

San Juan Island

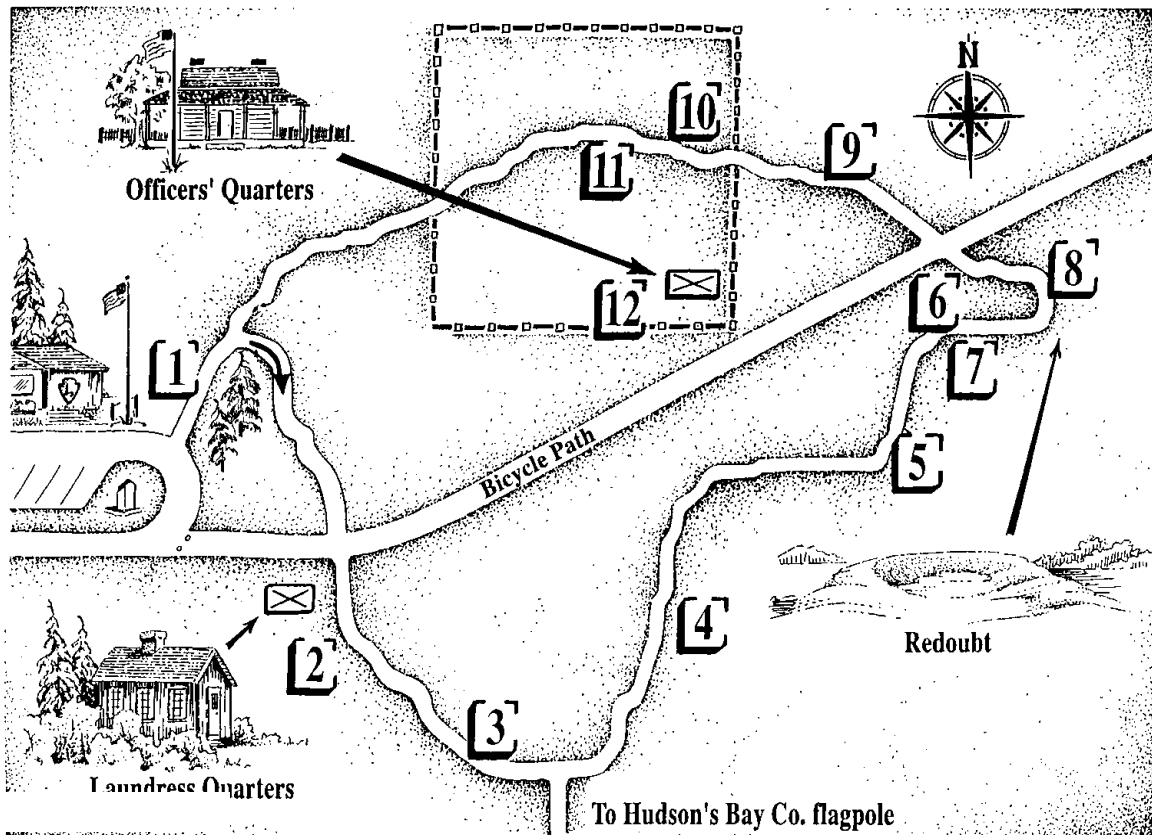
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
San Juan Island National Historical Park



American Camp

A Historic Guided Walk

San Juan Village on Old Town Lagoon,
Griffin Bay in October 1859



A Historic Guided Walk

Use this booklet to relive the Pig War along the one-mile trail that starts in the Visitor Center picnic area. The guide is conveniently numbered to correspond to trail stops along the way. Please protect and preserve the wildlife and vegetation around you by keeping to the marked trail. Also, beware of stepping in rabbit holes. Serious injury could result. Enjoy your walk!



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The Pig War

On June 15, 1859, an American farmer named Lyman Cutlar shot and killed a Hudson's Bay Company pig rooting in his San Juan Island potato patch. By so doing he nearly started a war between the United States and Great Britain.

However, much more than a pig was involved. For more than 40 years, the two nations had been contending over the Oregon Country, which today comprises Washington, Oregon, Idaho, as well as portions of Montana and Wyoming and the province of British Columbia. On June 15, 1846, the two nations agreed upon the 49th parallel as the international boundary. The final sticking point was possession of the San Juan Islands.

The Hudson's Bay Company allegedly threatened Cutlar with arrest by British authorities if he did not make fair restitution for the pig. This compelled U.S. Army Department of Oregon commander Brigadier General William S. Harney to dispatch a company of the 9th U.S. Infantry, under Captain George E. Pickett, to San Juan on July 27, 1859. British Columbia Governor James Douglas responded by sending three warships under Royal Navy Captain Geoffrey Phipps Hornby to dislodge Pickett, but to avoid an armed clash if possible.

The two sides faced off on the Cattle Point peninsula for more than three months until the arrival of U.S. Army commander Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. Scott and Douglas negotiated a joint occupation of the island until the dispute could be resolved through diplomatic channels. The Americans remained at Cattle Point while British Royal Marines established in March 1860, a comfortable camp on Garrison Bay, 13 miles north.

The joint occupation ended 12 years later when, on October 21, 1872, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, acting as arbitrator, settled the dispute by awarding the San Juan Islands to the United States. And so ended the so-called war in which the only casualty was a pig.

Start your walk by taking the trail through the grove of tall trees in front of you. When you emerge from the grove you will come to a fork in the trail. From here, on a clear day, you can see Mount Baker looming in the east beyond the other San Juan Islands and the old Parade Ground with its white picket fence. *Take the right fork in the trail, briefly skirting the picket fence, then cross the gravel bicycle path to the Laundress Quarters.*

1.

2.



This building once housed as many as three post laundress families during the joint occupation, from 1860 to 1872. Laundresses were officially attached to the post and, like soldiers, were subject to the Articles of War. They normally earned a dollar per head per month doing wash for about 20 soldiers. A laundress had to be married. If she lost her husband, she was given 60 days to find another or would be escorted off the post. While some laundresses ran through several husbands, more typically they were married to sergeants and maintained stable households. One laundress, Catherine McGarey, eventually staked a claim and settled on the island. *Walk down the hill on the grass path and follow the trail markers to the third trail fork.*



3.



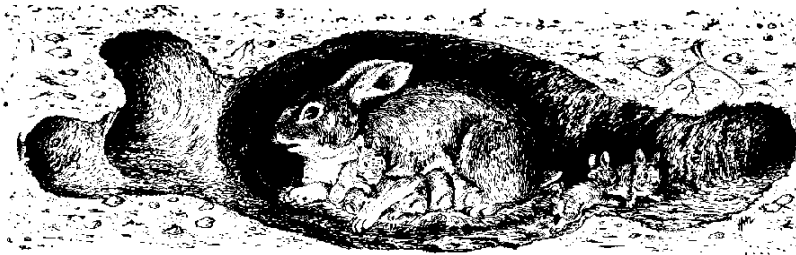
In December 1853, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) employee John Charles Griffin (above) was dispatched from Fort Victoria to establish a sheep ranch on the southern end of San Juan Island. He brought with him four Hawaiian herdsmen, 1,369 sheep, seed for crops...and a few pigs. The company's principle aim was to establish a presence on the island to solidify Great Britain's claim. But Belle Vue Farm, as Griffin called it, actually prospered as an HBC subsidiary. Wool, mutton, fish and produce were traded for furs with the Russian-American Company to the north. *If you wish, take the path through the bushes and down the offshoot trail for about 50 yards.* Just east of the trail you will see a masonry ruin. This is all that remains of the chimney of one of the plantation houses shown below in a photograph taken at the height of the crisis in September 1859. *Return to the main trail, turn right, proceed to number 4.*



4.



This open prairie with its fertile soil was one of the primary reasons the Hudson's Bay Company and Lyman Cutlar chose to come here. After the U.S. Army left in 1874, the land was farmed. The farmhouse at right-center in photo is the Officers' Quarters (the white building inside the Parade Ground fence). The building was restored to its original state by the National Park Service in the 1970s. Cutlar's modest homestead (with potato patch) was about a mile north of here. He walked across this field to confess to the shooting of the pig and offer payment. Griffin turned him down. *Our story continues uphill; proceed along the trail to number 5.*



5.

The hill before you was selected by U.S. Army engineers as the site for an earthwork (or redoubt) that would command the approaches to the shoreline on both sides of the Cattle Point peninsula. Extensive digging went on here from August through October 1859, just as it does today...through the works of one the park's most celebrated (and numerous) creatures -- the European rabbit. The warren network on the hillside just ahead of you is one of hundreds at American Camp. The rabbits were introduced to the island by ranchers in the late 19th century, were released and literally went wild. In some places there are 500 per acre. You may not see them because they are timid and usually remain underground during the day. Today they are prey to golden and bald eagles, red-tailed hawks and red foxes. *Proceed to number 6 by walking up the trail to the large rock at the top of the hill.*

6.

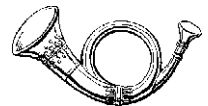


This big rock is named for Henry Martyn Robert, who, as a young engineering officer, designed and supervised the construction of the redoubt to your left. Robert was two years out of West Point when he came here on August 22, 1859. After leaving two months later, he enjoyed a long career in the Corps of Engineers, retiring as its commanding general. He also wrote a little book on parliamentary procedure called *Robert's Rules of Order*. *Take the lower trail to your left, following it along the ditch at the base of the redoubt. Number 7 is about halfway to the end of the redoubt.*



Brigadier William S. Harney, Department of Oregon commander based at Fort Vancouver, had been visiting Governor James Douglas in Victoria on July 8. He heard of the pig incident before meeting the governor. While steaming through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, he spotted an American flag on San Juan not far from where you're standing. He decided to stop and investigate. *Walk to the end of the redoubt to the base of the stairs where you will find number 8.*

7.



8.



Go up the stairs, turn right and take a few steps to the end of the redoubt so that you are facing east toward the end of the island.

Harney was met here by several of the 18 Americans living on the island at the time. They told him that British authorities had ordered Lyman Cutlar to pay for the pig. If he did not, he would be arrested and tried in a British court for destruction of property and criminal trespass. They also reiterated their fears about raids by “Northern Indians” from Southeast Alaska and British Columbia. A renowned Indian fighter, Harney was headstrong by nature. He decided the British government had wrongfully assumed jurisdiction over a disputed territory. Consequently, he ordered Captain George E. Pickett and his Company D, 9th Infantry from Fort Bellingham to occupy the island and protect U.S. citizens from Indian raids *and* the Hudson’s Bay Company. On July 27, 1859, Pickett landed at Old Town Lagoon on Griffin Bay, across the peninsula to your left (see illustration above and cover).



Pickett was a West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran and had spent years enduring the boredom of frontier army life. This assignment, with its prospects for glory, was more to his liking. (This same Pickett later would receive an overdose of glory at Gettysburg.) On landing, he posted an inflammatory proclamation declaring the island “U.S. territory.” He camped on the open hillside above Griffin Bay, despite having been ordered to find a more secure position.



On July 28, recently appointed Royal Magistrate John DeCourcy threatened Pickett with arrest if he did not leave the island. Pickett frostily refused to recognize DeCourcy's authority. The next day, Governor Douglas dispatched the Royal Navy's Captain Geoffrey Phipps Hornby (above) and his 31-gun steam frigate, HMS *Tribune*, to order Pickett off the island -- by force if necessary. Alarmed Royal Navy officers in Victoria talked the governor out of this course, suggesting instead that the governor land Royal Marines on the island, equal to the number of American soldiers. By this time the *Tribune* (above) already was anchored in Griffin Bay, her guns trained on Pickett's camp. Pickett positioned his men and civilian volunteers along the ridge (today's Cattle Point Road), expecting the worst. "We'll make a Bunker Hill of it," he reportedly said. When the HMS *Satellite* arrived on July 30, Pickett decided to move his camp across the peninsula, away from the British guns. He set up his "Spring Camp" on the plain west of today's Pickett's Lane, above South Beach, to your right.

Hornby received Douglas's new orders, which additionally directed him to land the marines on the island, whether or not Pickett agreed. Hornby made contact with Pickett and set up an August 3 meeting in the American's new camp. He also made up his mind ahead of time that he would not force the issue of a landing. He ignored the governor's orders and awaited his superior, Rear Admiral R. Lambert Baynes (right), en route to Victoria from Valparaiso, Chile.





Baynes arrived in Victoria on August 5, at which time Hornby told him about his fruitless August 3 meeting with Pickett. Pickett had at first threatened to resist a British landing, then asked for time to consult with Harney. Hornby added that Pickett probably *would* open fire if the British attempted to land troops. Baynes backed Hornby and ignored the sputtering Douglas, deciding that with three warships in Griffin Bay -- the *Satellite* (above) and HMS *Plumper* had joined the *Tribune* -- they could afford to await diplomatic measures. This judicious decision was consistent with Royal Navy policy around the world. Meanwhile, on August 10, Lieutenant Colonel Silas Casey (above right) arrived aboard the steamer *Julia* from Fort Steilacoom with 180 soldiers. Having been warned beforehand by Pickett that the British might fire on reinforcements, Casey approached cautiously and landed the bulk of his force on South Beach in a thick fog. The steamer USS *Massachusetts* soon followed. Her eight 32-pound naval guns also were unloaded at South Beach and manhandled up the hill before you. The British watched and did nothing. *Turn around and walk to end the redoubt toward Robert's Rock.* As you proceed, note the earthen gun platforms constructed in the interior of the redoubt. Five are complete. Look closely for traces of three others. The platforms were to be timbered to accommodate the naval guns from the *Massachusetts*. Only one gun was emplaced, and the only time it was fired was in honor of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, who visited Griffin Bay on November 7, 1859. *At the end of the redoubt (about even with Robert's Rock), turn right and walk through the fence opening to the parking area. Cross the road to the trail marker and proceed to number 9. Help preserve the redoubt by not walking up and down the interior and exterior faces. Please use the trail.*



9.

After enduring two storms at Spring Camp and wishing to move out of range of the British naval guns, Casey on August 22 relocated the camp to a wooded area just over the hill from Belle Vue farm. The post (photo above left) began as a collection of buildings from Fort Bellingham and conical Sibley tents, shipped from Fort Steilacoom. The British were impressed, Baynes later remarking that the Americans had become strong enough to repel any British action. The redoubt, begun shortly after Casey's arrival, was starting to take shape on the rise east of the new camp as men labored with pick and shovel under the supervision of Lieutenant Robert (below center). But fighting was the last thing anyone wanted. Tourists from Victoria explored the camp and ships, while San Juan Village on Griffin Bay sold liquor and other wares to all comers. Soon, word came that Lieutenant General Winfield Scott was on the way from New York City, to negotiate an end to the incident with Governor Douglas. *Proceed down the hill to the Parade Ground gate.*



10.



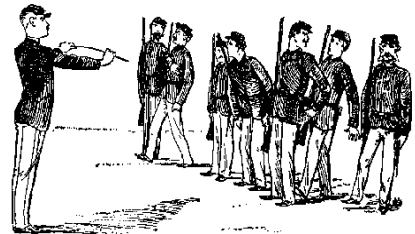
While Casey was building his camp, General Scott (above right) was enroute, having been sent by a horrified President James Buchanan to cool the situation without abandoning U.S. interests. Scott already was an American institution, having fought in the War of 1812 and led the U.S. Army to victory in the war with Mexico in the late 1840s. His six-week trip by steamship, via the Isthmus of Panama, brought him to Port Townsend on October 25, whereupon he began negotiations with Governor Douglas (above left). Scott proposed a joint military occupation, while Douglas insisted on a return to the status quo as it existed before Pickett's landing. After a week of dickering via letters dispatched between Port Townsend and Victoria by revenue cutters, Scott offered to remove Casey's reinforcements, including the artillery, if Douglas would withdraw all but one warship from the harbor. The British government eventually agreed to a joint military occupation. The Royal Marines established their camp (below) on Garrison Bay, 13 miles north of here, on March 21, 1860. *Walk through the gate to the flagpole.*



11.



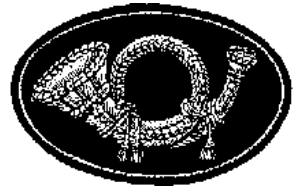
American Camp, shown above in 1868, remained active through July 17, 1874. Eight companies or batteries from four regiments -- all regular army -- under command of 15 different officers would man the post through some of the most tumultuous years of American history. They endured isolation, bad food, worse quarters and crushing boredom. Unlike the officers, enlisted men seldom went home on leave because they could not afford the more than \$300 for steam ship passage east. As an escape, some sneaked off to numb themselves with the rotgut whisky of San Juan Town, knowingly risking company punishment, which might include carrying a 40-pound log around the post perimeter or riding a sawhorse all day. A few committed suicide, while many more took "French leave" (deserted). Officers attempted to head off trouble by keeping the men busy with endless drill, which took place on the expanse of parade ground in front of you. *Walk to the Officers' Quarters.*





American Camp was a forgotten post throughout its 14-year existence, as Congress never appropriated money for repairs or improvements. The lithograph on the cover and the photo on the preceding page show the camp as it looked about 1866. Many of the buildings, including the blockhouse, were shipped from Fort Bellingham by George Pickett. Above is the hospital Pickett first erected at Spring Camp then moved to Casey's site in August 1859. The hospital compound stood outside the fence in the field between the Parade Ground and today's Visitor Center. A clump of brambles marks the site. Despite its tidy appearance, the camp became so run down by 1867 that the camp commander was begging for a new barracks roof. The original had been built with green lumber and "it has now become rotten -- almost uninhabitable, and irreparable." The quarters on officers' row were "shells, battered on the inside, and owing to the exposed position of the garrison, extremely uncomfortable and cold." One commander was "compelled to allow...stable hands (to sleep) in the stables." The Secretary of War denied all requests for improvements.

12.



The Officers' Quarters is one of two surviving structures from American Camp's active army days. It was built in 1860 by George Pickett (below center) during his second tour on San Juan Island. Some of the lumber for the structure probably was salvaged from Fort Bellingham, which had been condemned (for the second time) in April 1860 by General Harney. The building served as a duplex throughout its military history, first shared by Pickett and his second-in-command, First Lieutenant James W. Forsyth (below right). Forsyth was a brigadier general in the Union Army during the Civil War and led the 7th Cavalry at the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890. After the buildings were auctioned off in 1875, the structure was eventually converted into the farm house below. *You have completed your walk. Now, head west across the parade ground, through the fence opening and back to the parking area. If you have any questions, please stop at the Visitor Center.*



