

Cape Hatteras

National Seashore
North Carolina

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Welcome to the Outer Banks

Between broad, shallow sounds to the west and the foaming surf of the Atlantic to the east lie the windswept Outer Banks of North Carolina—a string of barrier islands where wind, sea, and sand have contended with each other for ages. Here long stretches of beach, sand dunes, and marshlands have

been set aside as Cape Hatteras National Seashore, a park offering many opportunities for stimulating outdoor recreation and rewarding exploration in nature and history. Here you can swim and fish and sunbathe, climb the tower of an 1870 lighthouse, and see a variety of wildlife.

But Cape Hatteras offers something besides the pleasure of refreshing activity. On these lonely, isolated islands, those who seek it can still enjoy that vanishing state of being called solitude.

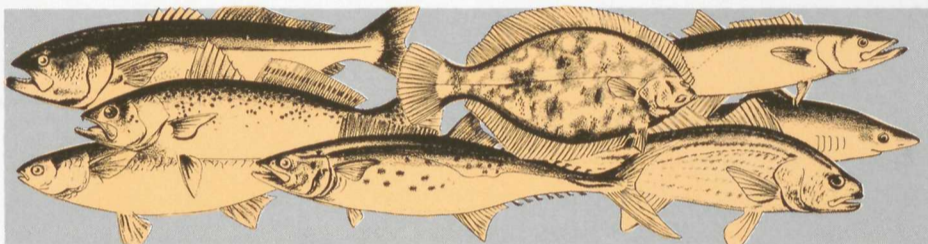
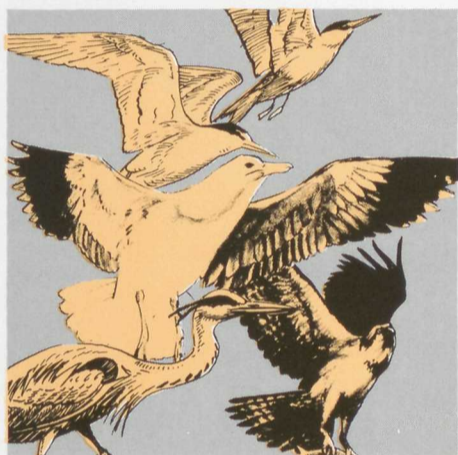


Shoreline adventures. Children, especially, are fascinated by seashells along the shore. But marsh pools and ponds can be just as intriguing. There's always the chance of seeing mussels, blue crabs, minnows, fiddler crabs, or other inhabitants of the cord-grass.

Food from the marsh washes out with the tide supplying nourishment for nearby clams and oysters and many kinds of fishes.

Near Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the Buxton Woods self-guiding nature trail describes life in the wetlands.

Scientists have found that the tidal marsh is rich in nutrients.



Shorebirds and fishes. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded on Cape Hatteras, where fresh- and salt-water ponds and marshes supply food for permanent residents as well as those birds

migrating along the Atlantic fly-way. Snow geese winter here as do Canada geese and many species of ducks.

Observation platforms at Pea Island National Wildlife

Refuge give you a chance to spot unusual specimens.

Flounder, bluefish, marlin, dolphin, mackerel, striped bass, tuna—the waters around the park support these and

other fishes providing a wide variety of sport and commercial fishing. You can enjoy surf fishing, deep-sea fishing, pier fishing, or fishing in the sound. As elsewhere, "fisherman's luck" prevails.

An Ongoing Battle with the Sea

The history of the Outer Banks is so full of stories about ships in distress and shipwrecks that this coast has come to be known as the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." A combination of conditions extremely hazardous to ships is responsible for this grim epithet. Here, two ocean currents used as shipping lanes come very close to Diamond Shoals—the shallow sand bars that extend about 16 kilometers (10 miles) into the Atlantic from

Cape Hatteras. Ships taking advantage of these northward- and southward-flowing currents are forced to follow a narrow channel or run aground on the shoals. This situation is further complicated by the fact that at sea it's sometimes very difficult to recognize landmarks along the low sand dunes of the Cape. Other factors such as bad weather and poor navigation can also contribute to the problem.

To warn seafarers of these treacherous waters, Congress has authorized over the years construction of several lighthouses on the Outer Banks. And beyond that are the many courageous rescue efforts made by men of the U.S. Life Saving Service and then the U.S. Coast Guard. They have faced the very same dangers of the sea that threatened the lives of those they were rescuing. This tradition of lifesaving remains strong today.



Beacons on the banks. Today, three lighthouses within the park—and a Texas tower out on Diamond Shoals—guide mariners along this dangerous coast.

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse (left) is the tallest in North America, and with its distinctive candy-striped pattern has become the most popular landmark in the area. More importantly, it serves as a primary navigational aid visible both day and night for a distance of 32 kilometers (20 miles) out to sea.



Courtesy Aycock Brown

Every-ready rescuers. Hatteras men manned stations of the U.S. Life Saving Service here from its beginnings in the 1870s. Built 11 kilometers (7 miles) apart, each station had boats, beach carts and horses, and special beach apparatus; during the winter season, each had a crew of seven or eight men and a keeper.

When a ship in distress was spotted, men from the nearest station hauled their oar-powered boat to the beach, launched



it into the crashing surf, rowed to the stricken vessel to take people off, and returned to shore, again through heavy surf.

In 1915 the Service was merged with the

Revenue Cutter Service to form the U.S. Coast Guard. Today, three modern stations carry on the job of saving lives and property along the Hatteras coast.



Stranded victims. As crowds watch from the shore, a breeches buoy is used to rescue a crewmember from a ship foundering in the surf off Cape Hatteras.

Another casualty, the *G. A. Kohler* (above) sailing out of Balti-

more, lies high and dry on the beach in 1934.

These are just two of the more than 600 ships that have fallen victim to the sea along this coast during the past 400 years. Only bits and pieces remain, partly

buried in the sand or submerged in the surf, reminders of man's battle with the sea.

Safety Today

Lighthouses and life-saving stations on the Cape are symbols of a long history of concern for people in distress. In that tradition, please observe these safety tips so that your visit will be a pleasant one.

Strong littoral currents, rip currents, and shifting sand make swimming particularly dangerous. Tidal currents are hazardous near inlets. Offshore winds can quickly blow air mattresses and other flotation devices out to sea.

Swim only where lifeguards are on

duty. Ocean swimming is not like swimming in a pool, pond, or lake. If this is your first ocean visit, please contact a lifeguard or ranger for further information. Special demonstrations are given by lifeguards during summer months.

Sunburn can cause a great deal of discomfort; it can even ruin your vacation. The combination of bright sun, water, and sand can cause a burn quickly, so short periods of exposure and the use of protective waterproof lotions are recommended.

Hurricanes are not common, but might occur in August or September, and winter storms, called Northeasters, should not be taken lightly. Efforts will be made to leave low-lying areas should any of these storms occur.

Be sure to walk—never drive—across the **barrier dune** to the sand beaches. Park your car only in designated parking areas to avoid getting stuck in soft sands. Ramps are provided only for vehicles properly equipped to drive on the soft sand. Check with

rangers or at visitor centers for special regulations governing off-road vehicle travel.

Bicyclists should use extreme caution because there are no established bike trails within the park.

Mosquitos and other insect pests can make your trip an ordeal if you don't come prepared with an effective repellent and suitable mosquito netting for camping.

Lightweight **clothing** in summer should be adequate to protect you from the sun and

keep you comfortable in the cool evening breezes. You should wear shoes when walking to the beach, over dunes, or in campgrounds. Warm, wind-resistant clothing is needed during winter months when high humidity and northerly winds make the weather much colder than temperatures indicate.

Limited **medical services** are available in Hatteras village on Hatteras Island, in Manteo on Roanoke Island, and in Nags Head.

Please do not hesitate to ask park rang-

ers for help. They are here to answer your questions or assist you in any way to make your visit comfortable, enjoyable, and safe.

Cape Hatteras

Places to Go

Beginning at Whalebone Junction, the park includes part of Bodie Island (pronounced "body"), Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Hatteras Island, and Ocracoke Island. The islands are connected by bridge or ferry, and you can drive the length of the park on Highway 12—a relatively narrow paved road with soft shoulders. The road passes through eight small villages that reflect the culture of the Outer Banks. They are not a part of the park.

Here are some places that might interest you along the way; the numbers correspond to numbers on

the map. Symbols will help you locate where to camp, fish, swim, or find information.

1 Stop at **Whalebone Junction Information Center** for assistance in planning your visit and for current information about accommodations in the area. Free informational brochures and activity schedules are available here and at all visitor centers.

2 **SandCastle**, a children's activity center on Bodie Island, offers interpretive programs daily in the summer. These programs are geared to children but are open to people of all ages.

The wind generator there demonstrates an alternate method of producing energy.

3 At **Coquina Beach**, the remains of the shipwrecked *Laura A. Barnes* are accessible to the visitor. This four-masted schooner was stranded on a sand bar off Bodie Island in 1921. Nearby, lifesaving operations are re-enacted weekly in summer with reproductions of equipment used by the U.S. Life Saving Service.

4 You are invited to visit **Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge** to see many species of protected birds

and animals. The refuge is operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

5 The **three lighthouses** within the park are located on Bodie Island, Hatteras Island, and Ocracoke Island. The lighthouse tower at Cape Hatteras is open to the public during daylight hours.

6 A **ferryboat** runs between Hatteras Island and Ocracoke Island during daylight hours. It is free of charge.

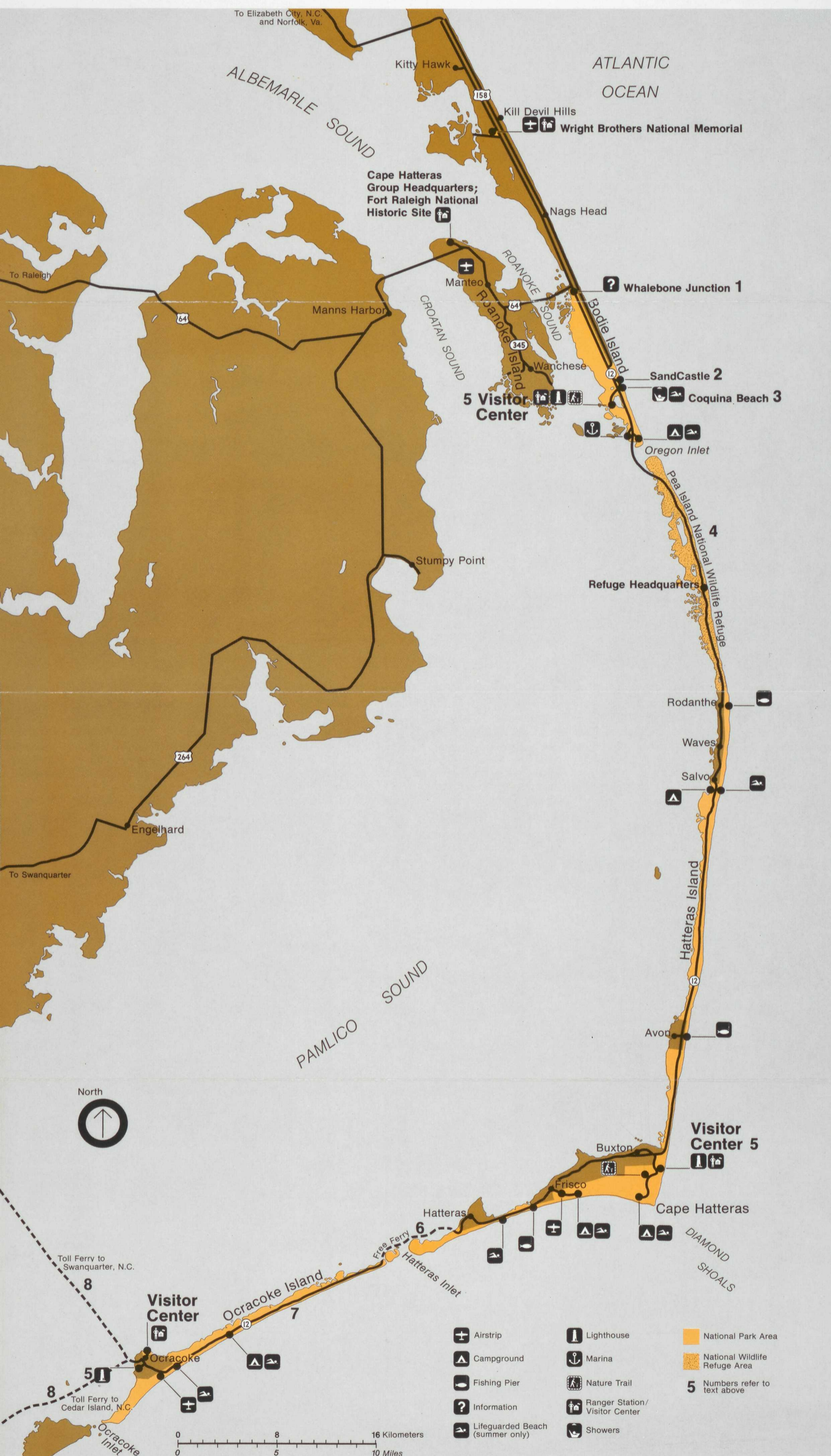
7 **Ocracoke Island** and the tiny village around Silver Lake, because they are somewhat isolated,

have retained much of their early charm and character. Blackbeard sold his pirate's booty here in the early 1700s. You might see another reminder of the past on your visit—the remnant of a once-large herd of banker ponies.

8 **Toll ferryboats** operate between Ocracoke and Cedar Island (2¼ hours) and between Ocracoke and Swanquarter (2 hours) connecting the park with the mainland. Visitors should check ferry schedules well in advance. Reservations are required. Call Ocracoke (919) 928-3841; Cedar Island (919) 225-3551.

Outside the park Not too far northwest of Whalebone Junction is **Fort Raleigh National Historic Site**. The park commemorates the "Lost Colony," one of several unsuccessful attempts by Sir Walter Raleigh to settle Roanoke Island in the 1580s.

You can also visit **Wright Brothers National Memorial**, 14.5 kilometers (9 miles) north of Whalebone Junction. It was on the sand flats at the foot of Kill Devil Hill that Wilbur and Orville Wright flew the first heavier-than-air powered airplane in 1903.



Camping in the Park

Campsites are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. No utility connections are provided, and camping is permitted only in designated campgrounds. Sand and wind conditions require longer than normal tent stakes. Awnings for shade and netting for insect protection will make camping more enjoyable.

All of the campgrounds in the park have cold showers, drinking water, tables, grills, and modern restrooms—except Ocracoke, which has pit toilets. Oregon Inlet, Cape Point

(at Cape Hatteras) and Ocracoke campgrounds are open all year; Salvo and Frisco are open during peak travel periods. Dumping stations are located near Oregon Inlet campground, Cape Point campground, and Ocracoke campground.

A group camping area is available upon request; reservations must be made in advance.

Administration Cape Hatteras Group includes Cape Hatteras National Seashore as well as nearby Fort Raleigh National

Historic Site and Wright Brothers National Memorial. The parks are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through a general superintendent. The Group sponsors an Environmental Study Area near Bodie Island, which is available to groups by reservation. For information write to Division of Interpretation, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Route 1, Box 675, Manteo, NC 27954, or telephone (919) 473-2111.

