

### Stop 3

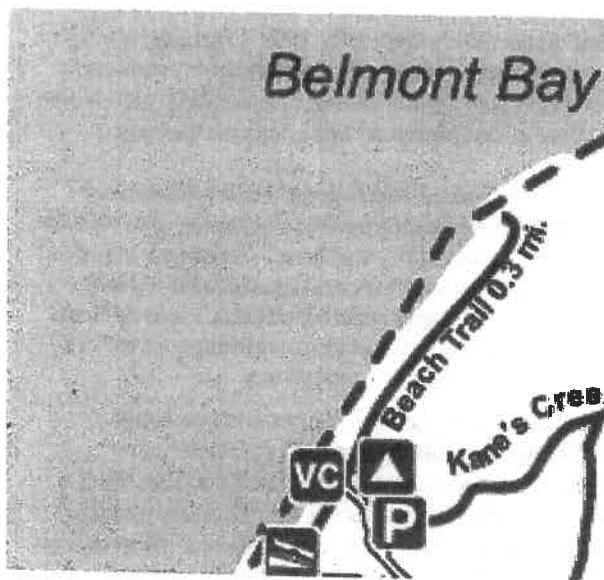
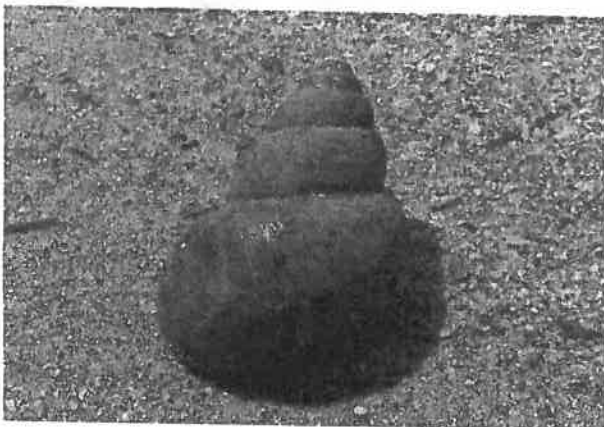
#### Wooden Overlook

This overlook provides a nice view of the bay. Many animals live on or near the bay, including people! On the other side is the Occoquan National Wildlife Refuge and the city of Woodbridge. The Occoquan River feeds into Belmont Bay, which in turn eventually flows into the Potomac River and the Atlantic Ocean. European settlers have been using the bay since the 1700s, and the Dogue tribe called the bay home long before them. You may see boats out fishing, people kayaking, or on windy days, windsurfers. Bald Eagles and Osprey can be seen fishing here as well. Many other animals call this place home—everything from catfish to clams and invertebrates. The American Eel lives in the bay, but goes out to the ocean to breed. As you can see, the bay is an important ecosystem.

### Stop 4

#### The Beach

Our coastline is subject to tides, so please check at the Visitor's Center or online for when high tide occurs. Once you get down the steps, one of the things people notice is the remains of a barge that was sunk here to help prevent erosion. This area was a tobacco farm in the Colonial Era. Since the farmers did not rotate their crops, this area became prone to erosion. Because of this, we do not have much topsoil, and the bay has been slowly filled in over time. Many people come to our beaches to play or fish. You may also see some large, spiral snail shells on the beach. These are called Mystery Snails, and are originally from Asia. Scientists are researching what affect these snails are having on the bay ecosystem. Don't forget to look for small holes in the sand where tiny creatures live!



#### Trail Information

The Beach Trail is a .3 mile, handicap accessible trail that runs from the Visitor Center to the wooden overlook with a nice view of the bay. A portion of the trail is paved, making passage especially easy. At the end of the trail opposite the Visitor Center the pavement ends at a set of steps that descend to the beach.

#### Beach Trail Self Guided Tour

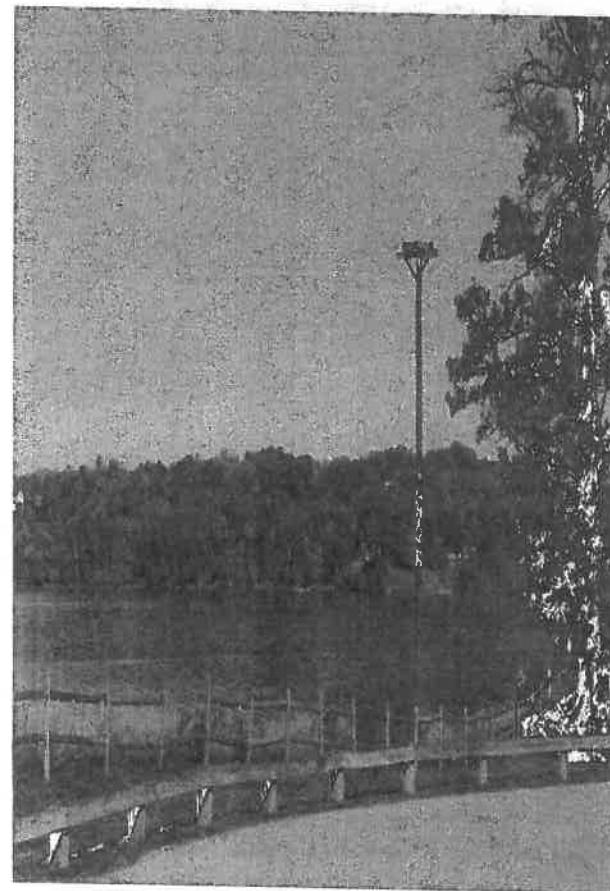
Tour stops 1 through 4 are marked by numbers along the trail.



Mason Neck State Park  
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Virginia State Parks

## Mason Neck State Park Beach Trail Self Guided Tour

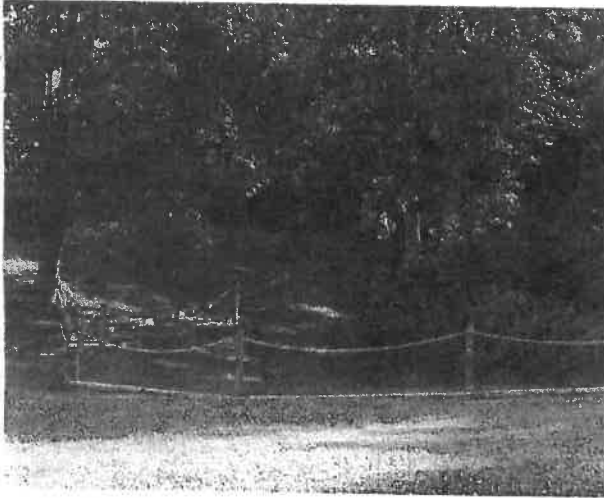


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# Mason Neck State Park

## BEACH TRAIL SELF GUIDED TOUR



### History of Mason Neck

Mason Neck State Park is steeped in natural and cultural history, encompassing 1,825 acres. The park shares 'The Neck' with Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Gunston Hall and BLM's Meadowood Special Recreation Area. Combined, these areas provide over 6,400 acres dedicated to recreation, preservation and wildlife management.

The first recorded history of Mason Neck was by Captain John Smith in 1608. He wrote of his meeting with the Dogue Indians and charted the chief's village of Tauxenent on his map of Virginia. The area was referred to as Doggs Island and Doeg Neck originally. Later, this peninsula received its current name from the Mason family.



During the 1800's and early 1900's, logging was the area's primary industry. The removal of mature pine, hardwood and the use of the pesticide DDT, led to the decline of the American Bald Eagle in the region.

In 1965 the Conservation Committee for Mason Neck formed to preserve the area from increasing development pressures. In July 1967, the Nature Conservancy made its first purchase of land to protect areas of Mason Neck. Later, funds were appropriated to federal, state and local agencies to begin buying land parcels from private land owners and the Nature Conservancy.

The park is now managed for passive recreation, environmental education and the protection and preservation of habitat for the American Bald Eagle and other animals in the area. Animals that frequent Mason Neck include: bald eagles, hawks, white-tailed deer, fox, beavers and over 200 species of birds.



### Stop 1

#### Osprey Platform

From here you can see an example of a nesting platform for Osprey. These birds prefer to nest where they have a 360° view. They have adapted to living near humans by nesting on power and light poles. Osprey are one of the most common birds of prey at the park. They are fish eaters and can often be seen flying over the bay. Many people confuse these birds with juvenile Bald Eagles. Osprey will have an almost entirely white belly with a brown partial ring around their neck. The Osprey are often attacked by Bald Eagles for their fish. Osprey can be seen at the park from March through October. The rest of the year they spend in South America, avoiding the cold temperatures here.

### Stop 2

#### The Campfire Ring

The fire pit here is used by our interpreters for programs. In the summer we do several free campfire programs on the weekends. These range from campfire safety & cooking to storytelling and learning about some of the nocturnal animals here at the park. We also do owl prowls here. If you are lucky you may hear a Barred Owl call (even during the day!). The Barred Owl call sounds like "Who Cooks For You? Who Cooks For You-all?" When they feel threatened or territorial, they can even sound like monkeys calling. Be careful not to make Eastern Screech Owl calls if you make Barred Owl calls too. The Barred Owls see the tiny Screech Owls as a nice snack. Look around closely after making calls, since owls fly silently and may be watching you without you seeing them.

