

# Island Farm Nature Trail

*a self-guided interpretive trail with 11 stations*



*goldenrod*

## Burton Island State Park



**AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES**  
Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation



## **Welcome to the Island Farm Nature Trail**

Set in the northern waters of Lake Champlain, 253-acre Burton Island is accessible only by boat. The island's rocky shoreline, marshy areas, woods and open fields provide habitat for a variety of plants and animals.

The island was farmed extensively from the early 1800s through the 1950s. The abandoned fields have been reclaimed by wild plants. Those who take time to explore can see the remnants of farm buildings and other signs of the past including rusting equipment, drainage ditches and foundations.

Enjoy your walk on the Island Farm Nature Trail. All wildflowers and historic artifacts are protected on state lands. Please leave them for others to enjoy.

### **1. St. Albans Bay**

Native people lived in the Champlain Valley for thousands of years before the Europeans explored and settled the area. The earliest maps call Burton Island "Isle-of-White," and refer to its neighboring islands as the "Whitewood Islands."

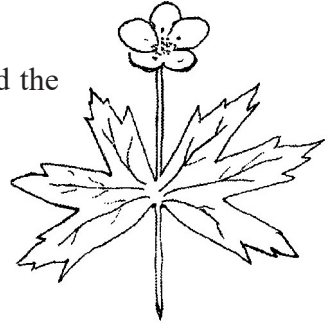
As you stand here, St. Albans Bay is to your left. Jesse Weldon, one of the first settlers of St. Albans, was commissioned by the family of Vermont-legend Ethan Allen to survey the bay's potential as a port location.

By 1790, the bay was an important port for shipping lumber as well as potash and pearl ash. These industrial chemical compounds were made by leaching hardwood ashes. The main ingredient in lye, potassium carbonate, was essential for making soaps, glass, gunpowder, dyeing fabrics and as a leavening agent in baking until the 1860s. Around that time ash-based potassium carbonate was replaced by alkaline compounds from other sources.

When the US Congress passed the Embargo Acts of 1807 and 1808, prohibiting trade with Canada, smuggling became a profitable activity in St. Albans.

The North-South Railroad, built in 1850, reduced the importance of St. Albans Bay as a port.

Canada anemone (*Anemone Canadensis*), a lovely member of the buttercup family, grows along the water's edge. Its graceful white flowers are often seen in early summer. Note the sharply indented leaf that encircles the stem of the flower.



*Canada anemone*

## 2. Abandoned Fields

As you look inland at this spot, you can imagine the cultivated fields that once covered the island. When C.C. Burton purchased the land in 1840 and hired a family to work it, the island was known as “Potters Island.”

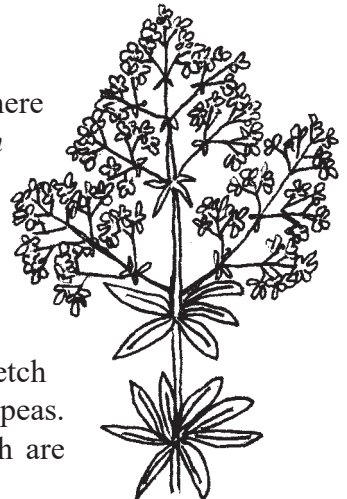
During that time beans and corn were the main crops. Cows, sheep, horses and poultry were also raised. Tenant farmers sent out produce, butter and wool to St. Albans.

In recent times, the farm fields have begun to disappear. Colonizers, plants which move into abandoned fields, now cover the landscape. Goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*) is among these plants. Its abundant blooms can be seen here after mid-August.



*cow vetch*

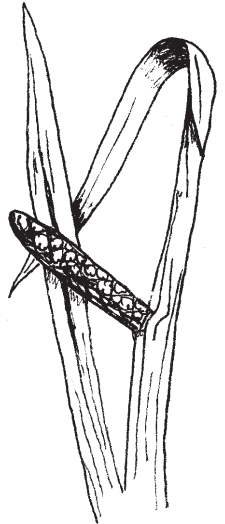
Other wildflowers found here include bedstraw (*Gallium sp.*), so named because it was once used to stuff mattresses, and cow vetch (*Vicia cracca*). Vetches belong to the pea family. The curling tendrils of cow vetch are reminiscent of garden peas. The little seed pods of vetch are poisonous to eat.



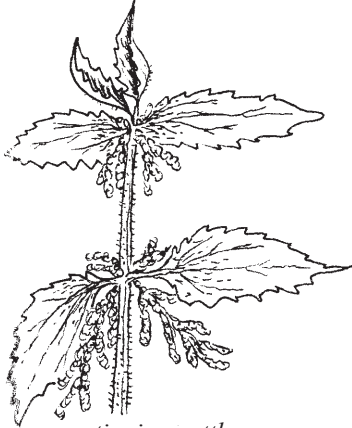
*bedstraw*

### 3. The Marsh

A marsh is a wetland with consistently wet soil and herbaceous grassy plants. Marshes are considered to be one of the richest ecosystems in the world. What is now the marsh here was once a farm pond, where livestock came to drink. The fragrant leaves of the marsh plant sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*) were strewn on settlers' floors as a room freshener.



sweet flag



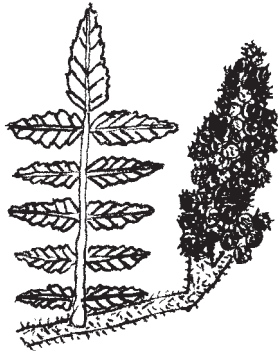
stinging nettle

Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is found throughout the island, and is best left alone. The tiny hairs covering the stem and leaves can sting and itch for hours. The crushed leaves and stem of the spotted touch-me-not, or jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), growing nearby can be rubbed on as a remedy for stinging nettle and poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) irritation.

### 4. Sumac

Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), a member of the cashew family, is among the first woody plants to grow in abandoned fields.

Native Americans used hollowed sumac twigs as tubes for gathering maple sap. They used the fuzzy seed clusters to brew a lemonade-like beverage.



sumac

Sumac grows best in open sun. Enough shade has been created by the surrounding shrubs to make it more difficult for the sumac here to prosper. Other shrub and tree species such as trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) now appear in a natural process known as succession. The types of vegetation will continue to change over time if uninterrupted until the site finally reaches a self-sustaining community of long-lived trees.

## 5. The Main Barn

This is the former location of the farm. The foundation here is that of the main barn where the cows were milked, and the horses and sheep were kept. This tenant farm was self-sufficient with more than a dozen milk cows, 500 turkeys, 200 sheep and many pigs, horses and chickens. Cultivation was done by hand and horse teams. Today only drainage ditches and rusty farm equipment remain.

Ida Lashway acquired the island from Sidney Burton in the 1920s. The Lashways continued to employ tenant farmers to supply meat, dairy products, eggs and produce for Lashway's Market in Swanton. Mr. and Mrs. Randall Dimon purchased the island in 1954. Although they did not employ tenant farmers, they maintained some of the fields in hay, beans and pasture until they sold the island to the State of Vermont in 1961. The Dimons continued to summer on the island through the 1980s. The main barn accidentally burned during the Dimons' tenure on the island.



## 6. Ice House

In Sidney Burton's day, families farming the island worked under a half-share agreement, splitting profits with the owners. Children were home-schooled or traveled to school in St. Albans Bay when they could get there. If the spring ice was too thin to cross safely, students boarded with friends on the mainland. The boys living on the farm the winter of 1942-43 had to drag a canoe over the ice as they crossed each day in case they broke through.

# Island Farm Nature Trail

## Burton Island State Park

North Shore  
Trail

### LEGEND



Nature Center



Park office



Self-guiding trail



Restrooms



Interpretive trail stop (corresponds to number in booklet)



Campground



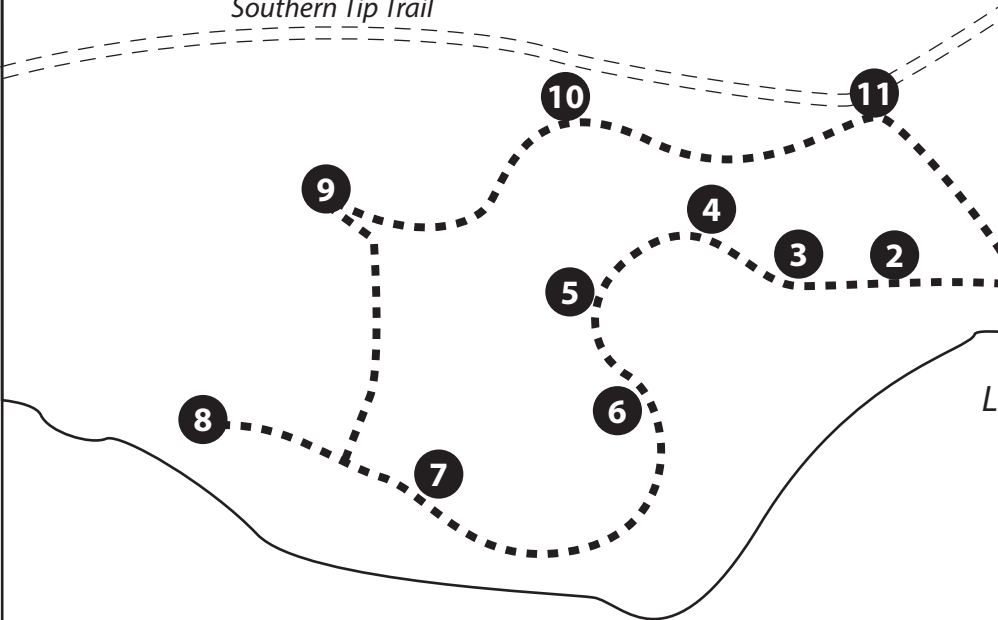
Marina

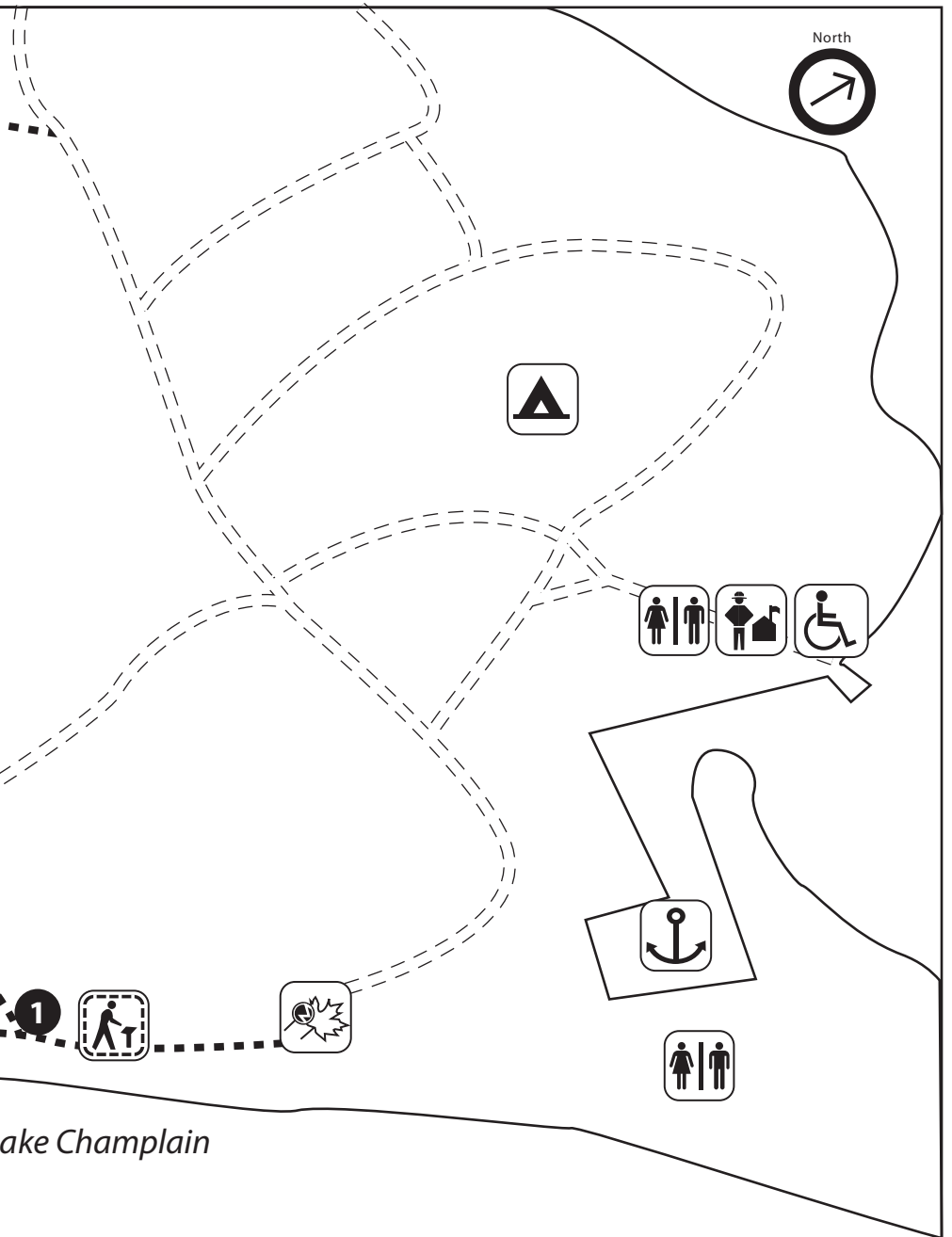
Foot trail

Multi-use trail

*this map is intended for informational purposes only*

Southern Tip Trail





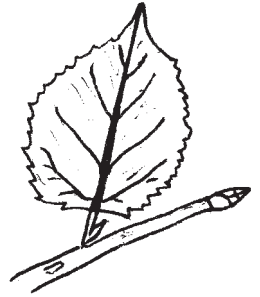
Lake Champlain



The section of concrete wall here is what remains of the ice house. Blocks of ice were cut and dragged from the lake in the winter, packed in sawdust and used for refrigeration through the summer. Next to the ice house was a creamery, and beyond it was the farmhouse. The buildings were taken down by the State prior to opening Burton Island State Park in 1964. The site has been grown over by red raspberries and stinging nettles. You will also see burdock (*Arctium minus*), a large-leaved plant that often grows in the rich soils of abandoned farms.

## 7. A Young Forest

The forest you have entered will change to larger sturdier types of trees farther up the trail. Here you will find trembling aspen growing. The Onondaga Indians of New York called these trees *Nut-Ki-e*, meaning “noisy leaf.” If you listen when the breeze blows, you will know why. Over time, trees like aspens which require direct light, are crowded out by more shade-tolerant trees such as maples.



*trembling aspen*

## 8. The Old Forest

Watch out for a steep cliff here. You are now in an area where trees were left standing during the island’s farming years.



*shagbark  
hickory*



*northern white cedar*



These trees are much older, and include northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) and shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*). It is so shady under the trees that there is little undergrowth. Light-loving plants like sumac can't survive, but the cedars, maples and hickories sprout beneath the shady canopy and continue to replace themselves. This type of forest is called a "climax" forest. If natural processes are allowed to continue, most of Burton Island could, in time, resemble this spot.

To reach Station 9, retrace your steps toward 7 and bear left, up the hill at the arrow in the center of the trail. The trail to Station 9 takes you along the edge of the old orchard that stood west of the farmhouse.

## 9. Chicken and Turkey Houses

This is one of the highest spots on the island. In early summer, wildflowers such as dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) and wild mustard (*Brassica sp.*) bloom. Later in the summer, spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) and daisy fleabane (*Erigeron annuus*) flower. Early settlers used to burn daisy fleabane to repel fleas. Notice the lush growth of sumac. Rich soils accumulated here when turkey and chicken houses stood on this hill.



*daisy fleabane*

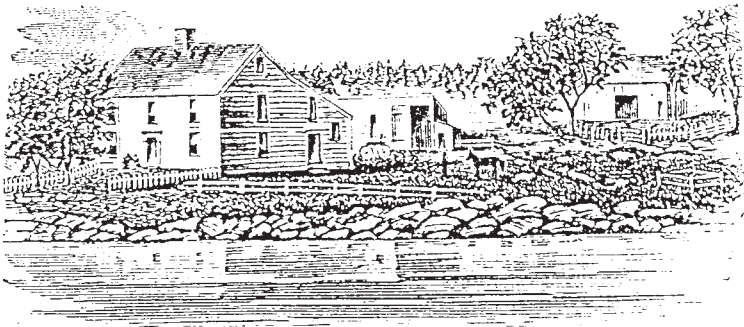


*dame's rocket*

## 10. Hawthorn

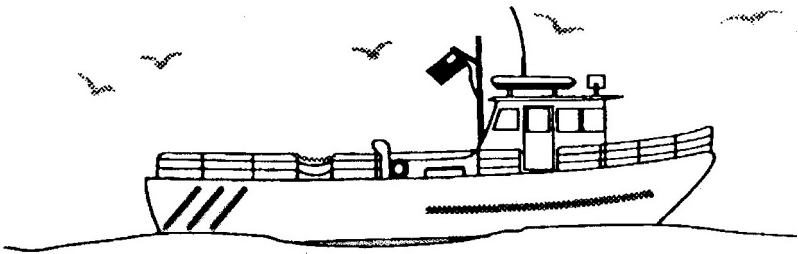
You are now on the other side of the marsh. The slope makes a natural basin, and now the impermeable clay soils keep the area wet. That is why the farm pond was located here. Do you see areas where the sweet flag here has been flattened? Deer sometimes bed down here.

The large bush with long, sharp thorns and tiny apple-like fruits is hawthorn (*Crataegus sp.*). When settlers moved to new homes, dishes and other breakables were packaged in boxes filled with these small apples. Upon reaching their destination, the settlers discarded the fruit outdoors, spreading hawthorn across the United States.



## 11. Island Park

The *Island Farm Nature Trail* ends here. The Dimon family conveyed Burton Island to the State of Vermont in 1961, retaining use of the cabin until 1991. Construction of park facilities was completed in 1965. In 1966, the marina was expanded and a breakwater was built. Plans to build a causeway for cars were abandoned to protect the special character of the island. In 1967, the State acquired Kamp Kill Kare, a former boys' camp to provide access for ferry service to the island.



Ferry Service is available to visitors going from Kill Kare to Burton Island. Contact the park office or visit us on the Internet at [www.vtstateparks.com](http://www.vtstateparks.com) for updated schedules and fees. Burton Island is a popular destination for boaters on Lake Champlain. A special camping experience awaits those who enjoy the seclusion of an island setting.

Please stop by the nature center for more information about the natural or cultural history of Burton Island, or speak with park staff. If you do not wish to keep this brochure, please return it to the nature center for others to use.



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[parks@vermont.gov](mailto:parks@vermont.gov)  
VT TDD Relay Dial 7-1-1  
Printed on recycled paper  
03/09 - ERP/RRA