

Scenic Vistas

Several nice views of Canaveral National Seashore's (CANA) beach can be gained from boardwalk viewing platforms, particularly Parking Area #3 in the North District and Eddy Creek in the South. Excellent views of Mosquito Lagoon are available from the Visitor Center and Eldora docks, where manatees can also occasionally be seen. Vistas to look out over the marshes are sometimes open along the South District entrance road (depending on NASA security requirements). The marsh vistas offer good birding for a variety of wading and shorebirds in season.

But for the visitor, there is one vista that should definitely not be missed - **Turtle Mound**. Located along Mosquito Lagoon in the north end of the park, it is one of Florida's best known archeological sites. Built by Native Americans between 800 AD and 1400 AD, it consists of 1 1/2 million bushels of oyster shells and towers 35 feet above the surrounding landscape. Being such a prominent feature of the landscape, it was included on some of the earliest European maps of Florida and was an important navigational point for sailors.

From its summit is a panoramic view that extends for miles. A quote made in 1926 says that looking out from the summit of Turtle Mound, "one has the sensation of standing on top of a mountain". To the north can be seen the abrupt line where the condominiums of Bethune Beach stop and the undisturbed vegetation of the park begins. To the south can be seen the Eldora Statehouse and the beginning of over 20 miles of undeveloped barrier island. Westward are the islands and open waters of Mosquito Lagoon, while the Atlantic Ocean lies just beyond the dune to the east.

Turtle Mound stimulates other senses as well. Waves can be heard crashing against the shore. A refreshing sea breeze often provides relief from the Florida heat. The imagination is stirred as one ponders why such effort was expended to build such a structure. Was it a look-out to watch for enemies....a haven from high water during severe storms....a ceremonial center....a place to watch for migrating whales? No one knows. The people that built Turtle Mound vanished long ago.

Turtle Mound has additional noteworthy facets. It is a favored spot to watch for migrating hawks and oceanic birds moving along the coast. The mound is also the northernmost known location for several species of subtropical plants (for more on that topic see Plants). Observe that this unique assemblage of plants is growing on a human-made structure. Thus Turtle Mound symbolizes one of the most intriguing aspects of CANA- a fascinating combination of cultural and natural features.