

MOUNT HOPE HOPSCOTCH

Overlooked by many boaters, Mount Hope Bay offers a host of attractive spots in which to wile away a day—or week—on the water.

**BY CAPTAIN DAVE BILL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CATE BROWN**

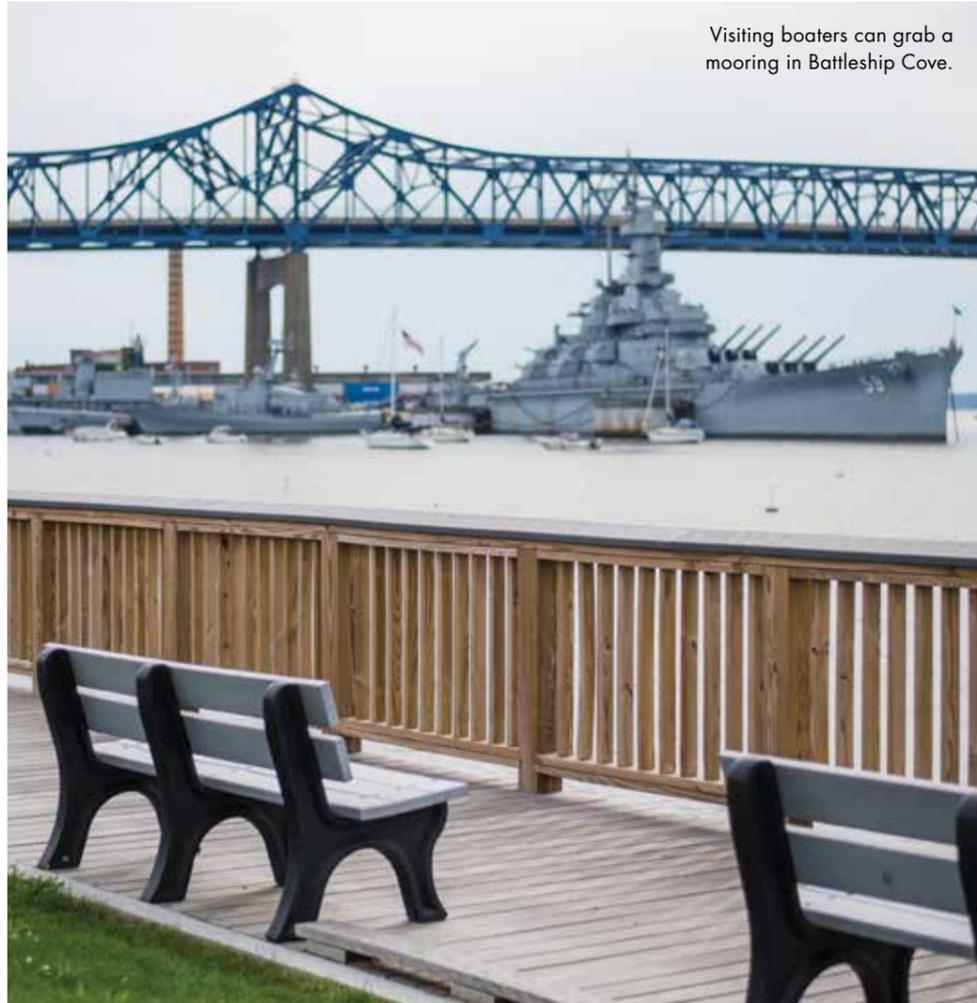
Mount Hope Bay, shared by Massachusetts and Rhode Island, doesn't get a lot of attention from boaters. But it should. The bay is filled with interesting places to dock, drop an anchor or explore in a small boat, so you could fill an entire week visiting a new spot every day.

Every summer, I spend a significant amount of time on the bay aboard a 36-foot Union cutter, so I've gotten to know and love this body of water, which offers everything from interesting things to see and do to great dock-and-dine restaurants to scenic spots where one can drop the hook and take a dip. Here are some of my favorite places to visit, as well as some points of interest.

The main gateway to Mount Hope Bay (which is named after a small hill on its western shore) is via the center span of the Mount Hope Bridge, with Hog Island Shoal to port and Musselbed Shoals to starboard. You can also enter, from the north, via the Taunton River, and from the south, via the Sakonnet River. Although the Army Corps of Engineers maintains a 35-foot-deep shipping channel through the bay up to Fall River, be mindful of navigational aids that mark obstructions such as Spar Island or Old Bay Rock. If sailing, you'll also need to plan your itinerary around the strong tidal currents.



Visiting boaters can grab a mooring in Battleship Cove.



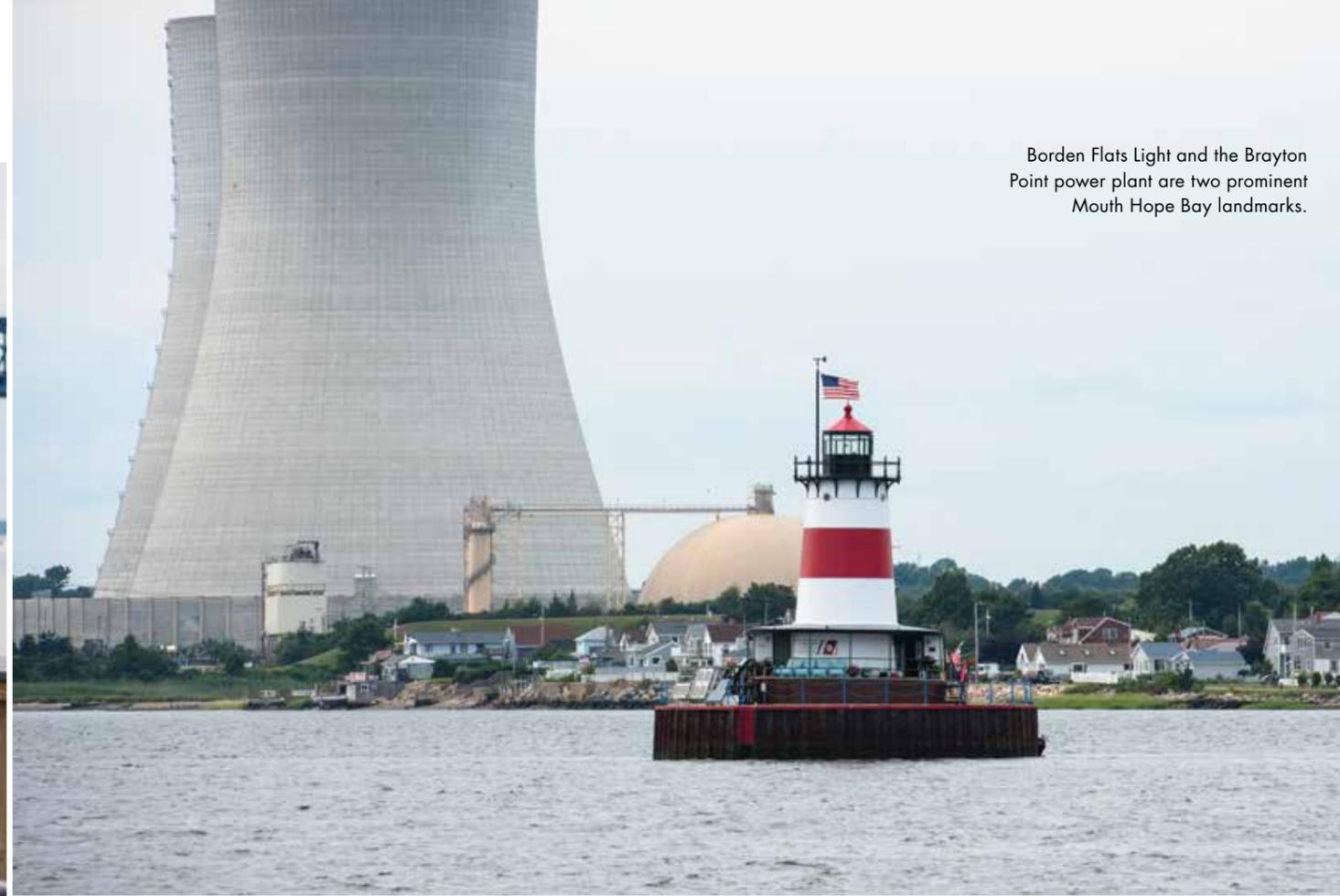
FALL RIVIERA

The city of Fall River, once a thriving textile center, often gets a bad rap, but it offers a treasure trove of things to do and see. One of the main attractions is Battleship Cove, home to the world's largest collection of World War II naval vessels, including the battleship *Massachusetts* and the attack submarine *USS Lionfish*. Reserve a mooring through the harbormaster's office and you can spend the night in the shadow of these historic warships.

If you wish to explore downtown Fall River, you can tie up at the public dinghy dock on the south end of Battleship Cove. If traveling with small children, don't miss a ride on the 1920-built Fall River Carousel. You can also stroll along the waterfront boardwalk through Fall River Heritage State Park or take in a show at the Narrows Center for the Arts, a premier destination for the visual and performing arts.

Few people realize that Fall River was an important stop on the Fall River Line, a combination steamboat and railroad route between New York City and Boston from 1847 to 1937. The steamboats of the FRL were some of the most advanced and luxurious of the day, and you can learn more about this era at the Marine Museum and Visitor's Center in Heritage State Park.

Borden Flats Light and the Brayton Point power plant are two prominent Mouth Hope Bay landmarks.



The Boathouse restaurant in Tiverton offers a long pier for boating patrons.

DOCK & DINES

Mount Hope Bay also has a couple of dock-and-dine options worth checking out. My favorites are The Cove in Fall River and The Boathouse in Tiverton. Both offer transient dockage, plus some pretty good food. It's best to call ahead at The Cove to arrange a space, but it's first come, first-served at The Boathouse's pier.

If you're in the mood for a party atmosphere, take a funky detour into Borden Light Marina, directly east of Borden Flats Lighthouse. The marina always has a few slips available for transients or free dockage for daytrippers on either side of the Topsy Seagull, the marina's double-decker floating pub and restaurant. Take in the sunset while sipping a Topsy Sunset and enjoying a Seagull Stuffy appetizer. You can also take the gratis Topsy Taxi, a 1972 four-door Cadillac convertible, to visit downtown Fall River or to the equally funky Topsy Toboggan, the Seagull's sister fireside pub that's decorated to resemble a Vermont ski lodge. In late August, Borden Light Marina plays host to the Fall River Grand Prix, New England's only offshore powerboat race. Contestants compete for \$35,000 in prize money on a 2 1/2-mile course on the bay and lower Taunton River.

RENT-A-LIGHT

Approaching the Braga Bridge, which connects Fall River to the town of Somerset, you'll notice the white-and-red, 47-foot tower of Borden Flats Light, which marks Borden Flats shoal. Built in 1881, the light is now privately owned and available for overnight stays. Renters can take a water taxi from Borden Light Marina to access the light.

SEA SAVVY

On my summer cruises, I often drop the hook off the Bristol campus of Roger Williams University, near the base of the Mount Hope bridge, to visit one of my favorite watermen, Matt Griffin. Matt is the university's shellfish restoration and aquaculture research associate. Among his many duties is providing technical assistance to sea farmers, conducting research on shellfish aquaculture and investigating the ecological dynamics of shellfish restoration in Rhode Island, along with managing the university's shellfish farm.



Anglers will find plenty of scup on the bottom of the bay.



Borden Light Marina in Fall River offers overnight slips and free dockage at the Topsy Seagull.

CHURCH COVE

Breathtaking Mount Hope Farm borders Church Cove, on the bay's western shore. I regularly anchor in the protected nine-foot hole between Seal Rock and Mount Hope Point. Although there is no public landing on the cove, you can beach a kayak or dinghy along its shore and explore the property. On the north shore of the cove is Cove Cabin, one of the property's function venues, available to the public for rent. The farm offers lovely walking trails, a Saturday morning farmer's market, gardens, a beautiful bed-and-breakfast and more. History buffs take note that the farm occupies the spiritual grounds of Metacomet's Pokanoket tribe. The scenic cove deserves exploration in a kayak or dinghy, and is a great spot to cast for stripers, but larger boats should be careful of the many hidden rocks therein.

THREE RIVERS

The Kickemuit River, in the northwest corner of the bay, is one of my favorite gunkholes, and makes a fine anchorage in any weather. When entering the river, mind the channel markers carefully. Once through Bristol Narrows, the river opens into an expansive area. The center is deepest, with shallow water on all sides, and you can usually find plenty of room to drop the hook.

In the north end of the bay, on either side of Gardiner's Neck, are the Cole and Lee Rivers. The Cole is my favorite of the two, with a nice day-anchoring area just off Ocean Grove Beach. You can explore further past the small entrance at the sand spit in a kayak or shoal-draft dinghy.

The neighboring Lee River is less attractive than the Cole due to the unsightly, but soon-to-be-shuttered Brayton Point power plant, plus it lacks a protected anchorage. Still, the upriver areas offer some interesting paddling opportunities. 

MOUNT HOPE BAY AT A GLANCE

DOCKAGE, MOORINGS & SERVICE

CITY OF FALL RIVER

(774) 955-0123; fallriverharbormaster.org

Transient moorings in Battleship Cove, just above the Braga Bridge.

BORDEN LIGHT MARINA

(508) 678-7547; bordenlightmarina.com

Fall River marina offering transient slips, a swimming pool, hot tub, laundry, showers, grills and more. Home of the Topsy Seagull restaurant and bar.

THE COVE MARINA

(508) 672-4540; cove392.com

Transient slips for boats over 25 feet. Onsite restaurant with free tie-up for patrons.

BREWER SAKONNET MARINA

(401) 683-3551; byy.com

Full-service marina on the Portsmouth side of the Sakonnet River.

LAUNCH RAMPS

BRISTOL NARROWS, BRISTOL

At end of Narrows Road, on the Kickemuit River.

MT. HOPE FISHING ACCESS, BRISTOL

End of Annawamscutt Road in Bristol. Trailer parking available.

SAKONNET BRIDGE, TIVERTON

Public access to the Sakonnet River and lower Mount Hope Bay. Concrete ramp and parking.

BICENTENNIAL PARK, FALL RIVER

Access to the Taunton River and Fall River area. Concrete ramp with floating dock and 46 parking spaces.

GULL COVE, PORTSMOUTH

Public access to The Cove, which opens into the narrows of the Sakonnet River.

WHERE TO EAT

THE COVE

(508) 672-4540; cove392.com

Fall River eatery offering good food and transient dockage.

THE BOATHOUSE

(401) 624-6300; boathousetiverton.com

Tiverton-based restaurant offering upscale cuisine and free transient dockage.

THE TIPSY SEAGULL

thetipsyseagull.com; (508) 678-7547

Festive dock-and-dine at Borden Light Marina offering live music and outdoor patio overlooking the bay.

THE TIPSY TOBOGGAN

(508) 567-0550; thetipsytoboggan.com

Ski lodge-themed restaurant and bar near the waterfront in Fall River.

THINGS TO SEE & DO

NARROWS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

(508) 324-1926; narrowscenter.org

Visual and performing arts venue in Fall River.

FALL RIVER HERITAGE STATE PARK

(508) 675-5759

Boardwalk, benches and a three-acre meadow bordering the Fall River waterfront.

BATTLESHIP COVE

(508) 678-1100; battleshipcove.org

Non-profit maritime museum and war memorial featuring the world's largest collection of World War II naval vessels. Tours available.

FALL RIVER MARITIME MUSEUM

(508) 674-3533; battleshipcove.org

Nautical-themed museum featuring memorabilia, artifacts and models of the Fall River Line steamboats and the *Titanic*.

MT. HOPE FARM

(401) 254-1745; mounthopefarm.org

Wander the public walking trails of this beautiful property in Bristol. Also offers a year-round farmer's market, bed and breakfast, and venues for weddings and other events.

BORDEN FLATS LIGHTHOUSE

bordenflats.com

Spend the night in this historic lighthouse off Fall River.