

## Botany Bay Plantation WMA Driving Tour

Botany Bay Plantation is 4,630 acres and consists of two large plantations: Bleak Hall and Sea Cloud. Bleak Hall consisted of twelve parcels of land put together by the Townsend family in the 1840's. By 1859 John Ferrars Townsend had combined both the Sea Cloud and Bleak Hall Plantations into one of the largest long staple cotton plantations on the east coast. In 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 a front beach. The driving (or cycling) trail covers about 3 miles and can take an hour or several hours depending on how many stops you make. The numbered markers are only suggested stops. You can stop anywhere along the way and walk off the road to view flora and fauna. Please park on the shoulder. A spur off the tour takes you to a parking area from which you can walk about a half-mile to the beach.

1) The tour begins at the information kiosk at the main gate. Proceed along the entrance road admiring the large live oaks interspersed with loblolly pine and cabbage palmetto, the State Tree. The spreading limbs of the live oaks support colonies of resurrection fern, green after a rain, brown during a drought.

Depending on the season a variety of songbirds including warblers, vireos, and tanagers, forage in this foliage. At any season, listen for the songs of pine warblers and yellow-throated warblers. From the entrance you can also hear the roar of the surf on the front beach to the right. Deer often cross this road.

2) After about a mile you will see the manager's house, once the owner's house, off to the right along with a horse pasture. On the left is a particularly large live oak. Stay straight on the entrance road for about another mile until you reach a four-way crossroads. Turn left and drive a short distance and park at number 3.

3) You are now on the grounds of Bleak Hall Plantation. Walk straight ahead for about 100 yards to two small buildings both built in the 1800's. The white wooden structure on the left once served as the Bleak Hall icehouse where this locally rare commodity was shipped from the north and packed in sawdust to stay frozen in the tabby-walled foundation. The Ice House is an outstanding example of Gothic Revival Architecture and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The steep cypress shingled roof gables are trimmed with half-circle gingerbread with a gable dormer with fake Gothic doors. Real doors and windows appear on the gable ends. The holes in the flushboard surface were probably bored for ventilation. The building is pegged together, and the walls are filled with sawdust insulation.

On the right a small tabby gardener's shed and a well stand at the edge of the now overgrown Japanese formal garden, the first of its kind in North America. It is said that John F. Townsend heard of a Japanese botanist in Washington, D.C. who was brought from the orient with Admiral Perry's expedition. Mr. Townsend made a trip to Washington and persuaded the gardener, Oqui, to return with him to Edisto, where he laid out an extensive oriental garden at Bleak Hall. This garden boasted camphor, olive and spice trees, citrus and all manner of vegetables and flowers. Like the icehouse, the shed is built in the Gothic Revival style. Constructed of tabby, it has a single door, and a slightly bell-cast pyramidal roof with a simple wood finial. A few of the exotic plants such as ivy and several types of privet still thrive along the edges of the old garden.

Return to your vehicle and follow the dirt road through the hedgerow onto the site of the Bleak Hall Plantation house.

(4) On your left is another tabby structure from the plantation. This structure most likely was a barn during the Colonial period and served as an equipment shed in later years. The Bleak Hall house site overlooks Ocella Creek in the general vicinity of the current storage building. The first Bleak Hall mansion

was two and a half stories high on a raised basement 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 right after the Civil War and was replaced by another large house, built in an eclectic mix of Victorian styles.

(5) The road crosses the ends of two agricultural fields, an open area to look for soaring eagles and other raptors as well as sparrows among the grasses. The fields provide winter food for deer, quail, turkeys, doves and many songbirds.

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

(7) The chimney of a slave house, one of many such dwellings that once dotted the property still remains standing on the right. The road then winds through a typical coastal forest of mixed pines and hardwoods and crosses a small wooden bridge that spans a natural creek.

(8) On the left, Picnic Pond, created in the 1970's, provides habitat for wood ducks, wading birds and many aquatic species. At the end of the pond, a live oak has become known as Mrs. Peppers' Oak after the former owner saved it from destruction during the digging of the pond.

(9) The road turns right across the dike that created Jason's Lake in the 1970's. A variety of water birds including herons, egrets and, in season, ducks, make use of the impounded waters and adjacent creek. Ospreys regularly fish here as well. Low tide in the salt marsh to the right exposes oyster beds. After crossing this dike you are on the property of the former Sea Cloud Plantation.

(10) The main road swings left, but if you continue straight you will quickly arrive at the Sea Cloud landing on Ocella Creek. Here boaters can launch car top boats such as canoes and kayaks to explore the creek and salt marsh.

(11) Following the road to the left for about 200 yards you reach Sea Cloud Plantation ruins, one of 21 recognized historic sites on the property. When a Seabrook married a McCloud in the 1800's they built this house to oversee the cotton plantation that covered the entire property. 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. Built entirely by slave labor in the early 1800's, it was said to have been quite elegant.

Cross the adjacent agricultural fields into another stand of open pines and oaks, then turn left onto Middle Dike Road.

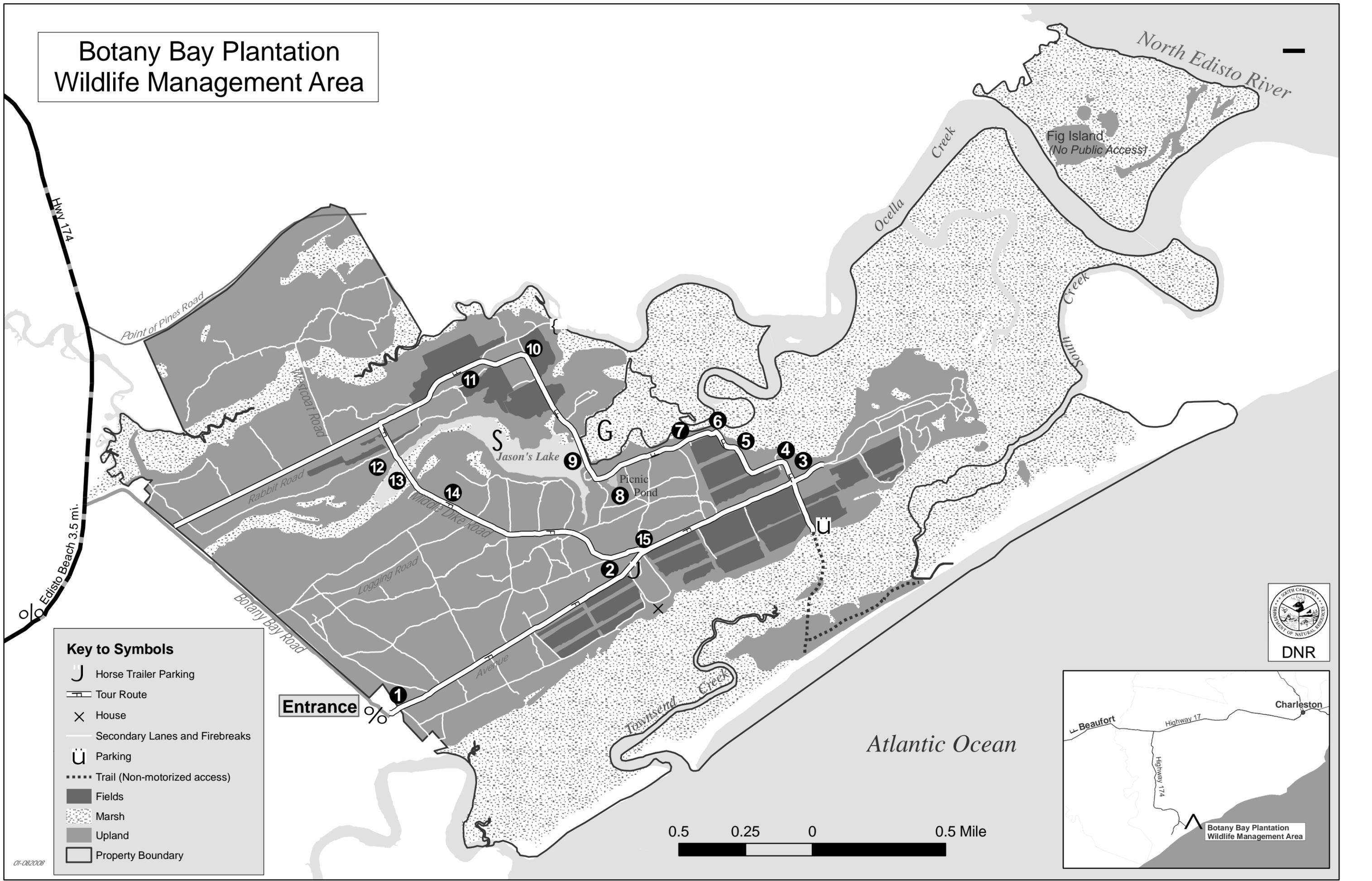
(12) As you approach the dike across the upper end of Jason's Lake, note the brick beehive well on the right. Built by slaves in the 1700's for a source of drinking water, this well continued to flow until about 20 years ago.

(13) The middle dike separates the brackish Jason's Lake on the left from the freshwater upper ponds on the right. This is a good spot to look for wood ducks, anhinga, common moorhens and other birds.

(14) Across the dike the road enters pine-hardwood forest dotted with a number of live oak skeletons. Previous owners killed thousands of live oaks because they had no value for timber. The owners replaced the oaks with loblolly pines that they could market for pulpwood and eventually saw timber. At a three-way junction stay straight and continue back to the main road.

(15) Here a right turn takes you back to the main entrance gate. A left turn will return you to the crossroads where you can turn right to reach the walking trail to the front beach.

# Botany Bay Plantation Wildlife Management Area



## Key to Symbols

- Horse Trailer Parking
- Tour Route
- House
- Secondary Lanes and Firebreaks
- Parking
- Trail (Non-motorized access)
- Fields
- Marsh
- Upland
- Property Boundary

