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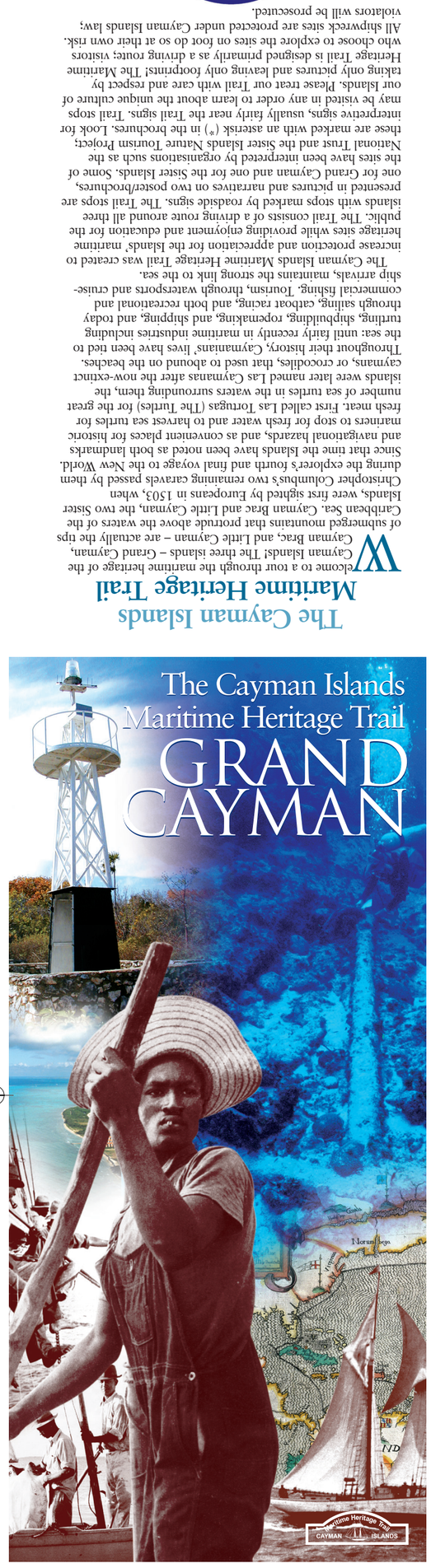

Grand Cayman

Grand Cayman is the largest of the three Cayman Islands, measuring 22 miles long and 4 miles across at its widest point. The shape of the island is dominated by North Sound; scenic Seven Mile Beach stretches along the west coast, while the eastern end is marked by a high bluff and fringing reef. Natural harbours dot the coastline, and stands of mangrove and silver thatch palm, the national tree, can be found in the interior. Grand Cayman is home to the unique Cuban parrot, found only in the Cayman Islands, Cuba, and the Bahamas, and frigatebirds are common in the skies. Green sea turtles still crawl ashore to lay their eggs on the island's beaches.

The history and culture of the Cayman Islands are tied to the sea. The Islands' location in the heart of the Caribbean and in the route of prevailing winds and currents brought vessels plying the Spanish Main near the small land masses. For more than 200 years after discovery, Grand Cayman was uninhabited, although visited occasionally by sailors to replenish supplies of food and water. Pirates and privateers favoured Grand Cayman as a hideout and rendezvous.

Under the Treaty of Madrid, signed in 1670, the Spanish acknowledged Britain's sovereignty over the West Indian islands that she currently occupied, which included Jamaica and, by extension, the Cayman Islands. Until about 1730, however, they were probably used primarily as temporary settlements – a base for a seasonal turtle fishery and a trade in logwood. English settlers gradually populated Grand Cayman during the early 1700s, probably attracted by the abundance of turtles. The first land grants were recorded in 1735 and 1741–42, after which the population grew steadily, if slowly. Cotton, grown on modest plantations, eventually replaced mahogany as the island's principal export, but the cotton boom did not last long, and most Caymanians survived by a combination of fishing (including turtling) and subsistence farming. They became legendary for their seamanship and boatbuilding skills, and after World War Two many of the men became involved in commercial shipping, working on U.S. bulk carriers and for Caymanian-owned shipping companies, supporting their families from afar. When they retired from the sea, they came home to find an economy that was beginning to flourish, and they started businesses, many of which are still thriving.

The Cayman Islands were a dependency of Jamaica until 1962, when Jamaica chose to become independent from Britain. Choosing instead to maintain ties with Great Britain, the Cayman Islands retain that historical link through their current status as a British Overseas Territory.

The permanent population of Grand Cayman today numbers over 40,000 and includes native Caymanians as well as expatriates from all over the world. Hundreds of thousands of tourists visit Grand Cayman each year, and the island is a top diving and watersports destination.

Grand Cayman Brochure Photo Credits

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Poster (clockwise from top left): Della Scott-Ireton; Mike Guderian; National Maritime Museum, London; Cayman Islands National Archive; Peggy Leshikar-Denton

The Cayman Islands Maritime Heritage Trail

Welcome to a tour through the maritime heritage of the Cayman Islands! The three islands – Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman – are actually the tips of submerged mountains that protrude above the waters of the Caribbean Sea. Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, the two Sister Islands, were first sighted by Europeans in 1503, when Christopher Columbus's two remaining caravels passed by them during the explorer's fourth and final voyage to the New World. Since that time the Islands have been noted as both landmarks and navigational hazards, and as convenient places for historic mariners to stop for fresh water and to harvest sea turtles for fresh meat. First called Las Tortugas (The Turtles) for the great number of sea turtles in the waters surrounding them, the islands were later named Las Caymanas after the now-extinct caymans, or crocodiles, that used to abound on the beaches. Throughout their history, Caymanians' lives have been tied to the sea: until fairly recently in maritime industries including turtling, shipbuilding, ropemaking, and shipping, and today through sailing, cabboat racing, and both recreational and commercial fishing. Tourism, through watersports and cruise-ship arrivals, maintains the strong link to the sea.

The Cayman Islands Maritime Heritage Trail was created to increase protection and appreciation for the Islands' maritime heritage sites while providing enjoyment and education for the public. The Trail consists of a driving route around all three islands with stops marked by roadside signs. The Trail stops are presented in pictures and narratives on two poster/brochures, one for Grand Cayman and one for the Sister Islands. Some of the sites have been interpreted by organizations such as the National Trust and the Sister Islands Nature Tourism Project; these are marked with an asterisk (*) in the brochures. Look for interpretive signs, usually fairly near the Trail signs. Trail stops may be visited in any order to learn about the unique culture of our Islands. Please treat our Trail with care and respect by taking only pictures and leaving only footprints! The Maritime Heritage Trail is designed primarily as a driving route; visitors who choose to explore the sites on foot do so at their own risk. All shipwreck sites are protected under Cayman Islands law; violators will be prosecuted.

Maritime Heritage Trail
CAYMAN ISLANDS

CAYMAN ISLANDS NATIONAL MUSEUM
NATIONAL TRUST FOR THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
National Archive
Ships of Discoveries

The Cayman Islands Maritime Heritage Trail Partners wish to thank the following:
Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Culture and Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Development and Commerce for financial support. Sister Islands District Administration and its Sister Islands Tourism Project for assistance in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Cayman Airways and Island Air for travel assistance. Department of Planning for sign-placement permissions. Public Works Department for sign installation. Department of Lands & Survey for maps. Designgroup for logo and sign production. Thompson Shipping for freight. Cayman Free Press for brochure design. Claudette Upton for copy editing. Peggy Leshikar-Denton and Della Scott-Ireton for project conception and coordination. The Florida Division of Historical Resources for the model of the Florida Maritime Heritage Trail, adjacent landowners and the people of the Cayman Islands for their support.

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Designed by Cayman Free Press

1 Sir Francis Drake

Sir Francis Drake, on his 1585–86 voyage to the Spanish Main, stopped at Grand Cayman with a fleet of 23 ships. A journal from this voyage includes a colourful description of the crew's activities in the Cayman Islands:

… the xxij [22] of Aprill wee fell with an Ile that had no people in hit. There wee founde strawnge kindes of beastes & killed more than xx [20] Alligatos … There weare Crocadiles which did Incounter & fighte with us, they live bothe in the sea & on lande. Wee tooke divers & made verie good meate of them; some of the same weare ten foote in lenghte. Also wee killed … a great number of Turtles of huge bignes which served us for verie good meate. This Ilande is a verie Desert & wildernesse & so full of woodes as hit can growe. We thought to have watered there but could finde none. Wee staid there ij [2] Daies & set the woodes on fire & soe departed.

Finding no good source of fresh water, Drake sailed on to continue his rampage through the Caribbean. While the exact location of Drake's landing is unknown, his description of turtles and the sandy beach suggests he landed on the western shores of Grand Cayman.

2 Old West Bay Historic Anchorage & Town Centre

Old West Bay was an important commercial centre on Grand Cayman. The sheltered bay had good holding ground for anchors and protected generations of Caymanian mariners and their vessels. Goods for the community were landed by catboat at the government wharf and could be purchased at the seven or eight stores located in the seaside town. Turtle were brought ashore to the south. The wharf, a gathering place for members of the community, was destroyed in the 1944 hurricane. *E.L. Banks*, a Caymanian schooner, wrecked at anchor in the bay while loaded with casks of lard; her dispersed remains rest in the offshore waters. To the north, near the present dock, is a place in the ironshore where rock was removed for road building. The resulting water-filled pen was used as a turtle crawl (see #5). West Bay also is the start of Seven Mile Beach, one of the most famous and beautiful beaches in the world.

3 Boatswain's Bay

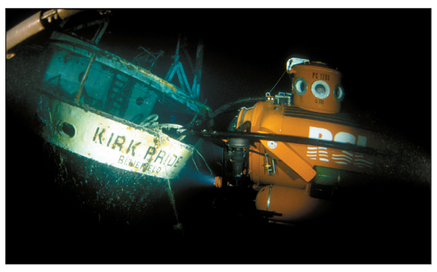
The lighthouse at Boatswain's Bay marks the north end of Grand Cayman, warning approaching mariners of danger. This area also is associated with the phosphate industry. Phosphate deposits found in the northwest section of the island were mined for use in fertilizer in the late 1800s. A light tramway brought the phosphate to the waterfront at Boatswain's Point and Vickersville at North West Point, where it was loaded onto small lighters and carried out to waiting ships. One of the island's earliest land grants, to Samuel Spofforth in 1741, encompassed the Boatswain's Bay area. Local legend suggests it was named for Spofforth's boatswain. A more colourful tale proposes that the name commemorates the boatswain of the pirate ship *Scourer*, who shot and killed his captain, John Evans. The murderous boatswain was, in turn, killed by his angry shipmates.

4 Barkers Shipwrecks

Treacherous reefs and shipwrecks lie hidden just offshore of Barkers, the Cayman Islands' first National Park. On patrol for pirates in 1715, the British sloop-of-war HMS *Jamaica* was dismasted in a storm. In tow by HMS *Drake* and seeking safety, *Jamaica* crashed into the reefs. In 1765, *Augustus Caesar* wrecked on the North Sound reef. *Emily* and *Sarah Phelan*, a pair of Caymanian schooners anchored at Duck Pond, broke moorings in the 1876 hurricane and both broke up on the reefs. *Lydia E. Wilson*, a two-masted Caymanian schooner built in 1931, burned in a fire in 1968. The usually tranquil and scenic views at Barkers National Park yield few clues to the tragedies of years past. All wrecks are protected under Caymanian law, and their integrity must be respected. Access to Barkers can be moderately difficult.

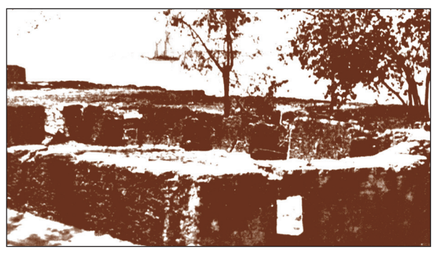
5 Historic Turtle Crawls

Sea turtles have played a central role in most of Cayman's five hundred years of recorded history. Generations of islanders fished for turtles around the Cayman Islands, Cuba, and Central and South America. Caymanian catboats and specialised nets were developed to aid in the pursuit and capture of turtles. Captured turtles were confined in "crawls," often built of vertical stakes set in the shallow waters of sounds, until they could be sold or slaughtered. The name is derived from the Dutch word *kraal*. One such crawl existed north of the dock at Batabano Barcadere in North Sound, now called Morgan's Harbour. Crawls also were located at West Bay, George Town, and South Sound. All three islands have bays named Crawl Bay. Today, the Cayman Turtle Farm provides farmed turtle meat for local consumption and carries out a captive breeding and release program.



6 George Town Harbour Shipwrecks

George Town Harbour, also called Hog Sty Bay, is the main historic anchorage on Grand Cayman and has its share of shipwrecks. *Balboa* was a Jamaican freighter anchored in Grand Cayman for repairs when she wrecked in the infamous 1932 Storm. Her sunken hulk was dynamited in 1957 to reduce the threat to navigation. The captain of *Cali*, a four-masted barkentine, ran her ashore when she began to take on water in 1948. Her salvaged rice cargo provided food for many Caymanians, and some was even exported. The freighter *Kirk Pride* sank in a nor'wester in 1976 and now rests on the Cayman Wall in 800 feet of water; the local tourist submarine occasionally takes visitors to the wreck. The steel freighter *Gamma* ran aground on the reef in 1980, and the waves of a subsequent storm pushed her onto the beach where she still can be seen. These wrecks, like all wrecks in the Cayman Islands, are protected under law.



7 Fort George*

Fort George commanded the primary approach to Grand Cayman. Built around 1780, the fort was established in response to war between European nations that also embroiled their New World colonies, including the Cayman Islands. Caymanians organized a volunteer militia to man Fort George and a second fort at Prospect. After a Spanish force from Cuba attacked and destroyed Fort George, it was rebuilt with eight embrasures for cannons and a mahogany gate. Edward Corbet's 1802 report on the Cayman Islands records that the fort mounted three small, poorly equipped guns. The walls were built of local limestone, two to five feet thick and five feet tall. Little is left of Fort George today, though cannons still ceremonially guard the sea approach to George Town. A World War Two submarine lookout, manned by the Home Guard, was perched in a silk cotton tree at Fort George; it can be seen on the grounds of the fort.

8 Maritime Architecture

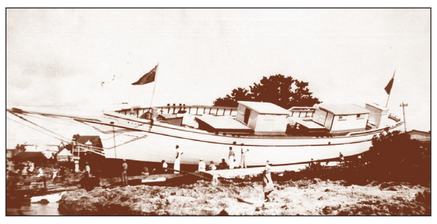
In times past, the waters of the Cayman Islands were filled with beautiful, locally built sailing and motor vessels. Today, surprisingly, the best places to see the skills of traditional Caymanian shipbuilders are on land. With generations of experience building schooners, catboats, and other vessels, local shipwrights also applied their skills to architecture. Captain Rayal Bodden built Elmslie Memorial Church using the techniques and materials most familiar to him. Captain Rayal also built the Post Office, Library, and Town Hall in George Town in the 1930s and 1940s. Upon entering the buildings, look up to see the shipwright's craft in the unique and beautiful ceilings reminiscent of inverted ship's hulls. Unfortunately, the works of few other local master shipwrights survive.

9 Historic Hog Sty Bay

Today, Hog Sty Bay is the site of a bustling port and an anchorage for local vessels and visiting merchant, navy, and cruise ships. The National Museum, originally constructed as the Courts Building at the heart of the harbour in the 1830s, served as the location of a lantern hoisted up the flagpole to serve as a beacon to homeward-bound sailors and passing ships. British Navy surveyor George Gauld anchored here while creating the first hydrographic chart of Grand Cayman. In 1773 he wrote, "the only place of anchorage is at the west end, abreast of the Hogsties … This, in good weather is a very convenient place for wooding and watering and getting stock and other refreshment." In 1802 Edward Corbet wrote, "At George Town vessels are supplied with water as well as provisions from wells dug at no great distance from the Beach." Recent archaeological finds suggest, in fact, that permanent settlement of the shoreline began by the mid-1700s. And several historic stepwells can still be seen.

10 Shipbuilding

The shoreline of Grand Cayman is dotted with remnants of the island's seafaring history. Look carefully beside the Atlantis Submarine building to see a slipway carved into the ironshore where the Arch family's shipyard launched vessels, including *Arbutus II*, pictured here. Farther north is the cove known as Whitehall, where Captain Rayal Bodden launched his ships. Other prominent shipyards were located at West Bay, Bodden Town, and East End. Wilbanks Miller built and launched vessels at North Side. Local wood was used in construction, including mahogany, cedar, and plopnut. Most families launched their home-built small boats from slipways and coves, called barcaderes, carved by nature or man into the ironshore. Slips and barcaderes still can be seen around the shores of all three Cayman Islands. Smith Barcadere near South Sound today is a popular picnic and swimming spot.



11 Pallas & Pull-and-be-Damned Point

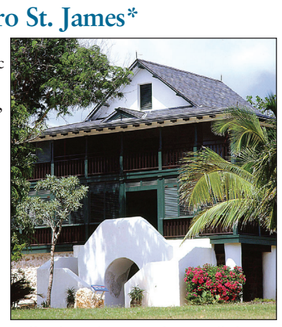
Iron wreckage protruding above the sea in South Sound is a piece of the Norwegian barque *Pallas*. Built in Scotland in 1875, she sailed in ballast from Buenos Aires bound for Mississippi via Barbados in 1910. Blown off course by a hurricane on 13 October, *Pallas* was swept onto the reef, where island residents helped save the lives of her crew. Parts of the ship's hatches, doors, and cargo still adorn local homes. To the southwest stands the Sand Cay Lighthouse, marking the channel at Pull-and-be-Damned Point. The area earned its colourful name from the futile effort required by a rower to fight the rush of water exiting South Sound. Water driven over the reef by waves must flow out through the channel. Rowers attempting to enter the channel against the current would "pull and be damned."

12 Early Prospect

Prospect was settled soon after 1760 by Scotsman Thomas Thompson. Two families, comprising 20 family members and 73 slaves, led prosperous lives there by 1802. They built ships, grew cotton, and engaged in trade. A fort once stood near the location of the present monument. Nearby are historic cemeteries and archaeological remains of the Prospect settlement. Look to the north for a view towards the site of the old Red Bay community. Here some of the Islands' schooners, among them *Fame* and *Thomas & James*, were lost in hurricanes in 1846 and 1876. Other ships foundered on the offshore reefs.

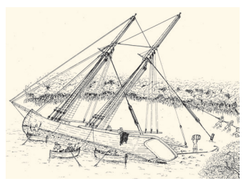
13 Pedro St. James*

The historic home called Pedro St. James, built in 1780, is the oldest remaining building on Grand Cayman. William Eden constructed the grandest house on the island on a high bluff that provided a clear view of ships navigating along the south coast. In 1835, an official proclamation freeing all slaves in the British Empire was brought by ship to Grand Cayman and read on the steps of Pedro St. James. The imposing three-storey structure was restored in the 1990s by the Cayman Islands Government as part of its historic preservation initiative. Guided tours are available, and a state-of-the-art audiovisual presentation brings island history to life. Pedro St. James is included on the Heritage Passport, which offers a reduced admission fee that also applies to the Cayman Islands National Museum, Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, and the Cayman Islands Turtle Farm.



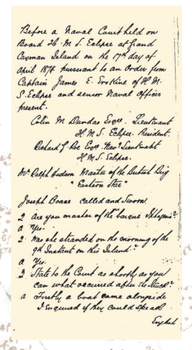
14 Duck Pond Careenage

Mariners' lives depend on the seaworthiness of their ships, which require constant maintenance. Historically, wooden craft were repaired in a process called careening, which involved running the vessel into shallow water and hauling it over on each side so the bottom could be examined. Tasks included scraping the hull clean of barnacles, which slow and damage vessels. Planking eaten by teredos, commonly called shipworms, had to be replaced. If the crew found a ship too damaged to repair, they might strip and abandon it at the careenage. The shallows of the southeastern side of North Sound were a favoured careening place. This area is marked on the first Admiralty chart of the island, created by British Navy surveyor George Gauld in 1773. Two 19th-century wrecks located near Duck Pond may have been abandoned during the careening process. Historic Duck Pond also was the site of a landing place for small boats arriving from North Side.



15 Iphigenia

The barque *Iphigenia* of Cardiff, Wales, was stranded on the Bodden Town reefs on 9 April 1874 through reckless navigation. The ship was overrun by local salvagers before Captain Joseph Boase gave her up. The salvaging of building materials and cargo from wrecked vessels, known as "wrecking", was an important part of life for the early Caymanians, who had scarce access to imported goods and made use of the salvaged material in their daily lives. A naval court held at Grand Cayman admonished Captain Boase to be more careful in the future. The inquiry also found that the ship was pillaged in defiance of the efforts of two Caymanian Magistrates. A third Magistrate, who desired to "wreck" the ship, failed to control the scene. As a consequence of this event, a law was passed in 1875 entitled "Instructions to Receivers of Wreck Concerning their Duties in Respect of Wreck, Casualties and Salvage". These rules for wrecking formalised the salvage system. The practice of wrecking continued until improved navigation aids made shipwrecks almost a thing of the past.



16 Juga

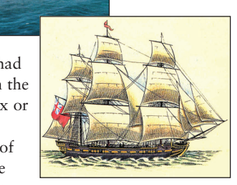
Look into the crashing waves just offshore of the southeast side of Grand Cayman to see the anchor-fluke of *Juga*. The Norwegian ship wrecked in 1888 at Old Isaacs, a location first noted on George Gauld's 1773 Admiralty Chart. East End wreckers were aboard *Juga* barely five minutes after she foundered. First, they helped the ship's crew. Next, they negotiated the salvage rights with the captain. A sensational account published in a European newspaper unjustly referred to the wreckers as "savages" who took advantage of the predicament of the captain and crew. An official naval inquiry, later published in the Jamaica *Gazette*, revealed the truth.

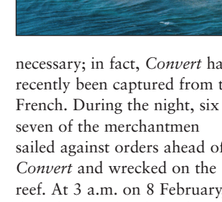
17 East End Lighthouse*

Prevailing winds and ocean currents carried sailing ships east to west through the Caribbean. The Cayman Islands were long recognized as navigational landmarks – and hazards – on the route toward the Leeward Passage at the west end of Cuba. Many ships were lost on the treacherous reefs of Grand Cayman, particularly at East End. To help guide ships, Caymanians built a succession of lights atop the bluff. The first proper lighthouse was constructed in the early 1900s. The latest is a modern, solar-powered light. Foundations of previous structures can still be seen. The site is interpreted by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands through a series of interesting signs. Look out to sea to view the old Spanish Main.

18 The Wreck of the Ten Sail

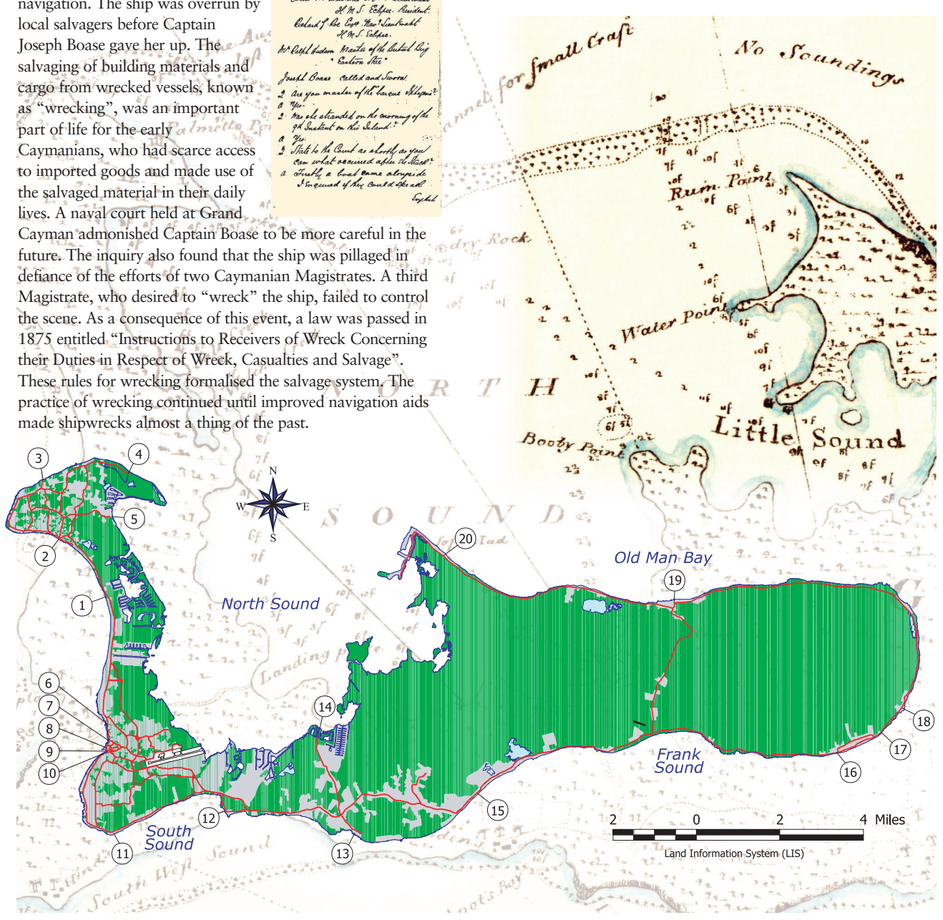
The Wreck of the Ten Sail is the most famous shipwreck disaster in the history of the Cayman Islands. The frigate HMS *Convert* was charged with defending a convoy of 58 merchant ships sailing from Jamaica to Europe in February of 1794. The French Revolutionary War made armed protection necessary; in fact, *Convert* had recently been captured from the French. During the night, six or seven of the merchantmen sailed against orders ahead of *Convert* and wrecked on the reef. At 3 a.m. on 8 February, their distress signal was heard by *Convert*'s crew. "Breakers ahead! Close to us!" cried a sailor from a topsail yard. John Lawford, *Convert*'s captain, fired a warning shot to the rest of the convoy. While trying to steer clear, *Convert* was struck by another vessel, causing her to run onto the reef. Morning light revealed ten wrecked ships: *William & Elizabeth*, *Moorhall*, *Ludlow*, *Britannia*, *Richard*, *Nancy*, *Eagle*, *Sally*, and *Fortune*, along with *Convert*. Caymanians provided all assistance possible, saving many lives. More than thirty ships are wrecked on the East End reef, including *Cumberland* (1767), *Weymouth* (1845), *Dene* (1846), *Glamis* (1913), *Ridgefield* (1962), and *Rimandi Mibaju* (1964). All ships wrecked in the Cayman Islands are protected under law as part of our maritime heritage.





19 Shipbuilding

See #10, above.

20 Rum Point

The area of Rum Point was first noted on the 1773 British Admiralty chart of Grand Cayman. Shipwrecks along the reef include *Seagrim*, a Caymanian schooner wrecked in 1919, tragically drowning Captain Fuertado's young wife. Archaeological evidence indicates that turtle butchering, probably by passing mariners, took place along the north coast as early as the 1700s. A small channel through the reef east of Rum Point allowed access to the relatively calm water between the reef and the mainland. Caymanians traveling to and from the landing place at Grape Tree Point, North Side, passed Rum Point on the way to West Bay, George Town Barcadere, Duck Pond, and other points around North Sound. Islanders tell of courting voyages made along these aquatic trails by suitors going to see their sweethearts.