



Office of Greenways & Trails

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 22

Space Coast

Emergency contact info:

911

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

Volusia County Sheriff's Office: 386-423-3888

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

FPTA Region: K

Begin: IR9A

End: Titusville Horseshoe Crab Island

Distance: 79.3

Duration: 5 days

Special Considerations: Boat traffic can be heavy along the Intracoastal Waterway, 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 there are few inlets to allow paddlers to move to more sheltered waters.

This is an area where large populations of manatees congregate. Manatees can become skittish at times, especially in dark water, throwing up a large amount of water and

having the potential of capsizing a kayak. Be respectful and keep a good distance from manatees and other wildlife for their protection and yours.

Introduction

This segment continues along the Indian River Lagoon, considered to be North America's most diverse estuary. Overlapping boundaries of tropical and subtropical climates have helped to create a system that supports 4,300 plants and animals, 72 of which are endangered or threatened. Paddlers are almost guaranteed to spot sea turtles, manatees, dolphins, and a wide variety of birdlife, from roseate spoonbills to bald eagles, depending on the season.

A highlight of the segment will likely be the Mosquito Lagoon, an inviting place of unspoiled islands and a labyrinth of tidal creeks that is sheltered from the Atlantic by Cape Canaveral and Merritt Island. This estuary is a vital nursery for fish, oysters, clams, shrimp, and other sea life, and, not surprisingly, it's one of Florida's most famous fishing grounds.

The abundant life of the Indian River and Mosquito Lagoon estuaries has attracted people for thousands of years. Timucuan Indians annually migrated to these shores from inland areas to gather clams, and oysters and to catch fish. They left behind giant shell mounds, two of which can be seen today—Seminole Rest and Turtle Mound, both of which are managed by the Canaveral National Seashore.

The adjacent Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, like the national seashore, was established as a buffer zone for nearby National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) activities. It covers 140,000 scenic acres of brackish estuaries, marshes, coastal dunes, scrub oaks, pine forests and flatwoods, and palm and oak hammocks.

This segment covers two aquatic preserves, Banana River and Mosquito Lagoon. An optional route through the wildlife-rich Banana River is highly recommended. The preserves help to maintain and restore water quality along with mangrove marshes and seagrass beds that act as nursery grounds for 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 and Mosquito Lagoons.

This guide primarily follows the western shore of the Indian River Lagoon as it offers more parks and boat ramps that can be used as rest areas and water stops. Plus, between Cocoa and Titusville, much of the western shore is a shallow manatee protection zone where boaters must observe slow speeds. This guide also provides options for the paddler to visit points of interest if along an eastern shore.

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.

1. Island IR9A to Island BC38, 13.6 miles

Besides Sebastian Inlet State Park (see the 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 the 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.

2. Island BC38 to Rockledge Spoil Island #35, 25.6 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 and is a good launch site for this segment. Proceed north along the Indian River Lagoon. Bear in mind that although this stretch involves paddling in a relatively straight and wide water body, this is an estuary teeming with life. You may want to hug the shore to see more birdlife and to view original Victorian homes, especially in Rockledge, an enclave founded in 1867.

Rockledge Spoil Island #35 is one of the numerous spoil islands created from the dredging of the Intracoastal Waterway in the 1950s. Primitive camping is allowed. No amenities are provided. Other islands have been designated for educational purposes and a few are designated for conservation, generally because they are active bird rookeries.

Paddlers should keep at least 100 yards from the shore of conservation islands and observe birds quietly.

Rockledge Spoil Island #35 is located 500 yards east of channel marker 80, a mile and half south of the Highway 520 Bridge. Access is on the east side.

3. Rockledge Spoil Island #35 to Manatee Hammock Campground, 13.5 miles

In proceeding north, you can land at Lee Wenner Park at the Highway 520 Bridge after about two miles. Restrooms and water are available and several restaurants and shops are easily accessible just to the west in historic Cocoa Village.

The Port St. John Boat Ramp is the only other public landing spot to the north. This is about two miles before the campground. A city park with restrooms and water is a hundred yards north, but you may want to walk there as landing is difficult. Across the highway are several restaurants. A supermarket is one half mile north on U.S. 1.

The Manatee Hammock Campground, managed by Brevard County, offers shaded sites, water, showers, a swimming pool, a laundromat, volleyball and shuffleboard courts, and horseshoes. A supermarket is 1.3 miles south on U.S. 1. The park has a narrow landing for small boats south of the fishing pier. You may want to reserve tent sites 163 through 168 as these are closest to the water. Call 321-264-5083 for reservation information.

4. Manatee Hammock Campground to Titusville Horseshoe Crab Island, 9.5 miles

Make sure to stock up on fresh water in Titusville, either at Kennedy Point Park or at the Highway 406 Bridge boat ramp, as there may not be another opportunity until late the next day. Camping is on Horseshoe Crab Island, a spoil island just north of Highway 406 Bridge in Titusville. There are also two islands closer to the bridge. Note that the spoil islands in a direct line to the Haulover Canal are managed by the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and are off-limits to camping. Refuge lands also extend into Mosquito Lagoon. Camping is prohibited on all islands and shorelines to marker 19 in the Intracoastal Waterway.

5. Titusville Horseshoe Crab Island to Canaveral National Seashore's County Line Island, 17 miles

In this section, you will proceed toward the Haulover Canal (Blair's Cove Ramp). Before the canal was dug, fishermen used to haul their boats over this short spit of land to the Mosquito Lagoon, thus the name. Two of the spoil islands before the canal have since become bird rookeries. Keep your distance as you observe these active bird colonies.

Adult birds will be tending young, defending territories, and retrieving food and nest materials.

In the canal, be sure to pull into the little cove for the Bair's Cove Boat Ramp. Manatees frequent this spot along with other parts of the canal.

Once in the Mosquito Lagoon, proceed north along a series of spoil islands. You can stay on the west side of the islands to keep out of boat traffic if you wish. Islands managed by the Canaveral National Seashore that are available for camping begin at County Line Island about two miles south of Lefils Fish Camp. You can adjust your mileage with several island campsite choices. There are 14 total primitive campsites at Canaveral National Seashore that can be reserved online or by calling 1-386-428-3384. Sites 1 thru 5 are generally reserved for paddlers, but boaters can take them if not used.

Alternate Route: Paddlers can enter the Banana River Aquatic Preserve just past the Highway 518 Bridge in Melbourne. The Banana River has many notable features. Almost every East Coast manatee comes through the river due to its abundant seagrasses. Not surprisingly, the river is the site of the largest manatee aggregation ever documented outside of a warm water site (700). It boasts one of three diamondback terrapin sites on the East Coast, counting the Keys. It has the largest known brown pelican rookery, a large great blue heron rookery, and it is a major place for dolphins. Just north of Port Canaveral, a manatee protection zone exists where no motorized watercraft are allowed.

To break up this stretch, the 53-acre Samsons Island is available for primitive camping at the southern end of the Banana River near Satellite Beach. It lies about 6.5 miles from the launch in Melbourne. Free permits must be obtained from the city prior to camping, either in person or by fax. Contact info: City of Satellite Beach, 1089 South Patrick Drive, Satellite Beach, FL 32937; (321) 773-6458; Fax: (321) 779-1388. There are fire pits, grills, and a port-a-let on the island, but no water or other facilities. Leave No Trace principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide. The permit holder must be 18 years old or older and must remain on the island for the duration of the permit.

The next campsite is on Ski Island near Port Canaveral. Ski Island is about 23.5 miles from Front Street Park in Melbourne or about 17 miles from Samsons Island. From Ski Island, you may want to spend a day exploring the no-motor zone of the Banana River north of the power lines. Thousands of alligators and other wildlife frequent this area. Canine companions should be left at home as they will attract alligators. Fishing is considered excellent. Port Canaveral offers numerous restaurants and opportunities to view manatees, dolphins, and large fish going through the locks. Past the locks, there is a full-service campground at Jetty Park; (321) 783-7111.

Sykes Creek, between Banana River and Indian River Lagoon, is a popular waterway for day kayak trips. Sykes Creek can also be used as an alternate route in windy conditions, although camping options are limited.

From Ski Island, head east on the barge canal to reenter the Indian River Lagoon. It is about 13 miles from Ski Island to Manatee Hammock Campground.

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.