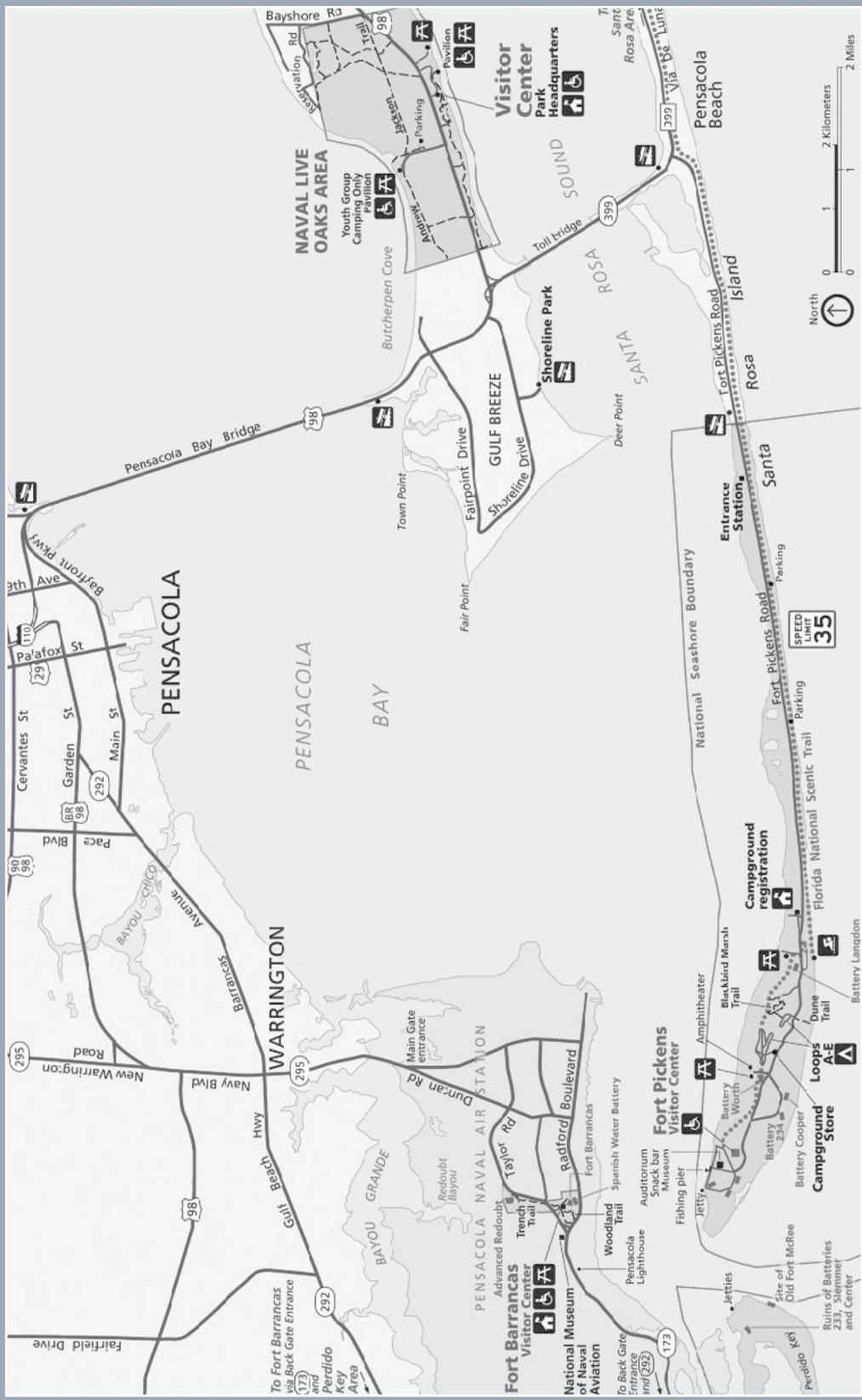


the park in pictures



GULF
ISLANDS
NATIONAL SEASHORE



GULF ISLANDS

NATIONAL SEASHORE

the park in pictures



H

ot white sand, cool blue water, barrier islands and coastal forests rich in wildlife, and a diverse array of historical sites and structures make Gulf Islands National Seashore one of the most popular and appealing of America's coastal parks. No wonder millions of visitors come every year from near and far to swim, fish, camp, watch wildlife, learn about American history, and relax in the shade of live oaks and beach umbrellas. No wonder thousands of these visitors return again and again. A hotbed of diversity caressed by cool breezes from the Gulf of Mexico, Gulf Islands National Seashore wins hearts, engages the intellect, and soothes the harried spirit.

The majority of national parks, monuments, historic sites, and seashores consist of a single block of land, immense or compact, around which can be drawn a clear and continuous border. Look at a map of Gulf Islands National Seashore, and you will see a very different kind of picture. Instead of a block, you find a mosaic. The park includes lands and waters in two states, Florida and Mississippi. Alabama lies between the two, dividing the seashore into halves. From the western tip of Cat Island in Mississippi to the eastern reach of Santa Rosa Island in Florida, Gulf Islands National Seashore spans 160 miles of colorful, ecologically diverse, and historically significant coastline.

Gulf Islands National Seashore is divided into Florida and Mississippi districts. Both offer roaring, windswept beaches on the Gulf of Mexico, quiet shores lapped by sheltered bays and sounds, an array of recreational opportunities such as camping, fishing, and swimming, and an exciting mix of wildlife. Here you can watch brown pelicans nose-diving for fish, see black skimmers flying in formation against a flaming sunset, or gasp in delight as bottlenose dolphins explode from the surface of sparkling blue water.



If history is your passion, you may join a park ranger on a tour of one of the seashore's historical structures, such as Fort Pickens in Florida or Fort Massachusetts in Mississippi. Or, if rest is what you seek, pitch your tent or park your trailer or recreational vehicle in one of the seashore's two improved campgrounds, lie back, and listen for the distant cry of an osprey.

Yellowstone National Park is best known for its geysers, Yosemite National Park for its grand mountains and valleys, and Gulf Islands National Seashore for the long, narrow barrier islands that give the seashore its name. The islands contain no bedrock but are built of fine sands, created in large part from the erosion of distant mountains and carried seaward by rivers and creeks. Waves, winds, and currents shaped the islands, and mold them still, but geologists cannot be certain how the islands were originally formed.

Long roots of golden sea oats help sandy dunes form.



Fishing at Davis Bayou is a popular activity.

One theory holds that they developed as coastal dunes at the end of the last ice age when sea levels were lower; another that they were created over thousands of years by the action of waves and currents. Whatever their origin, the islands continue to change in form. Hurricane-force winds from recurring tropical storms frequently result in breaching and reshaping the barrier islands.

Currents remake the seashore's geography a little bit every day, eroding the islands' eastern ends, carrying the displaced sand westward, parallel to their shores, and depositing it on or near their western tips. (You can feel the process firsthand. Stand in the water and note the sand brushing past your legs.) Thus,



A monarch butterfly rests on a flower.

the islands creep inexorably westward. Meanwhile, above the mean water line, winds blow, dunes rise and fall, and big waves associated with storms scour the shores.

Despite the constant change, the islands are stable enough to support a rich array of plants and animals. Along the beaches, ghost crabs scuttle in and out of burrows, and sandpipers hunt the water's edge for tiny creatures cast up by waves. Sea oats grow on the dunes, helping to hold the sand in place with their vast and intricate root systems. The roots accomplish the nearly impossible: extracting fresh water and nutrients from the sandy soil. Behind the dunes,



shielded from the salt spray that severely limits plant growth along the shore, forests of slash pine, live oak, saw palmetto, and yaupon holly provide home to butterflies, moths, frogs, toads, snakes, turtles, American alligators, and a great variety of birds and mammals.

The wildlife and beauty attract visitors to Gulf Islands National Seashore.



Bring a pair of binoculars to the seashore and, with luck and in the proper season, you may see ospreys and great blue herons nesting in treetops, migratory birds by the thousands feeding or resting in thickets, and otters and least bitterns quietly making their living in interior ponds, lagoons, and canals. Armadillos dig, squirrels collect acorns, Perdido Key beach mice burrow, and raccoons climb. From the rare and endangered sea turtles and piping plovers that nest on the beaches, to the summer tanagers and parula warblers that sing in the forest canopy, the wildlife of the barrier islands offers a wealth of subjects to watch, study, draw, photograph, and enjoy.



Around the islands, the waters teem with life. In the saltier and rougher waters of the gulf side, pompano and red drum cruise the shorelines, stingrays ripple through the shallows, and a variety of mollusks and marine snails decorate the beaches with their shells. Along the sound shores, the water is



calmer, shallower, and soupy with microscopic life. Here you may find blue crabs scavenging for anything they can get their claws on, flounder lying flat and still like dinner plates as they wait for unsuspecting bite-sized creatures to swim by, and eastern oysters piling up hard and thick on jetties and pilings. Swimmers must take special care to avoid accidental encounters when the stingrays come near shore or when sharks feed at dawn and dusk.

Gulf Islands National Seashore was created by Congress in 1971 not only to provide recreational opportunities, but also to safeguard the islands, their wildlife, and historic structures from development that might threaten their very existence. To some extent, the islands also absorb the force of waves from the open gulf, making the sounds behind them relatively calm. Here the shrimp and fish that provide livelihoods for so many along the coast pass the early vulnerable stages of their lives. The sound waters, fed by coastal rivers and creeks, are unusually rich in nutrients. The combination of fresh water draining

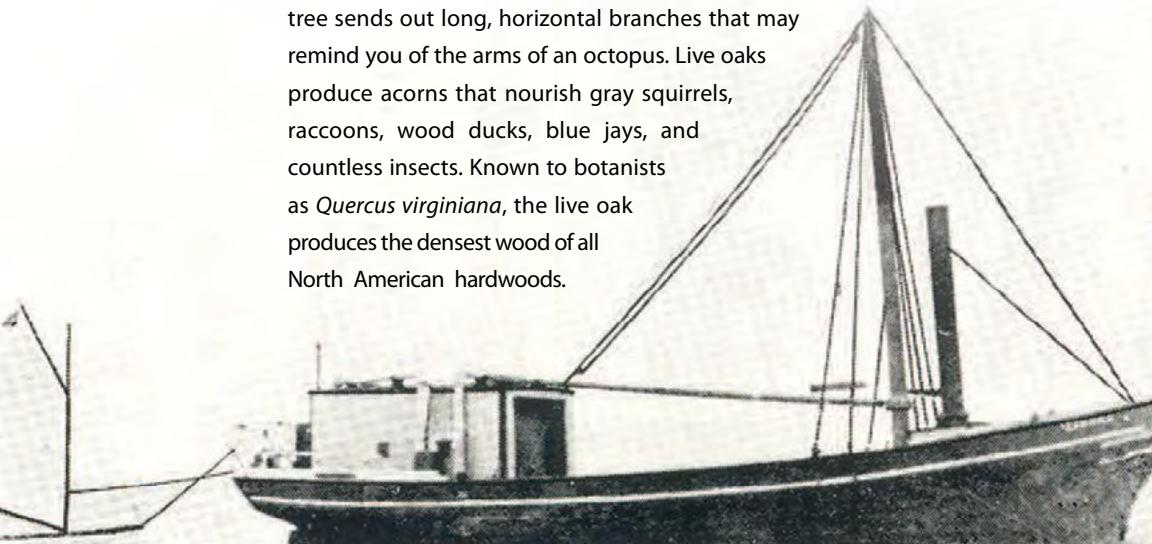




The Pensacola Lighthouse, fishing, history, and live oak trees reflect the islands' attractions.

from the mainland, salt water from the gulf, and a smorgasbord of things to eat and grow on makes the warm, shallow basins behind the islands a marvelous nursery for marine animals large and small.

The emblems of the park's mainland and peninsular landholdings are live oak trees. These titans of the plant kingdom live for hundreds of years. From a short, thick trunk, each tree sends out long, horizontal branches that may remind you of the arms of an octopus. Live oaks produce acorns that nourish gray squirrels, raccoons, wood ducks, blue jays, and countless insects. Known to botanists as *Quercus virginiana*, the live oak produces the densest wood of all North American hardwoods.



After drying, a cubic foot of the tree's timber weighs 75 pounds! The tree gets its name "live" oak because, while most oaks lose their leaves in autumn, the live oak keeps its waxy green foliage throughout the year. Live oaks grow slowly. Their squat trunks, sturdy wood, and low-hanging limbs adapt them for life on a coast forever blasted by storms.



Rangers interpret the history and resources of the seashore.



Given the varied resources of the islands, waters, and mainland forests, it is no surprise that humans have shown a lively interest in the Florida and Mississippi gulf coasts since the arrival of the first American Indians thousands of years ago. Bones found in southeastern caves and swamps suggest that the first peoples to visit and linger along the gulf found the forests and savannahs there inhabited by woodland bison and elephant-like mammoths and mastodons. The Indians probably hunted these and other animals for meat and skins. The oldest evidence of human activity within the seashore's borders dates to the Deptford period (roughly 500 B.C. to 200 A.D.); artifacts nearly 10,000 years old have been discovered in nearby Alabama. Perhaps the most exciting single archeological find within the seashore was the discovery in 1979 of an earthen pot dating to the Weeden Island period. Dr. Jim Morgan, a geologist, found the



object when examining a beach for storm damage after the passing of Hurricane Frederic. Made from local clay and etched with simple designs, the pot was in nearly perfect condition when the shifting of a dune uncovered the place where it had lain undisturbed for 1,000 years. (Note: Cultural artifacts found in the seashore are property of the U.S. Government and must be left in place. Please notify a ranger of all finds, and be aware that disturbing archeological sites is unlawful and punishable by stiff penalties.) In the Florida district's Naval Live Oaks Area, shell middens exist in places where countless generations of Indians shucked oysters pulled from Pensacola Bay. Undoubtedly, the American Indians were drawn to the Florida and Mississippi coasts and its lands by a congenial climate and an abundance of fish and game.



**Fort Barrancas
with interior
view of
casemates.**



Colorful Hobie Cat on Fort Massachusetts' beach.

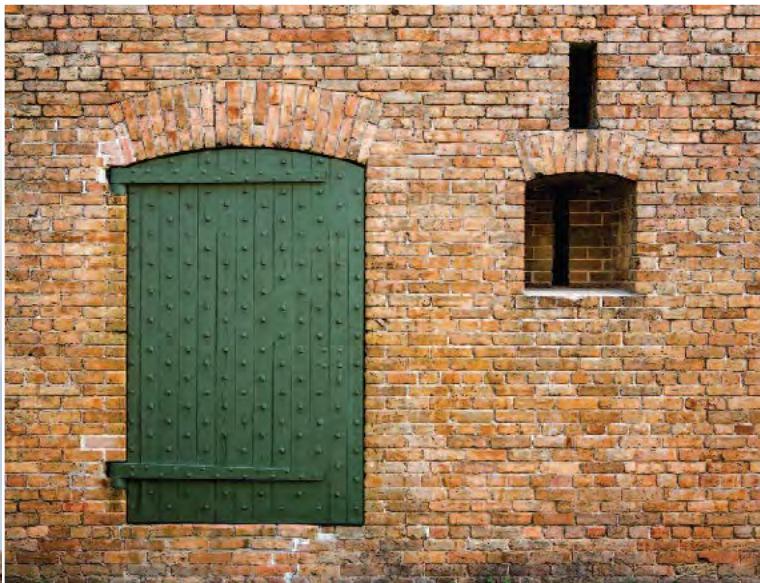
From the first stirrings of interest by Spanish, French, and English explorers in the North American mainland, Europeans began to visit and settle the islands and coasts of the gulf. In 1559, Spanish explorers established their first American colony on Pensacola Bay, although the outpost was quickly abandoned. The Spanish returned in 1698, building a fort near the present Fort Barrancas to prevent French occupation of Pensacola Bay. The following year, French explorers scouted the Mississippi barrier islands, ventured ashore on the mainland, and established a fort and small settlement where the city of Ocean Springs rises today. With terrible speed, the Indians of the coast were displaced by force and by diseases such as smallpox, and European powers vied for control. Portions of the lands that today are included within Gulf Islands National Seashore passed back and forth between French, Spanish, and English control.

In the early nineteenth century, the United States recognized the need to protect its coastlines from powerful European navies. The War of 1812 gave the matter urgency. British warships sailed up the Potomac and burned down the White House and the Library of Congress. From the Gulf of Mexico, another British fleet mounted a failed but nearly successful attack on New Orleans. Mississippi's Ship Island had provided a staging area for the attempted invasion

of New Orleans, and American leaders were determined to prevent such an assault on its sovereignty from happening again.

Such coastal defenses as the United States possessed before the War of 1812 were mostly crude structures made from logs and earth. Rock-solid masonry forts of the kind that protected Europe's ports were called for. These could stand up to the powerful cannons and exploding cannonballs carried by the wooden ships of the day. Simon Bernard, a French military engineer, was given the job of designing a system of forts to defend ports and shipyards along America's Gulf and Atlantic coasts. The work Bernard initiated resulted in the construction of coastal defenses known collectively as the Third System. Built of bricks, stone, mortar, earth, and in some cases concrete, the forts represented the pinnacle of military design in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the Florida district of Gulf Islands National Seashore, Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, the Advanced Redoubt, and Fort McRee (destroyed by the erosion of Perdido Key's eastern tip) date to this time and provided comprehensive defenses for the navy yard and sheltered harbor of Pensacola Bay. In what is now the seashore's Mississippi district, Fort Massachusetts grew brick by brick on Ship Island, providing solid

Though the brickwork was designed to last, a fire in 1899 caused a powder magazine to explode at Fort Pickens.





The Advanced Redoubt and the Spanish Water Battery still stand in the Fort Barrancas Area in Pensacola.

assurance that no foreign navy would ever again mount a sneak attack on New Orleans from the deep, protected anchorage along the island's northern shore.

By the time Fort Massachusetts, one of the last Third System forts to be built, was nearly completed, the American Civil War had shown that wooden ships, smooth-bore cannons, and the brick forts designed to stand up to them would soon be outmoded. New forts were needed, and they would be built of reinforced concrete and shielded by enormous aprons of earth.

On Santa Rosa Island in the Florida district, visitors can see the story of coastal fortifications unfold and come to its conclusion. There they will find Endicott System batteries, built of reinforced concrete, dating to the late nine-



teenth and early twentieth century. Not far away, Battery Langdon rises, an immense artificial hill of sand that conceals a warren of hidden rooms. Two gaping openings on

Perdido Key (top), Naval Live Oaks Area (inset), and Santa Rosa Island (right) provide miles of shoreline to explore.

either end of the hill once housed powerful artillery pieces that during World War II stood prepared to fire on hostile ships miles out in the gulf.

Ironically, although the forts never had a chance to defend the coast against a foreign enemy, they helped to protect the islands and mainland shores from ourselves. By the 1960s, it was clear that development threatened to engulf the coast from New Orleans to Tampa. A national seashore would protect the vegetation of the islands from wholesale destruction, which in turn would reduce erosion, safeguard wildlife, and preserve the mainland's best defenses against the monster storms of summer. But where to create such a seashore? No better place than the islands of the Mississippi and northwest Florida coasts, where historic forts and gun emplacements offered unique educational opportunities and stood in need of care.



In Florida, Gulf Islands National Seashore manages six parcels of land, from the immense Fort Pickens Area on Santa Rosa Island to the tiny Okaloosa Area near Fort Walton Beach. Each offers unique recreational and educational opportunities.

the **FLORIDA DISTRICT**



NAVAL LIVE OAKS AREA

Here, visitors find the seashore's administrative headquarters, a visitor center, picnic area, and nature trails leading through a coastal forest shaded by enormous live oak trees. The north shore of the Naval Live Oaks Area fronts on Pensacola Bay, and the south shore is lapped by Santa Rosa Sound. The waters are rich in sea life, including grass beds that provide food and habitat for a majority of marine animals. Anglers visiting the Naval Live Oaks Area can try their luck for speckled trout and white trout in Santa Rosa Sound (Florida regulations apply).

On the 10th of March, 1828, during the presidency of John Quincy Adams, Congress authorized the expenditure of \$4,900 to purchase 1,338 acres of land that included much of the present Naval Live Oaks Area. Known as the Deer Point Plantation, the place soon became the nation's first and only federal facility devoted to the planting and propagation of live oak trees. In 1830, the plantation was expanded to include a forest of live oaks growing nearby. The purpose of both areas was to provide the United States Navy a steady and

A summer sunset provides brilliant lighting after a storm over Langdon Beach.



Fort Pickens, named after Revolutionary War hero, Andrew Pickens, housed a 15-inch Rodman cannon that could shoot three miles in any direction.

reliable supply of live oak timbers for the building of warships. Eventually, iron, steel, and ferroconcrete ships replaced the wooden ships of old, and the live oaks plantation and preserve were no longer needed for national defense. Today, live oaks are admired and enjoyed for recreation. To walk among them, shaded by limbs shaggy with Spanish moss, is to step back in time.

FORT PICKENS AREA

Here, on the westernmost reaches of Santa Rosa Island, visitors find an array of features and facilities. Heavily damaged by Hurricanes Ivan and Dennis in 2004 and 2005, the Fort Pickens Road can flood during storms. There is a campground with sites for tents and recreational vehicles, a fishing pier, a





Originally built for coastal defense, today these wooden and brick buildings are utilized for a snack bar, offices, staff housing, and a museum.



bicycle trail, walking paths, picnic areas, and beautiful gulf and sound beaches. Wildlife abounds in the maritime forest of slash pine and saw palmetto that thrives in the island's wide western reaches, as well as in the rolling dunes dotted with Florida rosemary and seaside goldenrod and held together by the roots of sea oats. You probably won't see the rare and unique Santa Rosa beach mouse, but with luck and persistence you may spy brown pelicans and laughing gulls flapping across cobalt skies, otters and herons hunting in the island's interior freshwater marshes, and perhaps a few of the hawks, warblers, tanagers, vireos, and hummingbirds that in spring and fall migrate through the area in vast numbers. Armadillos are sometimes seen, and so are snakes, lizards, and raccoons. Walking along the self-guided trails or boardwalks provides a good introduction to the island's plant and animal life. A fishing pier near Fort Pickens provides lively entertainment for anglers (Florida regulations apply).

For the history buff, the Fort Pickens Area is a marvelous classroom. Standing in the middle of it all is Fort Pickens itself, built between 1829 and 1834, one of the largest of America's Third System forts. Tours are given at scheduled times (check with a ranger), and visitors are also invited to pick up a self-guided brochure and explore the structure at their leisure. Fort Pickens, along with Fort McRee (no longer in existence) on nearby Perdido Key, and Fort Barrancas and its Advanced Redoubt on the mainland, were designed to prevent hostile warships from entering Pensacola Bay from the gulf. When first approaching Fort Pickens, visitors may notice that one entire corner is missing! The damage resulted not from enemy fire, but from the accidental explosion of a powder magazine in 1899.

Fort Pickens is one of many historical structures on the island. Nearby, there stand wooden and brick buildings of more recent origin, built by the U.S. Army to house a variety of functions relating to coastal defense. These structures now provide shelter from the storms and sun for a snack bar, ranger offices, staff housing, and a small museum. Elsewhere in the Fort Pickens Area, concrete batteries in various stages of repair catch the eye. Some are open to the public; others are off-limits because of safety concerns. Together, these structures provide a lively introduction to the evolution of coastal defense from post-Civil War times through World War II.

Accessible trails are featured at the Fort Pickens Area.





SANTA ROSA AREA

The Santa Rosa Area is reached from the Pensacola Beach toll bridge by driving 10 miles east along Highway 399 to the J. Earle Bowden Way section. It offers one of the seashore's most beautiful and popular swimming beaches, with glittering turquoise water and sand so white that to look at it on a sunny day is all but blinding. Hurricanes in 2004 and 2005 destroyed sections of the road and all facilities, requiring expensive rebuilding. Flooding can occur during high tides or storm surges.

Six picnic areas are located at Opal Beach. Hurricanes and their aftermath remind us that barrier islands, pummeled by winds and waves, are forever changing, and the structures on them are fragile.

J. Earle Bowden
Way at Santa
Rosa Island.

OKALOOSA AREA

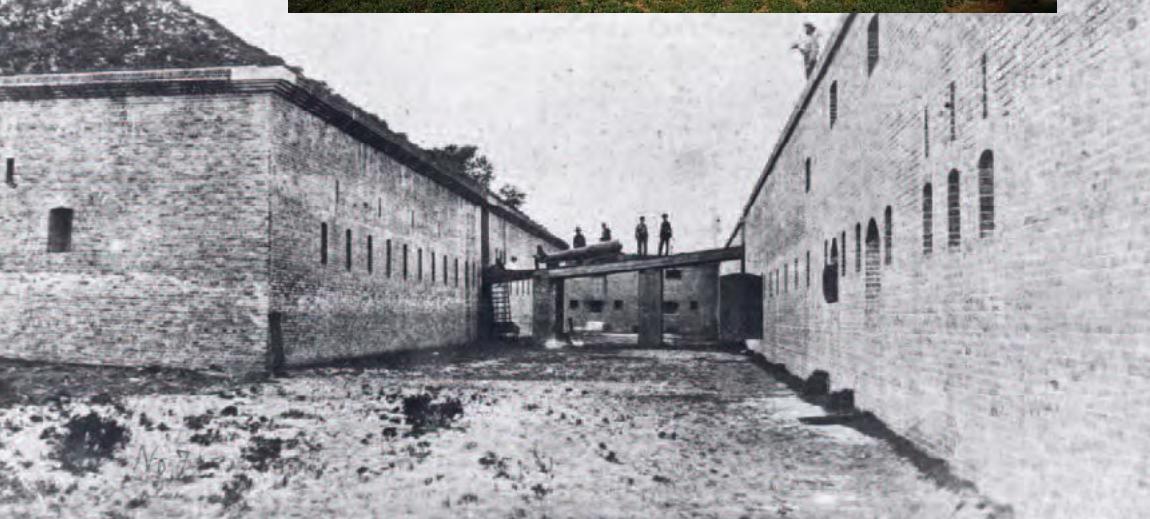
The smallest component of the Florida district, the Okaloosa Area provides visitors with a parking area, a small boat launch, a picnic area, and a beach popular for swimming. The Okaloosa Area is located on Santa Rosa Island, a short drive south and east from the city of Fort Walton Beach.

FORT BARRANCAS AREA

History lovers place the Fort Barrancas Area high on their list of places to explore when visiting the Gulf Coast. Here, within Pensacola's Naval Air Station, visitors find three historic fortifications. The Bateria de San Antonio, built by the Spanish circa 1797 after they had wrested control of West Florida from the British in 1781, was restored by the National Park Service in the late 1970s. Beautiful to behold with its curving white walls and green, grassy interior, the Bateria was built to fire on ships sailing toward Spain's Pensacola settlement from the open gulf.



Interior and exterior views
of Fort Barrancas.



Fort Barrancas was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers after the Florida panhandle had become part of the U.S. It was restored in the late 1970s. Built of bricks and mortar between 1839 and 1844, it includes a counterscarp wall (through which runs a rifle gallery), a dry moat, a drawbridge, and imposing walls of brick. When the fort was in active service, cannons were mounted both in protected casemates and on an open-air terreplein.

Near Fort Barrancas lies the Advanced Redoubt, a smaller but still imposing structure designed to protect the larger fort on its landward side. Access to the interior is limited. Ask a ranger for details.



PERDIDO KEY AREA

The Perdido Key Area, west of Pensacola and the mainland forts, is reached via State Highway 292. An entrance fee is charged to Rosamond Johnson Beach, where visitors find a ranger station, picnic pavilions, a nature trail, canoe launch, and plenty of water and sand. Swimming, walking, sailing, and fishing are the popular activities here. Wildlife-watching opportunities are numerous. Birds of sea and shore abound, the shells of a great many mollusks and gastropods wash up on the beach, and female sea turtles come ashore to lay their eggs in the warm sand. Energetic visitors may want to consider a backpacking trip to Perdido Key's eastern tip. Here, a hike of several miles brings you alongside dunes inhabited by the rare Perdido Key beach mouse to a concrete battery of World War II.

Advanced
Redoubt
drawbridge at
Fort Barrancas.



Perdido Key's uncrowded beaches are popular with beach lovers.



Nearby, beneath the water and sand, lies the site of Fort McRee, built between 1835 and 1839. Positioned just across the opening to Pensacola Bay from Fort Pickens, its purpose was to work with Fort Pickens in keeping foreign warships beyond the barrier islands. Erosion of the island's eastern tip doomed the fort, and today, none of it remains to be seen. (Note: Hikers are forewarned that wilderness conditions prevail on Perdido Key east of Johnson Beach. All water and food must be carried in. Weather conditions may be extreme. Complete a free backcountry permit at the ranger station.)

Four barrier islands held together by the roots of sea oats and other plants and a small, but very beautiful, parcel of land on the Mississippi coast provide five good reasons to visit Gulf Islands National Seashore's Mississippi district. The challenge is access. Three of the islands can be reached only by private boat or special charter. (Regular passenger ferry service makes access to the fourth island easy.) But, as any visitor to national parks knows, the places that are the hardest to reach are often the most wild and beautiful. Horn, Petit Bois, Cat, and East Ship islands reward the intrepid souls who visit them with rare glimpses of the Gulf Coast before the advent of human settlement.



the **MISSISSIPPI DISTRICT**

DAVIS BAYOU AREA

Located in the small, historic, coastal city of Ocean Springs, the Davis Bayou Area offers a wide range of features. The modern William M. Colmer Visitor Center welcomes visitors to the district with an information desk, interpretive programs, a book sales area, and exhibits about the history and natural history of the Mississippi coast. Exhibits include reproductions of paintings by regional artist Walter Anderson, who studied the offshore islands scenery and wildlife



and captured his vivid and wonderfully original impressions in watercolor. Two small bayous flow into the larger Davis Bayou just behind the visitor center. A deck and boardwalk provide fine views into the area of convergence, where a mixing of salt and fresh water rich in nutrients creates a salt marsh teeming with wildlife. Quiet observation from the boardwalk may reward you with a glimpse of an alligator, a heron, a clapper rail, an egret, or perhaps you'll spy an osprey wheeling overhead or a least tern darting into the water after fish. Interpretive programs for adults, children, and families are offered throughout the year. Ask a ranger or information desk volunteer for details. Within a short walk of the visitor center, picnic tables provide a pleasant place to eat beneath massive live oak trees, and a fishing pier offers anglers a place to try their luck for red drum and speckled trout (Mississippi regulations apply).



Windswept beaches, bayous for fishing, and forests with flowers are found throughout the Mississippi district.

At the northeast end of the visitor center parking lot, the one-mile Davis Bayou Trail leads through a forest and skirts the bayou. Take the short CCC Spur for a view of a great overlook and return to connect with the circular Nature's Way Trail that has observation points at the edge of the salt marsh. The paths take about one hour to walk, but allow additional time to observe wildlife. Beyond the Davis Bayou Trailhead, a drive leads to a group camping area, a picnic pavilion, and a boat launch that doubles as a popular fishing area. Just around the corner, campers will find the well-shaded Davis Bayou camping area. Picnic pavilions and a playing field provide opportunities for rest and recreation. Enjoy the Live Oaks Bicycle Route that can be accessed near the picnic pavilions and winds through the area to downtown Ocean Springs.



**Boardwalk
behind the
Davis Bayou
Visitor Center.**

One-mile Davis Bayou Trail.





A passenger ferry takes visitors to Ship Island.

SHIP ISLAND

East Ship and West Ship islands have joined and separated more than once. Hurricanes such as Camille in 1969 and Katrina in 2005, like their historic hurricane predecessors, have cut away sections of the island. Over time, dredging and channel maintenance have removed sand that would have flowed from island to island. Renourishment projects by the National Park Service

in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers help protect Fort Massachusetts and place sand in other areas that may help reunite the two sections of Ship Island in the future. Barrier islands are the first line of defense from tropical storm winds and storm surge waters, so they are highly valued.





West Ship Island



Gulf Islands National Seashore

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



WEST SHIP ISLAND

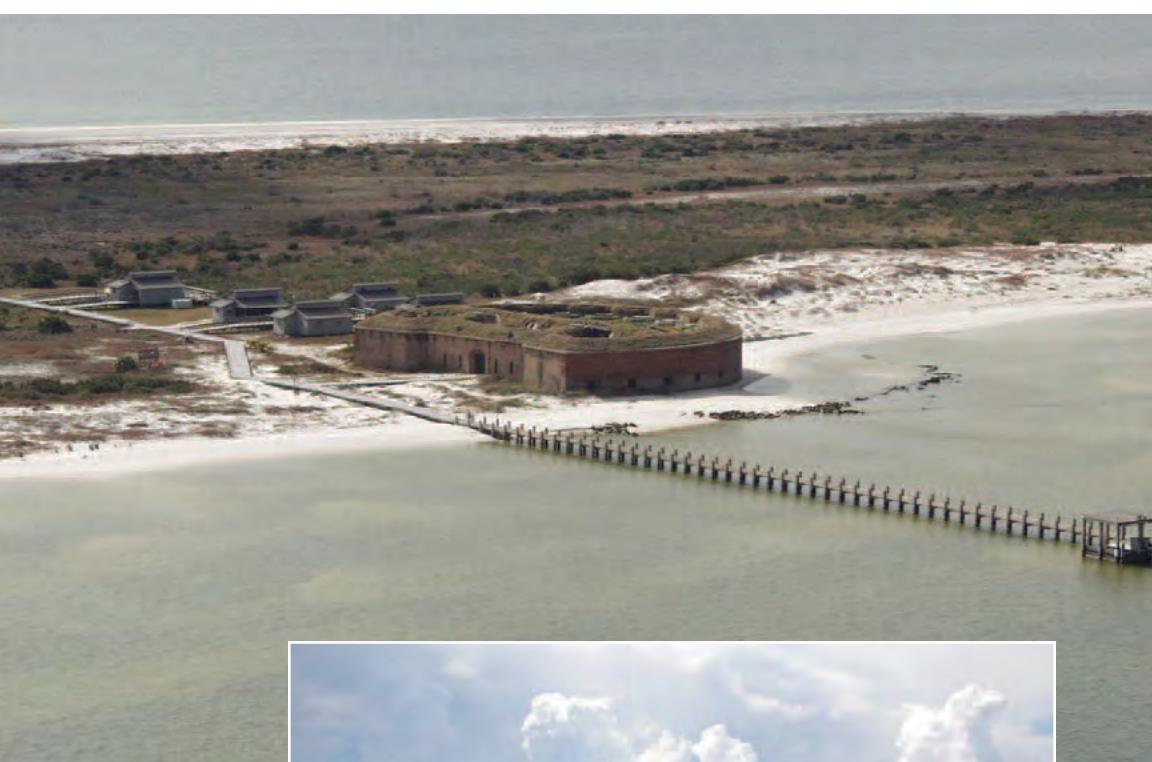
Half the fun of a visit to West Ship Island is riding the passenger ferry that takes you there. The boats, operated by a private company under license from the National Park Service, come and go from the Gulfport Small Craft Harbor at the intersections of U.S. highways 90 and 49. No reservations are required (large groups are an exception), but fees are charged, and schedules vary with the season. Be sure to check at the William M. Colmer Visitor Center at Davis Bayou for details. During the cruise, which lasts about an hour, a bit of luck and patience may bring you glimpses of dolphins, schools of mullet, and a variety of seabirds.

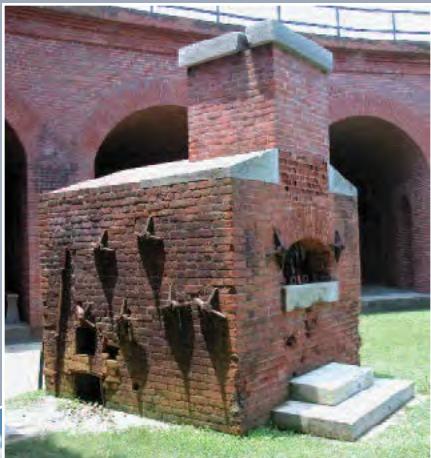
On West Ship Island, you will dock on the quiet Mississippi Sound shore. A boardwalk leads straight ahead for about a third of a mile to a snack bar, picnic pavilions, and a swimming beach on the Gulf of Mexico.



But wait! History beckons. Immediately before you loom the brick walls of Fort Massachusetts, built between 1859 and 1866. Fort Massachusetts was designed as a Third System defense post to keep foreign warships from using the protected anchorage that gives the island its name. In 1861, while the Civil War raged, Confederate forces seized the fort

First Lt. Frederick Prime, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' superintending engineer for the Ship Island fort from 1859-1861, before it was temporarily taken over by Mississippi State Troops.





when it was in an early stage of construction. They exchanged cannon fire with the Union gunship *USS Massachusetts* but were ordered to abandon the fort not long afterward because of the fear of additional attacks and loss of needed cannons. Federal forces reoccupied the fort,



and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resumed construction in 1862. Although completed in 1866, the fort was considered obsolete. Partially restored by the National Park Service, it stands today as a monument to war, peace, and architectural ingenuity.

Many visitors see little more than the fort and the gulf beach. But the island offers much more. There are graceful dunes held together by sea oats and silver-leaved croton, quiet stretches of beach where few feet tread (except those of sandpipers and ghost crabs), and interior wetlands inhabited by a variety of wildlife including raccoons, herons, rails, snakes, alligators, and lizards. Rare piping plovers sometimes nest on the island, as do a variety of more common coastal birds. Spring and fall bring great numbers of migratory birds to West Ship Island, as well as zealous bird watchers eager to see them. Treacherous currents characterize the waters at both ends of West Ship Island. Swimmers are warned to beware of these places.

West Ship Island is known for its wide, sandy beaches and for Fort Massachusetts.



In 1969,
Hurricane
Camille destroyed
buildings
associated with
the Quarantine
Station on
East Ship Island.

EAST SHIP ISLAND

Near the west tip of the present East Ship Island, a beach provides numerous outdoor recreational opportunities such as bird watching, camping, and beachcombing. The channel separating the island from West Ship Island can be fast moving and dangerous; swimming is not recommended in this area. In 2005, most trees were killed by Hurricane Katrina's 30-foot storm surge that covered the island. Thirty-six years earlier, Hurricane Camille destroyed buildings associated with the historic Quarantine Station. Between 1881 and 1918, about 3,200 ships were detained here, most of them carrying immigrants from England and Norway. Sick passengers were isolated and ships fumigated. The foremost concern of the operation was in disinfecting ships and preventing the spread of yellow fever. Access to East Ship Island is by private boat and licensed charter only. Contact the William M. Colmer Visitor Center for details. Camping is primitive. All supplies, including water, must be brought from the mainland and all trash carried away.

HORN ISLAND

The largest and perhaps the most beautiful of Mississippi's barrier islands, Horn Island stretches 13 miles from end to end. Along with neighboring Petit Bois Island, Horn Island was designated a federal wilderness area on November 10, 1978. The long, narrow island is bordered on the gulf side by sparkling surf and on the other flank by the quiet waters of the Mississippi Sound. Dunes, forests, lagoons, and salt marshes make the interior a haven for birds. Visitors who come and linger are often rewarded by glimpses of bald eagles and ospreys, both of which nest on the island, as well as a diverse array of sea, shore, and woodland birds. During spring and fall migration, the island makes an important rest stop for great numbers of tropical migrants moving to and from

Horn Island's dunes, forests, lagoons, and salt marshes are a haven for birds, sea turtles, and alligators.





breeding territories on the North American mainland and wintering grounds in Central and South America. Sea turtles, abundant in earlier centuries but rare today, nest occasionally on the beaches, and alligators cruise the calm lagoons. Walter Anderson, an artist who lived in Ocean Springs until his death in 1965, was inspired by the beauty and wildlife of Horn Island. After his death, his paintings, sculptures, block prints, and ceramics, capturing the magic of the place, helped to inspire the efforts that led to the preservation of Horn Island as part of Gulf Islands National Seashore. To reach Horn Island, one must come by private boat or licensed charter. Primitive camping is allowed, and there is no potable water. Visitors are reminded to take home only memories, sketches, and photographs, and leave behind only footprints.

PETIT BOIS ISLAND

More than six miles long, Petit Bois (pronounced “Petty Boy” by locals) is the most remote of the seashore’s barrier islands. It lies to the east of Horn Island and rises from the gulf not far from Sand Island, an ever-growing mass of dredge spoil that has become a popular stop for recreational boaters and an important breeding ground for birds. Covered mostly by dunes and a low, shrubby growth of wax myrtle, Petit Bois Island is home to a small forest of slash pine. (The island’s name, given by French explorers, means “little woods.”) This is a place where terns and gulls greatly outnumber the human visitors, and the sight of a footprint in the sand is rare. Petit Bois Island is a federally designated wilderness area. Primitive camping (meaning that you provide for all your own needs and carry out everything you bring in) is permitted. Access is by private boat and licensed charter only. There are no facilities on the island and no source of potable water. Sun, silence, and solitude abound.



A dolphin enjoys the solitude near Petit Bois Island.

Dense forests of slash pine and live oak trees back Cat Island's remote sand beaches.



CAT ISLAND

In 2002, Gulf Islands National Seashore began acquiring parts of privately owned Cat Island, Mississippi. This 2,200-acre island is a unique "T-shaped" barrier island created by colliding Gulf of Mexico currents. Unlike the other Mississippi islands, Cat Island's sand beaches are backed by dense forests of slash pine and live oak trees. Bayous and marshes on Cat Island are home to alligators and refuge to migrating birds. During World War II, the island was base for the Cat Island War Dog Reception and Training Center where Americans sent their family pets to be trained for military service. Access to the public sections of the island is by private or park service licensed boats. For additional information, contact the William M. Colmer Visitor Center in Ocean Springs.

For more information on Gulf Islands National Seashore, contact one of the following addresses:

Gulf Islands National Seashore
1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563
Telephone (850) 934-2600

Gulf Islands National Seashore
3500 Park Road
Ocean Springs, MS 39564
Telephone (228) 230-4100

Or visit Gulf Islands National Seashore's page at:
<http://www.nps.gov/guis/>

Text by Edward Kanze.

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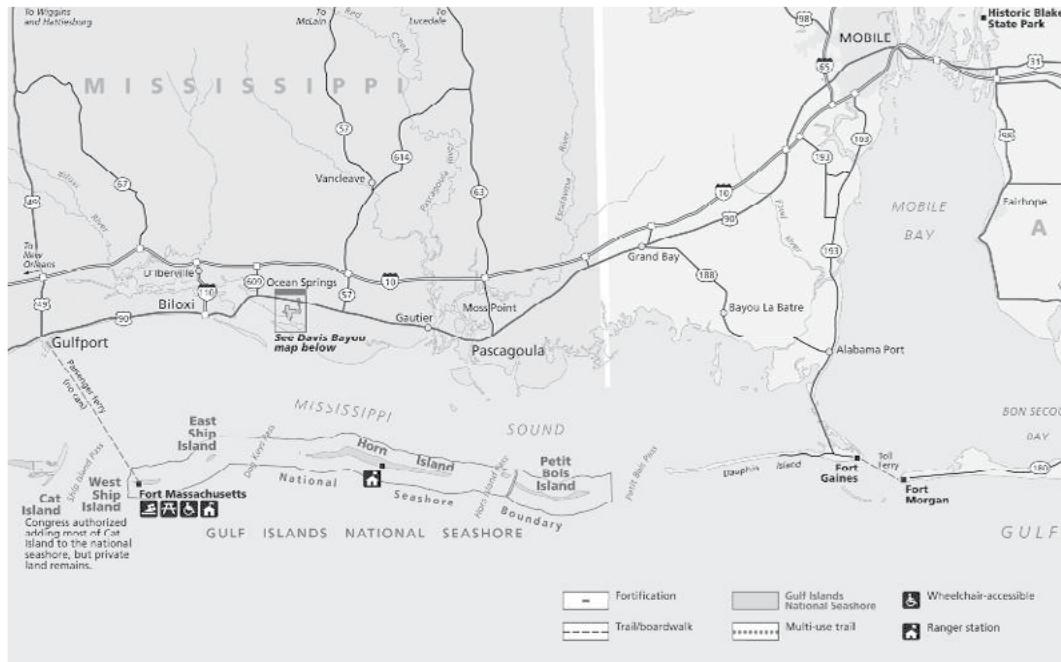
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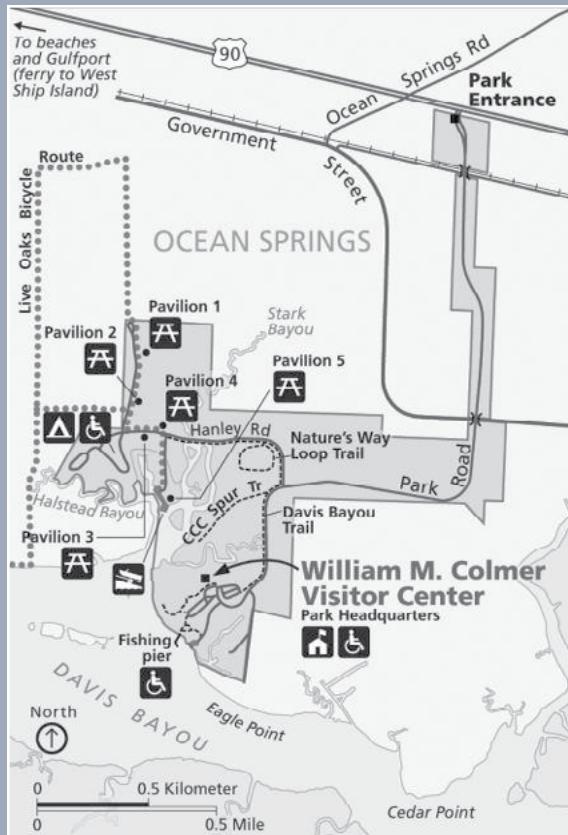
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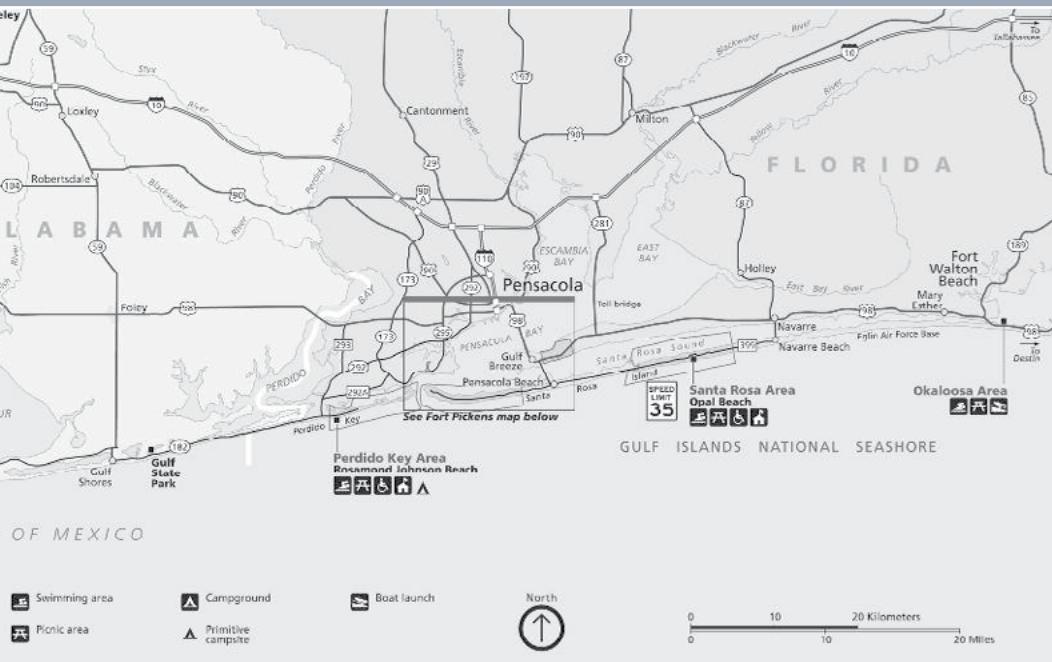
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GULF ISLANDS

NATIONAL SEASHORE



GULF ISLANDS

NATIONAL SEASHORE

the park in pictures

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rom the Okaloosa Area on Santa Rosa Island in the Florida district to the western side of Cat Island in Mississippi, Gulf Islands National Seashore preserves and provides access to a dazzling array of natural and historical resources. Visitors come from far and wide to taste the flavor of the Gulf Coast at its best, to rest and play, to learn, to paint and to draw, to photograph, and to carry home memories and a few pretty seashells. All the park's plants, animals, fungi, landforms, and historic sites are strictly protected by law (only uninhabited shells may be carried out), and visitors easily can see why. The beauty of Gulf Islands National Seashore is both rugged and fragile. Hurricanes shift and shape the islands but fail to destroy their essential nature. Yet, the sea oats that bind the islands together and the flora and fauna that thrive on them are all too easily damaged by thoughtless acts. All who visit can help the National Park Service in the enormous challenge of protecting the flora, fauna, and historical sites of the islands and adjacent mainland for the swimmers, sunbathers, history buffs, and wildlife watchers who, in years and centuries to come, will flock here, as so many of us have, to sample the islands' myriad wonders.



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