



Top, left to right: great egret, lilly pads, shark eye, turkeys, wood duck, palmetto trees;  
bottom: boneyard beach, remains of martello tower, bulls impoundment, whelk and whelk casing, bald eagle, brown pelican, ghost crab

# Welcome to Bulls Island at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge

Bulls Island is the largest of four barrier islands found within the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. The Cape Romain Refuge is one of over 540 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. This system, encompassing over 90 million acres, is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for wildlife. Bulls is a 5,000 acre island consisting of maritime forest, fresh and brackish water impoundments, sand dunes and white sandy beaches. Live oaks, Sabal palmettos, cedar, loblolly pines and magnolias are the dominant trees found on the island, while deer, alligators, otters, raccoons, black fox squirrels, reptiles and amphibians call Bulls Island home, but the bird life is what Bulls Island is known for throughout the world. Over 275 species of birds have been recorded on the refuge with most being found on or near Bulls. Black ducks, pintails, mallards, canvasback and teal can be found in the many impoundments. Yellowlegs, sandpipers, dunlins and sanderlings are best viewed on the mud flats and beaches. Warblers, sparrows, woodpeckers and raptors abound in the lush forest of Bulls Island.

The island was originally known as Oneiscau; a name given by the Sewee Indians. Throughout the 1600's and into the early 1700's, the Sewee tribe inhabited the area north of Charleston to the Santee Rivers and it was here they hunted game and fished the tidal creeks for food. Their name, it is believed, means island people. In 1669 the English settlers set sail to the province of Carolina which later became South Carolina. On March 15, 1670 they set foot on the island called Oneiscau and were met by the Sewee. Shortly afterwards, they made their way down to the Kiawah River and settled the area which is now known as Charleston. One of the leaders among these early settlers was Stephen Bull, who was later made colonel of the militia of the province. Throughout Bull's life his name became so associated with Oneiscau that it has ever since been known as Bulls Island.

## Dominick House

The Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1932 for the purpose of providing habitat for wintering waterfowl as well as habitat for resident wildlife populations. In 1925 United States Senator Gayer Dominick purchased the island for a winter residence and constructed the house from native materials. For eleven years he and his family enjoyed the tranquil life on Bulls Island and then sold it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1936. Beginning in the 1940's until the late '60's, the Dominick House was operated as an inn

for bird watchers, nature enthusiasts, and fishermen. Today, the house is used as living quarters by refuge employees and volunteers while on special duty and occasionally for conservation workshops and conferences.

## Dave Clough Wildlife Viewing Platform

Just a short walk off the Bulls Island nature trail and situated on Upper Summerhouse Pond is the Dave Clough Wildlife Viewing Platform. From this platform, one can see a variety of wading birds such as the American and snowy egrets, great blue heron, black-necked stilt and black-crowned night-heron. A variety of waterfowl can be seen from the platform as well as the American alligator. The endangered wood stork is a regular visitor to this area. Dave Clough was a wildlife enthusiast and a champion for national wildlife refuges. This platform is named in his honor.

## Boneyard Beach

Perhaps the most photographed location on Bulls Island is the area known as Boneyard Beach. This is a three mile stretch of beach on the northeast corner of the island. Here, hundreds of oaks, cedars and pines can be found strewn along the beach; all the result of an ever-changing beach which is in constant battle with the in-coming surf. Boneyard Beach gets its name from all the downed trees which have been bleached by the sun and salt water ultimately resembling a grave yard of bones. This is an excellent location to find sun bleached sand dollars, especially after an off-shore storm.

## Martello Tower or Old Fort

During the 1600 and 1700's, pirates roamed the seas off the South Carolina coast, raiding and plundering ships and small coastal towns. In 1707, the South Carolina General Assembly passed an act authorizing the appointment of "lookouts". Lookouts were placed on at least six coastal islands. Generally, the lookouts maintained their watch from hills or high dunes. It is possible that lookouts built small forts.

The structure found on Bulls Island is most probably the remains of a type of fort called a Martello Tower. Martello Towers originated in Italy to signal the approach of a pirate ship. The tower on Bulls Island consisted of "one white man and two Sewee or other neighboring Indians". Story has it that in the event of sighting a

pirate vessel, the watch would fire three consecutive cannon shots to warn nearby English vessels and neighboring families. The men would then paddle to safety in the creeks behind Bulls. There were several Martello Towers of various constructions in this country prior to the Civil War. Apparently, this particular tower was used during the war and served as a fort or perhaps a prison for Confederate soldiers.

On December 28, 1862 – "...the first cutter with an armed crew and 70 pounds of powder was sent to destroy the fort on Bulls Island. At 1 pm the boat returned having destroyed the magazine shell room and set fire to all the woodwork"...Lt. Com. Uphur of the U.S. Navy, USS Flambeau. The structural remains of the Martello Tower (or Old Fort) are located on Old Fort Road on the edge of Jacks Creek.

## Permitted Activities:

- Saltwater Fishing, Clamming, Shrimping, Oystering, and Crabbing – in accordance with State regulations
- Hiking, Photography, Wildlife Observation, and Picnicking
- Hunting – a refuge hunting leaflet is available to inform you of hunting opportunities
- Bikes allowed on island roads only. Bikes are not permitted on beach or nature trails.

## Prohibited Activities:


- Camping
- Fires
- Weapons – except during open hunting seasons and in open hunt areas.
- Pets
- Collection – Taking of any items, including items of antiquity is prohibited. One small bag of dead shells may be taken. *Commercial shelling is prohibited.*
- Littering



**Walking Distances (one-way)  
From Dock**

Picnic Area	.5 mi
Front Beach	1.5 mi
Jacks Creek	2.5 mi
Old Fort	2.5 mi
Lower & Upper Summerhouse Ponds	1.5 mi
Moccasin Pond	2.5 mi

*This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*



*Bulls Island and the remainder of the refuge is Day Use Only. Bulls Island is accessible only by passenger ferry service (or private boat). Call 843/881 4582 or 843/928 3368 for information.*



Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge  
 5821 Highway 17 North  
 Awendaw, SC 29429  
 Phone 843/928 3368  
 Ferry Service to Bulls Island – phone 843/881 4582  
[caperomain.fws.gov](http://caperomain.fws.gov)  
[seweecenter.fws.gov](http://seweecenter.fws.gov)

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
 1.800.344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>  
 photos: USFWS volunteers