

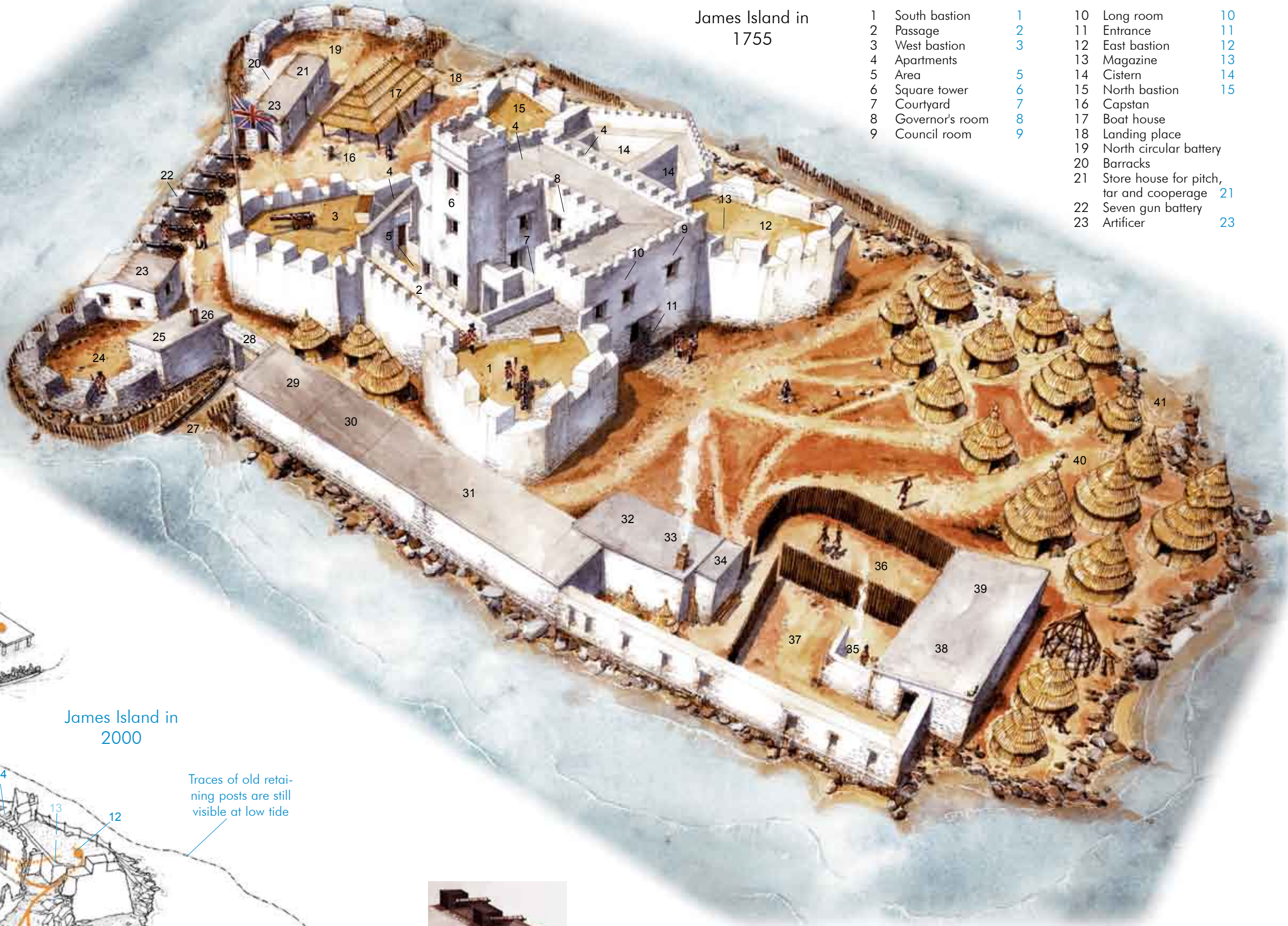
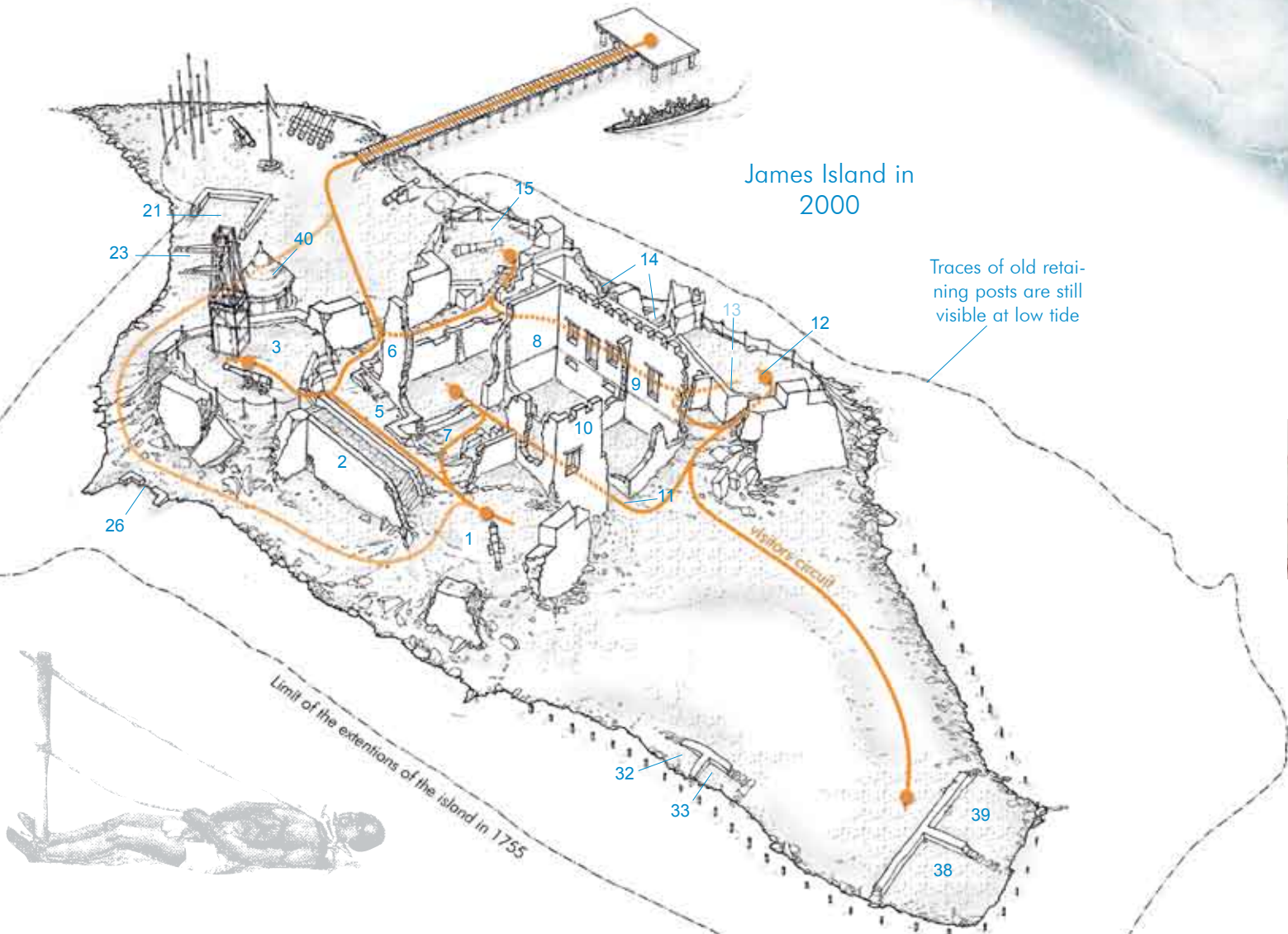
# JAMES ISLAND

## THE GAMBIA



The destruction of Fort James on the river Gambia is a service rendered to mankind. I cannot understand how men who were not born on this small sandy Island can live in this inhospitable place. It is in the middle of a salty river, just two feet above its level, and is fully covered by fortifications, stores, cages, with narrow spaces for men to manoeuvre, and hardly any room to keep a few domestic animals.

Extract from some notes on the possible implementation of a settlement on River Gambia, May 1779, from French Military Archives. Author unknown, on board of the Epervier, a French frigate.



James Island in 1755

- |   |                 |   |    |  |    |
|---|-----------------|---|----|--|----|
| 1 | South bastion   | 1 | 10 | Long room                                | 10 |
| 2 | Passage         | 2 | 11 | Entrance                                 | 11 |
| 3 | West bastion    | 3 | 12 | East bastion                             | 12 |
| 4 | Apartments      |   | 13 | Magazine                                 | 13 |
| 5 | Area            | 5 | 14 | Cistern                                  | 14 |
| 6 | Square tower    | 6 | 15 | North bastion                            | 15 |
| 7 | Courtyard       | 7 | 16 | Capstan                                  |    |
| 8 | Governor's room | 8 | 17 | Boat house                               |    |
| 9 | Council room    | 9 | 18 | Landing place                            |    |
|   |                 |   | 19 | North circular battery                   |    |
|   |                 |   | 20 | Barracks                                 |    |
|   |                 |   | 21 | Store house for pitch, tar and cooperage | 21 |
|   |                 |   | 22 | Seven gun battery                        |    |
|   |                 |   | 23 | Artificer                                | 23 |



Basically, James Island is a small rocky outcrop. It allowed room only for the construction of the fort and was extended to provide space for the complementary buildings. This was created by embankments maintained by piled stakes. The natural processes of decay acting on the stakes, coupled with the partial destruction in 1779, entailed the erosion of the embankments by the waves. This has been a continuous process that is still ongoing, but extremely slowly. James Island and its fort are not sinking, as generally assumed ! However, the Island's banks and the fort require regular maintenance to redress the attack of the windy, humid and salty environment.



- |    |                       |    |
|----|-----------------------|----|
| 24 | West circular battery |    |
| 25 | Granary               |    |
| 26 | Smith shop            | 26 |
| 27 | West landing place    |    |
| 28 | Gateway               |    |
| 29 | End store house       |    |
| 30 | Middle store house    |    |
| 31 | Long store house      |    |
| 32 | Store house           | 32 |
| 33 | Governor's kitchen    | 33 |
| 34 | Wood house            |    |
| 35 | Kitchen               |    |
| 36 | Slave yard for women  |    |
| 37 | Slave yard for men    |    |
| 38 | Men slave house       | 38 |
| 39 | Women slave house     | 39 |
| 40 | Castle slaves huts    |    |
| 41 | Old landing place     |    |



The Gambia, like most parts of West Africa, was inhabited 1.6 million years ago. But the most direct prehistoric evidence in the country are the stone circle sites and the shell mounds which illustrate widespread habitation from around 750 A.D.

By 1456, the Portuguese had established contact with the indigenous population, introducing new influences. Thus began a period of cross-cultural relations which, over the next five hundred years, substantially changed the face

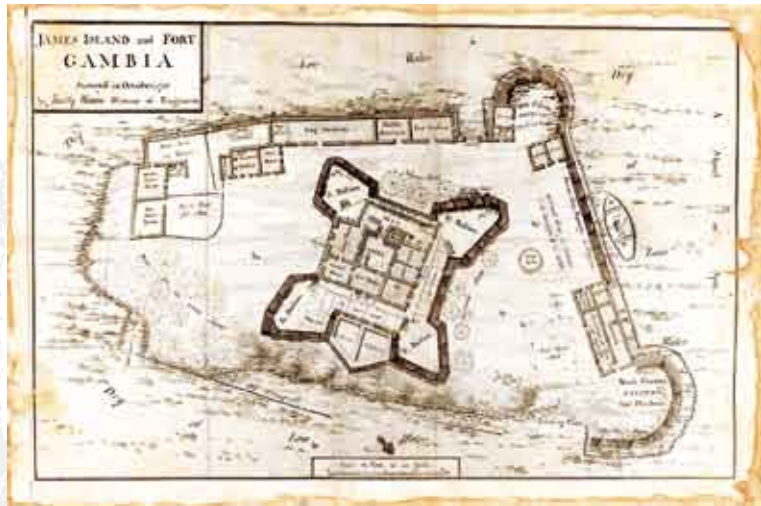


The slave trade became one of the most profitable business between West Africa and the Americas. Its peak was between the 1500s and the late 1700s. The vestiges of this inhuman trade can still be seen today in remains of European trading posts. The most important of them is James Island.

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On Banyon Point (Banjul), a Six-Gun artillery battery was built, covering fire to deter illicit slavers. But it was found that the effective range of the guns was not sufficient to cover the full width of the river. Therefore, in 1826, Fort Bullen was erected on Barra Point to provide crossing fire from the North Bank. As such, Fort Bullen, built to arrest the slave trade, was the antithesis of James Island Fort which had been constructed for the perpetuation of European trading interests.

In 1829, James Island had outlived its usefulness and was finally abandoned.



- 1456** A Portuguese sailor, in the entourage of Luiz de Cadamosto, dies and is buried on the Island which is named St Andrew Island after him.
- 1651** The fort is built by servants of the Duke of Courland in an attempt to establish an empire in this part of the world.
- 1661** The fort is seized by the Royal Adventurers of England and the island is renamed James Island after James, Duke of York.
- 1695** The fort is seized by the French three times (1695, 1702, 1704). They blow up some of the walls and bastions. The fort is reconstructed in 1698. It is repaired in 1703 after a partial destruction by fire.
- 1708** The Royal Adventurers of England garrison in the fort mutinies.
- 1709** The island is abandoned.
- 1714** The fort is reconstructed (till 1717).
- 1719** Pirates seize the Island and carry off all the goods and slaves.
- 1720** During a period of about 9 years, there are raids and counter raids between the French and English. The fort is reconstructed twice: in 1721, and with improvements, after the explosion of the powder magazine in 1726.
- 1764** Constant friction between the English at James Island and the French at Albreda.
- 1768** Unsuccessful attack of James Island by 500 'Niumi' men.
- 1779** James island is seized by the French without firing a shot and the fort is destroyed.
- 1808** The slave trade is outlawed by England.
- 1829** James Island is abandoned.



1. James Island
2. Fort Bulien (Barre)
3. Six Gun Battery
4. Old French trading House (Albredo)
5. San Domingo (Jufureh)
6. Slave House (Georgetown)
7. Stone Circles (Massu)
8. Bending Crocodile Pool

- James Island and related sites
- Other sites of major interest in the Gambia



This leaflet was prepared within the frame of Africa 2009, with the support of the World Monument Fund, American Express Design CRAlerte - Arno Misse, printed in France by Bastianelli Clerc Impresor

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