

Gulf Islands

Official Map and Guide

Gulf Islands National Seashore
Mississippi and Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The Life of a Barrier Island

Gulf Islands National Seashore is a place of myriad riches. There are sparkling blue waters, magnificent snow-white beaches, and fertile coastal marshes. There are nineteenth century forts, shaded picnic areas, winding nature trails, and comfortable campgrounds. Diverse and abounding with wildlife, the park is not a single block of land but a mosaic. It includes 11 separate units stretching eastward 150 miles from West Ship Island, Mississippi, to the eastern tip of Santa Rosa Island, Florida. Congress established Gulf Islands National Seashore in 1971. The purposes of the park are to provide recreation for visitors and to protect wildlife, barrier islands, salt marshes, historic structures, and archeological sites along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Barrier islands constitute much of the park's acreage and are the glue that holds it together. Composed of brilliant

white sand carried seaward by rivers draining the Appalachian Mountains, the islands are long and narrow. They are called barrier islands because they serve as blockades to ocean waves and violent storms that would otherwise strike the mainland coast with greater force.

Besides islands, Gulf Islands National Seashore includes parcels of land on the Florida and Mississippi mainlands. Here you can find fortifications built by Spaniards and Americans, the site of the first federal tree farm established in 1829, archeological traces of Native Americans, and forest and marshes teeming with wildlife.

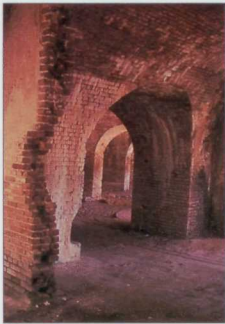
When Europeans first visited the northern Gulf of Mexico in the early 1500s, they found Native American settlements that were populous and thriving. At the Naval Live Oaks Area in Florida, middens (rubbish piles) and other remains help archeologists to understand and chronicle the long period of Indian settlement. All the park's archeological sites, historic sites, and artifacts are protected by law and must not be disturbed.

Along the Gulf, discovery by Europeans was followed by a lengthy struggle for the region's control. Spain, in 1559, established a settlement in Florida on Pensacola Bay, but the place was abandoned soon afterward. Spaniards revived the settlement in 1698, surrendered it to the French in 1719, regained it by treaty in 1722, ceded it to the English in 1763, and repossessed

it by force in 1781. Meanwhile in Mississippi, sovereignty shifted from France to England and from England to Spain. Eventually, Florida and Mississippi joined the United States. In 1825, the U.S. Government began to develop Pensacola as a major naval base guarded by fortifications, and in 1859 work began on a fort on Ship Island, Mississippi. The forts saw brief action during the Civil War. In later years, fortifications and weapons systems along the coast were updated and expanded. They remained active until the end of World War II, when modern weapons made traditional coastal defense obsolete.

Gulf Islands National Seashore, a park rich in natural and cultural resources, is yours to enjoy and protect. Whatever you do or however long you stay, we hope you enjoy your visit.

How the barrier islands were formed is something of a mystery. All theories involve the work of waves, winds, and fluctuating sea levels. Whatever their origin, the barrier islands are everchanging. Alongshore currents wear away their eastern ends and build up the islands on the west, and, as a result, the islands shift steadily westward. Further alterations are made by violent storms that overwash the islands and rearrange the sand, and by winds that shift and sculpt the island dunes. Such changes are constant. They are slowed only by the protective covering of grasses and other plants that grow on the dunes and in the island interiors. In particular, the sea oat, which has an elaborate stem and root system, plays a vital role in holding the islands together. Long stretches of beach ring the barrier islands and provide visitors with wonderful places to swim, relax, and reflect.



Recipe for a fort: begin with an important location, add a skilled work force, season with arches and cisterns, and stir in millions of bricks and a vast supply of mortar.



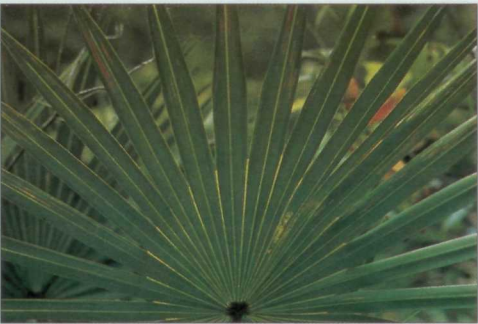
Misty mornings, cool, quiet, and peaceful, can be the best time to view birds, catch a fish, or meditate on the beauty of nature.



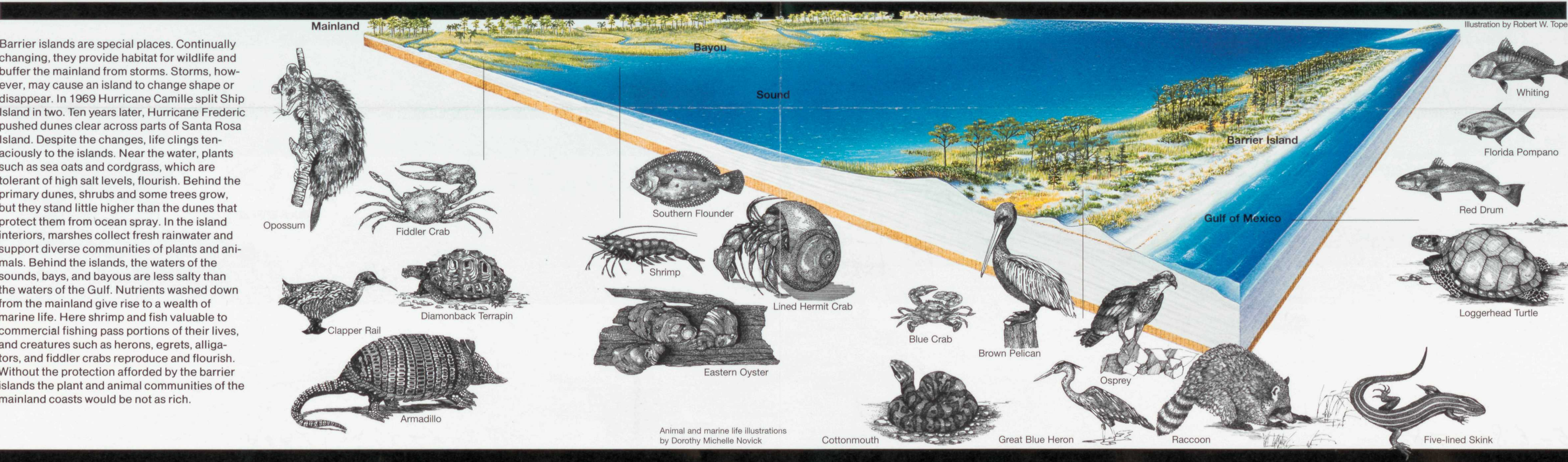
Dunes of snow-white sand give a distinctive look to the barrier islands of Gulf Islands National Seashore. Held together by a fragile network of stems and roots, the dunes are composed of fine quartz sand that originated in distant mountains.



Look closely to find animals who live in the marsh from small fiddler crabs to stately Great Blue Herons. The marsh provides a home to many creatures.



Find the saw palmetto under stands of pine and oak trees. Coastal Indians found uses for the berries, as does medicine today.



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Visiting the Mississippi District

Getting There. To reach Davis Bayou on the mainland in Ocean Springs, follow the signs for Gulf Islands National Seashore along I-10 and U.S. 90. The islands in the Mississippi district are about 10 miles offshore and can be reached only by boat. During the spring, summer, and fall, excursion boat trips from Gulfport and Biloxi to West Ship Island are offered by a concessioner. The schedules change with the seasons; consult the concessioner's printed schedule for frequency and times, or call 601-864-1014. Private boats may dock near Fort Massachusetts on West Ship Island in the daytime all year. Information about charter boats licensed to carry passengers to the wilderness islands (East Ship, Horn, and Petit Bois) is available at the William M. Colmer Visitor Center at Davis Bayou.

The Mainland Davis Bayou has many year-round facilities, including a first-come, first-served campground with 51 sites, electric and water hookups, and a sewage dump station. The area also has a group tent area, picnic shelters, ball field, self-guiding nature trail, and boat launch. There is no beach. The Colmer Visitor Center features an information desk, a bookstore, exhibits, and an auditorium in which orientation films are shown daily. Pamphlets for a self-guiding nature trail are also available.

The Islands The islands offer dramatic scenery but limited facilities. On East Ship, Horn, and Petit Bois islands, primitive camping is permitted but food and drinking water must be packed in and all trash removed. On West Ship Island, limited food service and water are available at

the concession stand. Park rangers can answer questions or give help in an emergency at the ranger station. Guided tours of Fort Massachusetts on West Ship Island are given in summer. Visitors to the fort will also find exhibits, informational publications, and a small bookstore. A boardwalk, about 1/3-mile long, goes from the boat dock across to the south side of the island where a swimming beach with a bathhouse, a snack bar, restrooms, indoor and outdoor showers, and a picnic pavilion are to be found. The sun on the islands is strong; visitors are advised to wear protective clothing, drink plenty of fluids, and use sunscreen. Watch changing weather and surf conditions. Fishing is permitted except in the swimming area. Check state laws for license requirements. Boaters should consult NOAA charts 11372 and 11374.

Visiting the Florida District

Getting There. To reach the historic mainland forts and the National Museum of Naval Aviation, use the main entrance of Pensacola Naval Air Station about 1 mile south of Barrancas Avenue (Fla. 292) on Navy Boulevard (Fla. 295). Fla. 292 leads southwest from Pensacola to the Perdido Key Area. On the island turn left onto Johnson Beach Road. The Perdido Key Area has an entrance fee. To get to the Naval Live Oaks, Fort Pickens, and Santa Rosa areas take U. S. 98 east from Pensacola. The Naval Live Oaks Area is just east of Gulf Breeze on U.S. 98. To reach Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa, take Fla. 399 from Gulf Breeze to Pensacola Beach. From there, Fort Pickens is 9 miles west, while the Santa Rosa Area is 10 miles east. The Fort Pickens Area has an entrance fee. The Okaloosa Area is on U.S. 98 east of Fort Walton Beach.

Camping and Other Facilities. Visitor centers are located at Naval Live Oaks, Fort Barrancas, and Fort Pickens. All have exhibits. Santa Rosa has exhibits only. For information at Santa Rosa tune to 1630 AM on your radio. Near Fort Pickens is a campground, open daily, with 200 sites, some of which have electricity. No reservations are accepted. Supplies and a laundry are available at the campground store. Picnic areas are located at each area in Florida. Snack bars are open seasonally at Johnson Beach on Perdido Key, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Fort Pickens.

Swimming, Fishing, Boating, Hiking. Swimming areas are located at Johnson Beach on Perdido Key, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Fort Pickens. Santa Rosa and Johnson Beach have bathhouses, and Fort Pickens and Okaloosa have outdoor showers. Do not spearfish around jetties, piers, or where people are swimming. Do not swim in shipping channels. You may charter a boat and fish anywhere on beaches where swimmers are absent. Check state laws for license requirements. Fort Pickens has a fishing pier; use NOAA chart 11378. Hikers are advised that certain dune areas may be closed to restore damage. Park rangers conduct interpretive programs year-round.

