



*INNER HARBOR NAVIGATION LOCK AND CANAL. In use for more than half a century, the Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal at New Orleans provides access to the Intracoastal Waterway and Lake Ponchartrain and is used by pleasure craft as well as large ocean-going vessels.*

## **CHALMETTE, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 89.3 AHP, Map 52  
Left bank, descending*

The War of 1812 had officially ended on December 24, 1814, but the British expedition that was then approaching the mouth of the Lower Mississippi did not know it, nor was General Andrew Jackson, in command of the American force that awaited the redcoats, aware that the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States had already been signed.

General Jackson had expected the British attack to begin at Mobile, but Jean Laffite, leader of the “Baratarians,” said that New Orleans and the Lower Mississippi Valley was to be the British objective. The Baratarians were privateers who had established a base in the Bay of Baratavia. They plundered foreign ships, and supplied New Orleans and the rest of the country with smuggled slaves and other goods. Jean Laffite was their leader, and the British had offered him a fabulous reward if only he and his men and vessels would join them in the attack against New Orleans.

General Andrew Jackson had called the Baratarians “hellish banditti” and William C. Claiborne, governor of the brand new State of Louisiana, called them “a public disgrace.” With the British knocking at the gates of New Orleans, the Americans needed all the help they could get. General Jackson gathered a force that included a handful of U. S. regulars, volunteer militiamen, a battalion of “free persons of color,” a group of Choctaw Indians, and the once-scorned Baratarians. Jackson declared martial law in the city of New Orleans, sent Captain Henry Shreve’s steamboat, the *Enterprise*, up the river to fetch some badly needed ammunition barges, and prepared to defend the city and the river.

The British advance came through Bayou Bienvenue and Bayou Manzano to the plantation below New Orleans owned by Jacques Villere, a militia general. The well-disciplined and experienced British soldiers were within eight miles of the city of New Orleans before the Americans were aware of their approach. When General Jackson was notified, he moved his troops into position silently and hastily. The U. S. Navy’s 14-gun schooner, the *Carolina*, was on hand to assist. The 16-gun converted merchant vessel, *Louisiana*, and two Navy gunboats, were also ready to cooperate.

When the *Carolina* appeared on the river in front of the camp the British had set up on the night of December 23, 1814, the redcoats were as surprised as the Americans had been to learn of their approach a few hours earlier. They fired on the ship, and General Jackson and his troops launched their land attack. It was a noisy, confusing, and inconclusive battle.

For the next few days, it was a standoff, as the British prepared an attack of their own and the Americans dug in to resist them. On December 27, the British succeeded in blowing up the *Carolina* with a well-placed volley of red hot shells. At daylight the next morning, they began their advance. With his motley crew of determined fighters, General Jackson pushed them back. On January 1, the British tried it again. Again they were forced back. On January 8, reinforcements had arrived and heavier guns, and the disciplined British troops were ordered forward. Sir Edward Pakenham, leading the British troops, was killed. When the battle ended, the British had suffered eight times as many casualties as the American Army.

The next day, a flotilla from the British Navy attacked Fort St. Phillip and began a bombardment that lasted eight days. The British shells did little damage and American casualties again were light. The attempt to take the fort was abandoned just before dawn on January 18, 1815, and the same evening the pitiful remnant of Pakenham’s army went back to the British ships that awaited them. General Jackson was surprised to discover the enemy had gone and made no effort to follow the retreating forces.

On January 21, 1815, New Orleans welcomed the victorious Americans and celebrated the end of the War of 1812, but it was not until March 6, 1815, that General Jackson received dispatches informing him officially that the treaty had been signed and ratified, and that his troops should be dismissed and sent home. On Jackson’s recommendation, Jean Laffite and his men received full pardons for their service with the American Army and Navy.

The final and decisive battle had taken place on Chalmette plantation, and the plantation house itself had been destroyed in preparation for the battle. It was later

replaced by another house, built for Judge Rene Beauregard, the son of a Confederate general. The Beauregard house, called Bueno Retiro, still stands in its beautiful setting of moss-hung live oaks and serves as a museum for the Chalmette National Monument, erected to commemorate the Battle of New Orleans. There is also a National Military Cemetery at Chalmette where Union casualties from the Civil War are buried. About half of the 14,000 graves are marked "Unknown."

## **ALGIERS LOCK AND CANAL (Intracoastal Waterway)**

*Mile 88.0 AHP, Map 52  
Right bank, descending*

The Algiers Lock and Canal connects the Mississippi River with the Intracoastal Waterway. The lock is 75 feet wide, 800 feet long, and has a controlling depth of 13 feet. The 9-mile channel that leads into the GIWW is 12 feet deep. The Lock was opened to navigation in April, 1956. It was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers to relieve the overburdened Harvey Lock and Canal.

Algiers, a highly industrialized area, is strung out along the west bank of the river and is officially a part of the city of New Orleans. For more than a century, Algiers has been a boat-building and repair center. There is a U. S. Naval Base, as well as a U. S. Immigration Station, and a Quarantine Station at Algiers.

## **VIOLET, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 84.0 AHP, Map 52  
Left bank, descending*

A seven-mile channel called the Lake Borgne Canal begins at Violet, Louisiana, and was formerly much used by light-draft vessels because it cut about 60 miles off the trip from the Gulf to the Port of New Orleans. Since the opening of the Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal at New Orleans, the old canal is used only by fishermen.

## **POYDRAS CREVASSE**

*Mile 82.1 AHP, Map 53*  
*Left bank, descending*

The Poydras community was on the western boundary of the area that early settlers called "Terre aux Boeufs," where about 1,500 Canary Islanders settled under Spanish rule in 1778 and 1779. The small farmers were given supplies and tools and implements by the Spanish government. They used oxen to pull their plows and wagons, and the French phrase "Terre aux Boeufs" meant "Land of Oxen." All of the Canary Islanders spoke Spanish, and were called "Islenos" by the French settlers of Louisiana.

The community of Poydras was virtually wiped out in 1922 by a crevasse in the levee that local interests had constructed. Less than half an hour before the levee collapsed, an inspector had examined the levee and said that it was in excellent condition. The break at Poydras relieved a critical situation at New Orleans, causing the river stage there to fall .2 of a foot in the next 24 hours. The crevasse water spread rapidly over the small farms and citrus groves on the east bank of the river below Poydras.

In New Orleans, the crevasse that had possibly saved the city from disaster, was the object of much curiosity and interest. Thousands of people travelled by automobile to Poydras to see the great crevasse. At Violet, Louisiana, cars were stopped and a donation of \$1 was collected from each of the sightseers, to be used for flood relief.

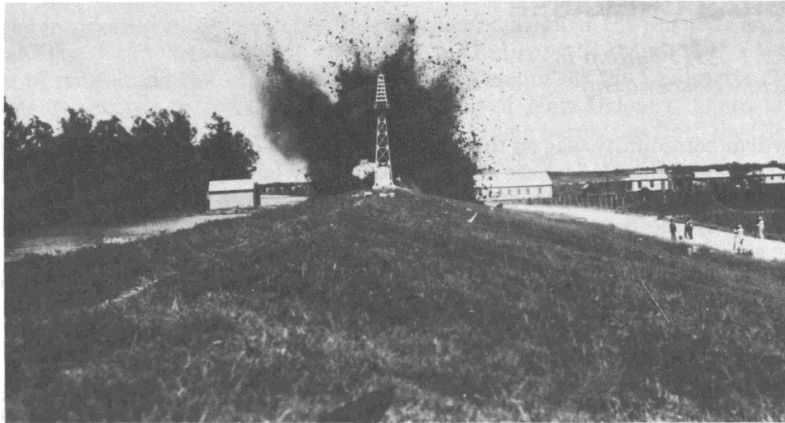
The steamboat *Capitol* was sent down from the city to assist in flood relief work. Refugees were taken from the levees and other high spots as far down as Pointe a la Hache.

## **CAERNARVON CREVASSE**

*Mile 81.3 AHP, Map 53*  
*Left bank, descending*

In 1927, the Lower Mississippi Valley was experiencing the worst flood ever recorded in the river's history. By mid-April, the river was so swollen at New Orleans that levees around the city were in real danger of being overtopped.

After long conferences between State and city authorities and the Army Corps of Engineers, it was agreed that the situation at New Orleans was desperate enough to call for drastic remedial measures. It was decided that an artificial crevasse would be made at Caernarvon plantation, in the hope that this would reduce the flood height at New Orleans and save the city.



*CAERNARVON CREVASSE. When the record flood of 1927 threatened to overtop the levees that protected the city of New Orleans, flood fighters blasted an artificial crevasse in the mainline levee below the city at Caernarvon plantation. The result of the first blast, shown in the above photograph, was disappointing. Later, the gap was enlarged; the river at New Orleans began to fall; and the city was saved.*

On April 25, 1927, a large crowd of engineers, government officials, reporters, and spectators gathered at Caernarvon to watch the blowing up of the levee. There was some embarrassment when the first charge of dynamite failed to do more than open up a small gap, through which the water trickled very, very slowly. Again and again, divers slid into the muddy water and carefully placed additional charges of dynamite, but the river refused to cooperate. After several days, successive charges opened a wide gap in the levee and the crevasse quickly enlarged until it was about 2,600 feet wide. At New Orleans, the river began to fall.

Many of the people who had lived behind the Caernarvon levee were small farmers, trappers, and fishermen. Not all of them were willing to sacrifice their own homes and fields for the sake of New Orleans. "Let nature take its course and choose her own victims," they grumbled. Residents of New Orleans promised to reimburse the small farmers for their losses.

For a while, it had been feared that the farmers and fishermen might oppose the levee crevasse with violence, and the Governor of Louisiana had ordered a small contingent of national guardsmen to Caernarvon, but they were not needed. The Islenos had bowed to the inevitable and were jamming the road to New Orleans with their ox carts and wagons, carrying all their worldly goods with them as they evacuated their homes.

Small farmers in the Caernarvon area still raise cattle and vegetables today. St. Bernard Parish, in which the community is located, has ground elevations ranging from 11 feet above mean sea level to below sea level. Many shallow lakes, bays, bayous, and canals make the parish attractive to both commercial and sport fishermen. There is some oil and gas production in the parish, as well as several refineries. The population of the area is increasing rapidly, as people spill over from the New Orleans area.

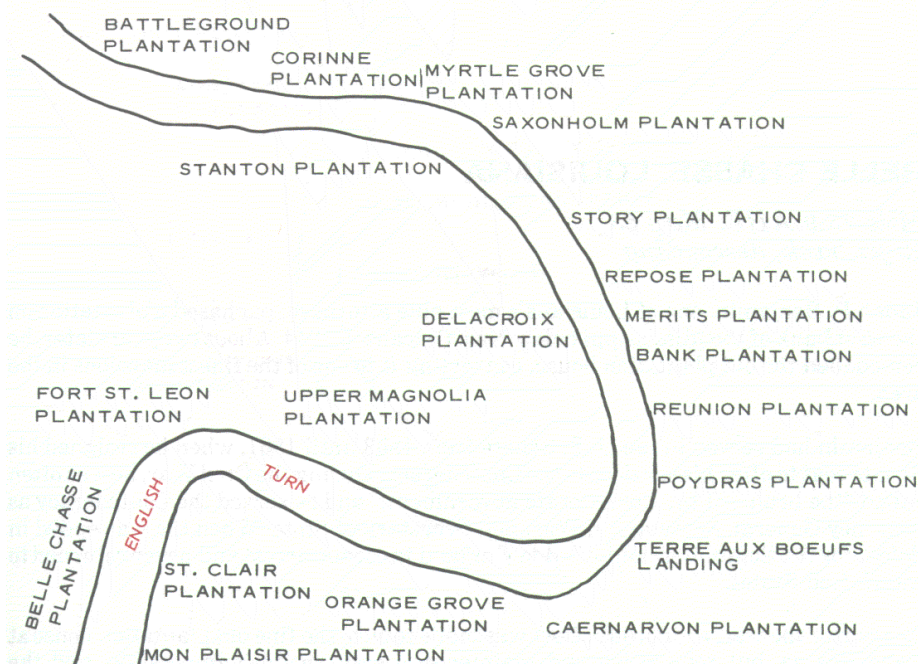
## ENGLISH TURN BEND

*Mile 78.0 AHP, Map 53*

On September 16, 1699, Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville, was descending the Lower Mississippi in a small boat with a handful of men when he met an English ship that had dropped its anchor in a great bend of the river below the bend in which the city of New Orleans is now located.

The ship was under the command of Captain Lewis Bond, who had been engaged to take a group of settlers to the Mississippi to establish a British colony on the lower reaches of the river. Bienville, a lad of 19 at the time, had an air of authority that belied his years. Haughtily informing the English captain that he was in the wrong river, Bienville declared that this one was claimed by the French. A large force of French ships and French soldiers was following close behind him, Bienville added casually, and should appear in the bend above very soon.

The young Frenchman's monumental bluff succeeded. Captain Bond raised his anchor, turned his vessel, and hurried back out into the Gulf of Mexico. From that time forward, the bend was known as "English Turn."



*RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: English Turn. An 1895 map shows some of the plantations that lined the banks of the Lower Mississippi just below New Orleans. The sharp bend where Fort St. Leon plantation is shown was known as English Turn. Fort St. Leon was a French post established around 1722 to prevent other European powers from sending their ships into the Lower Mississippi.*

Later the French officials erected a small fort on the west bank at English Turn. The old fortification, called Fort St. Leon, was strengthened by the Americans during the War of 1812, when batteries were erected and a garrison was stationed there for the protection of New Orleans.

One of the last naval engagements of the Civil War also took place in English Turn. The Confederate ram, *William H. Webb*, had dashed out of the mouth of Red River late in April, 1865, and had run boldly and swiftly through the whole Union fleet that was stationed in the area. Just above New Orleans, the wily commander of the rebel ram raised a U. S. flag, carrying it at half-mast as though in mourning for the assassinated President Lincoln. The ruse fooled observers briefly, but inevitably someone recognized the *Webb* as she was about to pass the city unmolested. Defiantly running up the rebel banner, the steamer sped past the New Orleans waterfront and went downriver with the *U.S.S. Hollyhock* hot on her heels.

The *Webb* had reached English Turn when she met the *U.S.S. Richmond*, coming upstream toward New Orleans. Caught between the two hostile gunboats, the rebel crew had little choice. They ran their vessel to shore, set fire to her, and disappeared into the Louisiana swamps. The daring exploit had taken place almost two weeks after the surrender at Appomattox. The war was grinding to a close, and the *Webb's* bold dash for freedom had failed.

## **BELLE CHASSE, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 75.9 AHP, Map 53*  
*Right bank, descending*

Judah P. Benjamin, one of Louisiana's most able attorneys, purchased a plantation on the west bank of the Mississippi below New Orleans in 1844. About two years later, he remodelled the old plantation house, converting it to one of the finest mansions in the area.

Benjamin had served in the U. S. Senate from 1853 until 1861, when he resigned his Senate seat to offer his services to the Confederacy. During the Civil War, he was often called "the brains of the Confederate government," and he served the Confederacy as Attorney General, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. When the war ended in defeat for the South, Benjamin fled to England to escape arrest and never returned to the United States.

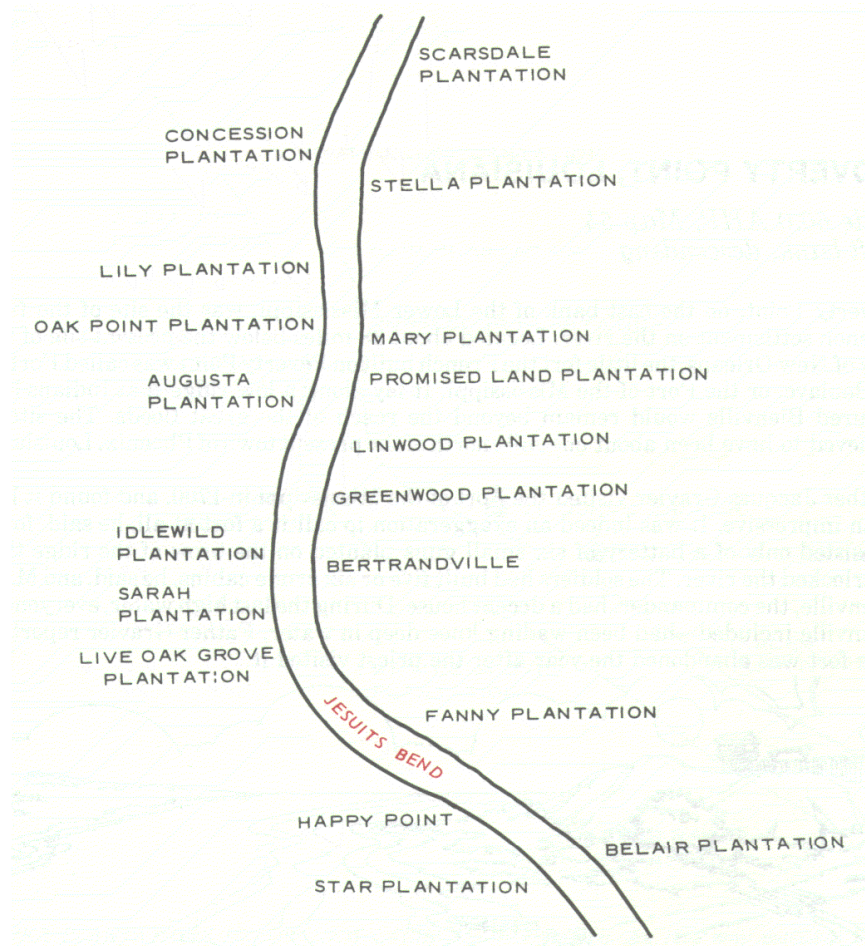
Long after the war, a vigorous effort was made to save the fine old plantation house at Belle Chasse, but restoration and maintenance costs made it impossible, and the mansion soon fell into ruins. It was demolished in March, 1960.

The large community at Belle Chasse today is a suburb of New Orleans, and many of its residents cross the Mississippi every day to work in the city on the east bank.

## JESUITS BEND

*Mile 68.5 AHP, Map 53*

The Society of Jesus is a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jesuits took an active part in the early settlement and development of the Lower Mississippi Valley. A Jesuit priest accompanied Iberville and Bienville, and other Jesuits established small missions on the Mississippi, enduring all kinds of incredible hardships and laboring incessantly to convert the Indian tribes to Christianity. Some were murdered for their efforts, but the Jesuits continued their work in Louisiana



*RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: Jesuits Bend. An 1895 map shows plantations on the east and west banks of the Lower Mississippi, in the area pilots called Jesuits Bend. The bend was named for an order of the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuit priests came to Louisiana with the first French colonists. They established missions and educational institutions and supported their work with produce raised on their plantations in this area.*



until they were expelled in 1763 because of European opposition to the Order. They helped introduce indigo, oranges, figs, and sugar cane to the colony, and established missions and educational institutions.

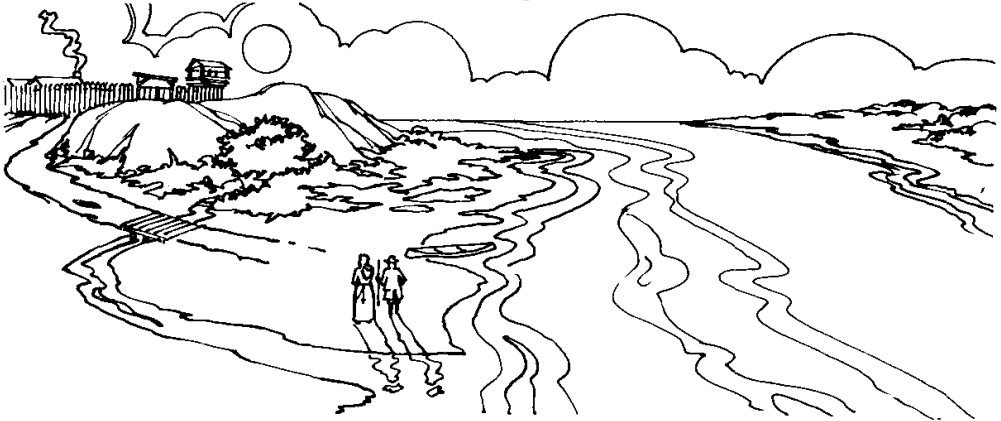
In 1837 the Jesuits were allowed to come back to Louisiana, and they acquired land below New Orleans and operated plantations to support the educational institutions they established in New Orleans and elsewhere. River pilots called this great bend of the river Jesuits Bend, because some of the land belonging to the order was located in the area.

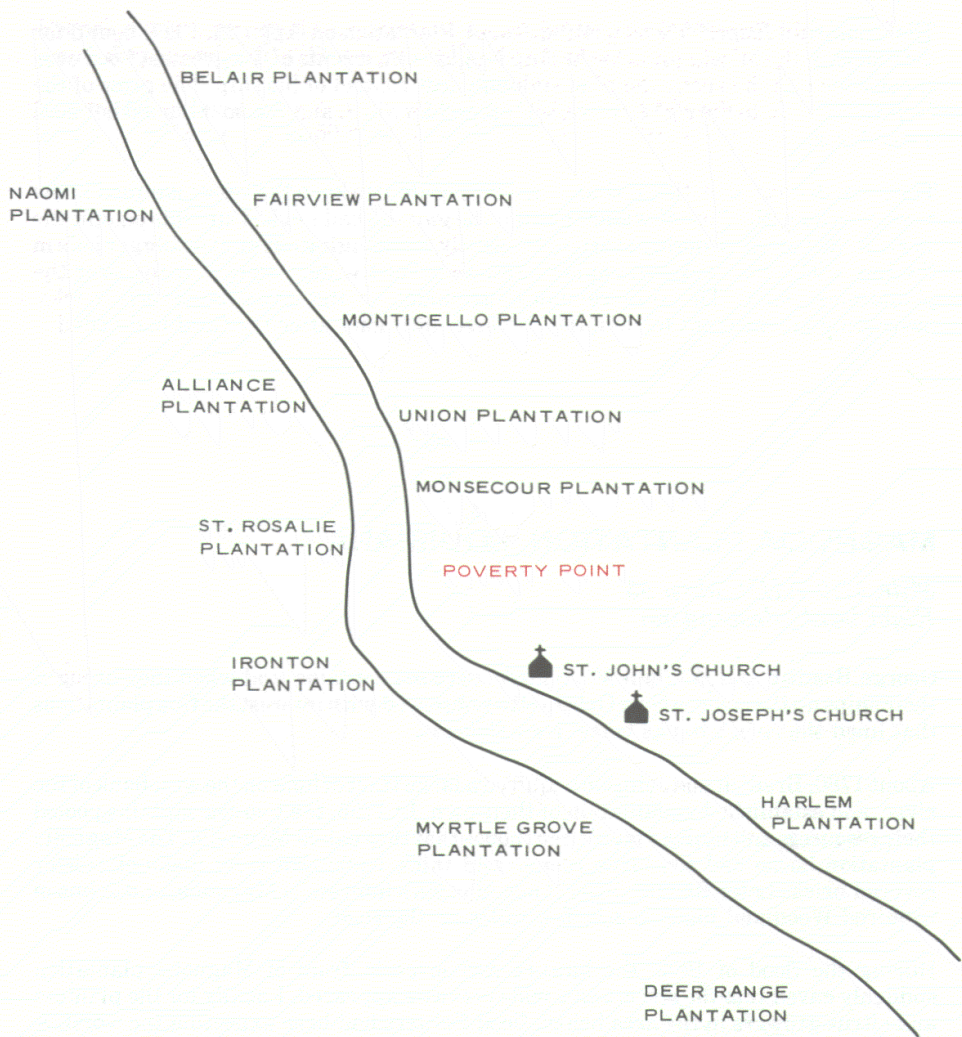
## **POVERTY POINT, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 60.0 AHP, Map 54  
Left bank, descending*

Poverty Point, on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi, was the site of the first French settlement on the river. Located about 38 miles below the present site of the city of New Orleans, the little fort the French built on Poverty Point was called Fort de la Boulaye, or the Fort of the Mississippi. It lay along a low ridge that Indians had assured Bienville would remain beyond the reach of the great floods. The site is believed to have been about one mile north of the present town of Phoenix, Louisiana.

Father Jacques Gravier visited the Fort of the Mississippi in 1700, and found it less than impressive. It was indeed an exaggeration to call it a fort at all, he said, for it consisted only of a battery of six small guns planted on the brow of the ridge that overlooked the river. The soldiers had built five or six crude cabins, he said, and M. de Bienville, the commander, had a decent house. During the last high water, everyone—Bienville included—had been wading knee-deep in water, Father Gravier reported. The fort was abandoned the year after the priest visited it.





*RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: Poverty Point. An 1895 map published by the Mississippi River Commission shows some of the plantations on the east and west banks of the Lower Mississippi in the Poverty Point area below New Orleans. Poverty Point was the site of the first settlement made on the river by French colonists. It was not a success, and was soon abandoned in favor of New Orleans.*

## **JUNIOR CREVASSE**

*Mile 55.0 AHP, Map 54  
Right bank, descending*

The steamship *Inspector* was passing Junior Plantation on April 23, 1927, bound for the mouth of the Mississippi. As the ship fought the currents of the greatest flood ever experienced on the river, the pilot suddenly lost control of his ship. The prow of the *Inspector* swung to the right, the vessel lurched forward, and the boat buried her nose in the levee.

The pilot, dismayed by the mishap, tried desperately to keep the vessel jammed in the levee to reduce the flow of water through the gap she had made. Currents caught the stern of the vessel, swinging it around violently and gouging out an even bigger hole in the levee. The gap widened rapidly, and soon flood waters were pouring over the plantations below. The ship remained grounded in the levee for several weeks, preventing any attempt to close the crevasse until long after the flood had ended.

## **MAGNOLIA PLANTATION, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 47.0 AHP, Map 55  
Right bank, descending*

George Bradish and William M. Johnson were sea captains, and when they brought their ships up the river to New Orleans they observed with interest the fine plantations that lined the river's banks below New Orleans.

About 1780, Bradish and Johnson acquired a large tract of land on the west bank of the river, and established a plantation of their own. In 1795, the two sea captains pooled their resources and built a magnificent house that they called Magnolia. The Magnolia plantation house had ten large rooms, and thick walls that were made of plaster covered brick. Later Bradish bought out Johnson's interest in Magnolia, and Johnson acquired Woodland plantation, a few miles up the river.

During the flood of 1903, the batture and levee in front of Magnolia plantation suddenly caved into the river, and a wide crevasse appeared. Luckily for the planters and citrus growers in the area below, flood fighters had been expecting the worst. A trainload of materials waited in the railroad yard at Algiers. The train, picking up laborers along the way, rushed to Magnolia and the crevasse was closed in time to prevent severe damage.

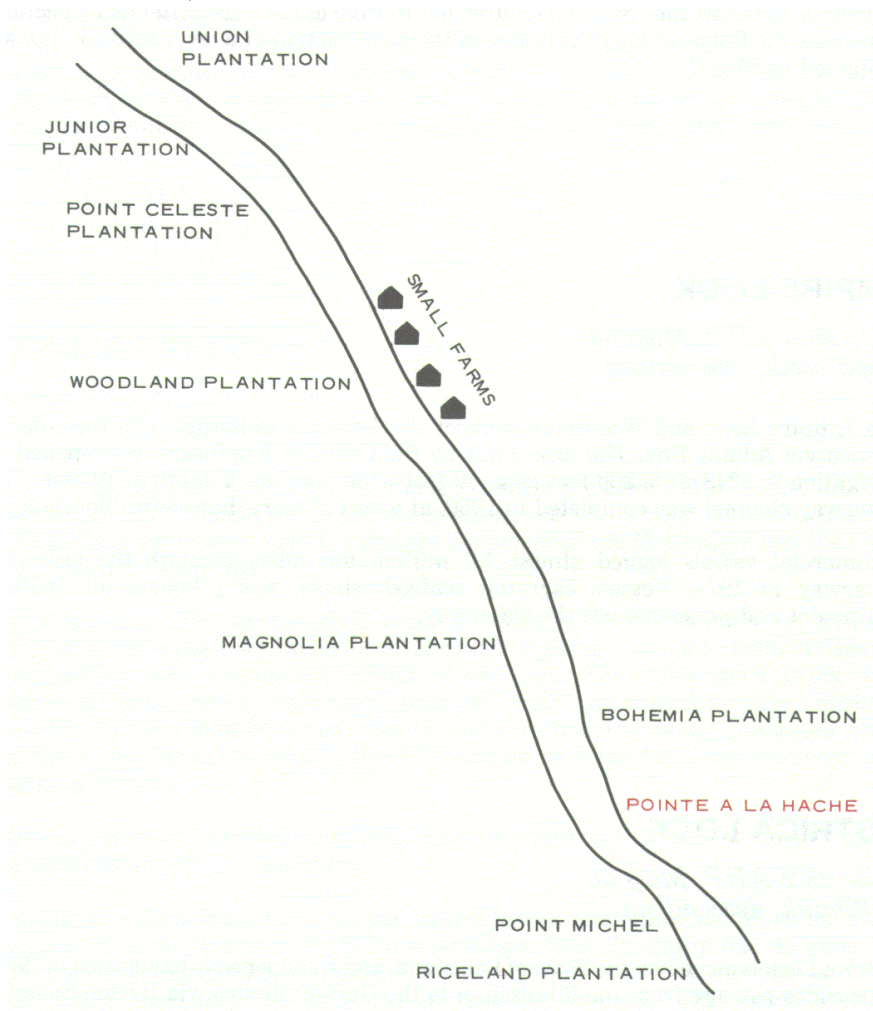
Magnolia is now abandoned and deteriorating rapidly. Recent hurricanes have damaged the front of the house. Woodland plantation, however, appears to be in good condition and the house is still in use. The land is planted with orange trees.

## POINTE A LA HACHE, LOUISIANA

*Mile 45.0 AHP, Map 55  
Left bank, descending*

French explorers named this point, using a French phrase that meant "Point of the Axe." A map made in 1765 called it "Hatchet Point."

The mainline levee system on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi terminates at Pointe a la Hache, about 50 miles above the Head of Passes.



*RIVER PLANTATIONS ABOVE POINTE A LA HACHE. Most of the plantations just above Pointe a la Hache are owned by citrus growers. On the east bank, most of the farms are small ones. Oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and vegetables are grown on the citrus farms in the area.*

## **NAIRN, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 34.0 AHP, Map 55  
Right bank, descending*

In 1973 a major flood crisis occurred at Nairn, Louisiana, on the west bank of the Mississippi about 60 miles below New Orleans. On April 26, 1973, late in the evening, a bank in front of the levee began to slough, and by dawn the next morning volunteers and Army engineers were working desperately to prevent failure of the levee itself. Old car bodies, stones, sandbags, shell, gravel, and everything else available went into the tremendous hole the river had scoured out in front of the levee. After an inspection of the site, the Corps of Engineers began the construction of a levee setback. It was completed by May 3.

## **EMPIRE LOCK**

*Mile 29.5 AHP, Map 56  
Right bank, descending*

The Empire Lock and Waterway connect the Lower Mississippi with the Gulf of Mexico via Adams Bay. The lock, built by the Corps of Engineers, was opened to navigation in 1948. It is 200 feet long, 40 feet wide, and has a depth of 10 feet. The waterway channel was completed in 1950, at a cost of more than one million dollars.

Commercial vessels logged almost 1.7 million ton miles through the lock and waterway in 1974. Vessels carrying seafood, shells, and off-shore oil drilling equipment and personnel use the waterway.

## **OSTRICA LOCK**

*Mile 25.2 AHP, Map 56  
Left bank, descending*

Ostrica Lock is owned by the State of Louisiana, and was opened to navigation in 1952. It provides passage from the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, via Breton Sound.

The lock at Ostrica is used chiefly by crewboats, fishermen, and pleasure craft. It is 250 feet long, 40 feet wide, and has a controlling depth of 10 feet.

## **BURAS, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 25.0 AHP, Map 56  
Right bank, descending*

Buras, Louisiana, was named for a family of French brothers who moved into the area around 1850, and the name is still a common one in the community. Orange groves and farms extend in a narrow band along the river in the Buras area. Behind the orange groves are wooded swamps and marshes famous for the abundance of their wildlife population. Much of the community was destroyed by recent hurricanes. Many of the older orange groves were also lost.

Satsuma, Sweets, and Navel Oranges are grown in this area, as well as Ruby Red Grapefruit. Harvest begins in mid-October, when the small trees are heavily laden with the bright fruit, and continues until January when the weather permits.

## **FORT ST. PHILIP**

*Mile 20.0 AHP, Map 56  
Left bank, descending*

In 1792, the Spanish built a fort on the left bank of the Lower Mississippi, in a bend that was called Plaquemines Bend. Spain was at war with France at the time, and the fort at Plaquemine was meant to protect the mouth of the Mississippi and the city of New Orleans from invaders.

In 1796, a visitor to the fort reported that it had a battery of 24 guns and was garrisoned by about 100 Spanish soldiers. A small fleet of Spanish war galleys was stationed in front of the fort. The fort's thick brick walls were already being damaged because their foundations were unstable, General Victor Collot reported, and the soldiers had to employ 100 galley slaves on the river bank in front of the fortification to keep the river currents from washing it away.

General Andrew Jackson strengthened Fort St. Philip in 1815 and it withstood a nine-day bombardment by the British.

During the Civil War, Confederate authorities strengthened old Fort St. Philip again, and made it a part of the river defenses. Fort St. Philip had 45 guns, and the partially completed ironclad, *Louisiana*, was towed down and stationed just above the fort, to serve as a floating battery. The *Louisiana* was abandoned when the Union fleet succeeded in passing Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson (on the opposite bank). She was set afire, exploded, and sank near Fort St. Philip.

Both of the forts were surrendered after the fall of New Orleans. In 1960 the U. S. Department of the Interior designated Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson as national historical monuments. Fort Jackson is open to the public, but Fort St. Philip cannot be reached except by boat.

## **FORT JACKSON, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 18.6 AHP, Map 56*  
*Right bank, descending*

French colonial authorities had erected earthen and timber breastworks on the right bank in Plaquemines Bend in the mid-1750's and around 1792 a stronger redoubt called Fort Bourbon was constructed by the Spanish in the same area. Fort Bourbon was destroyed by a hurricane in 1795, but was ordered rebuilt immediately.

An attack by the British on the west bank in 1815 demonstrated the need for a major fort at Plaquemines Bend, and its construction was begun in 1822. Named for General Andrew Jackson, Fort Jackson was completed and occupied in 1832. It had cost the Federal Government more than half a million dollars. It was garrisoned by U. S. soldiers until the State of Louisiana seized the facility in 1861.

The Confederate government grudgingly provided funds and materials to strengthen Fort Jackson, but the preparations proved inadequate when Farragut's fleet of Union war vessels came steaming up the river in April, 1862.

The battle at Plaquemines Bend pitted the Union Navy against the two land forts, with the river defense fleet of the Confederacy playing only a minor and disastrous part in the engagement. The big Confederate ram *Manassas* ran aground early in the battle and was destroyed. The rebel boats *Warrior*, *Stonewall Jackson*, *General Lovell*, *General Breckinridge*, *Phoenix*, *Star*, and *Belle Algerine* were sunk. The *General Quitman* was lost. The rebels themselves destroyed the *Resolute*, *Governor Moore*, *Defiance*, *McRae*, and the costly but incomplete *Louisiana* to prevent their capture by the Union Navy.

The Union force had only two losses. The *Maria J. Carlton* was hit by Confederate artillery on April 19, 1862, and the *Varuna* was rammed by a rebel ship as she attempted to slip past the forts.

After the Union fleet passed the forts, Admiral David Farragut drew his fleet up in front of New Orleans and demanded the surrender of the city. The mayor laughed bitterly. "To surrender such a place were an idle and unmeaning ceremony," he said. The city was undefended.

Farragut suggested that the mayor raise a Union flag. The mayor retorted that the Union forces could raise their own flag. Farragut sent a small detachment on shore, and the men marched to a public building and hoisted the U. S. standard. William B. Mumford, a southern sympathizer, watched the little ceremony with hate in his eyes. When the Union men marched back to the waterfront, Mumford tore down the Union banner and dragged it through the streets, followed by a delighted mob that cheered him every inch of the way. Farragut blustered and blew, and threatened to bombard the city. The mayor replied that if the Union officers had no scruples about murdering thousands of innocent women and children who thronged the city, "because of a question of etiquette," then they could just go right ahead and bombard it. The Union admiral did not shell New Orleans, but when General Benjamin F. Butler moved in to take command he hunted William B. Mumford down and had him hanged in the street in front of the building from which he had taken the Union flag.

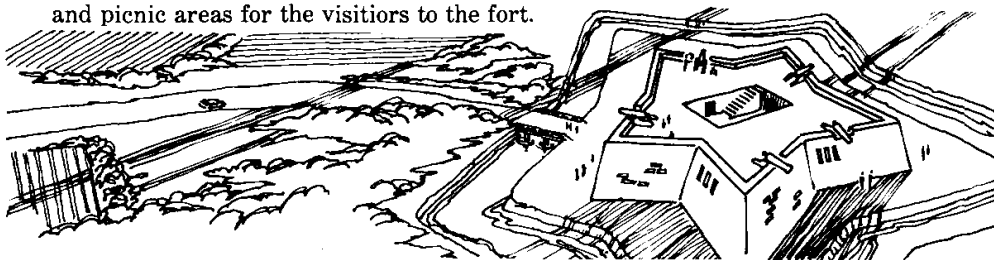
While Farragut was squabbling with the New Orleans authorities, Admiral David D. Porter's fleet of mortar boats continued to pound the two forts below the city. On April 27, 1862, the soldiers at Fort Jackson had had enough. They mutinied, spiking their own guns and threatening the lives of their own officers. The following day the two forts were surrendered to Porter.

Descriptions of the battle in Plaquemines Bend were confused and incoherent for the most part, but General Benjamin Butler left this vivid picture of the action:

*"Twenty mortars, a hundred and forty-two guns in the fleet, a hundred and twenty in the Forts, the crash of splinters, the explosion of the boilers and magazines, the shouts and cries, the shrieks of scalded and drowning men; add to this, the belching flashes of the guns, blazing rafts of burning steamboats, the river full of fire, and you have a picture of the battle that was all confined to Plaquemines Bend."*

With the fall of Forts St. Philip and Jackson, the fate of New Orleans was sealed, and the eventual control of the Mississippi by Union forces was made inevitable. Only Vicksburg and Port Hudson would manage to hold on for another year. The Union fleet that won the victory consisted of 46 vessels and 21 mortar boats.

The United States kept a garrison of soldiers at Fort Jackson until 1920. In 1960 the Harvey family of Louisiana, who had purchased the property, donated it to Plaquemines Parish. The parish has constructed access roads and repaired and restored the old fort, which was classified as a national historical monument in 1960. It is a large star shaped pentagon, surrounded by a moat. The old brickwork has withstood the ravages of time remarkably well. There is an excellent small museum, and picnic areas for the visitors to the fort.





## **VENICE, LOUISIANA**

*Mile 10.8 AHP, Map 57*  
*Right bank, descending*

Venice, Louisiana, is the last town on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi River that is accessible by highway. It lies at the end of the MR&T Project west bank levee system, and marks the termination of what is probably the longest continuous levee line in the world. The levee extends from Venice 650 miles northward to the Arkansas River.

Venice is in Plaquemines Parish, a long peninsula on the west side of the river that was formed by the Mississippi as it pushed its delta into the Gulf region. The entire parish is made up of accretion deposited by centuries of overflow before the Mississippi River levee system was built.

Hurricane Camille in 1969 virtually wiped out the lower part of Buras, Louisiana, and most of Venice. Houses were swept off their foundations or collapsed where they stood, as the 200 mile per hour winds and tidal surges swept over the area. From Fort Jackson to Venice, houses and trailers were smashed, livestock was drowned, and citrus groves were destroyed by the wind and water. Plaquemines Parish lies on both sides of the river, but most of its population lives on the west bank. Pointe a la Hache on the east bank is the seat of the parish government, however.

The parish is generously endowed with petroleum, gas, and sulphur deposits, and its fish and wildlife resources have significant value as well. Many former agricultural workers have abandoned the farms to go to work for the petroleum industry. Sulphur is processed at Port Sulphur, and fish and seafood are processed at Empire.

## **THE JUMP**

*Mile 10.5 AHP, Map 57*  
*Right bank, descending*

Around 1840, some fishermen dug a small canal on the west bank of the Mississippi just below Venice, Louisiana. A couple of years later, the river broke through into the canal and enlarged its channel very rapidly. Pilots called the area "The Jump" and it became a permanent outlet of the river. The channel, which became known as Grand Pass, is the first of the channels or passes that lead directly to the Gulf of Mexico.



## **CUBITS GAP**

*Mile 3.0 AHP, Map 58*  
*Left bank, descending*

In 1862, Richard Cubit, his wife, four daughters, and a 12-year-old son were living on the left bank of the Mississippi, about three miles above the Head of Passes. The commander of the first Union vessel that came into the river in March, 1862, caught Cubit in the act of notifying Confederate authorities by telegraph that the Union boats were in view of his house. The Union officer cut the telegraph cable, took Cubit's instrument away from him, and carried the man to the flagship *Hartford*.

On board the Union vessel, Cubit was questioned closely, lectured severely, and given a parole to sign under oath. He was allowed to return to his home and family.

Later in the Civil War, Federal forces cut through a bulkhead near Cubit's house, diverting a part of the Mississippi's flow into a fishermen's canal. The channel enlarged and soon became a permanent outlet of the river. River pilots called the new channel Cubits Gap.

## **HEAD OF PASSES**

*Mile 0.0, Map 58*

About 953.8 river miles below the confluence of the Ohio and Middle Mississippi Rivers, the Lower Mississippi comes to an end, branching from this point—called the Head of Passes—into numerous small channels that lead into the Gulf of Mexico.

When the French colonists came to the Lower Mississippi Valley, they found navigation difficult in all the Passes. In 1723, one of the colony's master carpenters made a proposal to dredge the bar at the entrance to the Mississippi, declaring that he believed he could give it a depth of 38 feet. His plan was not approved, but in 1729 a colonial official reported that the channel had been deepened from little more than 12 feet to 17 feet and would soon be navigable for all kinds of French vessels.

The channel that the French navigators used was the Southeast Pass, a branch of Pass a Loutre. They built a fortification on the bank in the pass and called it "Balize," a name derived from the French word that meant "beacon." Bienville called it the most important post in the Louisiana colony.

By 1750 it was reported that Pass a Loutre had become choked with debris and sandbars and mudlumps.

The Passes were to be a constant source of worry and irritation for the growing port of New Orleans, Louisiana. At high water, ships could come and go with ease, but in

lower water periods it was often impossible to find a Pass that could be navigated at all by a fully loaded vessel.

In 1836, 1837, and 1852, unsuccessful efforts were made to improve South Pass and Southwest Pass for navigation. In 1858 torpedoes were exploded in another unsuccessful attempt to remove the mudlumps and bars from Pass a Loutre.

The Civil War brought all improvement efforts to a complete halt, but when the war had ended, the old controversy was taken up again. Countless proposals were made, and were embraced or denounced by various factions with equal passion.

In 1875, the United States Congress, with many misgivings, accepted a “no-cure, no-pay” proposition from Captain James B. Eads. Eads proposed to solve the problem with jetties and other works. If he failed, he would be a ruined man; if he succeeded, the United States Government would pay him eight million dollars.

The remarkable Captain Eads went about his gigantic task with supreme confidence. Eads had good reason to trust his own judgment and his own ability, for he had spent a good part of his life doing things that other people believed could not be done. He had invented a diving bell in 1842 and had made a fortune salvaging cargo and other property from sunken steamboats. He had put all his money into a glass factory that had failed, and had gone back to salvage work and accumulated another fortune. In 1861 he had proposed to President Lincoln that a fleet of armor-plated steam gunboats be built to help the Union gain control of the Lower Mississippi. He had received a contract to construct seven of the boats, and had delivered them within 65 days. Later he built seven more boats for the Union, as well as four heavy mortar boats, and converted two river steamers to ironclads. In 1874 he had completed another “impossible” project when he finished the Mississippi River bridge at St. Louis. The Eads bridge at St. Louis is still in use today.

Eads had agreed not only to deepen South Pass for the Federal Government, but to maintain a 30-foot channel in it for the next 20 years. He achieved what he had set out to do, and in 1901 the government took over the maintenance of the ship channel.

The Eads improvements in South Pass increased commerce in the Port of New Orleans to such an extent that a deeper channel was proposed for Southwest Pass. The work was authorized in 1902, and jetty construction was completed in 1908. A 40-foot channel was achieved.

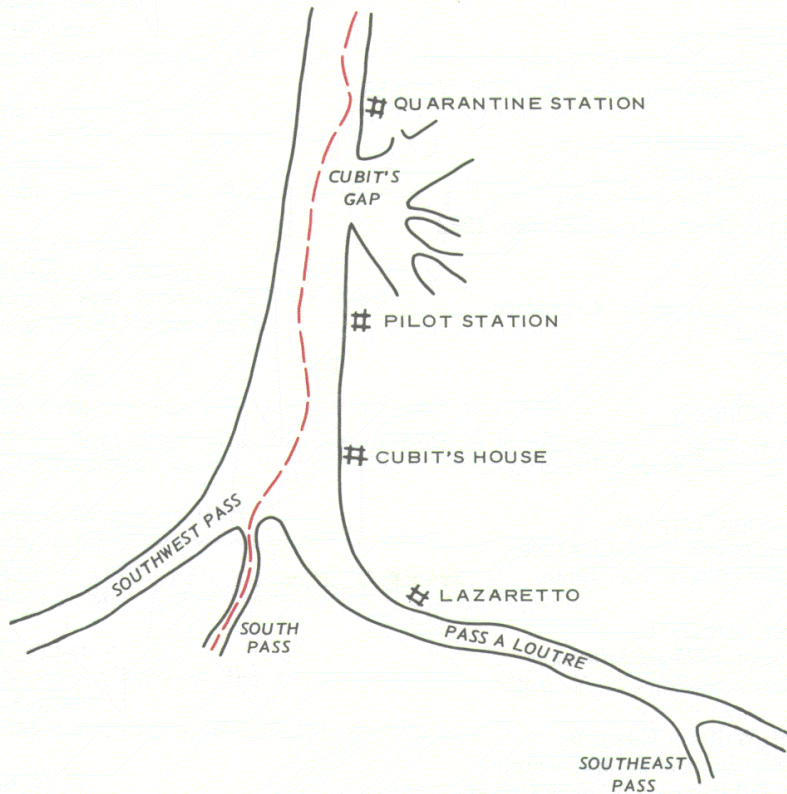
Today the Southwest Pass is most often used by oceangoing vessels that enter the Mississippi from the Gulf, bound for the ports of New Orleans or Baton Rouge. The Army Corps of Engineers maintains the channel by dredging when necessary.

During the Civil War, the first naval engagement on the Mississippi occurred at the Head of Passes. The U. S. Navy had established a blockade at the mouth of the Mississippi in the summer of 1861. On October 12, the Union vessels *Richmond*, *Water Witch*, *Preble*, *Frolic*, and *Vincennes* ventured up to the Head of Passes, where the Union force hoped to establish a battery of guns on the river bank.

From New Orleans, Captain George N. Hollins brought his improvised Confederate warships boiling down the river to meet the enemy. In the rebel squadron were the

*McRae, Virginius, Ivy, Tuscarora, Calhoun, Jackson, the ram Manassas, and an unarmed towboat called the Watson.*

The rebels met the Union fleet on October 13, 1861, and easily routed them from the Head of Passes. In their haste to be gone, several of the Union ships ran aground and lay all day on the bars in the Pass. Hollins failed to follow up on his decided advantage, and steamed back upstream to New Orleans to celebrate the glorious victory. The Union vessels were finally pried off the bars and resumed their blockade of the mouth of the river.



*HEAD OF PASSES. An 1895 map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed a Quarantine Station on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi just above Cubits Gap, and a Pilot Station below. Cubit's house was near the Head of Passes, and a hospital for lepers was located on Pass a Loutre. South Pass was the main navigation channel for ships bound for New Orleans out of the Gulf of Mexico.*

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