

















Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Alternate Panhandle Route

Segments 2-4

Emergency contact information:

911

Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office: 850-833-9200

Walton County Sheriff's Office: 850-892-8186

Bay County Sheriff's Office: 850-747-4700

Gulf County Sheriff's Office: 850-227-1115

Franklin County Sheriff's Office: 850-670-8500

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 24-hour wildlife emergency/boating under the influence hotline: 1-888-404-3922

FPTA Regions: A and B

Begin: Destin

End: Apalachicola

Distance: 145 miles

Duration: 9 days

It is possible to choose an alternate 'inland' route to avoid the coastal option on the CT if weather conditions are not favorable for the outside passage along the Gulf coastline in Segments 2-4 which begins at the East Pass in Destin. Also, take into consideration that the outside passage between St. Andrews State Park and Mexico Beach traverses a long stretch of the coastal boundary of Tyndall Air Force Base that does not allow camping. This entails a 25-mile paddle to reach motels at Mexico Beach, the next available overnight stop after leaving St. Andrews State Park.

The inland route begins after leaving the spoil island in the Santa Rosa Sound and proceeds east under the US 98 Bridge. It skirts the north shore of the Choctawhatchee Bay and traverses through St Andrews Bay and Lake Wimico, using the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) to

Apalachicola, a distance of about 145 miles. It is also possible to return to the coastal route at several points if weather conditions are favorable. The alternate route does have its own potential challenges with long stretches of open water in the various bays and big barges that may be encountered in the narrow ICW. Plan to paddle early to avoid the bay winds that build up through the day.

The story of the ICW began in 1905 when the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association was formed to promote the development of a single, major waterway that would connect all major ports along the Gulf Coast. This waterway also would require the establishment of federally-protected status for it and the other inland waterways of the Gulf Coast through legislative efforts. It took more than four decades for the Association's idea to materialize, but the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway was completed in 1949 and has remained one of the most heavily-traveled and economically-significant marine routes in the nation.

The Choctawhatchee River and Bay watershed covers approximately 3,422,154 acres. About 42 percent of this is within Florida, with the remainder in Alabama. The Choctawhatchee Bay is around 30 miles in length and 4-6 miles wide in places and bordered on the western and northern shores by Eglin Air Force Base.

1. Santa Rosa Spoil Island Site to Fred Gannon/Rocky Bayou State Park (FGRB), 16-17 miles

A passage around the north side of Choctawhatchee Bay has been created since the southern side of the Bay is almost all private residential land with very limited rest stops or overnight options. Leaving the Segment 2 spoil island campsite and passing through a narrow stretch of the Santa Rosa Sound known as The Narrows, you'll enter the wide Choctawhatchee Bay. A short distance beyond the US 98 bridge on the south side of the bay is Ross Marler Park with bathrooms, picnic pavilions, an outdoor shower, and potable water. There are several restaurants within walking distance of the park. From the Ross Marler Park paddle northeast along the shoreline bordering Eglin Air Force Base. Around 6 miles beyond the US 98 Bridge, the houses thin out and uninhabited stretches of beach appear. Much of the undeveloped shoreline on the north side of the bay is Eglin AFB property and short rest breaks are permissible, below the mean high water mark, east of White Point and the Mid-Bay Bridge. However, Eglin AFB Main Base beach (between Black and Postal Points) is a controlled area and all non-Department of Defense affiliated paddlers should only land vessels for emergency purposes. Buoys approximately one-quarter mile offshore will alert paddlers of this controlled area. Passage through this area is permitted, except during heightened security periods. Continue following the shoreline to the northeast and look for condos with red roofs on the east side of the channel leading to Rocky Bayou. Just to the north of these condos is the Bluewater Bay Marina and restaurant with a small sandy beach. From the marina keep the shoreline to your right and go under US 20 Bridge. About a half-mile east of the bridge look for kayak rentals along the southern shoreline. About 200 yards further east is a small sandy beach, ideal for landing and camping at #36, 37, or 38 in the Fred Gannon/Rocky Bayou State Park. For camping reservations, visit [Reserve Florida State Parks](#) or call (800) 326-3521.

U.S. Air Force Colonel Fred Gannon was instrumental in preserving this site with beautiful old-growth longleaf pine trees, several more than 300 years old. Rocky Bayou, the main feature of the park, is the trailing arm of Choctawhatchee Bay and is popular for boating and fishing. Other opportunities for recreation include hiking, geocaching, and wildlife viewing. A well-shaded campground is available for full-facility camping. From the entrance of the state park on SR 20, it is about a one-mile walk either east or west to groceries, restaurants, banks, a pharmacy, etc. This is your last chance to purchase groceries until you reach St. Andrews State Park in Panama City (there will be a couple of options for restaurants along the way).

2. Fred Gannon/Rocky Bayou State Park to Basin Bayou, 16-17 miles

From the state park return to the Bay and head south, keeping the shoreline to your left. If you have military I.D. it is possible to stay in cabins or camp at the Max Gunter Recreation Area as you round White point and proceed east. Continue along the shoreline for about 9 miles to Nick's Seafood Restaurant, an excellent place for local seafood. Nick's is the landmark for the channel to Basin Bayou where a primitive campsite with tables and a fire ring is located on the east side of this Eglin AFB property. Use of this campsite is strictly limited. Be sure to read the description of [authorized users](#). It is necessary to obtain an Eglin Outdoor Recreation pass and pay a fee in advance at eglin.isportsman.net. You must register for an isportsman account. Call (850) 882-4165 or 850-882-4166 for any other questions on Eglin permits.

3. Basin Bayou to Pt. Washington, 11-12 miles

Leaving Basin Bayou paddle towards the US 331 Bridge. On the northwest end of the bridge, you will find [Grady Brown Park](#), a great new county park accessible from the water with a dedicated kayak launch, restrooms, picnic pavilions, water, etc. On the south end of the bridge there is [Pilcher Park](#), a county park accessible from the water with restrooms, picnic pavilions, etc. On the southeast side of the bridge is a seafood restaurant with a good beach for landing kayaks. Another overnight option, if you don't want to camp, is to paddle to [Live Oak Landing RV Resort](#), a private resort on the northeast side of the Bay with RV sites and cabin rentals on Black Creek, accessible from the water about 2.5 miles east of the SR 83 Bridge. 877-436-5063.

After passing under the bridge, head to Pt. Washington where there is a small public boat ramp next to the Choctawhatchee Rowing and Paddling Club on the southeast corner of the Bay and the nearby entrance to the ICW.

A worthwhile stop is at the picturesque [Eden Gardens State Park](#) just to the west of the public ramp. Just in front of the park's retaining wall is an area of constructed oyster reef breakwaters, providing shelter for replanted salt marsh grasses, an effort by the non-profit Choctawhatchee Bay Alliance (CBA) to establish a [Living Shoreline](#). In Choctawhatchee Bay and all along the state's coastline, many property owners use hardened structures such as sea walls, riprap, groins, and bulkheads (as opposed to Living Shorelines) to stabilize and protect waterfront property from erosion caused by wind and wave action. While these "hard" solutions may prevent some localized shoreline erosion, they often act to increase erosion by reflecting wave energy and altering natural sediment movement. Volunteers coordinated by CBA help create living shorelines associated with natural, gradually sloping beaches, seagrass meadows, and salt

marshes. These efforts help restore nursery, feeding, and refuge habitats for vital estuarine species while also providing protection from shoreline erosion.

There are two day-use areas at the Eden Gardens historic state park with restrooms, a nature trail, and potable water. To visit the historic home, land to the east of the boat dock on a small sandy spot under large magnolias. Pay an entrance fee at the park office located just south of the historic home. The house is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The focal point of this small park is the beautifully renovated, two-story Wesley house with its elegant white columns and wrap-around porch. The view from the mansion of the moss-draped, 600-year-old “Wedding Tree” and ornamental gardens inspire visions of hoop skirts and landed gentry at this popular wedding destination. Named after a wealthy Florida timber family, the park is part of the family's estate. In 1963, Lois Maxon bought and renovated the home, creating a showplace for her family heirlooms and antiques. The house holds the second largest known collection of Louis XVI furniture in the United States. Visitors can also take a stroll along the grounds and enjoy the picnic area. The old pilings visible in the water to the east side of the public boat ramp once moored large ‘rafts’ of logs that were floated down the Choctawhatchee River to await processing in nearby lumber mills.

For primitive camping visit the Choctawhatchee Rowing and Paddling Club next to the public boat ramp where paddlers are allowed to camp in front of the building overnight with permission. Do not block access to the building or water access. Please keep your presence discreet to not disturb adjacent neighbors. There is also a potable water tap across the street. Visitors are asked to call 850-259-8600 for permission to stay here.

4. Pt. Washington to SR 79 Bridge, 18 miles

Point Washington has remnants of a charming bayou community with ancient oak trees and an array of historic sites. According to historian Dale Cox, Brigadier General William Miller, second-in-command of Confederate forces at the Battle of Natural Bridge, once called Point Washington home, as did a number of other Civil War veterans, both Union and Confederate. A small sign points out the location of Miller's home and a walk through the community's historic cemetery reveals the graves of a number of Civil War soldiers.

Leaving Pt. Washington, navigate to the ICW and head east. The ICW has tall sandy spoil piles lining the long channel in places and barge boats with significant wake may be encountered. An unofficial primitive campsite is located just east of the bridge on the north side at N30.2910 W85.8516. There is the Boondocks Restaurant on the south side of the bridge and a convenience store about a half-mile walk over the SR 79 Bridge on the north side.

5. SR 79 Bridge to St. Andrews State Park, 18 miles

The ICW enters West Bay just beyond the SR 79 Bridge. It is about a 4-mile crossing to reach the mainland which you continue to keep on your right side heading eastward. Be careful crossing West Bay. This is a large body of water and can get quite rough on windy days. Continue under the US 98 (Hathaway) Bridge and into St Andrew Bay. There is an option to sample excellent local food at a variety of restaurants and bars while taking a walking tour to

visit a slice of ‘Old Florida’ in the vibrant Historic St Andrews District. To choose this option stay on the north side of the bay after passing under the bridge and head to St Andrews Marina about 2.6 miles further east. Look for a small sandy cove just south of the boat dock at Uncle Ernie’s Bayfront Grill. The schooner Governor Stone, a Historic National Landmark, is sometimes moored here.

If you elect to head straight for St Andrews State Park then follow the southern side of the shoreline for about 4 miles east of the bridge as it makes a sharp right and proceed to the opening of the Grand Lagoon. Make another sharp right into Grand Lagoon and paddle east past the state park boat ramp. Check Reserve America well in advance for one of the numerous campsites on the water where you can land your kayak (even numbers from 16-38, 96-114, and 101, 132, 134, and 143). There may be rip-rap (large rocks) and marsh grass in front of others. The park offers fresh water, showers, and bathrooms. This is your last chance for potable water until you reach White City.

To access a large grocery store and restaurants paddle west from the state park and proceed under the bridge that crosses the Grand Lagoon. This is a very narrow and busy channel under the bridge so watch for boat traffic. Immediately turn right after the bridge and head for a small boat rental business that offers a small beach area for landing a kayak. Walk north along Thomas Drive about 0.7 miles to a grocery store or visit one of many restaurants along the road. This will be your last chance for a good-sized grocery store until you reach Apalachicola.

6. St. Andrews State Park to Piney Point, 15-16 miles

Human history at St. Andrews State Park began with early Native Americans, who feasted on fish and abundant shellfish and left behind numerous middens (trash heaps of discarded shells, bones, and other refuse). In the early 1900s, bathers frequently used the area, generally arriving by boat. The first known full-time resident during this period was a Norwegian-born sailor who wrecked his boat on the south bank of Grand Lagoon during a 1929 hurricane. “Teddy the Hermit” decided to homestead and remained until his death in 1954 at age 74. His makeshift shack once stood between campsites 101 and 102. The purchase of land for a state park began in 1947 when 302 acres were acquired from the federal government for the bargain price of \$2.50 an acre. Today, after the addition of several adjacent parcels, at a considerably higher cost, the popular park consists of more than 1,200 acres.

The inlets and bays around the park are part of the St. Andrews Aquatic Preserve. Considered one of the most diverse bays in North America, with over 2,100 recorded marine-dependent species, St. Andrews Bay has the largest expanse of ecologically valuable seagrass beds in the Florida panhandle. These beds, along with expansive salt marshes, provide spawning and nursery habitats for a wide variety of fish and shellfish. The beaches and uplands along the preserve provide habitat and nesting areas for several protected species such as loggerhead and green sea turtles, the Choctawhatchee beach mouse, and snowy and piping plovers.

When leaving St. Andrews cross the pass between Shell Island and the Grand Lagoon with caution as boat traffic can be heavy and conditions challenging in the pass. The land north of Shell Island is Tyndall Air Force property and visitors are not allowed to land on the shoreline

where posted. If a restaurant meal is desired before entering the remote ICW again, head to the channel just to the east of the Panama City Marina and proceed under the drawbridge into Massalina Bayou. There is a dock-side restaurant, Bayou Joe's, in the boat basin, and others within walking distance.

Continue paddling east passing shipyards and industrial sites along the waterway. Your destination is Piney Point, a failed subdivision, about 5 miles east of the US 98 (Tyndall) Bridge. If you are retired or active duty military you may stay at the Tyndall Air Force Base Fam Camp located on the southwest side of the US 98 Bridge, about 10 miles east of St Andrews State Park. The Piney Point site is primitive with a great view of sunrise and directly opposite the airstrip at Tyndall Air Force Base, several miles across the bay. Jet pilots known as the 'Blue Angels' may be seen practicing hair-raising maneuvers for aerial shows held around the country, an entertaining contrast against the backdrop of rugged shoreline.

7. Piney Point to Overstreet Spoil Bank Area, 17-18 miles

From Piney Point, it is about 10.5 miles to the beginning of the next stretch of the ICW. Paddle through East Bay and along the shoreline of Tyndall Air Force Base where nothing but miles of planted pines, upland woodlands, and small slivers of white sand beaches are visible in this remote area. About 3.6 miles after entering the ICW the small village of Overstreet will appear below an enormous, tall bridge. On the east side of the bridge is a restroom, picnic pavilion, and boat ramp, with water labeled "non-potable". There are no amenities or businesses here. About two miles east of Overstreet there are a multitude of spoil sites that are easy to access for primitive camping. Just avoid stopping anywhere posted as private land.

8. Overstreet Spoil Bank Area to Lake Wimico Campsite, 18-20 miles

It is about 12.5 miles from Overstreet to an industrial canal that heads south to the town of Port St. Joe, a distance of 6 miles. From Port St Joe it is possible to rejoin the CT coastal option of Segment 4 by crossing St Joseph Bay to the T.H. Stone/St Joseph Peninsula State Park. This is really a stunning portion of the coastline with gorgeous barrier islands worth visiting if weather conditions are favorable for a return to the Gulf.

To continue the inland route to Apalachicola it is about 1.6 miles past the industrial canal to the small town of White City. There are restrooms and potable water at the city park with a half-mile walk north on the main road to a small convenience store. This is the last option for any limited amenities before arriving in Apalachicola. There are camping options on spoil sites along the eastern bank several miles after leaving White City. It is about 6 miles from White City to Lake Wimico and 2.4 miles farther to a small point of land jutting into the lake on the northern shoreline that provides a shady respite for camping on a small ridge. (GPS coordinates on the map)

9. Lake Wimico to Apalachicola, 13 miles

From Lake Wimico it is an easy paddle to historic Apalachicola, where paddlers may be tempted to spend several days soaking up the charms of this picturesque fishing village. There is a primitive camping opportunity on a large sandbar across from the Abercrombie Boat Ramp. If

continuing to Apalachicola, the take out and this Alternate Panhandle Route segments 2-4 ends at Battery Park City Marina. Stop by the Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center at 17 Avenue E and learn about the enduring culture and maritime heritage of this still vibrant port town of Apalachicola. Grab a map and enjoy a walking tour taking in historic homes, the colorful harbor, and the John Gorrie State Museum.

John Gorrie was a young physician who moved to Apalachicola in the early 1800s when it was a prominent port of trade, commerce, and shipping in Florida. Gorrie served as postmaster, city treasurer, town councilman, and bank director. Concern for his yellow fever patients motivated Gorrie to invent a method for cooling their rooms. He became a pioneer in the field of air conditioning and refrigeration by inventing a machine that made ice and received the first U.S. Patent for mechanical refrigeration in 1851. A replica of his ice-making machine is on display at the museum, as well as exhibits chronicling the colorful history of Apalachicola, which played an important role in Florida's economic development.

To rejoin Segment 4 from Apalachicola, paddle across the bay six or seven miles to a number of campsites on either Cape St. George or St. George Island. If you remain on the north side of the bay, the next stop is The Moorings of Carrabelle (see Segment 5).



Panhandle Alternate Route

Segments 2-4

Circumnavigational Trail Data Book

PC = Primitive campsite

O = Outfitters

LA = Laundromat

L = Lodging

PO = Post Office

S = Shower

g = convenience/camp stores

G = medium/lg supermarkets

C = Campground

POI = Point of Interest

W = Water

I = Internet computer

R = Restaurant

B = Bathroom

PI = Put-In

| <i>Mile #</i> | <i>Type of amenity</i> | <i>GPS # on trail (decimal-degrees)</i> | <i>CT Segment and Map #</i> | <i>Directions</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 0 | R, B, S,W,PI (Ross Marler Park, just past 98 Bridge) | N 30.40030 W-86.59260 | Alt 1A | On trail |
| 16 (5 miles north of route) | C, B, S, W, LA, G, PI (Rocky Bayou State Park) | N 30.50163 W-86.43725 | Alt 1A | East of US 20 bridge. Shopping center one mile east of park entrance |
| 12-13 (alt. for Rocky Bayou SP) | C, S, L, LA, W (Maxwell-Gunter Recreation Area Military | N 30.45740 W-86.41163 | Alt 1A | On trail Requires military ID |

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|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|-----------|--|
| | Only) | | | |
| 19 | B, PI, W Choctaw Beach | N30.476676 W-86.330760 | Alt 1B | On trail |
| 23 | R, B, W, PI Nick's Seafood Restaurant | N 30. 486592 W-86.250917 | Alt 1B | On trail |
| (1 mile north of route) | PC Basin Bayou Primitive Campsite | N 30.496910 W-86.240160 | Alt 1B | North of Nick's. Go under bridge and head to northeast side of Basin Bayou |
| 2.5 miles east of SR 83 Bridge | C, L, LA, I, B, W, PI (Live Oak Landing RV Resort) | N 30.430074 W-86.114335 | Alt 2A | On trail |
| | R, W, PI Seafood Restaurant | N 30.387342 W-86.174294 | Alt 2A | SE corner of SR 83 Bridge Small beach in front of restaurant for access |
| 34.5 | POI, B, W Eden Gardens State Park (no camping) | N 30.373613 W-86.117191 | Alt 2A | On trail |
| 35 | PC, PI, W (Choctawhat chee Rowing and Paddling Club) | N 30.372820 W-86.114970 | Alt 2A | On trail, camp behind club building |
| 53 | Unofficial Primitive Campsite, SR 79 Bridge | N30.291035 W85.851549 | Alt 3A | On trail, next to bridge. There is also another restaurant on east side of the bridge. |
| 0.5 mile north | G, W, B Small grocery store | N 30.299013 W-85.852304 | Alt 3A | Walk north over bridge on SR 79. |
| 67 | POI, R, B, | N 30.169433 | Alt | Land on small beach next to Uncle |

| | | | | |
|-------|---|----------------------------|--------|--|
| | W, L, I Historic St Andrews | W-85.702729 | 3B | Ernie's Bayfront Grill. |
| 70.5 | C, R, S, B, G, W, PI St Andrews State Park | N 30.133946 W-85.732256 | Alt 4A | On trail |
| 79 | C, L, W, B, S Tyndall AFB Fam Camp (Military only) | N 30.099278 W 30.099278 | Alt 4A | On trail Restricted to military with ID |
| 84.5 | PC, no facilities Piney Point | N 30.094056 W-85.522627 | Alt 4B | On trail |
| 92 | B, P, PI Overstreet | N 29.997630 W-85.370707 | Alt 5A | On trail Water must be treated |
| 94 | PC (Canal Spoil Bank) | N29.9700 W85.3723 | | |
| 104 | POI Gulf County Canal | N 29.887165 W-85.249186 | Alt 5B | On trail, six-mile long canal that leads to coastal CT route near town of Port St Joe. |
| 105.5 | G, B, W, PI White City | N 29.879865 W-85.220956 | Alt 5B | Small convenience store 0.5 miles north of bridge on CR 71. |
| 114 | PC, no facilities Lake Wimico | N 29.800620 W-85.137452 | Alt 6A | On trail, east side of Lake Wimico, small point mid-way of lake |
| 121 | POI ICW joins Apalachicola River | N 29.778106 W-85.050790 | Alt 6A | On trail |
| 121.5 | PC, no facilities Large sand bar, east side of river | N 29.772759 W-85.043145 | Alt 6A | On trail, 0.5 miles downstream confluence of Apalachicola River and ICW |

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|-----|--|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 122 | PI, P Abercrombie Boat Ramp | N 29.768459 W-85.043253 | Alt 6A | On trail |
| 127 | L, R, B, G, POI, PI Apalachicola | N 29.723839 W 84.980832 | Alt 6B | On trail, join Segment 4 here |