Your Tour of the Capitol

The main entrance to the Capitol is the center stairway on the east side. The cast iron dome rises 288 feet and is the most well-known part of the Capitol. It cost $1,042,291 in 1865 when it was finished and weighs almost 9 million pounds. On top of the dome facing the east is Freedom, a bronze statue of a woman with a sword and shield. In 1993, a helicopter was used to temporarily remove the 99-1/2 foot, 7-ton Statue of Freedom for a cleaning.

Stop #1: The Rotunda

The Rotunda is a ceremonial room with statues and paintings of important people and events in America's history. The statues around the room include those of several presidents, Martin Luther King, and three women who fought for women's voting rights (called suffrage). Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy and the Unknown Soldiers of World War I and II, Korea, and Vietnam have their coffins covered by the U.S. flag.

On the dome canopy, or ceiling, is the painting "The Apotheosis of George Washington," (ah-po-thú-sis) meaning glorification. It shows Washington rising to heaven.

Other works of art in the Rotunda include eight framed paintings that represent events in the nation's history. The first two paintings, on your right as you entered the Rotunda from the east side, show DeSoto's discovery of the Mississippi River and Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas. The two pictures on the left side of the entrance are of the Pilgrims' departure from Europe for America and the last one is "Baptism of Pocahontas." (Pocahontas is shown two more times in this room.)


The Frieze is the painting around the Rotunda just below the windows. It shows historical scenes including the "Reading of the Declaration of Independence, 1776" and "The Birth of Aviation in the U.S. in 1903." (Look for another picture of Pocahontas here.)

TO BEGIN YOUR TOUR: Walk up the East Front steps (the main center staircase) and pass through the large bronze doors. Go through security and enter the Capitol Rotunda (1).

NEXT STOP: Exit the Rotunda past the statue of Andrew Jackson at the north door, into the Small Senate Rotunda (2). Follow the signs to the Old Senate Chamber (3).