

# Boston Harbor Islands

## IslandCache Program

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



### Site 6: The Outer Islands

N 42° 19.243' W 070° 55.706'



“Truly, the harbor is a classic link in the ‘stern and rock-bound’ New England coast, a chain of bristling ledges, unsheltered islands, and exposed beaches.” —Robert F. Sullivan

Using the Island Guide above your head and along the walls of the observation tower, identify the islands described below. The natural and geological features of the islands are visible with the naked eye on a clear, sunny day.

#### Little Brewster and Boston Light

Looking out toward the rocky expanse of the outer island chain, it is not difficult to imagine the dangers the outcroppings presented to sailors attempting to enter the port of Boston in colonial times. Boston Light was erected in 1716 to mark the entrance to The Narrows—the deepest natural shipping channel in Boston Harbor. Boston Light’s significance as a maritime guide made it a pawn during the American Revolution, and was often vandalized by British troops and colonists. The British, however, had the final say when they torched Boston Light

upon their departure for Great Britain in 1776. The lighthouse was rebuilt in 1783, just after the completion of Sandy Hook Light in New Jersey, making Boston Light the second oldest lighthouse in America. In order to honor maritime trade and America’s first lighthouse station, Congress voted to keep Boston Light permanently staffed by the U.S. Coast Guard. You can still view the unique flash sequence identifying Boston Light—one flash every ten seconds.

#### The Graves

Contrary to popular belief, Graves Light was not named for the bedrock that juts out from the water, conjuring the image of the watery headstones. Instead, The Graves was named for Vice Admiral Thomas Graves, a 17<sup>th</sup> century fleetsman. On September 1, 1905, Eliot Hadley lit the most powerful light in Massachusetts history, making Graves Light one of the youngest lighthouses in the Commonwealth. Its first-order Fresnel lens (3.2 million candle-power) is one of a handful in the country, and is now in storage at

the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. The lighthouse was staffed until 1976; in 1991, the lighthouse was witness to the most powerful weather forces ever recorded, which was documented in the movie, “The Perfect Storm.” Today, the lighthouse is powered by solar energy generated by the windmill at Pemberton Point. You can still see the Graves Light flash sequence in inclement weather—two flashes every twelve seconds.

#### Green and Calf Islands, The Brewsters and Shag Rocks

The outer islands, including Little Brewster, Calf and Green Islands, are very unlike the islands you have visited up to this point. They are rocky outcrops with few, if any, trees or shrubs. The habitat, however, is more suitable for seabirds and waterfowl. Visitors to the outer islands can expect to see American oystercatchers, Greater yellow legs, Cormorants and Brant. Considering

the harsh weather conditions and the significant distance from Boston, only a few people have ever lived on the outer-most islands. Remains of the summer home of actress Julia Arthur and her husband are still visible on Calf Island. The ruins of a short-lived military base and desalinization plant on Great Brewster Island are visible with binoculars.

Next Clue: Your next site is near the final resting place of the French warship, *Magnifique*. In fact, from this waterside cache, in still waters, you can spot the submerged vessel. But first, you should stop and smell the Staghorn sumac and play in the tidepools in the Northwest corner of the island.

N 42° 19.902'  
W 070° 55.818'