



Florida a Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 21

Indian River/Pelican Island

Emergency contact info:

911

Indian River County Sheriff's Office: 772-569-6700

Brevard County Sheriff's Office: 321-264-5100, 321-633-7162

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

Begin: Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park

End: Front Street Park in Melbourne

Distance: 47.5 miles

Duration: 3.5 days

Special Considerations: Boat traffic can be heavy along the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW), especially on weekends and holidays. Paddling along the high energy East Coast shoreline is not recommended due to safety considerations. While some calm periods may make it suitable for paddling the coastal shoreline, conditions can change abruptly and few inlets allow paddlers to move to more sheltered waters.

Introduction

Covering the middle section of the [Indian River Lagoon](#), considered to be North America's most diverse estuary, this segment incorporates premier state and county parks, federal land, numerous spoil islands, and a traditional fish camp. Paddlers are almost guaranteed to spot sea turtles, manatees, dolphins and a wide variety of bird life.

A highlight is the [Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge](#), where paddlers can cruise along the small island rookery that marked the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Two scenic state parks are covered, [Ft. Pierce Inlet](#) and [Sebastian Inlet](#). Both of

these parks link the Indian River Lagoon with the sparkling Atlantic Coast. Paddlers can land in safe waters and visit sandy Atlantic beaches on foot if desired

This segment also covers the [Indian River-Malabar to Vero Beach Aquatic Preserve](#) and the [Indian River-Vero Beach to Ft. Pierce Aquatic Preserve](#). A purpose of both preserves is to highlight the ecological and economic importance of the Indian River Lagoon since the entire natural system is estimated to generate more than \$800 million in annual revenue to the local economy. Preserve efforts have helped to reconnect mangrove marshes and seagrass beds that act as nursery grounds to recreationally and commercially important species, such as snook, grouper, snapper, seatrout, tarpon, and lobster. Also, many species of migratory waterfowl winter in the Indian River Lagoon.

Of special benefit to the paddling trail, aquatic preserve staff and volunteers work from October through April of each year to enhance the numerous spoil islands along the ICW by creating campsites, installing fire rings and picnic tables, blazing trails, stabilizing shorelines, removing trash and exotic species, and building informational kiosks. Many groups have adopted spoil islands and regularly remove debris and do enhancement work. Some of the recommended campsites in this guide have been enhanced through these efforts. [Leave No Trace](#) principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide.

This guide covers some of the spoil islands available for camping, but for free comprehensive guides to spoil islands in the Indian River Lagoon, call the [Florida Inland Navigation District](#): 561-627-3386. Also, for maps and information about current spoil island enhancement projects, check out the [Indian River Lagoon Spoil Island](#) website.

1. Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park to Gifford Point, 15.5 miles

Once a place where U.S. Navy Frogmen trained for the D-Day invasion in World War II, [Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park](#) offers a great rest stop and beach. You can launch or land along a sandy stretch on the north side of the inlet near Dynamite Point, named for the activities of the Navy Underwater Demolition Team (see map). From here, you can access restrooms, the picnic area, beaches and a short nature trail.

Several islands near the park along the ICW are available for camping. Many local paddlers recommend Island #SL2, otherwise known as Run-a-Muck Island. This is about a mile from Round Island, a popular place for paddlers and a good place to spot bottlenose dolphins and manatees. There is a county-run kayak launch at [Round Island](#) along with restrooms and water.

2. Gifford Point to Island #IR5, 11.5 miles

As you head north, you can follow the narrowing ICW on the east side of Pine Island, or you can paddle on the shallower west side and avoid most of the boat traffic.

North of the Wabasso Causeway, where you can take a rest break with full amenities, hug the shallower eastern side of the lagoon along several scenic islands. Eventually, you'll come to tiny Pelican Island, part of the [Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge](#). This island was the last known brown pelican rookery along the east coast at the turn of the twentieth century. Diligently defended by German immigrant Paul Kroegel, he convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to formally protect the island in 1903, helping to spawn the national wildlife refuge system. Today, the system is comprised of 540 units in all 50 states and includes American Samoa, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Johnson Atoll, Midway Atoll and several other Pacific islands.

While you can't land on Pelican Island, you can observe the birds from a safe distance. Use a camera zoom lens or binoculars to keep a football field distance between you and wildlife when possible. Besides pelicans, you may also spot wood storks, anhingas, cormorants, American oystercatchers and several types of wading birds. The [Great Florida Birding Trail](#) has many sites along this coastline where the quiet, observant paddler can see a multitude of bird species, especially during spring and fall migration.

From Pelican Island, curve around to the ICW where Island #IR5 is located. A nearby boat ramp in the town of Sebastian will enable you to access several restaurants and paddler-friendly [Captain Hiram's Resort](#) within easy walking distance. Biologists have noted that the area between Pelican Island and Sebastian Inlet is a nursery ground for juvenile green sea turtles.

Another choice for camping, or a good rest stop, is [Sebastian Inlet State Park](#). If camping, the best place to land is opposite the boat ramp where you can carry or wheel your kayak a hundred yards or so to a campsite. [Reservations](#) on-line are recommended, especially in late winter/early spring. Or call Reserve America at 1-800-326-3521.

In 1715, a Spanish fleet laden with gold and silver from Mexico and Peru wrecked in the vicinity of the park. More than a thousand sailors made it to shore. Some died from exposure to the elements, but many more would have perished if not for the generosity of Ais Indians. When salvagers from Havana finally arrived, they recovered only half the treasure. Modern-day treasure hunters found a sunken ship laden with gold and jewelry. The McLarty Treasure Museum is located within the [Sebastian Inlet State Park](#) off A1A, and highlights the shipwreck and treasure salvage. A second museum, the Sebastian Fishing Museum tells the history of the area's fishing industry.

Just past the state park is another campground with full amenities, [Long Point County Park](#) (see map). Reserve a site on-line or call 321-952-4532.

Yet another camping option in the vicinity is [Donald MacDonald County Park](#), less than two miles up the Sebastian River. Camping at the shaded campground is on a first-come, first serve basis. Call 772-589-0087 for more information.

3. Island #IR5 to island #BC38, 13 miles

Besides Sebastian Inlet State Park (see previous section) an interesting stop along the way is the [Honest John's Fish Camp](#), one of the last of the Old Florida style fish camps along the east coast. An 1890s pioneer home and a vintage train depot exist on grounds. Kayak rentals, snacks and cold drinks are available. Fishing in the area is legendary.

The camp was named for Honest John, otherwise known as the Cracker of all Crackers. He was best known for his fishing exploits and for his aversion to wearing shoes. At his funeral, all of his pallbearers were in bare feet.

For a grocery stop, your best bet is a Winn Dixie supermarket on the mainland about a mile north of the mouth of the Sebastian River. You can land along the shore, climb the bank to U.S. 1, and the supermarket is across the road (see map).

The Island #BC38 campsite is on the southwest side.

4. Island #BC38 to Front Street Park in Melbourne, 7.5 miles

In this stretch, several parks on the west bank offer good rest stops, while a point of interest is the Melbourne Beach Park on the eastern shore. Melbourne Beach was founded in the 1880s when Captain Rufus Beaujean began sailing people to the island from the mainland. A railroad was soon built from the pier to the beach. Several historic buildings exist within easy walking distance of the park.

At the Front Street Park boat ramp in Melbourne, you can easily access restrooms and water along with nearby businesses and restaurants.

For a scenic day trip, many paddlers enjoy wildlife-rich Turkey Creek in Palm Bay. The upper portions of the creek wind beneath a hardwood forest canopy and along steep sandy bluffs.