

THEODORE ROOSEVELT ISLAND



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
National Capital Parks, Washington, D.C.

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Theodore Roosevelt Island, in the Potomac River opposite Washington, D. C., is a living memorial to the great conservationist for whom it is named. Here visitors may find a respite from the tensions of urban life, and by observing fascinating examples of the infinitely varied and patient processes of nature, gain a deeper appreciation and a better understanding of man's relationship to his environment - just as Theodore Roosevelt found in the wilderness a new and truer outlook on life and a keener appreciation of its spiritual values.

Though only forty-three when he became President in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt had a brilliant intellect and was already well known as a man of letters, soldier, and statesman. Impetuous and bubbling over with high spirits, he communicated much of his enthusiasm to the American people, particularly his zest for an active physical life and his zeal for nature. Of the many achievements of his administrations, conservation of our natural resources may well be considered the most important and lasting. His boyhood ambition to be a naturalist, and his adventures in the Dakota Badlands had given him an understanding of the fundamental relationship between the national welfare and the preservation of wildlife, water and forest. Therefore, as President, he initiated a program of conservation, reclamation and irrigation which today is a fundamental source of our national strength and economic well-being. Theodore Roosevelt Island commemorates his conservation achievements and his life-long love of the outdoors.

Wildlife

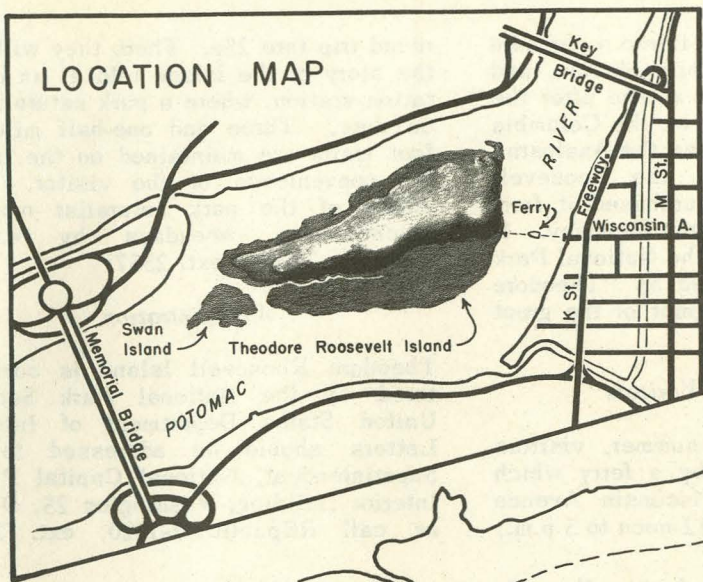
The diversity of natural habitats makes the island rich in plant and animal life. One of these habitats is the half-mile long marsh on the east side. Few marshes remain in the District of Columbia. Here the yellow iris makes a

colorful display in the spring, followed by the white flowers of arrowhead in June. Narrow-leaved cattail provides nesting sites for long-billed marsh wrens and red-winged blackbirds. The black-crowned night heron may often be seen passing overhead with lazy wing beats, while the more impatient belted kingfisher hurries over the marsh, often uttering his characteristic rattling cry. Stately white American egrets stalk their prey in the shallow waters.

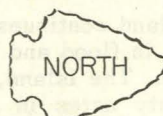
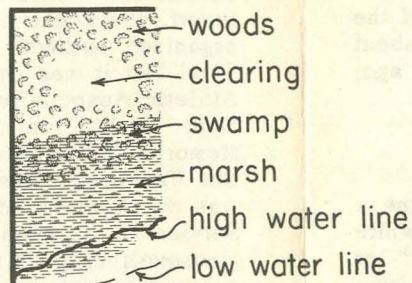
Bordering the marsh is a swampy strip of land on which trees grow in shallow water. Elms, red maples, and ashes form a canopy, while willows and boxelders grow beneath as smaller trees. Bald-cypresses, common in Southern swamps, have gained a foothold. Trees planted in Rock Creek Park have dropped seeds which may have been brought here by Rock Creek and Potomac River currents.

Vegetation on the higher ground demonstrates the natural succession of plant types, which takes place when cultivated land is abandoned. Stage by stage, the once intensively cultivated fields have been covered first by herbaceous weeds, then shrubs, and finally trees, until today most of the trees native to the District of Columbia are represented in the mixed hardwood forest on the island. Most common are elms, ashes, maples, tulip-trees, oaks, and sycamores. Mulberrys and boxelders, some quite large, are common in the understory. In addition to black cherry, black locust, and hickory, there are some thirty other species of trees. One hundred and thirty-five species of herbaceous plants and vines have been identified. Spring wildflowers are abundant on the forest floor before the trees get their leaves; summer ones in the few small clearings and along the trails.

The many species of herbs, shrubs, and trees, together with the great variety of natural habitats found on the island provide food and shelter for a large number of birds and other small animals. Mammals known to be present are the

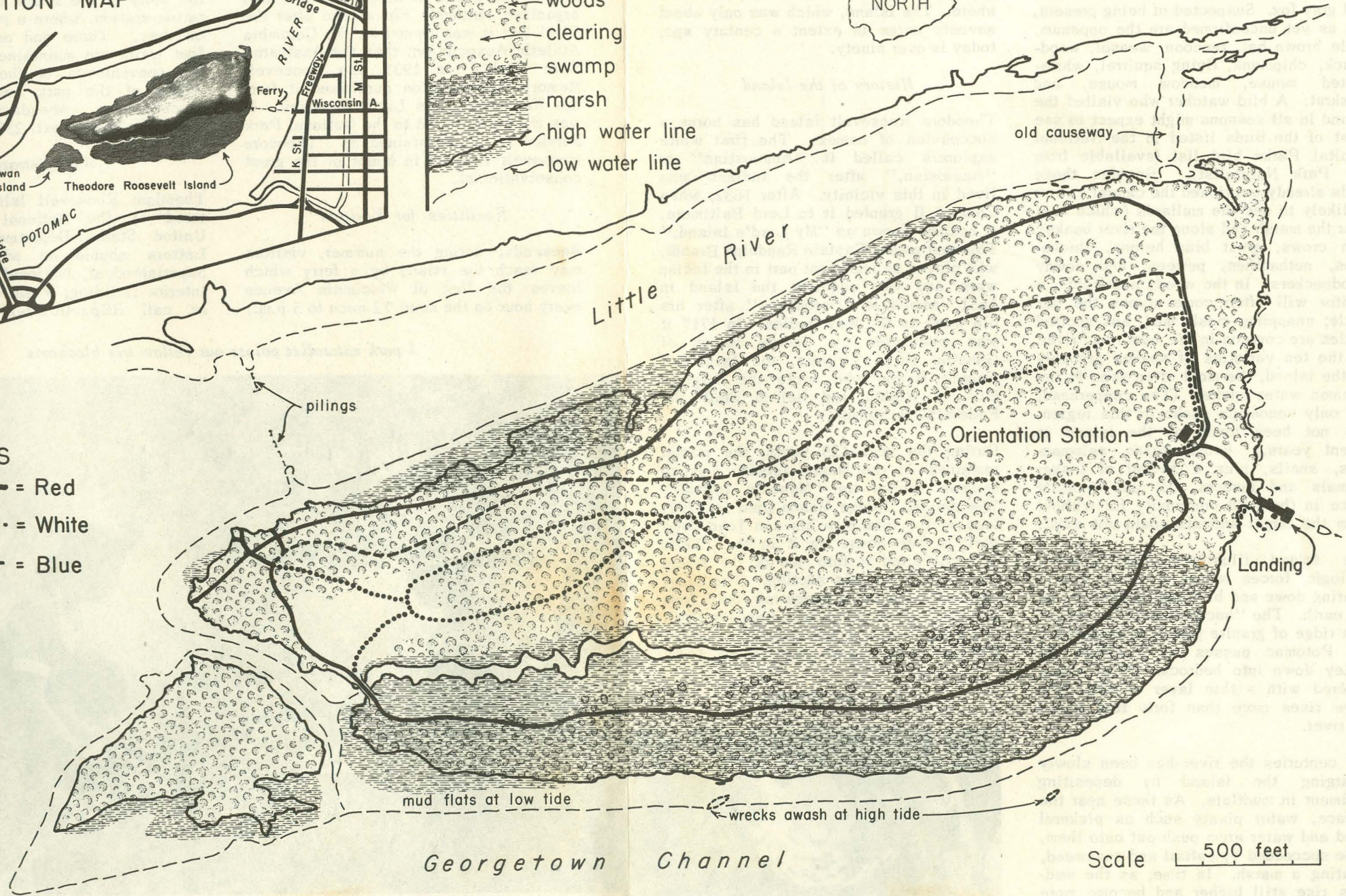


PHYSICAL FEATURES



TRAILS

- = Red
- = White
- - - = Blue



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mole, short-tailed shrew, Norway rat, gray squirrel, cottontail rabbit, skunk, and gray fox. Suspected of being present, but as yet unconfirmed are the opossum, little brown bat, raccoon, weasel, woodchuck, chipmunk, flying squirrel, white-footed mouse, meadow mouse, and muskrat. A bird watcher who visited the island in all seasons might expect to see most of the birds listed in the National Capital Parks bird list (available from the Park Naturalist). Besides those birds already mentioned the casual visitor is likely to see the mallards (which nest near the marsh and along the river banks), fish crows, great blue herons, chickadees, nuthatches, pewees, and downy woodpeckers. In the woods and fields, a visitor will often come across the box turtle; snapping, musk, mud, and spotted turtles are common in the marsh and river. Of the ten varieties of snakes probably on the island, the most often seen is the common water snake. (The copperhead, the only venomous snake in this region, has not been found on the island in recent years.) Frogs, toads, salamanders, snails, plus a myriad of lesser animals and insects, fill an important place in the wild community for without them the larger animals could not exist.

The island illustrates the dynamic geologic forces which are continually wearing down and building up the face of the earth. The "backbone" of the island is a ridge of granite gneiss around which the Potomac passes as it slices its valley down into bedrock. Now mostly covered with a thin layer of soil, this ridge rises more than forty feet above the river.

For centuries the river has been slowly enlarging the island by depositing sediment in mudflats. As these near the surface, water plants such as pickerel weed and water arum push out onto them, to be succeeded by cattail and snapweed, creating a marsh. In time, as the mudflats rise still higher and become more firm, willows and boxelders begin to replace the herbaceous plants, forming a swamp, and so the process of building

new land continues. Sometimes the river rises in flood and takes back part of the shore. The island, which was only about seventy acres in extent a century ago, today is over ninety.

History of the Island

Theodore Roosevelt Island has borne a succession of names. The first white explorers called it "Anacostian" or "Analostan," after the Indians who lived in this vicinity. After 1632, when Charles II granted it to Lord Baltimore, it became known as "My Lord's Island." The next owner, Captain 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 it was purchased by George Mason of Gunston Hall, Virginia, the father of George Mason who wrote the Virginia Bill of Rights and helped draft the Federal Constitution.

During the next 125 years, the island remained in the Mason family, and so became known as "Mason's Island." The second George Mason died in 1792, leaving the island to his son John, who built a fine house on it in the 1790's and converted it into one of the finest farm-estates in this section. The 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 about 1832.

Birds are abundant



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

Facilities for Visitors

Weekends, during the summer, visitors may reach the island by a ferry which leaves the foot of Wisconsin Avenue every hour on the hour; 12 noon to 5 p.m.;

round trip fare 25¢. There they will find the story of the island told at an orientation station, where a park naturalist is on duty. Three and one-half miles of foot trails are maintained on the island for convenience of the visitor. The office of the park naturalist may be reached on weekdays by calling REpublic 7-1820, ext. 2557.

Administration

Theodore Roosevelt Island is administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of Interior. Letters should be addressed to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks, Interior Building, Washington 25, D. C.; or call REpublic 7-1820, ext. 2095.

A park naturalist points out yellow iris blossoms



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - Douglas McKay, Secretary
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - Conrad L. Wirth, Director