

Kiptopeke State Park

Self-Guided History Hike

May—Lewes ferry service, which continues to operate today. Only one of the former Kiptopeke ferries still operates today, as the SS Cape Henlopen on the Cross Sound Ferry in Connecticut. She holds the distinction of being one of the few vessels from World War II still in active passenger service.

You may also notice the concrete ships which form a breakwater around the pier. There are 5 ships on the south breakwater, and 4 on the north breakwater. The ships get their name from their unique building material, reinforced concrete. Built for the US Army in 1943 by a shipyard in Tampa, FL—the hulls of the ships were entirely made of concrete due to a shortage in steel. Concrete has actually been explored as a shipbuilding material for several centuries, beginning in the late 1870s in France.

The ships were seaworthy, albeit slow (they steamed at a max speed of 6 knots). They were mainly used to move bulk goods in the South Pacific during the war, where crews noted that the concrete was great at insulating heat, which would have been great if the ships had sailed in a more northern climate. There are reports that one of the vessels even took a torpedo hit with little damage. After the war, the 2 dozen ships were sold as surplus by the government. 8 ships are in British Columbia, serving as a floating breakwater for a lumber mill. Several others were sunk as artificial reefs, or used as piers. One of the ships (located in California) was originally intended to become a water-front amusement park.

However, as you can see here at the park, over time the ships have deteriorated and began to fall apart. The 9 ships located at Kiptopeke are the largest collection of concrete ships. They were purchased in 1948 to serve as a breakwater for the ferry pier, helping to create a safer harbor for the ferries. They are sunk on the bottom of the bay in about 12-18 feet of water.

The Virginia Ferry Corporation noted that they spent more money transporting the vessels from Texas than they paid for them. Once the ships were brought up, and positioned, pumps were used to fill them with water and sink them to the bottom of the bay. On a windy or stormy day, you can often see the difference the breakwater makes in the waves. Now, they serve as a unique artificial reef that not only provides an aquatic environment, but also a nesting and roosting location for birds. On a summer evening, you can often see hundreds of brown pelicans flying in for the night.

When the ships were bought, they came with everything in them—including furniture, dinnerware, and ship equipment. Over time, some items found their way to new homes—and rumors abound about ships wheels and furniture decorating local houses.

This is the last stop on the main guided tour. If you're interested in more, please see the extra locations listed in the next column!

Extra Locations

Potato Barn (near lodges and cabins)

This potato barn is all that remains of a former farm located in this section of the park. When the park opened, the farm was actually still in operation, and the state even considered making it a demonstration farm. With time, the decision was made to put lodges and cabins here instead and a 114 acre reforestation project began, which can be seen here as well as in other areas of the park.

Bird Banding Station (Baywoods Trail)

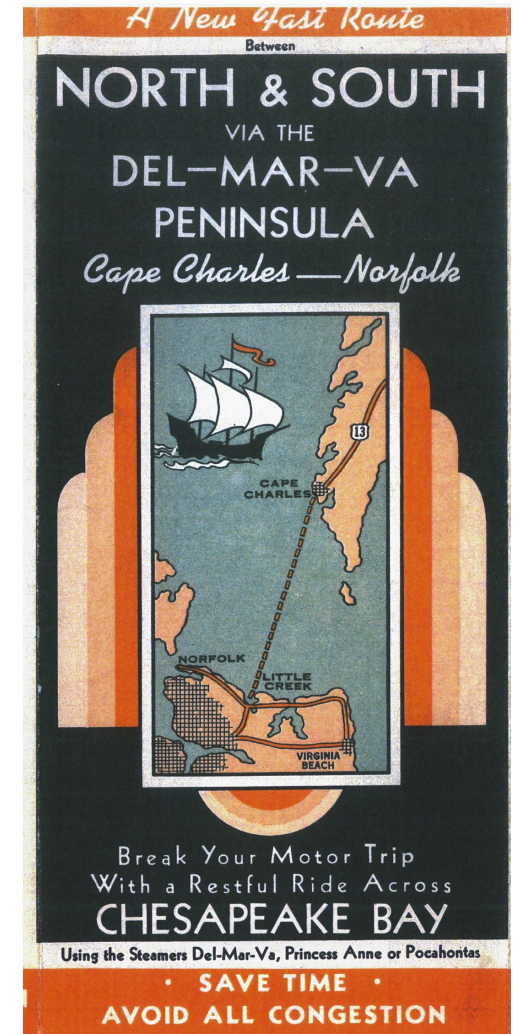
Kiptopeke is well known as a birding location, and was actually the site of a bird banding and raptor banding station for over 50 years. Bird banding is a scientific way of tracking bird migration, by capturing birds and placing small metal rings on their feet. As birds are caught again and recorded, scientists can use those data points to figure out migration patterns and changes.

Old Farmhouse (Songbird Trail)

Not much remains of this old farmhouse—which was toppled by the plant growth around it.

Taylor Pond (Raptor Trail)

This pond is man made, originating as a borrow pit for the bridge tunnel construction. Over time, it returned to a more natural state, and is one of the unique areas of the park. Be on the lookout for foxes and birds who use the pond. The pond is named after musician James Taylor, who donated the funds to help purchase the land at the pond.



Welcome to Kiptopeke State Park—located on Virginia’s beautiful Eastern Shore.

This brochure is designed to be a self-guided tour of the park. The main stops listed are all easily accessible by foot or vehicle. The extra locations listed on the reverse side are further into the park, and cannot be accessed by vehicles.

History of the Park

Kiptopeke State Park opened on Memorial Day 1992, as Virginia’s only state park on the Eastern Shore. Several sites were considered for purchase by the state, and they eventually decided to purchase the former ferry landing at Kiptopeke Beach. While ferry service stopped in 1964 with the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, the parcels of land were purchased by an entrepreneur from Virginia Beach, John Maddox. Mr. Maddox purchased the land with the goals of opening a family camping resort. Over several decades he built up the infrastructure of the park, including building the parks roads, campground, bathhouses, and contact station. The state purchased the property on the 1st of May 1992, and spent the next month building boardwalks, trails, and completing the buildout of the park. Over time, more land was purchased at the south end of the park (where Taylor Pond is located) - and cabins and lodges were built on a former farm site, which has since been reforested with Virginia pines. Kiptopeke continues to be a popular park, boasting an annual attendance of more than 150,000 guests.

Please begin at the parking lot near the Hawkwatch/Picnic Shelter 2— located up the asphalt ramp on the left side of Kiptopeke Drive as you head towards the pier.

Stop 1: Tourinns Motor Court Sign

This sign should be visible as you entered the parking lot for the Hawkwatch. It is the only visible remnant of the Tourinns Motor Court, which originally occupied the site of the picnic area and hawkwatch. If the grass is just greening for the year, or the park hasn’t seen rain in a while, you may be able to view the outlines of the buildings in the grass within the picnic area and parking lot. The motel consisted of an office/restaurant building, and 4 buildings containing about 50 rooms. One of the notable parts of the sign is an advertisement for “free TV” - while the TV in the hotel was free, it was only black and white! The motel also had a “private beach” on what is now the south beach, and offered fishing trips and boat charters to guests.

The motel opened not long after the ferry terminal was constructed in 1950, as a service to the travelers on the ferry. It actually outlasted the ferry service, and was demolished when the state built out the park in 1992. If you look on the back side of the sign, the neon is actually more intact there!

To Proceed to Stop 2, head down the asphalt ramp to the camp store.

Stop 2: Kiptopeke Camp Store

As you approach the camp store, you may notice several concrete remnants to the right of it. This is all that remains of the original toll booth structure for the ferry pier. It originally spread out across the road (the road is still in its original configuration) and vehicles and pedestrians would stop here to purchase their tickets for the ferry.

The ferry service was a vital link in the “Pines to Palms” highway which was constructed in the late 1930s, as an alternate way to travel the east coast from NJ to Florida—believe it or not, even then the I-95 corridor had horrendous traffic problems! Cars, trucks, pedestrians, and even animals boarded the ferry on the southern end of the eastern shore, originally in Cape Charles—but a new multi-million dollar “state of the art” pier was constructed here beginning in 1948. The pier opened in 1950, and provided 24/7 ferry service every half-hour across the bay to Norfolk until 1964 when the first span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel opened.

In 1961, the toll rates for an automobile were \$3 for the vehicle, and 75 cents for each passenger. The bicycle fare was 50 cents, and a mule or horse cost \$2.50 to cross the bay.

It is also worth noting that the camp store marks where the 1,800 foot pier originally began. If you look to the right of the camp store, you can actually see the original bluff face. Over time, wind and tides have changed the shape of the beach, adding almost 14 acres of new land. This land has

actually developed plants and trees, and can be walked through on the Osprey boardwalk that goes from the campground to the swim beach.

Please proceed to the fishing pier for Stop 3

Stop 3: Concrete Ships and Ferry Pier

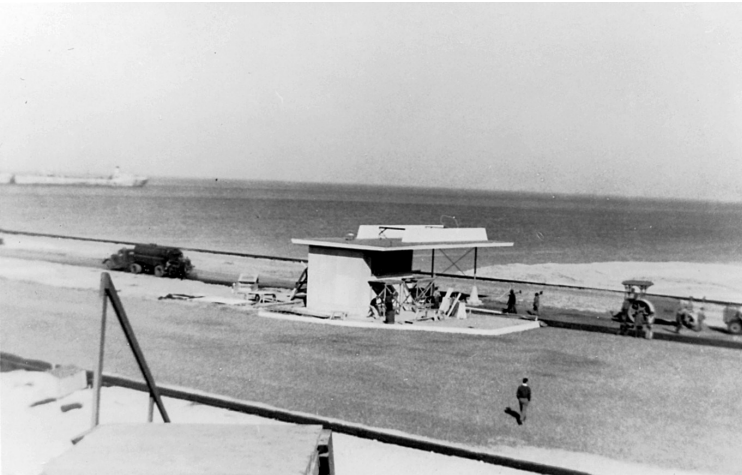
You are now standing on the Kiptopeke Ferry Pier. If you look towards the end of the pier, you can see the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and on a good day even Virginia Beach! This is where automobiles and passengers boarded the ferry. In the middle of the pier was originally a terminal building which contained a restaurant, waiting room, and a modern walkway to board the ferry vessels. Vehicles were loaded by ferry employees separately.

At the peak of its popularity—the Virginia Ferry Corporation operated 7 ferries out of Kiptopeke, including several former military vessels from World War II. The flagships of the fleet were the SS Princess Anne and SS Pochahontas, built for the ferry system in the 1930s. They featured art deco streamlining designed by the renowned industrial architect Raymond Lowry—famous for designing Studebakers and streamlined trains of the era.

These vessels were used by the ferry corporation throughout its entire existence, and in the 50s were actually sent to a shipyard in Baltimore, where they were cut in half, and lengthened by 90 feet to a length of 350 feet. After the ferry service stopped, 5 of the original ferries were actually taken up north to begin the Cape



A brochure showing the highlights of the Tourinns Motor Court. The photos of the hotel were taken from the campground side of the park



FERRY SCHEDULE
LITTLE CREEK—
 (Near Norfolk, Va.) U. S. 13
KIPTOPEKE BEACH, VA.
 (Near Cape Charles, Va.) U. S. 13
 Crossing Chesapeake Bay
 Year Round Ferry Service
 Automobile — Truck — Passengers

SPECIAL NOTICE Additional Red Departure Trips Added June 15 through September 10. Black Departure Trips—year round schedule

Effective June 24, 1960
 Eastern Standard Time
 Subject to change without notice

Daily North Bound	SCHEDULE	Daily South Bound
LEAVE Little Creek		LEAVE Kiptopeke
2:00 AM		2:00 AM
3:00 AM		3:00 AM
4:00 AM		4:00 AM
5:00 AM		5:00 AM
6:00 AM		6:00 AM
7:00 AM		7:00 AM
8:00 AM		8:00 AM
9:00 AM		9:00 AM
9:30 AM		10:00 AM
10:00 AM		10:55 AM
10:55 AM		11:25 AM
11:25 AM		11:50 AM
11:50 AM		12:45 PM
12:45 PM		1:15 PM
1:40 PM		1:40 PM
2:35 PM		2:35 PM
3:00 PM		3:00 PM
3:30 PM		4:25 PM
4:25 PM		4:50 PM
4:50 PM		5:20 PM
5:20 PM		6:15 PM
6:15 PM		6:40 PM
6:40 PM		7:10 PM
7:10 PM		8:05 PM
8:05 PM		8:30 PM
9:00 PM		9:00 PM
10:00 PM		10:00 PM
11:00 PM		11:00 PM
12:00 MN		12:00 MN

This Fleet of seven radar equipped super modern Bay Steamers is used to maintain fast service.

Steamer	Passengers	Cars
S.S. Pochontas	1200	1200
S.S. Del Mar Va.	1200	104
M.V. Old Point Comfort	1000	92
M.V. Accomac	1200	70
M.V. Northampton	630	68
M.V. Virginia Beach	1200	80

Note 17 Additional Trips Daily as Traffic Demands
CHESAPEAKE BAY FERRY DISTRICT
 P. O. Box 120 Norfolk, Virginia
 Printed in U.S.A. (over) Union Made



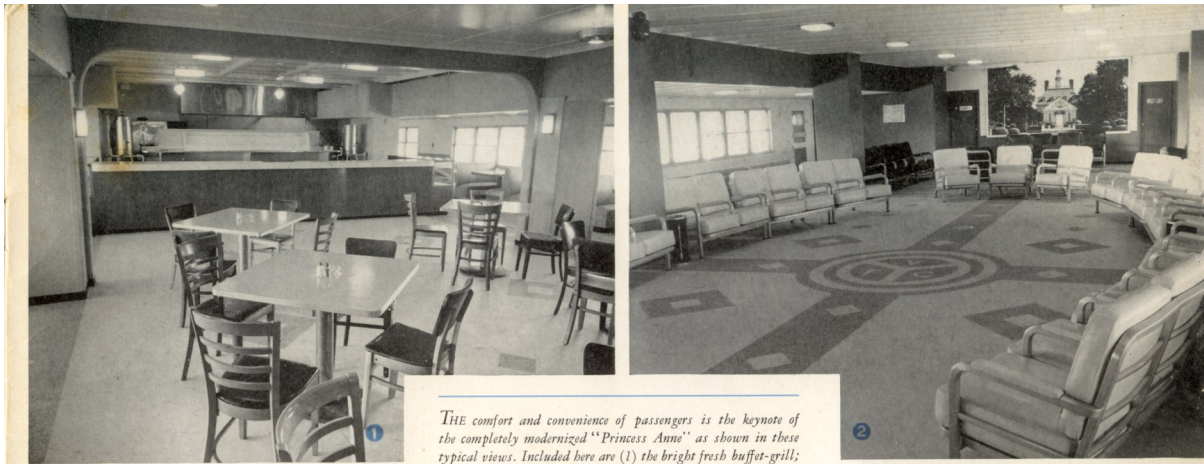
Top left: A view of the pier under construction, with the concrete ships visible in the background

Middle: A view of the toll booth under construction, this is where the modern camp store is.

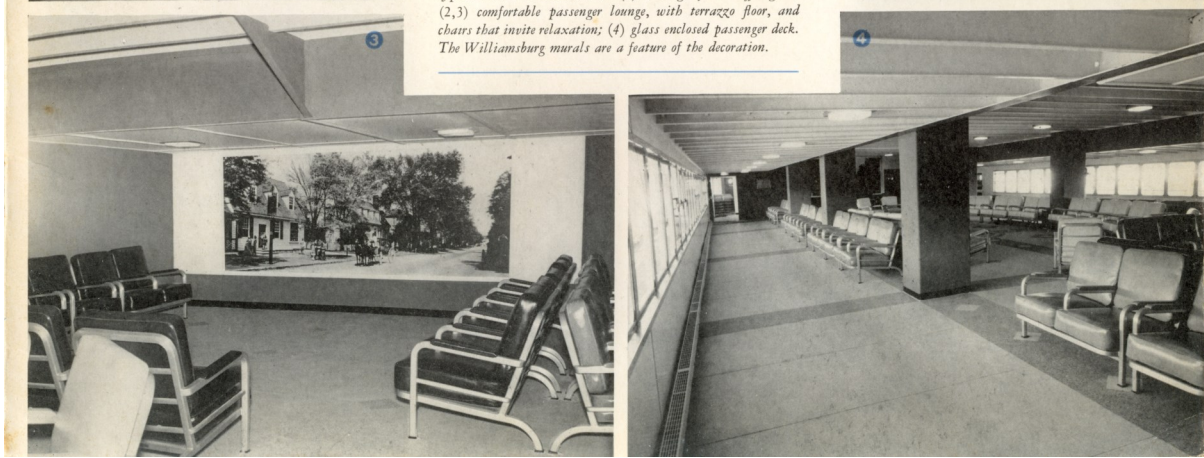
Top right: A ferry schedule for the Norfolk-Kiptopeke ferry,

Right: an aerial view of the ferry terminal soon after construction





The comfort and convenience of passengers is the keynote of the completely modernized "Princess Anne" as shown in these typical views. Included here are (1) the bright fresh buffet-grill; (2,3) comfortable passenger lounges, with terrazzo floor, and chairs that invite relaxation; (4) glass enclosed passenger deck. The Williamsburg murals are a feature of the decoration.



Left: the terminal building soon after the park opened in 1992—originally the park planned to use this as a visitors center, but structural and asbestos issues mandated its demolition

Below: an early view of the Kiptopeke ferry pier



Above: interior shots of the SS Princess Anne following her lengthening

Left: the SS Princess Anne docked at the ferry pier with the terminal building

