



Tips for Planning a Field Trip

The undeveloped islands of Cape Lookout National Seashore offer pristine examples of barrier island ecology while the historic lighthouse and villages provide a glimpse into the lives of the people who have called these islands home. A field trip to the park can be an excellent way to connect classes to these subjects. However, the remote nature of the park means that class trips require advanced planning. The following information is designed to aid teachers and school administrators in their preparation for school trips to the park.

General Information

Class Safety

It is best to plan on bringing one adult (teachers or other chaperones) for every five students. The islands are vast and allow for many places for students to get confused or turned around, and there are many temptations for students to explore unsafe activities.

It is important for students and chaperones to bring plenty of drinking water for use during their visit. This is especially important for trips planned for May through August or for trips where a significant amount of hiking will be required, but all groups should be prepared.

There are no lifeguards at Cape Lookout National Seashore. Unless you plan on providing your own lifeguards, swimming is not recommended as a class activity.

For more safety information, download the “Beach Safety and Survival Guide” from the brochures webpage (<http://www.nps.gov/caloplanyourvisit/brochures.htm>).

Transportation

The Harkers Island Visitor Center is the only location within the national seashore which can be reached by vehicle. All other locations—the lighthouse, Portsmouth Village, Shackelford Banks, and others—require the use of a ferry service. Ferry rides can take anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes to go from the mainland to the park, this depends on the location and style of the ferry as well as the area of the park you plan to visit.

There is a variety of boat sizes and styles used by the various ferry operators which transport visitors to the islands. Some are larger and some are smaller. Some will go out into the ocean while others stay in protected waters of the sound. Some can go fast, and may get passengers wet, and some may be better able to accommodate special needs or requests. It is important to choose a ferry which is appropriate to your needs.

Contact the ferry operators to discuss the boat style, departure and pickup times, how long the boat ride will take, costs and group rates, as well as your group’s specific needs. A list of ferry operators can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/caloplanyourvisit/ferry.htm>.

Arrive at the ferry operator early and plan to be at the pickup location at least 15 minutes before your scheduled time of departure.

Many groups underestimate the amount of time necessary for land transport to the ferry service or Harkers Island Visitor Center. Give yourself at least a half hour more than you think you need for travel. Directions to the Harkers Island Visitor Center and information on visiting the barrier islands can be found on this webpage: <http://www.nps.gov/calocalo/planyourvisit/directions.htm>.

Lunch and Snacks

All food and drinks will have to be brought with you. There are no concession stands in the park. Anything brought for lunches will need to be carried from the ferry drop off to where you plan to eat. Many items are hard to keep cold for hours at a time without heavy amounts of ice which can make transportation more difficult.

Be sure to bring trash bags for your group. There are no garbage cans or trash-pick up on the islands. Let your group know that they are responsible for cleaning up after themselves and taking their trash back to the mainland for recycling and disposal.

Do not feed the wildlife, especially the sea gulls! Besides being against park rules, feeding wildlife human food is not good for them. Feeding sea gulls can make them lose their fear of humans and become bold enough to steal your lunch out of your hands.

Planning Activities

When planning activities, remember that materials will be exposed to the weather, they will need to be carried to the location(s) where they will be used, will need time set aside to set up and break down, and will take up space on the ferry. Allowing ample time for activities will eliminate frustrations and any extra time will allow students to do a bit of beachcombing or exploration on their own.

Some suggested activities include attending a Ranger Program, exploring mud flats a low tide, beachcombing, completing a Junior Ranger Adventures booklet, taking a private truck tour of the point of the Cape or of the Cape Lookout Village (for an additional cost), or investigating a scientific question. More information on several of these options can be found in the Self-Guided Field Trip and Ranger Guided Field Trip sections below.

Students' Packing List

- Water
- Lunch and/or snacks
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- A towel and an extra pair of shoes if class activities require wading
- An extra set of clothing in case of rain or cold weather

Self-Guided Field Trips

Whether your class is studying barrier island geology, marine ecology, or maritime history, Cape Lookout National Seashore can provide excellent field trip opportunities.

If you prefer to plan a self-guided field trip to Cape Lookout National Seashore, the ideas below will give you a good start. Park staff can help educational group leaders plan trips as well. Some planning materials are available upon request. For more information, contact the park at 252-728-2250 or CALO_Information@nps.gov.

Curriculum Materials

Cape Lookout also offers several sets of curriculum materials designed to be used in conjunction with a class visit to the park or a park ranger visit to the classroom. These guides offer pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit activities and are available for download from <http://www.nps.gov/caloforteachers/curriculummaterials.htm>.

Junior Ranger Adventures

The Junior Ranger Adventures program uses interactive activity booklets to introduce kids to various aspects of the natural and cultural history of the park.

There are five booklets in the series: Experience Cape Lookout, Saltwater Explorer, Island Investigator, Rescue Ranger, and Village Detective. The first booklet serves as a general introduction and is designed for kids in 1st through 8th grade. Booklets two through five are designed for grades 5 to 8 and require the use of activity kits, backpacks for small groups or totes for larger groups. More information on these booklets can be found on this webpage: <http://www.nps.gov/caloforkids/jradventures.htm>.

For more information on the Junior Ranger Adventures program or to reserve a tote, contact the park by phone (252-728-2250) or e-mail (CALO_Information@nps.gov).

Traveling Trunks

While these materials are designed for use in a classroom, some activities are suitable for use at the Harkers Island Visitor Center. More information on this program can be found on the Traveling Trunk webpage. To reserve a trunk, contact the park by phone (252-728-2250) or e-mail (CALO_Information@nps.gov).

Scheduled Ranger Programs

Rangers and volunteers give programs in the lighthouse area, in Portsmouth Village, and in other parts of the park. It is not necessary to sign up for scheduled programs, but it may help us prepare if we know you are bringing a large group.

Other Activities

On Harkers Island

- Visit the Harkers Island Visitor Center and watch the park film *Ribbon of Sand*.
- Explore the Soundside Loop (4/5 mile) and Willow Pond (1/3 mile) trails behind the visitor center.
- Visit the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center, located next to the visitor center, to learn about maritime history and traditions such as decoy carving, boat building, and commercial fishing. To contact the Core Sound Museum, call 252-728-4761.

In the Lighthouse area

- Visit the Keepers' Quarters Museum and discover life on Core Banks in the 1800 and 1900s.
- Attend a scheduled ranger program to learn more about the natural and cultural history of the park. A list of scheduled programs can be found on our website.
- Explore the mud flats at low tide.
- Search for and identify common seashells and compare their structure and life history. (Remember to leave any shells with animals inside.)
- Take a private truck tour of the Cape point or the historic Cape Lookout Village. Check with the tour operator for pricing and availability. Contact information can be found on this webpage: <http://www.nps.gov/cal/planyourvisit/feesandreservations.htm>.
- Examine the various habitat zones of a barrier island and identify some of the plants and animals that live in each.

In Portsmouth Village

- Take a free guided tour of Portsmouth Village. A list of scheduled programs can be found on our website.
- Visit the Theodore and Annie Salter House and Visitor Center, the Post Office, the School, and the Portsmouth Life-Saving Station to learn about the lives of villagers and surf heroes.
- Explore the mud flats at low tide.
- Search for and identify common seashells and compare their structure and life history. (Remember to leave any shells with animals inside.)

In other parts of the park

- Search for wild horses on Shackleford Banks. Please remember that these are wild animals. Safety tips for watching wild horses can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/cal/planyourvisit/watching-horses.htm>.
- Explore the natural maritime forest on Shackleford Banks, the man-made forest on South Core Banks, or thicket areas on any of the islands and identify adaptive traits which help plants survive in this harsh environment.
- Find and identify common seashells and compare their structure and life history. (Remember to leave any shells with animals inside.)
- Explore the mud flats at low tide.
- Look for signs of animals and identify the creature that made them.

Ranger Guided Field Trips

Park Rangers are available to speak to your class or group while they are visiting Cape Lookout National Seashore. The following programs may be requested from October through April. Please make arrangements for a program at least 2 weeks in advance of your group's planned field trip.

Lighthouses and Lighthouse Keepers: In the shadow of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse we will look into why this part of the coast received the nickname “Graveyard of the Atlantic”. Through an interactive discussion students will address the hazards ships faced navigating off our coast and how aids to navigation helped. To get a first-hand view what life was like at Cape Lookout Lighthouse we will read from the diary of Keeper Gillikan, who kept the light from 1923-1925. Program lasts 2 hours.

Sea Turtles: The students will gain a greater understanding of sea turtles and some of the reasons they are endangered with an interactive discussion using props and visual aids at the Keeper’s Quarters. From there we will head the beach to determine what makes a good nesting location for a sea turtle and look closer at the life of a sea turtle hatchling. Program lasts 2 hours.

Coastal Creatures: We will explore the diverse ecosystems that Cape Lookout has to offer. Students will discover the adaptations of plants and animals that help them survive in a place where change is constant. This program can take place almost anywhere in the park. Program lasts 2 hours.

Horse Watching: Available by advance reservation, half-day and day-long horse watching trips are popular among wild-horse enthusiasts. Groups (usually organizations or classes) travel by charter ferry to Shackleford Banks island where they are met by program leaders. Tours include walking for miles in soft sand to find the horses, then standing or sitting a safe distance away to watch. Binoculars are recommended.

Groups and classes visiting during the summer months are welcome to join the ranger for any of the park's regularly scheduled public programs. A list of these programs can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/caloplanyourvisit/events.htm>.