

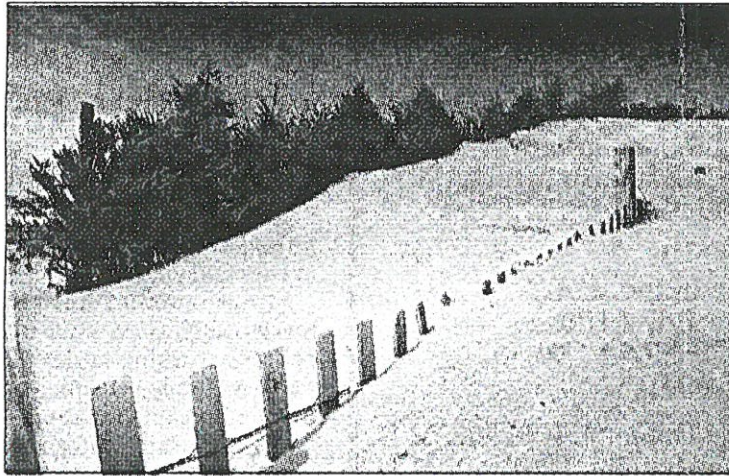
# Castle is duned to vanish again

BY JERRY ALLEGOOD  
STAFF WRITER

**W**ith every hearty gust or whisper of wind, the forgotten castle emerges a little more from the deep sand of Jockey's Ridge State Park.

The sand overtook the castle, built as a prop at a miniature golf course at the foot of the giant dune, and hid it for most of the past 14 years. Now the sand is moving again — to the delight of park visitors who snap photos and clamber over the small concrete turrets and towers that poke as many as 7 feet from a barren slope.

NAGS HEAD



Fences and old Christmas trees have been placed as barriers to shifting sand at Jockey's Ridge State Park.

ered about 140 feet in the 1930s but now is down to 87 feet. More troublesome is its horizontal meandering, which has moved the southern edge of the main dune about 400 feet since 1974. While the loss of height is confined to the part of the dune inside the park boundary, the sideways slide causes sand to drift onto private property and nearby roads. Barnes said the state Division of Parks and Recreation is trying to decide how to cope with the movement without too much interference with nature.

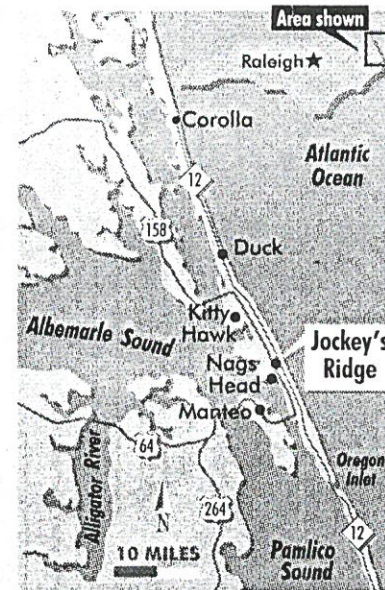
Visible from U.S. 158 in Nags Head, the sand-colored concrete castle looks like an oversize creation in a gigantic sandbox. It has become an impromptu attraction in the last few months, prompting visitors to pepper park staff with questions: What is it? Did the state build it? How long will it be uncovered?

"I'm the king of the castle," 7-year-old Mike Rock of Newport News, Va., proclaimed this week as he stood atop a turret during a visit with his family.

For some, there is a fairy-tale flavor to the reappearance of a structure once buried under several feet of sand. But scientists say the shifting sand is simply part of the natural process on the Outer Banks, one that creates problems for state officials trying to manage a moving dune in the boundaries of a 420-acre state park.

"It's a pretty good teaching tool," said park superintendent George Barnes. "It shows how sand moves back and forth."

Researchers have concluded that Jockey's Ridge is getting wider and flatter. The mound tow-



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## CASTLE

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The castle was part of a miniature golf course built on a 3-acre site on the south side of the park, which was established in the mid-1970s, Barnes said. The state bought the golf course in 1987 to provide more park room and to eliminate problems with sand blowing over the putting lanes and facilities. In addition to the miniature golf course, the state bought several lots and private homes along the south side that were threatened by the migrating sand.

### How the course vanished

When the sand was no longer swept away to protect the miniature course, it piled up. And up. No one knows why the winds have now started to uncover the castle, how much will be uncovered and how long that will last.

In recent years, the state has concentrated on the southern boundary, where sand has blown onto private property along Soundside Road. Although the winds alternate — generally from southwest in summer and northeast in winter — the northerly winds are stronger and the pile migrates to the southwest at a rate of 1 to 6 feet a year. The state also has scooped up sand on the south side of the park, trucked it to the north side and dumped it so it can blow back into the park.

In the most recent relocation last June, about 20,000 cubic yards of sand was trucked around. Barnes said about 30,000 cubic yards still need to be moved, but state budget

cuts have put such projects in limbo. In the interim, the division has planted beach grass and placed discarded Christmas trees along a ridge to slow the steady spread.

### The options they faced

Long-range options included doing nothing, continuing to haul sand from the south end and selectively planting vegetation on the south end. Park officials say that a combination of relocation and vegetation is the best approach.

At one point on the south side, the

curving wall of sand looms over a private rental house. Cola Vaughan, a local Realtor who is part owner of the house, said the house is popular for visitors who like the view of the park, even if it is getting uncomfortably close. He said he would like the state to stabilize the edge of the dune but leave the natural processes at work in the bulk of the park.

"I think they [park officials] created a quandary when they elected to make a state park out of a moving object," he said.

Stacey Banks, a teacher at White Oak Elementary School in Edenton,

recently brought her fourth-graders for a firsthand lesson on the dunes. She said she recalled playing miniature golf around the castle when she was a child, when mock dragons stood silent on the grounds.

She said her students were mesmerized by the castle in the sand and the vagary of the wind.

"The wind was blowing so hard, they could really see the direction it blows the sand," she said.

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Ben and Heather Lunsford of Asheville enjoy their first outing to Jockey's Ridge during a vacation recently on the North Carolina coast.

STAFF PHOTO BY COREY LOWENSTEIN



## AT JOCKEY'S RIDGE | A FLEETING FAIRY TALE



Alex Hollowell, at right, is one of the fourth-graders in Stacey Banks' class at White Oak Elementary School in Edenton who came to Jockey's Ridge State Park recently and discovered more magic than they had imagined.

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