

## Hope for the New Century

Going into the last five years of the twentieth century, National Park Service officials still sought closure for four types of problems. Natural resource managers needed to expand their research and monitoring of coastal erosion as well as resolve the question of feral animals. Historic preservation suffered not only from a woeful shortage of funds but also disagreement over the priority of cultural resources. Private landholders still controlled several critical island-straddling private plots while the limits of retained rights remained vague. Finally, Cumberland Island National Seashore desperately needed a wilderness plan. The level of conflict between various interest groups grew more emotional and vicious with each passing year. The agency's reactive and somewhat erratic management faced almost certain lawsuits over the wilderness in the near future. Designing a wilderness plan in the midst of such acrimony was a forbidding prospect. Superintendent Rolland Swain understated the complexity of wilderness planning when he noted that "it is almost certain to be difficult and contentious."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, events during 1995 and 1996 crushed the hard-won optimism of the early 1990s. In each management area the National Park Service saw its plans and proposals unravel in the face of renewed public criticism and the worst interest-group conflict in the history of the seashore. Yet as the new century dawned, the agency reevaluated the Cumberland legislation and retained-rights pacts and decided to plow ahead with wilderness planning. At the same time, many seashore officials reluctantly admitted that only a court of law or Congress could settle the myriad problems of Cumberland Island National Seashore.

### Natural Resources

Park Service and cooperating independent scientists continue to research and monitor natural resources and to plan for their management in the new

century. The agency released another version of a fire plan in 1996, which again failed to satisfy the prescription for the wilderness. Turtle research has expanded, as have efforts to protect the nests from marauding pigs. Seashore officials now even relocate nests that are in vulnerable areas. Other species of fauna continue to draw attention, while the agency sporadically pursues eradication of tung trees and tamarack. Nevertheless, natural resource management is focused predominantly on three issues: coastal erosion, pigs, and horses. U.S. Navy monitoring and research culminated with a report in December 1997 stating that erosion on the western shore of Cumberland Island was not the fault of its submarines. Instead, the contract scientists blamed the Cumberland Island jetty, Intracoastal Waterway dredging, and the deepened St. Marys channel. Although this study did not satisfy some independent coastal geomorphologists, the navy summarily terminated its investigation of the destructive erosion on Cumberland Island.<sup>2</sup>

Pigs continue to destroy sea turtle nests, and this has proven especially difficult to solve. Rangers or turtle program volunteers patrol the long Cumberland beach each night during the summer nesting season for loggerheads. Upon locating a fresh nest, a resource specialist covers it with a wire grate that allows the baby turtles to escape but blocks access by raccoons to the deeper portions of the nest. Unfortunately, pigs are intelligent enough to learn how to dig open the grated nests. Seashore resource management specialist Jennifer Bjork has estimated that from 1995 to 2001, hogs consumed 7,800 turtle eggs, a disheartening figure for an endangered species. In October 2000 the agency released an environmental assessment for feral hog management alternatives. The preferred option calls for the agency to alternate trapping and hunting (fig. 8.1). This sequence may offset the pigs' ability to learn to avoid one method. The large traps must be moved over trails widened for the trucks that carry them. Even then, removal of trapped pigs to the mainland will take place only if they are found to be disease free. Testing for porcine disease threatens to become a tedious and expensive process. As the pigs' number dwindles, the Park Service plans to allow hunters with dogs to eliminate the last and smartest of them. Public response has been muted and generally supportive. However, when the actual destruction of pigs begins, it will surely bring renewed criticism from animal lovers.<sup>3</sup>

Horse management continues to be the most irksome of natural resource issues for seashore officials. In early 1995 the Park Service held a



Fig. 8.1. Live trapping and transportation off the island is one difficult and expensive way to control the hog population on Cumberland Island.

meeting of twenty-six agency, state, and university specialists to consider horse management at both Cumberland Island and Cape Lookout. For Cumberland, the group was unified in its solution: remove the horses, or at least reduce their population. With this renewed support, as well as that from the environmental organizations, the agency developed an environmental assessment of various horse management alternatives. These options included complete removal, reduction of the herd to 60 horses kept at the south end of the island, use of a onetime herd reduction and immunocontraception to stabilize an islandwide population at 120, or the no-action alternative required by NEPA.<sup>4</sup>

On April 8, 1996, the seashore staff released the assessment that identified the 120-horse option as its preferred one. Three hearings were held in Brunswick and Kingsland, Georgia, and Fernandina Beach, Florida. The Park Service conspicuously neglected to schedule one for Atlanta. Jennifer Bjork presented the data on the increasing horse population and their destruction of marshes and dunes. The response of the public was predictable. Locals united with island residents to oppose all the forms of herd reduc-

tion. They refused to believe either the Park Service or the scientific data. Some insisted that the horses had been there for centuries with no effect on the environment. A few even claimed that the horses were native. Island residents, still annoyed about the reintroduction of bobcats, insisted that the feline was also exotic to the island. If the Park Service could introduce an exotic, they reasoned, why persecute the horses? Speakers claimed that horses were part of the history, part of the beauty of the island, and the key to visitor satisfaction with the national seashore. Furthermore, they cited a *Florida Times-Union* article that showed people who adopted feral horses and mules rounded up in the West by the Bureau of Land Management often sent them to slaughterhouses. Soon people from Atlanta joined the clamor. Letters and petitions from more island residents, children's groups, and animal rights activists poured into various Park Service offices.<sup>5</sup>

Not all the respondents to the environmental assessment favored uncontrolled horses on the island. Environmental groups and ecologists continued to call for their removal. Robert Coram of the *Atlanta Constitution* blamed overpopulation for the condition of the horses, which he called "spavined, disease-ridden, glue-factory material with a foal mortality rate of 29 percent." Coram claimed that the Park Service was backing away from the option to remove horses completely and worried that it would "bow to irrational, and in this case destructive, emotion rather than doing its job."<sup>6</sup>

The horse management issue dragged into autumn of 1996 as National Park Service officials wavered in the face of yet another bristling public response to its planning. At this point local congressman Jack Kingston decided to act. He toured the island with one of the residents and suddenly claimed that the horse numbers in fact had decreased and that he could find little evidence of damage caused by them. Without discussing the issue with the Park Service, he added a rider to the fiscal year 1997 budget bill banning all horse management at Cumberland Island National Seashore. The rider suggested that the Park Service use the money allocated for the horse program to further sea turtle protection.<sup>7</sup>

Seashore officials, as government employees, were forced to remain publicly quiet on this extraordinary step, but environmentalists erupted. Judy Jennings of the Georgia Sierra Club told the *Florida Times-Union*, "What does he know about managing a horse herd on Cumberland Island? The Park Service is relying on expert managers to do their job." Kingston held a forum in Kingsland on October 20, 1996, to defend his action. According to the *Times-Union*, environmentalists pressed him to say whether he had

noted any damage from horses on the island, but he refused to answer. The Florida paper added that in response to a question about why he did not contact the Park Service or any environmental groups, he replied, "If it was such an important issue to them, why didn't the environmental groups or the National Park Service contact me?" At present, the Park Service continues to take no action with horses other than the annual census.<sup>8</sup>

### Cultural Resources

Each superintendent of a national park unit seeks to leave a legacy of his leadership. For Rolland Swain, solving the dilemma of Plum Orchard's maintenance was paramount. During 1995 and 1996 he pursued the bureaucratic steps to complete a memorandum of agreement (MOA) giving the Carnegie-Cook Center for the Arts a fifty-year lease on the mansion. At the same time, opposition grew among environmental groups and, surprisingly, some Camden County residents. Conservationists warned that people living in or visiting the center would inevitably spill into the adjacent wilderness and damage its resources. In addition they cited concerns such as increased automobile traffic on the Main Road, the probability of a new wave of construction at Plum Orchard and on private lands, and the detrimental effect that a fifty-year lease would have on later planning and wilderness legislation.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, Camden County state representative Charlie Smith Jr., whose father once challenged the Park Service ban on motorboat access to the island, was incensed by what he regarded as a "sweetheart deal" between the Park Service and the arts center. He complained that after years of pushing for a higher visitor ceiling on the island, locals were furious over the agency's plan to allow "an elite group of persons interested in the arts and restoration causes" to evade the 300-person limit. Smith called for an investigation of the Park Service on Cumberland Island. He told the *Southeast Georgian*, "I can't imagine how the Park Service could ignore the public's right to visit Cumberland Island in favor of a private institution."<sup>10</sup>

Despite a January 24, 1995, meeting between the Cumberland Island Historic Foundation, the Carnegie-Cook Center, and the Park Service, who favored the MOA, and the environmental groups, who opposed it, the two factions continued to polarize. Even the National Parks and Conservation Association, a seventy-five-year-old organization pledged to support preservation of all national park system resources, questioned the proposed

agreement. Don Barger, the organization's southeast regional representative, wrote to Swain: "Rolland, I am not an attorney, but it seems clear to me that the public's interests are not being adequately protected by this agreement. I am amazed that the Interior solicitors would even consider the numerous hooks and loopholes I believe are in this document. In fact, it seems as though the public's interests are being *increasingly sacrificed* as this process moves forward." He followed with a line-by-line review of the proposed MOA, questioning nearly every aspect of the plan. He assured Swain that while he was gravely concerned, he was also "willing to be convinced I'm wrong."<sup>11</sup>

Barger's moderate tone quickly drowned in a debate that increasingly involved grander philosophical beliefs and strong personalities. The president of Earthwatch, a research and public resources institute, lauded GoGo Ferguson and called restoration of Plum Orchard her "rendezvous with destiny." Norman Owen of the Georgia Sierra Club doubted that 20 people in the mansion would share bedrooms while 10 others stayed at the rebuilt carriage house. Even though the Carnegie-Cook faction dropped its plan to build new structures and agreed that the 300 people participating in the quarterly colloquia would stay on the mainland, Owen did not believe that the center could resist expansion. Environmentalists saw the agreement as a window of opportunity for development in the middle of the wilderness. They resolved to stop it at all costs.<sup>12</sup>

In February 1996, despite a voluminous letter-writing campaign by environmentalists, the Park Service issued a "finding of no significant impact" approving the lease of the mansion to the Carnegie-Cook group, now renamed the Plum Orchard Center for the Arts. This in turn spurred a desperation move by a new organization that had appeared during the Plum Orchard MOA debate. Atlanta attorney Hal Wright founded the Defenders of Wild Cumberland to oppose what he saw as a serious threat to the wilderness status and natural resources of the island. On April 17, 1996, Wright filed a lawsuit to block the memorandum of agreement for Plum Orchard. This froze the plan and set Park Service solicitors to work analyzing the entire scheme. Apparently they did not like what they saw because in mid-June Regional Director Robert Baker told GoGo Ferguson and Nancy Parish of the Center for the Arts that the Park Service would "discontinue" the MOA proposal. He cited the need to initiate a new lease procedure under guidelines specified in the National Historic Preservation Act and NEPA. Baker added that the future of Plum Orchard should be considered as part



Fig. 8.2. The Plum Orchard mansion is the largest and costliest structure on the island. Surrounded on three sides by wilderness, the magnificent house is the focal point of controversy over Park Service management. (National Park Service photograph by Elbert Cox during the 1957 survey)

of the wilderness management planning due to commence very soon. Bitter Carnegie heirs and historic preservationists had to start all over looking for a way to save the historic house (fig. 8.2).<sup>13</sup>

### The Museum Collection

While preservation of Plum Orchard and other historic structures on Cumberland Island continues to be dogged by controversy, the Park Service did find a solution to the conservation of the historic furnishings left in those buildings. Yet even this positive step has raised questions about the worth of the island's cultural resources and the spending priorities of a financially strapped Park Service. The term *historic furnishings* includes not only furniture and household goods but clothing, linens, paper materials, photographs, and personal possessions of the former residents. The museum collection at Cumberland Island includes two other categories of items: natural resource specimens and archaeological remains. When the Carnegies turned over the land and buildings to the Park Service, the total of the three cate-



Fig. 8.3. Perhaps the most significant archaeological find on the island was this Native American canoe. It is now preserved at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

gories ran to more than 12,000 items. The agency's Southeast Archaeological Center in Tallahassee, Florida, took most of the archaeological resources for preservation and study (fig. 8.3). The Cumberland Island staff has the responsibility to preserve, catalog, and properly store the remaining items, which range in size from individual straight pins to horse-drawn wagons.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of the valuable historic items came with the donation of Plum Orchard mansion by the Johnston family. The house contained several rare Tiffany lamps, Carnegie family china, crystal, and fine linens. However, a dispute arose in November 1978 when the Johnston group removed a number of items for division among themselves, including the china, crystal, silverware, and pieces of furniture. Approximately 1,400 of the items had been cataloged for the national seashore's museum collection. Superintendent McCrary contacted Arthur Allen, the Park Service's chief of museum services at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. He in turn wrote to the regional office in Atlanta and pointed out that many of those items not only were Park Service property but as part of the mansion were included on the National Register.<sup>15</sup>



An investigation followed that further muddied the picture. The gift deed from the Johnston branch of the family to the National Park Foundation had no reference to the contents of the Plum Orchard house. Nevertheless, the foundation reported that it had correspondence indicating the Johnstons had reserved the china, glassware, and silver. Foundation officers said nothing about furniture or other objects. Additionally, for some months the foundation even speculated about whether it had conveyed the furnishings to the Park Service or still owned them. A disgusted Superintendent McCrary later wrote, "The only thing we didn't resolve was the care and feeding of the Carnegie heirs who, evidently, still had claim to several items but had showed no interest in them for almost six years [since the seashore's establishment]." Later Margaret Wright returned her 239 items, enabling the Park Service to display some of the china and glassware for tours of the mansion.<sup>16</sup>

For more than twenty-five years, the Park Service stored the remaining furnishings in a variety of island buildings. Periodic inspections showed that the facilities were inadequate and that many museum resources were exposed to unacceptable levels of heat and humidity. Eventually the seashore purchased a "Bally building," a climate-controlled metal shed which was placed inside one of the Dungeness buildings. It provided adequate storage for the most endangered items such as clothing and photographs. Criticism from Carnegie heirs, historic preservationists, and museum experts eventually combined with the opportunity to acquire the Coastal Bank Building in St. Marys. From 1996 through 1999 the agency spent more than \$1 million on acquiring, redesigning, and adapting the structure for storage and display of museum objects.

Several problems arose to complicate the process and exaggerate the cost. Builders installed a floor for the second story that regional office specialists claimed might emit harmful gases into the collection. Some months later, the regional office replaced it with a vastly more expensive one. The first elevator in the building also had to be replaced. Even after all that expense, seashore officials submitted a proposal for \$40,000 in 2001 to modify the building's facade in order to meet the standards of the St. Marys historic district.<sup>17</sup>

As curators prepared to move the museum materials from their many island caches, they were able to evaluate the quality of the collection. The natural history materials were first-class, the products of nearly thirty years of painstaking collection by rangers and visiting scientists. The historic ob-

jects, however, did not match the quality of the natural resources. In 1998 the collection underwent a comprehensive survey to identify the significance and condition of every object. The curatorial specialist evaluated them on a scale from 1 for very significant to 7 for no significance. Excluding the natural resources and the paper items, most of which were photographs, the curator rated more than 76 percent of the collection from 4 to 7. Only 2.5 percent rated the highest level of significance, and those items consisted primarily of the remnant china and fine linens. These results corroborated the belief among most seashore officials that the Johnstons removed the bulk of the valuable items and left behind objects in poor condition or of low value.

The agency's full-time museum curator carefully preserves an amazing array of common and virtually worthless items in the finest museum storage materials available. These include modern straight pins, burned-out lightbulbs, shoe polish, ordinary clear glass ashtrays, a late 1960s Maxwell House coffee can, dog shampoo from the same period, twisted aluminum and plastic lawn chairs, jam jars, and a container of prophylactics. Many items of some original value, such as beds, couches, and chairs, are in terrible condition, with rips in the fabric and broken frames. Even the museum curator questions the propriety of spending so much money on storing these items when significant structures like the Dungeness Tabby House need further maintenance.<sup>18</sup>

### Lands and Retained Rights

Land acquisition proceeded in the late 1990s in fits and starts. The Park Service suffered several setbacks with the Rockefeller lands. Andrew Rockefeller elected not to sell his land. His sister Georgia Rose chose to sell but refused to negotiate with the Park Service. Instead, Rose sold her 82-acre cross-island tract abutting Sea Camp to Atlanta developer Chris Allen in 1997. The sale was conducted in secrecy, and for months the Park Service had no idea who the new landholder was. Many speculated that John F. Kennedy Jr., who had been married at the Settlement's African-American church earlier in the year, was the purchaser. Once Allen admitted his ownership, many environmentalists and seashore officials feared he would subdivide or build rental cottages. However, in 2001 Allen claimed that he would only build a personal residence.<sup>19</sup>

The National Park Service regarded the nearly 1,200-acre plot of land in

segment 2N offered by the Greyfield Corporation as much more important. This land lay just north of Stafford in the proposed wilderness zone. The agency convinced the Nature Conservancy to secure options and help defray the cost of the purchase. The Conservancy negotiated a five-phase purchase of 1,148 acres for approximately \$20 million. Release of funds for the purchase had to be approved by Congress. Money theoretically existed from the 1965 Land and Water Conservation Fund Act to enable such an acquisition. That act, as amended, orders that revenue generated by offshore oil and gas leases, motorboat-fuel taxes, the sale of surplus property, and recreation user fees on public lands be used to acquire and develop property for recreation at both the federal and state levels. However, President Reagan began a practice of diverting the funds for other purposes, and over the years only a tiny fraction of the revenue generated by the various commercial activities has been used to support recreation.<sup>20</sup>

Congressman Kingston followed this trend by objecting to the conditions of the proposed sale. He called for an evaluation of the proposal by the General Accounting Office (GAO). When the GAO concluded that the projected deal was not unusual, Kingston submitted a new plan aimed at avoiding any cost to the government.

The Candler at High Point had come to regret selling their land to the Park Service. During the Greyfield negotiations they informed Kingston that they would purchase the tract and donate it to Cumberland Island National Seashore if the government in return would reestablish Candler ownership of a plot of land at High Point of equal value. In September 1997 Kingston announced his support for this idea. The Park Service rejected this option based on agency opposition to returning potential wilderness lands to private ownership. In early 1998, despite the expenditure of \$4.8 million by the Nature Conservancy for 344 of the Greyfield acres, Kingston made it clear that he would not support any other land acquisition plan. Senator Max Cleland of Georgia supported the Park Service but could not convince Kingston to change his mind. Faced with his intransigence, the Park Service, through the Nature Conservancy, opened negotiations with the Candler heirs while environmental groups sought ways to block the deal.<sup>21</sup>

### Driving on the Beach

At the same time, environmental organizations looked anew at other incongruous wilderness activities. Because of its perceived threat to sea



Figure 8.4. Driving on the beach by retained-rights holders and their guests and renters is another focus of conflict at Cumberland Island.

turtles, shorebirds, and sunbathers, an obvious target was the island residents' cherished right to drive on the beach. In February 1996 Cumberland Island began receiving very similar letters from around the South complaining about cars on the beach (fig. 8.4). In each reply seashore officials explained the retained rights of residents and the state's jurisdiction below the high-tide line and asked for patience until the estate agreements ended.<sup>22</sup> However, organizations like the Defenders of Wild Cumberland would not be placated. Soon the seashore also received letters from island residents insisting that their rights be respected.<sup>23</sup>

In this particular case the Park Service was able to pass the responsibility for solving a management debate on to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, which faced the issue of driving on its beaches on other islands. In 1992 the state legislature passed a regulation that allowed beach driving only with official permits. On Cumberland the DNR intended to issue permits immediately, but a lawsuit filed by Hal Wright forced it to carry out a full public planning procedure. In June 1998 the state agency held public meetings in Atlanta, Savannah, and Kingsland to determine who should re-

ceive permits. After the skirmish with Wright and other environmentalists, the DNR proceeded cautiously, hoping to avoid the planning debacles of the National Park Service at Cumberland Island. Among those who spoke were environmental activists, residents of Cumberland and other Georgia islands, and the National Park Service. The latter supported issuance of permits to island residents with private property or retained rights, their immediate families, and their resident employees. However, the agency opposed permits for people renting homes on the retained estates, guests of island residents, and any commercial tours, including the ones operating from the Greyfield Inn.<sup>24</sup>

In December 1998 the DNR issued its final regulations for beach driving. Only island residents, their immediate family members, researchers, and management officials would receive permits. Cumberland Island residents anticipated this decision by voluntarily agreeing to use only existing access roads to the beach, stay on wet sand below the high-tide line, and avoid driving at night during the turtle-nesting season. Nevertheless, Hal Wright brought suit against the DNR when it issued the first permits to island residents. The National Park Service testified for the state office, and the suit was dismissed. At present the state office has issued more than 300 permits for Cumberland Island's beach. However, this has proven to be a minor interruption in Wright's campaign to turn Cumberland into a true wilderness.<sup>25</sup>

### Wilderness and Other Plans

The failure of the Plum Orchard Center for the Arts project disheartened Superintendent Rolland Swain. On September 1, 1996, he left to assume leadership at Big South Fork National Recreation Area on the Cumberland River in Tennessee and Kentucky. After several temporary superintendents, the Park Service assigned Denis Davis to the permanent position in December. Davis arrived from Glen Canyon National Recreation Area on the Colorado River with strong credentials in park planning. He hoped to use collaborative input from all the interest groups to formulate a wilderness plan and solve the dilemma over use of the Plum Orchard mansion.

However, Davis underestimated the degree of philosophical differences and the personal hatred that had developed between the factions. Island residents had formed another association, the Cumberland Island Preservation Society, to advocate increased protection for historic structures and

defend their rights against aggressive environmental organizations like the Defenders of Wild Cumberland. The residents' new organization is also aggressive, at one point filing suit against Hal Wright for harassment.<sup>26</sup>

After a series of public meetings hosted by the Park Service, the Cumberland Island Preservation Society sponsored a forum on wilderness planning in October 1997. Residents, environmentalists, historic preservation specialists, Park Service officials, and a professional facilitator from New Jersey attended. The results were promising. Participants avoided recriminations and discussed all the ramifications of wilderness planning for the island. They identified a number of issues to be addressed by wilderness planners, including a definition of Cumberland's wilderness and its boundaries, retained rights including vehicle use, visitor activities and the limit on their numbers, identification and preservation of historical and archaeological resources, and management of horses, hogs, exotic species, and fire.<sup>27</sup>

The preservation society hosted two more meetings the following spring. The first met to consider the Plum Orchard dilemma. Historic preservation supporters dominated this forum and struggled to find a way to fund the mansion's rehabilitation and carry out maintenance surrounded by wilderness on nearly all sides. The second forum again addressed wilderness planning and the related issues that had been raised during the October meeting. This time several preservation society members suggested that the Main Road be removed from wilderness designation. In this way building supplies and visitors could be carried to both Plum Orchard and the Settlement by vehicle. This option would be far less costly than access only by boat. The process of removing a road from the wilderness is called "cherry-stemming." In addition, residents called for removal of all features on the National Register of Historic Places from the wilderness as well. They suggested that Congress could add a portion of the island south of Dungeness to compensate for the loss of wilderness acreage on the road. Much of the proposed addition consists of marsh and dredge spoils deposited by the Army Corps of Engineers. The Park Service and environmentalists rejected these ideas.<sup>28</sup>

Subsequently, GoGo Ferguson of the Cumberland Island Preservation Society issued a transcript of recommendations from the second wilderness forum. Included in the summary was a statement that the Park Service "will address all available avenues to enhancing designated and proposed wilderness while permitting unrestricted access to the island's cultural resources, including local discretion, permitted exceptions, cherry-stemming the

road, and redefining the wilderness boundary, to add to, not diminish wilderness on Cumberland Island.” A week later Denis Davis wrote to Ferguson: “I had some notes that corresponded to what you showed in your transcript, but they were notes of the general discussion, not the group’s recommendation. In fact, several of the recommendations in your transcript are clearly in violation of the Wilderness Act and I, and many others, would have objected if that would have been part of the group’s recommendation.”<sup>29</sup>

This disagreement became moot on June 23, 1998, when Congressman Kingston announced he would introduce a bill to be called the Cumberland Island Preservation Act. The bill had four sections. First, it provided funds for the restoration of Plum Orchard and other historic structures. The congressman cited a lack of funds as the reason for the losses of the Dungeness Recreation House, the Plum Orchard carriage house, and one of the houses in the Settlement. Sierra Club volunteers had razed the latter at the direction of the Park Service. A second provision ordered the High Point–Greyfield land swap. The final two sections cherry-stemmed the Main Road and added the south end land and marsh to the wilderness. The bill matched exactly the proposals of the island residents.<sup>30</sup>

The reaction to Kingston’s bill was predictably tumultuous. Island residents, naturally, were elated. The bill caught the seashore officials completely off guard again, and they opposed it. Environmental organizations were furious at what they saw as a betrayal of the collaborative process worked out during the island meetings. Senator Cleland also opposed the bill, as he had opposed the High Point–Greyfield deal separately. During the year since Kingston first proposed the idea, the Nature Conservancy had completed two more phases of land acquisition but still had only options on the remaining 575 acres. During the ensuing months the two legislators negotiated to find a solution. Hoping to break the deadlock, Park Service director Robert Stanton and Assistant Secretary of the Interior Donald J. Barry visited the island and agreed to divert funds from other programs and parks for cultural resource preservation.<sup>31</sup>

In late November, Senator Cleland and Congressman Kingston announced their mutual stand on the Cumberland Island issues. Their letter committed the Park Service to allocate \$1 million to rehabilitate Plum Orchard mansion, \$500,000 for other cultural resources, and \$50,000 for new interpretive exhibits. Cleland and Kingston also promised to increase the seashore’s annual base funding for historic maintenance by \$300,000. In

addition to these welcome increases for cultural resources, the legislators promised that Congress would release \$11.9 million for land acquisition. These funds, coupled with a \$6 million donation by the Nature Conservancy, would complete acquisition of the Greyfield North tract. However, the lawmakers placed conditions on the land funds. The Park Service and all its many interest groups had to settle the issue of visitor access to Plum Orchard and the Settlement.<sup>32</sup>

During the next two months these senior officials worked with all the parties to reach an agreement. On February 17, 1999, fourteen organizations representing the various advocacies, the Carnegie and Candler heirs, and representatives of the senator and the congressman signed a "Cumberland Island Agreement." This document included provisions that the Park Service would:

1. Provide another \$1.4 million for Plum Orchard and \$150,000 for stabilization of other island structures in addition to funds already promised for management of historical resources.
2. Establish a Cumberland Island Subcommittee of the national park system advisory board.
3. Renew the request for proposals to lease Plum Orchard.
4. Provide scheduled visitor tours to the mansion and the Settlement by vehicle in the short term but by boat as soon as possible.
5. Build a trail parallel to the Main Road for hikers.
6. Keep the visitor capacity at 300 per day.
7. Carry out the land purchases with government and Nature Conservancy funds.
8. Expand the wilderness planning effort to include discrete plans for natural resources, cultural resources, interpretation, and commercial services (concessions).<sup>33</sup>

This sweeping document would have been unusual at any national park unit. At Cumberland Island it was little short of miraculous. The key factor was linking land acquisition to the public access to historic properties. Within weeks, however, more difficulties appeared. First, the Greyfield people approached the Park Service to change the sales contract they had



signed. Second thoughts led them to want to keep more of their land. According to Superintendent Davis, the Park Service refused to renegotiate the contract, but Assistant Secretary Barry ordered them to do so. Ultimately, the Greyfield group kept sixty-five of the potential wilderness acres that had been included originally in the contract.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, ominous signs appeared regarding the agreement itself. Another environmental organization, Wilderness Watch, announced that it did not approve of the stipulation that the Park Service should take visitors to the historic sites by vehicle through the wilderness. Then, citing similar concerns, the Defenders of Wild Cumberland decided to negate their commitment to the agreement.<sup>35</sup> Harsh words and lawsuits soon reappeared, and Superintendent Davis became a casualty.

According to Davis, Congressman Kingston urged Regional Director Jerry Belson to remove him from the superintendency. Kingston gave two reasons. First, he claimed that the seashore staff had erected a wayside exhibit on horses that insulted the island residents. Second, he accused Davis of demonstrating his contempt for historic resources by putting vinyl siding on his home in the St. Marys historic district. A distraught Davis answered that no horse exhibit existed on the island and that he did not live in the St. Marys historic district. In fact, it turned out that it was a Dennis Davis, not Denis Davis, who had altered the historic home. Then, a few months later, Davis received word that Assistant Secretary Barry wanted him removed immediately. The Park Service leadership resisted, and Davis could have refused to move, but the pressure was intense. He left in December 1999 for the assistant superintendent position at Glacier National Park.<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Department of the Interior removed Davis after the National Parks and Conservation Association bestowed on him its annual national award for conservation leadership. Hal Wright summed up the feelings of the environmental community when he wrote to Barry, "There is no longer any doubt whatsoever for whose interests you are attempting to manage the Cumberland Island Wilderness and those interests are certainly not the public's." Yet another superintendent fell to the incessant conflict and political influence that characterized the seashore's entire history.<sup>37</sup>

### The Five Plans

As the new century began, Park Service officials at the regional office steadfastly but carefully developed the wilderness and other plans. Regional

planner Richard Sussman drew upon expertise from around the national park system to craft a series of drafts for public review. At the same time, the Park Service sought to establish the legal and scientific grounds to support the alternatives it preferred. The regional solicitor's office undertook the most complete and detailed review of retained-rights agreements ever compiled to determine who had rights to the different uses and activities and who did not. In January 2000 one of the Foster retained rights ended. They requested an extension, but the Park Service refused. Ownership passed to the seashore, and turtle management volunteers and other researchers now seasonally occupy the Foster Beach House.<sup>38</sup>

When the five draft plans were released on December 15, 2000, they had something to annoy everyone. The Park Service's preferred alternatives for the wilderness included vehicles for ranger patrols, for one sea turtle-monitoring trip per day, and on rare occasions for maintenance of roads, bridges, and historic structures. The agency proposed two new wilderness campgrounds, a loading ramp at the Plum Orchard Dock, a new dock at the north end, a trail parallel to the Main Road, and visitor tours by concession boat. Planners also asked island residents to "voluntarily" give up driving on four roads east of the Main Road, including South Cut. The draft natural resource plan proposed elimination of the hogs, by the use of dogs if necessary, and reduction of the horses to a "representative" herd across the island. The cultural resource management plan called for the Park Service to remove Plum Orchard's carriage house and boat house plus the ruins of the Recreation House and three other structures at Dungeness. The agency also proposed to find a lessee for Plum Orchard, move the wilderness campground away from the Brickhill archaeological site, and turn Lucy Graves's home, The Grange, into a visitor facility when her lease ends in 2010. Finally, the Park Service planned to encourage kayak and canoe tours to the wilderness.<sup>39</sup>

While the public reviewed the drafts, the Park Service continued its data-gathering effort. In early July 2001 Andrew Carnegie III died. Subsequently, rumors circulated that his trustee Gertrude Schwartz was also dead.<sup>40</sup> This information raised questions about their retained right, rented by Ben Jenkins. The agency also prepared to contract for an official study of the island's visitor carrying capacity. Two studies conducted in the mid-1990s claimed that island visitors did not perceive much recreation conflict or crowding. At the same time, Camden County and its political representatives constantly lobbied for a visitation limit of at least 600.<sup>41</sup>

Between December 2000 and July 2001, the Park Service held eight hearings and received more than 3,500 letters and electronic mailings. Among the respondents were two early players in the Cumberland Island drama. Former secretary of the interior and Carnegie attorney Stewart Udall addressed the question of retained rights on the island:

It's my understanding that some controversy has arisen about Island residents and their guests driving in the Wilderness and on the beach. This issue was addressed in detail in the individual retained rights agreements when the Seashore was formed. These retained rights must be honored as written, but they should not be extended in any way, as this would be harmful to the Wilderness and the values it was designated to protect. In our work to acquire the private lands to establish the Seashore, I do not recall any commitments made by the federal government to the landowners other than those specifically included in the deeds of conveyance. Needless to say, any commercial tours in vehicles would be contrary to the 1964 Wilderness Act and should not be allowed.

Thereafter he chastised the Park Service for its plans to conduct vehicle tours to Plum Orchard and the Settlement, even if only on a temporary basis. He wrote: "The National Park Service is obligated to carry out its administrative duties in the Cumberland Island Wilderness as it would in any other Wilderness. It should fulfill its stewardship role by setting an example for others to follow."<sup>42</sup>

Another interested reviewer was George Sandberg, the man who negotiated for the National Park Foundation in the early 1970s. In a letter to Thornton Morris, he reiterated that the residents had been promised "convenient access" by vehicle to the beach until a jitney transportation system throughout the island began operations. Sandberg added that George Hartzog had promised these liberal retained rights to offset the low price per acre that the government offered. This argument swayed legislators in 1979 when they forced the Park Service to keep South Cut Road open.<sup>43</sup>

The thousands of other reviewers of the draft plans fell into predictable groups. Those favoring the positions of the main environmental groups decried all traffic in the wilderness. One extremist suggested at a public hearing that the structures in the settlement be burned to cleanse the wilderness. This met an angry response not only from residents and historic preservationists but also from more moderate environmentalists and the National Association for African American Historic Preservation. At the other end of

the scale, a number of individuals suggested that the Park Service should either move the historic structures to sites outside the wilderness or eliminate the wilderness designation completely.<sup>44</sup>

As the Park Service fielded these responses, some of its thoughts about the wilderness plan began to change. By July 2001 the agency banned virtually all use of its own vehicles in the wilderness except for emergencies or if justified as the minimum action necessary to complete a task. Ranger patrols now take place on foot or on horseback. Historic preservation activities are implemented with “minimum tools.” The latter term denotes use of hand implements unless the job is impossible without a machine. Then the job’s importance itself must undergo careful review. Coupled with the regional solicitor’s findings, this compliance with the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act has led the Park Service to review the Greyfield Inn’s motorized tours except along the Main Road where it holds a legal right to drive. This ultimately may force the inn’s guests to walk from the road to other locations in or near the wilderness such as the Plum Orchard mansion or the Settlement.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, the five plans probably will not stand as proposed. The intensity of public interest, distrust of the Park Service, group self-interest, and philosophical differences are too deeply entrenched. Sierra Club representative Bill Harlan writes: “40,000 people come from across the country and across the globe to Cumberland because it is wild. . . . They visit Cumberland because they want to experience wilderness—not to see the mansion of Andrew Carnegie’s brother’s fifth son George, [a] mansion built less than a hundred years ago and of limited regional historical significance. The international significance of the Cumberland wilderness outweighs any historical value at Plum.”<sup>46</sup>

Georgia historic preservationist Gregory Paxton offers a different prescription: “There is more to Cumberland Island than wilderness. An indelible 5,000-year history of human habitation is written on the Island’s landscape, and the evidence is everywhere, from the Native American burial grounds and shell middens to the crumbling chimney pots and tabby ruins, from the circa-1870 freed slave settlements to the large estates with numerous outbuildings. These tangible traces of Georgia’s history need to be protected along with the areas that have grown wild around them.”<sup>47</sup>

Finally, Cumberland Island resident and Candler heir William C. Warren writes: “I believe a wilderness has, virtually, no roads, no houses, no airstrips, no docks, no permanent human habitation, no fences, etc., etc.,

and this cannot and will not happen in my lifetime or yours. As long as there are retained rights to be honored, there can be no true 'wilderness' or 'potential wilderness' as I define it. Time is on the 'wilderness' advocates['] side—it will be 80 years and they will have it all—until then they'll have to put up with those that made all this possible."<sup>48</sup>

The only thing certain about this ongoing planning process is that it will lead to wilderness management, natural resource management, cultural resource management, concession services, and long-range interpretive plans that will be quite bruised and modified when they go into effect. In fact, their very survival will surely depend on the courts or Congress.