

Dominion Gooses Reef Buoy History

Welcome to NOAA's Gooses Reef Interpretive Buoy, located in the Chesapeake's main stem between the mouth of the Little Choptank River to the east and Calvert Cliffs to the west, at 38 degrees 33.375 minutes North latitude, 76 degrees 24.882 minutes West longitude. It lies just east of what fishermen call the Gooses Bell Buoy, red marker number 78 along the Chesapeake's main channel.

The buoy sits in 35 feet of water on a relatively shallow shelf between the Bay's deep main channel and the channel flowing out of the big Choptank River. It probably was a large oyster reef reaching nearly to the surface when Captain John Smith and his crew first sailed by here on June 11, 1608, during their first exploratory voyage up the Bay.

While in the Nanticoke River, the Indians told Smith's crew about a great tribe called the Massawomeck. Having previously heard that this tribe lived on wide water to the north, and perhaps thinking that this water must be the famed (but mythical) Northwest Passage, Smith pressed his crew downriver. They crossed the Bay near the site of this buoy, to spend the night along the western shore's "Ricard's Cliffs" (today's Calvert and Scientists' Cliffs), which he found to be "well-watered, full of deer and bears," but without Indians. This part of the Chesapeake's western shore stood between the Patuxent tribes to the south and the powerful Massawomeck and Susquehannock people to the north.

The next day, Smith and crew sailed north, passing "many shallow creeks" (including today's West, Rhode, South, Severn, and Magothy Rivers), before turning into "the first we found navigable for a ship" (today's Patapsco). Smith and crew passed by here again June 22 on their way south to the Potomac, again on July 29 headed for the Susquehanna, and on August 8 on their way back down to the Patuxent. Today, he would be surprised to find this buoy and the nearby #78 bell here, but he would certainly recognize the long line of cliffs to the west.