



NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The National Park Service And The National Air Tour 2003 Announce Plans For Stop At Wright Brothers National Memorial

Historic flight re-creation provides once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Memorial visitors

KILL DEVIL HILLS, N.C., (May 20, 2003) — At today's joint meeting of the U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission and the First Flight Centennial Advisory Board, representatives of the National Park Service's Outer Banks Group and the National Air Tour 2003 announced plans for the upcoming National Air Tour's stop at Wright Brothers National Memorial on September 20, 2003.

Weather permitting, more than 25 rare, vintage aircraft will land at the park's First Flight Airstrip and be displayed in a circle around the base of Big Kill Devil Hill. The National Air Tour's visit to the birthplace of flight is part of a 17-day, 4,000-mile journey to celebrate the Golden Age of Aviation and the Centennial of Flight by re-creating the original Tours that were held from 1925 through 1931.

"The National Air Tour presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness so many magnificent aircraft from the '20s and '30s flying together again," said Lawrence A. Belli, Superintendent, Outer Banks Group. "We're pleased to be able to share this important part of aviation history with visitors to Wright Brothers National Memorial."

Vintage Aircraft to Fill Skies Above Wright Memorial

The National Air Tour aircraft will depart from Dare County Airport on the morning of September 20, and land shortly thereafter at the First Flight Airstrip between 9 and 10 a.m. The aircraft, including large transport tri-motors, flying boats and open-cockpit biplanes from the 1920s and '30s, will then be positioned for public display in a circle around the base of Big Kill Devil Hill, where the Wright brothers conducted hundreds of their pre-flight gliding experiments. The Wright Memorial, a 60-foot granite pylon, crowns Big Kill Devil Hill, and honors the Wright Brothers.

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National Air Tourists will be on-hand to answer questions about their airplanes and the Tour. Throughout the day, the planes will be on display and programs will be offered. Weather permitting, the aircraft will remain at the Memorial overnight and depart from First Flight Airport for Richmond, Va., on September 21.

National Air Tour 2003 Celebrates Aviation History

The National Air Tour 2003 is an official U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission celebration that places a spotlight on the innovators and innovations of the Golden Age of Aviation — the period in aviation history between the two World Wars. The Golden Age marked a time of great advancements in civil aviation, spurred-on by such ventures as air tours and air races. Concrete runways, airport facilities, radio navigation, enhanced instruments, airmail, all-metal transport aircraft and even brakes on airplanes were among the significant developments during this era.

“It is a great honor for the best of America’s vintage fleet on the National Air Tour 2003 to land at the First Flight Airstrip, literally steps away from where it all began,” said Greg Herrick, President of the Aviation Foundation of America, the non-profit organization coordinating the Tour. “We’re thrilled to salute both the first flight and the Golden Age of Aviation — a period in which so many advancements took place that affect how we fly today.”

Departing on September 8 from Dearborn, Mich., the National Air Tour 2003 will visit 21 states along a 4,000-mile route during a 17-day period. The National Air Tour 2003 will fly a route for what would have been a 1932 Tour.

The original National Air Tours, officially known as the “National Air Tours for the Edsel B. Ford Reliability Trophy,” were commonly referred to as the “Ford Air Tours.” Edsel B. Ford, a staunch supporter of the Tours, held a vision for the future of aviation and provided the trophy. The Tours helped build America’s modern system of air transportation in part by showcasing the latest advancements in aircraft design, encouraging the development of airports and promoting the safety and reliability of civil aviation.

National Park Service’s First Airplane to Visit the Outer Banks

The National Park Service’s first airplane, a 1928 Fairchild FC-2W2, N-13934, will fly on the National Air Tour from Dearborn to Kill Devil Hills. It is the only flying example of its kind and is privately owned. It is painted as it was when J.D. “Dave” Driskill flew it over the Outer Banks in the ‘30s. Driskill shuttled mail, payroll, supplies, patients and passengers to and from the Civilian Conservation Corps camps. Prior to being sold to the National Park Service in 1936, the Fairchild was the first airplane owned by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) — the predecessor of NASA.

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1927 National Air Tourists Met Orville Wright

When the 1927 National Air Tour pilots landed in Dayton, Ohio, they were greeted by one special gentleman who, in essence, helped make all Air Tours and aviation related activity possible — Orville Wright. Orville came to McCook Field and was personally introduced to each pilot by Tour referee Ray Collins. A dinner followed their arrival at the Miami Hotel. More than 300 people attended the dinner, including Mayor A.C. McDonald and Congressman Roy G. Fitzgerald.

About the Aviation Foundation of America

Minneapolis-based Aviation Foundation of America is a 501(c)3 public charity designed to preserve and promote America's aviation heritage at a grassroots level through initiatives such as historic flight re-creations, airport preservation projects and educational programs. The Aviation Foundation of America is a full partner in the U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission along with the FAA, NASA and the Experimental Aircraft Association.

For additional information about the National Air Tour 2003, please visit www.NationalAirTour.org

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