

# The Cape of Three Oceans

You can have it calm, moderate or rough  
—all within a few hundred yards at Cape  
Lookout.

By BILL SHARPE

The trip to Lookout turned out to be more of a chore than it had appeared. When young Jimmy Harker cranked up his skiff at Harker's Island, he offered rubber boots. But the Sunday was warm and the water calm, and the landlubbers rejected the assistance.

Jimmy said nothing, but he glanced out toward the reef and whistled to himself. A half-mile out we were exposed to a lively breeze, a heavy spray flew over the boat and everyone was soaked from head to foot before reaching the banks. Jimmy said nothing except:

"If this was fresh water, you'd have pneumonia."

He was always reassuring. Later, when we started back and the motor balked, he remarked hopefully:

"I'm *almost* sure this motor will start. Anyway, we're drifting toward the Coast Guard Station."

Heretofore I had always landed up on the beach near the pony pens and had never been down to the hook. This is a remarkable place, and the trip is recommended for those who like a little geographical adventure.

From Harker's Island you follow the channel which leads into Barden's Gut (or Inlet or Drain). It was named for our congressman who fathered its cutting. However, in olden times there have been natural inlets at or near the same place.

We hate to report to Rep. Hap that his gut is misbehaving. If we had followed those markers, we would have landed up on shoals. Jimmy Harker, knowing how to disregard the markers like a good bridge player learns to disregard his partner's lead, told me how to steer around this shoal and that one. The Inlet is badly in need of "drudging" as they say down there.

After crossing Core Sound, the boat entered the narrow Gut, and emerged in Lookout Bight, the first of our three oceans. The Bight is formed by the hook of the cape, which has been artificially extended by the Break-

We crossed this first ocean and on the far side, Jimmy threw an anchor into the shallow water and we waded easily ashore — if wading in ice-cold water can be called easy. We landed on the unique beach of the Bight.

There is no surf on this sheltered seashore, and when the tide goes out, it uncovers a flat, tremendously wide beach. When the tide comes lapping in, it provides hundreds of feet of wading and swimming water — shallow, with firm, sandy bottom, gently shelving toward deep water. An outdoor sheltered swimming pool.

The Bight is a practical, natural harbor. Aycock Brown once said, in a burst of poetic enthusiasm, that all the navies of the world could find anchorage in its deep water.

And a lot of ships have, too. During World War II, it was a rendezvous for merchant ships, gathering here to make up convoys for the dangerous trips ahead. Submarine nets were strung across the channel. Buoys which held these nets in place later were cut loose, and some of them washed up on Lookout Beach.

Boulders form Lookout's jetty.





We walked across the narrow point of the hook and came to the second ocean. Here the surf comes in, but quite moderately, because the beach trends toward the northwest, and is protected from the open ocean. Due west and due south lies the Atlantic.

On the second ocean we found the old Breakwater. This is a jetty of rocks—boulders, really—thrown into the sea and serving as a sort of synthetic extension of the natural hook. It was low tide, and the rocks were just exposed. At high tide, they are covered.

The breakwater is a monument to a great scheme that failed. When put down, it was proposed to build a railway bridge to the Cape, and vessels were to stop in there for re-coaling. Nothing came of it, but Jimmy Harker the Elder—who worked on this project—says he is convinced that the railway from Morehead to Beaufort would never have been built except for this dream.

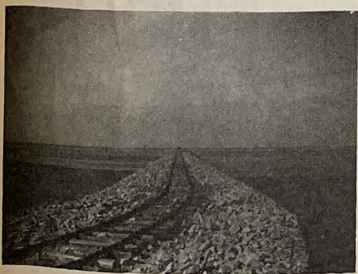
It served another purpose. Sand collected on the rocks and built up a considerable stretch of beach. Consequently the breakwater comes in from the sea and disappears under the sand. How far it runs under the beach I don't know.

That was quite a job, too. Charts show it is 30 to 40 feet deep around the breakwater, and unless they dumped the rocks onto a hidden reef, it took a lot of rock to reach to the surface.

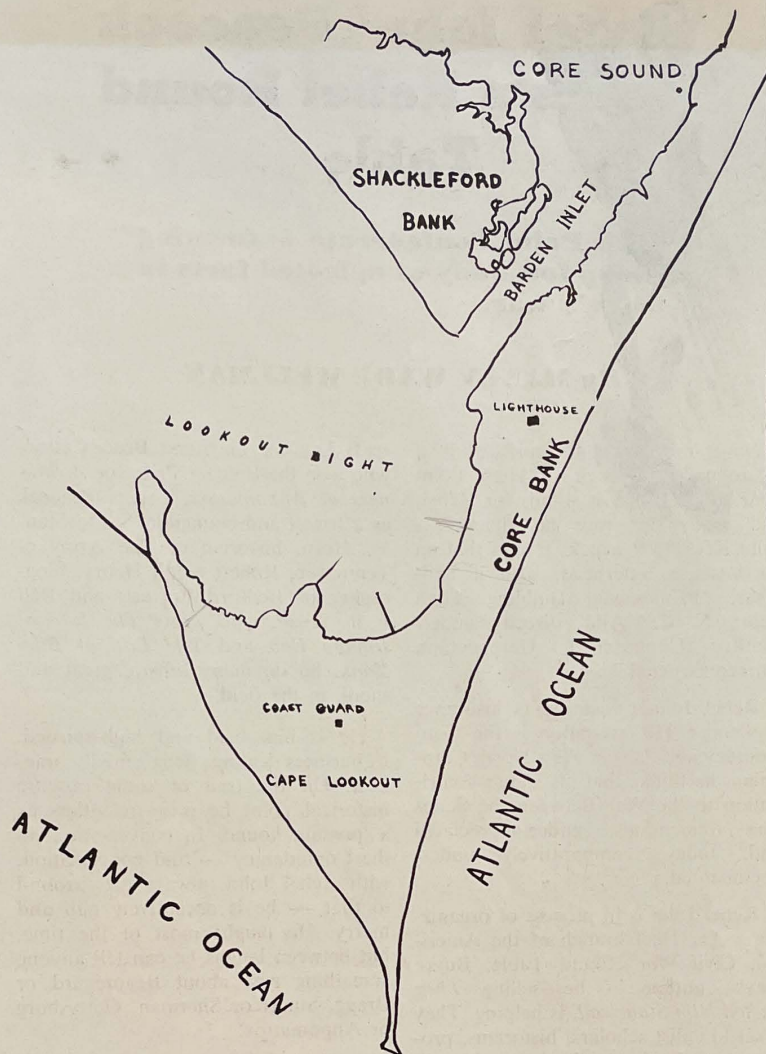
Across Barden's Gut is Shackleford Bank, a high, fine wooded beach, running sharply to the northwest. It is completely undeveloped, except for a few camps, but Beaufort people run across the sound there for swimming, fishing and crabbing. Some day it will be popular.

The Cape area of Core Banks likewise is undeveloped and neglected,

**This rare picture, furnished us by Steve Wall of Wilmington, was made during construction of the Cape Lookout Breakwater.**



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though it is an easy trip from Harker's. The lighthouse and Coast Guard station are at the Cape itself, and there are a few fishing camps. You have to go all the way to Drum Inlet before encountering much use, and there the surf fishermen have taken over.

Core Banks are eroding badly, and north of Drum Inlet the dunes have mostly been leveled. Ira Morris, who owns some fishing cabins up there, told me he was doing all he could to keep his property from being blown and washed away. He puts out old car bodies to catch the wind and thus start dunes. Even his garbage is carefully piled on the beach for this purpose.

If the second ocean is still too innocuous, stroll down the beach to Cape

Point and turn toward the east. Here a robust surf sends its hissing combers up to the crown of the beach—our third ocean is highly exposed and rough. Extending beyond Cape Point, but beneath the surface, are Lookout Shoals, the surf breaking violently over them in rough weather and tossing spray high in the air.

The lighthouse is conspicuous, and on a fair day you can see it from Atlantic Beach. It is 169 feet tall, and was rebuilt in 1859 after being first established in 1812 to warn mariners from the shoals.

The tower is painted in black diamonds—officially “black and white diagonally checkered.”

A local legend says that the painting

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crew was supposed to paint the diamonds on the Cape Hatteras light to identify Diamond Shoals. By mistake, they painted them on the Lookout light.

The light is now unattended (automatic) and if you fetch up there in the dark you can identify your surroundings by this flash: 2 seconds flash, 2 seconds eclipse, 2 seconds flash, 9 seconds eclipse—a 15 second group flashing which repeats endlessly. The nearby Coast Guard station has responsibility for this light and perhaps will let you climb the tower if it is not too inconvenient to unlock the door.

If you make this trip—and it is an adventure available to any visitor to the area—let me suggest that you:

Either go in a cabin boat or choose a calm, warm day.

Figure on at least 4 to 6 hours. Pack a lunch with drinks. Take your camera. Get G.S. maps or charts. For these, write Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., allowing plenty of time for a reply and delivery—about three weeks.

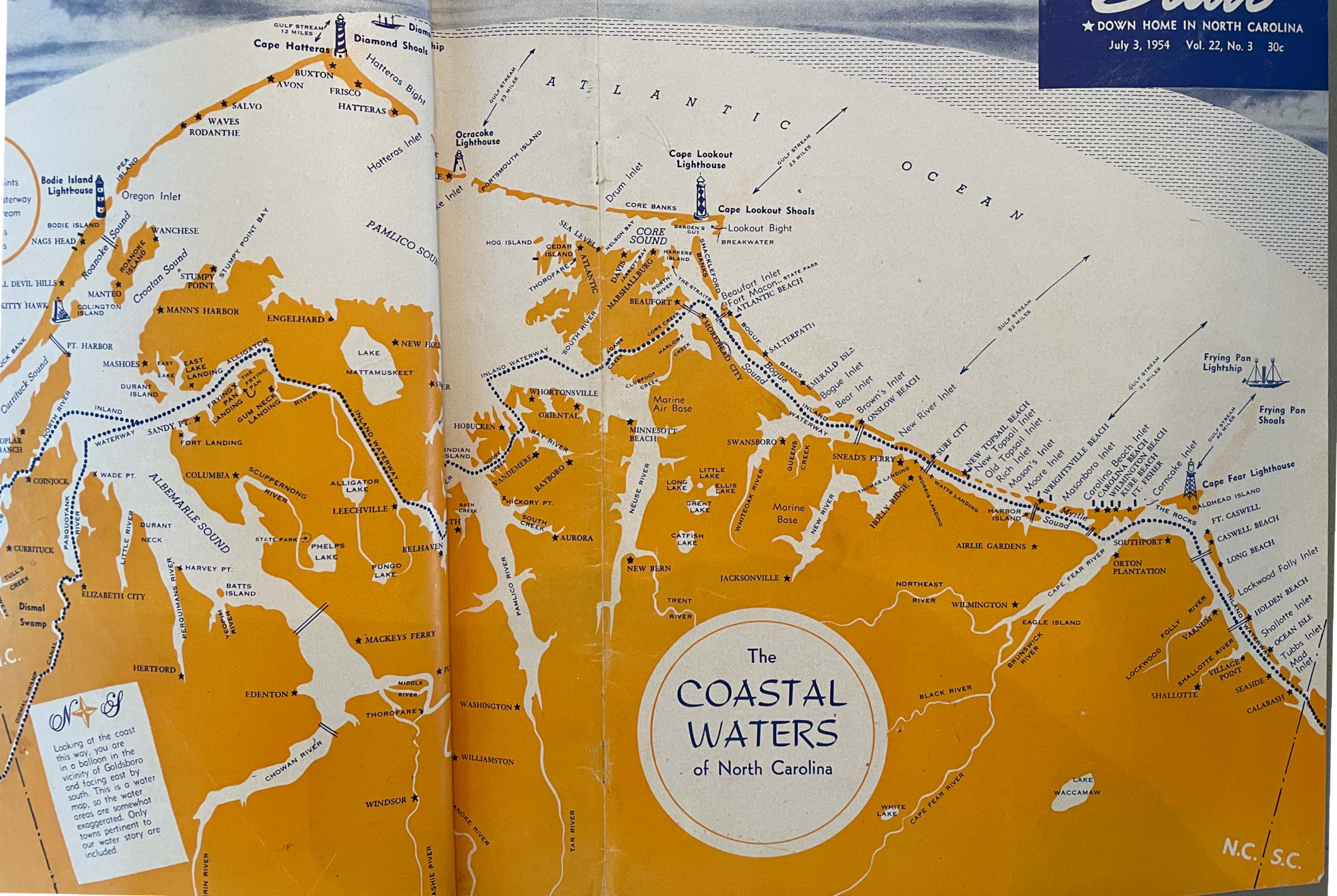
(Most feasible take-off point is Harker's Island (Harker's Lodge).)

Coming back, the wind shifted into the north and we got wet all over again. The tide was in, but still the shoals prevented our following the channel strictly.

The motor did work, after all!

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The COASTAL WATERS of North Carolina

Looking at the coast this way, you are in a balloon in the vicinity of Goldsboro and facing east by and south. This is a water map, so the water areas are somewhat exaggerated. Only towns pertinent to our water story are included.