Flight may have been “born” in Kitty Hawk, NC with the Wright Brothers, but since 1784, Anacostia Trails Heritage Area has watched flight grow up. From hot air balloons to steps on the moon, the Heritage Area is a great place to explore the “Maryland Milestones” of the history of flight.

In June 1784, Peter Carnes, owner of the Indian Queen Tavern in Bladensburg (near today’s George Washington House and the Bladensburg Waterfront Park) went out in the fields around Bladensburg to launch a balloon — based on the balloons launched in Paris the year before. This launch was an unmanned, tethered balloon. Later that year, in Baltimore, he would successfully launch a balloon with a passenger.

Carnes’ balloon tests were a first step for aviation. At the turn of the twentieth century, two brothers from Ohio — Orville and Wilbur Wright — held the first tests of an airplane in North Carolina. After the successful tests in 1903, the brothers would be asked by the U.S. Army to begin using planes as a military and defense vehicle.

Wilbur Wright took on this responsibility and helped to establish an airfield at College Park Airport in 1909. At this field, military aviators were trained, including Frederic Humphries who was the first to fly solo in a military plane. In 1918, the first airmail service was established. In 1924, Emile and Henry Berliner tested some of the earliest helicopter designs. Tests of navigation systems, machine guns, and altitude were all made on the “field of firsts.” Nearby, the “virtually un-spinnable” Ercoupe was made at the ERCO factory, near Riverdale Park.

After these aviation firsts in College Park, the next step was to leave Earth behind. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, was established in 1959 as the first central operations facility for NASA and led the early Mercury projects before being transferred to Johnson Space Center. Goddard SFC was the lead in the operations of the Hubble Space Telescope in the 1990s and helped build and test the James Webb Space Telescope during the early 2000s. Today, engineers and space flight experts work in Earth sciences, astrophysics, heliophysics, and satellite development. Visitors to the Goddard Space Flight Visitor’s Center can experience the innovative work with exhibits and activities.

The aviation tradition continues at the University of Maryland, with the Glenn Martin Hall (of Lockheed Martin fame), home to the University’s Wind Tunnel and the Aerospace Engineering Department which holds the human-powered flight record with Gamera. There is also a neutral buoyancy tank for space simulation.

Come and explore a new generation of aeronautics taking flight here in the Heritage Area!

HERITAGE ROUTES
The following Heritage Routes are tours which connect multiple sites and themes. They can be accessed by foot, bike, or vehicle. Brochures for select routes are available at the Maryland Milestones Visitors Center or find all of them at www.marylandmilestones.org.