

E | LIVING & ARTS

READY TO PORCH?
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DISCOVERING GEORGIA'S
BARRIER ISLANDS



At St. Simons Island, a British flag still flies at the remnants of Fort Frederica built in 1736.
CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

Salt marsh filled with kayaking pleasures

Beautiful but delicate ecosystem essential for breeding and feeding.

By **Suzanne Van Atten**
svanatten@ajc.com

ST. SIMONS ISLAND — “There’s one thing about the area I don’t like,” said the bartender from Idaho. He was talking about his adjustment to life on the Georgia coast.

“What’s that?” I asked distractedly as I read over the dinner menu.

“The Martians.”
My head snapped up and I studied his face.

“The what?”
“The marshes.”
“Oh.”

My hearing difficulties aside, his comment struck an ironic chord. I’ve spent my life vacationing along the Southeastern coast and had never given much thought to those grassy wetlands we crossed over to get to the beach. That is, until a recent trip to St. Simons Island, when I officially fell in love with the mucky, verdant wonderland of salt marshes.

I know the moment it happened. I was walking around Fort Frederica, the remains of fortifications used by British Gen. James Oglethorpe and his men in the early 1700s to defend the newly founded colony of Georgia from foreign attacks. The fort backs up to a great expanse of marsh laced with the tributaries of Fancy Bluff Creek.

On this day in early spring, it looked like a sea of tall, Kelly green grass. I’ve since learned the plant is called spartina, and it turns yellow in the fall, which is why Georgia’s southern Barrier Islands are called the Golden Isles.

The tide was high and the river was running at a fair clip, creating a trickling, rustling sound as it flooded the grasses beneath a cloudless blue sky. My heart was set aflutter. I was overcome with a desire to get in the marsh, to see it up close, to navigate the twisty creek, to smell the salt and mud. When I got back to my hotel that afternoon, I booked a guided kayak trip for the next morning.

I am not the first person to fall under the spell of the marshes of Glynn County. The ecosystem’s most celebrated fan is poet Sidney Lanier, a Confederate soldier from Macon and a significant writer of his time whose

St. Simons continued on **E19**

COMING MONDAY

» Explore the uninhabited island of Wassaw.



Personal Journeys

An award-winning feature that spotlights the lives of extraordinary individuals and the stories that define our region and connect our community.



Atlanta Journal-Constitution photographer Ben Gray runs along Ga. 21 toward Savannah last month in memory of his friend Frank Barham, who was killed along this route in May 2015. RYON HORNE / RHORNE@AJC.COM

REMEMBERING FRANK

A friend memorializes Frank Barham’s life by finishing the journey cut tragically short last year.

By **Ben Gray**
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Adrainne: How’s it going?

Me: Hot and tired. Having to switch between walking and running to keep enough water in me. Probably 2 more hours unless I get some rain.

Adrainne: K
Adrainne: It’s not a race. Take your time.

Me: I know. But I also want to be done.

Adrainne: You are on a road that Frank never got to travel. Enjoy the Journey.

Tears well up in my eyes, my breath hitches and goosebumps rise on my sunburned arms as the truth of that text from my wife hits me like a ton of bricks.

After six hours of running alongside major roads with the roar of trucks, the acrid smell of over-used brakes and the sun burning my skin, I turn onto a shaded, quiet street. Tall trees form a tunnel over the road and the sounds from a breeze rustling the leaves replace the noise of the highway. Frank didn’t get to experience this payoff a year ago, but I can feel him with me as I move forward with a renewed sense of purpose.

A year ago to the day, Frank Barham would have been excited but probably a bit melancholy, too, as he wheeled his chair along this very road, thinking about all the things he had experienced on his 10-day wheelchair roll



Frank Barham, who chronicled his journey from Atlanta to Savannah on Facebook, posted this photo while en route.

from Atlanta to Savannah. A little sad for it to be drawing to a close, tired from the journey but excited to reach his destination. He would have appreciated the shade and the change of scenery after a long day in the sun.

Frank never got to travel this road because as he rolled his chair south on Ga. 21, he was killed in a fiery crash. A tanker truck hit the support van that was traveling behind him, also killing Margaret

Kargbo and severely burning Carrie Johnson inside the van.

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Friends and neighbors

I’m not sure exactly when my wife and I met Frank and Adriana Barham, but it would have been around the beginning of 2000, shortly after we bought a house in the Kirkwood neighborhood of Atlanta. Frank and

ABOUT THE STORY

In the same breath longtime AJC photographer Ben Gray told me he was moving to Jerusalem, he told me about a great story idea for Personal Journeys. After he told me about it, I knew there was only one person who could write it: Ben Gray. His eyeballs practically rolled back in his head as he contemplated adding one more thing to his already overloaded plate as he prepares to leave the country. But it didn’t take him long to agree. For this story, Ben drew from his 16-year friendship with Frank Barham and filled in the gaps with interviews with Frank’s wife, Adriana, and an audio interview AJC video producer Ryon Horne recorded with Frank just before he left on his roll to Savannah. I like to think of this story as Ben Gray’s parting gift to our readers who are sure to carry a part of Frank in their hearts after reading this moving story about mistakes, redemption and friendship.

Suzanne Van Atten
Personal Journeys editor
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Adriana lived up the street and we probably met at a party, on a stroll through the neighborhood or maybe while out doing yard work.

Adriana’s intense, effervescent energy and Frank’s deep, soulful spirit made them just the kind of people we loved to be around. We became fast friends.

Continued on **E6**

Next week: An excerpt from ‘The One True Barbecue’

What’s inside

Manage your photos

Have a ton of images that you don’t know what to do with? We may have the answer. **E4**

50 years of civil rights struggles

“Jackson, 1964” is a collection of 17 essays by Calvin Trillin that spans his long reporting career. **E8**

Farmhouse’s touch of California

Private Quarters: Milton home uses West Coast materials for classic Southern comfort. **E16**

On the road again

Americans are increasingly turning to road trips for family bonding, making memories. **E18**

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TRAVEL

St. Simons

continued from E1

works were inspired by nature. His poem “Marshes of Glynn” is among his most notable works.

Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea? / Somehow my soul seems suddenly free / From the weighing of fate and the sad discussion of sin, / By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn.

According to the state Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia coastline boasts 380,000 acres of marshland. In the 1900s, that represented just 10 percent of the East Coast’s salt marshes; today it represents 35 percent, thanks to the state’s Coastal Marshlands Protection Act, established in 1970, which manages activities and restricts development in and around the area. It is a delicate ecosystem, but an essential one that serves as a vital breeding and feeding ground for birds, fish and shellfish, and it provides a buffer against offshore storms. In addition to all that, it is just plain beautiful.

Early the next morning, I met Matthew Morton, a guide for Southeast Adventure Outfitters, at Village Creek Landing. Being a novice, I was given a single kayak with a rudder to help keep me on track, and off we paddled through the sea of green.

It took me a few minutes to get the hang of my vessel, but before long I was paddling along, dodging the occasional oyster bed with relative ease. It was a weekday morning, so other boats were scarce, making it seem as though the marsh was all ours.

We crossed Village Creek and paddled into the creeks behind Sea Island, where we spotted brown pelicans, oystercatchers, cormorants and white ibis going about their avian duties. Every once in a while, a mullet leapt from the water and slapped its gills on the surface.

“Do they ever jump in the boat?” I asked.

“I’ve seen it happen,” Morton said.

At one point, we wedged our boats against the shore and sat quietly, feeling the sun on our skin and listening to the birds chatter, the grasses rustle.

“I do my best thinking out here,” Morton said after some time had passed.

Just then, I detected an occasional popping sound.

“Oysters snapping shut,” Morton explained, a result of the changing tides.

It was a revelation. Oysters make a sound. How could I have gone my whole life and not know this?



Visitors to the St. Simons Lighthouse and Museum can climb 129 steps to the top of the beacon for panoramic views of the island. CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

St. Simons Island



ROBERT CALZADA / STAFF



A Brown Pelican in adult winter plumage stretches its neck on a sand bar at Goulds Inlet, St. Simons Island, Ga. Unique among the world’s seven species of pelicans, it is found along the ocean shores and not on inland lakes. It is the only dark pelican and the only one that plunges from the air into the water to catch its food. CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

Back at the bar, once I understood what the bartender was talking about – that it was marshes he disliked, not Martians – I asked him why.

“They’re swampy and buggy,” he explained with a shrug.

It’s true, they are. Bug spray is a necessity.

He seemed apologetic, acknowledging he held the minority opinion on the subject.

Too bad, I thought, as I sipped my glass of wine. You’ll never know the sound an oyster makes.

We crossed Village Creek and paddled into the creeks behind Sea Island, where we spotted brown pelicans ... going about their avian duties.



Village Creek Landing, from which Southeast Adventure Outfitters launches its St. Simons kayak tour. SUZANNE VAN ATTEN / SVANATTEN@AJC.COM



Fort Frederica, located on St. Simons Island, was established in 1736 by James Oglethorpe. SUZANNE VAN ATTEN / SVANATTEN@AJC.COM

IF YOU GO

Insider tips

The main strip on St. Simons Island is called Pier Village, featuring a cluster of restaurants and shops along Mallery Street, Beachview Drive and Ocean Boulevard. Dogs are permitted on the beach at St. Simons Island, off-leash and on, except 9 a.m.–6 p.m. from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

SIGHTS

Fort Frederica National Monument. Established in 1736 by Gen. James Oglethorpe to protect the newly established colony of Georgia from foreign attack, Fort Frederica once consisted of a small walled village and fort. What remains today are the foundations of several tabby homes and businesses, as well as a portion of the fort, which succeeded in holding back Spanish forces in 1742. Free. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. daily. 65 15 Frederica Road. 912-638-3639, nps.gov/state/ga/index.htm.

St. Simons Island Lighthouse and Museum. The 104-foot-tall beacon was built in 1810 and reconstructed in 1872 after it was destroyed by retreating Confederate troops in 1862. Visitors can climb 129 steps to the top for panoramic views of the coast, as well as tour the lighthouse keeper’s house, also reconstructed in 1872. \$12, \$5 children 6–12. 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays, 1:30–5 p.m. Sundays. Last climb at 4:30 p.m. Museum is closed noon–1 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays. 101 12th St., Pier Village. 912-638-4666, saintsmonsighthouse.org.

Christ Church. Built in 1884 and featuring stunning stained glass windows, Christ Church has a long history that predates its current structure. The church was established as a congregation in 1776, and its first structure, built in 1820, was destroyed by Union troops. But, before that, John and Charles Wesley, considered the fathers of Methodism in America,

DISCOVER GEORGIA'S BARRIER ISLANDS

An experiential travel guide to the coast with tips on how to get there and what to do. Go to specials.myajc.com/barrier-islands and learn more about Cumberland Island, Jekyll Island, Little St. Simons Island, Ossabaw Island, Sea Island, St. Simons Island, Sapelo Island, Tybee Island and Wassaw Island.

preached on this site in 1736. This is an active church, with services and events throughout the week, but visitors are welcome to stop in to tour the structure. Volunteer docents are available 2–5 p.m. Tuesdays–Sundays. 6329 Frederica Road. 912-638-8683, christchurchfrederica.org.

RECREATION

Beaches. Unless you’re staying at a hotel or vacation rental located within walking distance of the ocean, your best bets for going to the beach are at Massengale Park at 1350 Ocean Blvd. and Coast Guard Station/East Beach at 4100 First St. Both parks offer lots of free parking, Americans with Disabilities Act beach access and well-maintained restrooms. Massengale also offers a playground, shaded picnic tables and grills.

Golf. St. Simons is home to three golf resorts offering multiple courses: King and Prince Golf Course, 100 Tabbystone, 912-634-0255, kingandprince.com; Sea Palm Resort & Conference Center Main Course and West Course, 5445 Frederica Road, 912-638-3351, seapalms.com; and Sea Island Golf Club’s Plantation Course, Retreat Course and Seaside Course, 100 Retreat Road, 912-638-5118, seasiland.com.

Neptune Park. Located in the heart of St. Simons Island Village,

this waterfront park features a swimming pool with a play zone for kids, miniature golf, a playground and a paved path along the water to the pier. Golf, \$8 per round; pool, \$8 a day, free for children 3 and under, swim diaper required. 550 Beachview Drive, Pier Village. 912-265-0620, 912-279-3720, glynncounty.org.

Southeast Adventure Outfitters. Kayak tours, \$45–\$85. Standup paddle board rental and instruction, \$49 for two hours. Boat tours, \$55–\$80. 313 Mallery St., Pier Village. 912-638-6732, southeastadventure.com.

Coastal Georgia Charter Fishing. Inshore fishing and shark, tarpon, redfish and reef fishing, \$450–\$650. Deep sea fishing, \$750–\$1,000. Kids fishing trips, \$275–\$325. All prices are for one to three people. 301 Sea Island Road, #12. 912-617-5577, charterfish.com.

Ocean Motion Surf Co. Bicycle rentals, \$19 a day; three-wheel fun cycles, \$15 an hour; kayak tours, \$49 per person; Hobie Cat sailboat rentals, \$85 an hour. 1300 Ocean Blvd. and 210 Mallery St. 912-638-5225, 912-638-8053, 912-638-5390, stsimonskayaking.com.

SHOPPING

Gogo Jewelry. Rattlesnake jaw earrings and sand dollar chokers are among the pieces of fine silver, gold and bone jewelry created by Janet “Gogo” Ferguson, a Carnegie heir who grew up on Cumberland Island. 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays, noon–4 p.m. Sundays. 217 Redfern Village. 912-634-8875, gogojewelry.com.

Go Fish Jewelry & Clothing Co. Locally designed, well-crafted batik-print clothing and beaded jewelry. 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Mondays–Fridays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Sundays. 203 Mallery St., Pier Village. 912-634-5654, shopgofish.com.

Simons Gallery, Gifts & Antiques. Well-curated collection

of framed original art, pottery, jewelry, garden accessories, vases, crystal stemware and beach-inspired décor. 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Mondays–Wednesdays, 10 a.m.–8 p.m. Thursdays, 10 a.m.–9 p.m. Fridays–Saturdays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Sundays. 316 Mallery St., Pier Village. 912-638-3899.

DINING

Southern Soul Barbeque. Outstanding barbecue joint with covered outdoor seating overlooking a busy traffic circle. In addition to the usual pork ribs, pulled pork, beef brisket and smoked chicken, the menu features ‘cue-inspired interpretations of a Philly cheesesteak and a Cuban sandwich. Excellent Southern sides, including collard greens and Hoppin’ John, and a full bar, too. Open daily starting at 11 a.m. for lunch and dinner. Closing time depends on the crowds. 2020 Demere Road. 912-638-7085, southernsoullbbq.com.

Palmer’s Village Cafe. Serving hefty portions from a creative menu of Southern-inspired classics, including banana pudding pancakes, chicken potpie omelet and a delightful twist on eggs Benedict made with crab cakes on smoked Gouda grits cakes. Also offers a terrific pimento cheese and a selection of burgers and sandwiches. The dinner menu changes weekly. 7:30 a.m.–2 p.m. daily for breakfast and lunch; 5:30–9:30 p.m. Thursdays–Saturdays for dinner. 223 Mallery St., Pier Village. 912-634-5515, palmersvillagecafe.com.

The Half Shell at the Pier. An excellent option for fresh seafood standards. Specialties include shrimp ceviche, barbeque shrimp and grits and oysters bruschetta. Opens 5 p.m. Mondays–Thursdays, 11:30 a.m. Fridays–Sundays. Closing time depends on the crowd. 504 Beachview Drive, Pier Village. 912-268-4241, thehalfshellssi.com.

Del Sur Bakery. Serving crave-worthy artisanal baked goods, including ciabatta, sweet and savory tarts, empanadas and wedding cookies, as well as a variety of sandwiches and cookies. 7 a.m.–5 p.m. daily. 539 Ocean Blvd. 912-638-8080, delsurbakery.com.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Sea Palms Resort & Conference Center. Offering a wide range of accommodations, from standard guest rooms to multi-bedroom suites with full kitchens overlooking salt marshes at 515 N. Windward Drive and condominium-style suites at a smaller property across the street from the beach at 1015 Beachview Drive, Pier Village. Amenities include 10,000 square feet of meeting space, as well as 27 holes of golf, a driving range and a practice putting green. \$199–\$739. 912-638-3351, 1-800-841-6268, seapalms.com.

The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort. Beachfront accommodations range from standard rooms and suites to multi-bedroom villas and individual guesthouses. Amenities include an 18-hole golf course, a beachfront swimming pool and massage therapy services. \$289–\$829. 201 Arnold Road. 912-638-3631, 1-800-342-0212, kingandprince.com.

Ocean Inn & Suites. Small, three-story hotel offering standard rooms, one-bedroom suites and one two-bedroom suite in the heart of Pier Village. Amenities include a small swimming pool and free parking. \$209–\$419. 599 Beachview Drive. 912-634-2122, oceaninnsuites.com.

MORE INFORMATION

Golden Isles Welcome Center. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays, 1–5 p.m. Sundays. 529 Beachview Drive, Pier Village. 1-800-809-1790, explorestsimonsisland.com.