

THE DUNE

Breeze

Kites flying at the Rogallo Fun Fly held September 20th to honor Francis Rogallo (1912-2009), inventor of the flexible wing. Photo courtesy Kitty Hawk Kites.

Father of the Flexible Wing, Francis Rogallo, Dies at Age 97

By Sarah Downing



Francis Rogallo, circa 1972.

Photo by Aycock Brown, courtesy Outer Banks History Center.

The windswept Outer Banks are home to hundreds of retirees who move to the area after distinguished careers in a variety of vocations. The local community and the field of aviation lost a special member in September with the passing of Francis Melvin Rogallo, the inventor of the flexible wing.

Rogallo was born in Sanger, California in 1912. After earning a degree in Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautics at Stanford, he took a position in Hampton, Virginia with the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the predecessor of NASA) in 1936.

He met and married Hampton native, Gertrude Sugden (1914-2008) in 1939. The couple dreamed of creating a method of making simple inexpensive flight accessible for

sport and recreation. Together they worked to create the flexible wing in 1948. In fact, the first successful prototype was created from some of Gertrude's old curtains.

The Rogallos gave their patent to the United States government, to advance the country's technological abilities within the space program.

The invention of the flexible wing was the springboard for many sports enjoyed at Jockey's Ridge State Park today – hang gliding; kiting and kite boarding, which is ever increasing in popularity.

According to Bruce Weaver, Hang Gliding Manager at Kitty Hawk Kites in Nags Head, "It was the Rogallo Wing that started it all. That invention led to the development of

Continued on Page 2

From the President's Pen



Greetings All, Jockey's Ridge State Park has been busy, hosting record numbers of visitors over the summer and fall. Hats off to park staff, who have continued to offer a wide array of educational programs for all ages, while maintaining the park and even implementing new projects, such as the new oyster reef area and wind turbine in spite of budget cuts and being short several staff positions. Big thanks for the seasonal staff that help support the programming, maintenance and manning the visitor center.

Everyone has felt the crunch of the times, and Jockey's Ridge State Park is no exception. The financial down turn just happens to coincide with a focus of the Friends of Jockey's Ridge to increase volunteer opportunities for Friends members and other interested parties. Over the summer,

volunteers sold t-shirts outside the Visitor Center during the evenings. We had a great time talking with summer visitors and sharing information about park activities and the Friends of Jockey's Ridge. The organization is also hosting workdays every three months to provide chances for people to get together, learn about the park, and work on projects designated by park personnel. Our first two workdays were a success and our next one is planting grasses on December 5.

September brought the opening of our Guest Lecture Series with former board member and local author and historian Sarah Downing, who gave a presentation on early Outer Banks photography. The October lecture featured Jockey's Ridge's new superintendent Debo Cox who shared his path on becoming superintendent and present and future plans for the park. In November we featured Virginia Tech's Gina Davis, who discussed local invasive plant and insect species. The weather has been great so come out and visit the park, and if you get a chance attend one of the lectures or enjoy a workday. It is my hope that as the volunteer program develops there will be more opportunities for interested people to volunteer in different capacities at the Jockey's Ridge State Park.

Sincerely, John Welch



Francis Rogallo *Continued from Page 1*

hang gliders, paragliders, ultralights, sport parachutes, delta kites, stunts kites, parafoil kites, and kiteboarding kites. I don't know of many people who have been responsible for bringing so much joy to so many people. His invention has allowed millions of people to experience the magic of flight, either through flying themselves or by flying kites."

In 1967 the couple purchased a vacation home in Southern Shores and eventually retired to the Outer Banks community where they were often seen at

aviation events and hang-gliding and kiting contests and fly-ins.

"Back in the '70s Mr. Rogallo flew his hang glider regularly out on Jockey's Ridge." Weaver said. "Although he took his last flight on his 80th birthday, Mr. Rogallo would still come out on the dune to see and talk to people flying their kites and gliders."

The Rogallos were honored internationally for their achievements in aviation. In 1995, they were enshrined in the First Flight Shrine

at the Wright Brothers National Memorial, where their likeness hangs in the portrait gallery. Francis was awarded the National Air and Space Museum Trophy in 1992 for his lifetime achievements in aviation.

The Outer Banks attract all types. Lovers, dreamers, artists, writers and even scientists. We are blessed to have walked the same sands as Francis Rogallo, a man who truly changed the world. Fair and steady winds.





He almost stepped on it.

If he had, it would have broken into a million pieces. It was just sitting there like a twig on top of the sand, and had probably been passed-over by twenty other people. Something shiny or oddly shaped must have drawn his attention for a split-second and piqued his curiosity. He started digging with his hands at first, and then called the office to get a ranger to bring him a shovel. That's how Assistant Ranger Neal Ward found what is probably the second-largest fulgurite unearthed at Jockey's Ridge State Park recently.

If you're not familiar with all things geological, fulgurites are created when the heat of a lightning strike fuses sand grains together into a glass tube. They can be tiny pieces, or quite large like the one Neal found. They're truly one of nature's most remarkable treasures; fragile, and elegantly beautiful in that way that only nature can produce. I'm not going to

say they're common at Jockey's Ridge (I've never found one), but as the highest natural landmark in the area we do get more than our share of lightning strikes.

Hearing Neal's story started me thinking about the other people who had passed directly over that fulgurite while taking their daily soundside beach walk. What a shame it was that out of all of those people, nothing caught their eye and made them start digging. Imagine being so close to something so beautiful and not realizing that it's even there.

So with this story fresh on my mind, I'd like to take the opportunity to invite you to Jockey's Ridge State Park. If you've never been here, you really should try to make the trip. It, like the fulgurite, is one of nature's most striking (pardon the pun) achievements. If you're one of those people who visited years ago and haven't been back in a while, I invite you to come back and witness the astonishing beauty and grace that time, wind, and sand can assemble. Let us catch your eye so you'll begin digging. Imagine being so close to something so beautiful and not realizing that it's even there.

CRAZIEST Things Heard This Summer...

Once again compiled by the JRSP staff

Can we bring a picnic?

Can we bring pizza?

Do you guys still do the rattlesnake show?

Can I get a fishing license here?

It's been raining today, so is the sand out on the dune wet?

Can you help me? I lost my kite string. Has anyone turned one in?

Since when do turtles have skulls?



HELPING HANDS

Friends of Jockey's Ridge chair, John Welch and vice chair Mark Dunlevy put in some volunteer hours in September to help remove Weeping Love Grass at Jockey's Ridge State Park.

According to park superintendent, Debo Cox, "Weeping Love Grass is an invasive plant that people were encouraged to propagate in the area to stabilize the soil. The problem is that it grows so well that it spills over onto the ground. Cox says this prevents other natural plants from taking hold.

"It has a big root system and is physically difficult to remove, so around here there's no love for the love grass. Many thanks to those who picked, poked, pulled, and prodded. The area where John and Mark were working has some reasonably rare and threatened plant species (Woolly Beach Heather, Maritime Pinweed) and removing that stuff helps ensure their survival."



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WHO'S IN THE PARK?

Finn Parks and his second grade classmates from First Flight Elementary School in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina visited Jockey's Ridge State Park in October. The students learned about the sand that forms the dunes, how the dunes move back and forth, some of the wildlife that make Jockey's Ridge home and how fulgurites are created when lightning strikes the dune. Finn is the son of Stuart and Lara Parks of Kill Devil Hills.



JOCKEY'S RIDGE STATE PARK

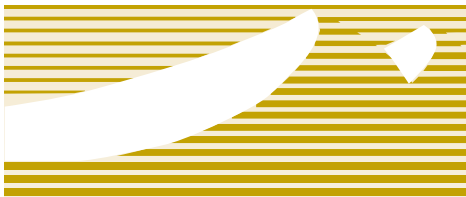
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