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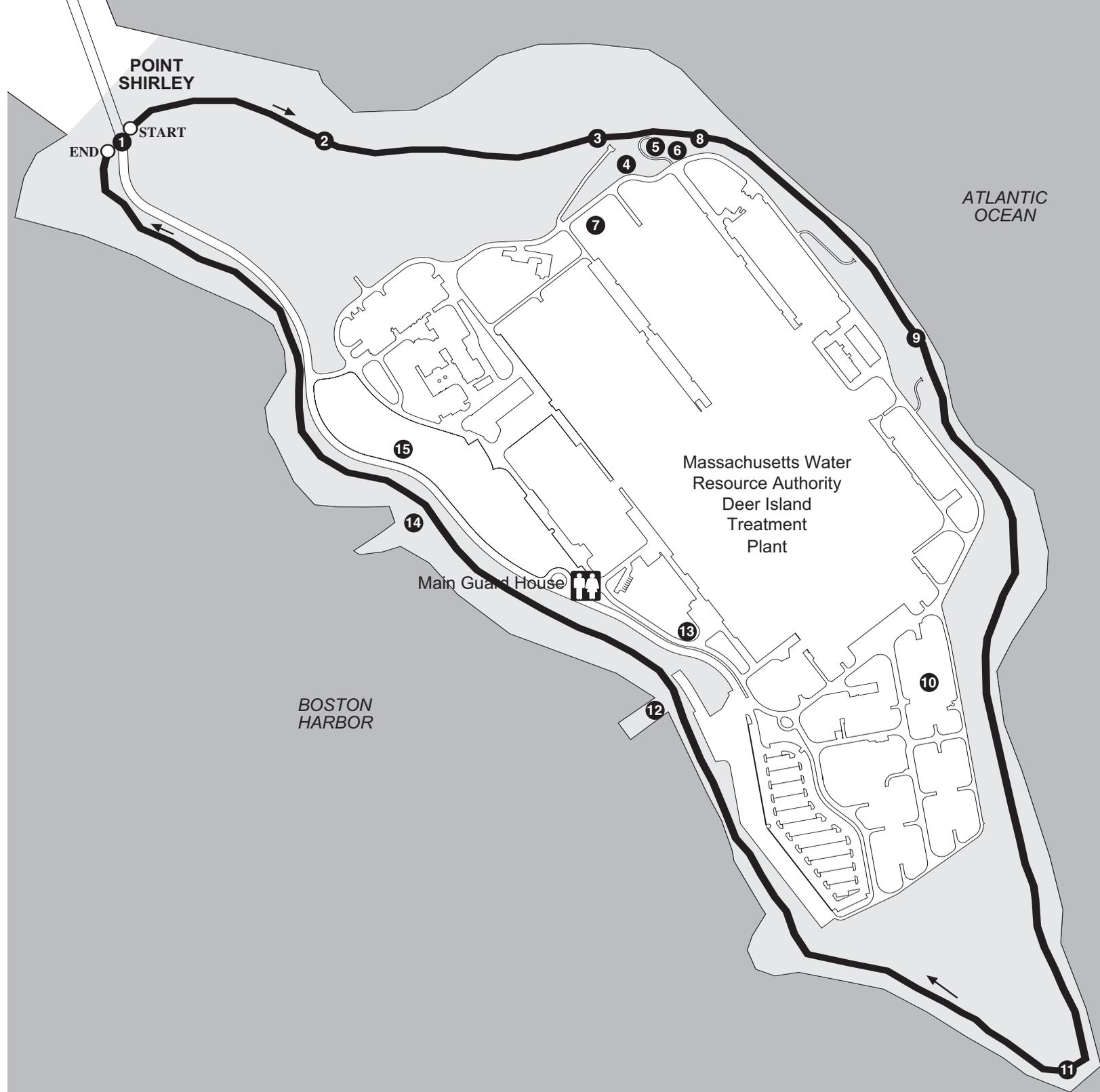
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## Deer Island: tech jewel in the crown

**From a high hill on the northern end of Deer Island, you can see dramatic views of Boston’s skyline to the west, Hull’s windmill to the southeast, the harbor’s 29 other islands, lighthouses near and far, and open sea all the way to Europe. At the southern end of the island is the \$4 billion wastewater treatment plant, opened in 2001 to end centuries of sewage discharges to the harbor. This island facility, surrounded by parkland, has become the technological jewel in the crown of the Boston Harbor Islands National Park. The giant treatment plant – especially the 15-story egg-shaped sludge digester installation—form a dramatic backdrop to the 60 acres of park that ring the island.**

**Despite its name, Deer Island is not an island at all, but a peninsula connected to the Town of Winthrop. In colonial times Shirley Gut, which separated the island and the mainland, was a respectable 325 feet across—wide enough to allow the frigate USS Constitution to steal out to sea to escape British blockaders during the War of 1812. Deer Island remained intact until a 1938 hurricane filled Shirley Gut with sand. In 1941, the US Army built Fort Dawes on the island and constructed a road across the former Shirley Gut waterway.**

**Before being connected to the mainland, Deer Island had a dark side. From the 1600s, the island was home to Boston’s unwanted, including quarantined immigrants and criminals, Native Americans, orphans, paupers and the military. Today, those remnants are gone and Deer Island works to keep pollution out of Boston Harbor and to provide recreation for regional residents. A walk on Deer Island’s new 2.6-mile handicapped-accessible perimeter walkway will take you along some of the harbor’s most breathtaking, heartbreaking, and interesting sites.**

## The walk

The walk begins at the Point Shirley parking lot.

❶ **Point Shirley** – A part of the Town of Winthrop and named in 1753 for colonial Governor Shirley, the point has a varied history: in the mid-18th century, it became as a summer resort for Boston aristocrats. By the middle of the 19th century, Taft’s Hotel (or the Point Shirley House) was a celebrated resort for New England gourmets, with a menu that included hummingbirds prepared in nutshells.

❷ **The view over Winthrop** – The settlement of Winthrop began when Dr. Samuel Ingalls bought 40 acres of land, laid it out in building lots and avenues, and sold parcels for 1.5 to 2 cents a square foot. Logan International Airport is directly west. The nearby National Park Service’s interpretive sign describes how three harbor islands were connected and enlarged to create the airport. Another sign names the buildings in Boston’s skyline.

❸ **The best viewing spot on Deer Island** – From the top of the 135-foot, manmade hill you can see the entire harbor. This hill is made up of material from a glacial drumlin that formed the center of Deer Island. To make room for wastewater treatment plant construction, the drumlin was moved to this northern part of the island to shield Winthrop residents from the noise and dust of construction and operations.

❹ **The restored New Resthaven Cemetery** – Refugees of the Great Irish Famine, who died in a Deer Island hospital, are buried here. In the mid-1800s, 2 million Irish fled their homeland to escape death by starvation. In 1847 alone, as many as 25,000 traveled by ship to Boston. Deer Island was designated as a quarantine station. Of the nearly 5,000 refugees who were quarantined, approximately 850 died and were buried at the island’s Resthaven Cemetery.

❺ **Remains of island fortifications** – Boston Harbor was a fortress from earliest times through World War II. Radio communication centers were here and nets to prevent submarines from entering the harbor stretched from Deer Island to Hull. The fort here had bunkers with 12-foot-thick walls and concrete roofs nearly 17 feet thick, and a pair of naval guns capable of firing as far north as Gloucester and south to Plymouth.

❻ **Deer Island’s 130-foot-high water tower** – Here, you look down the hill to the rows of settling tanks - closed tanks for primary wastewater treatment and open tanks for secondary treatment, when odor- and disease-causing bacteria have been nearly removed. Far to the south the “Goliath” crane marks the Fore River Staging Area, once a terminus for barges, cargo and supplies, and now home to a sludge plant that converts our sewage solids into fertilizer.

❼ **The Suffolk County House of Correction** – Now demolished, this was the last in a series of institutions for the unwanted on Deer Island. The original five-story structure, completed in 1904, was one of the first institutions in the nation built specially for women. When the prison closed in 1991, it ended one of the oldest continuing penal institutions in the western hemisphere.

❽ **Two black iron benches** – Facing the sea, the benches commemorate the lives of two young workers who died in 1999 during the construction of the effluent outfall tunnel. Look out to the Graves - the island with the nearest lighthouse - and imagine a 27-foot-diameter concrete tunnel that was bored through hard rock under it to reach 9.5 miles from Deer Island’s shore. The tunnel, starting from the bottom of a 420-foot deep shaft on Deer Island, is capable of discharging nearly a billion gallons of treated wastewater daily.

❾ **The seawall** – This side of Deer Island is protected from the ocean’s fury with a concave curve that absorbs some of the force of the waves, controls their direction and throws them back to the sea. When the tide comes in to the nearby sandbar, called Great Faun, so do charter fishing boats, whose passengers use an irresistible lure made of a long piece of rubber tubing tipped with a hook and a seaworm.

❿ **Twelve egg-shaped sludge digesters** – Standing 150 feet tall, the digesters hold three million gallons of wastewater. The egg design, rare in the United States, allows digesters to be located on a fraction of the space needed for conventional tanks. The eight eggs nearest the water and the two egg cups (sludge storage tanks) were barged up the coast from Maryland. The remaining four 720-ton eggs were built of steel in Quincy. All are clad with weather-resistant aluminum panels.

⓫ **The island’s southern tip** – A small lighthouse 400 yards out in the harbor marks the dangerous shoals at the northern edge of President Roads, Boston Harbor’s main shipping channel. Its light is visible from 14 miles away. Nearby, on a stone jetty, fishermen are known to drop “swimming plugs” into outgoing nighttime tides. Very large striped bass are rumored to find the swimming motion of the plugs irresistible.

⓬ **The island pier** – Completed in 1990, the pier handled more than 1.6 million worker trips to the treatment facility construction site from passenger terminals around the harbor. An adjacent roll-on/roll-off pier brought nearly 222,000 cargo-carrying trucks to Deer Island. Without the pier, you can imagine the decade-long, ‘round-the-clock traffic jam that construction traffic would have brought to Winthrop.

⓭ **The old 1890s steam-driven pump station** – The only remnant of Deer Island’s past now serves as a visitors center. At the station, operating until 1968, you can see one of the original steam engines on the first floor.

⓮ **A memorial to the Native Americans** – Those who died here in 1675 during King Philip’s War are acknowledged for the forced internment and the hardships they suffered on Deer Island. Now, new construction and a new park in the center of the harbor suggest a new beginning.

⓯ **The thermal power plant** – A backup power source for the treatment facility, this plant generates power by converting methane gas from the twelve sludge digesters into electricity, saving money, and eliminating a source of objectionable odor and possible danger.

The walk ends at the Point Shirley parking lot.