

Gulf Islands National Seashore

Mississippi, Florida



Mississippi Areas

Bayous, Islands, Wildlife, & More



Protect Yourself and the Park During Your Visit

For Your Safety:



The sun can be intense. Wear sunblock.



Be mindful of uneven surfaces.



Closed areas protect you and wildlife.



Extreme weather possible.



In case of an emergency call 911.

Important Park Regulations:



Glass is not permitted on beaches.



Pets are not permitted on island beaches.



Metal detectors are not permitted.



Unmanned aircraft are not permitted.

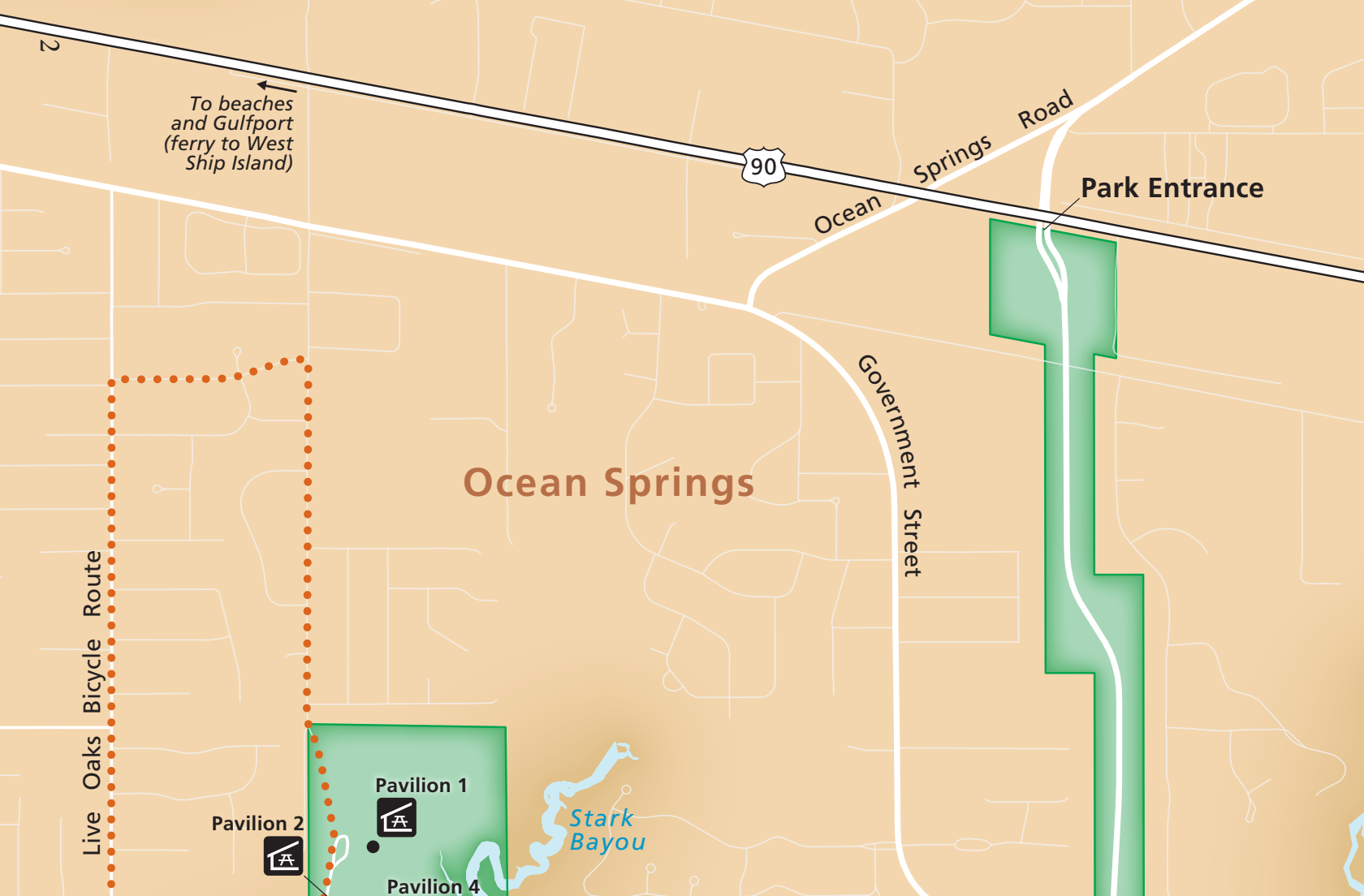
To learn more about the park visit our website www.nps.gov/GulfIslands



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To beaches and Gulfport
(ferry to West Ship Island)

90

Ocean Springs Road

Park Entrance

Ocean Springs

Government Street

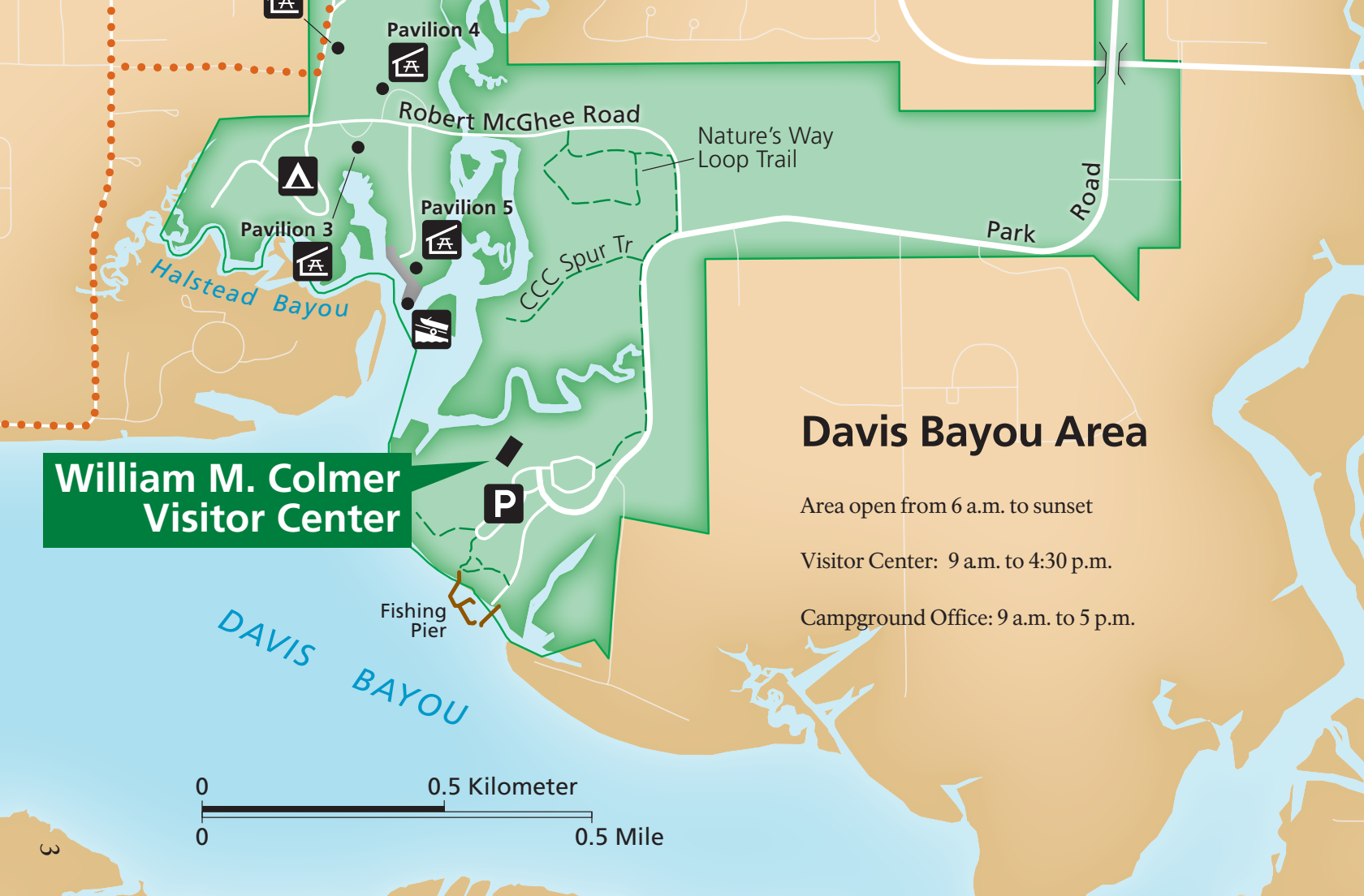
Live Oaks Bicycle Route

Pavilion 2

Pavilion 1

Pavilion 4

Stark Bayou



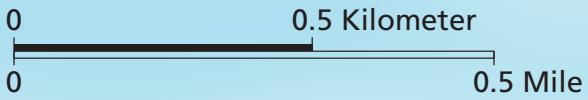
William M. Colmer Visitor Center

Davis Bayou Area

Area open from 6 a.m. to sunset

Visitor Center: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Campground Office: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Ship Island

Located 12 miles off the coast, Ship Island, like other barrier islands serves as an important buffer for the mainland and critical habitat for many species. Shorebirds and sea turtles lay their fragile nests on the islands annually. Native vegetation, like sea oats, anchor the islands' ever-moving sand.

In 1969, Hurricane Camille, one of the most powerful storms recorded to make landfall in Mississippi, cut the island in half creating East and West Ship Islands. The separation was exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In an effort to reintroduce sand into the barrier island system, the United States Army Corps of Engineers reconnected the islands in 2019. It is now known as Ship Island.



Know Before You Go

Ship Island is only accessible by boat. Ticket information and schedules for the seasonal passenger ferry service can be found at www.msshipisland.com.

There is a swim beach on the south side of the island with seasonal lifeguard service. Facilities on this island include restrooms, a snack bar, and two large shade shelters. Sunscreen and insect repellent are highly recommended.

Glass, drones, camping, and metal detectors are not permitted on the island.

Ship Island Lighthouses

The lighthouses on Ship Island are no longer present. However, for generations they represented safety and home. The first lighthouse, completed in 1853, survived the fighting at Ship Island during the Civil War. Eventually, the harsh environment took its toll on the lighthouse and it was abandoned in 1885.

A new lighthouse was constructed in 1886. For nearly 100 years this lighthouse (*background image*) signaled the safety of Mississippi Sound. After surviving numerous storms and strong hurricanes, campers accidentally set the wooden tower on fire and destroyed it in 1972.



Recapturing the Past

After the second Ship Island Lighthouse was destroyed, a grassroots movement to recreate this icon began. In 1996, a slightly smaller “exhibit” lighthouse (left) was completed on West Ship Island. The structure provided a physical link to the past lighthouses that once stood on the island. Nature, however, is an unyielding force and Hurricane Katrina destroyed the exhibit lighthouse in 2005.

Fort Massachusetts

1. Sally Port

Secured with heavy doors, this is the only entrance to the fort. Although a drawbridge was planned, it was never completed.

2. Terreplain

In 1866, the west end of the island was 500 feet from the fort. Today, the end is almost a mile away. From the terreplain, soldiers operated ten cannon positions covering the pass.

3. Traverses

The east side of the fort's upper level is divided by large earthen traverses, which provided additional protection to the cannon positions and storage for powder and ammunition.

4. 15- Inch Rodman

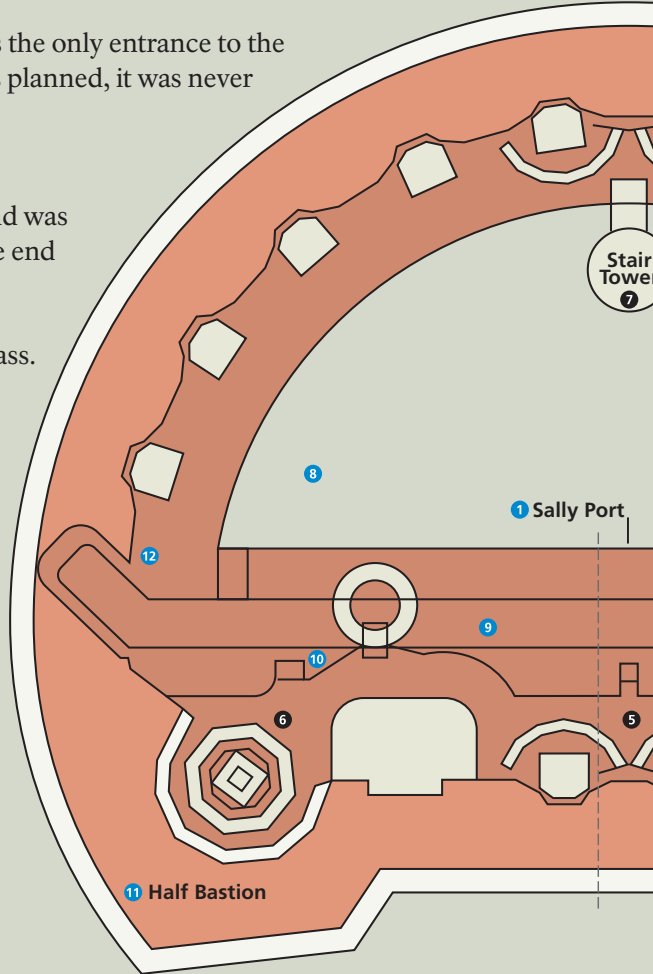
The 15-inch Rodman weighs 50,000 pounds and fired a 450 pound solid cannonball three miles. In 1873, this cannon was raised over the fort's wall and mounted here.

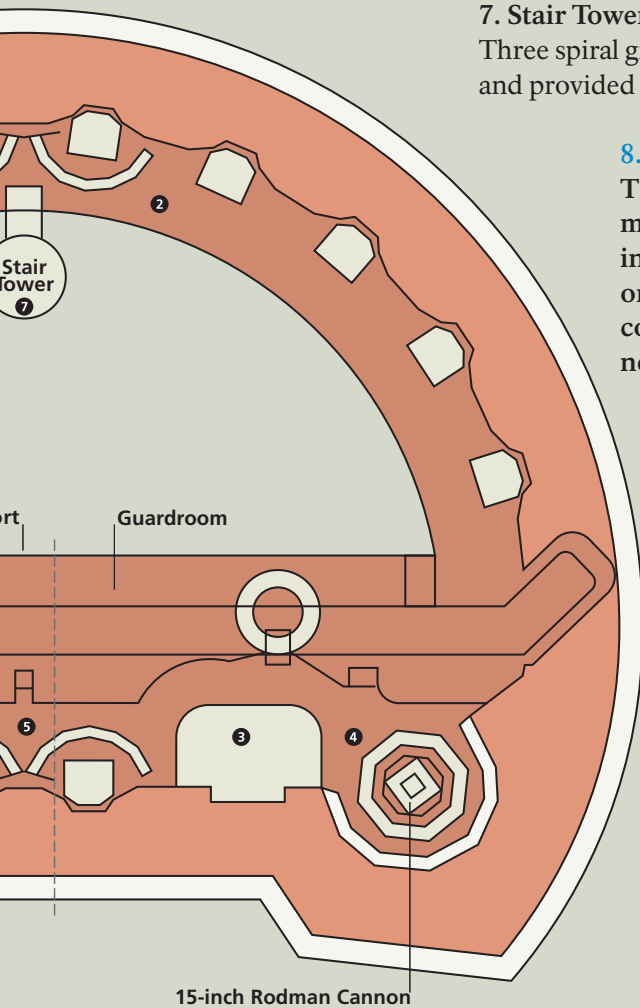
5. Parrott Rifles

Unlike smoothbore cannon, projectiles fired from rifled cannon had greater range, accuracy and destructive power. Two 100-pounder Parrott rifles protected the fort's eastern flank.

6. Cannon Debris

Although designed for 37 cannon, only 17 were mounted during the 1870s. In the early 1900s, many were sold for scrap. Due to their weight, most were broken apart before removal. The debris here was never removed from the fort.





7. Stair Tower

Three spiral granite staircases used less space and provided protection against enemy fire.

8. Hot Shot Furnace

This coal-fired furnace was meant to heat cannon balls intended to set wooden ships on fire. Although common to coastal forts, this furnace was never used.

9. Guardrooms

One on either side of the sally port, these rooms could house soldiers, but most lived outside the fort. The narrow opening in the wall permitted the soldiers to fire on enemy forces with rifles.

10. Powder Magazines

Located next to the guardrooms, powder magazines stored the fort's supply of black powder. The magazines were lined with wood to keep the powder dry.

0 Lower Level

1 Upper Level

11. Half Bastions

Projecting out at each end of the fort's east wall, half bastions provided cross fire to protect the entrance.

12. Casemates

These arched rooms on the lower level of the fort provided support for the upper level, and a protected firing position for cannon. In 1873, thirteen 10-inch Rodman cannon were mounted in these casemates, and set to fire through the embrasures.

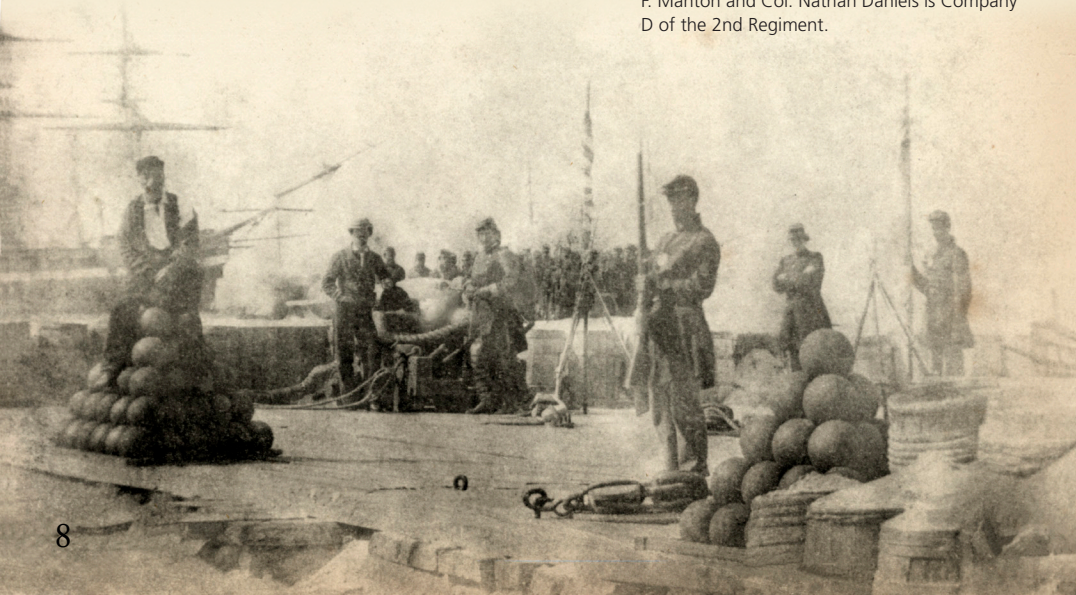
Civil War on Ship Island

Both Federal and Confederate troops used Ship Island even though Fort Massachusetts was not completed until 1866. Calls for fortifying the island began in 1855. Construction of a brick-and-mortar fort began in 1857, but the challenges of building on the remote island meant progress was slow. Secession and war halted construction before more than the fort's foundations could be laid.

Mississippi troops captured Ship Island in January 1861 and immediately established defensive positions. These positions would be tested as Federal commanders began looking for Gulf Coast footholds to launch small raids and major campaigns. On July 9, 1861, the USS *Massachusetts* engaged Confederates positioned on the island, but the battle was indecisive.

The Confederacy abandoned the island as the war progressed. Federal troops took possession in September 1861. With its protected deep water, the island proved an ideal location for Federal forces to launch raids on Gulf Coast cities in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. It also supported operations in the Florida panhandle. In spite of these ongoing operations, construction of the fort resumed.

The Louisiana Native Guards built this battery on Ship Island. In the center behind Capt. Benjamin F. Manton and Col. Nathan Daniels is Company D of the 2nd Regiment.



African American Soldiers on Ship Island

Hundreds of men of African descent served as Union soldiers on Ship Island during and after the Civil War. On Ship Island, those soldiers demonstrated that they could and would fight to preserve the Union and destroy American slavery.

Northern politicians and generals who supported black recruitment intended to use those recruits for labor or guarding forts—not for fighting. Many white Northerners believed black men could not learn how to be soldiers. Northern soldiers and civilians eventually saw these men were necessary to end the rebellion and save the Union.

Black soldiers faced more challenges than white soldiers. Challenges included discrimination, unequal pay, and more danger if taken prisoner. Some white regiments refused to drill alongside black troops. One regiment that endured these challenges was the 2nd Louisiana Native Guards.

The 2nd Louisiana comprised mostly enslaved men who fled slavery and joined Union forces in New Orleans. Most recruits came from Louisiana, but two privates, Wemba Congo and August Congo, had only arrived three years earlier aboard an illegal slave ship from Africa. The regiment entered service in October 1862, becoming one of the first black regiments to officially join the US military.

The 2nd Louisiana set sail for Ship Island just days after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in January 1863. There they drilled and guarded prisoners. On April 9, 1863, 180 men participated in a raid on East Pascagoula, Mississippi. During a break in the fight, several black soldiers entered a hotel and raised the US flag. This fight was one of the first between black soldiers and Confederates. Though the raid had little military importance, it illustrated black resolve for the Union war effort.

By war's end in 1865, the 2nd Louisiana had adopted the name 74th US Colored Troops. At least 200,00 African American soldiers and sailors had fought for the United States during the Civil War. More than 40,000 gave their lives so that the nation might live.



The Louisiana Native Guards arrived on the island in 1863.

Visit the Mississippi Barrier Islands

Incredibly beautiful islands are just a handful (8-13) of miles off the coast of Mississippi. In addition to Ship Island, the National Park Service preserves and protects Petit Bois, West Petit Bois, Horn, and portions of Cat Islands. Maritime forests, marshes, meadows, freshwater ponds, lagoons, and sand dunes provide habitats for diverse wildlife.

Be Prepared

Exploring these barrier islands can be a unique and exciting experience, but be prepared to be self-sustaining. There are no facilities or potable drinking water on any of the islands. Camping is permitted on the islands, although there are specific regulations available on the park's *Backcountry Camping* webpage.

Getting to the Islands

Access to the islands (other than Ship Island) is by private boat only. Boaters should follow all state and federal operation and safety laws. Inland water boats are not appropriate for transportation to the islands.

Captains should refer to navigational charts #11372, #11373, & #11374 and monitor VHF radio channels 16, 22, & 23.

The Horn Island Pier is for administrative use only; boaters to the islands should anchor a safe distance from shore.

Island Wilderness

Wilderness is an indispensable part of the American story. American Indians depended on the bounty of wilderness for survival while western explorers were inspired by its untamed beauty. However, wilderness has disappeared in the last 100 years.

As Americans realized the long term health and welfare of the nation was at risk, a vision for conservation emerged in 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act.

This act provided Congress the ability to designate qualifying areas as wilderness areas, providing the highest level of protection to “secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.”

Off the coast of Mississippi two islands have been afforded this protection as places of solitude, self-reliance, and refuge from modern-day civilization. Horn and Petit Bois Islands are wild places for challenging, but memorable experiences. All should practice wilderness ethics and Leave No Trace principles.



Habitats & Wildlife



Shorebirds

Several species of shorebirds nest and raise their chicks on the national seashore's barrier islands, including least terns, piping plovers, black skimmers, and more. Help protect these fragile creatures by remaining out of areas closed for nesting activities.

Sea Turtles

Four species of sea turtles lay nests on the Mississippi barrier islands. Nests are laid between May and October each year, predominately at night. Reducing or eliminating outdoor lights, even inland, can help sea turtles thrive.



Sand Dunes

Anchored by sea oats and other vegetation, sand dunes hold barrier islands together. These fragile features are home to a variety of plants and animals that play a critical role in the barrier island ecosystem. Please do not walk on dunes.

Ospreys

Gulf Islands offers some of the best nesting and hunting grounds for these powerful raptors. Ospreys are territorial, especially around their nests, but they can be scared so much that they abandon their nest. Keep your distance (300 yards) from nests.



Seagrass

Seagrass meadows serve as nurseries in the shallow waters around barrier islands. These plants provide shelter to shrimp, crabs, and many species of fish. Motorized boats damage seagrass beds; boaters should push, pull, drift, or troll instead.

Share Your Experience



@GulfIslandsNPS



#GulfIslandsNS

#FindYourPark

More Information

Website:
www.nps.gov/GulfIslands

Phone:
(228) 230-4100

Mail:
3500 Park Road
Ocean Springs, MS 39564



15-inch Rodman

This 15-inch Rodman is the first's only remaining cannon. One of these guns, among the largest antebellum cannons ever manufactured, was on the right hand in the early 1860s. The Union army brought thirty pounds. With a maximum effective range of three miles, the Rodman would fire a 15-inch diameter spherical shot about 300 pounds on a wheel about weight. The carriage over the rails allowed the cannon to fire in any direction. This fired at a cost.



KEEP OFF MOUNDS