

Remnants of Four Civil War Forts on Hilton Head Island, SC

Hilton Head Island has the remnants of four Civil War forts. Although there is not much remaining of the old encampments that ultimately housed over 50,000 Union troops, traces of the original earthworks and interpretive historical markers tell the story of the Island's role in the war.

The story begins with Fort Walker on Port Royal Sound, built by Confederate soldiers in 1861 to help protect the critical southern ports of Charleston, Beaufort and Savannah. Later that same year, Union forces successfully attacked and captured the fort during the Battle of Port Royal Sound, thus gaining a strategic foothold to aid the Union blockade of the ports. That same day occupying Union soldiers freed over 1,000 island slaves. They were the first slaves freed by the Civil War. The Union continued to occupy the Island for the remainder of the war. Today, all that remains are earthworks and numerous interpretive markers in Port Royal Plantation.

Two additional forts were built in 1862 by the Union Army to continue the defense of the Union blockade and to prevent Confederate assaults: Fort Sherman, the remains of which are still visible in Port Royal Plantation; and the earthworks of Fort Mitchel in Hilton Head Plantation, administered by the Heritage Library Foundation.

For access to Fort Mitchel, acquire a gate pass at no charge; however the pass is only good for Fort Mitchel. To see both Fort Walker and Fort Sherman, you must have a gate pass to Port Royal Plantation, or sign up for a guided tour conducted by the Coastal Discovery Museum (843-689-6767).

The fourth fort, Fort Howell, was built to defend Mitchelville; the nearby village built for the country's first emancipated slaves. It is located on Beach City Road at Dillon Road. The earthwork remnants are partially eroded and covered by trees. It is open to the general public for self-guided tours every day from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There are interpretive markers erected by the Hilton Head Island Trust.

If you are interested in historic forts, don't miss two of Savannah's most significant forts: Fort Pulaski and Fort Jackson; and in the Charleston area, Fort Sumter. All are open for tours daily.

For more information, contact:

[Heritage Library Foundation](#) (843-686-6560)