



Office of Greenways & Trails

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 23

Tomoka/Pellicer

Emergency contact info:

911

Volusia County Sheriff's Office: 386-254-4689

Flagler County Sheriff's Office: 386-437-4116

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

Begin: Smyrna Dunes Park

End: Faver-Dykes State Park/Mellon Island

Distance: 48 miles

Duration: 4 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

Rich in history, ecology and scenic beauty, this segment invites paddlers to enjoy scenes that have changed little since Timucuan Indians plied these waters in dugout canoes. The village of Nacoroco, perhaps the largest Timucuan town, thrived in an area now contained in [Tomoka State Park](#), a point of interest along the route. Once numbering about 40,000, the tribe's population quickly dropped after European contact due to disease and war. The last Timucuans fled with the Spanish as they retreated from the peninsula in 1763.

After Spain's withdraw, English planters developed several large plantations in the area, such as Bulow and Mount Oswald. Boosted by skilled slave labor, the plantations raised cotton, indigo, various vegetables and rice. The plantations also exported timber, hides, molasses, rum, sugar and oranges. Indigo, valuable for blue dye, became a primary cash crop and some indigo plants can still be found in area forests today. Most of the plantations and associated sugar mills and other structures were burned by raiding Seminole Indians and black warriors during the Second Seminole War and were never rebuilt.

Along Ponce Inlet, paddlers will have the opportunity to visit the [Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse Museum](#) and climb Florida's tallest lighthouse for panoramic views in all directions. Paddlers can explore numerous islands and shallow creeks around Ponce Inlet and enjoy wide scenic stretches and numerous islands along the Tomoka Basin and Pellicer Flats.

Five outstanding Florida state parks are within reach of paddlers for exploration and enjoyment: [Tomoka](#), [Northern Peninsula](#), [Gamble Rogers](#), [Faver-Dykes](#) and [Washington Oaks State Gardens](#).

The [Tomoka Marsh Aquatic Preserve](#) and [Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve](#) are part of this segment. These preserves are valuable nursery areas for shrimp, crabs and fish. They are utilized by more than 120 species of fish and more than 180 bird species. The Pellicer Creek preserve, largely buffered by public lands, is one of the most pristine estuarine/riverine systems along Florida's east coast.

[Leave No Trace](#) principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide.

1. Smyrna Dunes to Port Orange Causeway (Highway A1A bridge), 7 miles

Heading north from [Smyrna Dunes Park](#), on the south side of Ponce Inlet, numerous spoil and natural islands within the wide Halifax River basin are available for primitive camping. We have provided GPS coordinates for two islands on the map, but most islands are available unless they are obvious bird rookeries. There are two such rookeries near the A1A Bridge. Roosting birds should be viewed from a safe distance

(100 yards). [Spruce Creek](#) is also a state designated paddling trail and popular kayaking spot in the area. The wide nature of this section enables paddlers to utilize side channels and creeks and avoid the sometimes busy ICW.

On the north side of the Ponce Inlet, you can land on a small beach at the county park and hike to the Atlantic shore if you wish. High waves breaking over the jetty can be impressive. Due to currents and heavy wave action, it is not recommended that you paddle through the inlet to the Atlantic.

A must stop is the [Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse Museum](#). You can land at a public ramp (see map), enjoy an adjacent restaurant, and walk less than a hundred yards to your left (facing the lighthouse) to the museum entrance. For a fee, you can explore the historic buildings on the grounds, view various Fresnel Lenses on display (used for lighting the lighthouse) and climb the spiraling staircase of the redbrick lighthouse, the tallest in Florida and second tallest in the United States. The lighthouse is still in use and has had the unintended effect of limiting high-rise condominiums and motels from being built in the immediate area. Just south of the boat ramp is [Volusia County's Marine Science Center](#), which includes exhibits, aquariums, nature trails, an observation tower and facilities to rehabilitate sea turtles and seabirds. The [Port Orange Causeway Park](#), a site on the [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail](#) at the A1A Bridge can be a welcome rest stop.

2. Port Orange Causeway to Tomoka Basin islands, 16 miles

While this long stretch through the urban setting of the Daytona Beach area lacks suitable islands or other lands available for camping at the moment, it offers other options such as numerous shaded riverfront parks with docks for picnics and respite and many popular waterfront restaurants with docks. Also, the [River Lily Inn B&B](#), (386-253-5002) is easily accessible directly across from Ross Point Park in Holly Hill (just over 7 miles from Port Orange Causeway). Check for paddler discounts. You can access the shops, restaurants and events of Daytona Beach from the downtown [Riverfront Park](#) (see map) at the docks at Halifax Harbor Marina shops and Manatee Island paddling docks near Main Street Bridge (sunrise/sunset hours).

Near the Tomoka Basin, you'll see the first of several spoil and natural islands that stretch for a couple of miles. Since the ICW is on the narrow east side of these islands, you may want to paddle on the west side and enjoy an unfettered view of the Tomoka Basin. Most of these islands are open for camping. Try to pick a spot on the western side of the islands, out of view of houses that line the eastern shore of the river.

A visit to [Tomoka State Park](#) is highly recommended. You can access the park via a boat ramp and walk a short distance to a museum, which includes displays of the park's Timucuan and European history, as well as its ecology. You can also learn more about artist Fred Dana Marsh, creator of the park's huge statue depicting Chief Tomoka and maidens and warriors. The statue will likely be removed at a future date due to deterioration, but a replica is on display in the visitor's center. Canopied nature trails allow you to enjoy the park's renowned live oak hammocks. The park store next to the boat ramp offers snacks, some supplies, and canoe rentals.

3. Tomoka Basin to Silver Lake spoil islands, 11 miles

After the Tomoka Basin, the Halifax River suddenly narrows and morphs into Halifax Creek, then into Smith Creek, and finally into the Matanzas River. Along the way, you can stop at [Northern Peninsula State Park](#) and access the two-mile Coastal Strand hiking trail. A short distance later, you can land at [Gamble Rogers State Park](#) and enjoy a short hike to an unmarred Atlantic beach.

Several spoil islands are available for camping near Silver Lake, although be wary of cacti in open areas. The GPS point on the map is for a suitable campsite that has been cleared. There is a tiny kayak launch on the east side of Silver Lake along a mangrove-lined canal. The launch can be muddy, especially at low tide. No facilities are available.

4. Silver Lake spoil islands to Mellon Island, 14 miles

As the river widens in the Pellicer Flats, numerous spoil and natural islands appear. Most are suitable for camping. You will likely want to paddle on the western side of the islands through the flats, where numerous oyster reefs keep out most motorized crafts. You can also paddle up the unspoiled [Pellicer Creek](#), a state designated paddling trail, to [Princess Place Preserve](#) and visit [Faver-Dykes State Park](#).

Princess Place Preserve is named after previous owner Angela Sherbatoff, who was married to an exiled Russian prince. This spacious property of more than 1500 acres features numerous hiking trails and historic buildings and is definitely worth a visit.

Faver-Dykes State Park is accessible about 2.5 miles up Pellicer Creek and is known for its pristine looking pine and hardwood forests. It was once part of the Buena Suerte (Good Luck) Plantation in the early 1800s and was occupied by federal troops during the Second Seminole War. Restrooms and water are available at the park ramp.

Two scenic natural islands are also available for primitive camping along the river, Jordan and Mellon Islands, managed by Faver-Dykes State Park. You'll notice that the predominant mangrove shorelines just to the south have given way to mature forests of cedar, sable palm and live oak. A half-mile nature trail runs the length of Mellon Island. There are three primitive campsites on each island and they are available free of charge on a first-come, first-serve basis.

A must stop in this section is the Washington Oaks State Gardens, once owned by a relative of George Washington. You can land near the picnic area and access a nature trail. The picnic area is a short distance to the south and the picturesque gardens and historic interpretive center begin about a half mile to the north. The creator of the gardens envisioned a manicured exotic landscape "in the jungle" with numerous fountains and reflective pools. Arching live oak limbs festooned with Spanish moss and resurrection ferns provide a natural garden dome.

Another interesting stop is [Marineland](#), a short distance before Mellon Island along the eastern shore. You can land at the [River to Sea Preserve](#) kayak launch and walk a short distance south along A1A to the world's first "oceanarium". Opened in 1938 by an eclectic group that included members of the Vanderbilt and Tolstoy families, the park fell on hard times with the advent of central Florida's theme parks. The facility has since been revived, with a special emphasis on dolphin interactions.