



Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 8

Pinellas

Emergency Contact Information:

911

Pinellas County Sheriff's Office: 727-582-6200

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

Begin: Anclote Key State Park

End: Fort De Soto Park

Distance: 45.5 miles

Duration: 3 days

Special Considerations: Open water stretches around Anclote Key may pose a hazard in windy or stormy weather. Currents and tidal influences in passes, especially Hurricane Pass, can pose a threat, too. As always, proceed with caution. Rats are known to inhabit some of the spoil islands and raccoons can always be problematic, especially at Fort De Soto Park, so do not leave food or fresh water unattended.

As with most South Florida segments, boat traffic can be heavy, especially on weekends.

Advance reservations are recommended for motels and campgrounds, especially during holidays and the spring season. The situation regarding motels may change as motels in some locations are being converted to condominiums and resorts that require multi-day rentals.

Introduction

The rich history of Pinellas County began thousands of years ago when Tocobaga Indians and their predecessors hunted, fished and later farmed the area. About 1,800 years ago, the area's native people created a more sophisticated social and ceremonial structure that was reflected in their art forms. This "Weedon Island culture," (sometimes spelled "Weeden") lasted about 800 years and was marked by exquisitely decorated pottery. The 3,164-acre [Weedon Island Preserve](#) on the west side of Tampa Bay protects a large shell midden and burial mound complex associated with this time period and is open to the public.

Panfilo de Narvaez landed along Tampa Bay with about 300 soldiers in 1528. The Spaniards treated the Indians cruelly in a futile search for gold and silver. Most of the Indians eventually died from European introduced diseases and Seminole Indians inhabited the area for a brief period before and during the Second Seminole War, before being driven south or removed to Oklahoma.

Odet Phillippe is credited with being the first white settler of the area, establishing a plantation and citrus grove in the 1830s. Phillippe is believed to have spawned Florida's citrus industry. The area began to boom in the 1880s with completion of the Orange Belt Railroad to St. Petersburg. Large motels, such as the famous Belleview-Biltmore, were built to accommodate tourists. Many visitors who came for health reasons and balmy weather decided to stay. From a population of 13,000 during the county's inception in 1912, the residential population now stands at almost a million. In addition, more than four million tourists visit Pinellas County each year. The word "Pinellas" reflects the area's rich history, having been derived from the Spanish words *Punta Pinal*, and meaning "point of pines."

Although this segment marks the beginning of a long stretch of urbanized coastline as you head south, you'll be able to enjoy several scenic state and county parks reminiscent of original Florida. Three premier Florida state parks are situated along the route: [Anclote Key](#), [Honeymoon Island](#) and [Caladesi Island](#).

The [Pinellas County](#) park system, totaling more than 4,000 acres, is unrivaled. Several "green space" and beach parks are spaced out along the route. Some of the larger parks have viewing towers, hiking trails, paddling trails, kayak launches and unspoiled tracts of land. Birdwatching possibilities abound.

The paddling trail in this segment traverses the [Pinellas County Aquatic Preserves](#). Established in 1972, the preserve's 336,265 acres of seagrass beds, hard and soft bottoms, oyster reefs, spoil islands and mangrove areas helps to protect wildlife species such as manatees, roseate spoonbills, bald eagles, sea turtles, indigo snakes and a host of fish and marine creatures.

[Leave No Trace](#) principles should be followed when camping on Anclote Key, or on any spoil island. Bear in mind that some spoil islands are bird colonies and should be avoided. These many spoil islands and their designations are described in the Boater's Guide to Clearwater Harbor and St. Joseph Sound. To obtain your free copy, call 727-893-2765 or 813-623-6826.

1. Anclote Key (north end) to spoil island # 13, 12 miles

At Anclote Key, three miles from the mainland near Tarpon Springs, primitive camping is at the north end of the island. There is a composting toilet, but no other amenities. You can explore this three-mile long undeveloped island on a series of hiking trails or along the Gulf side beach. Kayaking along the mangrove-lined bay side is inviting as well. The south end, open for day use, has picnic shelters, grill and a composting toilet, along with a 19th century lighthouse that is still operational. Due to bird nesting, dogs are not allowed on the island. Camping is free on Anclote Key, but you must first check in by calling (727) 469-5942.

Another more sheltered option along the coastline is to visit Eagle Point Park where local Eagle Scouts built a platform for an overnight stop. The platform has corner posts to hang tarps, tents, hammocks, along with a fire ring and picnic table. There is a restroom on site, but visitors need to walk about 100 yards. Call and get confirmation to stay overnight and ask for the restrooms to be left unlocked/open. Phone number is 727-834-3278.

Be wary of crossing open water stretches to and from the island as winds can cause dangerous paddling conditions.

Howard Park is directly east of Anclote Key and a good stopping point for water, restrooms and a picnic. The park also offers a paddling trail through sheltered mangrove areas, and the mainland section of the park covers an impressive live oak forest grove.

On your way south, be sure to stop at [Honeymoon Island State Park](#) and hike through the 80-acre old-growth slash pine forest. Viewing these majestic trees is worthy of a visit, but the forest also supports an unusually high density of active osprey nests.

After Honeymoon Island, you'll cross Hurricane Pass. Due to currents, tidal influence, boat traffic, and breakers on the Gulf side, crossing Hurricane Pass should only be attempted by experienced paddlers in favorable weather conditions along the bay side. If you cross under the Dunedin Causeway along the Intracoastal Waterway, you should be safe.

For camping, there are several spoil islands to choose from along the route, but the one near channel marker #13 is of good size and it features a marked interpretive trail, fire ring and picnic tables. The island has been impressively landscaped with native plants.

2. Spoil Island #13 to Island #BC 21, 17 miles

A cultural stop along the route is historic downtown Dunedin, which features a museum, shops, galleries and several restaurants. You can access this area by entering a sheltered marina of boat slips and hanging a right until you come to the Dunedin boat ramp (see map). Here, you can carry your kayak across the road and leave it at Edgewater Park.

Roughly a mile across from Dunedin is [Caladesi Island State Park](#), accessible only by boat. Here, you can enjoy three miles of unspoiled beaches on the Gulf side and a three-mile round trip paddling trail on the bay side through mangroves. You can obtain maps for the trail at the marina near the boat docks, where you can land on a low kayak dock adjacent to the ferry dock. The park also has a snack bar and gift shop near the docks. Channel markers will lead you to the marina. Kayakers must pay a \$1 admission fee.

Many paddlers access the park's marina from the Dunedin Causeway, where there are numerous launch points and a kayak concessionaire. From channel marker #14, just west of the Dunedin Causeway Bridge, take an approximate 212° degree heading on your compass for approximately one mile to the marked channel to the marina.

As you proceed south, you have the option of remaining on the bay side en-route to Island BC 21, or, if the weather is favorable, paddling on the Gulf side by traversing Clearwater Pass and arranging for a motel stay at a beachside motel along Indian Rocks Beach or other coastal communities to the south. Advance [reservations](#) are recommended, especially in springtime beginning around February 1st.

It is about 13 miles from Island #13 to Indian Rocks Beach, and another 19 or so miles from there to Fort De Soto Park Campground along the Gulf, so plan accordingly. There are

numerous public beaches along the route that make for ideal rest stops, most of which are listed on the maps. Supermarkets are located near the Memorial Causeway to Clearwater Beach on the north side and across the street from the St. Petersburg Beach Park (see map).

In the bottom half of the bay route, you will proceed through “The Narrows,” where the width between the mainland and barrier islands is very narrow, thus the name. Be wary of boat traffic as there is not as much room for maneuvering. At the Bellair and Park Boulevard Causeways, you can find public boat ramps, restrooms and potable water. There are at least two marinas along this stretch as well. Numerous small spoil islands are available for rest stops all along the route.

As you leave the narrows and enter the first stretch of Boca Ciega Bay, Island #BC 21 will come into view. Campsites are on the southwest side of the island. For a break, you can land at Boca Ciega County Park near the viewing tower just to the east of the island. Stretch your legs on scenic boardwalks through mangrove forests. Restrooms are about 200 yards from the kayak launch area. The area is very shallow at low tide.

Another excellent island for camping is CB #9, about 3.5 miles farther south (see map). Camping is on the east side. Just northwest of the island campsite is another scenic county park--War Veterans' Memorial Park on Turtlecrawl Point. Restrooms and fresh water are near the kayak launch site.

3. Island #BC 21 to Fort De Soto Park Campground, 16.5 miles

As you head south, you may want to skirt around the end of Long Key to Pass-A-Grille Beach. [Pass-A-Grille](#) is an historic coastal village with a lot of charm. There is also a post office on 8th Avenue if you want to use it as a mail stop (zip code 33706). It is open Monday through Friday from 9-4 with a break for lunch. A downtown museum is open Thursday through Saturday from 10-4 and from 1-4 on Sunday.

The Spanish Explorer Panfilo de Narvaez was believed to be the first European in the area when he anchored off Pass-A-Grille Pass in 1528. Since then, the island was long used by fishermen to obtain fresh water and to grill their catch, thus the reason for the name (likely from the French *Passe aux Grilleurs*). Beginning in 1857, John Gomez, a self-proclaimed pirate, opened the way for tourism by bringing in excursionists from Tampa. A section of Pass-A-Grille was declared a National Historic District in 1989.

Fort De Soto Park, your destination for the day and the end of this segment, also has a rich history. You can tour Fort De Soto, built to protect Tampa Bay during the Spanish-American War. The fort was named after Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto, who began his tumultuous three-year march from Tampa Bay in 1539 to find gold and subjugate the native population.

Fort De Soto Park is known for its birdwatching, one reason it is a featured stop on the [Great Florida Birding Trail](#). Flocks of shore and migratory birds seem to pose for visitors as they feed or rest. Two hundred and ninety-six avian species have been sighted in the 1,136-acre park.

Exploring the park is easy. You can kayak through mangrove-lined lagoons in its interior to a kayak livery facility that also rents bicycles (see map). By bicycling or hiking, you can tour the park's off-road trails that lead to beaches, coastal hammock forests, a small museum, and the historic fort.

Numerous campsites at Fort De Soto Park are easily accessible by kayak, especially tent sites. A small seawall surrounds most of the RV campsites, which may prove difficult for kayaks, so make sure you reserve one of the tent sites (sites 1 through 85). Advanced reservations are highly recommended, so call (727) 582-2100 up to six months in advance of your trip or [reserve online](#).

Primitive camping is available at no charge on Shell Key, which is just offshore from North Beach in Fort De Soto Park (see map). This island is also managed by Pinellas County. Leave No Trace principles should be followed on the island. Campers must first obtain a [Shell Key Preserve Camping Permit online](#).