Carolina Beach Hotel Fire

Your next stop is at Carolina Beach Elementary School. A hotel opened on this spot in June of 1926. It included a dining room, ballroom, and 100 guest rooms. It was touted as a great new addition to the beach. It stayed open for two seasons and burned to the ground in September of 1928. The owners had to be rescued from the roof. By November, after extensive investigation, they were both arrested and indicted on charges of arson. These arsonists are often used as an example of how difficult it can be to make a living here at the beach.

Blockade Runner

Working blockade runners was a dangerous job, but it could also be lucrative. A boy of 15 or 16 working as a ship's clerk could make as much as $25,000 in a year (as much as the president of the Confederacy). A steamer transporting 1,000 bales of cotton could turn a profit of $250,000 in a single trip. The average steamer made four trips before being captured or destroyed. In one year, when Wilmington was the primary port for the Confederacy, blockade runners brought in 6.2 million lbs of meat, 1.49 million lbs of lead, 1.85 million lbs of salt peter, 420,000 pairs of boots and shoes, 292,000 blankets, 408,000 lbs of coffee, and 137,000 muskets and rifles. No Confederate army ever lost a major battle or campaign for lack of guns, ammo, supplies, or food. If you’re here at low tide, you may see remnants of the General Beauregard blockade runner.

Battery Anderson (Kure Beach Post Office)

The Kure Beach Post office is located just after M Street at 237 N Forth Fisher Blvd. By about 2:00 am on January 14th, 1865, General Alfred H. Terry had led Union troops to approximately this location. They dug in for the night, creating breastworks to defend their position. 800 shovels were passed back and forth for hours. In approximately 6 hours they had dug a trench line that extended all the way from the ocean to the Cape Fear River. The breastworks were bolstered by abatis (sharpened stakes).
North Carolina Ferry at Fort Fisher/Southport

The ferry offers a 35 minute cruise across the Cape Fear River to Southport, NC, a quaint town of antique shops, restaurants, restored homes and historic sites. Be sure to visit the North Carolina Maritime Museum's Southport branch and the Captain Thompson Home for a glimpse of a Civil War blockade runner’s life.

The Basin, Zeke’s Island & Battery Buchanan

Beyond the WWII bunker, the Civil War museum, and the beautiful sandy beaches of Fort Fisher, you’ll find another network of islands including Zeke’s Island and a rock jetty known as “The Rocks”. These are part of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). This area is home to a variety of habitats including salt marshes, sea forests, tidal flats, sand dunes, beach, and rocks. Threatened and endangered species can be found in this area of Fort Fisher, including Loggerhead sea turtles who build their nests on the beaches.

Visitor Center Hours:
Tuesday-Saturday
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Closed Sunday, Monday
and most major holidays

Self-Guided History Bicycle Tour
Carolina Beach, Kure Beach & Fort Fisher

Fort Fisher Civil War Site
Construction on Fort Fisher began in 1861, to help protect the port of Wilmington 19 miles up the Cape Fear River. By 1864, Wilmington was the last Atlantic port open to trade with the outside world and the role of Fort Fisher in the war became crucial. Two battles were fought at Fort Fisher, in 1864 and 1865. During the second battle that the fort was captured by Union naval and army forces - only three months later, the Civil War was over.

Visit the Fort Fisher State Historic site and tour the grounds where this fateful battle was fought. The accompanying Visitor Center includes a diorama of Fort Fisher in 1865, illustrating the Union Forces attack and the Confederate defense of the fort. You can also view Native American artifacts from the time before the fort existed, including arrowheads and pottery fragments.

Interesting side note: General Benjamin Butler of the U.S. Army proposed one of the first “Weapons of Mass Destruction” in a bold attempt to try and destroy Fort Fisher. His idea was to load the ship Louisiana with 430,000 lbs of gunpowder, drive it ashore, detonate the gunpowder and destroy the earthworks. Unfortunately, the fuses did not perform properly, the ship only got within 500 yards, and only a portion of the powder detonated. Other than waking up some of the Confederate soldiers, the explosion was barely noticed inside the Fort.

*For an excellent history of Civil War activity at Fort Fisher and in the greater Wilmington area, be sure to pick up a copy of “The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope,” by Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle Jr. Dr. Fonvielle is a favorite local historian who teaches at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. The gift shop at the Civil War battlefield carries his book.

Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point (MOTSU)
While at the Fort, you can look out across the Cape Fear River and see several large cranes. The cranes support the largest ammunition port in the nation. Encompassing 16,000 acres of land, this unique port is one of only a few “container” ammunition ports where munitions arrive via truck or train. The port was responsible for supplying 90% of munitions used during Operation Desert Storm/Army – they had to unload over 27,000 rail cars. Due to the sensitive nature of the facility, much of the island is technically in a federally designated “blast zone.”

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Fun Restaurants Along the Way

Kure Beach Pier Restaurants
Near the pier in Kure beach, you will find Jack Mackerel’s Island Grill. Jack Mackerel’s offers great Caribbean cuisine in a warm, casual atmosphere. Next to the pier is the Kure Beach Diner, which offers great fare in a diner type atmosphere (if it is an early ride, this is a great stop for breakfast). In between you will find a fine dining experience at Freddie’s which offers some of the Island’s best Italian meals.

Ocean Grill and Tiki Bar
On your way to or from Kure Beach, you will pass the Golden Sands Motel, home of the Ocean Grill and Tiki Bar. This little slice of paradise offers casual dining and during the summer, be sure to check out the Tiki Bar — great food and beverages on a pier that overlooks the ocean.

Carolina Beach Boardwalk Restaurants
Among the fare on the Boardwalk in Carolina Beach, you can find world famous Britt’s Donuts, Fentoni’s Pizza, fresh coffee at Crush & Grind, Latella’s Gelato and Hurricane Alley’s restaurant which is an oceanfront bar and grill.

The Fudgeboat
No bike history tour is complete without a stop at The Fudgeboat. The Fudgeboat offers home made butter and cream fudge, hand dipped ice cream, and many other sweet treats. This is a must stop.
1. Turn right (north) on to Carolina Beach Ave. N.
2. Turn left (west) on to Pelican Lane.
3. Turn left (south) on to Canal Dr.
4. Turn right (west) on to Harper Ave. (street that Wheel Fun Rentals is on).
5. Cross over Lake Park Blvd. (US 421) and turn left (south) on to 4th Ave. Continue to Carolina Beach Elementary School.
6. Turn left (east) into entrance of Carolina Beach Lake Park. Take path along the right (south) side of lake. Proceed across both bridges and head straight to Lake Park Blvd. If you’re on an eBike, please pedal your bike while on the park path.
7. Exit the park path at Lake Park Blvd. (US 421) and turn right (south).
8. Turn left (east) on Lake Dr. (just before Laundromat) and ride straight to the end of the street. Use beach access to arrive at the Gazebo.
9. Exit beach access and turn left (south) on Carolina Beach Ave. ride until the street dead-ends into Lake Park Blvd.
10. Turn left (south) on Lake Park Blvd.
11. Lake Park Blvd. will turn into Fort Fisher Blvd. when you reach Kure Beach.
12. Continue south on Fort Fisher Blvd. to Fort Fisher Battlefield Site on your right side.
13. Return to Fort Fisher Blvd. and turn right (south). The ferry entrance will be on your right.
14. Exit the ferry landing and turn right (south) on Fort Fisher Blvd. until you reach the end of the Island (Battery Buchanan Tour Stop).
15. Return north on Fort Fisher Blvd.
16. *Optional* Turn right at entrance of Fort Fisher State Park Recreation Area and NC Aquarium (Loggerhead Rd.) then, continue north on Fort Fisher Blvd.
17. Turn right (east) on K Ave. (the only stop light in Kure Beach).
18. Turn left on Atlantic Ave. and continue north along the boardwalk until the street dead-ends.
19. Turn left on N Ave. and then right (north) on Fort Fisher Blvd.
20. Fort Fisher Blvd. will turn into Lake Park Blvd. when you reach Carolina Beach.
21. Lake Park Blvd. will veer left just after Carolina Beach Lake Park.
22. Turn right (east) on Harper Ave. and continue onto Carolina Beach Ave. N.
23. Return to the Boardwalk. We hope you enjoyed your tour!