

Fort Dupont Park

Washington, D.C.



A “park for all seasons” describes the 376 rolling wooded acres that make up one of the largest parks in all of Washington. Picnics, nature walks, Civil War programs, gardening, environmental education, music, skating, sports, and youth programs are among the varied seasonal activities at this spacious area east of the Anacostia River.

Among the traces of old roadways, oaks, beech, maples, and pine cover the hillsides. Squirrels and rabbits find homes along with the night foragers—raccoons and opossums. The pink lady-slipper orchid blooms in quiet shade.

At the park’s Activity Center, heart of much that goes on, park rangers lead workshops and walks. Neighboring schools bring young students for nature study and to learn about special people, cultural traditions, and holiday events. The center’s showcases display uniforms and equipment of black soldiers who served the Union in the Civil War. Summer days are alive with children participating in a Junior Ranger program. Weekend jazz concerts, free to all, draw people to the lawns around the outdoor summer stage.

The Fort

East of the Activity Center the park land rises to a high ridge, where a bronze plaque on a boulder just off Alabama Avenue marks the site of Fort Dupont as “one of the defenses begun in the fall of 1861.” More than 100 years ago, in the Civil War, the siege guns of Fort Dupont guarded the Eleventh Street bridge over the Anacostia River near the Washington Navy Yard. Abraham Lincoln had no sooner taken the presidential oath to uphold the Union than war began. The capital city, says one history account, “was an island in a hostile sea,” because it stood between the Confederacy and Maryland’s doubtful loyalty. Engineers hastily set to work to fortify the high points of ground all around Washington. By the end of the war, 68 forts and 93 gun batteries formed a ring around the city.

This particular fort had six sides, each 100 feet long, protected by a deep moat and trees felled side by side with branches pointing outward. It was named for Flag Officer Samuel F. du Pont, who commanded the naval victory at Port Royal, South Carolina, in November 1861.

Although its garrison and guns never saw battle, Fort Dupont served as a lifeline

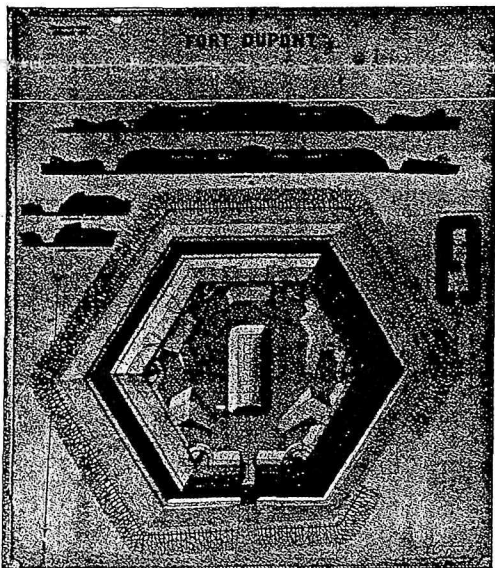
of freedom. Runaway slaves found here before moving on to join the community of “contrabands” in Washington. The barracks and guns are gone; the fort’s earthworks can still be traced the picnic area on Alabama Avenue.

In the 1930s the National Capital Park and Planning Commission acquired the park and surrounding land for recreation. An 18-hole golf course was constructed. In the 1970s the city grew, golf gave way in 1970 to a sports complex along Ely Place that includes tennis and basketball courts, soccer fields, and a softball diamond. An ice rink offers skating all winter.

Where once the Civil War fort loomed over farmlands, city dwellers now grow vegetables in community garden plots.

The sound of busy traffic around the park is hushed at picnic spots under the trees. A hiker-biker trail circling the park also offers a break from the city sounds.

Whatever the day’s activity, the park is a precious community asset. All who love it can help to keep it that way.



Drawing of Fort Dupont, showing gun emplacements and a sally port. Courtesy Fort Ward Museum.

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How to Get There


From downtown Washington, drive east on Pennsylvania Ave., SE, and cross the Sousa Bridge. Turn left on Minnesota Ave. and proceed to Randle Circle. Turn right at the circle to the entrance at Fort Dupont Drive. Or, from Benning Rd., turn right on Minnesota Ave. to Randle Circle. Left around circle to the park.

METRO: Blue or Orange Lines to Potomac Ave. station on Minnesota Ave. Transfer to V4 or V6 bus along Minnesota Ave., SE.

Hours

- Activity Center: 8 am-4 pm Monday through Friday (Tuesday through Saturday in summer)
- Summer Theatre: 7:30-11:30 pm Fridays and Saturdays (June through August)

Facilities

Most available to handicapped 

- Activity Center: crafts, nature walks, films; call 426-7745
- Hiker-Biker trail
- Free summer concerts
- Junior Ranger program, ages 7-14
- Community gardens; call 426-7723 for permit
- Picnic areas; to reserve space, call D.C. Department of Recreation, 673-7647
- Indoor ice rink (fee, skate rental, lessons; call 584-3040)

Information

Fort Dupont Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Call (202) 426-7745, 472-2676 V/TDD, or write: National Capital Parks East
1900 Anacostia Drive, SE
Washington, DC 20020

