

Padre Island

NATIONAL SEASHORE • TEXAS

ADMINISTRATION

Padre Island National Seashore is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 8560, Corpus Christi, TX 78412, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service



THE ISLAND

Stretching for 113 miles along the Texas gulf coast from Corpus Christi on the north almost to Mexico on the south, the island ranges in width from a few hundred yards to about 3 miles. It is separated from the mainland by Laguna Madre, a shallow body of water with a maximum width of 10 miles. At each end of the island, some development has been completed by the counties and individuals. The national seashore boundaries encompass the undeveloped central part of the island, 80.5 miles long.

From gulf to lagoon, the island consists of a wide, clean beach of sand that in places gives way to small shells; next an alinement of dunes paralleling the shore; then grassy flats, broken here and there by smaller dunes; and last a vaguely defined area of sand dunes and mud-flats that merges with the waters of the lagoon.

Padre is a textbook example of a barrier island, built by wave action and crowned by wind-formed dunes.

Winds and strong tides continually change the appearance of the island. In some places, dunes inch their way over the grassy flats before the force of prevailing winds off the gulf; in others, they have become stabilized by the binding roots of grasses and shrubs—stabilized until the inevitable day that hurricane winds and great tides break through the vegetation and start them moving again.

Plants, beset by strong winds and smothering sand, struggle for survival. On the outer dunes, such shrubs as senna and croton fringe the rounded outlines, and railroad vine reaches 20 feet and more across the sand, blending its purple blossoms with the yellow flowers of evening-primrose. On the flats of the island's interior, grasses nod before the sea breezes. Nearer the lagoon, pure stands of sesuvium form islands of vegetation where they have stabilized small dunes amid the moving sands.

More than 350 species of birds are year-round residents or seasonal visitors. Common along the gulf beach are the great blue herons, sand-erlings, and several species of gulls and terns. On the grassy flats behind the dunes are meadowlarks, marsh hawks, an occasional great horned owl, and—in winter—sandhill cranes. Many thousands of ducks and geese winter in the area.

Among the mammals: coyotes, gophers, black-tailed jackrabbits, Mexican freetail bats, and several species of rodents.

And the reptiles: marine loggerhead turtles,

light-gray keeled earless lizards, bull snakes, coachwhips, garter snakes, and western diamondback rattlesnakes.

Also present in or near the water: blue and ghost crabs, cabbagehead and portuguese man-of-war jellyfishes, gooseneck barnacles that float in on driftwood, and many species of fish that can be caught in the surf.

EARLY VISITORS

In 1519, Alfonso Alvarez de Pineda discovered and charted the island on behalf of Governor Garay of Jamaica. First named Las Islas Blancas—The White Islands—the long island became infamous as a graveyard for ships driven onto this shore by storms out of the Gulf of Mexico. The best known of these disasters occurred in 1553, when a 20-ship Spanish treasure fleet ran into a hurricane and many of the galleons broke up on the island. Of some 300 survivors of the storm, only two survived the fierce Karankawa Indian attacks and hardships of the march down the coast to Mexico.

About 1800, Padre Nicholas Balli, for whom the island was later named, received a Spanish land grant that included Padre Island. With his nephew, Juan Jose Balli, he founded the Santa Cruz Ranch, and since then cattle have been raised almost continuously on the island. Parts of the Dunn Ranch, established in 1879, are still used as collecting points for cattle during annual roundups.

COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION

Commercial airlines and buslines serve Corpus Christi and Brownsville, where there are taxicabs and car rental agencies. City buses make regular trips from Corpus Christi to the north end of the island.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Motels and restaurants are available at both ends of the island and in Corpus Christi, Port Isabel, and other communities along approach highways. Picnic supplies and gasoline can also be obtained at the ends of the island and, of course, in nearby cities and towns.

A snack bar, gift shop, free showers, locker rooms, and rental equipment for beach use are available at Malaquite Beach. Limited camping and sanitary facilities are available nearby or visitors may use the beach for camping. Those using remote sections of the beach for camping should be prepared to carry their own water.

Trailers may be taken down the beach as far as passenger cars go. A trailer park is main-

tained in the Cameron County Park at the south end of the island near Port Isabel.

Boat supplies and launching ramps are available along the John F. Kennedy Memorial Causeway, and at Corpus Christi, Port Isabel, and South Padre Island.

REGULATIONS

The disturbance or removal of any artifacts of archeological, historical, or scientific importance is prohibited by the Antiquities Act of 1906. However, materials washed in by the recurring tides that do not fall into these categories can be collected as beachcomber items.

Plants and animals. Cooperation of all visitors is required if the delicate ecological balance at Padre Island is to be maintained. All plants and animals within the national seashore are therefore protected by Federal law. Please refrain from disturbing them in any way.

Litter. Your degree of enjoyment of the seashore is directly related to its cleanliness. Or do you enjoy picnicking amid someone else's garbage and litter? Do your part by depositing your trash, including bottle caps, in the containers or taking it away when you leave.

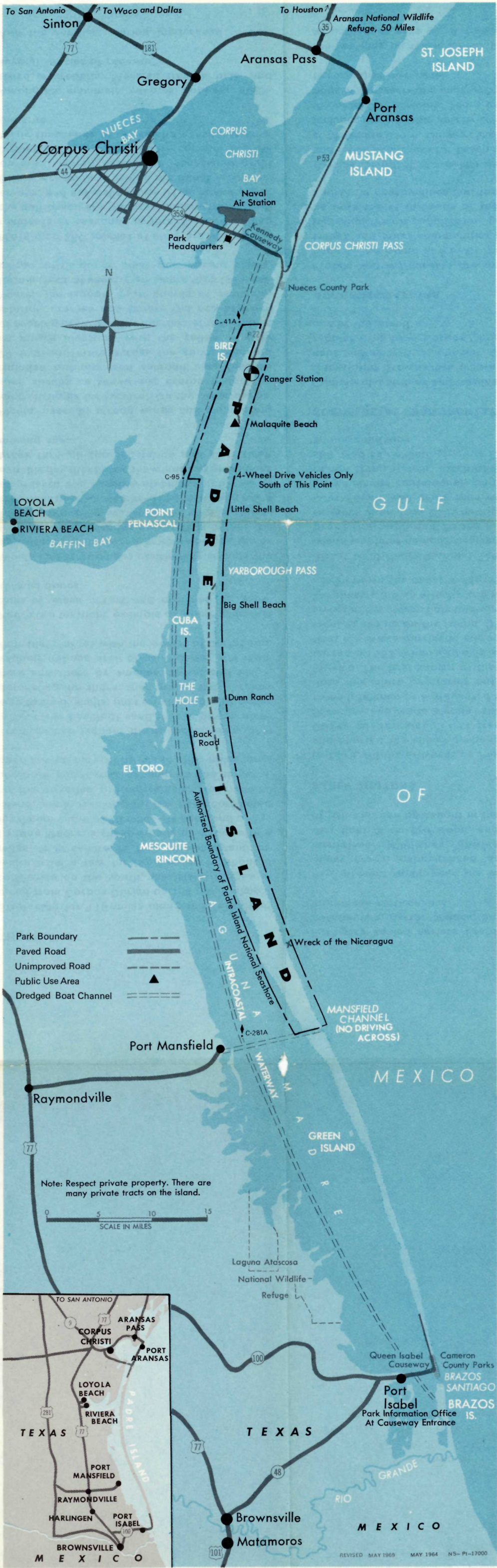
Boating. Within the boundaries of the seashore, boats must be operated under the Statutory Rules of the Road promulgated by Congress for safe boat operation and be equipped in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard regulations. (The U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey can provide you with charts that show water depths near the island, so that you may avoid shoals. Address: Environmental Science Services Administration, Washington Science Center, Rockville, MD 20852.)

Water-skiing. Water skiers must wear approved floatation gear and be towed by a boat having an observer as well as an operator on board.

Hunting and the discharge of firearms are not allowed in the national seashore except on the waters of the Laguna Madre during open season on certain waterfowl as prescribed by State and Federal agencies.

Towing people on slides or other devices behind cars is not allowed.

You can obtain information about the area at park headquarters in Corpus Christi, at the entrance to Queen Isabel Causeway, and at the North District Ranger Station. (See map.)



MILEAGE



WHAT TO DO

Beach driving. You can drive a conventional car for 14 miles southward from the northern boundary of the national seashore; and you can drive one northward for about 5 miles from the southern end of the island (not as far as the southern boundary of the seashore). Between these points, you should use only a 4-wheel-drive vehicle, for the sands are soft, intermixed with tiny shells, and will not support an ordinary passenger car. You'll get stuck. The Mansfield Channel intersects the island and prevents a continuous trip along its entire length.

Fishing. Game fish are taken throughout the year in Laguna Madre as well as in the gulf. Some species are more numerous at certain seasons: pompano (April and October), redfish (autumn), drum (December through April), red snapper (October through March), tarpon (October and November), and sheepshead (December through March). Occasionally, sharks, rays, and sawfish are caught in the surf. A Texas fishing license is required.

Swimming. Coastal waters of South Texas are warm enough for swimming all year; however, cold snaps ("northers") sometimes drop temperatures to uncomfortable levels for short periods in winter. The gradual slope of the gulf beach and the shallow water are safer for swimming than most other seashores. But the usual sensible precautions should be taken. Surfboards must be kept out of designated swimming areas. Lifeguards are on duty at the Malaquite Beach swimming area in summer.

Scuba-diving. The relatively shallow water along the coast is not attractive to swimmers with scuba equipment. Snorkelers and scuba divers find that the deeper water offshore is excellent for hunting larger fish, such as ling and jewfish.

Hiking. Although there are as yet no established trails, you are free to hike over the entire island except in areas fenced off for use by oil companies.

WHAT TO AVOID

- *Overexposure to the sun.* Use suntan lotion.
- *Swimming alone.* Keep a careful watch on children playing in the surf.
- *Rattlesnakes.* Be alert when walking in grass or brushy areas, and be especially careful at night.
- *Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish.* These strange creatures sometimes float in the surf and wash onto the beach. Their sting is painful. If you are stung, contact a park ranger or go to one of the first-aid stations in the county parks at the ends of the islands. *Do not rub the irritated areas.*
- *Fishing lines in the water.*
- *Getting your car stuck in the sand.* Do not park your car where a rising tide may bring water under it. Carry a shovel and car jack to use if your car gets stuck.
- *Anything that looks like a bomb or gun shell—do not touch it.* Interior sections of the island were formerly used by the U.S. Navy as target sites, and live ammunition may still be there.
- *Broken glass and boards with nails* that have been washed onto the beach. Wear shoes while hiking.
- *Vehicle traffic on the beach.* The sound of the surf may drown out the sound of approaching cars, so be alert for them.

