

allow improved access via Jenkins Bayou to the great birding near the restored wetlands at the end of the inlet.

(Now turn around, return to the T-intersection of park roads and turn left to complete your tour).

10. Karankawa Reef

At the end of the road across the mud flats and off the last point of land lays Karankawa Reef, now under water even at low tide due to subsidence (but well known by boats with deep hulls). The reef is named after the once powerful Karankawa (Carancahua) Indians who inhabited the Gulf Coast region at least through the 1840s. These Indians reportedly could wade on the reef to the mainland. Tall, naked, coated with shark oil to repel mosquitoes and with faces tattooed using oil seepage for color, the Karankawas were feared by other tribes and early settlers (reportedly they were ceremonial cannibals, believing they could thus gain their enemies' valor). Karankawas were excellent bow fishermen and canoeists and lived a nomadic life on barrier islands and along the coastal mainland. By 1860, decimated by disease and conflicts with settlers, the few remaining Karankawas intermingled with other populations and disappeared as a distinct tribe.

We hope you enjoyed the tour provided with support from the Friends of Galveston Island State Park.

Galveston Island State Park
14901 FM 3005
Galveston, TX 77554
(409) 737-1222
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/galveston

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

4200 Smith School Road
Austin, TX 78744
(800) 792-1112
www.tpwd.state.tx.us

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TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

DRIVING TOUR OF POINTS OF INTEREST AT GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK



Galveston Island State Park

offers visitors a rare, intimate view of a barrier island ecosystem. The park contains a mosaic of coastal habitats that host a surprising variety of wildlife and is visited by birds from throughout the eastern hemisphere during spring and fall migration seasons. The park has 1,998 acres, 180 overnight camping sites and 60 day-use sites. There are four miles of nature trails with an observation platform, boardwalks and photo blinds on the Galveston Bay side. Approximately a half million people visit Galveston Island State Park each year and you are one of them – welcome!

1. Back Dunes and Swales

Here you can see dunes pushed landward and troughs formed, the work of hurricane winds. Flooded by storm seawater, these low tracts transformed over time to freshwater swales (marshy land) with ponds populated by huge bullfrogs and a variety of birds.

(Turn around and continue on this road to the short road in between the first and second campgrounds.)

2. Beach Landings

On the beach at the eastern border of the park is the spot where Cabeza De Vaca's barge is thought to have foundered in the surf on a cold November day in 1528. De Vaca, the first European to set foot in Texas, was second in command of the ill-fated Narvaez expedition for the conquest of Florida. Upon completion of their land exploration of Florida and finding that their ships were gone, De Vaca's party built barges and searched the Gulf coastline. Of the 247 who set out from Florida, 40 landed naked and near death on Galveston Island. After eight harrowing years and 6,000 miles over mostly unknown reaches of North America, four survivors finally found their way home.

Dutch pirates used the Island as a rendezvous point in the early 1600s as no doubt did other pirates who operated in the Gulf, including Henry Morgan, Captain Kidd and Blackbeard. Legend tells of pirates tying lanterns to the backs of burros and leading them along the Galveston beach, hoping seamen would mistake them for passing ships and founder. The privateer Jean Lafitte, who made his home on the east end of Galveston Island in the early 1800s, hunted in the vicinity of Galveston Island State Park and fought a battle with Karankawa Indians at Three Trees about three miles east of the park on present-day Steward Road.

Smugglers also used beaches along the west end of the island as debarkation points for the illegal importation of slaves, who then traveled inland to work Texas plantations. During Prohibition schooners from Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas anchored off the coast and off-loaded liquor into small powerboats that relayed the cargo to trucks waiting along the miles of deserted beach. From there, the liquor made its way into cities through the middle and southwestern states. The Beach Gang, led by mobster Ollie J. Quinn, landed most of its goods on West Beach, possibly on the park's own strip of shoreline.

(Return to road and take a left to the dead-end and toward the beach.)

3. Gulf of Mexico Shoreline

Look past the surf and imagine the time when Spanish galleons, pirate ships or German submarines cruised near the horizon. Today sailboats, shrimp boats and drilling rigs populate the Gulf off the park's shoreline. One can often see dolphins cavorting and pelicans diving for their catch. Scientists have identified a West Galveston dolphin pod that is joined by other pods when the fishing is particularly good. Brown Pelicans can dive straight down at great speed and have a special air-filled sac to cushion the shock. A rare sight on the Island in the 60s, Brown Pelicans have made a dramatic recovery since DDT has been banned. Sandpipers and other shorebirds cruise the surf for worms (you can generally determine how deep each species' particular delicacy is buried by how long the beak is). And, of course, several species of gulls populate the shoreline performing their garbage collection chores. But the great majority of life on our beach remains out of sight-burrowed underground to escape the hazards of surf, currents, shifting sand and baking heat.

(Return to the park entry road and cross Hwy. 3005 to Bay side of park).

4. Texas Coastal Prairie

On either side of this point, you can view a remnant of the original upland tall grass and lower saltgrass native prairie that once surrounded Galveston Bay. The "Sea of Grass" was so vast and tall that one could lose his way if he left established trails. Even this small acreage, though changed by cattle production and the introduction of invasive, exotic plants such as Chinese tallow trees, is still filled with a wonderful variety of grasses and wildflowers. Over 60 percent of bird species of North America can be found on Galveston Island at some time during the year. Park staff and friends of Galveston Island State Park volunteers participate in Project Prairie Bird, an annual bird count in prairies of the State. This environment is also home to raccoons, opossums, coyotes, field mice, rabbits, toads and snakes. Park staff and volunteers work to restore and extend the park's prairie by eliminating invasives and mowing to replicate the grass renewing effects of prairie fires and buffalo grazing.

5. Nature Center

Our nature center is open weekends from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. It's a good place to learn more about the park's environment, birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and crustaceans.

(Once past the nature center, take the first road to the left).

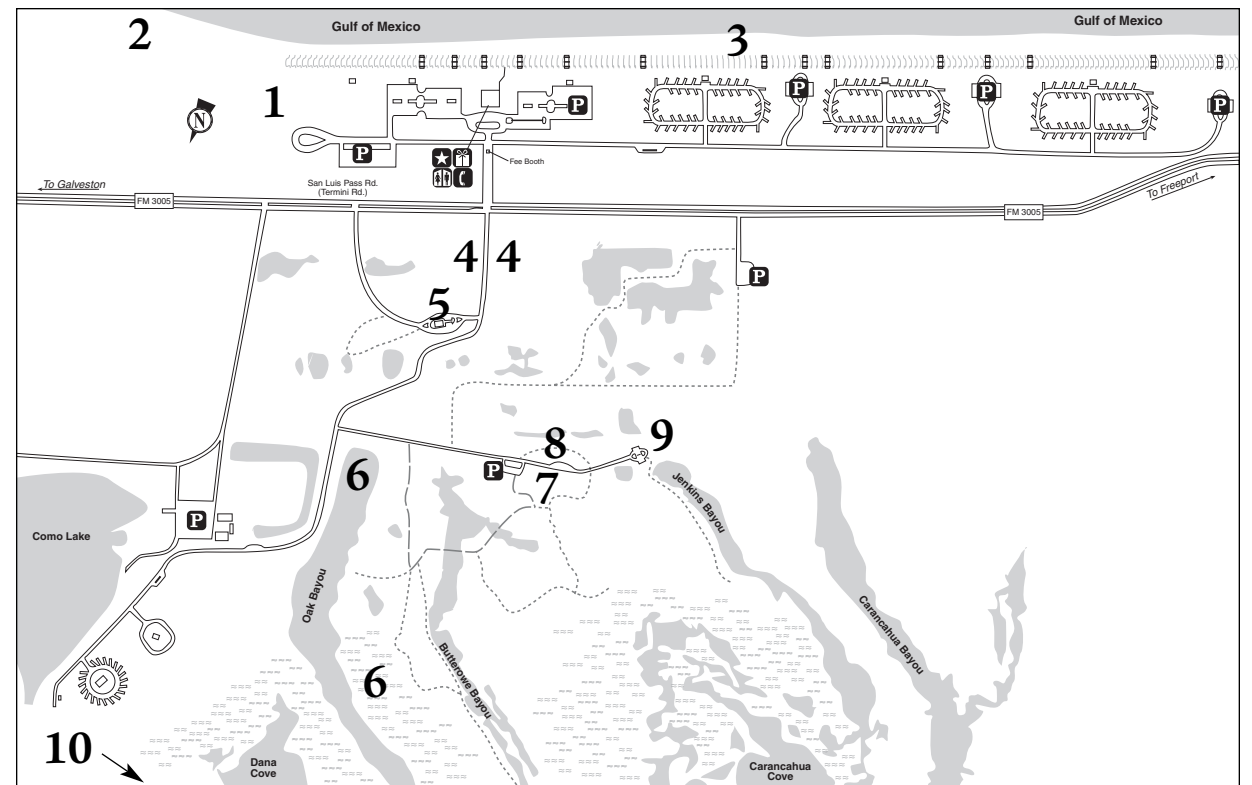
6. Bayou and Wetlands

The open water you see on your right is an inlet from Galveston Bay called Oak Bayou that is surrounded by estuarine (tidal fringe) wetland. These vegetated marshes are found between the open bay and uplands all along the west end of our barrier island. Wetlands are one of the world's most endangered, yet essential environments. They protect our water quality by efficiently filtering surface water before it is released in groundwater or rivers. Coastal wetlands also serve as a nursery for the fish and shellfish that support the \$400 million wholesale commercial fishing industry as well as the \$2 billion Texas saltwater sport fishing industry. Wetlands reduce the severity of floods by acting as natural detention areas, reduce shoreline erosion and stabilize banks, and provide habitat for birds and other animals. These in turn support the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry – wildlife watching. In 1996, 3.8 million U.S. residents spent 1.2 billion eco-tourism dollars in Texas.

(Now proceed to the parking lot on your right.)

7. Observation Platform

If you exit your vehicle and climb the platform you'll be rewarded with a view across wetlands to the bay. The black line you see in the water near the shoreline is an expanse of geo-textile tubes (huge sand filled socks) placed there to halt further shoreline erosion. The geo-textile tubes have served so well in smoothing wave action that the water has cleared enough to allow recovery of seagrass beds. Galveston Island State Park now has a seagrass bed that covers more than 50 acres of the bay floor. Looking to the left you may spot a grid of terraces planted with cordgrass as part of the marsh restoration. You'll see a few shorebirds – egrets, spoonbills, herons, terns and white pelicans in winter – as well as small migrating birds and an occasional hawk or White-tailed Kite. The trail to the right of the observation platform will take you in a quarter mile to a



boardwalk where you can get a close-up view of the wetlands cord grass and possibly see crabs skittering across the mud. Crabbing is allowed in the park.

(Just past and to the left of the observation parking lot is the next site.)

8. Oak Mott

A mott (derived from the Spanish word mata) is a small stand of trees surrounded by prairie. Although this one was planted after the park was established, early settlers planted most of the oak motts in Texas as shelter around their homes.

(Now drive on to the end of this road.)

9. Freshwater Pond and Some History

On your right is one of the park's 20 or so freshwater ponds, essential to wildlife, especially to those thirsty birds who have migrated across the Gulf of Mexico. When the park gets hurricane flooding this pond

becomes brackish, but gradually recovers to its original freshwater state, evidenced by the presence of cattails and ducks. Freshwater ponds support life quite different than our brackish estuarine wetlands – turtles and frogs do not like salty water. This small perfectly round pond is of particular interest. It was dredged in 1893 for the planned town of South Galveston. Streets were laid out, lots platted and a railroad connecting the town with Galveston begun. A racetrack with grandstand seating for 6,000 had already been constructed, a railroad bridge to the mainland across Karankawa Reef was proposed and the Alta Loma Hotel and Zoological Garden was planned to front on Lake Como (edging the park's northeast boundary). However, these plans were never fully realized. Streets returned to pasture, the railroad bridge was never built, the racetrack was abandoned and the city rail line collapsed in the 1900 Great Storm. Only the pond remains. At the end of this road a canoe-kayak launching area is available to