



Kitty Hawk: The Right Place For The Wright Brothers



View of original location of Baum home with the Kitty Hawk Oak, circa 1930. From the Bald View B&B Collection.

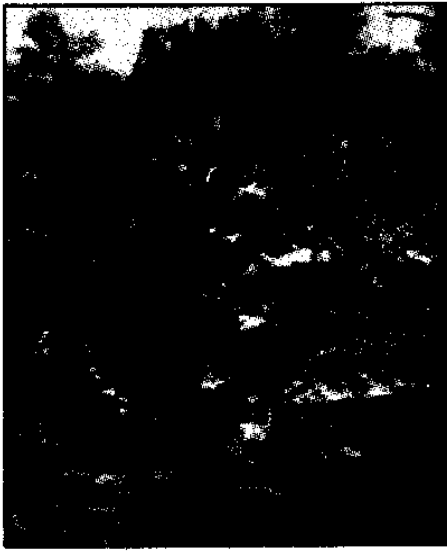
By Emerson Brantley, American Forests' Tree Nursery

On September 13, 1900, after an arduous trip on an old schooner, Wilbur Wright sailed into Kitty Hawk Bay and stepped off a boat at Kitty Hawk Village, NC. Fifteen-year old Elijah Baum met Wilbur at the landing, guiding him across a wooded ridge under the sheltering arms of over a dozen large old live oak trees to the Tate house. Mr. Tate was the area post-master.

Over the next few years the Wrights returned to Kitty Hawk and walked this trail many times. Several of the old houses still stand along this path, and a simple marker notes the location where the Wrights landed. In a painting of the site as it was in 1900, and in photographs taken in the late 1920s and later, many of the trees are visible just as they stand today.

These grand old Live Oaks are the only living witnesses to this incredible moment in human history. As we touch their bark and sit beneath their cooling shade, we are transported to that distant time when human beings first broke the power of Earth's gravity and began to soar. Because of this living connection to a dramatic chapter in our past, these trees have been nominated into the National Register of Historic Trees.

A few years after Wilbur's first visit, Elijah built a general store and post office on the site, and today, the road is still named "Elijah Baum Road." Where the store once stood, well-known local historian David Stick ("Graveyard of the Atlantic," "The Outer Banks of North Carolina," and other books) now resides. Several of the ancient oaks visible in old photographs are clearly identifiable on Mr. Stick's lot. Just east is the house in which Elijah was raised, now on the grounds of The Bald View Bed & Breakfast. This rolling eleven-acre site, owned by Dr. Frank Bald, is home to most of the ancient trees that make up this historic grove, including the largest, known as the "Kitty Hawk Oak."



Same view of the Kitty Hawk Oak today, with Bald View B&B in background. Photo by American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery.

These trees remain as witnesses to the chapter of our history that began on that September day 100 years ago. Their designation as a National Historic Grove, and listing on the National Register of Historic Trees by American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery, bears witness to their story.

The designation of the Kitty Hawk Historic Live Oak Grove does not give any legal protection to the trees. It does, however, help focus our attention on the unique value these trees bring to our lives. At this time these are the only documented living trees directly associated with Orville and Wilbur Wright and their trips to the Outer Banks from 1900 through the historic first flights of December 17, 1903. As such, these trees deserve special recognition, and will be included in the online and printed versions of the National Register of Historic Trees (expected publication date, spring 2004).

American Forests is the country's oldest non-profit citizens' conservation organization, founded in 1875. The group was instrumental in the founding of the Department of the Interior, The National Parks Service, and other state and federal conservation programs. Its primary mission is to plant trees for environmental restoration and to reverse the national urban Tree Deficit. In our "Wildfire ReLeaf" program we recently planted our 20 millionth tree in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to kick off the restoration of wilderness destroyed by recent wildfires covering three states.

American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery seeks to "Identify, Preserve and Protect Trees With American Heritage." The group collects seeds and cuttings from

famous and historic trees nationwide, from National Parks and monuments, even the White House. For several years the Historic Tree Nursery has collected seeds from the Kill Devil Hills site, simply because of the significance of the site itself. There are no known, documented trees at the National Memorial site, which would have been alive at the time of the Wright Brothers.

The Historic Tree Nursery is the organization of record for the National Register of Historic Trees, charged with identifying the silent witnesses of our

common history as a people. It was under this program the group sent a representative to Kitty Hawk, to



Kitty Hawk Landing marker. Photo by American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery.

locate trees that were living witnesses to the Wright Brothers and their time here.

Coastal Live Oaks, such as those seen at the Wright Brothers' National Memorial at Kill Devil Hills, are often small, scrubby, and bent from the wind and salt of the prevailing air currents. As early settlers landed, most large trees were cut to clear land for farming, build dwellings and ships, and provide fuel for cooking and warmth. In sheltered areas such as the Kitty Hawk Historic Grove, live oaks can reach substantial size. Live oaks grow from southernmost Florida through Delaware and into parts of lower Pennsylvania.

It should be noted that all of these oaks are on private property, and the Bald View property is only accessible for guests of the Bed and Breakfast.

Emerson Brantley works on National Projects for American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery. For more information about the organization, call 800-320-8733 or visit www.historictrees.org.

