OUT THE SPOTS, ON WHICH THE

TRUSTEES OF THE HUMANE SOCIETY,

HAVE ERECTED HUTS, AND OTHER PLACES

WHERE SHIPWRECKED SEAMEN MAY

LOOK FOR SHELTER,

October, 1802.



By a Member of the Humane Society,

James Freeman.

BOSTON :

Printed by HOSEA SPRAGUE, No. 44 Marlboro' Street.

1802.

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At a Meeting of the Trustees of the Humane Society,

OCTOBER 4, 1802.

A Gentleman who was requested by the Trustees to contract for a number of Huts, to be erected upon the most exposed places upon Cape Cod, for the preservation of shipwrecked Seamen, made the following Report, which was read and accepted. Whereupon, after voting the thanks of the Trustees for the following accurate and judicious Report,

It was Voted—That the Treasurer be requested to have two thousand Copies of said Report printed, and cause the same to be dispersed among the several Custom-houses and Insurance Offices in this Commonwealth.

A true Extract from the Minutes.

Attest. JOHN AVERY, Secretary.

A Description of Cape Cod, &c.

THE curvature of the shore, on the west side of Provincetown, and south of Race Point, is called Herring Cove ; which is three miles in length. There is good anchoring ground here ; and vessels may ride safely in four or five fathoms of water, when the wind is from north east to south-east.

On Race Point stand about a dozen fishing huts, containing fire places and other conveniences. The distance from these huts to Provincetown, which lies on Cape Cod harbour, is three miles. The passage is over a sandy beach, without grass or any other vegetable growing on it, to the woods, through which is a winding road to the town. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for a stranger to find his way thither in the dark ; and the woods are so full of ponds and entangling swamps, that if the road was missed, destruction would probably be the consequence of attempting to penetrate them in the night.

Not far from Race Point commences a ridge, which extends to the head of Stout's Creek. With the face to the east, on the left hand of the ridge is the sandy shore ; on the right is a narrow sandy valley ; beyond which is naked sand, reaching to the hills and woods of Provincetown. This ridge is well covered with beach grass ; and appears to owe its existence to that vegetable. Beach grass, during the spring and summer, grows about two feet and a half. If surrounded by naked beach, the storms of autumn and winter heap up the sand on all sides, and cause it to rise nearly to the top of the plant. In

the ensuing spring the grass sprouts anew ; is again covered with sand in the winter ; and thus a hill or ridge continues to ascend, as long as there is a sufficient base to support it, or till the circumscribing sand, being also covered with beach grass, will no longer yield to the force of the winds.

On this ridge, half way between Race Point and the head of Stout's Creek, the Trustees of the Humane Society have erected a hut. It stands a mile from Peaked Hill, a land-mark well known to seamen ; and is about two miles and a half from Race Point. Seamen, cast away on this part of the coast, will find a shelter here ; and in north-east storms, should they strike to the leeward of it, and be unable to turn their faces to the windward, by passing on to Race Point, they will soon come to the fishing huts before mentioned.

At the head of Stout's Creek the Trustees have built a second hut. Stout's Creek is a small branch of East Harbour in Truro. Many years ago there was a body of salt marsh on it ; and it then deserved the name of a creek. But the marsh was long since destroyed ; and the creek now scarcely exists, appearing only like a small depression in the sand, and being entirely dry at half tide. The creek runs from north-west to south-east, and is nearly parallel with the shore on the ocean, from which it is at no great distance. Not far from it the hills of Provincetown terminate ; and should not the hut be found, by walking round the head of the creek, with the face to the west, the hills on the right hand, and keeping close to the shore on the harbour, in less than an hour the shipwrecked seamen would come to Provincetown.

The Humane Society, several years ago, erected a hut at the head of Stout's Creek. But it was built in an improper manner, having a chimney in it ; and was placed on a spot where no beach grass grew. The strong winds blew the sand from its foundation, and the weight of the chimney brought it to the ground ; so that in January of the present year it was entirely demolished. This event took place about six weeks before the Brutus was cast away. If it had remained, it is probable that the whole of the unfortunate crew of that ship

would have been saved, as they gained the shore a few rods only from the spot where the hut had stood.

The hut now erected stands on a place covered with beach grass. To prevent any accident from happening to it, or to the other hut near Peaked Hill, the Trustees have secured the attention of several gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Dr. Thaddeus Brown and Capt. Thomas Smalley of Provincetown have engaged to inspect both huts, to see that they are supplied with straw or hay in the autumn, that the doors and windows are kept shut, and that repairs are made, when necessary. The Rev. Mr. Damon of Truro has also promised to visit the hut at Stout's Creek twice or thrice in a year; and the Rev. Mr. Whitman of Wellfleet, distinguished through the county for his activity and benevolence, has undertaken, though remote from the place, the same charge.

From the head of Stout's Creek to the termination of the salt marsh, which lies on both sides and at the head of East Harbour river, the distance is about three miles and a half. A narrow beach separates this river from the ocean. It is not so regular a ridge as that before described, as there are on it one or two hills, which the neighbouring inhabitants call islands. It may without much difficulty be crossed every where, except over these elevations. By these hills, even during the night, the beach may be distinguished from those hereafter to be mentioned. It lies from north-west to south-east; and is in most parts covered with beach grass. The hills have a few shrubs on the declivities next the river. At the end of the marsh the beach subsides a little; and there is an easy passage into a valley, in which are situated two or three dwelling houses. The first on the left hand, or south, is a few rods only from the ocean.

The shore, which extends from this valley to Race Point, is unquestionably the part of the coast the most exposed to shipwrecks. A north east storm, the most violent, and fatal to seamen, as it is frequently accompanied with snow, blows directly on the land: a strong current sets along the shore: add to which that ships, during the operation of such a storm, endeavour to work to the

northward, that they may get into the bay. Should they be unable to weather Race Point, the wind drives them on the shore, and a shipwreck is inevitable. Accordingly, the strand is every where covered with the fragments of vessels. Huts therefore, placed within a mile of each other, have been thought necessary by many judicious persons. To this opinion the Trustees are disposed to pay due respect ; and hereafter, if the funds of the Society increase, new huts will be built here for the relief of the unfortunate.

From the valley above mentioned the land rises, and less than a mile from it the High Land commences. On the first elevated spot, the Clay Pounds, stands the Light House. The shore here turns to the south ; and the High Land extends to the Table Land of Eastham. This High Land approaches the ocean with steep and lofty banks, which it is extremely difficult to climb, especially in a storm. In violent tempests, during very high tides, the sea breaks against the foot of them, rendering it then unsafe to walk on the strand, which lies between them and the ocean. Should the seaman succeed in his attempt to ascend them, he must forbear to penetrate into the country, as houses are generally so remote, that they would escape his research during the night : he must pass on to the vallies, by which the banks are intersected. These vallies, which the inhabitants call Hollows, run at right angles with the shore ; and in the middle, or lowest part of them, a road leads from the dwelling houses to the sea.

The first of these vallies is Dyer's Hollow, a mile and a half south of the Light House. It is a wide opening, being two hundred rods broad from summit to summit. In it stands a dwelling house, a quarter of a mile from the beach.

A mile and a half south of Dyer's Hollow, is a second valley, called Harding's Hollow. At the entrance of this valley, the sand has gathered ; so that at present a little climbing is necessary. Passing over several fences, and taking heed not to enter the wood on the right hand, at the distance of three quarters of a mile, a house is to be found. This house stands

on the south side of the road ; and not far from it, on the south, is Pamet river, which runs from east to west through a body of salt marsh.

The third valley, a half of a mile south of Harding's Hollow, is head of Pamet Hollow. It may with ease be distinguished from the other hollows mentioned, as it is a wide opening, and leads immediately over a beach to the salt marsh at the head of Pamet river. In the midst of the hollow the sand has been raised by a brush fence, carried across it from north to south. This must be passed ; and the shipwrecked mariner will soon come to a fence, which separates what is called the road from the marsh. If he turns to the left hand, or south, at the distance of a quarter of a mile, he will discover a house. If he turns to the right hand, at the distance of half a mile, he will find the same house, which is mentioned in the foregoing paragraph.

The fourth opening, three quarters of a mile south of Head of Pamet, is Brush Valley. This hollow is narrow, and climbing is necessary. Entering it, and inclining to the right, three quarters of a mile will bring seamen to the house, which is situated at the Head of Pamet. By proceeding straight forward, and passing over rising ground, another house may be discovered, but with more difficulty.

These three hollows, lying near together, serve to designate each other. Either of them may be used ; but Head of Pamet Hollow is the safest.

South of Brush Valley, at the distance of three miles, there is a fifth opening, called New comb's Hollow, east of the head of Herring river in Wellfleet. This valley is a quarter of a mile wide. On the north side of it, near the shore, stands a fishing hut.

Between the two last vallies the bank is very high and steep. From the edge of it, west, there is a strip of sand, a hundred yards in breadth. Then succeeds low brushwood, a quarter of a mile wide, and almost impassible. After which comes a thick, perplexing forest, in which not a house is to be discov-

ered. Seamen therefore, though the distance between these two vallies is great, must not attempt to enter the wood, as in a snow storm they would undoubtedly perish. This place, so formidable in description, will however lose somewhat of its terrour, when it is observed, that no instance of a shipwreck on this part of the coast is recollected by the oldest inhabitants of Wellfleet,

Half of a mile south of Newcomb's Hollow, is the sixth valley, called Pearce's Hollow. It is a small valley. A house stands at the distance of a little more than a quarter of a mile from the beach, west by south.

The seventh valley is Cohoon's Hollow, a half of a mile south of Pearce's Hollow. It is not very wide. West from the entrance, several houses may be found at the distance of a mile. This hollow lies east by north from Wellfleet meeting house.

Two miles south of Cohoon's Hollow, the eighth valley is Snow's Hollow. It is smaller than the last. West from the shore, at the distance of a quarter of a mile, is the county road, which goes round the head of Blackfish creek. Passing through this valley to the fence, which separates the road from the upland and marsh at the head of the creek, a house will immediately be found by turning to the right hand, or north. There are houses also on the left, but more remote.

The High Land gradually subsides here, and a mile and a half south terminates at the ninth valley, called Fresh Brook Hollow, in which a house is to be found a mile from the shore, west.

The tenth, two miles and a half south from Fresh Brook Hollow, is Plum Valley, about three hundred yards wide. West is a house, three quarters of a mile distant.

Between these two vallies is the Table Land.

After this there is no hollow of importance to Cape Malabarre.

From Fresh Brook Hollow to the commencement of Nauset beach, the bank next the ocean is about sixty feet high.

There are houses scattered over the plain, open country : but none of them are nearer than a mile to the shore. In a storm of wind and rain they might be discerned by day light ; but in a snow storm, which rages here with excessive fury, it would be almost impossible to discover them either by night or by day.

Not far from this shore, south, the Trustees have erected a third hut, on Nauset beach. Nauset beach begins in latitude $41^{\circ} 51'$. and extends south to latitude $41^{\circ} 41'$. It is divided into two parts by a breach, which the ocean has made through it. This breach is the mouth of Nauset or Stage harbour ; and from the opening the beach extends north two miles and a quarter, till it joins the main land. It is about a furlong wide and forms Nauset harbour ; which is of little value, its entrance being obstructed by a bar. This northern part of the beach may be distinguished from the southern part by its being of a less regular form : Storms have made frequent irruptions through the ridge, on which beach grass grows. On an elevated part of the beach, stands the hut, about a mile and a half north of the mouth of Nauset harbour. Eastham meeting house lies from it west south west, distant a mile and three quarters. The meeting house is without a steeple ; but it may be distinguished from the dwelling houses near it by its situation, which is between two small groves of locusts, one on the south and one on the north, that on the south being three times as long as the other. About a mile and a quarter from the hut, west by north, appear the top and arms of a windmill. The Rev. Mr. Shaw and Elisha Mayo, Esq. of Eastham have engaged to inspect this building.

The southern part of Nauset beach, most commonly called Chatham beach, and by a few persons Potanumaquut beach, begins at the mouth of Nauset harbour, and extends eight or nine miles south to the mouth of Chatham harbour. It is about fifty rods wide. A regular, well formed ridge, which in the most elevated part of it is forty feet high, runs the whole length of it ; and, with the exception of a few spots, is covered

with beach grass. This beach forms the barrier of Chatham harbour, which from Strong island north receives the name of Pleasant bay. A mile south of the entrance of Nauset harbour, it joins the main land of Orleans, except in very high tides, when the sea flows from the north eastern arm of Pleasant bay into the harbour of Nauset, completely insulating the beach. By those, who are acquainted with the shallow, it may be safely forded at any time; but strangers must not venture to pass it, when covered with water, as below, the channel is seven feet deep. On this beach, about half way between the entrances of Nauset and Chatham harbours, the Trustees have erected a fourth hut. The spot selected is a narrow part of the beach. On the west, the water adjoining it is called Bass Hole. Salt marsh is north and south of it next the beach, but is here interrupted. Orleans meeting house lies from it north west. The meeting house is without a steeple, and is not seen; but it is very near a windmill placed on an elevated ground, a conspicuous object to seamen coming on the coast. It may be necessary to add that there are three windmills in Orleans forming a semicircle, that the mill referred to is on the right hand, or north east point, and that the mill in the middle point of the semicircle stands on still higher ground. The meeting house of Chatham is situated from it south west. This meeting house is also without a steeple, and is concealed by Great Hill, a noted land mark. The hill appears with two summits, which are a quarter of a mile apart. The hut lies east from Sampson's island in Pleasant bay. Timothy Bascom, Esq. of Orleans has undertaken to inspect this hut.

Lest seamen should miss this hut, by striking to the leeward of it, the Trustees have erected another on the same beach. It stands a mile north of the mouth of Chatham harbour, east of the meeting house, and opposite the town.

Another spot on the same beach would be a proper situation for a hut. It is north of the fourth hut, and east of the middle of Pochet island. The highest part of the ridge is near it, south.

A break in the ridge, over which the sea appears sometimes to have flowed, divides this high part from the northern portion of the beach.

On the beach of Cape Malebarre, or the Sandy Point of Chatham, the Trustees have built a sixth hut. This beach stretches from Chatham, ten miles into the sea, toward Nantucket ; and is from a quarter to three quarters of a mile in breadth. It is continually gaining south : above three miles have been added to it during the past fifty years. On the east side of the beach is a curve in the shore, called Stewart's Bend, where vessels may anchor with safety, in three or four fathoms of water, when the wind blows from north to south-west. North of the Bend there are several bars and shoals. A little below the middle of the beach, on the west side, is Wreck Cove, which is navigable for boats only. The hut stands two hundred yards from the ocean, south east from the entrance of Wreck Cove, a half of a mile. Between the mouth of the Cove and hut, is Stewart's Knoll, an elevated part of the beach. The distance of the hut from the commencement of the beach is six miles, and from its termination four. Great Hill in Chatham bears north by west, distant six miles ; and the south end of Morris's island, which is on the west side of the beach, north by east, distant four miles. Richard Sears, Esq. of Chatham has engaged to visit the two last mentioned huts.

Two miles below the sixth hut is a fishing house, built of thatch, in the form of a wigwam. It stands on the west side of the beach, a quarter of a mile from the ocean. Annually in September it is renewed ; and generally remains in tolerable preservation during the winter.

Another spot, a few rods from the sea, four miles south from the commencement of the beach, and a half of a mile north of the head of Wreck Cove, would be a proper situation for a hut. A little south of this spot, in storms and very high tides, the sea breaks over from the ocean into Wreck Cove.

Cape Malebarre beach may be distinguished from the two beaches before described, not only by its greater breadth, but

also by its being of a less regular form. It is not so well covered with grass as Chatham beach. From Stewart's Knoll, south, to the extremity, it is lowest in the middle. In this valley, and in other low places, fresh water may be obtained by digging two feet into the sand. The same thing is true of Nauset and Chatham beaches.

The six huts, the situation of which has thus been pointed out, are all of one size and shape. Each hut stands on piles, is eight feet long, eight feet wide, and seven feet high; a sliding door is on the south, a sliding shutter on the west, and a pole, rising fifteen feet above the top of the building, on the east. Within, it is supplied either with straw or hay; and is farther accommodated with a bench.

The whole of the coast, from Cape Cod to Cape Malebarre, is sandy, and free from rocks. Along the shore, at the distance of a half of a mile, is a bar; which is called the *Outer bar*, because there are smaller bars within it, perpetually varying. This outer bar is separated into many parts by guzzles, or small channels. It extends to Chatham; and as it proceeds southward, gradually approaches the shore and grows more shallow. Its general depth at high water is two fathoms, and three fathoms over the guzzles; and its least distance from the shore is about a furlong. Off the mouth of Chatham harbour there are bars which reach three quarters of a mile; and off the entrance of Nauset harbour the bars extend a half of a mile. Large, heavy ships strike on the outer bar, even at high water; and their fragments only reach the shore. But smaller vessels pass over it at full sea; and when they touch at low water, they beat over it, as the tide rises, and soon come to the land. If a vessel is cast away at low water, it ought to be left with as much expedition as possible; because the fury of the waves is then checked, in some measure, by the bar; and because the vessel is generally broken to pieces with the rising flood. But seamen, shipwrecked at full sea, ought to remain on board till near low water; for the vessel does not then

break to pieces ; and by attempting to reach the land before the tide ebbs away, they are in great danger of being drowned. On this subject there is one opinion only among judicious mariners. It may be necessary however to remind them of a truth, of which they have full conviction, but which, amidst the agitation and terrour of a storm, they too frequently forget.

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