

North Carolina Flight First: John Harris Hang Glides from Grandfather Mountain ^[1]

North Carolina Flight First: John Harris First Person to Hang Glide from Grandfather Mountain

By Kelly Agan, N.C. Government & Heritage Library, 2015

On July 13, 1974 John Harris became the first person to hang glide from the 1,600 foot high rock pinnacle of Grandfather Mountain. Harris had managed to convince Hugh Morton, the mountain's owner, to let him make the daring attempt that occurred during the annual Gathering of the Scottish Clans. And Morton was on hand that day to capture the event in one of his iconic photographs.

Harris flew some 1,500 feet, landing safely in the golf course below, and a hey day of hang gliding at the mountain began. In 1975, the U.S. Open Hang Gliding Tournament was held at Grandfather Mountain and continued for eleven years. By the mid-eighties, the kites had become so efficient that there were inadequate safe landing areas around the heavily forested mountain for the increasingly longer and faster flights. After several accidents, flying was suspended in 1986.

Like his spiritual predecessors Wilbur and Orville Wright, John Harris was a native midwesterner who was inspired by the North Carolina Outerbanks. He relocated to North Carolina from California in the early 1970s for work as an engineer and became captivated by the fledgling sport of hang gliding, spending his free time on Jockey's Ridge. He launched a kite and hang gliding business, Kitty Hawk Kites, and it's still in business today.

References:

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