

North Carolina Highway 12 crosses seven tidal creeks on Ocracoke Island. From south to north they are *Island Creek* (near Hammock Hills nature trail and the National Park Service ocean side campground), *Shad Hole Creek* (now little more than a damp ditch), *Old Hammock Creek* (named for the nearby hammock, or sand hill), *Molasses Creek* (a wide creek, named either for the dark, slow moving water; or a long-ago shipment of molasses lost there — stories vary), *Old Quawk's Creek* ("Old Quawk," an irascible shipwrecked sailor, or perhaps even a pirate, settled on a nearby hammock more than two hundred years ago), *Parker's Creek* (the Parker family lived in the vicinity in the mid-1800s), and *Try Yard Creek* (named for a temporary facility located there many years ago for the "trying" or rendering of whale oil from blubber).

These seven creeks are almost certainly the remnants of old inlets. In fact, Ocracoke Inlet, between Ocracoke Island and Portsmouth Island, is the only Outer Banks inlet that has been continuously open since Europeans began keeping written records in the sixteenth century. Storms and hurricanes routinely open and close inlets along our coast. As inlets close along the ocean side, marshy, tidal creeks that connect with Pamlico Sound are often left behind.

New inlets frequently form as older inlets close. The current Hatteras Inlet (as well as Oregon Inlet) was opened September 07, 1846 in a severe gale.

In 1956 the state of North Carolina built a hard surface two-lane road connecting the village of Ocracoke to Hatteras Inlet, fourteen miles to the north. At the same time the state assumed operation of the ferry service begun by Frazier Peele in 1950. For the first time Ocracoke had a convenient and reliable link to the northern beach communities, Norfolk, and beyond.

The present day bridges spanning the seven tidal creeks were constructed when the road was built, more than fifty years ago. They have served Ocracoke well for the last half a century. Today, although rated in "fair" condition, they are slated to be replaced in early 2008.

The Bridge spanning Island Creek:



(Click on photo to view larger image.)

In March of this year, a representative of the North Carolina Department of Transportation met with Ocracoke citizens to discuss alternative plans for the replacement of the bridges. The multi-million dollar project could be undertaken in two ways, we were told.

One alternative was to keep one lane of traffic open while contractors replaced four of the bridges. This would take an estimated eight months to complete. When more money became available the remaining bridges would be replaced, taking an additional six to eight months. During this time there would be continuous delays as north and south bound traffic was alternately allowed to pass over the one lane bridges. There was little enthusiasm for this plan among island residents.

The second alternative, though disruptive, was embraced as an unwelcome, but necessary solution to the issue. In this plan, NC Highway 12 would be closed for up to 75 days while all seven bridges were replaced (Shad Hole creek bridge would be replaced by a culvert).

Ocracoke citizens have been encouraged by the attention the DOT has given to this problem. During a lengthy and very thoughtful public meeting many of our questions were addressed, along with assurances that they would pursue solutions to our most worrisome concerns.

Following are some of the main decisions as I understand them:

- The NCDOT will replace all of the bridges at one time.
- The new bridges will be wider and will include a designated bicycle lane.
- Construction will begin soon after January 01, 2008, and will be completed no later than mid-March, 2008.
- During this 75 day period Highway 12 will be closed from the Pony Pen to the NPS campground.
- The National Park Service will open a new ramp at the Pony Pen. Capable vehicles will be permitted to drive the beach between the Pony Pen and the campground.
- All ferries (including Hatteras Inlet) will run on their regular schedules (Swan Quarter & Cedar Island ferries may even run more frequently). Ocracoke will NOT be shut down during this period.
- Plans are now under way to ensure that all services are maintained as conveniently and reliably as possible. Of primary concern are medical and fire & rescue services. Other concerns revolve around mail & package delivery, groceries and related supplies, building materials, off-island school functions, and, of course, tourism. Every effort will be made to maintain connections as much as possible, and to return the island to normal as quickly and painlessly as possible.

If you are planning a trip to Ocracoke during the first two and a half months of 2008 please keep the above information in mind so you can plan your trip accordingly.

As of this writing I was unable to find official information on the internet. However, we anticipate future advisories from the NC DOT. Check the following link for more information as the beginning date of the bridge replacement nears:

[NCDOT](#)