

Spring Lighthouse Season Opens With a New NC Tower to Climb

Renovated Bodie Island Lighthouse offers regular ascents for the first time

North Carolina's prime lighthouse-climbing season begins April 19 with the historic Bodie Island Lighthouse opening for regular tours for the first time. The newly restored lighthouse, its magnificent first-order Fresnel lens cleaned down to the shine, becomes the sixth along the state's 320-mile coastline to allow visitors a top-of-the-tower view. Also expected to open for tours this spring: the restored 1886 Roanoke River Lighthouse in Edenton. The 2-story structure, the only remaining screw-pile lighthouse built on North Carolina's sounds and rivers, opens during the Colonial capital's 300th anniversary celebration.

The Bodie (pronounced "body") Island Lighthouse, built in 1872 and day-marked with broad black and white bands, sits on the Roanoke Sound south of Nags Head. Before being deemed ready for visitors, it underwent a major overhaul from the marble and slate on the bottom floor to the metal features around the gallery and lantern decks. The Fresnel lens's 344 glass prisms were removed for cleaning and the optical panels from its 12-foot framework polished.

"The view from the top of a lighthouse always takes my breath away - and not just because it's such a steep climb," said Wit Tuttle, director of marketing for the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Tourism. "From the Bodie Island Lighthouse, we'll take in a panorama of the ocean and the sound that few people other than the lighthouse keepers have seen."

Lighthouse aficionados may find the gleaming lens even more remarkable, Tuttle added. The first-order Fresnel was the largest of these revolutionary 19th-century lenses, which use a complex system of hand-cut prisms to cast light 20 miles out to sea. Only about 15 U.S. lighthouses - including Currituck Beach Lighthouse in Corolla - are equipped with first-order Fresnels. Others, such as the storied lens from the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, are prized by maritime museums.

The Bodie Island Lighthouse is one of only a dozen surviving "tall brick tower type" lighthouses in the United States. (Three more in North Carolina - Currituck Beach Lighthouse, Cape Lookout Lighthouse and Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the nation's tallest - also fall into the category, which specifies a minimum height of 150 feet.)

The restoration of the Bodie Island Lighthouse adds another chapter to a dramatic history. Shoddy construction set the original 1847 lighthouse canting to the east. The tower was replaced in 1859, just in time for the Civil War. Confederate troops, retreating from the war's first amphibious operation, blew up the lighthouse so that the victorious Union forces couldn't use it.

After the war, a new lighthouse was constructed on a 15-acre tract between tall pines and freshwater marsh. Less than three weeks after its opening on Oct. 1, 1872, a flock of geese crashed into the lantern and damaged the lens. The lighthouse's lot improved under the management of the National Park Service, which eventually turned the keepers' cottage into a visitor center and gave people a glimpse inside the tower.

Until now, public access to the gallery has been limited to one weekend in 1988 during the U.S. Lighthouse Service's bicentennial. Before climbers could be permitted to spiral their way to the top on a regular basis, restoration was needed. Work began in 2010 but was halted when crews found structural deficiencies that weren't covered by the budget. Funds became available the next fiscal year, and the project was finally completed.

In Edenton, the Roanoke River Lighthouse also has a rich screw-pile lighthouse history in North Carolina. Decommissioned in 1941, the lighthouse was eventually brought to Edenton and used as a private residence.

The Edenton Historical Commission acquired the lighthouse in 2007. Restored, refurbished and relocated to Edenton Bay, the lighthouse again sits atop pilings over the water and is expected to open for tours this spring. ehcnc.org

NC Lighthouses You Can Visit

- From north to south, here's a list of North Carolina lighthouse towers, with information about climbs and visits.
 - Currituck Beach Lighthouse, Corolla. 162 feet high, 214 steps. First lit in 1875. Open through Nov. 23. www.currituck-beachlight.com
 - Bodie Island Lighthouse, near Nags Head. 170 feet high, 214 steps. First lit in 1872. Open April 19-Oct. 14. www.nps.gov/caha/index.htm
 - Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, Buxton. 207 feet high, 248 steps. First lit in 1870. Open April 19-Oct. 14. www.nps.gov/caha/index.htm
 - Ocracoke Island Light, Ocracoke. About 75 feet high. The public can access the grounds but not the tower. www.nps.gov/caha/index.htm
 - Cape Lookout Lighthouse, near Beaufort. 169 feet high. 207 steps. First lit 1859. Open May 15-Sept. 21. www.nps.gov/caloc/index.htm
 - Oak Island Light, Oak Island. 153 feet high, 131 steps (on ships ladders). First lit in 1958. Grounds are open daily. Tour information: www.oakislandlighthouse.org
 - Bald Head Island Lighthouse (Old Baldy), Bald Head Island. 100 feet high, 108 steps. First lit in 1817; deactivated in 1930. www.oldbaldy.org
- Find more about North Carolina lighthouses at VisitNC.com.

Fraud Seminar at Grace Senior Center

Grace Senior Center will sponsor a fraud seminar entitled "Standing Up, Fighting Back" on Thursday, April 18th at 2 p.m. The seminar will feature interviews with North Carolinians who explain how scammers operate and how to avoid the tricks they use, including:

- Telemarketing and sweepstakes scams
- Health Care Scams
- Annuity and Investments Scams
- Home Construction and Repair Scams

The information is provided by the Attorney General Office and local Wadesboro Police Department's Sgt. Kristen Ray. They will be available for questions and comments. If you are interested in attending please call Grace Senior Center to register or for additional information at 704-694-6616. Refreshments will be served.

Computer Skills Classes for Beginners & Advanced

Burnsville Recreation and Learning Center in association with South Piedmont Community College is continuing to provide Computer Literacy classes for adults. You can enroll now for the Spring Sessions that will begin April 23. The class will start at 6 p.m. All students need to enroll in advance. This class is designed to break the fears from those who are finding it difficult in becoming comfortable with computer technology.

The sessions are Computer Skills for the Work Place and Computer skills for Job Seekers. The classes are on a first come, first served basis. The computer training is one on one. Do not hesitate to enroll. You do not have to be left out or afraid any more. Call 704-826-8182 or 704-826-8737 to enroll.

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Annual Senior Health Fair

Seniors are encouraged to come out to the Senior Health Fair at Lockhart-Taylor Center and learn all about local resources that are available in Anson County and surrounding counties that are available for you. On Thursday, May 2, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Grace Senior Center will sponsor this event that is full of information, exhibitors, and even features lunch...all for free!

- FREE Lunch for seniors 55 and older.
- FREE Lunch will be served to all who attend.
- FREE to all Exhibitors who attend. (Exhibitors may start to set up at 9:30 a.m.)
- Transportation will be provided only to seniors that attend the nutrition congregate sites.
- Blood Sugar Testing provided.
- Blood Pressure Screening provided.
- Screenings by some Exhibitors.
- and lots more!

Mark your calendar for Thursday, May 2, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Lockhart-Taylor Center, 514 North Washington Street in Wadesboro.

For more information and to register call Grace Senior Center at 704-694-6616.

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