



Office of Greenways & Trails

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 24

St. Augustine

Emergency contact info:

911

St. John's County Sheriff's Office: 800-346-7596

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

Begin: Faver-Dykes State Park/Mellon Island

End: Palm Valley Road (Highway 210)

Distance: 35.5 miles

Duration: 3 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. Even in the ICW, there is often a strong easterly shore breeze.

Introduction

[St. Augustine](#) is the oldest European-founded city in the United States. For centuries, Spain, France, England, a young United States and various Native American tribes wrested for control of Florida through the historic town. Paddlers on the circumnavigational trail can touch the past by visiting the historic section of St. Augustine and other historical sites in the area.

The St. Augustine segment is also blessed with scenic beauty. The trail skirts county parks and large tracts of public land. These include the [Guana Tolomato Matanzas](#)

[National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) (GTM). The reserve encompasses more than 60,000 acres of wetlands, upland habitats and offshore areas.

The [Matanzas State Forest](#), along the western shore of the Matanzas River in the beginning of this segment, is part of a 16,000-acre conservation corridor linking protected lands along Pellicer Creek to the [Moses Creek Conservation Area](#). A significant wood stork rookery is located in the forest. Moses Creek Conservation Area is managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District and features scenic primitive camping along the sandy bluffs of Moses Creek, along with miles of hiking trails.

[Anastasia State Park](#) and its white sand beaches and campground are accessible near the end of the Salt Run east of St. Augustine, just past the [St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum](#) (also accessible by kayak). Much of the coquina rock used to build [Castillo de San Marcos](#) in St. Augustine was quarried here by the Spanish. Two historic Spanish-built forts can be accessed from the trail, [Fort Matanzas](#) and [Castillo de San Marcos](#). Both are national monuments.

[Guana River Wildlife Management Area](#) covers nearly 10,000 acres along the eastern shore of the Tolomato River in the northern part of this segment. An estimated 3000-4000 migratory waterfowl winter at Guana Lake, a site on the [Great Florida Birding Trail](#). The area is known for being an ideal place to spot peregrine falcons during April and October.

1. Mellon Island to Moses Creek Conservation Area, 7 miles

Take your time paddling this section for there is much to see and explore. By taking the old channel of the Matanzas River just past Mellon Island, you'll not only avoid busy boat traffic, you can also access the [Fort Matanzas National Monument](#). Land near the dock along the east side of the river to tour the visitor's center and hike the nature trail. Do not land at the fort itself. To reach the fort, you must take a free ferry ride across the river, where you will be treated to a guided tour by a person in character as a Spanish infantryman. The panoramic view of a relatively unspoiled terrain from atop the fort is worth the trip alone. If you are taller than 5'7", duck your head through the doorways.

The ferry boat leaves every hour from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, seven days a week every day except Christmas. Ground-shaking cannon firing demonstrations occur Saturday through Monday. The fort, built from 1740-1742, was needed by the Spanish to guard the Matanzas Inlet to St. Augustine. The Spanish had good reason to fear a raid since the English repeatedly harassed St. Augustine, beginning in 1586 when Sir Francis Drake burned the city. The fort proved to be an adequate deterrent. Gunners fired upon British vessels soon after completion, and never saw military action thereafter.

The Matanzas Inlet was named for a Spanish slaughter of about 250 Frenchmen who had surrendered to Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1564. *Matanzas* is the Spanish word for “slaughters.”

About a mile past the Highway 206 Bridge along the western shore is the [Moses Creek Conservation Area](#). Two primitive campsites atop sandy bluffs overlooking Moses Creek are hard to beat anywhere. The first shaded site beneath arching live oak and cedar trees is only a quarter of a mile in from the Matanzas River near Murat Point. This campsite has picnic tables, a fire ring and a hand pump for washing dishes (not potable). Each site can accommodate up to four tents; they are available free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis. From this first campsite, you can access several miles of marked hiking trails, or you can paddle up Moses Creek.

2. Moses Creek Conservation Area to St. Augustine, 9.5 miles

To access the historic section of [St. Augustine](#), land your kayak at the low dock at the St. Augustine Municipal Marina alongside numerous small dinghies, just south of the Bridge of Lions. Make sure you have a bowline to tie up. You'll need to register at the marina office at the end of the dock and pay a small fee. The marina has restrooms, showers, a Laundromat, small store, and there is a motel across the street. Various other motels and bed and breakfasts are within easy walking distance, including an inexpensive hostel with an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast, The [Pirate Haus Inn](#)—954-567-7275. You can also walk to shops, museums, restaurants and to the historic Castillo de San Marcos, or you can paddle to the fort and land on the north side at a small beach. Learn how Seminole Indians achieved their great escape from the fort's jail during the Second Seminole War. Downtown ghost tours are available after dark. If you don't want to walk, you can take a sightseeing train or a horse drawn carriage.

If not staying in St. Augustine, about four miles north on the east side of the Tolomato River is the [North Beach Camp Resort](#). You can land at the boat ramp near a bait and tackle shop (see map) and walk to the office to register for a tent site. The campground has restrooms, showers and a laundromat. Advanced reservations are recommended. Call 800-542-8316.

Though a bit off the route, you can also camp at [Anastasia State Park](#) by paddling up the Salt Run to the park's launch area. The campground is a short walk across the road. Make reservations [on-line](#) well in advance or call 1-800-326-3521.

3. St. Augustine to Palm Valley Road (Highway 210), 19 miles

As you head north, you'll be passing alongside several large tracts of public land, mostly along the eastern shore.

To access the GTM Reserve's Guana River site, you can land at Shell Bluff, the site of a coquina well remaining from a Minorcan farm in the early 1800s. There are 10 miles of hiking/biking trails and it is about a 1.5-mile walk from Shell Bluff to the GTM [Environmental Education Center](#) (small fee for entry) where there are exhibits, aquariums, an orientation video, and a nature shop. The Guana River and lake east of the Tolomato River is a popular destination for day paddlers.

The next large chunk of public lands is the [Guana River Wildlife Management Area](#) (WMA). While there is no camping allowed on WMA land on the east side of the ICW, you can paddle through several adjacent coves and side channels that will allow you to separate yourself from the sometimes busy ICW and enjoy unspoiled marshy vistas and rich bird life.

Several spoil areas along the ICW are often used for primitive camping by boaters, but permission has not been granted to include them in this guide. [Leave No Trace](#) principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide.