



THEODORE
ROOSEVELT
ISLAND

WASHINGTON, D.C.



THEODORE ROOSEVELT ISLAND

A LIVING MEMORIAL

In the Potomac River is an island purchased and dedicated to a great conservationist president, Theodore Roosevelt. His interest in conservation grew out of his boyhood passion for recording his outdoor experiences and his collections of scientific specimens. This early enthusiasm had a profound effect on his varied and active career. Even as president, he was recognized as an exceptional field naturalist.

During his terms in the White House he spurred thoughtful Americans to a new evaluation of the natural resources of their Nation. Largely through Roosevelt's efforts and interest, 234 million acres of land were reserved by the Federal Government for conservation. When the U. S. Forest Service was created in 1906, much of this land was turned over to that agency for administration. In addition, several national monuments were established. As a busy president, Roosevelt frequently sought recreation in the quiet solitude of the forest. On Theodore Roosevelt Island, too, one may find respite from the tensions of urban life and gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of man's relationship to his natural environment.

Theodore Roosevelt Island is a natural area, a complex of plants and animals which have found a unique refuge surrounded by large urban communities. Three and one half miles of foot trails give fine coverage of the varied habitats. An orientation station contains exhibits and functions as a contact point for interpreters, who conduct nature walks from May through October. Details of these trips may be found in the Outdoor Program, obtainable from the Director of the National Capital Region, National Park Service.

GEOLOGY

The island is an example of the dynamic forces that are continually wearing down and building up the face of the earth.

The large slabs of rock at the boat landing are a type of rock called granite gneiss. This hard rock forms the base of the island, a tough remnant of the riverbed that resisted the tearing fingers of water even in flood.

The trees, shrubs, and herbs on the island are rooted in soil that was formed in place or deposited on the bedrock by the river. Soils resulting primarily from alluvial deposits develop faster than those resulting from residual material and, today, more deposits are enlarging the island. The Potomac makes a 45 degree turn at Georgetown, and the island is on the side opposite the cutting edge of the river. Therefore the current is slower near the island side, and river

sediments of mud, sand and gravel are deposited. The incoming tide also slows the river current, causing it to drop some of its sediment.

As these deposits build up toward the surface of the water, cattails, arrowhead, pickerelweed, and other plants invade the warm, shallow waters. Later a growth of yellow Iris, arrowarum, sweet flag, snapweed, and some shrubs dominate. In this way a marsh is created. In time, more river deposits, decayed vegetation, and the roots of marsh plants raise the mudflats above the river surface (except in flood or high tide) and make them firm enough for willows, ash, and maples to root and grow. These trees and water-loving shrubs replace the marsh plants and continue the process of building new land. The habitat becomes a swamp. As a result, the island has increased from 70 acres a century ago to over 88 today.

● *Baby opossums ride pickaback.*



PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

The variety of wild, natural habitats makes Theodore Roosevelt Island rich in plant and animal life. Each of the habitats on the island - marsh, swamp, upland forest, and meadow - has its own kind of plants. In each habitat are also insects, birds, mammals, and other animals adapted to the plants and conditions of life they find there.

All plant and animal life on the island is protected by law.

THE PLANTS

You need not walk far on one of the trails before you realize that there are many kinds of plants on the island. Noteworthy among the natural habitats are the marsh and the swamp on the east side, about two-thirds as long as the island itself. In these, plant succession is well illustrated. Plants here now will be replaced by others as the land becomes drier. Growing in the shallow water are plants such as the yellow Iris, the white-flowered arrowhead, and the narrow-leaved cattail. Here the yellow Iris makes one of the most spectacular displays in this area.

Red maple, alder, willow and green ash grow in the shallow waters bordering the marsh; beneath them are thickets of boxelder. Here you can see a few bald-cypress trees which were planted in the mid-thirties.

On the higher and drier ground there is a mixed hardwood forest of elms, yellow-poplars, white ashes, red maples, and oaks. Look for the mulberry, black cherry, black locust, and hickory, also, among the more than 40 species of trees growing on the island. In addition, over 100 species of herbaceous plants, shrubs, and vines can be found here. Spring flowers grow in profusion on the forest floor before the trees get their leaves. Later such flowering plants as the may-apple, jack-in-the-pulpit, Solomons-plume, Queen Anne's lace, and wingstem will brighten your way along the trails.

THE ANIMALS

Theodore Roosevelt Island is a natural refuge for wildlife. You may catch sight of an elusive raccoon in upland forest or swamp, or a muskrat swimming in the marsh. Gray squirrels, cottontails, skunks, chipmunks, opossums, meadow voles, white-footed mice, foxes, and Norway rats have all been seen.

The island is excellent for birdwatching, because of its compact area and varied habitats, all readily accessible by trail.

The cattail marsh provides nesting sites for both the long-billed marsh wren and the red-winged blackbird. You may be startled by the rattling cry of the belted kingfisher and see its flash of blue as it flies over the marsh to a new diving perch. In summer, the leaves



● *Yellow Iris blossoms are pointed out by a park naturalist on a conducted trip.*

hide many of the birds, so you can hear more than you can see. However, if alert as you walk the trails, you may catch a glimpse of a secretive wood thrush, startle a mallard or a great blue heron in the marsh, see an inquisitive nuthatch, hear the noisy drumming of a downy woodpecker, or the songs of the wood pewee and the red-eyed vireo.

Along the forest trails you will often find the box turtle, while in or near the marsh and swamp you may see the snapping, painted, and spotted turtles. Several kinds of harmless snakes are to be found here; the most often seen is the common banded water snake. The only venomous snake in this area, the copperhead, need not cause concern as it has not been found on the island in recent years.

Many kinds of snails, insects, frogs, toads, salamanders, and other small animals, fill an important place in the wild community, for without them the larger animals could not exist.

COLORFUL HISTORY

Theodore Roosevelt Island has borne a succession of names. The first white explorers called it "Anacostian" or "Analostan," which was derived from a local Indian name. After 1632, when Charles II granted the island to Lord Baltimore, it became known as

"My Lord's Island." The next owner, Capt. Randolph Brandt, who played an important part in the Indian wars and who acquired the island in 1681, named it "Barbadoes" after his old home in the West Indies. In 1717 the island was purchased by George Mason. His son, also named George Mason, is known for building Gunston Hall, writing the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and helping to draft the Federal Constitution.

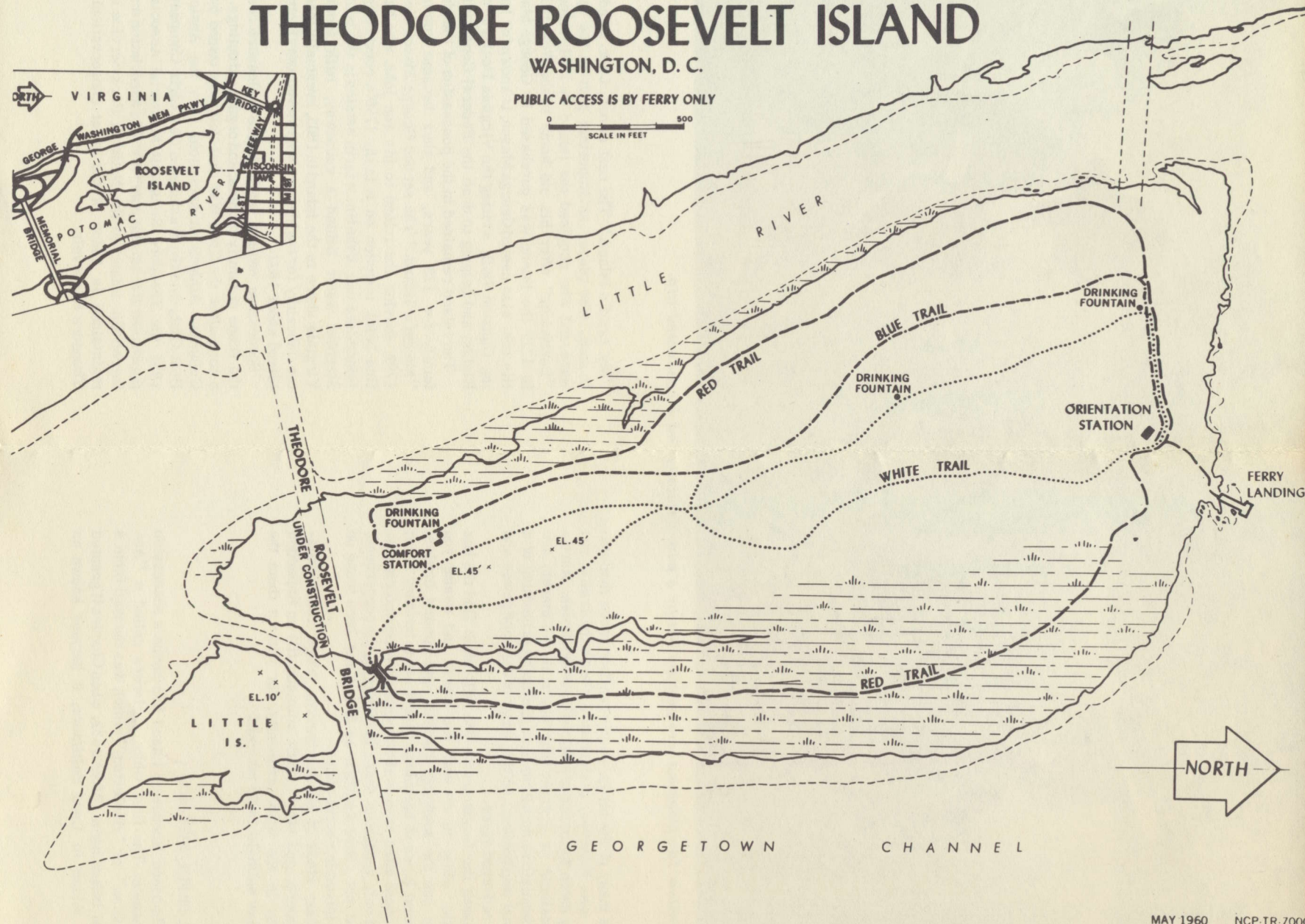
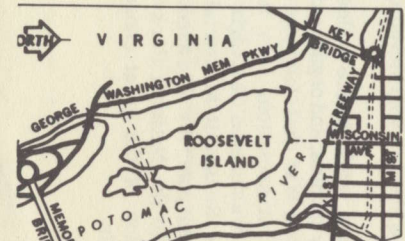
The island remained in the possession of the Mason family for 125 years, and thus became known as "Mason's Island." The second George Mason died in 1792, leaving the island to his son John, who built a fine brick mansion on it in the 1790's converting the island into one of the finest farm estates in the section. Stagnant water behind a causeway, built from the Virginia shore to the island in 1805, eventually made it too unhealthy for the Masons, who moved away from the island about 1832.

Successive owners made it into a pleasure resort, the scene of family picnics, and organized outings. For a time after the Civil War the island was owned by the Columbia Athletic Association, then the Analostan Boat Club, and the Washington Gas Light Company. In 1931 the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association purchased it from that company. The association transferred the island to the National Park Service to be maintained in honor of the great conservationist - Theodore Roosevelt.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT ISLAND

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PUBLIC ACCESS IS BY FERRY ONLY



ACCESS TO THE ISLAND

On weekends, from June through October, public access to the island is by means of a free ferry which leaves the landing near Wisconsin Avenue and K Street, N. W., on a regular schedule. Before the conducted nature walks, a park naturalist tells the story of the island at the orientation station. The average nature walk is about 1 1/2 miles long and takes a little over 1 1/2 hours. While on the island, information on things to do and see may be obtained at the orientation station. For schedule of ferry service and conducted walks, call the Branch of Interpretive Services, REpublic 7-1820, Ext. 2557, Monday through Friday.

● *The song
of the elusive wood thrush
can be heard
on the Island.*



ADMINISTRATION

Theodore Roosevelt Island is a part of the National Capital Parks, which are administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Inquiries should be addressed to the Regional Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Interior Building, Washington 25, D. C., or call REpublic 7-1820, Extension 2403.

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and Territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

The National Park System, of which National Capital Parks is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

Washington, D. C.

