

View from Sugarloaf, Carolina Beach
State Park. Photo by Sarah Crate.

Longleaf Destinations

Here's to the Land of the Longleaf Pine Wilmington, North Carolina

North Carolina has many connections to longleaf pine, from its state tree – the pine – to the Tarheel nickname. Few places in the state demonstrate those connections more than Wilmington, the port city once at the center of the American naval store industry.

Longleaf beginnings

Reliance on wooden ships for transatlantic travel meant the vast pine forests of the Carolinas were central to the colony's early economy. Naval store products manufactured from pines, like tar and pitch, were crucial to maintaining wooden ships by caulking seams and preserving ropes. Later on, uses for turpentine and rosin (both extracted from crude pine resin) expanded, increasing the economic contributions of longleaf pine and other Southern yellow pines.

Naval stores were North Carolina's number-one export for centuries, and much of it departed through the port at Wilmington. According to one 19th-century account, "Nearly the whole trade of the town [Wilmington] is derived from the produce of the pine forests. The Wharves display immense quantities of pitch and resin barrels, and stills for the manufacture of turpentine are numerous."

Before the Civil War, North Carolina produced over 95% of all naval stores in the United States. Eventually, the industry moved south to other states, but the marks of the naval stores industry remain. In North Carolina forests, one can spot the familiar V-shaped streaks known as "cat faces," as well as box cut stumps and tar kiln mounds, symbols of the earliest methods used in naval store production.

A visit to the Cape Fear Museum of History and Science in downtown Wilmington will provide a deep dive into the city's early reliance on longleaf pine and other aspects of life in the region. While you are there, make sure to say hello to the Museum's famous resident - the giant ground sloth uncovered during construction in Wilmington in 1991. Its sister display at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh even depicts the giant sloth in a longleaf pine savanna.

Carolina Beach State Park,
Photo by Sarah Crate.



The Cape Fear Arch landscape contains a diversity of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else.



A. The Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration serves as America's Longleaf local implementation team for longleaf restoration efforts in southeastern North Carolina. Its namesake, the Cape Fear Arch, is a geologic uplift; its slight increase in elevation allowed it to remain above sea level longer than the rest of the Coastal Plain. Map courtesy of the NC Coastal Land Trust.

B. Southern Hospitality by Paul Hill depicts the Venus flytrap, the area's endemic carnivorous plant. The sculpture is on the Cape Fear Riverfront in downtown Wilmington at the intersection of Front and Water Street. Photo by Craig Hewett.



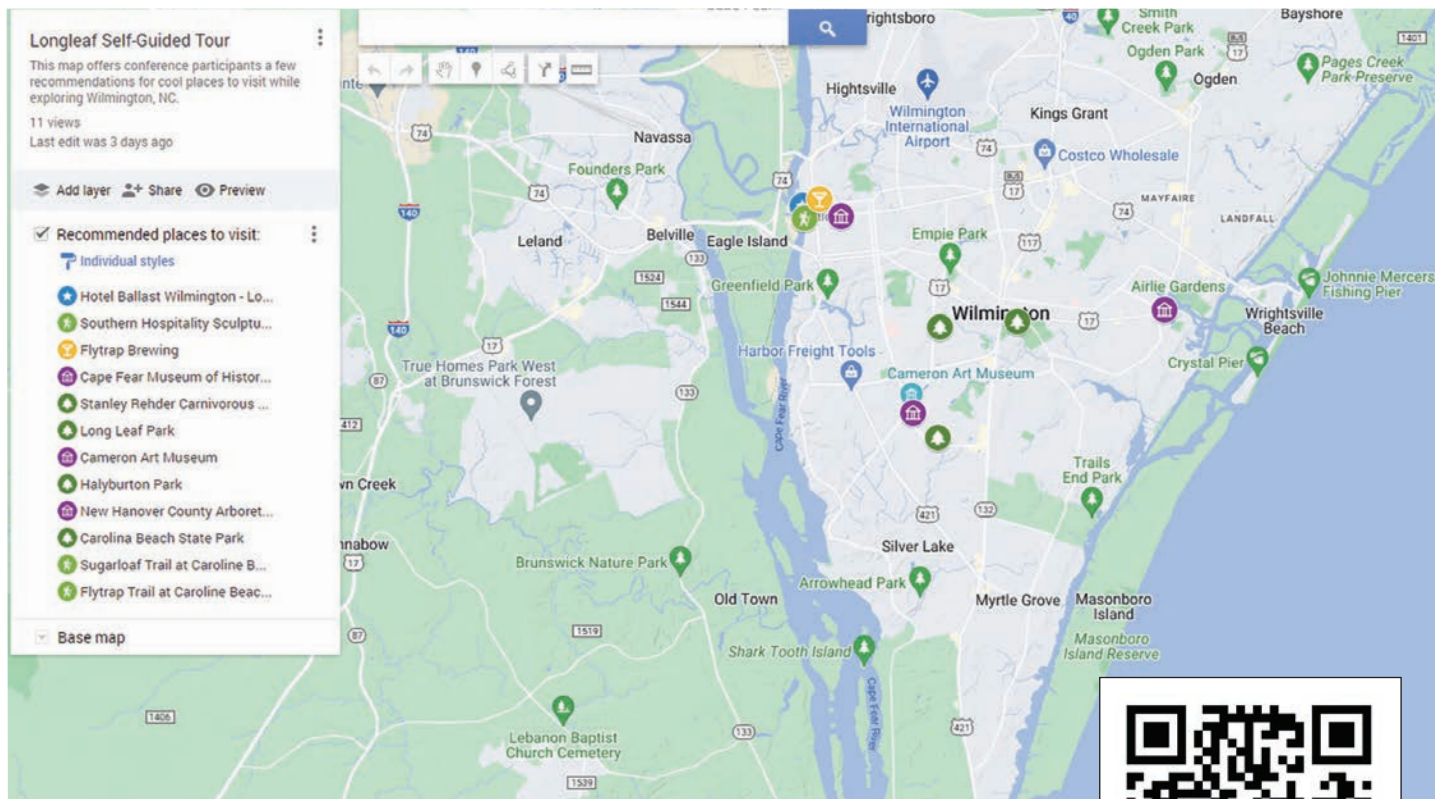
C. The "Land of the Long Leaf Pine" archway over Front Street at Chestnut Street was built for President William Howard Taft's visit to Wilmington in 1909.



A Walk in the Park

Today, the City of Wilmington offers numerous chances for recreation under the canopy of longleaf pines. Long Leaf Park (spelled as two words after the original spelling used in North Carolina's official state toast) is a New Hanover County park proudly displaying the natural beauty of its namesake tree. Centrally located and easy to spot when driving through town on College Road, the Park has something for everyone, including picnic areas, a fully-accessible playground, splash pad, fitness obstacle course, 1.5-mile paved walking trail, sports fields and courts, and dog park.

Just down the road, Halyburton Park, a 60-acre City of Wilmington park, hosts thousands of visitors at the Fire in the Pines Festival each year. After two years of virtual programming, the Festival returns to Halyburton on October 8th, 2022, with live music, wagon rides, crafts, and educational exhibits. The collaborative event raises positive awareness about prescribed fire in the longleaf pine ecosystems and even includes a demonstration burn right in the middle of the city.



While there are many attractions to see in Wilmington and surrounding beach communities, we specifically want to highlight the longleaf pine-related sites around town. Our interactive map makes for an easy exploration virtually or on-the-go from your mobile device.



longleaf.info/Wilmington

The 1.5-mile path at Halyburton Park connects to the Cross-City Trail, a 15-mile off-road, multi-use trail. The Trail offers access to many noteworthy longleaf stops, including the Cameron Art Museum's Pyramid Park with longleaf woodlands, the University of North Carolina Wilmington's majestic longleaf pine, and the Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden. Consider renting a bike, and make a day of it!

The Carnivorous Carolina Original

Wilmington's most famous botanical resident, the Venus flytrap, is one of many unique natural wonders of the area. Found only within a 75-mile radius of Wilmington, the closest opportunity to spy this plant in the wild is 12 miles south of town at Carolina Beach State Park. The Park's Venus Flytrap Trail features a boardwalk overlook that promises a peek of this diminutive plant plus other noteworthy carnivorous plants. With 9 miles of trails, there is much to explore at the Park while crossing off this bucket list carnivorous plant.

Carolina Beach State Park also contains numerous coastal habitats within its 761 acres. Prescribed fire maintains the woods dominated by longleaf pine, turkey oak, and live oak on relict sand dunes. Sugarloaf Dune, a 50-foot dune that once served as a navigational marker for river pilots, provides a view of the Cape Fear River and Intercoastal Waterway. Three

limesink ponds, each vegetated by a unique plant community, are found among the sandy forests. You'll also see dense shrub swamps, called pocosins, with pond pines, sweet bay, and evergreen shrubs, as well as brackish marshes adjacent to the river.

For a chance to see Venus flytraps without leaving Wilmington, the Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden at the Piney Ridge Nature Preserve hosts a serene landscape even though it is tucked behind a major shopping mall. The Garden features a paved walking trail, wooden observation decks, and a collection of native carnivorous plants. The Garden is owned by The Oleander Company, leased to the City of Wilmington, and protected by a conservation easement held by the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust. The Garden was named in honor of Stanley Rehder, a Wilmington native who worked tirelessly to protect carnivorous plants.

More to Explore!

Of course, Wilmington offers numerous recreation opportunities, from the historic downtown to the area's lovely beaches. Consider visiting the stately World War II Battleship North Carolina or taking a ferry ride from Fort Fisher to Southport for scenic shopping and a meal. Visit www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com for more ideas!