The self-guided tour of the Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay consists of 16 points traveling around the bay and into the Burning Basin. To reach the Accomac from the launch point is a 7-10 minute paddle, and the complete route requires 1.5-2 hours and covers 2.5 miles.

**POINTS OF INTEREST**

1. LAUNCH POINT

A boat ramp is located within Mallows Bay Park for small craft (shallow water) access to the Potomac River. It is open from 5:30 AM to dusk year-round.

2. ACCOMAC

The only steel-hulled vessel in the Mallows Bay tributary area. She seasoned the far west route between Cape Charles and Norfolk, Virginia until she suffered a fire and was permanently taken out of commission. About 1973, the ship was hauled into Mallows Bay and abandoned.

3. BENZONIA

Launched into the Columbia River in Washington in 1919 and named after a town in Michigan. Her career ended during World War II when she was engaged in the war effort, but was sold to Western Marine and Salvage Company in 1922. In 2003, she was moved by Hurricane Isabel and in 2013, a hurricane-force wind held her at her derelict station.

4. MONO

Mono was among the 94 U.S. Shipping Board steamships in the celebrated “Tulip Wrecks” of national ship launching on July 4, 1918. She was put to work on the San Francisco-Hawaiian Islands “Pineapple Run.” Mono was among the last of Mallows’s wooden ships to be permanently retired, until she was sold for scrapping. She appears to have been among the last wrecks to be permanently enroached in Mallows Bay since at least 1929.

5. YAWAH

Yawah is documented as making at least one voyage to Genoa, Italy, in late 1919. Laid up in the James River during the Great Ship Turn-Ofs of 1922, she was eventually purchased by the Western Marine and Salvage Company for scrapping, and moved to the Potomac River soon afterwards. Yawah is entirely submerged except at her stern section.

6. THE THREE SISTERS

The Three Sisters is a group of three wrecks: Gradyana, the “Heron Wreck,” and the Moosabee. Dertona was briefly in the coasting trade. The “Heron Wreck” is named for the frequent sightings of Great Blue Herons on and about the site. The Moosabee carried timber logs to Europe from 1919 until 1922.

7. THE FLOWER POT WRECKS

Here lies the remains of an unidentified US Shipping Board (USWB) wooden hull cargo steamer. Both wrecks are overgrown with vegetation and the remains are exposed around the stern and through but some of the exposed full areas.

8. SS AFLRINA

Engaged to make at least an unknown trans-Atlantic voyage to Rouen, France, from which she sailed on her return voyage for NVIC, USA in 1922. Afnrina lay re-crested on her back and partially submerged.

9. THE FLOWER POT WRECKS

Here lies the remains of an unidentified US Shipping Board (USWB) wooden hull cargo steamer. Both wrecks are overgrown with vegetation and the remains are exposed around the stern and through but some of the exposed full areas.

10. GRADY’S SPIT

Grady’s Spit is an active bird rookery and hosts a variety of nesting species. The spit remains are visible at low tide.

11. THE FLOWERPot WRECKS

Here lies the remains of an unidentified US Shipping Board (USWB) wooden hull cargo steamer. Both wrecks are overgrown with vegetation and the remains are exposed around the stern and through but some of the exposed full areas.

12. SS AFRINA

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13. SS BOONE

Named by the wife of President Woodrow Wilson, Boone was launched in 1918 in the presence of 3,000 spectators. Her career, like many other vessels built hastily for World War I, was brief, and she was sold for scrap in 1922.

14. BAYOU TECHE

The Bethlehem Steel Corporation built a saigeage basin during World War I to recover metal from the abandoned ships in Mallows Bay. Now known as the Burning Basin, the opening of the gateway was 44 feet across, and wide enough to permit passage of the largest steamer hull.

15. THE BARGE WRECK

This wooden barge with iron fittings was used by Bethlehem Steel during the creation of the Burning Basin. In 1920, it was being used as a work platform and to haul building supplies.

16. THE SEA SCOUT WRECK

One tradition suggests this barge may have been a US Coast Guard patrol vessel or a US Navy patrol torpedo boat sold out of service after World War II.

17. CASMALIA

Named after a locale in California, Casmalia’s career, like many others, was brief, and she was sold for scrap in 1922.

18. MONO

For a short period Benzonia was engaged in the war effort, and Salvage Company in 1922. For a short period Benzonia was engaged in the war effort, and Salvage Company in 1922.

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WELCOME TO MALLOWS BAY!

Just a short drive from Washington D.C., the Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay is home to the largest number of visible historic shipwrecks in the Western Hemisphere, and offers a truly unique paddling experience. Over one hundred wooden and steel-hulled ships dating from the 18th century through the mid-20th century are located here, with nearly ninety belonging to the United States Shipping Board’s World War I Emergency Fleet of wooden steamships. These unique sites are evolving into veritable islands: artificial habitats for birds, animals, and fish of all kinds.

As the historic hub of the Mallows Bay Widerwater National Register Historic and Archaeological District, Mallows Bay offers visitors the most unique marine landscape in the Chesapeake Tidewater, where history is in the process of becoming nature itself.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Mallows Bay holds a diverse collection of historic shipwrecks during both the Revolutionary War, but is most renowned for the remains of more than 100 wooden steamships, known as the “Ghost Fleet.” These ships were built for the US Emergency Fleet between 1917-1919 as part of America’s engagement in World War I. Their construction at more than 40 shipyards in 17 states reflected the massive wartime effort that shaped the expansion and economic development of communities, and related maritime service industries.

By the end of WWI, the obsolete ships were brought to Mallows Bay to be burned. Bethlehem Steel later built a salvage yard for recovering valuable metal during World War II to recover metal to support the war effort.

In addition to the rich WWII history in Mallows Bay proper, the surrounding area is home to historic vessels dating back to the Revolutionary War. In the Civil War, the shores were fortified and defended by thousands of Union troops to prevent a Confederate invasion of the United States.

The nationally significant history of this area earns its designation as the Mallows Bay-Wide Water Historic and Archeological District on the National Register of Historic Places. It has also been named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Potomac River is home to three national trails: The tidal Potomac National Historic Trail, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Trail, and the Historic National Capital Trails. For more information about these trails, visit www.nps.gov/nts.

A Self Guided Tour of the Ghost Fleet of the Potomoc River

PADDLING INFORMATION & SAFETY

BEFORE YOU GO

• For optimum viewing of the wrecks, schedule your visit to correspond with low tide.
• Check the National Weather Service report before departing.
• Fishing is permitted within the Potomac River and Mallows Bay (fishing license is required.)
• Real-time water quality conditions are available at eyesonthebay.net.

GETTING THERE

MALLOWS BAY PARK:
1440 Wilson Landing Road
Nanjemoy, MD 20626
(301) 932-3470

• Amenities include a boat ramp, soft launch, portable toilets, parking, walking trail, interpretive signs, and picnic area.
• The park is open daily from 5:30 am to sunset.

PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

• Always wear your life jacket.
• Paddle with others if possible.
• Cold Water Temperatures are Hazardous to Paddlers. Paddling is recommended between May and September.
• When paddling in wind, stay close to shore.
• Respect Wildlife. Animals and birds should be viewed from a distance.
• Beware of Hidden Wrecks. It is dangerous to travel through the central shipwreck cluster, especially during high tide when ships remain just below the waterline and are invisible to the paddler.

WILDLIFE

Mallows Bay has tremendous opportunities for wildlife viewing, both on shore and on the water. The bay and surrounding area is rich with diverse wildlife, including more than 300 species of bird, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, and an array of fish, plants and animals. The list below describes some of the species you are likely to observe during your visit.

BIRDS

• Bald Eagle
• Osprey

FISH

• Large, invasive fish with a slate blue back and an orange and yellow belly. Coontail
• Slow-moving plants that usually have visible teeth along their edges.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

• Northern Water Snake
• Red Bellied Cooter

PLANTS

• Monarda (Beebalm)
• Medicago (Medick)

DRAGONFLY

• Live near still bodies of water and have an appetite for mosquitoes and other small insects. Many species feature brilliant iridescent or metallic colors.

DAMSELFLY

• Dragonflies and damselflies are often mistaken for each other, but damselflies have slender bodies and hold their wings above their body while at rest, while dragonflies cannot do this.

INSECTS

• Ring-Billed Gull
• Eastern Box Turtle

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