

gulf islands

florida

Clear blue water, mild surf, gently sloping beaches and a rich history dating back to the 16th-century Spanish explorations of the New World—this is Gulf Islands National Seashore. The Florida section of this new National Park System area consists of Johnson Beach on Perdido Key, a group of fort ruins on the mainland, Naval Live Oaks, and parts of Santa Rosa Island. For information on the Mississippi islands in the National Seashore, see the other side of this folder.

On the mainland bluff, inside Pensacola Naval Air Station, are a group of historic fortifications. These forts, built to defend the channel entrance to Pensacola harbor, are open to visitors. Facilities are limited.

Scuba divers and spear fishermen should stay away from designated beaches and other spots where people are swimming or surf fishing. Rangers at Fort Pickens can recommend interesting scuba diving and spear fishing areas.

Florida headquarters of the Seashore is near Fort Pickens. The National Park Service manager's address is P.O. Box 100, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561.

Recommended routes for reaching the major visitor areas within the National Seashore are: **Johnson Beach**—take Fla. 292 southwest from Pensacola; **historic mainland forts**—use the main entrance of Pensacola Naval Air Station off Barrancas Avenue (Fla. 295); **Naval Live Oaks and the Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa beach areas**—take U.S. 98 from downtown Pensacola across the Pensacola Bay Bridge.

You can charter a fishing boat, or try your luck surf fishing anywhere along the beach where there are no swimmers. No license is required.

Boaters, use small craft navigation chart 872-SC.

Events during the Ice Ages, the most recent geological period, strongly influenced the way Florida's coastline evolved. Water stored on the continents in the form of great ice masses had the effect of lowering the sea level. When the ice melted, the sea level rose again and land that had been exposed was covered once more with water and sandy sediments. As these fluctuations took place, new coastal landforms appeared where the sediments collected. Finally, the combined action of seawater and wind shaped some of these landforms into elongated barrier islands, such as Santa Rosa Island and Perdido Key, lying parallel to the mainland.

Today the islands are protected against the sudden erosive force of storms because the primary dune nearest the Gulf is held together by the elaborate stem and root system of the sea oat. The sea oat's presence here is vital; therefore, picking or possession of sea oats is strictly prohibited.

Watch your step while exploring the interiors of the forts and batteries. Taking a flashlight is good advice, since the passageways are dimly lighted.

The distance from Santa Rosa Sound bridge to Ft. Pickens is 14.5 kilometers (9 miles).

Motor vehicles are not allowed on sand dunes and beaches. Please park in designated parking areas and road pull-offs.

Gulf Islands National Seashore became part of the National Park System under legislation enacted in January 1971. Recreation facilities are being developed, and additional land is being acquired to expand the Seashore to its authorized total size of 50,600 hectares (125,000 acres). Please respect the rights of remaining private property owners.

The live oak, the typical tree of the Deep South, in 1828 was placed under protective management here at Naval Live Oaks to supply highly prized timbers used in the building of ships at the Pensacola Navy Yard in the 19th century. Visitors can see these majestic trees, their branches draped in Spanish moss, on a hike through the deeply forested plantation. This early experiment in the management of valuable forest lands was a pet project of President John Quincy Adams, an amateur botanist.

FORT PICKENS AREA

Tours of Fort Pickens are scheduled daily throughout the year. A small museum of historic artifacts and nature exhibits is housed nearby in the Seashore headquarters building.

The 4-wheel-drive vehicle trail provides access to some choice fishing spots. The trail is closed to all but foot travel when flocks of terns nest here during August and September.

- Amphitheater
- Fishing
- Hiking Trail
- Interpretive Trail
- Picnic Area
- Picnic Shelter
- Ranger Station
- Restroom
- Swimming
- Tent Site
- Trailer Site
- 4-Wheel-Drive Vehicle Trail



The campgrounds have space for tents and trailers. Fees are charged each visiting day. Nearby are coin-operated washers and dryers, a concession store, and a sewage disposal unit. Long tent stakes for use in the sand and mosquito netting during the summer are a must. Group camping is in two areas, each limited to 30 persons. For group reservations, contact Seashore headquarters.

Swimmers have a choice of either the Gulf side or the sound. Lifeguards are on duty in season at Johnson Beach and Fort Pickens. In unguarded waters, do not swim alone and be extra cautious about undercurrents, jellyfish, and Portuguese man-of-war.

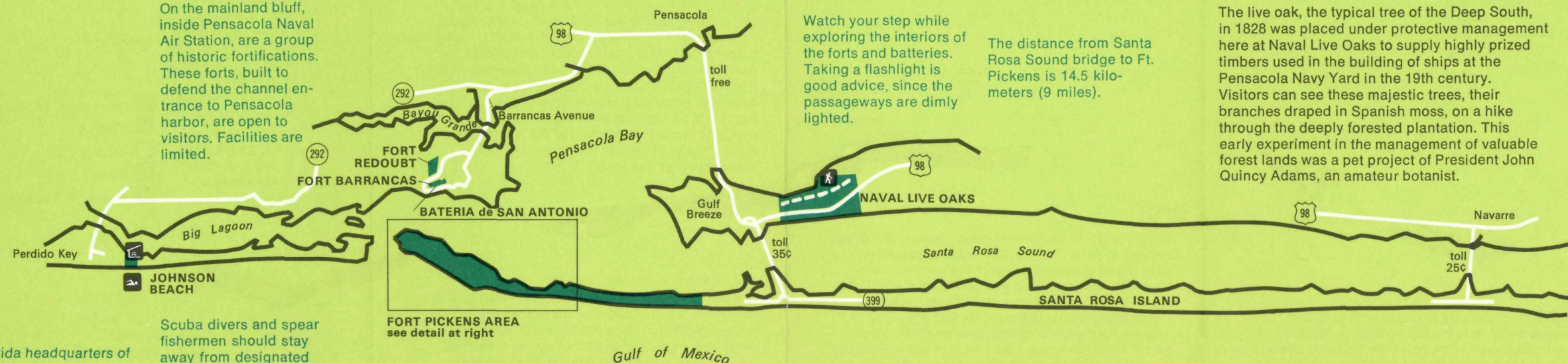
Hikers can take self-guiding nature trails or travel with groups led by park rangers. Others may simply want to join beachcombers on the seemingly endless stretches of sand.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

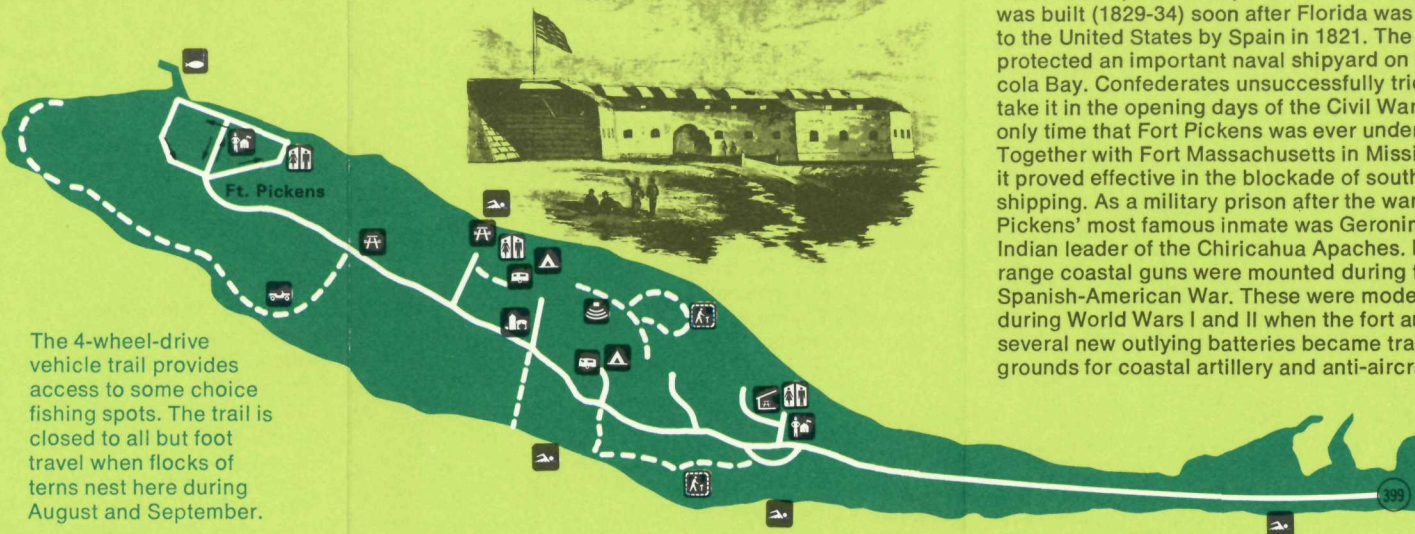
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FORT PICKENS AREA see detail at right

Swimming is not recommended in the entrance channel to Pensacola Bay because of the strong currents.

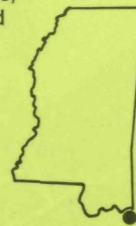


Fort Pickens, a massive, five-sided fortification, was built (1829-34) soon after Florida was ceded to the United States by Spain in 1821. The fort protected an important naval shipyard on Pensacola Bay. Confederates unsuccessfully tried to take it in the opening days of the Civil War—the only time that Fort Pickens was ever under fire. Together with Fort Massachusetts in Mississippi, it proved effective in the blockade of southern shipping. As a military prison after the war, Fort Pickens' most famous inmate was Geronimo, the Indian leader of the Chiricahua Apaches. Long-range coastal guns were mounted during the Spanish-American War. These were modernized during World Wars I and II when the fort and several new outlying batteries became training grounds for coastal artillery and anti-aircraft units.

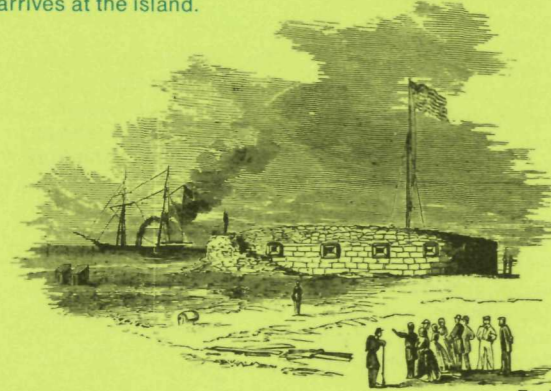
gulf islands

mississippi

For seafaring French explorers in the late 17th century, Ship Island was a significant beachhead in the rivalry with Britain and Spain for colonies in the new world. Today, the island is part of a new National Seashore where you can tour forts, swim, fish, or just enjoy the fine white sand and sunshine. The Mississippi section of Gulf Islands National Seashore includes two other less developed islands—Horn and Petit Bois—and a mainland campground at Ocean Springs. By highway, 129 kilometers (80 miles) away to the east, is the Florida section; information about the Florida islands is on the other side of the folder.



Guided tours of Fort Massachusetts are offered daily from June to Labor Day. They begin shortly after the boat arrives at the island.



Ft. Massachusetts

The swimming beach with a lifeguard is on the Gulf side directly across from the fort. Be extremely careful of strong currents during periods of heavy surf. Stinging jellyfish and Portuguese man-of-war should be carefully avoided. If you need assistance, go to the ranger station.

Litter bags are provided upon arrival at Ship Island. Please carry your trash with you when leaving. No glass is permitted on the Mississippi islands.

Profiting from the safe anchorage Ship Island provided away from the stormy Gulf of Mexico, French sea captains made it their first stop. Here they unloaded supplies, and from this point a steady stream of settlers made their way to new homes in Biloxi, Mobile, and eventually New Orleans. The island's strategic value steadily increased as New Orleans cornered the market for trade goods coming out of the Mississippi valley. In the closing days of the War of 1812, Britain concentrated a huge fleet of warships at

Access to Ship Island is provided by concession boats from Gulfport and Biloxi, Miss., twice daily May through October. In April, the only other month the boats operate, service is once a day and twice a day on weekends. Private boats may dock at **Fort Massachusetts** in the daytime. **Horn** and **Petit Bois** Islands are reached by chartered or private boats.

Ship Island has been two islands since 1969 when the middle was washed away in a hurricane. The primitive campground on the eastern half can be reached only by boat. Camp in the immediate vicinity of the old quarantine station.

Fishing boats can be chartered at Ocean Springs and Biloxi. Get information about them at the Ocean Springs information station.

Ship Island and launched a nearly successful drive to capture New Orleans. Fort Massachusetts on Ship Island assumed its unofficial name in 1861 when the Union warship *Massachusetts* retook the island from Confederate forces. Construction of the walls, which were barely six feet high, was resumed while Union ships tightened their blockade of southern ports. Like Fort Pickens in Florida, the fort housed Confederate prisoners-of-war. Less than half of the complement of 37 guns were ever mounted. By the 1880's the fort was considered obsolete mainly because guns on new ironclad ships could easily penetrate the brick and stone masonry walls. One 15-inch, smooth-bore Rodman cannon is still in place; the other pieces were removed for scrap during World War I.

Animals on the islands, isolated about 16 kilometers (10 miles) off the coast of Mississippi, have pioneered a livelihood apart from their mainland ancestors. Beach mice, for example, have developed a pale coloration that makes them less easy to spot in the sand. The largest animals include alligators, raccoons, and rabbits. Among the most readily observed of thousands of small creatures living at the edge of the sea are the ghost crabs and fiddler crabs. Migratory waterfowl—tern, heron, egret, ducks—make their winter homes and nesting grounds on Horn and Petit Bois Islands.

The peculiar wind and wave patterns that created these islands in the Gulf of Mexico would eventually reclaim them were it not for the stabilizing effect of the vegetation that grows here. Dunes along the shoreline are held down by sea oats, saltgrass, and pennywort. Further inland grow bush goldenrod, prickly pear, southern magnolia, palmetto, and live oak. Forest development on the islands is held back by periodic violent storms, but extensive slash pine groves have grown up. Natural, land-building forces are at work here still, resulting in a slow migration of the islands westward as sand is eroded from one end and redeposited at the other.

To reach Ocean Springs campground, take Hanley Road straight south from U.S. 90, a distance of about 1.6 kilometers (1 mile).

The Mississippi unit of Gulf Islands National Seashore is administered by a National Park Service manager, whose mailing address is P.O. Drawer T, Ocean Springs, MS, 39564.

The National Seashore boundary line around all three islands extends offshore 1.6 kilometers (1 mile).

Swim off Horn and Petit Bois Islands at your own risk. Lifeguard service is not provided. Be careful of heavy surf and treacherous currents.

Horn and Petit Bois Islands are both managed as wildlife sanctuaries. Hunting is strictly prohibited. Please do not make disturbances in nesting areas.

French explorers settled Biloxi Bay in 1699, in the vicinity of present-day Ocean Springs. They erected Fort Maurepas to protect Old Biloxi, which became the first French capital of the lower Mississippi River valley. In an era of intense colonial competition, French activity near the mouth of the Mississippi River threatened Spain's ambitions in Florida and provided the necessary urgency for a permanent Spanish settlement at Pensacola Bay (see other side of folder). Little physical evidence of early French settlement remains here. Attempts by archeologists to locate the old fort have been unsuccessful—so far.

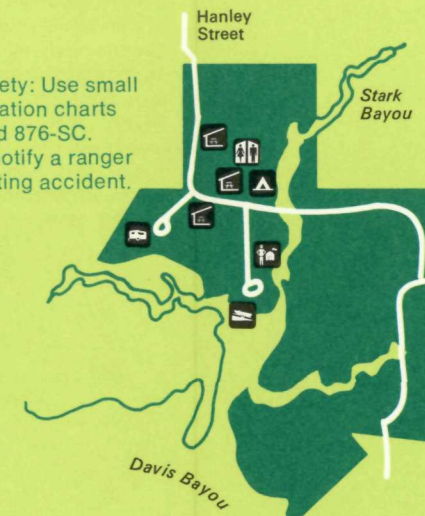


- Boat Dock and Ramp
- Fishing
- Osprey Nests
- Picnic Shelter
- Primitive Campsite
- Ranger Station
- Restroom
- Swimming
- Tent Site
- Trailer Site

You don't need a license for saltwater fishing, just a good line and a pole. Fish anywhere, but stay away from swimmers. In spring you might catch pompano and ling; in summer, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, and sea trout.

OCEAN SPRINGS CAMPGROUND

Boater Safety: Use small craft navigation charts 874-SC and 876-SC. Promptly notify a ranger of any boating accident.



Ocean Springs campground and the Seashore headquarters-information station are open year-round with 25 tent sites; 55 trailer sites (with or without electric hook-ups); picnic shelters; a ballfield; and a boat dock and ramp. Overnight camp fees are charged each day for a maximum stay of 14 days during the summer, 30 days the rest of the year.