

Hillsborough River Paddling Trail

Access Point 1: Hillsborough River State Park
N: 28.1485 W: -82.2358

Access Point 2: Dead River Park
N: 28.1284 W: -82.2645

Access Point 4: Morris Bridge Park
N: 28.0987 W: -82.3113

**Access Point 3: John B Sargeant Sr
Memorial Park**
N: 28.0831 W: -82.2854

 Hillsborough River Paddling Trail



Canoe/Kayak Launch



Restrooms



Camping



Potable Water



Florida Conservation Lands



State Parks

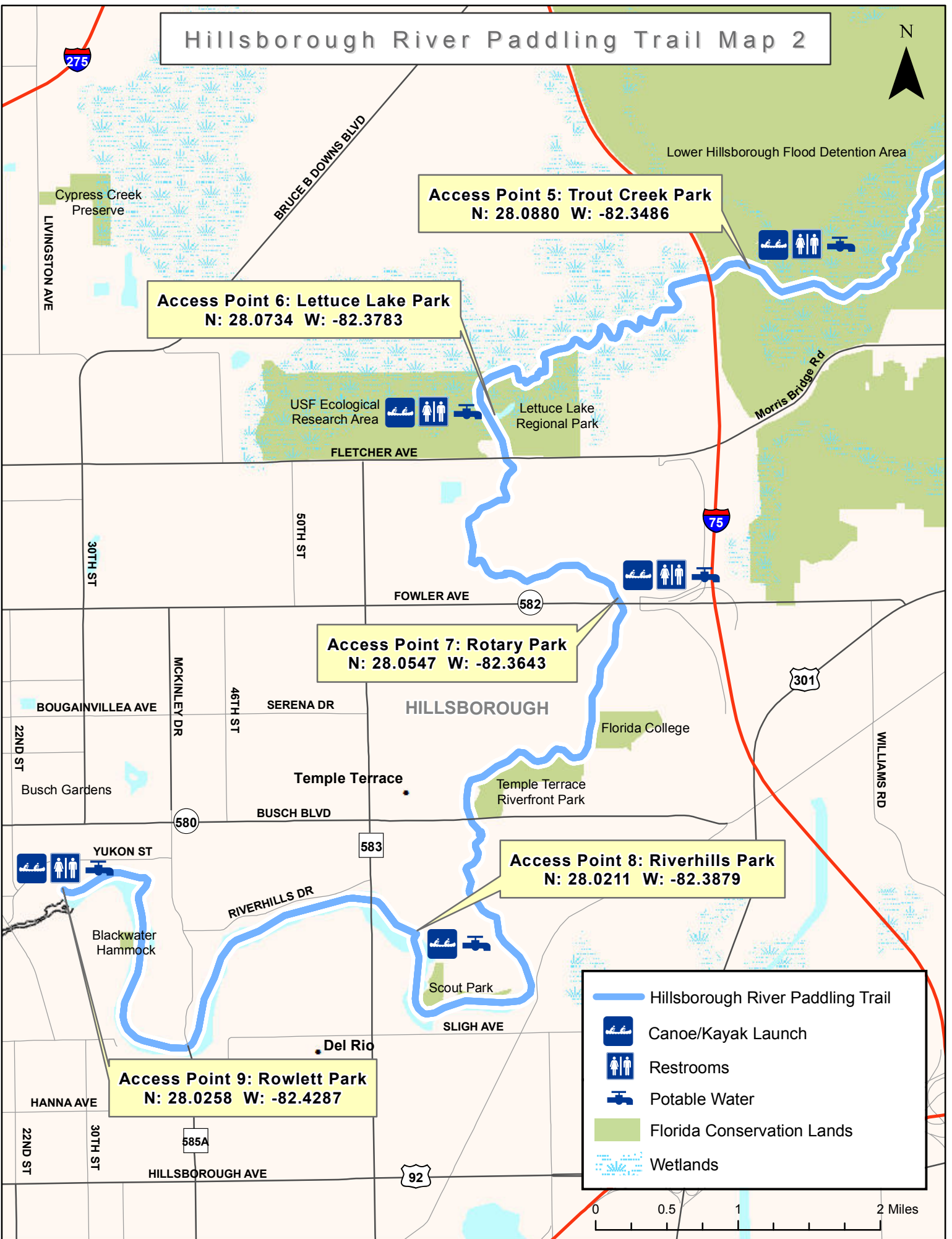


Wetlands

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Hillsborough River Paddling Trail Map 2

N





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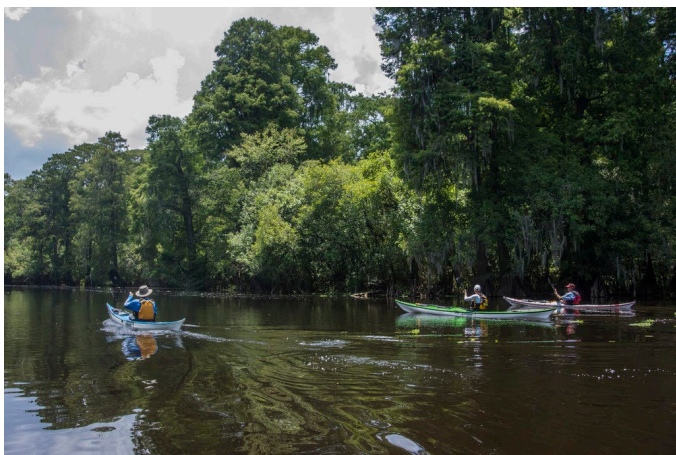
The Waterway

The Hillsborough River begins east-northeast of Zephyrhills in southeastern Pasco and northwestern Polk Counties. Its headwaters originate in the southwestern portion of the Green Swamp, where it also periodically receives overflow from the Withlacoochee River. From the swamp, the river flows southwesterly 54 miles to upper Hillsborough Bay. The Hillsborough River Paddling Trail runs 30 miles from Hillsborough River State Park to the City of Tampa's Rowlett Park. Beginning as a narrow, winding stream it ends as a tidal estuary in a heavily developed urban center. The Hillsborough River contains Class II rapids. Although the rapids are closed to boating, they can be viewed from a location in Hillsborough River State Park.

The Paddling Experience

The Hillsborough offers something for every type of paddler. This river is popular with paddlers in the spring and winter months as the wildlife is most plentiful then. There are several short sections that are very easy for beginners and then there is Seventeen Runs, one of the most challenging paddling destinations in the state. Because of the length and huge variations along the route, the paddling trips have been separated into four sections with different levels of difficulty: North, Seventeen Runs, Middle and South. You can also plan an excursion of various lengths using the access points below. The paddler only needs to purchase one hang-tag if using Sargeant, Morris Bridge and Trout Creek Parks in the same day. There are separate fees for Lettuce Lake Park and Hillsborough River State Park.

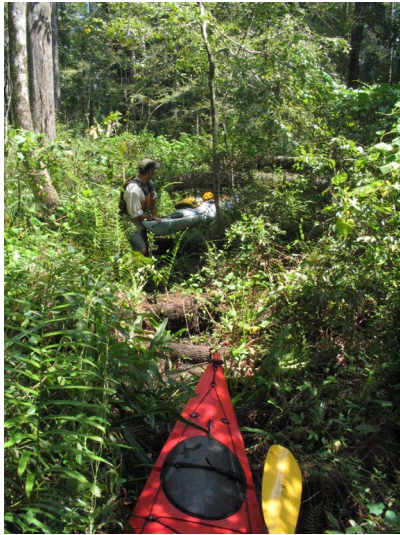
North Section is a scenic 3-mile trip from Hillsborough River State Park to Dead River Park. It is short and well-suited for beginner paddlers.



Photos: Gil Hidalgo



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Seventeen Runs, photos FWC

Seventeen Runs is a very rugged and narrow section 5-mile section of river between Dead River Park and John B. Sargeant Park. This stretch is not maintained and is **extremely difficult even for experienced paddlers**. Allow a minimum of six hours paddling time between the two parks. The river channel is very narrow, with swift current and many trees crossing the water. The river channel branches many times and it can be difficult to determine which branch to take. Paddlers should expect to wade in dark water at least 4 feet deep to push, pull or lift their boat over, under and around trees and branches. Paddlers should bring enough food, water and supplies with them should they be forced to travel past nightfall. The Seventeen Runs is not accessible by road or vehicle and traveling upstream against the current can be very difficult. **This section of the Hillsborough River should not be underestimated for its degree of difficulty.** Every year unwary paddlers are rescued from this area via helicopter. As a general rule of thumb, paddlers should attempt to follow the flow of water. However, during dry months, it is nearly impossible to detect the direction of the water flow to determine the main channel and correct path. Paddlers attempting this run must have good survival, orienteering and boating skills and should not attempt this at low water levels. Generally, when facing a fork in the channel, paddlers should follow the branch with the strongest flow. Looking for signs of old river maintenance (logs cut by saws) may help paddlers determine whether or not they are on the right track. At most of the forks, choosing the left fork will be the correct choice, but careful consideration must be made at each juncture. Signs listed below may or may not be present to help choose the right channels. GPS coordinates may help:

Seventeen Runs Entrance: N28.1248 W82.2673

Sign 1: N28.1143 W2.2717

Sign 2: N28.1099 W82.2724

Right Turn Sign: N28.0986 W82.2848

Seventeen Runs End: N28.0854 W82.2848

Sargeant Park: N28.0831 W82.2854

The 7.5 mile Middle section from Sargeant Park to Morris Bridge Park and Trout Creek Park is suited for beginner to intermediate paddlers, with some portages possible.



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The 5.5 mile South section from Trout Creek Park to Rowlett Park is rated for intermediate paddlers because of its length and the possibility of encountering winds and motorboat traffic.

Access Points

#1, Start of the trail, [Hillsborough River State Park](#)



This 3-mile section of the river is very scenic and easy for beginner paddlers. Canoes can be rented at the state park for the short paddle down to Dead River Park. A canoe/kayak launch is available at parking lot #4. *Directions: From I-75, Southbound from Ocala take exit #279, SR 54 east to Hwy 301, travel south for 6 miles. From I-75, northbound from Tampa take the exit #265, Fowler Ave., east to Hwy 301, travel north for 9 miles. From I-4, west bound take exit 10, CR 579 north to US 301, turn and go north 7 miles. From I-4, east bound take Exit 7, go 14 miles north on US 301.*

#2, Mile 3.0, [Dead River Park](#), 15098 Dead River Rd., Thonotosassa



Situated at the confluence of Dead River and the Hillsborough River, this park is a pleasant place to unwind and is a site on the [Great Florida Birding Trail](#). Nature lovers appreciate a scenic two-mile trail alongside the Hillsborough River. This is the start of the challenging Seventeen Runs segment. This park also offers a group camp by reservation only. *Directions: Dead River Park is located 8 miles north of Tampa on US Highway 301 at the end of Dead River Road.*

#3, Mile 7.5, [John B. Sargeant, Sr., Memorial Park](#), 12702 US 301, Thonotosassa



The 4-mile section between Sargeant Park and Morris Bridge Park is very popular with local paddlers and outfitters and is generally well-maintained. The park has a concrete slab ramp capable of handling boats to up to twenty feet and also allows night time access to the boat ramp for evening or early morning ventures on the river. The park has parking for up to ten trailers/vehicles. Primary use of the ramp is for small boats and canoes. From the river, the boat ramp and entrance to Sargeant Park is located 100 yards up a small canal off of the main river channel. As paddlers emerge from the Seventeen Runs, the Hillsborough River turns right. The entrance to the small canal leading to Sargeant Park is straight ahead. *Directions: From I-75, exit onto Fowler Ave. and head east 1.5 miles. Turn left onto US 301 and head north 3.5 miles. Park entrance is on the left.*

#4, Mile 11.5, [Morris Bridge Park](#), 13330 Morris Bridge Rd., Thonotosassa



The 3-mile section between Morris Bridge Park and Trout Creek Park is best for intermediate paddlers as it has some narrow sections that may have swift currents and log jams. The park is located about half-way between Sargeant Park and Trout Creek Park and is often used as a rest stop. Pull up on sandy beach adjacent to boat ramp. The ramp is a concrete slab designed for small boats, canoes and kayaks. There is parking available for up to ten vehicles with trailers. The river downstream from the park becomes narrow and difficult to navigate. *Directions: Morris Bridge Park is located 5 miles east of I-75 (exit 266, Fletcher Ave.) on Morris Bridge Road (do not turn west at exit onto Fletcher Avenue).*

#5, Mile 14.5, [Trout Creek Park](#), 12550 Morris Bridge Rd., Thonotosassa



Located near the mouth of Trout Creek, this property on the Hillsborough River is popular for fishing, canoeing and group picnics. It is a pleasant place to get away for a midday break or to take small children for a mini-adventure. *Directions: Trout Creek Park is located directly east of I-75 at the Fletcher Avenue exit (do not head west at exit on Fletcher Avenue). Head northeast on Morris Bridge Road 0.5 miles. Park entrance is on the left.*

#6, Mile 17.5, [Lettuce Lake Park](#), 6920 E Fletcher Ave., Tampa





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The 240-acre site offers something for everyone. Wooded picnic areas and playground are family favorites. A bicycle path/jogging trail, complete with a fitness course, meander through the park. Lettuce Lake is also a haven for nature study. An interpretive center, featuring exhibits, leads to a 3,500 ft. boardwalk and a 3-story observation tower where visitors can view an extensive variety of wildlife. The park also has canoes/kayaks available for rent. It is a 400-foot carry along a shelled path to the launch site. *Directions: From I-75 take exit 266 (Fletcher Avenue). Drive west on Fletcher Avenue 0.8 miles to park's entrance on the right.*

#7, Mile 20, Rotary Park, 11700 Terrace Point Ct., Temple Terrace

The Park offers picnic areas and plenty of views of the Hillsborough River. The boat ramp is constructed of grooved concrete slabs. The ramp has a loading and unloading dock and is capable of handling mid-sized boats twenty-five feet in length. There is parking in the park for twenty vehicles with trailers. *Directions: Rotary Park is located 0.2 miles west of I-75 on Fowler Avenue.*

#8, Mile 25.5, Riverhills Park, 401 S. Riverhills Dr., Tampa

This section of the river passes through many neighborhoods. As the river winds closer towards Tampa, the housing and development becomes more apparent. The Boat Ramp is constructed of an ungrooved concrete slab capable of handling boats up to twenty feet in length. The ramp is not a steep ramp so check water levels if using a larger boat. The park has parking for ten vehicles/trailers. *Directions: From I-75 southbound, take exit 265 to SR582, turn left and go 2.0 miles to E. Riverhills Dr., Go short distance and turn right onto Sunnyside Rd. The name changes to S Riverhills Dr. and park is 0.5 miles further*

#9, End of the trail, Rowlett Park, 2401 E. Yukon St., Tampa

Nestled along a bend in the Hillsborough River, the Rowlett Park Trail provides two miles of asphalt trail meandering through oak and pine hammocks. Nature trails cross the park. This park is adjacent to a major dam that spans the entire width of the Hillsborough River. Access to the river is available above and below the dam within the park. Anyone wishing to travel downriver of the dam will need to portage their boat several hundred yards around the dam. Above the dam, for about 5 miles, the river widens considerably. Motorboats and high winds are possible in this section. Between Trout Creek Park and I-75 the river flows through a large flood gate. This gate is usually open and poses no problem to paddlers except during times of high water when it is closed. *Directions: From I-275, exit at Busch Blvd. and head east to N. 22nd Street, then drive south towards the park.*

Outfitters and Shuttle Service

[Canoe Escape](#), John B. Sargeant Park, 813-986-2067
[Sweetwater Kayaks](#), 235 15th Ave. SE., St Petersburg 727-570-4844

Base Camp

Opened in 1938, [Hillsborough River State Park](#) is one of Florida's first state parks; this original CCC Park is divided by the swiftly flowing Hillsborough River with a set of Class II rapids that are closed to boating. The river provides opportunities for fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Hikers can walk over seven miles of nature trails. When the weather calls for it, visitors can enjoy a refreshing swim in the park's ADA accessible swimming pool. The park offers full-facility camping and a youth/group tent campground. A primitive campsite is available via foot trail; reservations are always recommended.

[Fort Foster State Historic Site](#) is part of Hillsborough River State Park, though located on the East Side of US



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301 from the park. Fort Foster is a reconstructed fort from the Second Seminole War. Catch a Ranger led tour of Historic Fort Foster Site on weekends for a small fee.

History

The area within the Hillsborough River State Park is rich with history over many eras. The river was utilized for food and transportation by the local Native Americans. It later provided a means of transportation for Spanish and British explorers and colonists. In the 1800s, the region was embroiled in the Second Seminole War, as American military forces sought to oust the Native Americans from the Florida peninsula. In the 1930s the Hillsborough River State Park was developed by workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Their woodwork, stonework and amazing bridge construction skills are still visible today.



Photos: Gil Hidalgo



Photos: FWC