

Cumberland Island

National Seashore
Georgia

Official Map and Guide



Forests so quiet that you can hear yourself breathe, sunlight filtered and diffused through over-arching trees and vines, sounds of small animals scurrying in the underbrush, the gentle splash of water moving through the salt marsh, the courting bellow of the alligator, blinding light on water and sand as you emerge from the shadows of the live oak forest, a standing row of slave cabin chimneys, fallow gardens, and crumbling

walls of mansions from bygone eras. This is Cumberland Island, Georgia's largest and southernmost barrier island and today a national seashore.

The word "seashore" is misleading, for Cumberland Island is a complex ecological system of interdependent animal and plant communities. Each lends itself to the preservation of the other. A system of foredunes protects the interdune meadow and shrub thickets. A canopy

of live oak trees stretches out just beyond the back dunes that provide protection from the salt spray. In the central and northern sections of the island, pine trees tower over mixed hardwood forests. On the western side of the island, saltwater marshes pulse with the tidal flow. Because the previous owners maintained Cumberland Island in its natural state, nature still reigns on this land that bears the imprint of humankind.

Saltwater Marshes



Approaching the island from St. Marys, Georgia, the marshes first come into view. When the tide is out, the marsh appears like a broad plain of tall grasses intricately interwoven with tidal creeks. Closer examination reveals an array of birds wading through the grass or feeding at the banks of the creeks. Fiddler crabs scurry across the mud flats and eat decaying vegetation and other organic material. Raccoons and other animals come down from the uplands to feed on crabs and to search for shellfish.

When the tide is in, the tops of the grasses sway with the current, making it hard to distinguish between grass and water, the color of one intensifying the color of the other. These tides play a vital role in the life of the marsh, for on their flood cycle they bring the microscopic organisms that many creatures need for nourishment and the water that they need from which to draw oxygen. On their ebb, the tides flush the silt and debris washed into the marsh from the inland rivers out to sea. The marshes buffer the landward side of the island from the twice daily influx of tidal flow and absorb some of the impact of storms. Marshes possess quiet, changeable beauty, and yet they are the most productive land acre per acre on this planet. With their wealth of nutrients, marshlands support large populations of fish, shellfish, plants, and bird-life. They also act as nurseries. Here in the grasses and shallow waters, the young of many species begin their lives protected from predators.



Maritime Forest



As the marshlands become higher and drier, washed only at extremely high tides, the salt-tolerant communities give way to freshwater-loving plants and, then, finally, to trees. The most striking feature of the live oak forest is the solitude. Even the air seems to move noiselessly above the tops of the trees' arching branches. The sounds of an ordinary rainshower are muted by the dense canopy of leaves and vines. Cradled in the branches, Resurrection ferns spring up with this life-giving moisture. Draping Spanish moss lends a touch of the exotic as it sways in the breeze. The vivid plumage of painted buntings, summer tanagers, cardinals, and pileated woodpeckers add a splash of color to the somber hues of the forest while the clear notes of yellow-throated warblers and Carolina-wrens punctuate the stillness.

Deeper in the forest's shadows at the midday, or in the interdune meadows at dusk, you may catch a fleeting image of the island's numerous whitetail deer. Raccoons, the masked bandits of the forest, are frequently seen as they tour the island on their nightly forays. You may come across a shy and newly arrived resident, the armadillo, first seen on Cumberland in 1974. Sloughs mark the eastern edge of the forest, where trees give way to the realm of dunes and beach. Farther inland, fresh water ponds appear like jewels. Here on a warm spring night you can hear the booming of the bull alligator as it goes through its courtship rites. Rainfall sustains the ponds and in turn the wildlife that are drawn to them, adding yet another dimension to the island.

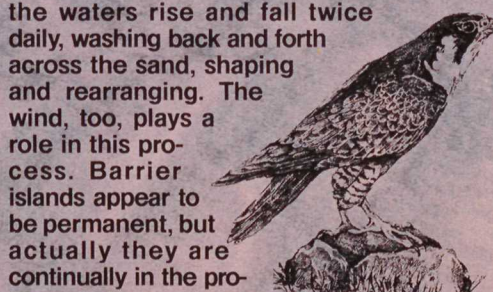


Beach



Emerging from the darkness of the forest to the brightness of the beach, you momentarily lose your sight, so sudden is the change. On the beach the waters rise and fall twice daily, washing back and forth across the sand, shaping and rearranging. The wind, too, plays a role in this process. Barrier islands appear to be permanent, but actually they are continually in the process of change. In some areas on Cumberland Island, you may notice the dunes covering the shrubs and trees in their path. The plants that grow on the dunes are the stabilizing element. Their root systems are fragile and are affected by the impact of humans and animals. Overgrazing by the island's feral horses may impair the ability of some grasses to reproduce.

Here the shorebirds are given to the spirit of movement. Sandpipers dance before the rhythmic advance and retreat of the water, and gulls soar on the ocean breeze. An osprey may dive into a wave before your eyes and a few seconds later emerge with a mullet in its talons. Loggerhead turtles, ancient reptiles of the sea, lumber ashore on Cumberland's deserted beaches at night. Guided by instinct, they lay their eggs and then return to the sea. Hatchlings emerge about 60 days later and scurry for the protection of the surf. Today tracks of humans, birds, and other animals mark the beach. Tomorrow they will have been swept away, and the beach will take on new configurations.



Drawings: Casey French Alexander
Photo: David Milburn

The Human Imprint



Plum Orchard Mansion

For thousands of years people have lived on Cumberland Island, but never in such numbers as to permanently alter the character of the landscape. Piles of shells, called middens, provide us with clues to the lives of the Indians who left them. An occasional pot shard indicates that Spanish soldiers and missionaries were here in the mid-1500s. No signs remain of Fort William and Fort St. Andrews, built to protect British interests. Revolutionary War hero Gen.

Nathanael Greene purchased land on Cumberland Island in 1783. His widow, Catherine Greene, constructed a four-story tabby home that she named Dungeness. In the 1890s, the Settlement was established for black workers. The First African Baptist Church, established in 1893 and rebuilt in the 1930s, is one of the few remaining structures of this community. Thomas Carnegie, brother and partner of steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, began building, with

his wife Lucy, on Dungeness's foundations in 1884. The ruins of this mansion remain today. Plum Orchard, an 1898 Georgian Revival mansion built for son, George, and his wife, Margaret Thaw, was donated to the National Park Foundation by Carnegie family members in 1971. Their contribution, as well as funds from supporting foundations, helped win Congressional approval for establishing Cumberland Island National Seashore.

Cumberland Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Enjoying the Park



Photo: Andre Jenny

Ferry Information A ferry transports passengers between St. Marys, Georgia, and Cumberland Island on a daily basis, except October to March when the ferry does not operate on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. A fee is charged and the ferry does not carry cars, bicycles, or pets. Mainland departure times are 9 and 11:45 a.m.; island departures are 10:15 a.m. and 4:45 p.m. Reservations can be made by calling 912-882-4335 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you miss the last ferry from the island, you must charter a boat to return.

Supplies No supplies are available on the

island. You must bring everything that you will need with you. Drinking water is available at the two visitor centers and at Sea Camp Beach campground. Comfortable walking shoes and rain gear are recommended.

Camping All camping is limited to seven days. Campers may choose between one developed and four primitive backcountry sites. The developed campground at Sea Camp Beach has restrooms, cold showers, and drinking water. Campfires are permitted at Sea Camp, but only dead and downed wood may be used. None of the backcountry sites—Yankee Paradise, Hickory Hill, Brickhill, and

Stafford Beach—has any facilities. Wells are near each backcountry campsite; the water should be treated. Campfires are not permitted in the backcountry and portable stoves are suggested. Camping permits for all overnight use must be obtained from the Sea Camp Visitor Center. Camping reservations

are required and can be made by calling 912-882-4335 Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Fishing Georgia state fishing laws apply.

Weather Cumberland Island's climate is moderate with short, mild winters. Summer temperatures range from

the 80s°F to low 90s°F. During the summer it is best to visit the beach early and late in the day and to retreat to the shade of the forest during the hot midday hours.

Private Property Some of Cumberland Island is still in private ownership. Respect the right of landowners and do not trespass.

Safety The ruins of Dungeness and most of its outbuildings are unstable. For that reason and because the diamondback rattlesnake, one of three poisonous snakes living on the island, can be found in these ruins, these structures are closed. Ticks, carriers of Lyme Dis-

ease, are present. A good tick check is recommended. The beaches are not protected by lifeguards, so exercise caution; sharks may be present in the surf. During periodic managed hunts, the island is closed to the public.

Cumberland Island National Seashore is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 350 units representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance. For answers to questions not addressed in this folder, write to: Superintendent, Cumberland Island National Seashore, P.O. Box 806, St. Marys, GA 31558.



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