



Office of Greenways & Trails

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 25

Jacksonville

Emergency contact info:

911

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

Duval County Sheriff's Office: 904-630-0500

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

Begin: Palm Valley Road (Highway 210)

End: Sister's Creek Marina

Distance: 21 miles

Duration: 2 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. Plus, there are no inlets in this segment connecting the ICW to the Atlantic with the exception of the St. Johns River. Jetties that extend almost two miles into the Atlantic along the mouth of the St. Johns make this option prohibitive. Tides will begin to have a stronger influence as you head north. Paddlers in the ICW must often contend with a strong easterly shore breeze.

Introduction

The city of [Jacksonville](#), chartered in 1832, was named after Florida's first territorial governor, Andrew Jackson. An important seaport, the city figured prominently in the Civil War, being occupied by Union forces on four separate occasions. In 1901, a devastating fire left almost 9,000 homeless, but the city was quickly rebuilt and today Jacksonville is a thriving urban center and port. Paddlers may spot numerous fast-moving helicopters along the ICW as Jacksonville is home to the United States Coast Guard Helicopter

Interdiction Tactical Squadron, commissioned to interdict high-speed drug-running vessels and helping to ensure homeland security.

While this segment covers one of the largest urban areas in the state, paddlers will be pleasantly surprised. Numerous unspoiled areas provide optimal paddling opportunities. Vast stretches of marsh, islands and coastal forest have been protected largely through the efforts of the City of Jacksonville, the [Timucuan National Preserve](#), and private landowners. The [Preservation Project Jacksonville](#) was begun in 1999 by then mayor John Delaney after voters approved a bond issue. Since then, more than 50,000 acres have been protected. The goal of the project is to help to guide growth, protect environmentally sensitive lands, improve water quality, and to provide more outdoor recreation opportunities.

Four main preserves are accessible along the trail: [Cradle Creek](#), [Castaway Island](#), [Dutton Island](#) and [Tideviews](#). The scenic network of these preserves has helped to create the [Jacksonville Intracoastal Salt Marsh Paddling Guide](#). Access to all of these preserves except for Dutton Island is limited at low tide.

This segment also traverses the southern part of the [Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve](#). Managed by the National Park Service, it is named for a large Native American tribe that once inhabited the area. The 46,000-acre preserve encompasses wetlands, upland forests, and historic sites. Paddling trails for day trips are available in the preserve.

[Leave No Trace](#) guidelines should be followed for primitive camping in this segment.

1. Palm Valley Road to Dutton Island, 16 miles

The landing at the Palm Valley Road Bridge is on the eastern shore, with a restaurant adjacent to the landing. Although the ICW becomes long and narrow for about nine miles north of the bridge, the west bank is relatively unspoiled and primarily consists of a mature hardwood forest. A private landowner owns the property. Two restaurants can be seen along the eastern shore, but access from the water is difficult.

The ICW widens after the Highway 202 Bridge and becomes more natural looking, with numerous tree islands, tidal creeks and unbroken expanses of marsh. Cradle Creek, along the eastern shore, is the first of three Jacksonville preservation lands that are ideal for kayaking. The next city preserve, [Castaway Island](#), is along the western shore just past the Beach Boulevard Bridge.

To access nearby restaurants, a drug store and a supermarket within easy walking distance (about a half mile), you can land at the Palm Cove Marina (see map). Check in at the marina service station first. There is also a restaurant at the marina. Directly across the ICW on the eastern shore is Beach Marine where you can also access restaurants.

Proceeding north in the ICW, past the Atlantic Boulevard Bridge, the [Tideviews](#) and [Dutton Island](#) Preserves will be along the eastern shore. This unspoiled area of islands and tidal creeks features a kayak launch dock and a mile-long marked paddling trail through a pristine tidal zone. Currently, paddlers can utilize the park's group camp area (a fee is required) by walking a quarter mile north of the kayak launch dock. For camping reservations, call the [City of Atlantic Beach Recreation Department](#): (904) 247-5828. A primitive campsite for paddlers is being established on a small peninsula east of the kayak launch.

2. Dutton Island to Sister's Creek Marina, 5 miles

Be wary of currents and large boats as you enter the St. Johns River. You must cross the river in a diagonal direction to reach Sister's Creek. If you want to visit the Fort Caroline National Memorial in the Timucuan Preserve, paddle a short distance up the St. John's along the south shore to the low floating docks just before the reconstructed French fort. Jean Ribault landed near here in 1562, exchanged gifts with area Timucuan Indians, erected a stone monument and claimed the area for France. "It is a thing unspeakable," wrote Ribault in his journal, "to consider the things that be seen there, and shall be found more and more in this incomparable land."

The French established a colony at the site in 1564, building Fort Caroline, but only a year later, Ribault and several hundred French soldiers sailed south to raid Spanish St. Augustine. He was shipwrecked by a powerful tropical storm. Spanish Admiral Pedro

Menendez saw an opportunity and raided Fort Caroline, brutally killing most of the adult males. He then hunted down Ribault and other shipwrecked sailors and killed them at a place called Matanzas (“slaughter”), part of segment 24. The fighting marked the first of many battles over European control of the “New World.” Regarding the Timucuan Indians, their numbers dwindled from tens of thousands to only a few hundred by 1700, primarily due to disease. The tribe is considered extinct today.

The [Sister's Creek Marina](#) is located on the west side of Sister's Creek just off Heckscher Drive (State Road 105), a short distance from the St. John's River. Please note that the marina is closed to the public during the Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament in July and one week before. Restrooms, water and a picnic area are available.