Botany Bay Plantation WMA Driving Tour

An avenue of oaks leads down the entrance road to historic Botany Bay Plantation WMA.

Botany Bay Plantation Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area is 4,687 acres and consists of two large plantations: Bleak Hall and Sea Cloud. Bleak Hall consisted of 12 parcels of land. Daniel Townsend II acquired the land in the 1780's, and the Townsend family owned and farmed this land until the early 1900's. Long staple Sea Island cotton was grown during the "Golden Age" (1820-1860) and made these planters very wealthy. During the twentieth century, Botany Bay Plantation owners harvested timber, farmed the open fields, and managed habitat for wildlife. The area is a mix of pine-hardwood forests, agricultural fields, coastal wetlands, and a barrier island with front beach. The driving (or cycling) tour covers 6.5 miles and is marked by numbers for suggested stops along the way. Please pull to the side of the road to view or photograph birds, wildlife, flora and fauna. Please observe the 15 mph speed limit. It is a safe speed and helps to prevent the unnecessary deaths of wildlife. A spur off the tour takes you to a parking area where you can walk the half-mile trail to the wild and unspoiled beach.

1) The tour begins at the information kiosk at the main gate. Please sign in and proceed along the avenue. Note the large live oaks, loblolly pines and cabbage palmetto, the S.C. state tree. The spreading limbs of the live oak support colonies of resurrection fern, green after rain, and brown during a drought. A variety of songbirds such as painted buntings, warblers, tanagers, and nuthatches can be seen and heard along the avenue and as well as red-headed, pileated, and red-bellied woodpeckers. Deer, wild turkeys, and fox squirrels may cross your path, and listen for the roar of the surf from the beach.

2) After a mile, you will see a house on the right along with a pasture and barn. The house was built in the 1930's and remodeled in 1977. It served as the retreat residence for Dr. James Greenway (owner from 1933-1962), and John E. (Jason) Meyer. It was the winter home of the last owner, Margaret "Peggy" Meyer Pepper. It is currently the DNR property manager's residence and remains private.

Continue on the avenue until it ends, turn left, and park at #3.

3) You are now on the grounds of Bleak Hall Plantation. Walk through the black gate, and you will see two small buildings, both built in the 1800's. The white building to the left is referred to as the Ice House. The building was a multipurpose structure used as a carriage house, the air drying of crops, and general storage, as well as an ice house. Beneath the floor boards of the building is a storage pit that was used to store ice. The ice was cut from rivers and lakes in New England and brought down on tall ships where it was insulated in saw dust. The small tabby structure served as a gardener shed for Oqui, a Chinese gardener, who was brought here by Admiral Perry's expeditions in the 1850's. Oqui laid out an extensive, oriental garden with olive, citrus and spice trees as well as poppies, sugar cane and multiple flowers and vegetables.

The first Bleak Hall mansion overlooked Ocella Creek. It was two and half stories high with a cupola on the top used by both Confederate and Union troops as a lookout over the North Edisto River. The original Bleak Hall burned after the Civil War and was replaced by another large house, built in an eclectic mix of Victorian styles.

4) The tabby building on the left was originally a barn, and later used as an equipment shed. The roof of this building was accidently destroyed in 1977 by an agricultural burn. During World War II, this building stored hay and feed for horses used by the Coast Guard for patrolling Edisto beaches. These patrols enforced "black-out" regulations to protect domestic shipping from German U-Boats.

5) The road crosses the ends of two agricultural fields, planted with corn, sunflowers, and wheat which provide food for deer, doves, turkeys, fox squirrels and countless songbirds.

6) Continue on the road to a stand of live oaks that border Ocella Creek on your right, offering great vistas of the coastal marsh that borders the property.

7) The chimney was from a replacement cabin built following the Hurricane of 1893 and probably housed an overseer. In the plantation era, slave cabins, usually single room 20' by 12' structures with small chimneys, dotted the creek bank of Ocella Creek. The door and window openings (no glass, only shutters for winter) faced the front to prevent the slaves from "sneaking out back" when an overseer came for work details.

8) On the left is Picnic Pond, which was dug in the 70's to accumulate the fill dirt required to build the dike on the large pond now known as Jason's Lake. Picnic Pond provides habitat for wood ducks and many aquatic species, including alligators. The plaque under the oak tree by the pond is a tribute to former owners' Margaret Morgan Pepper 2/18/22-12/29/07 and John Edward Meyer 8/27/18-1/1/77 "We are the people who loved and cared for this place."

9) The road turns right across the dike that created Jason's Lake. A variety of birds including herons, egrets, terns, and pelicans make use of the impounded brackish waters and adjacent creek. Ospreys and eagles regularly fish here as well. Low tide in the salt marsh to the right exposes oyster beds. After crossing the dike, you are on the property of Sea Cloud Plantation. Look for fields planted with Egyptian wheat, sesame, millet, corn and wheat. Portions of the fields are left fallow to grow native vegetation. This habitat diversity is good for all wildlife.

10) The main road swings left but if you continue straight, you will quickly arrive at the Sea Cloud Landing on Ocella Creek. Here you can launch kayaks or canoes to explore the creek and salt marsh. Please bring in boats on car tops or truck beds. No trailers allowed.

11) Follow the road to the left for about 200 yards, and you will reach the ruins of Sea Cloud Plantation. Sea Cloud was a name attached to the property by its builder, Ephraim Mikell Seabrook in 1825. The 1851 U. S. Coast Survey map shows Sea Cloud facing the marsh, fronted by a semicircular hedge, with gardens in the front and back. It was said to be quite elegant with a ballroom gracing the entire 3rd floor.

12) As you approach the dike across the upper end of Jason's Lake, note the brick beehive well on the right. It was probably built around 1825 as well, and it was a valuable asset to property owners in the era before electricity and readily available clean fresh water. It was 12 ft. in height at one time, but a limb knocked off the "steeple" in the 1980's.

13) The middle dike separates Jason's Lake on the left and the upper ponds on the right. Both sides are brackish, and support many shore birds as well as ducks. During low water, one can still see the remains of an old fish weir running diagonally from the left shore of Jason's Lake. This series of stakes formed an obstruction in the tidal channel that funneled fish into waiting nets on the receding tide.

14) Across the dike, the road enters a pine-hardwood forest with many live oak "skeletons" and a beautiful fern forest. During the plantation era, all arable land was clear cut for cotton and only a fringe of trees surrounded the fields. Although live oaks were used in early ship building, during the 20th century, live oaks were often killed by girdling the outer bark to make room for growing more valuable pine trees. Because live oaks have very hard and dense wood, they are slow to rot and the "skeletons" remain for many decades.

15) A right turn takes you back to the entrance gate; a left turn back towards the beach and Indian Point. Indian Point was a community for the Cusabo Indians (Edisto) who inhabited this area dating back to 2500 B.C. Devastated by disease and increased European presence, they disappeared in 1728. Indian Point is also the home of the Bache Monument, the U.S. Coast survey line measured by Benjamin Franklin's great-grandson, Alexander Bache in 1849. This survey line helped ships navigate the uncharted hazards of the east coast.

For more information about Botany Bay Plantation, and a complete list of current regulations, please visit the onsite kiosk or the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources web site at www.dnr.sc.gov.

Be Green, Save A Tree!

Please return this map to the kiosk when finished so others may use it as well.

The eroding beach, accessible only on foot, offers two miles of undeveloped shoreline between Seabrook Island and Edisto Beach.

www.dnr.sc.gov

Botany Bay Plantation
Heritage Preserve\Wildlife Management Area

North Edisto River

Fig Island
(No Public Access)

Ocella Creek

South Creek

Hwy 174

Point of Pines Road

Westcoat Road

Rabbit Road

Middle Dike Road

Logging Road

Botany Bay Road

Avenue

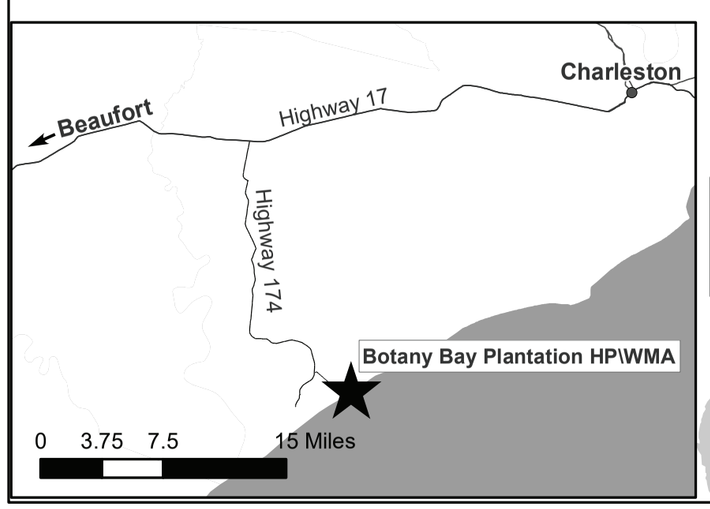
Edisto Beach 3.5 mi.

Jason's Lake

Picnic Pond

Atlantic Ocean

Entrance and Visitor Sign-in
32.54°N -80.26°W



www.dnr.sc.gov

Key to symbols

- Horse Trailer Parking & Check Station
- Tour Route
- Parking
- Kayak Launch
- A.D. Bache Monument
- House (Private Residence) (No Public Access)
- Secondary Lanes and Firebreaks
- Beach Trail (Non-motorized access)
- Wildlife Openings\Fields
- UpLand
- Marsh
- Property Boundary

0 0.25 0.5 1 Mile

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06-2018

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