

Wright Brothers

NATIONAL MEMORIAL • NORTH CAROLINA

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ADMINISTRATION

Wright Brothers National Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 457, Manteo, N.C. 27954, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service



Just after the turn of the century, these lonesome dunes of Kitty Hawk became a hub of activity, when two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, made them the proving ground for their experiments with flight.

The Wright brothers were born and raised in the Midwest, and from childhood had a keen interest in science. Their inspiration to pursue the problems of flight came from Otto Lilienthal, the "father of gliding." Through gliding experiments in his native Germany, Lilienthal had been the first to explain why curved wing surfaces were superior to flat wing surfaces in flying machines. Wilbur and Orville began to experiment, gathering information about lift, balance, and the warping and twisting of wings.

To test their theories they needed a place with fairly constant winds. By checking records from the Weather Bureau at Washington, D.C., they decided on Kitty Hawk. The brothers carried on experiments with their gliders here in 1900, 1901, and 1902, improving each model over the preceding one. They made more than a thousand glider flights from the top of Kill Devil Hill, setting many records for distances and time in the air.

By 1903 Wilbur and Orville felt that they had conquered the problems of flight and were ready to test their theories on a motor-driven, heavier-than-air machine. On December 17, 1903, their flying machine lifted off the level sand a few hundred feet north of Kill Devil Hill and moved forward under its own power. The plane was in the air about 12 seconds and traveled some 120 feet. Although the distance and the length of time in the air seem short, this was the first successful, powered, man-carrying airplane flight in history. The age of aviation had dawned.

HOW TO REACH THE MEMORIAL

Wright Brothers National Memorial is at Kill Devil Hills, N.C., 50 miles southeast of Elizabeth City, via U.S. 158.

Buses travel regularly to Kill Devil Hills. For private aircraft, there is a 3,000-foot, paved airstrip within the park near the "first flight" area. The airstrip is governed by Federal Aviation Agency regulations. Parking at the tie-down area adjacent to the airstrip is limited to 24 hours. There are no supplies, hanger space, or repair service available. The closest service airport is on Roanoke Island, at Manteo.

WHAT TO SEE

We suggest you go first to the visitor center, where the story of the Wright brothers is told through exhibits and full-scale reproductions of the 1902 glider and the 1903 flying machine.

The Wright Memorial Shaft, atop Kill Devil Hill, is constructed of gray granite from Mt. Airy, N.C. Completed in 1932, the 60-foot pylon stands on a dune of once-shifting sand, now stabilized by grass and shrubs.

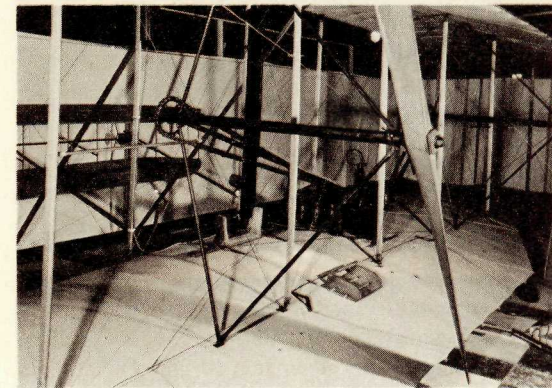
Just north of Kill Devil Hill, adjacent to the "first flight" area, are two wooden structures—a reconstruction of the Wrights' 1903 camp—built by the Park Service in 1963. One building duplicates that used by the brothers as a hanger and workshop. The other is similar to the one used for storage and equipment, and is furnished with items of the 1903 period, much like those the Wrights used when they were here.

On the historic first flight area a large granite boulder marks the spot where the plane first left the ground. Numbered markers indicate the distance of each of the four flights made that day.

NEARBY POINTS OF INTEREST

Beginning about 10 miles south of the memorial is Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Stretching southward for 70 miles, these narrow, sandy islands provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities.

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, located on Roanoke Island, about 17 miles southwest of the memorial, may be reached via U.S. 64-264. This is the site of England's unsuccessful first attempt at colonizing the North American continent. Raleigh's settlement disappeared shortly after its establishment and is known as the Lost Colony.



Courtesy Smithsonian Institution

