

Cape Lookout

Cape Lookout National Seashore
North Carolina

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Surf fishing is a popular activity. Knobbed whelk shells (top right) and horseshoe crabs are sometimes washed ashore.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF PAUL DESCHERER
FOOTBALLS AND © BRITT BROWN

The present lighthouse, completed in 1859, can be seen 15 miles out to sea. Its diamond pattern (day mark) and flash pattern tells mariners their location.

Fishing was the main occupation of the islanders.

Black skimmers
(above)
© BRITT BROWN

Shackleford Banks is home to more than 100 wild horses.

© BRITT BROWN

People have been returning to these islands for generations.

A Loggerhead turtle hatchling crawls to the sea. (above left) Red Knots (above right) stop here during spring and fall migration.

© BRITT BROWN

Clam and cockle shells

ALL IMAGES NPS UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED



Looking towards Portsmouth from the top of Cape Lookout lighthouse.

© BRITT BROWN

And so in my mind's eye these coastal forms merge and blend in a shifting, kaleidoscopic pattern in which there is no finality, no ultimate and fixed reality - Earth becoming fluid as the Sea itself.

The Edge of the Sea
Rachel Carson



Cape Lookout National Seashore is wild, beautiful, and remote. This isolated strip of sand is one of the few remaining undeveloped barrier island systems in the world. The rhythm of nature is evident here. Waves crash, winds blow, currents shift, and storms batter this dynamic landscape, where change is certain and survival difficult. The last residents left in 1971, but some of their

homes can still be seen, and their sense of community and love for this place can still be felt.

In the midst of this changing landscape connections to the past and the renewal of life are evident. Sea turtles, piping plovers, and American oystercatchers return, laying eggs on the same

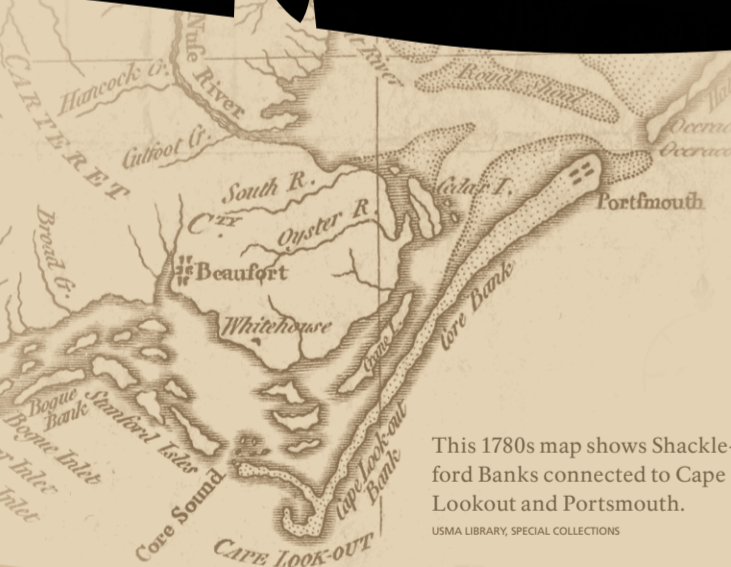
beach where their lives began. People travel back to visit historic villages, cast their lines, and swap stories about the catch of the day and previous generations who fished from these shores.

Step off a ferry and into a world where birds outnumber people and wild Shackleford horses roam. Enjoy the beach and ocean views, wiggle

your toes in the sand, gather shells, and surf cast. Watch the sunrise and sunset and see one of the best night sky views on the east coast. Connect with the rhythms of nature on the southern Outer Banks.



WIND, WEATHER, AND WAVES



This 1780s map shows Shackleford Banks connected to Cape Lookout and Portsmouth.

USMA LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Stand anywhere along North Core, South Core (named for the Coree Indians), and Shackleford Banks and you can be assured of one thing—it is changing. Undeveloped and controlled by the forces of nature, inlets open and close, shoals advance and retreat, sands shift, and islands roll. Sometimes the change is small, other times dangerous, dramatic, and life-altering. Waves, currents, tides, winds, sea level, and storms continually build, erode, and sculpt this ribbon of sand.

Barrier islands are the first line of defense during storms; absorbing the impact of surges, they protect coastal communities and marine life. At Cape Lookout National Seashore beaches, dunes, grasslands, maritime forests, and salt marshes provide home and refuge to a rich variety of vegetation and wildlife.

Fisherman harvesting oysters

© NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME MUSEUM



Oysters filter water as they feed in the intertidal zone, the area covered by water at high tide and exposed at low tide. One oyster can clean 50 gallons of water in 24 hours.

Eastern oyster

© SMITHSONIAN MARINE STATION



SHARE THE BEACH



Loggerhead hatchlings

© BRITT BROWN

Sea turtle hatchlings head straight to the ocean. Closing beaches to vehicles, about 10 days before hatches, smooths ruts helping the hatchlings reach the ocean.



Shackleford horses need protection too. Please stay 50 or more feet away to avoid disturbing these wild horses and endangering yourself.

© BRITT BROWN

The beach is a special habitat. People come here for recreation, but for wildlife this is home, a place to find food, rest during long migrations, and have their young. Sea turtles and shore birds build their nests on the beach. It's their nursery. Park staff monitor the shore and set up buffers to preserve nesting sites.

Help us protect their babies: • Respect protected areas and follow regulations. • Pets must be kept under control on a six-foot leash at all times. • Dispose of fishing line properly. Thanks for caring. Thanks for sharing the beach.

Piping plover chicks and eggs

© BRITT BROWN

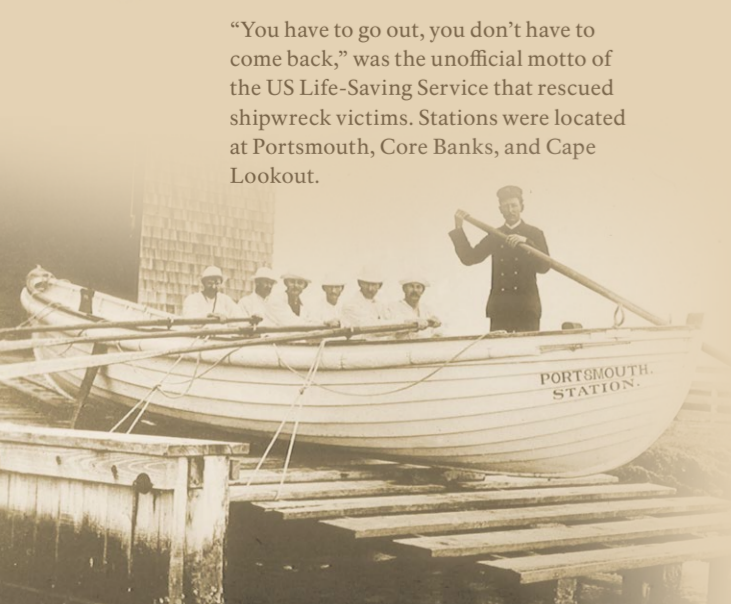


American oystercatcher chick

© BRITT BROWN

Shore birds build their nests in the sand, making them difficult to see. Closures help protect these nests, eggs, and baby birds.

WAVES OF GENERATIONS



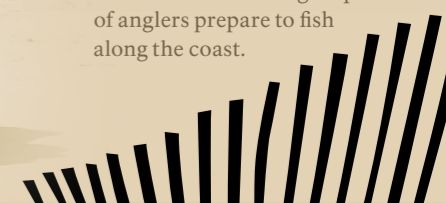
"You have to go out, you don't have to come back," was the unofficial motto of the US Life-Saving Service that rescued shipwreck victims. Stations were located at Portsmouth, Core Banks, and Cape Lookout.

Since prehistoric times people have been drawn to these barrier islands. American Indians hunted and fished along these banks and in 1753 a planned community, Portsmouth Village, was laid out. For over one hundred years it was the busiest seaport in North Carolina. Over time, storms and the constant

motion of sea, sand, and wind narrowed the entrance into Ocracoke Inlet. In 1846 a hurricane opened a new, deeper inlet at Hatteras and shipping routes shifted north. Fishing became the primary occupation for the islanders who stayed.



Generations of "Bankers" have hunted and fished on these islands. Here a group of anglers prepare to fish along the coast.



Exploring Undeveloped Barrier Islands

START YOUR VISIT to Cape Lookout National Seashore at the visitor center on Harkers Island, open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. From I-95 take US 70 east to Otway, NC, turn right on Harkers Island Road and continue to the visitor center, located at the end of the road.

PLAN AHEAD FOR AN ENJOYABLE VISIT

All access to the national seashore is by ferry or private boat. These islands are wild and undeveloped—no paved roads, concession stands, stores, restaurants, or trash cans. Restrooms are few and far between. **Be Prepared:** Please bring everything you need with you, including snacks/food, hand sanitizer, protective clothing/hat and sunscreen. **Water:** Please bring two liters of water per person per day. **Insects:** May to October mosquitoes, sand gnats, and chiggers can be a problem. Bring plenty of repellent. Ticks live on Shackleford Banks, check yourself often. **Trash:** Bring a trash bag and carry out all trash with you. **Comfort:** Wear comfortable clothing and shoes that can get wet. **Weather:** Check the weather and plan for high and low tides. **Pets:** Pets must be kept under control on a six-foot leash at all times. **Firearms:** For regulations, check the park website.

GETTING TO THE ISLANDS

Nearby towns offer ferry services to these islands. For ferry schedules and toll information contact the park or check the Ferry Services page at www.nps.gov/calo.

ACTIVITIES

Camping: Primitive beach camping only. For information go to the camping page at www.nps.gov/calo. **Swimming:** There are no life-guards. Rip currents occur along the beach creating dangerous water conditions. **Boating:** Make sure you have current navigational charts on board and follow marked channels. The sound is shallow; it is easy to run aground. Monitor the tides. **Cabins:** Rustic cabins at Long Point and Great Island offer beachfront views of the pristine, undeveloped barrier islands. Make reservations online at Recreation.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

Cape Lookout National Seashore
131 Charles Street
Harkers Island, NC 28531
252-728-2250
www.nps.gov/calo

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.



Harkers Island
The main visitor center is located on the eastern end of Harkers Island. This is a passenger ferry departure site.

Beaufort Visitor Information Center
Ferry departures

Harkers Island Visitor Center
Park Headquarters

Great Island
Open seasonally

South Core Banks
The Cape Lookout lighthouse, Cape Lookout Historic Village, and Great Island cabins are all located on this southeast facing island.

Cape Lookout Village Historic District
This historic village is about two miles south of the Cape Lookout lighthouse and has the Cape Lookout US Life-Saving Station and a US Coast Guard Station.

Cape Lookout lighthouse, circa 1898
ALL IMAGES NPS UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

Portsmouth Village
Open seasonally

US Life-Saving Service

Portsmouth Methodist Church
© MICHAEL HALMRSKI

Portsmouth Village Historic District
Portsmouth Village was established as a lightering port, to move cargo from heavier seagoing ships to lighter boats moving inland. Visit this village for a glimpse of what life was like on a barrier island from the 1750s to 1971.

Rustic rental cabins

North Core Banks
The northernmost point of the park is on this southeast facing island. North Core Banks also contains the Long Point cabins.

Red drum
US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE NETWORK BY COLLEGE RAVER

Shipwreck remains

Wading in the surf
© STEFANE RICHARDSON

Shackleford Banks
Shackleford Banks is about nine miles long and has the largest maritime forest in the park. Its wide southwestern shore is left exposed to the threat of southwest storms.

It is home to a herd of wild horses which is monitored by the National Park Service in partnership with the Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc.

Surfing off Shackleford Banks
© BRITT BROWN

Shackleford horses

The salt marsh (pictured below and shown as light green on the map above) is one of the most diverse ecosystems at Cape Lookout. Marsh grasses provide food for insects as well as Shackleford horses. In the fall grasses break down, becoming a food source for crabs, shrimp, and fish

The salt marsh is a vital nursery for many species of crustaceans and fish. It provides abundant food and protection from predators. Many species of birds flock here to feed on insects, fish, crabs, and other invertebrates.
© BRITT BROWN



Water depths from 0-6 feet (0-2 meters) are typical in Core and Back Sounds. New shoals and channels form continually. National Ocean Survey charts are essential for safe navigation in these waters.
Some land within the park remains private property; please respect the owner's rights.
Ocean coastline derived from Landsat 8 imagery taken on October 10, 2014.

- Natural areas within Cape Lookout NS**
- Maritime forest
 - Beach/grassland
 - Saltmarsh
 - Tidal flat
 - Toll ferry
 - Outer Banks National Scenic Byway (ferry connection to Ocracoke Island)
- Facilities and Services**
- Information
 - Lodging
 - Picnic area
 - Restrooms
 - Picnic shelter
 - Passenger ferry
 - Vehicle ferry
 - Showers
 - Drinking water
 - Sanitary disposal station