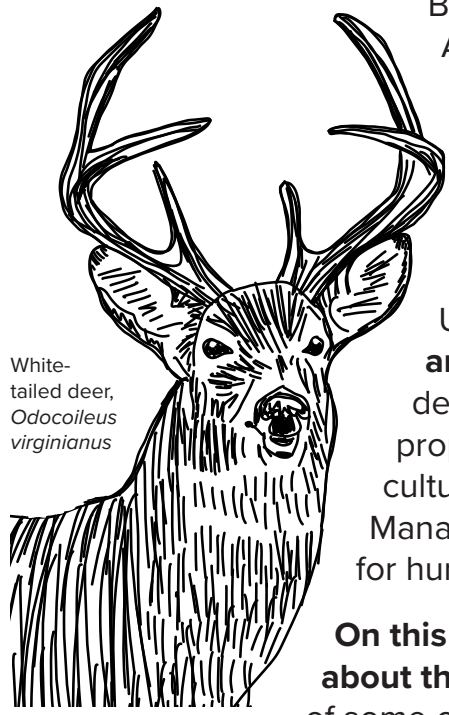




Welcome to Botany Bay

Plantation Heritage Preserve & Wildlife Management Area



White-tailed deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*

Botany Bay Plantation Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area is managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, a state agency tasked with protecting and advocating for South Carolina's wildlife, waters and landscapes. Botany Bay is also part of the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve, one of a national system of reserves dedicated to the science-based protection of coastlines and estuaries.

Unlike a state or county park, **Botany Bay is minimally developed and primarily managed for wildlife.** As a Heritage Preserve, a designation that affords the state's highest level of protection, this property provides a laboratory for scientific research, protection for cultural sites and habitat for rare and vanishing species. As a Wildlife Management Area, it serves as a place of refuge and outdoor recreation for hunters, hikers, birdwatchers and more.

On this driving tour and at stopping points along the way, you'll learn about the history and ecology of this special place – including the stories of some of the peoples who have lived here, from Indigenous peoples to European planters to enslaved Africans and their descendants. You'll also learn about the flora & fauna that have been here far longer than any humans – and the shared threats we face today.

Over the centuries, this property has witnessed moments of dramatic environmental change, human adversity and disasters both natural and manmade. Today, it offers us a beautiful place to connect with the natural world and reflect on our shared heritage as South Carolinians and Americans.

Please note: there are no restroom facilities or trash disposal on the property. The nearby Environmental Learning Center at Edisto Island State Park offers amenities (362 Oyster Row Ln, Edisto Island, SC).

Please help us protect this special place by leaving Botany Bay as you found it – follow regulations meant to protect wildlife and be respectful toward other visitors.

Scan to view public events, volunteer opportunities and a full list of regulations for Botany Bay:



Fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger niger*

How You Can Enjoy Botany Bay



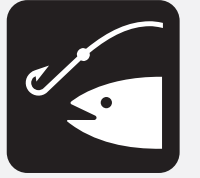
Driving/Cycling Tour

The 6.5-mile tour is a mobility-friendly way to explore the property.



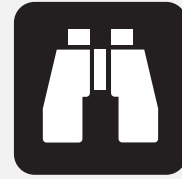
Hike to the Beach

The half-mile walk to the beach is accessible only at low tide.



Fish

Fishing is permitted from the front beach (and for youth at Jason's Lake).



Birdwatch

More than 230 bird species have been documented on Botany Bay's grounds.



Hunt

Botany Bay hosts lottery/archery deer, youth dove and small game hunts.



Learn

Signs across the property share more about the history and ecology of Botany Bay.

Follow Regulations to Protect This Special Place*

- No natural items or cultural artifacts may be gathered** or removed from Botany Bay; this includes plants, animals, fungi, shells, rocks, minerals, fossils, artifacts & ecofacts.
- Dogs are not permitted on the beach** at any time.
- Drive slowly and carefully to avoid killing wildlife.** Fox squirrels, snakes, deer and more all share the dirt roads with cars.
- Botany is open to day visitors** from one hour before official sunrise to one hour after official sunset.
- Only 15-passenger vans and smaller are allowed** to tour the property due to the fragile nature of the road system.
- There are no restroom facilities or trash disposal** on the property. Please visit the nearby Environmental Learning Center at Edisto Island State Park for amenities (362 Oyster Row Ln, Edisto Island, SC).

*Find a full list of regulations on the back of the entrance kiosk.



Botany Bay is home to two shell ring complexes (Image courtesy Jamie Koelker, Koelker & Associates, LLC).



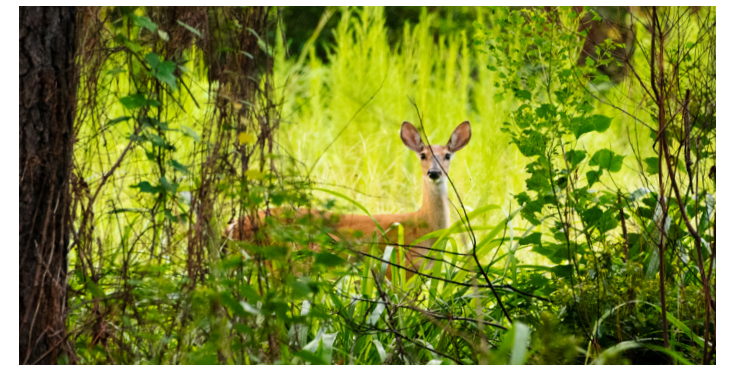
This 1696 French map of the South Carolina coast shows Edisto and Kiawah Islands (Image courtesy University of South Carolina).

The Ring People - Humans have inhabited this part of Edisto Island for thousands of years. Some 4,000 years ago, Indigenous peoples left marks on the landscape in the form of enormous rings composed predominantly of oyster shell but also whelks, ribbed mussels, periwinkles and animal bones. Since 2017, SCDNR archaeologists have raced to excavate one of these shell ring complexes before it is eroded by storms and rising seas. Some of the artifacts they've excavated are below, providing glimpses into the lives of Indigenous peoples.

New World Carolina - In the 1640s, Europeans began settling South Carolina primarily as a money-making venture. The plantation system they brought with them transformed Edisto Island into a landscape of rice, corn, livestock (and later, cotton) grown by an enslaved, majority-Black population. An estimated 1,000 individuals were enslaved on this land between ~1700 and 1863. A wealthy group of agricultural aristocrats owned most of the island during this time, including the Townsends of Bleak Hall, who vocally supported South Carolina's secession from the Union.



Freedmen and women on Hopkins' Plantation, Edisto Island, (Image courtesy Library of Congress; Henry P. Moore).



White-tailed deer are among the animals for which biologists now manage this property. Deer hunts occur at Botany each fall.

Civil War & Reconstruction - Edisto passed between Confederate and Union hands during the Civil War, with both sides using Bleak Hall's third-story cupola as a lookout. Thousands of enslaved people remained on the island. Many eventually took refuge in Union-controlled Beaufort, where 76 Edisto freedmen joined the Union Army. After the war, many freedpeople were forced to sign work contracts and remained on the island under conditions relatively unchanged. Others were able to fight for economic empowerment, buy land and become successful planters and businesspeople.

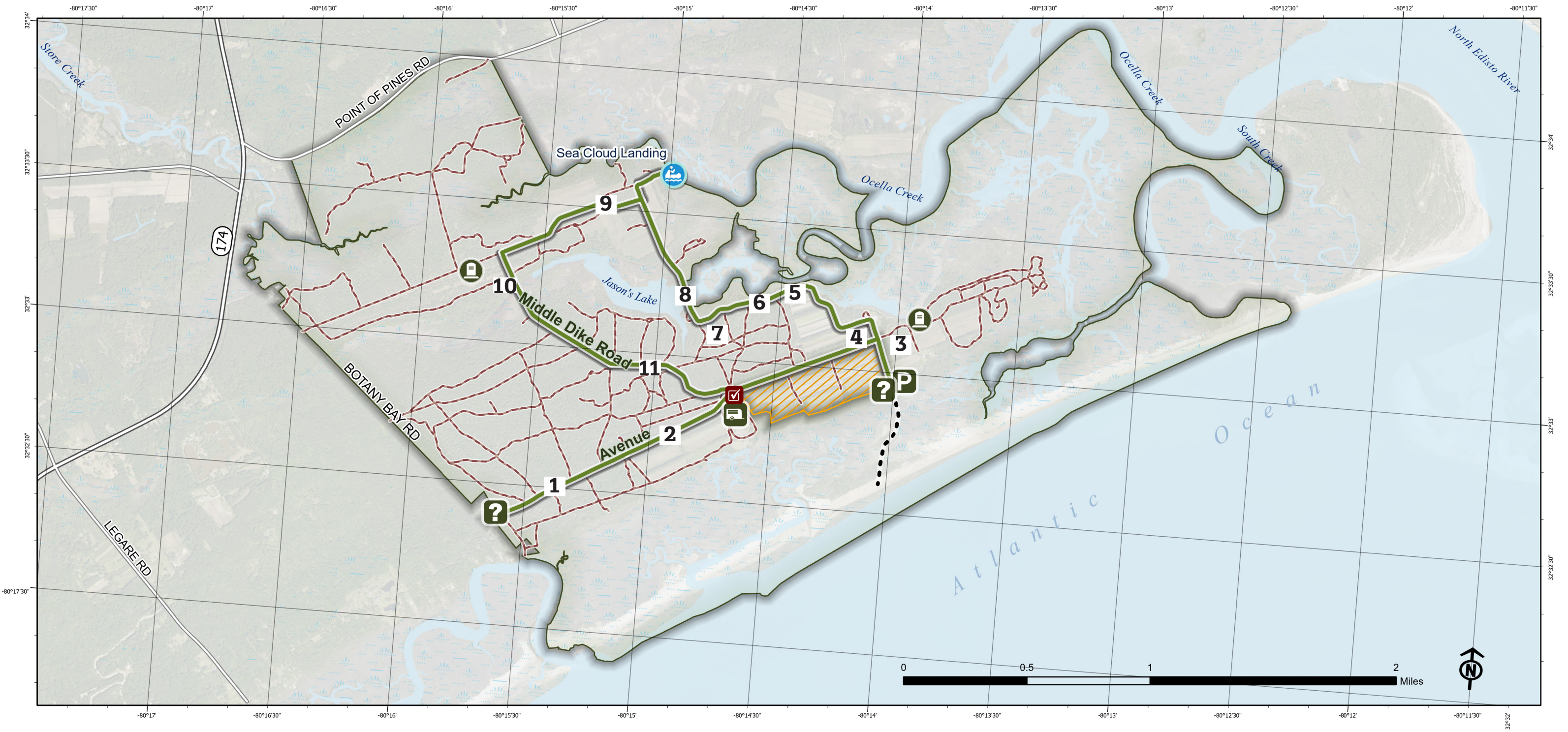
From Farm to Forests - The twentieth century saw this land move from intensive farming and human habitation to a forested refuge for wildlife. After the boll weevil arrived on Edisto Island, ending centuries of cotton cultivation, this land passed out of the Townsend family and was sold several times. Many of the Gullah families with deep connections to the property moved away in search of jobs and social equality. By the time it was deeded to the state, Botany Bay was the largest intact property on Edisto. Today, it is protected in perpetuity for all citizens.





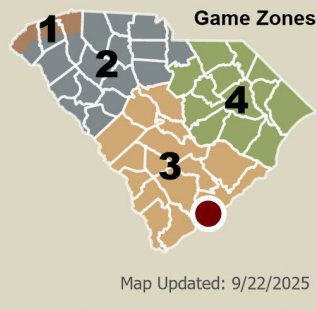
BOTANY BAY

Heritage Preserve & Wildlife Management Area



Legend

- Kiosk
- Parking
- Historic African American Cemetery
- Equestrian Trailer Parking
- Hunter Check Station
- Dove Management Area
- Paddle Launch; No Trailers Allowed
- Roads - Vehicles Allowed
- Secondary Lanes and Firebreaks - Closed to Vehicles
- Trail to Beach; Only Accessible at Low Tide



Driving/Riding Tour

- Avenue of Oaks** - For centuries, this road has served as the property's main entrance to visitors arriving by land. Borrowed from English estate design, tree-lined avenues were common features of antebellum plantations, often planted and maintained by enslaved workers to frame the view of a house. This shady live oak 'allée' led to the heart of Bleak Hall, one of two plantations that formerly made up Botany Bay. At the height of its size and wealth before the American Civil War, Bleak Hall was one of the East Coast's largest cotton plantations; its owner was one of the wealthiest slaveowners on Edisto Island. The landscape then would have been unrecognizable to modern visitors—almost all the land around you was painstakingly cleared and planted in Sea Island cotton by enslaved field workers. It was said that you could see clear to the ocean from where you are currently driving.
- Agricultural Fields** - The land around you has gone through many transformations before and since its life as a cotton plantation, serving at times as indigenous hunting ground, colonial salt works, fruit and vegetable farm, timber stand, private resort, and finally, heritage preserve and wildlife management area. Today, some agricultural fields remain on this property—but they're planted for wildlife, not people. Throughout the seasons, the fields to your right are planted with corn, sunflowers and wheat to provide food for deer, doves, turkeys, fox squirrels and countless songbirds. Where the main road ends, turn left to continue on the driving tour. Turn right to visit the beach access trail.
- Bleak Hall Plantation** - You are now on the grounds of Bleak Hall, the seat of one slaveholding family's fortune for nearly 150 years. In 1860, this was the site of a bustling village, home to 272 enslaved men, women and children of African descent in addition to the six-person Townsend family. A steady stream of people and animals passed through this intersection every day on the way to and from agricultural fields, a mill complex, multiple wharfs, barns, extensive gardens, the 'street' of enslaved dwellings and a grand, three-storied mansion. Today, just three of these structures remain, all of which were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973: a barn, the multipurpose 'Ice House,' and a gardener's shed. Visitors may park and enter the gates to learn more about Bleak Hall.
- Tabby Barn** - It's no coincidence that all three of Bleak Hall's surviving historic structures were made at least in part with the hardy building material called tabby. A mixture of oyster shells, lime and sand, tabby made use of plentiful local materials and would have been made by enslaved artisans. The tabby structure on your left (estimated origin 1840s) was originally a barn with a high wooden gable roof covered with cypress shingles. During World War II, this building stored hay for horses used by the Coast Guard to patrol Edisto beaches. These patrols enforced black-out regulations, ensuring that the coastline remained invisible to German submarines targeting shipping routes along the East Coast.
- Ocella Creek** - The road here parallels Ocella Creek, offering a beautiful vista of salt marsh beneath a stand of live oaks. Salt marsh is one of the productive ecosystems on the planet, and South Carolina is fortunate to have more of it than any other East Coast state. Without salt marsh, we would have no seafood: 75% of our saltwater fish and shellfish spent part or all of their lives in this ecosystem. It also protects coastal communities from storms. You can help protect salt marsh by keeping pollutants out of our waterways (properly dispose of pet waste in the trash, reduce your use of fertilizers and pesticides and avoid single-use plastics) and supporting low-impact development along the coast.
- Overseer's Home Remnants** - To your right are the remnants of what was likely an overseer's cabin that was rebuilt after the deadly 1893 Sea Islands hurricane. Overseers were essential to the running of large plantations, managing day-to-day operations and ensuring that enslaved workers completed their daily tasks, often through threat of violence. Planters typically hired white men as overseers, but occasionally enslaved men called 'drivers' served as overseers or worked alongside them. Because agriculture remained the dominant industry on Edisto Island well into the 1900s, the 'driver' continued to be an important position even after slavery was abolished. One such post-War driver at Bleak Hall was freedman Francis "Frank" Reed, Sr., whose parents were born enslaved.

- Picnic Pond** - Although it's now home to wood ducks, frogs, fish and the occasional alligator, this small pond is not a natural feature. In the 1970s, owner John "Jason" Meyer (1918-1977) directed this area be mined for fill dirt to construct the dike you will soon use to cross Ocella Creek. The borrow pit-turned Picnic Pond became a favorite spot of Jason and his wife Margaret Morgan Pepper (1922-2007), who were the last private owners of this property and are honored at this site with a memorial stone.
- Jason's Lake** - In 1970, owner Jason Meyer approved the construction of the dike you are crossing, which dammed part of Ocella Creek marsh. The dam created a prime fishing and duck hunting but destroyed salt marsh that did not belong to Meyer in the process. When authorities learned of the illegal construction, Meyer struck an unusual deal with the attorney general: the dam would remain in place, but Meyer would leave the property to the state as a wildlife refuge after his and his wife's deaths. Through this arrangement, Botany Bay passed to the state and opened to the public in 2008. Today, Jason's Lake is open Friday-Sunday for adult-youth (17 years old and younger) catch-and-release fishing. Adults must possess a valid saltwater recreational fishing license and must be accompanied by youth individual to fish. Youth cannot fish alone.
- The Ruins of Sea Cloud** - You have now passed onto the grounds of what was called, for a short period of this land's history, Sea Cloud Plantation. To your left are the ruins of a manor house believed to have been constructed by enslaved artisans in the 1820s for Ephraim Mikell Seabrook. The house was "once remarkable for its beautiful paneling and a fine, circular stairway" (*News & Courier*, 1935). Over the centuries, this portion of Botany Bay passed through members of the Linkley, Hamilton and McLeod families, who profited from rice, livestock and Sea Island cotton grown by African and African American hands. In the 1850s, planter and politician John F. Townsend purchased Sea Cloud, combining it with his own Bleak Hall into the singular property known today as Botany Bay.
- The Beehive Well** - As you approach the upper end of Jason's Lake, note the brick beehive-shaped water well to your right. Originally 12 feet tall and known as Jacob's Well, this unique structure provided access to fresh drinking and irrigation water for people, livestock and crops for at least 200 years. The conical top may have been designed to keep debris out. Leroy Burgess, who spent his childhood on Botany Bay, said that he and other schoolchildren stopped at the beehive well for water on the way home from school during the 1930s. The well was still in use until the 1980s.
- Pine-Hardwood Forest** - The last leg of the driving tour takes you through a pine-hardwood forest filled with lush ferns and many live oak 'skeletons.' Although it looks wild and untouched, recall that this land would have been clear-cut for cotton cultivation until the early twentieth century! Today, SCDNR biologists manage these woods for deer and other wildlife. One tool that benefits many native species here is prescribed fire, which removes thick underbrush, promotes nutritious plant growth, and reduces pest and disease loads. Can you spot evidence of fire in this forest? (Hint: look at the base of the tree trunks.) When the road ends, turn right to exit the property or left to reach the beach access lot.

Continue on foot to Pockoy Island

P This symbol on the map indicates where to park for access to a half-mile trail to the Atlantic Ocean. Botany Bay's beach is one of the most rapidly eroding sites along the South Carolina coast and is only reachable at low tide. At the end of the trail, you'll reach Pockoy Island, where SCDNR's archaeology team has worked to study Indigenous shell mound remnants before they collapse into the sea.

The ocean is rough along this stretch of coast and rapidly rising tides can quickly flood both the causeway and the beach. Please exercise caution and pay close attention to tide levels.

