

CASTLE WINDY - By Valerie Stanley

One of the many gems of Canaveral National Seashore is the Castle Windy Trail. This well-maintained, broad path leads from parking lot #3 in the Apollo District westward towards Mosquito Lagoon. It crosses a wide, half-mile section of the barrier island, giving hikers a glimpse of various plant zones along the way. This location is both naturally beautiful and historically significant.

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A canopy of trees covers most of the trail, so it's a wonderful place to tuck in if you want a break from the bright, sunny beach. Informational brochures are available in a box attached to the trail entrance sign. As hikers meander down the trail, they will first encounter low-growing saw palmettos. This thicket of dense vegetation thrives in the scrub habitat behind the dune system. Continuing on, they will find salt-stunted live oaks, eastern red cedars, and citrus trees. If it's a calm morning, birds can be seen flitting among the air plants, and lizards can be heard scurrying under the wild coffee and yaupon branches. A bench is available about halfway down the trail for those who want to sit quietly or rest.

The end of the trail rewards hikers with an excellent picnic spot. A wooden table sits (surprisingly on an old concrete slab) alone in the sunshine surrounded by mangroves. There is a gap in the trees along the shoreline that gives visitors a peek of Mosquito Lagoon. Early morning fishermen can often be found casting their lines into the water.

Many visitors don't realize that this place is archeologically significant. Centuries before the Spaniards' arrival into the New World, the native Timucua people harvested oysters and clams from this warm lagoon. They discarded harvested shells, broken pottery shards, and other debris into large heaps (middens). Many other tribes did similarly. Scattered throughout Florida and the southeast, middens stood as silent witnesses of once-thriving Native American populations. As the U.S. grew and transportation systems developed, shell middens were plundered and used to create road and railway beds. Unknowingly, artifacts were lost to destruction.

However, some shell middens remain in Canaveral National Seashore. One is Turtle Mound; another is at the end of the Castle Windy Trail. According to survey maps of the mid 1800s, a pre-Civil War home was constructed on top of this ancient midden. Standing above the vegetation, this home enjoyed the ocean breezes and was given the name "Castle Windy." While the home no longer exists, the name continues. Its legacy welcomes visitors to step back in time to enjoy the beauty, solitude, and history of this unique place. Enjoy the trail, but please remember: Take only photos. Leave only footprints. One very important closing footnote: If you are going to hike, do so in winter - the summer biting insects can be brutal!

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