

Ebey’s Landing

National Historical Reserve
Washington

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service



Discover a Cultural Landscape

Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve is a new kind of national park. It was created by Congress in 1978 “to preserve and protect a rural community which provides an unbroken historic record from...19th century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time.” The people of Central Whidbey Island urged its creation, realizing that the area’s unspoiled natural beauty and many historical sites told a special story worth sharing. The Reserve is administered by a nine-member Trust Board. Unlike most public parks, most of the Reserve remains in private ownership.

Enduring patterns of community life in such a setting have created a unique cultural landscape. The vistas, woodlands, and fertile prairies of the Reserve are much the same today as they were 100 years ago when New England sea captains were drawn to Penn

Cove and farmers to Ebey’s Prairie. Time has touched only lightly upon Central Whidbey. Still, the landscape of the Reserve continues to grow and change, shaped as always by the community of people who live and work here. Farms are still farmed, forests are logged and historic buildings are still actively used today as homes or places of business.

The Reserve has been described as a “blend of people and place, a cultural landscape, a cross-section of community continuity that lays bare the legacy of a way of life for those who wish to see and, those who will, to understand. It is, in fact, the first example of a new approach to the problem of preservation and protection, for it preserves and protects the essence, rather than the substance, of those ingredients which go to make a nation.” (Don Woodcock, local author)

Whidbey Island

Verdant Whidbey Island lies at the extreme north end of Washington’s island-strewn Puget Sound, forming the eastern boundary of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. To the east rise the glacier-clad peaks of the North Cascades, to the north and south stretch miles of deep water, islands, and coves. Silhouetted against the southwestern sky, the Olympic Mountains form a dramatic backdrop for the island’s rural setting. In the central portion of Whidbey Island is Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve. Its boundaries encompass broad fertile prairies, high seaside bluffs, rolling woodlands, shallow brackish lakes, and a deep protected cove.



Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve is located on Central Whidbey Island. It is easily accessible by car from Seattle (2 hours) and in close proximity to Vancouver, British Columbia (2 hours) and the Olympic Peninsula.

An Abundant Land...

Come look from this eminence of bluff, now in the soft hour before daybreak...the island’s farm fields are leather and corduroy, rich even panels between black-furred stands of forest. Tan grass...whisks soundlessly against a four-wire fence line. Yes, rural America of the last century.

Ivan Doig (above Ebey’s Landing)
Winter Brothers, 1980.

The landscape of the Reserve, with its pattern of field, forest, and shoreline, has a quiet kind of beauty all its own. Part of this beauty lies in the diversity of its land forms and vegetation. Within the boundaries of the 17,400 acre Reserve there are five distinctive character areas which together comprise the natural landscape. Overlaying each of these are the tangible reminders of man’s presence upon the land.

Coastal Strip The western shore of the Reserve, along Admiralty Inlet, is an eight-mile strip of narrow, sandy beach that gives way to dramatic bluffs and low ravines. The elevation ranges from sea level to just over 200 feet. Many of the bluffs are sparsely vegetated, relatively unstable, and constantly eroding. Access to the fragile bluffs is limited to the State Park trail along the crest. From this vantage point, an unobstructed westerly view opens toward the Pacific Ocean across the rough waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Prairies Three large natural prairies cover over 5000 acres of the Reserve. These prairies were once giant lake beds, formed over 13,000 years ago by the receding

glaciers. All are defined by ridges that embrace the rich fertile soils, an especially valuable resource. About one-third of the prairie lands are planted in squash, grains, forage and seed crops. The remainder are a mixture of wetlands, pastures, woodlands, and farmsteads. Together these features form a cohesive character area, one that holds the telling physical remnants of human history -- old fence lines, hedgerows, orchards, field patterns, weathered barns, and Victorian farmhouses.

Woodlands Two large, densely wooded areas on the Reserve comprise just over 4500 acres. These forests are primarily second and third-growth Douglas fir and Western red cedar, with an understory of alder, salal, and rhododendron. Steep-sided, glacial-melt depressions called kettles, some over 200 feet deep, are found within these forested areas. With the exception of Fort Ebey State Park and Rhododendron Park, the woodlands of the Reserve remain relatively undeveloped and inaccessible.

Uplands The upland areas of the Reserve are undulating, gently rolling hills that sweep up from the shorelines on either side of the island. Primarily pastures and cultivated fields carved out of woodland stands, these areas are sparsely settled with scattered farms and residences, forming a patchwork on the pastoral land.

Penn Cove Penn Cove, with its own special ambience, covers over 4000 surface acres. The scenic shoreline changes from low beach front at Monroe’s Landing, to uplifted banks at Coupeville. Along the west edge of the cove, the lowlands shelter lagoons that provide a rich habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds. Modest beach cottages contribute to the peaceful setting at Good Beach and Snakelum Point, where permanent and seasonal residents enjoy the tranquility of the quiet cove.

Filled With Memories...

When the first Euro-American settlers came to Central Whidbey Island, they found a land tempered by centuries of human habitation. As early as 1300, the Skagit Indians had established permanent villages on the shores of Penn Cove. The island provided an abundance of natural resources for their sustenance -- salmon, bottom fish, shellfish, berries, small game, deer, and water fowl. The Indians cultivated the prairies with selective burning, transplanting, and mulching to encourage the growth of favored root crops like bracken fern and camas. More than 1500 American Indians were recorded in the area in 1790. By 1904, the Indian population around Coupeville was reduced to a few small families.



Whidbey Island was named by explorer Captain George Vancouver in honor of his subordinate, Joseph Whidbey, who explored the island in a ship’s launch in 1792. Vancouver’s well-publicized exploration of Puget Sound helped prepare the way for settlers to the area. A more important inducement was the Donation Land Law of 1850, which offered free land in Oregon Territory to any citizen who would homestead the land for four years. Newcomers flocked to the fertile prairies of Central Whidbey and, within three short years, had carved out irregularly-shaped claims that followed the lay of the best land. Today this early settlement pattern can still be seen by the fence lines, roads, and ridges of the Reserve.

Colonel Isaac Neff Ebey was among the first of the permanent settlers to the island. Upon the advice of his friend Samuel Crockett, Ebey came west from his home in Missouri in search of land. Both men had filed donation claims on Central Whidbey by the spring of 1851. Ebey wrote home, enthusiastically urging his family to join him.

*My dear brother --
I scarcely know how I shall write or what I shall write... the great desire of heart is to get my own and father’s family to this country. I think it would be a great move. I have always thought so...
To the north down along Admiralty Inlet...the cultivating land is generally found confined to the valleys of streams with the exception of Whidbey’s Island...which is almost a paradise of nature. Good land for cultivation is abundant on this island.
I have taken a claim on it and am now living on the same in order to avail myself of the provisions of the Donation Law. If Rebecca, the children, and you all were here, I think I could live and die here content.*

Colonel Isaac Ebey’s letter to his brother, W.S. Ebey
Olympia, Oregon
April 25, 1851

Ebey’s family soon emigrated to the island. The simple home of Isaac’s father Jacob, and a blockhouse he erected to defend his claim against Indians, still stand today overlooking the prairie that bears the family name. As for Isaac, he became a leading figure in public affairs, but his life was cut short in 1857, when he was slain by northern coastal Indians seeking revenge for the killing of one of their own chieftains.

Today some farmers of Central Whidbey still plow donation land claims established by their families in the 1850s. Their stewardship of the rich alluvial soil preserves a historic pattern of land use centuries old.

Fertile farmland was not the only incentive to settlement. Sea captains and merchants from New England were



drawn to the protected harbor of Penn Cove and the stands of tall timber valued for ship-building. Many brought their families and took up donation claims along the shoreline. One colorful sea-faring man was Captain Thomas Coupe, who startled his peers by sailing a full-rigged ship through treacherous Deception Pass on the north end of the island. In 1852, Coupe claimed 320 acres which later became the town of Coupeville on the south shore of the cove.

The early success of Central Whidbey’s farming and maritime trade transformed Coupeville into a dominant seaport. The past remains apparent in Coupeville today, with its many 19th-century false-fronted commercial buildings on Front Street, its historic wharf and blockhouse, and its rich collection of Victorian residential architecture.

The military introduced another layer of history to the landscape of Central Whidbey, with the construction of Fort Casey Military Reservation in the late 1890s. Built on the bluff above Admiralty Head, Fort Casey was part of a three-fort defense system designed to protect the entrance to Puget Sound.

The first contingent of U.S. Army troops reported for duty in 1900, and eventually numbered 400. The fort became a social center for the surrounding community, hosting ball games, dances, and other social events. Today, the handsome wood-framed officers’ quarters, the gun escarpments, Admiralty Head lighthouse, and other remnants of military history still stand at old Fort Casey.

Near the north boundary of the Reserve is Fort Ebey, a remnant of the defensive build-up of World War Two. To the south, the 1943 Coupeville Outlying Landing Field is still used today, providing aircraft carrier landing practice for Navy pilots.

Preserves the Past for the Future

Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve is the first unit of its kind within the National Park system. Congress intended that the Reserve would remain largely under private ownership. To ensure that the riches of the Reserve are protected for future generations, the National Park Service purchased development rights to key sites including a portion of the original Ebey donation land claim. The Park Service continues to work cooperatively with Washington State Parks, Island County and the Town of Coupeville for the on-going protection of the historic rural landscape.

Some of the techniques used to preserve open space, farmlands, and historic sites within the Reserve include purchase of scenic easements, land donations, tax incentives, zoning, local design review, and purchase or exchange of development rights. This strategy reduces the cost of protection, keeps the land productive, and allows for private stewardship to continue as it has for generations.

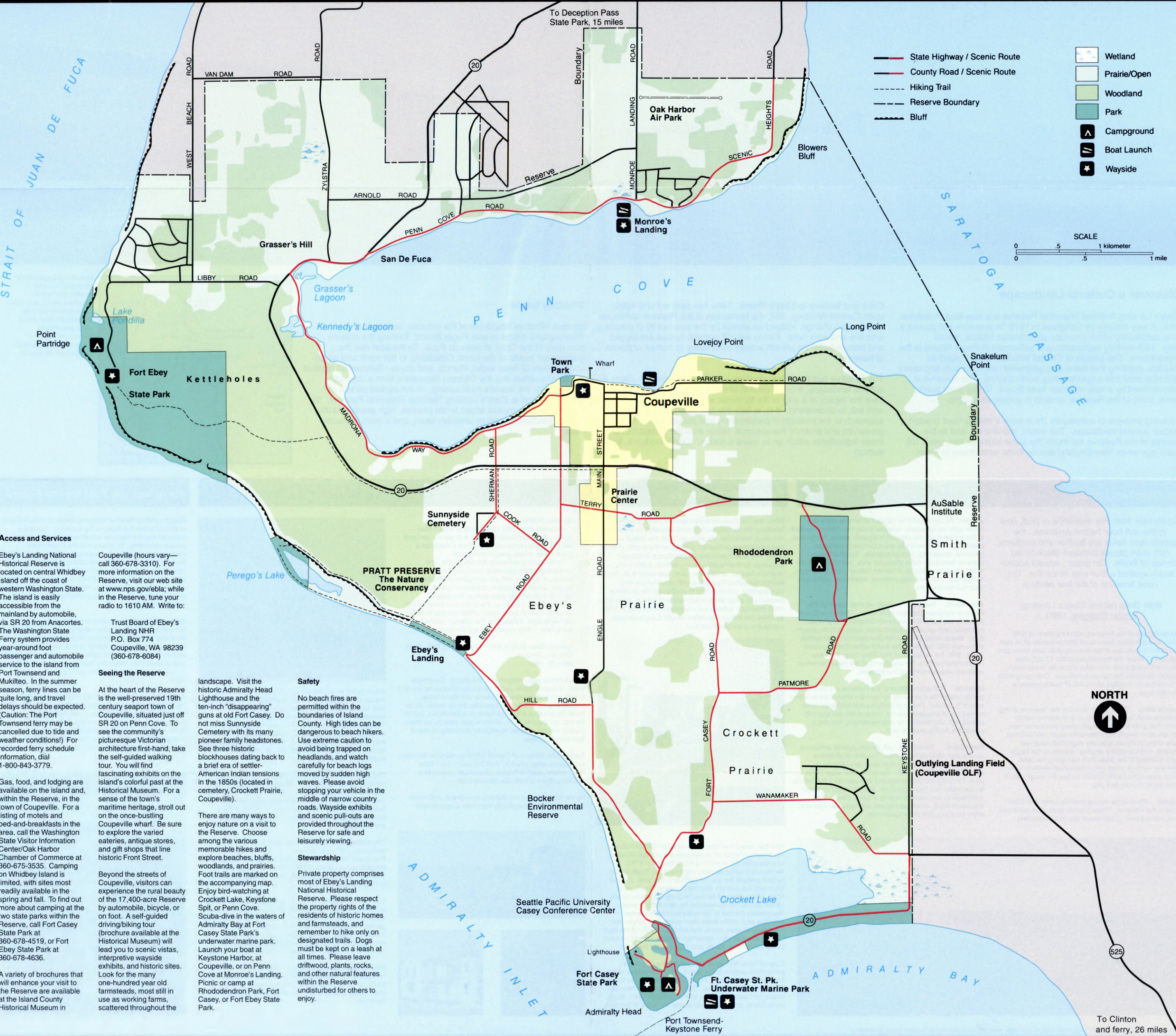
Administration and management of the Reserve is the responsibility of a local Trust Board. Seven residents, a representative from State Parks, and one from the National Park Service, serve on the Trust Board. The group promotes sound preservation practices and interprets the rich natural and cultural history of the Reserve for thousands of visitors annually.



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Access and Services

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is located on central Whidbey Island off the coast of western Washington State. The island is easily accessible from the mainland by automobile, via SR 20 from Anacortes. The Washington State Ferry system provides year-around foot passenger and automobile service to the island from Port Townsend and Mukilteo. In the summer season, ferry lines can be quite long, and travel delays should be expected. (Caution: The Port Townsend ferry may be cancelled due to tide and weather conditions!) For recorded ferry schedule information, dial 1-800-843-3779.

Gas, food, and lodging are available on the island and, within the Reserve, in the town of Coupeville. For a listing of motels and bed-and-breakfasts in the area, call the Washington State Visitor Information Center/Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce at 360-675-3535. Camping on Whidbey Island is limited, with sites most readily available in the spring and fall. To find out more about camping at the two state parks within the Reserve, call Fort Casey State Park at 360-678-4519, or Fort Ebey State Park at 360-678-4636.

A variety of brochures that will enhance your visit to the Reserve are available at the Island County Historical Museum in

Coupeville (hours vary—call 360-678-3310). For more information on the Reserve, visit our web site at www.nps.gov/ebly; while in the Reserve, tune your radio to 1610 AM. Write to:

Trust Board of Ebey's Landing NHR
P.O. Box 774
Coupeville, WA 98239
(360-678-6084)

Seeing the Reserve

At the heart of the Reserve is the well-preserved 19th century seaport town of Coupeville, situated just off SR 20 on Penn Cove. To see the community's picturesque Victorian architecture first-hand, take the self-guided walking tour. You will find fascinating exhibits on the island's colorful past at the Historical Museum. For a sense of the town's maritime heritage, stroll out on the once-bustling Coupeville wharf. Be sure to explore the varied eateries, antique stores, and gift shops that line historic Front Street.

Beyond the streets of Coupeville, visitors can experience the rural beauty of the 17,400-acre Reserve by automobile, bicycle, or on foot. A self-guided driving/biking tour (brochure available at the Historical Museum) will lead you to scenic vistas, interpretive wayside exhibits, and historic sites. Look for the many one-hundred year old farmsteads, most still in use as working farms, scattered throughout the

landscape. Visit the historic Admiralty Head Lighthouse and the ten-inch "disappearing" guns at old Fort Casey. Do not miss Sunnyside Cemetery with its many pioneer family headstones. See three historic blockhouses dating back to a brief era of settler-American Indian tensions in the 1850s (located in cemetery, Crockett Prairie, Coupeville).

There are many ways to enjoy nature on a visit to the Reserve. Choose among the various memorable hikes and explore beaches, bluffs, woodlands, and prairies. Foot trails are marked on the accompanying map. Enjoy bird-watching at Crockett Lake, Keystone Spit, or Penn Cove. Scuba-dive in the waters of Admiralty Bay at Fort Casey State Park's underwater marine park. Launch your boat at Keystone Harbor, at Coupeville, or on Penn Cove at Monroe's Landing. Picnic or camp at Rhododendron Park, Fort Casey, or Fort Ebey State Park.

Safety

No beach fires are permitted within the boundaries of Island County. High tides can be dangerous to beach hikers. Use extreme caution to avoid being trapped on headlands, and watch carefully for beach logs moved by sudden high waves. Please avoid stopping your vehicle in the middle of narrow country roads. Wayside exhibits and scenic pull-outs are provided throughout the Reserve for safe and leisurely viewing.

Stewardship

Private property comprises most of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. Please respect the property rights of the residents of historic homes and farmsteads, and remember to hike only on designated trails. Dogs must be kept on a leash at all times. Please leave driftwood, plants, rocks, and other natural features within the Reserve undisturbed for others to enjoy.

To Clinton and ferry, 26 miles