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VISITING CAPE COD

Head of the Meadow Beach Truro: A Quieter National Seashore Beach with Dramatic Dunes

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



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Head of the Meadow Beach Truro: A Quieter National Seashore Beach with Dramatic Dunes

Head of the Meadow Beach sits in North Truro between two parking areas — one managed by the Cape Cod National Seashore, one by the Town of Truro — separated by a short stretch of sand. That distinction matters for your wallet: the National Seashore lot accepts the America the Beautiful pass and the NPS weekly beach pass; the Truro municipal lot requires a separate town sticker or a higher daily fee. Knowing which lot you're parking in saves confusion at the entrance booth.

What draws people here who have already done Race Point and Herring Cove: it's dramatically quieter for most of the summer, the dune backdrop is among the tallest and most theatrical on the Outer Cape, and the surf is consistent enough that it draws bodyboarders and surfers who would otherwise fight the crowds in Provincetown. The tradeoff is zero concessions. Bring everything you need.

Where It Is and How to Get There

Head of the Meadow Beach is accessed via Head of the Meadow Road, which runs north off Route 6 in North Truro. Coming from the south (Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet), take Route 6 north through Truro toward Provincetown — the turnoff is on your left roughly 3 miles before you reach the Provincetown town line. Coming from Provincetown, it's a short drive south on Route 6 and the road is on your right.

The road ends at the two adjacent parking areas. The National Seashore lot is typically on the left side as you approach the beach, and the Truro municipal lot is adjacent. During peak summer, both lots fill by mid-morning on weekends — plan to arrive before 9:30am or after 3pm.

Distance from key towns: - **Provincetown:** approximately 4 miles, 8–10 minutes - **Wellfleet:** approximately 12 miles, 15 minutes - **Orleans:** approximately 28 miles, 35 minutes

The Two Parking Lots: What You Need to Know

This is the detail that catches visitors off guard.

National Seashore Lot The NPS-managed lot at Head of the Meadow accepts the America the Beautiful Interagency Annual Pass (\$80/year, covers all NPS sites), the Cape Cod National Seashore weekly vehicle pass, and a daily vehicle fee. Check the current NPS fee schedule at the Recreation.gov site or the CCNS site before you go — fees are updated seasonally and have increased in recent years. Holders of a Senior Pass, Access Pass, or Military pass enter free.

Truro Municipal Lot Truro residents park with a town sticker. Non-residents pay a daily fee that is typically higher than the NPS daily rate. If you do not have an NPS pass and are paying daily, compare both lots' current rates — the NPS lot is often the better value for non-residents. The town lot is managed separately and does not accept NPS passes.

Bicycles and pedestrians enter both areas at no charge.

The Beach Itself

Head of the Meadow is an Atlantic-facing, east-looking beach — which means sunrises here are excellent and the afternoon light goes flat. The shoreline is wide at low tide, with a steep drop to breaking surf that makes this beach unsuitable for young non-swimmers without constant supervision. This is not a calm bay beach. The waves are real.

The dunes behind the beach are the defining visual. Parabolic dunes rise 50 to 80 feet above the strand in places, their faces bare sand held only by beachgrass at the crests. Wind-sculpted and constantly shifting, they are among the most visually striking on the National Seashore. Climbing or walking the dune faces is prohibited — destabilization is a genuine erosion risk, and it's enforced.

The beach stretches roughly a mile of usable shoreline between the two parking areas. At lower tides, a longer flat-sand walk is possible in either direction.

Facilities

Lifeguards: Lifeguards are stationed at the National Seashore portion during summer (typically late June through Labor Day), during designated hours. Do not assume coverage outside those hours or outside the flagged swim zone. The Truro town beach section may or may not have concurrent coverage — verify before swimming with young children.

Restrooms: Seasonal restroom facilities are located in the parking area. These are basic seasonal facilities, not full bathrooms.

Concessions: None. This is the biggest practical difference from Race Point or Herring Cove. Bring water, snacks, and lunch. There are no food vendors, no snack shacks, no umbrella rentals on site.

Showers: Outdoor rinse showers are typically available at the lot's edge during the operating season — good for rinsing sand before the drive back.

Accessibility: A beach wheelchair is available at the National Seashore lot during staffed hours. Contact the CCNS visitor center at Salt Pond in Eastham to confirm availability in advance of your trip.

Head of the Meadow Bicycle Trail

One of Truro's underused assets runs directly adjacent to the beach area: the Head of the Meadow Bicycle Trail, a paved 2-mile path that runs from the beach area through the dunes and connects toward the Province Lands trail system near Provincetown. If you're combining a beach day with a bike ride, this trail is the connector.

The trail is flat to gently rolling, appropriate for most fitness levels, and passes through a quiet dune and scrub oak landscape that is notably different from the busier Province Lands loop. It is not heavily trafficked, which makes it good for wildlife spotting — red-tailed hawks and northern harriers are regularly seen working the dune margins.

If you're building a longer cycling day, you can chain the Head of the Meadow trail to the [Province Lands Bike Trail](#) for a full Outer Cape cycling loop covering some of the most dramatic terrain in the region.

Surfing and Bodyboarding

Head of the Meadow is one of the better surf spots in Truro and draws a small but consistent local surf community. The beach break here is faster and punchier than the gentler waves at some Outer Cape spots, and the sandbar

configuration changes after every significant storm. On the right swell, the peaks near the south end of the beach can produce rideable lefts and rights.

If you're a beginner, this is not the right beach to learn. The shorebreak is abrupt and can be powerful enough to knock you down in knee-deep water. Intermediate and above surfers with proper equipment will find it worthwhile, particularly in the shoulder seasons when the crowds are gone.

Bodyboarders use the same area — the beach is not formally designated for surfing at specific sections the way Race Point is, so awareness of the flagged swim zone and where the lifeguard is stationed matters.

Surf lessons and equipment rentals are not offered at the beach itself. For lessons or gear on the Outer Cape, check the CCC directory for outfitters in Provincetown and Wellfleet.

Wildlife and Birding

The dune and shrub habitat backing Head of the Meadow is excellent for birding, particularly in late summer and fall migration. The beach itself draws shorebirds at low tide — sanderlings, dunlin, and semi-palmated sandpipers work the wave wash from July onward. By August, the early southbound shorebird migration is underway and the numbers increase.

In the dunes: American kestrel, prairie warbler, and field sparrow nest in the scrub. Common nighthawks hawk insects over the dune crests at dusk in August. In fall, sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks move through.

Gray seals haul out on the bars north of the beach, particularly in the off-season. Keep a respectful distance — 150 feet is the NOAA guideline.

Best Time to Go

Early morning in July and August (before 9am): The lots are open, the surf is often calmer in the morning hours, and you'll have the beach largely to yourself for the first hour or two. The light on the dunes from the east is exceptional.

Late afternoon on weekdays: The lots clear out as families leave for dinner. The beach is often nearly empty by 4pm in midsummer.

September: This is the local's consensus best month. The water temperature peaks in late August and holds into September, the crowds drop dramatically after Labor Day, the parking is free (the NPS fee season typically runs through Labor Day, though confirm current year dates), and the light is softer. September weekends at Head of the Meadow feel like the beach most visitors are hoping to find when they picture Cape Cod.

October: Cold water, dramatic skies, shorebird and hawk migration, solitude. Not for swimming, but worth the trip for photographers and birders. The dunes in October afternoon light are extraordinary.

Avoid: Saturday and Sunday mornings in July and August unless you arrive before 9am. Both lots fill and the service road backs up.

Nearby — What to Pair It With

Truro is thin on commercial density by design, which is part of its appeal. A few worthwhile stops within a short drive:

- **Truro Vineyards:** A few miles south on Route 6, one of the few working vineyards on Cape Cod. Worth a stop in the afternoon.
- **The Blacksmith Shop:** A long-standing Truro deli/store near North Truro, useful for provisions before the beach.
- **Highland Light (Cape Cod Light):** The oldest lighthouse on Cape Cod sits in Truro's Highland district, a 10-minute drive from the beach. The Highland Golf Links, the oldest golf course in the US, is on the same property. Tours of the lighthouse are available seasonally — check current hours before going.
- **Pilgrim Spring Trail and Small's Swamp Trail:** Two short NPS walking trails in Truro accessible from a parking area off Route 6, good for a low-exertion nature walk before or after the beach.

For [whale watching departures](#), Provincetown is 4 miles north — the primary launch point for Stellwagen Bank trips.

Rules and Etiquette

The Cape Cod National Seashore operates under federal rules, which differ from state or town beaches in some ways:

- **Dogs:** Dogs are prohibited on the beach from 9am to 6pm during the summer season (typically Memorial Day through Labor Day). Before 9am and after 6pm, leashed dogs are allowed. Dogs are prohibited year-round on certain protected areas — check signage on arrival.
 - **Fires:** Fires are not permitted on NPS-managed beaches including this one.
 - **Dune climbing:** Prohibited. The dune faces are actively managed for erosion control and vegetation. Stay on designated paths.
 - **Drone flying:** Drones require an NPS Special Use Permit. Casual recreational drone use is not permitted within CCNS boundaries.
 - **Fishing:** Surf fishing is allowed. A Massachusetts fishing license is required for anglers 15 and older. Striped bass runs in June and September are the primary draw.
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Practical Pre-Trip Checklist

- Bring all food and water — no concessions on site
 - Verify your NPS pass or budget for daily parking fee
 - Arrive before 9:30am on summer weekends or plan for an afternoon arrival
 - Check the CCNS website for current lifeguard hours before swimming with young children
 - If bringing a dog, plan arrival before 9am or after 6pm
 - Pack sunscreen and a hat — the dune bowl can be windless and hot in summer afternoons
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Frequently Asked Questions

Is Head of the Meadow Beach part of Cape Cod National Seashore? Yes — the National Seashore manages one of the two adjacent parking lots. The other lot immediately next to it is managed by the Town of Truro. Both access the same contiguous beach. Your America the Beautiful pass or NPS weekly beach pass works in the NPS lot but not the Truro town lot.

Can I bring my dog to Head of the Meadow Beach? Dogs are allowed before 9am and after 6pm during summer (Memorial Day through Labor Day), on a leash. Mid-day, dogs must wait at the parking area or in the car.

In the off-season, leashed dogs are generally welcome during daylight hours — verify current NPS rules for the season before your trip.

Is the water safe for swimming at Head of the Meadow? The beach is Atlantic-facing with real surf and the possibility of rip currents. Swim within the flagged zone when lifeguards are on duty. It is not a calm-water beach and is not appropriate for very young swimmers or weak swimmers without close supervision. Check water quality notices from the Barnstable County Health Department before swimming.

Is there food available at Head of the Meadow Beach? No. There are no concessions, no food trucks, and no nearby restaurants within walking distance. Pack everything you need before you leave for the beach.

When does the National Seashore parking fee apply? The NPS fee season at Head of the Meadow typically runs from late June through Labor Day. Before and after that window, the lot is generally free. Confirm current-year dates on the CCNS website — the NPS occasionally adjusts fee season boundaries.

How does Head of the Meadow compare to Race Point Beach? Race Point has concessions, full facilities, a lifeguard program, and more consistent surf — and significantly more crowded parking. Head of the Meadow has none of the conveniences but also a fraction of the crowd, dramatically more impressive dune scenery at close range, and a quieter experience overall. Most experienced Outer Cape visitors prefer Head of the Meadow once they know it exists.

Plan Your Outer Cape Day

Head of the Meadow is one of several exceptional National Seashore beaches in the region. Explore the [CCC directory](#) for outfitters, surf instructors, bike rentals, and dining options in Truro, Wellfleet, and Provincetown to build a full Outer Cape day. The directory covers only verified local businesses — no national chains or generic listings.



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