



County Beaches:

- 1 **Fort De Soto Park**
3500 Pinellas Bayway S., Tierra Verde, FL
- 2 **Fred Howard Park**
1700 Sunset Dr., Tarpon Springs, FL
- 3 **Sand Key Park**
1060 Gulf Blvd., Clearwater, FL

Beach Access Locations:

- 4 **Indian Rocks Beach**
1700 Gulf Blvd., Indian Rocks Beach, FL
- 5 **Tiki Gardens/ Indian Shores**
19601 Gulf Blvd., Indian Shores, FL
- 6 **Redington Shores**
18200 Gulf Blvd, Redington Shores, FL
- 7 **Madeira Beach**
14400 Gulf Blvd., Madeira Beach, FL
- 8 **Treasure Island**
10400 Gulf Blvd., Treasure Island, FL
- 9 **St. Pete Beach**
4700 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach, FL



historic guide



www.pinellascounty.org



Culture, Education & Leisure
 - Parks & Recreation – www.pinellascounty.org/parks
 - Heritage Village – www.pinellascounty.org/heritage
 - Florida Botanical Gardens – www.flbg.org
 - Pinellas County Extension – www.pinellascountyextension.org
 - Cultural Affairs – www.pinellasarts.org

Pinellas County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To obtain accessible formats of this document, please contact the Communications Department at (727) 464-4600/TDD (727) 464-4431.

Printed on recycled paper. CEL 05/09. Funding for this booklet was provided by the Friends of Fort De Soto and Pinellas County Communications Department. 10,000 copies were printed at a cost of \$3,892.95 or \$0.389 each.

Don't miss our other guides:

beaches & shells guide 

bird checklist 



Fort De Soto
COUNTY PARK

historic guide





Fort De Soto is only one unit in the Pinellas County park system, developed with public funds for the enjoyment of our citizens and visitors.

The park is made up of five islands or keys: Madelaine Key, St. Jean Key, St. Christopher Key, Bonne Fortune Key and the main island of Mullet Key. Together the keys total 1,136 acres with more than six miles of beach frontage and several miles of waterfront along Mullet Key Bayou.

Fort De Soto History:

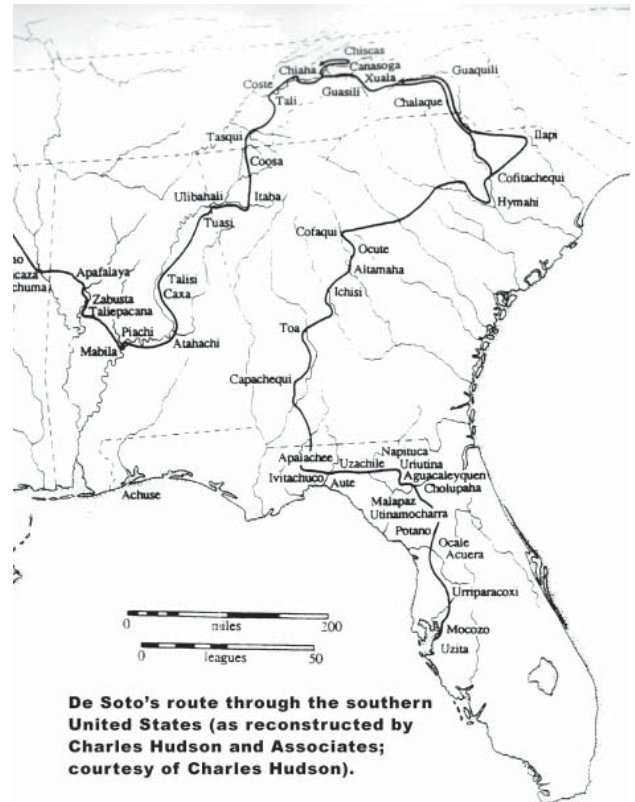
For more than 400 years, the Tampa Bay area of Florida has attracted a wide variety of visitors to its shores. Some of the first were the Tocobaga Indians, who enjoyed the bounty of the harvest from Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The savory clams, oysters, conchs, whelks and fish taken from the pristine waters must have been delightful as well as plentiful.

The Tocobaga Indians lived here from 1,000 A.D. to approximately 1,500 A.D. In archaeological terms, the Tocobaga Indians, who occupied Mullet Key and other barrier islands, belonged to the Safety Harbor culture period. Their diet consisted mostly of seafood, wild plants and the occasional game animal. They traveled to and from the Pinellas peninsula by dugout canoes.

In and around Mullet Key, Indian middens have been identified. A kitchen or shell midden is a shell mound where empty shells were discarded by the Native Americans. Because it was their place of work and food preparation (their kitchen), village middens contain artifacts, usually small bits of charcoal, fish and animal bones, broken pottery and shell tools.

On April 15, 1528, Spanish explorer Pánfilo de Narváez landed on the west coast of Florida. It is believed he came ashore somewhere between St. Pete Beach and Clearwater. He and his group of conquistadors explored the barrier islands of this area before moving up the coast.

On May 30, 1539, a well-known Spanish explorer came to the Tampa Bay area and began a conquest that would change the world. Hernando De Soto came ashore on or near the south shores of Tampa Bay. He began his expedition of the southeastern region of the United States, encountering Native Americans and hard times as he passed through this beautiful territory. He died on May 21, 1542, and his body was interred in the Mississippi River to prevent it from being taken by the Native Americans.



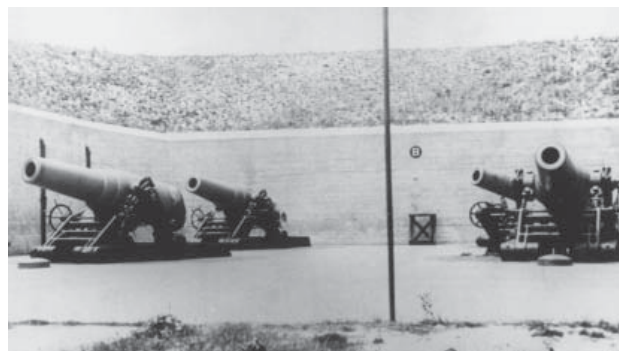


In February 1849, U.S. Army Engineers aboard the Schooner Phoenix anchored offshore of what is known today as Mullet Key to survey the coastline for possible use as a coastal defense area. Among them was a young Brevet Colonel named Robert E. Lee. The engineers were studying the islands at the mouth of Tampa Bay— Passage, Egmont and Mullet keys. In March 1849, the army engineers recommended Egmont and Mullet keys for military utilization, thereby prohibiting any private use or development.

The Civil War broke out in 1861, with no fortification on either Mullet or Egmont keys. The Union troops set up a blockade using the two islands. Any Confederates attempting to run the blockade could be seen by troops perched atop the Egmont Key lighthouse.

In 1898, the United States became involved in a conflict in Cuba, which led to the Spanish American War. This event prompted the citizens of Tampa to demand military defenses for Tampa Bay. Henry B. Plant, a prominent railroad, shipping and hotel magnate, was instrumental in convincing the Secretary of War to order construction of fortifications on Mullet and Egmont keys. Because of its close proximity to Cuba and port facilities, Tampa became the port of embarkation for U.S. troops and supplies going to the Caribbean war zones.

The first signs of construction on the Mullet Key military post began in November 1898. During the first six months, a 275-foot wharf extending into Tampa Bay was constructed as well as an office, a mess hall, quarters for the workmen and a stable. A narrow-gauge railway ran between the wharf and a construction plant with a spur line running to the future battery site.



In March 1899, the crew was ready to begin pouring the foundation of the mortar battery. The land had been cleared and the foundation forms were set. There was, however, one small problem. The stone, which was being transported by sailing ships, had not yet arrived from New York and New Jersey. In place of the stone, the workers used shells. The shell concrete formula worked so well in the foundation that it was decided that when the stone arrived on May 31, 1899, the stone was simply added to the shell, sand and cement mix to complete the construction of the walls and ceiling.

On April 4, 1900, the military fort was named Fort De Soto after the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto. Fort De Soto was officially a subpost of Fort Dade, located at that time on neighboring Egmont Key.

Captain Thomas H. Rees, engineer officer in charge of construction, announced the completion of the mortar battery on May 10, 1900, 14 months after the first shovel of dirt was turned. He could also boast that the project stayed within its \$155,000 budget. In fact, there was a remaining balance of \$16.73.

This battery was basically a new design for the military. Changes came to improve coastal fortification following recommendations from a committee led by then Secretary of War, William C. Endicott. These modifications were initiated due to the significant changes in weapons. Previously, U.S. forts had exposed stone or brick, making the walls vulnerable to the direct fire of cannons. With the advent of rifled bores or barrels, weapons became more destructive. The new-style fortifications featured thick walls and ceilings and were camouflaged using massive amounts of dirt.

To withstand direct fire, the walls of this battery ranged from eight to 20-feet thick. The ceiling was 5-feet thick, consisting of reinforced concrete with I-beams. There was approximately 72,000 cubic yards of sand covering the battery's topside. Each of the two gun pits housed four 12-inch mortars.

After the mortar battery was completed, funds were allocated to construct a battery for two 15-pounder rapid-fire guns. Work was completed on the gun battery in early 1902.

Both batteries were without weapons for some time. The eight 12-inch M 1890-MI mortars were not mounted until the summer of 1902. The two 15-pounder, 3-inch Driggs-Seabury rapid-fire guns were finally placed in 1903. When first installed, the 12-inch mortars were not functional; they did not have the new-style electrical firing device. An order went out for mechanics to report to the fort to install and assemble the devices to the breech locks.

The work was completed and the mortars, as well as the two 15-pounder rapid-fire guns, were test-fired November 19 and 20, 1903. The 12-inch mortar battery was named Battery Laidley in honor of Colonel Theodore T. S. Laidley who fought in the war with Mexico as well as the Civil War and died in Palatka, Florida. The 3-inch gun battery became Battery Bigelow in honor of 1st Lt. Aaron Bigelow of the 21st U.S. Infantry, killed at the battle of Lundy's Lane, Ontario, during the War of 1812.

The eight 12-inch M 1890-MI mortars, manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal in Watervliet, New York, were breech-loading and rifled. The weapon had built-in safety features, such as a device which kept the mortars from being fired until the breech locks were secured, and the weapons were elevated to the minimum 45 degrees. Each gun had a 12-man crew to manually load and aim it. The crew would choose an 800-, 824- or 1,046-pound projectile, along with a powder charge in a silk bag weighing 54 to 67 pounds. After the powder bag was put in the mortar, the sergeant would hang a fuse containing 1.25 pounds of black powder on the breech end of the powder bag. The fuse was ignited by the electrical primer, which fired the powder bag charge. The minimum range of the mortar was 1.25 miles at 70 degrees and a maximum range of 6.8 miles at 45 degrees.

The two 3-inch rapid-fire guns were Driggs-Seabury Model 1898. The projectiles weighed 15 pounds and the nitrocellulose powder charge weighed five pounds. The maximum elevation was 12 degrees with a range of 4.5 miles at that setting.

To spot the enemy in the Gulf of Mexico, the post had observers on towers and at the top of Battery Laidley. Seeing a ship coming over the horizon, the observers would relay the information to the Relocating Room in the mortar battery. That information would be telephoned to the Data Booths, where it was translated and posted on slate boards for the gun crews to view. After the mortars were set in position, the gun commander would insert the electrical firing plug and the guns would be fired from the firing room. Electricity was provided by generator, located in the dynamo room. The army would tow a barge behind a boat in the gulf to fire at for practice.

Post buildings were constructed between early 1900 and 1906. There were 29 buildings including a 100-foot long barrack, hospital, stable, guard house, a shop for blacksmiths and carpenters, an administration office, a mess hall and kitchen, a bake house and a storehouse. All of the buildings were of wood construction with slate roofs. The cost of the post structures totaled \$120,674.55. This did not include the expense of the water and sewer systems.



Fort De Soto Buildings



The water for the post was pumped from an artesian well (500 feet deep, with a capacity of 150 gallons per minute) into a 60,000-gallon tank, elevated 75 feet and distributed through pipes to the various buildings. This water was only used for bathing, flushing toilets and other such uses. Rainwater for drinking was collected in 13 tanks or cisterns. Each tank had a capacity of 6,000 gallons. The system was installed in 1901 and cost \$17,754. The post had a modern sewer system, which drained into the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay through 6- and 8-inch pipes and was installed at a cost of \$3,426.

Fort De Soto's designation changed several times through the years from subpost of Fort Dade to an independent post. Fort Dade had approximately 250 troops stationed on Egmont Key compared to approximately 125 troops at Fort De Soto on Mullet Key. Fort Dade had much more to offer the soldiers such as tennis, baseball, bowling, a gymnasium, a movie theater and more. Records do not show these activities at Fort De Soto. However, both posts shared in the misery of having horrendous hordes of mosquitoes. The troops could not even enjoy the nice beaches on the island due to the bloodthirsty pests. The post quartermaster gave this report in 1908:

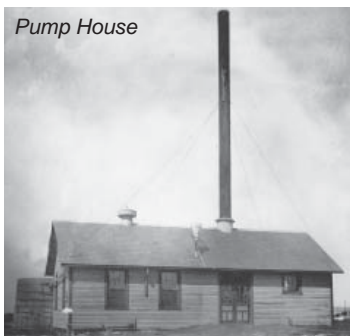
The suffering of the men daily at work or drill has been greater than can be imagined by any who have not actually experienced it. There have been nights that the men have had no sleep due to mosquitoes in quarters, even though mosquito bam (nets) are used. At present, life for the men is a torture both night and day, and the mosquitoes have to be fought with a bush continuously whether at work or resting.

The Chief Surgeon of the Department of the Gulf stated: "If this post is to continue as a station, life for those concerned should be, at least, made bearable." The commander of the Department of the Gulf recommended that the sale of beer and light wines be permitted in the post exchange at Fort De Soto to add to the "contentment and discipline" of the garrison.

In 1900, Fort De Soto was garrisoned by a detachment of Company A, 1st Artillery. In 1901, artillery ranks were reorganized and the company became the 1st Company, Coast Artillery. The number of troops had been cut with the military law act of February 2, 1901, which created the Coast Artillery; supplemental troops would be provided by state forces in the event of an invasion. In April 1907, the 1st Company shipped out and was replaced by the 39th Company, Coast Artillery, which stayed at Fort De Soto for three years until June 8, 1910.

There were three joint maneuvers at Fort De Soto with the U.S. Army and state troops. In 1907 and 1908, the 1st and 2nd Infantry, Florida State Troops and, in 1909, the 1st Company, Coast Artillery Corps, National Guard of Florida participated in training exercises.

Eight months after the third maneuver, the Fort De Soto garrison was transferred to Fort Morgan,



Pump House



Water Tower



A panoramic view of the post buildings taken from the top of the Army post water tower looking south towards Tampa Bay.

Alabama, and the fort became inactive with just a caretaker detachment remaining. By September 1914, there was one sergeant and a game warden from the Department of Agriculture remaining on the island. At that time, Mullet Key was being used as a hunting preserve for Fort Dade.

As a result of World War I, during the first months of 1917 the army assigned one noncommissioned officer and eight privates to Fort De Soto. Another group of soldiers arrived to dismount and ship four of the 12-inch mortars to Fort Rosecrans in San Diego, California. Through most of World War I, the detachment at Fort De Soto had 22 privates, two noncommissioned officers and two officers.

On November 23, 1922, the Secretary of War wrote a letter to the Governor of Florida explaining that the army would be closing forts Dade and De Soto. Excerpts from that letter are:

Modern developments in armament required considerable modifications in our coastal defense plans and the defense of much of our coastline can now be better accomplished by utilizing mobile artillery instead of fixed armament. The maintenance of Forts Dade and De Soto is not now essential to the coast defense, and sufficient mobile artillery is available to protect Tampa. The limited personnel for Coast Artillery purposes, the question of future appropriations, and the damage wrought by the severe storm in October 1921 were also considerations.

On May 25, 1923, both forts were abandoned, leaving one caretaker at each post.

In 1926, the U.S. Congress authorized the Secretary of War to sell surplus military reservations, including forts Dade and De Soto. The state, county and city governments chose not to purchase the property for the appraised price of \$192,000. Therefore, the land was offered for public sale by sealed bid opened on April 16, 1928. There were two bids and both were rejected.

Many storms had affected Fort De Soto during its short life including hurricanes of October 1921, September 18, 1926, and September 4, 1935. In October 1932, there were still 26 of the original 29 post buildings standing even after the storms. However, the estimated value of the buildings was \$6,000, compared to the original construction cost of more than \$120,000. Also in October 1932, Battery Bigelow collapsed and was swallowed by the Gulf of Mexico.

The U.S. Army was not the only government agency to occupy Mullet Key. The Hillsborough County Board of Health maintained a quarantine station there from December 16, 1889, until May 1899. The Secretary of the Treasury transferred 271 acres of the eastern end of Mullet Key to his department for quarantine purposes in May 1899. Four buildings were removed from Egmont Key and rebuilt on an area of Mullet Key, adding to the existing buildings and sanitary facilities. In 1901, the Marine Hospital Service took over jurisdiction of the station from

the Florida State Board of Health. In 1902, the agency's name was changed to Public Health and Marine Hospital Service. The duty of the station was to conduct medical examinations of immigrants and to inspect aliens aboard ships from foreign ports. In 1925, the station had 15 buildings. The mosquitoes were a problem for this organization as well. In 1933, the Public Health Service was given permission to begin mosquito eradication on the portion of Mullet Key that the Army had occupied. The program was a success.

The Mullet Key Quarantine Station was no longer needed when the Public Health Service moved its headquarters in 1937 to Gadsden Point outside of Tampa. On September 29, 1938, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners bought the 271-acre tract on Mullet Key for \$12,500.

In 1940, the War Department made a decision to turn Mullet Key into a bombing range. The army negotiated with the Department of the Interior and Pinellas County, and the tract was returned to military status as a subpost of MacDill Field in June 1941.

On August 11, 1948, after the end of World War II, Mullet Key was sold back to Pinellas County for \$26,495.24. That price included the original 271 acres plus 613 acres which the military had occupied and was not included in the original price. Extensive plans



were drawn up and many dreams became a reality on May 11, 1963, when Fort De Soto Park was officially dedicated.

In 1977, the Fort De Soto batteries were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A visitor coming to Fort De Soto Park today can view the remains of Battery Laidley and the last four 12-inch M 1890-M1 mortars remaining in North America (the only others remaining anywhere in the world are in the Philippines).

The ruins of Battery Bigelow can be seen in the surf of the Gulf of Mexico southwest of Battery Laidley. Visitors will also notice two weapons which appear to be out of place on the east side of Battery Laidley.

These are two 6-inch rapid-fire rifles manufactured by the W.B. Armstrong Company of England. They came from Battery Burchsted on Egmont Key and were part of the armament of Fort Dade. The gulf shoreline of Egmont Key was severely eroding and the weapons were in danger of being lost. Through the joint efforts of the U.S. Army Reserve, the state of Florida and the Pinellas County Highway and Parks departments, the weapons were saved, refurbished over a two-year period and mounted in 1980. This action preserved another segment of the rich history of our area.

Fort De Soto was never the site of any major battle. In fact, the weapons of forts De Soto and Dade were never fired in combat. However, that era was significant in terms of the evolution of modern weaponry.

Take a walk along the southwest tip of the island, where the post buildings were located, or climb to the top of Battery Laidley and look out over the area. Imagine this area at the turn of the century and the hardships the troops faced—mosquitoes, heat, isolation—and you will appreciate what we have in this modern age of mosquito repellent, air conditioning, automobiles and fine roads. However, the troops of Fort De Soto never had those conveniences and were forced to brave some of the worst elements a person could suffer.



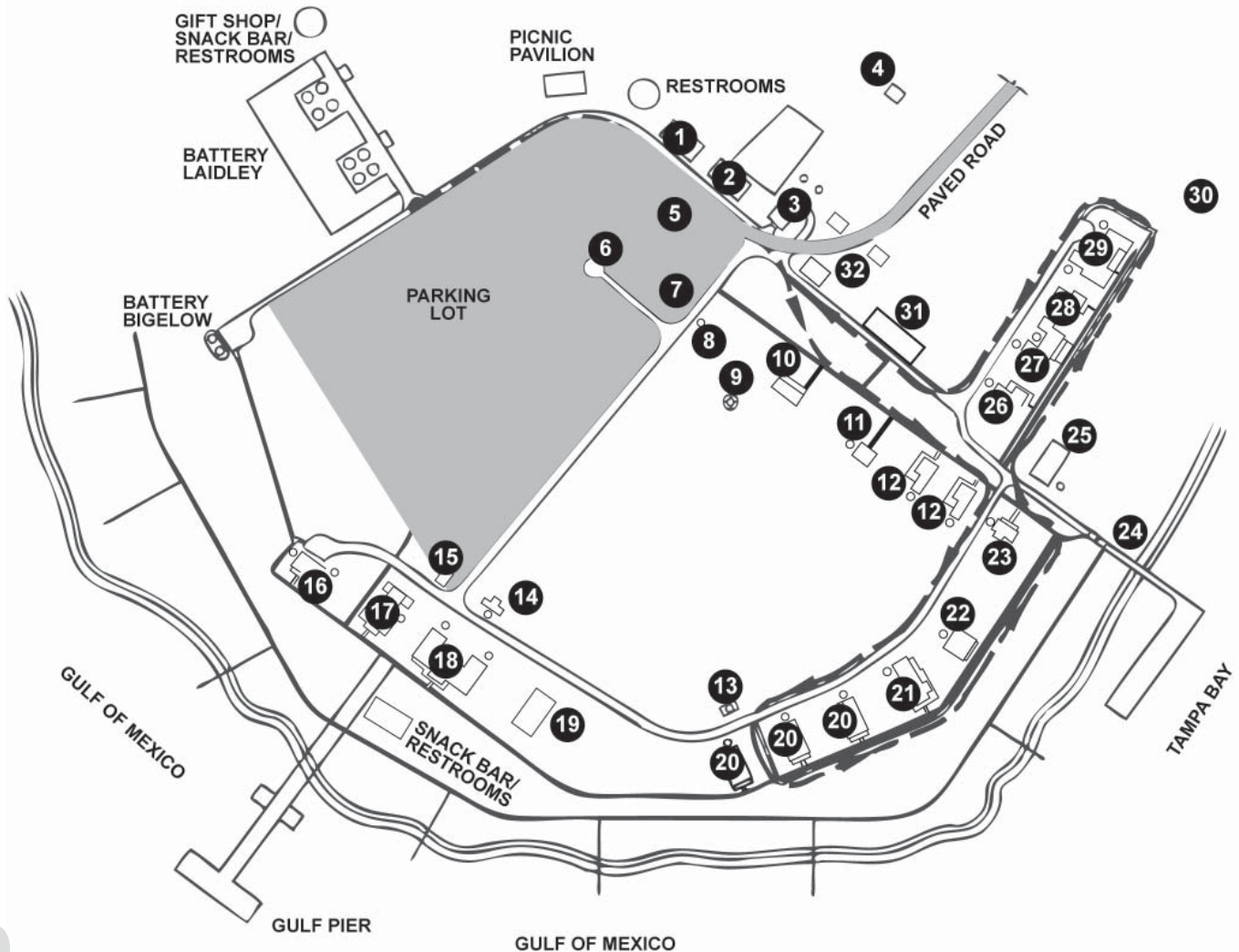
We salute these fine men and all the troops that have come before and after them. We thank them all for their dedication in obtaining and preserving the freedom this country has come to love and appreciate.

Bibliography - Sarles, Frank B., Jr. - Historian, The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Historic Sites Report on Fort De Soto Park. Pinellas County, Florida, United States Department of the Interior, 1960.



The brick road between the parking lot and Battery Laidley is the original road, built in 1898. The tour starts by following the brick road past the picnic area and restrooms. At the end of the brick road, turn right and cross the street to the shell path. Follow the shell path to the sidewalk, leading you past the quartermaster storehouse, bakery and civilian-quarters. Turn right on the graded path, originally a brick road, toward the observation tower. Turn left toward Tampa Bay

and follow the path to the sidewalk leading past Officers Row. From this vantage point, you can see Egmont Key State Park across the channel. On that island you will see a lighthouse built in 1858 and the remains of Fort Dade. Follow the shell path to the sidewalk in front of the guard house. At the next intersection, turn right onto the sidewalk that leads past the NCO Quarters and the former hospital building. Follow the shell road around the hospital, then follow the signs leading you back to the parking lot.



- 1 **Ordnance Storehouse** – Used for the storage and preservation of powder or explosives, its historical construction cost was \$3,460 for the 2,086 square-foot floor space.
- 2 **Stable** - Built at a cost of \$3,223, it had 3,340 square feet of space and could house eight horses. The second floor was used as a granary, and a corral was located to the rear of the building.
- 3 **Wagon Shed** - Built at a cost of \$2,874, it had 1,904 square feet and could hold 10 wagons.
- 4 **Oil House** - This structure could hold 2,500 gallons of oil. Construction consisted of walls of iron and a roof made of steel. The cost to build totaled only \$247.
- 5 **Water Tank** - The 60,000-gallon water tank was made of cypress wood and elevated 75 feet. The system was installed in 1901, at a cost of \$18,000 and distributed water throughout the post.
- 6 **Pump House** - Built for a total of \$16,064, it had a concrete floor and was heated by a boiler rather than stoves. Inside, the machinery pumped water from the wells into the water tank.
- 7 **Searchlight Shelter** - Housed the searchlight that illuminated night targets and made the gun battery almost as effective at night as it would have been during the daylight. The building costs totaled \$970.
- 8 **Engineering Building**
- 9 **Wells** - Three artesian wells, 500 feet deep with a capacity of 150 gallons per minute, were located on the post. This water was used for bathing and flushing toilets. Rainwater for drinking was collected in cisterns.
- 10 **Quartermaster Storehouse** – Built at a cost of \$190, it had 833 square feet of floor space but was not equipped with sewer or water.
- 11 **Bakery** – With a floor area of 619 square feet, it cost \$1,557 to build. It had wooden walls, a wooden floor and slate shingles.
- 12 **Civilian Quarters** - There were formerly two identical frame buildings for civilian employees. Each cost \$3,765 to build and featured slate and tin roofs and a total floor area of 1,062 square feet. Both buildings were wired for electric lights.
- 13 **Sewer System** - The cement structure was the equivalent of a modern septic tank. Water inside the tank kept the waste moving into the gulf. In total, there were four such flush tanks on the post and almost 1,200 feet of clay pipe sewers.
- 14 **Lavatory** – The structure contained more than 1,000 square feet of concrete floor space and four toilets. The cost totaled \$5,547 to build and was heated by a boiler unit installed during the first winter.
- 15 **Fire Apparatus House** - This unit housed a hook and ladder, one engine and four hose carts. Due to the high possibility of fires in the wooden buildings with oil-burning lights, 12 fire hydrants were located around the post. Of these, only five now remain.
- 16 **Post Exchange** – This two-story building totaled 3,106 square feet in floor space and was built at a cost of \$7,555.
- 17 **Mess Hall and Kitchen** – The structure cost \$3,684 to build and had 2,131 square feet of floor area to accommodate the needs of one company.
- 18 **Barracks** - The cost to build this 100-foot-long structure totaled \$14,599 and gave the 105 men more than 8,200 square feet of space in which to live. Heat was provided by fireplaces and the men used running water and facilities located outside.
- 19 **Observation Tower** - The footers to the original wooden building that once surrounding this tower can still be seen.

- 20 Single Set Officers Quarters** - The original first three structures were all two-story buildings with approximately 3,000 square feet of floor space each, costing \$5,529 to construct.
- 21 Captain's Quarters** - The cost to build this structure totaled nearly \$10,000. The quarters were heated not only by stoves, but also by fireplaces. The building featured two floors and an attic with a total floor space of 4,770 square feet. It was also wired for electric lights, but because a generator was not available for the post buildings, oil lamps were used.
- 22 Administration Building** - This two-story structure cost \$4,106 to build and had 2,248 square feet of floor space. The flag pole was located just to the south and stood at 75 feet in height.
- 23 Guard House** - This facility was equipped to hold five prisoners. Construction costs totaled \$3,476 for its 957 square feet of floor space.
- 24 Quartermaster Wharf** - The 275-foot wharf cut into Tampa Bay near the channel leading into Tampa. The wharf cost \$3,400 to build and was made of pine and palmetto woods.
- 25 Mine Storage** - Housing the submarine mines that were laid across the channel, the building allowed for control of the mines from either the land or detonation on contact with a vessel.



Construction Material Storehouse

- 26 NCO Quarters** - This building housed the noncommissioned officers (enlisted men appointed to a leadership rank after due examination). Built at a cost of \$3,658, it encompassed 1,062 square feet of floor space.
- 27 Double NCO Quarters** - Two NCOs were housed in these quarters with their families. Construction costs totaled \$4,583 with 2,022 square feet of floor space.
- 28 Hospital Steward Quarters** - The two floors totaled more than 1,000 square feet of floor space and cost \$2,653 to build.
- 29 Hospital** - The 2,628-square-foot building had space for 10 beds and cost \$9,726 to construct. It is the only building with a concrete basement on the post.
- 30 Quarantine Wharf** - Operated by the Public Health Service, it served as the center for Tampa Bay quarantine activities from 1889 through 1937. The Mullet Key Quarantine Station consisted of 15 buildings, four of which were relocated from Egmont Key.
- 31 Storehouse, Quartermaster and Subsistence Building** - Costing \$4,063, together they totaled 4,065 square feet of floor space.
- 32 Workshops** - Built for \$1,196, they contained shops for a blacksmith and carpenter as well as a saw mill but had no running water or sewer.



Army Barracks



A LITTLE MORE ON NEIGHBORING EGMONT KEY

In 1763, Egmont Key was named in honor of John Perceval, the Second Earl of Egmont and a member of the Irish House of Commons. Egmont Key has played an active part in Tampa Bay area history.

In the 1830s, the then “town” of Tampa had begun to develop into a bustling seaport. As the shipping increased, so did the number of groundings on the sandbars off Egmont Key. To remedy the situation, the citizens of Tampa petitioned the federal government for the construction of a lighthouse at the entrance of the bay. On March 3, 1847, Congress authorized funds to erect a lighthouse on Egmont Key. Construction was completed in May 1848 at a cost of \$7,050. At the time of completion, the Egmont Key lighthouse was the only one between St. Marks and Key West.

When the Great Hurricane of 1848 struck between September 23 and 25, it did extensive damage to the lighthouse. This and a subsequent hurricane in 1852 prompted the U.S. Congress, on August 10, 1856, to appropriate \$16,000 to rebuild the lighthouse and light keeper’s dwelling. Rebuilt in 1858, the second lighthouse was designed to withstand any storm. The rebuilt tower was approximately 120 feet tall with the most modern lighting equipment at that time.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Confederate troops briefly occupied the key.

In November 1861, Union Naval forces captured Egmont Key and established a base for Union gun boats blockading Tampa Bay.

Tensions ran high in Tampa during 1898 as war with Spain seemed imminent. Fort Dade was established with temporary gun batteries on Egmont Key at the outbreak of the Spanish American War. The Spanish fleet never came. However, between 1899 and 1916, more than 70 buildings were constructed on the island at a cost of \$494,427.48. A small city with more than 300 residents existed on Egmont Key at this time. Advances in armaments during the early 20th century made Fort Dade obsolete by the end of World War I. After a severe hurricane in 1921, the fort was deactivated and a caretaker assigned in 1923.

After Fort Dade was deactivated in 1923, the lighthouse and pilot stations became the focal points of the key. Before a formal harbor pilot association was established in Tampa Bay, incoming ships stopped at the lighthouse and borrowed a chart of the bay from the light keeper, returning it on the outbound voyage. In 1912, the Tampa Bay Pilot Association obtained a lease for two acres on the key to maintain a pilot lookout. The pilots have remained active on the key since then, guiding ships into today’s busy Port of Tampa.

In 1989, Egmont Key became a state park.

For additional information, contact Egmont Key State Park, 4905 - 34th St. S., # 5000, St. Petersburg, FL 33711, (727) 893-2627.





Battery Laidley was the primary defense for Fort De Soto. It contained eight, 12-inch M 1890-MI mortars with a maximum range of 6.8 miles at 45-degree elevation. The guns were manufactured by Watervliet Arsenal of Watervliet, New York. The battery had two observation points.

When a ship was sighted, the coordinates were relayed to the relocating room and that information was then sent to the data booth, where it was posted for the gun crews to view. At that time, the guns would be readied for firing.

Each gun required a 12-man crew to manually load and aim it. The guns had a 54-pound powder charge, which was put in after the projectile was loaded. The guns were fired either electrically or manually. Electricity was provided by generator, located in the dynamo room.

A visitor coming to Fort De Soto Park today can view the last four 12-inch M 1890-MI mortars remaining in North America (the only others remaining anywhere in the world are in the Philippines).

Built: Nov 1895 to April 1900
Turned over to artillery: 8 May 1900
Named for: Colonel Theodore T.S. Laidley
Mortars: 8-12 inch B.L. Model 1890-MI
 Watervliet Arsenal, NY
Carriages: Model 1896 MI American
 Hoist & Derrick CO. MN
Four motors shipped to: San Diego April 1917
Supervising Engineering: Lt. Col. W.H.H Benyaurd
 Capt. Henry Jervey
 Capt. Thomas H. Rees

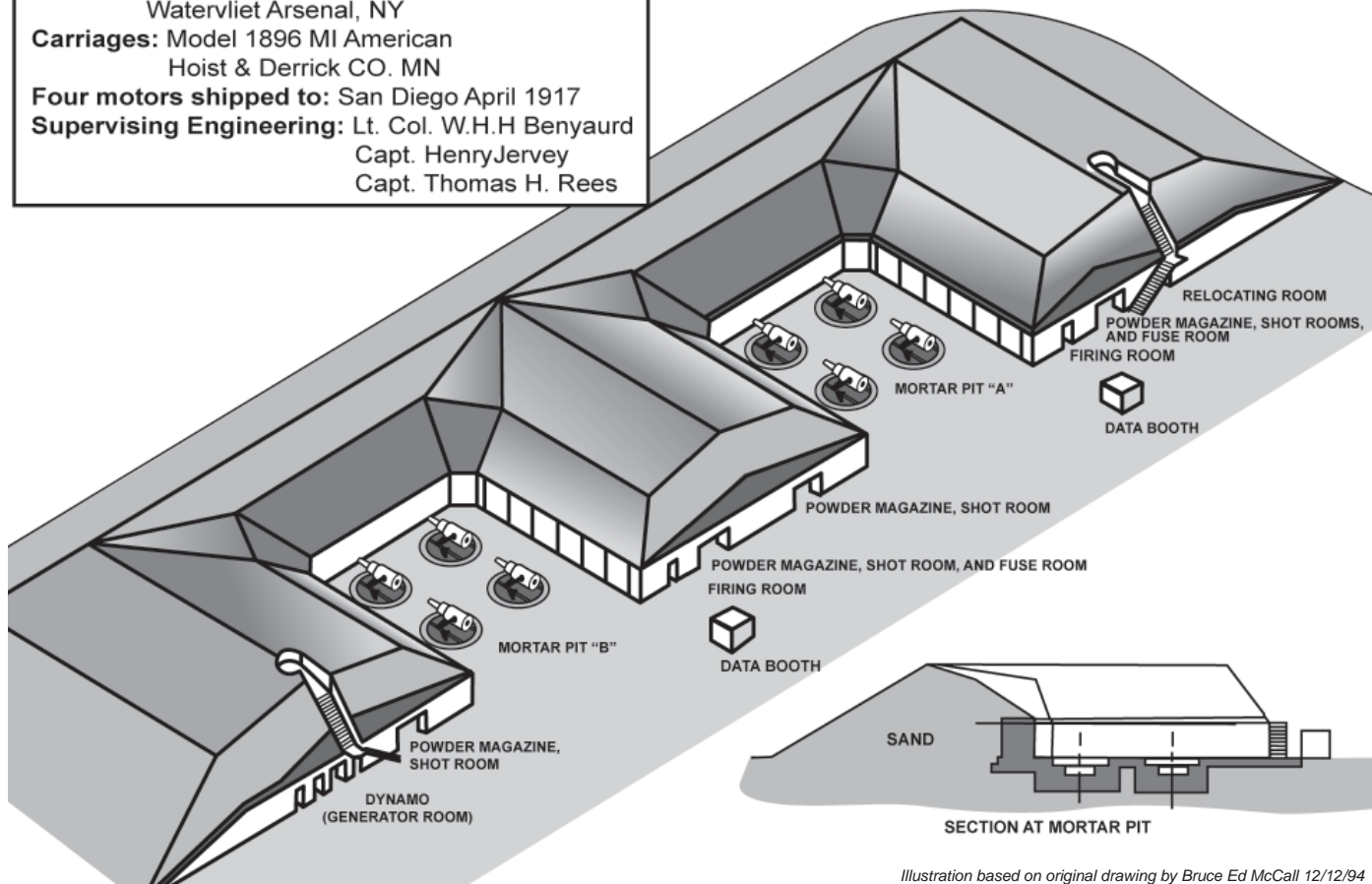


Illustration based on original drawing by Bruce Ed McCall 12/12/94

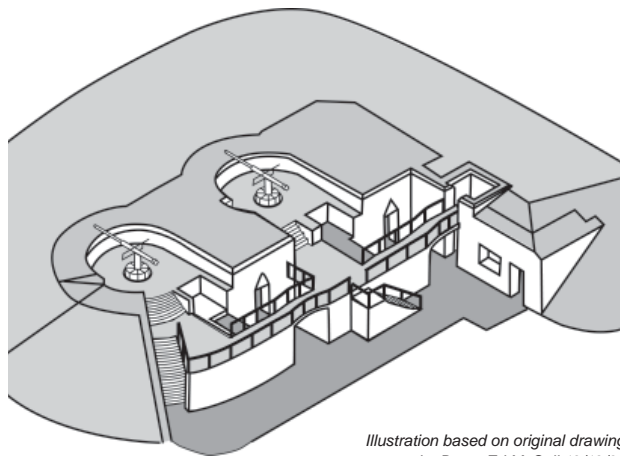


Battery Bigelow was the secondary defense for Fort De Soto. Its weapons were needed because Battery Laidley's 12-inch seacoast mortar mountings left 1.25 miles in front of the battery that could not be protected by the 12-inch mortar projectiles. It was also intended that the two 3-inch guns of Battery Bigelow would stop smaller, faster vessels that might elude the 12-inch mortars of Battery Laidley.

Mounted in Battery Bigelow were two 3-inch, 15-pound Driggs-Seabury Model 1898 rapid-fire guns. The 3-inch guns were manufactured by the Driggs-Seabury Gun & Ammunition Company of Derby, Connecticut. The task of the smaller caliber guns was also to defend and protect the minefield from torpedo boats, submarines, etc., at the harbor entrance.

In October 1932, Battery Bigelow collapsed and was swallowed by the Gulf of Mexico. The ruins of Battery Bigelow can be seen in the surf just southwest of Battery Laidley.

Battery Bigelow was named in honor of 1st Lt. Aaron Bigelow of the 21st U.S. Infantry, killed at the battle of Lundy's Lane, Ontario, during the War of 1812.



*Illustration based on original drawing
by Bruce Ed McCall 12/12/94*



View of Fort from
the Gulf of Mexico

General Information

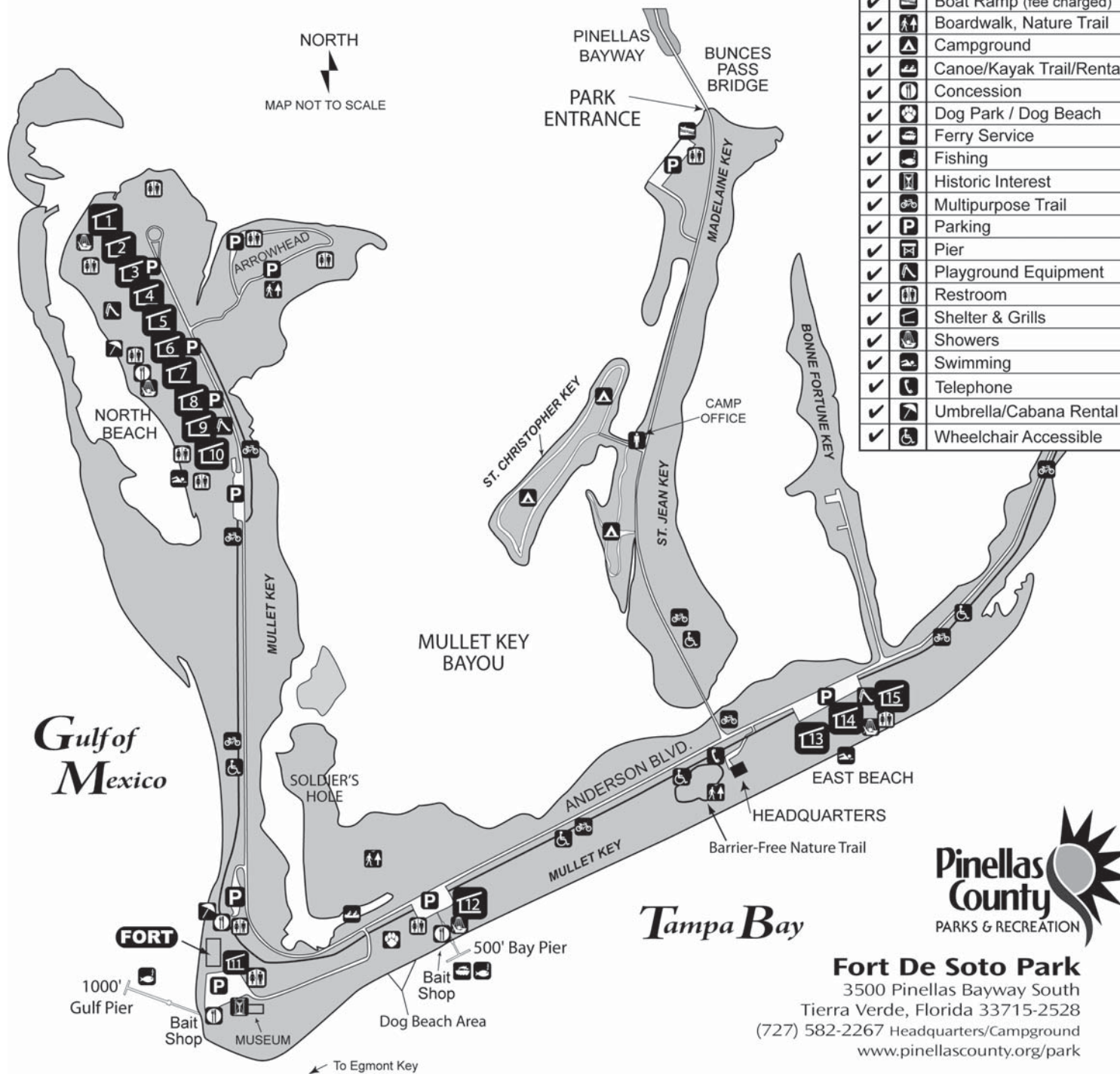
- Permits for metal detecting on the beaches may be obtained at park headquarters.
- Park rangers are on duty 24-hours a day to serve and assist you.
- To have a ranger dispatched, call the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office at (727) 582-6200.
- The bridge tolls are collected by the Florida Department of Transportation; the fees do not support the park.

Facilities

- 1,000-foot Gulf Pier and 500-foot Bay Pier: For your fishing pleasure. Both are equipped with bait, tackle and food concessions.
- Arrowhead Family Picnic Area and Nature Trail: No motor homes, trailers or buses are allowed.
- Historic fort built in 1898: Self-guided historical trail with historical and park literature available from the fort and park headquarters office. Fort tours are available for groups by appointment; call (727) 552-1862.
- 800-foot boat ramp: Vehicle and boat trailer parking.
- Family Camping Area: Includes 243 sites each with water and electrical hook-up, a picnic table and charcoal grill. A camp store, dump stations, modern restrooms and laundry facilities are provided for your convenience. Reservations required by calling (727) 893-9185 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/parks.
- North Beach and East Beach Picnic Areas: Reserve picnic shelters by calling (727) 453-3171 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/parks.
- Quartermaster Storehouse Museum: Reconstructed from a 1905 army building. Historical information is on display.
- Swimming beaches: Lifeguards on duty April through September. For your own safety, please swim ONLY in designated areas.
- Fort Snack Bar and Gift Shop: (727) 864-1376.
- Youth Camping: Recognized youth groups may reserve up to three months in advance by calling (727) 552-1862.
- Multi-purpose Trail: Seven miles of paved trail connecting North Beach, East Beach, the boat ramp and the camping area.
- Canoe Trail: 2.25-mile self-guided trail.
- Barrier-free Nature Trail: 2,200 feet long with six interpretive stations.
- Dog Park: 2.5 acres of dedicated park with one-quarter mile of beach, located west of the Bay Pier parking lot.

Prohibited

- ⊘ Pets in picnic shelters, restrooms, concession areas, public beaches or fishing piers.
- ⊘ Pets without a leash or with a leash more than six feet in length, except in designated Dog Park.
- ⊘ Patrons in the park after dark, except on the fishing piers or in the camping area.
- ⊘ Removing, damaging or defacing trees, shrubs or any other plants.
- ⊘ Vehicles on the beaches or in the picnic areas.
- ⊘ Feeding or harrassing wildlife, including birds, squirrels and raccoons.
- ⊘ Swimming outside of designated swimming area.
- ⊘ Alcoholic beverages
- ⊘



Fort De Soto Park
 3500 Pinellas Bayway South
 Tierra Verde, Florida 33715-2528
 (727) 582-2267 Headquarters/Campground
www.pinellascounty.org/park