



Foundation Document Overview

San Juan Island National Historical Park

Washington



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of SAN JUAN ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve and interpret the sites of American and English Camps and to commemorate the events associated with the final settlement and peaceful arbitration of the Oregon boundary dispute, including the Pig War crisis of 1859. Within these cultural landscapes, the park also protects and interprets natural resources and fosters connections between people and the land.



Significance

Significance statements express why San Juan Island National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- San Juan Island National Historical Park commemorates and interprets the arbitration and resolution of an international boundary dispute and the establishment of lasting, peaceful relationships between the United States, Great Britain, and Canada.
- American and English Camps are national historic landmarks that preserve the authentic settings of these mid-19th-century military encampments and associated communities. The park's well-preserved cultural landscapes and archeological resources convey this history to visitors.
- The park protects and interprets the site of Belle Vue Sheep Farm, one of the last Hudson's Bay Company operations established below the 49th parallel. With an eye to possession, the company introduced modern farm animals and farming methods to San Juan Island in 1853. Generally at odds with indigenous land-use practices, these techniques would forever change the economic and cultural landscapes of the island.
- The park's diverse natural habitats and resources range from rare prairie ecosystems to Garry oak woodlands, wetlands, lagoons, forests, and coastal marine environments. These ecosystems—many of which are rapidly disappearing—are home to threatened species and represent the varied array of ecological communities once prevalent in the Salish Sea bioregion.
- San Juan Island National Historical Park maintains evidence of thousands of years of human presence and effects on the landscape, including use by Coast Salish people, the establishment of military encampments, and development by homesteaders and other early settlers. The park's resources provide an exceptionally detailed record of this continuum of human occupation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Military Encampment-Era Features and Sites**
- **Homestead-Era Landscape Features**
- **Precontact Archeological Resources**
- **Traditional Use Sites**
- **Rich and Varied Ecosystems**
- **Cultural Landscapes**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Collaborative Stewardship**

San Juan Island National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Recreation**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Landforms wrought by ice-age glaciers, such as wave-cut terraces and sweeping prairies along with the terrestrial and marine ecosystems they support, have shaped the lives of people on San Juan Island for millennia and continue to leave a lasting impression on those who spend time in the park.
- The commercial coexistence of peoples from diverse ethnic backgrounds and nationalities at the Hudson Bay Company's Belle Vue Sheep Farm underscores the power of cooperation and tolerance.
- The cultural landscapes of American and English Camps are tangible reminders of both the military occupation and the peaceful resolution of the boundary conflict, illustrating how individuals and nations can settle their differences without resorting to violence.
- The establishment of San Juan Island National Historical Park provides compelling insight into the ongoing evolution of our relationship to the land, environmental citizenship, stewardship ethics, and the internationally shared heritage of public lands conservation.
- San Juan Island National Historical Park protects critical habitat for a number of rare and threatened species and showcases remnants of western Washington prairie, one of the country's most endangered ecosystems.
- Exploring the rich, ongoing history of Coast Salish people on San Juan Island adds a new dimension of understanding of and appreciation for the natural and cultural value of the park.
- The park's trails and shorelines offer outstanding recreational experiences that are living portals into the rich cultural histories of ancient and modern peoples, both native and newcomers.

Description

San Juan Island National Historical Park is on San Juan Island, the second largest island in the San Juan Archipelago in Washington State. The park was established by Congress in 1966 for the purpose of “interpreting and preserving the sites of the American and English camps on the island, and of commemorating the historic events that occurred there from 1853 to 1871 in connection with the final settlement of the Oregon Territory boundary dispute, including the so-called Pig War of 1859” (80 Stat 737, Public Law 89-565). San Juan Island National Historical Park illustrates, in its dramatic and largely intact physical setting, how war can be averted and peace maintained through positive action by individuals and governments. This narrative also provides a window into the little known multicultural and international communities that clashed and coexisted on this shared landscape during the early Territorial period of western Washington.

Today, San Juan Island National Historical Park provides a glimpse of life on the island in the mid-1800s, with stunning vistas, a variety of distinct ecosystems, and diverse recreation.

The park consists of two distinct units, American Camp (1,223 acres) and English Camp (915 acres). The marine ecosystems surrounding these units and their 6 miles of publicly accessible shoreline are renowned for their scenery. The diverse natural resources and historical significance of the park attract more than 250,000 visitors each year, mostly on weekends and during the summer months.



Humans have lived on San Juan Island for thousands of years, making use of the abundant natural resources of the archipelago. The sites that hosted English and American Camps served as gathering places, and the soil and vegetation communities of both sites influenced the settlement and use of these areas by indigenous peoples and Europeans alike.

English Camp is significant as the location of a British Royal Marines camp during the 12-year occupation of the island by British and American troops. It also offered Coast Salish people a protected living area for gathering shellfish and other marine resources. Situated on Garrison and Westcott Bays, the unit comprises marine shoreline, a broad level bank, and surrounding hillsides that host Garry oak woodland/savannah. English Camp features significant historic resources, including four buildings from the military period, the cultural landscape, extensive earth and masonry work, numerous archeological sites, and spaces sacred to the Coast Salish people.

In 2010 and 2013, the park added the Mitchell Hill and Westcott Bay properties, respectively, to the English Camp unit, increasing park lands by 386 acres of woodlands, uplands, and tidelands. The Mitchell Hill property was purchased from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. The state acquired the area as school trust lands in 1889 and managed it for multiple uses to fund education. Throughout the years the area was logged, leased for grazing, and provided recreational opportunities to local residents. Segments of an extant historic road, constructed by the British Royal Marines, traverse the property. The Westcott Bay property was acquired as the result of a unique partnership between the National Park Service, the Conservation Fund, and the Webb family. Following the military occupation period the area was homesteaded. Later, the property was purchased by Bill and Doree Webb who ran the Webb Camp-School, a summer camp for boys, and operated the Westcott Bay Sea Farm.

American Camp is significant as the location of the U.S. Army camp during the joint occupation, but it was also significant to the first inhabitants. The prairies were an important base for harvesting native plants and game, and the shorelines were optimal for fishing and collecting shellfish and other marine resources. The site occupies part of the southeast peninsula of San Juan Island, is composed of a broad ridge overlooking Griffin Bay to the north and Haro Strait and the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the south, and includes an expanse of rare coastal prairie, coniferous forest, and marine shoreline. American Camp features significant historic resources including three original military buildings, an earthwork redoubt, a reconstructed military fence and flagpole, and numerous archeological sites. The cultural landscape also includes the sites of the Hudson's Bay Company agricultural outpost, Belle Vue Sheep Farm, the European village of San Juan Town, the Salish fishing village at the Salmon Banks, and traditional tribal camas cultivation beds.