

Cape Lookout

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cape Lookout National Seashore
North Carolina



Beach Camping



Ah, camping at the beach. Sea, sand, sun, brilliant sunsets and dark skies. Swimming, surfing, fishing, clamming, crabbing and evening campfires. These are the things that memories are made of. The following information will insure that your camping trip to the seashore is a safe and enjoyable one.

All camping is done in the primitive style



Camping at Cape Lookout National Seashore is a different experience from camping at other national or state park areas. There are no established campgrounds in the park and few other amenities, such as water pumps or toilets, available within the park's boundaries. All camping is primitive. You must bring everything you need and take all trash with you.

Camping Permits:

A backcountry camping permit is required for camping within the seashore. These permits are free of charge and are available at each of the park's visitor centers as well as at self-serve permit stations on each of the islands. You may camp for up to 14 consecutive days.

Finding a Camping Spot:

Camping is permitted on all islands within Cape Lookout National Seashore; however, there are no designated campsites. Tent campers may set up among, but not on, the dunes just behind the ocean beach as well as on the sound-side of the island.



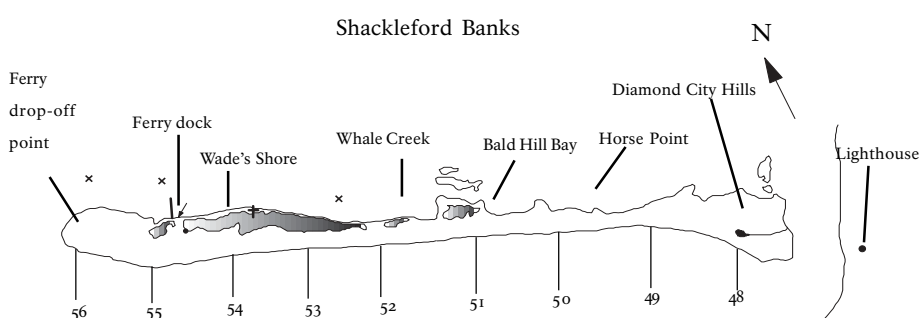
Vehicle camping:

Vehicle camping is permitted only on North and South Core Banks. All vehicles and trailers must remain on the ocean beach or use the designated pull-outs near Cape Lookout point. Vehicles are not allowed to camp on the sound-side of the island.

Areas Closed to Camping:

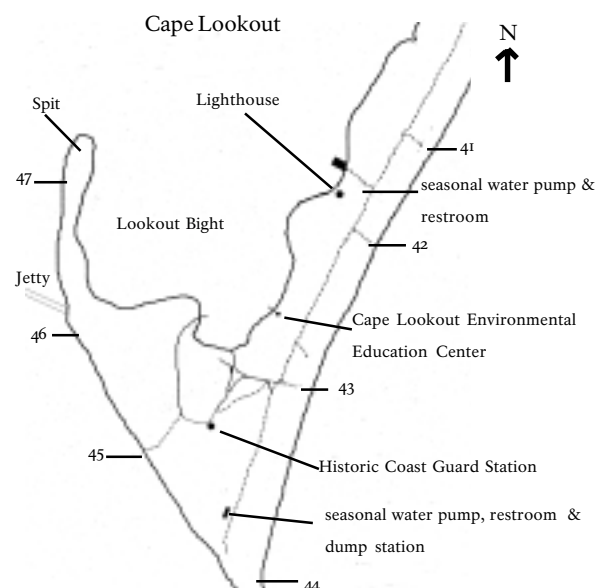
- Harkers Island Visitor Center site
- designated long-term parking lots/areas
- in concession cabin areas
- within 100 yards of the lighthouse, or any cabin or house
- within 100 feet of any docks, shade shelters, restrooms or other structures.
- in areas closed for sea turtle and bird nesting
- within Portsmouth Village Historic District
- within the grounds of the historic Cape Lookout Coast Guard Station

General maps of the most popular camping areas.



Note:

These maps are not in scale with each other nor oriented to each other. They are for general use only. Mile markers (41-56) are indicated for ease of orientation. On the islands, mile signs mark the beach in one-mile increments starting at Ocracoke Inlet.



Weather & Tides



Wherever you set up your campsite, be sure that the site you have selected is above the high tide zone. In North Carolina, the tidal change is generally between two and four feet. If rain storms are predicted during your stay, be sure that your campsite is above, or out of the way of, the higher storm tides. High winds during a storm can push waves higher on the beach than during calm weather.

Weather conditions can change rapidly on the islands. During the summer months, afternoon thunderstorms can occur. These storms pass quickly, but lightning can strike dunes, beach and water.

Hurricane season begins on June 1 and ends on November 30. The park will be evacuated and closed if a hurricane threatens the area. Please check the visitor center for the latest watches and warnings.

Tents, Bugs & Campfires



Tents:

For adequate shelter, a tent that has insect netting and is designed to withstand strong winds is recommended. To anchor the tent properly, use stakes that are about one foot in length. Standard stakes may not hold in the sand under high wind conditions.

Bugs:

Biting insects such as mosquitoes, greenhead flies, deerflies and gnats are active throughout the seashore during the months of May through October. Chiggers and ticks can also be found. Carry insect repellent with you.



Campfires:

Campfires are permitted in the park, but only on open beaches below the high tide line.



It is generally best to bring your firewood with you. Driftwood may be collected but is extremely limited. Only dead and down (already on the ground) wood may be collected for firewood. You may not cut down trees, including the trees of the “ghost forest” on Shackleford Banks, nor cut up the timbers of old shipwrecks for firewood.

It is a good idea to bring a campstove or charcoal grill for cooking.

Food & Water



Drinking Water:

You need to bring plenty of water for drinking and cooking. Fresh water is very limited and available only seasonally at a few widely dispersed locations. Do not depend on water being available in the park as weather conditions may unexpectedly render these sources unfit for drinking.

Food:

There are no snackbars, restaurants or campstores on the seashore. All food must be brought with you.

Store your food and water properly:

Proper food storage, including fish bait, is a must. Sea gulls and raccoons are very adept at raiding your camp. Raccoons will break through screens, chew their way into tents, open coolers, break into the storage well on kayaks and even board boats anchored just offshore in their quest for food. Store all food and bait in sturdy containers with locking lids.



Sanitation & Trash Disposal



Sanitation:

Toilet facilities are available in a few, widely spaced locations. Composting toilets are located at the end of the boardwalk near the lighthouse, on the back trail near Cape Lookout Point, on the road from Portsmouth Village to the beach, and on Shackleford at Wade's Shore and near the dock. The cabin camp areas have facilities available for day use.

If camping away from these areas, the use of “catholes” to properly dispose of human waste is important. Select a site above the high tide line and where others will be unlikely to walk or camp. With a small trowel, dig a hole about 6-8 inches deep and 4-6 inches in diameter. Cover the cathole when finished. Using this method minimizes the possibility of spreading disease.

Properly dispose of ALL trash:

Trash includes fish scraps and old bait, as well as leftover food, empty bottles and cans, wrappers and anything that smells like food. Put fish scraps in the ocean or sound away from campsites and cabin areas. Secure all other trash in sturdy containers.

Do not bury your trash! The sand is constantly moving and buried trash resurfaces quickly. This causes problems for other visitors and for wildlife.



Take your trash with you when you leave the park for disposal on the mainland.

Emergencies: Where to get help



The following locations have park staff or concession staff available (in season) to provide emergency assistance: Cape Lookout Lighthouse Keepers' Quarters, Great Island Cabin Area (formerly Alger Willis), Long Point Cabin Area (formerly Morris), Historic Portsmouth Village.

Cell phones:

Cell phones work in most locations on the islands. When making a 911 call, be sure to tell the dispatcher: 1-- your cell phone number (in case you lose contact). 2-- you are calling from Cape Lookout National Seashore, which island and as exact a location on the island as you can give. 3--the nature of your emergency.