



# Office of Greenways & Trails

## Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail Segment 26

### Timucuan Trails/Ft. Clinch

#### Emergency Contact Numbers:

**911**

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

Nassau County Sheriff's Office: 904-225-5174

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

**FPTA Region: L**

**Begin:** Talbot Spoil Island

**End:** Fort Clinch State Park

**Estimated Distance:** 15.3 miles

**Duration:** 1 day

**Special Considerations:** Paddlers need to be watchful of tides and currents, especially near river mouths. The Intracoastal Waterway can be busy with recreational boaters on weekends and holidays. This guide will focus on interior routes as the Atlantic side is considered dangerous and recommended for expert paddlers only.

#### Introduction

Two state parks are also part of the route; Amelia Island, and Fort Clinch. Besides paddling, numerous opportunities for hiking, swimming, biking, fishing, and other activities are available. For primitive campsites, users are required to keep these sites clean and follow all regulations in order for them to remain open for paddlers. Most of

these sites will be “pack-it-in, pack-it-out” only, with campers following Leave No Trace principles.

### **1. Talbot Spoil Island to Fort Clinch State Park, 15.3 miles**

Be wary of strong currents as you cross the Nassau River and enter the South Amelia River, which is the Intracoastal Waterway. There is a launch site, with a small store and restrooms, at the northern end of the AIA Bridge on Amelia Island. This is part of Amelia Island State Park. There is no camping allowed on Amelia Island State Park, and there are restrictions during migratory bird season. The park closes at sundown.

Paddle north up the South Amelia River. Look for flocks of white pelicans in the cool months. Numerous spoil banks provide opportunities to stretch and have a picnic. At the State Road 200 (A1A) Bridge, the current is very strong. Just past the highway bridge, you'll see one of the few remaining swinging railroad bridges.

North of the bridge, you'll pass the sprawling Rayonier paper mill on the eastern shore. Within a half-mile you will then see the docks and marina of Fernandina Beach, where you can find numerous restaurants and bed and breakfast establishments. An impressive fifty blocks of this historic town are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Stroll along the streets and check out the charming Victorian architecture.

In the spring, Fernandina hosts the Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival, which celebrates the town's shrimp industry and the fact that eight flags have flown over Amelia Island—more than any other spot in the United States. Since the 1500s, the flags have been French, Spanish, English, Patriots, Green Cross of Florida, Mexican, Confederate, and U.S.

After passing the papermills, you will see the Dee-Dee Bartles Public Boat Ramp. Just past the boat ramp is a nice beach landing located within the Ft. Clinch boundary. There is a large kayak cemented into the ground with a plaque, designating this site, like the one at Big Lagoon State Park, as a terminus on the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail (CT). Many celebrations have taken place on this beach marking the end, or start, of a CT paddler's journey.

You can camp at one of two campgrounds at Fort Clinch State Park. However, water access is highly restricted in the park. The park will allow for kayaks to land at the River Campground about a half mile before the fort, but you may have to carry your kayaks to your campsite. Sites 29, 30, 39, 40, 41, and 43 are near the water. Reservations are recommended. If you are registered at the campground without a vehicle and seeking to launch the next day, the park will ask you to wade and pull your boat along the shore

about 1,000 feet south to the county-operated Dee Dee Bartels North End Boat Ramp and Nature Center. This is due to strong currents and liability concerns.

The historic red-brick fort is worth checking out. Reenactors provide an 1860s feel to the place on the first weekend of each month. Look for shark's teeth along the beaches, or hike interior trails that traverse scenic maritime hammocks.

If you are beginning or ending your journey on the circumnavigational trail, it is best to utilize the county-operated North End Boat Ramp along the state park's southern boundary. This is accessible by following North 14th Street to its terminus from Atlantic Avenue. The state park has no official kayak launch. From the ramp, you can paddle north less than half a mile to view the historic Fort Clinch and see the state of Georgia across the channel, ensuring you are at the trail's terminus. Hug the shore to avoid swift currents.

If you want to keep paddling north, you can now follow the Georgia Saltwater Paddle Trail all the way up the eastern seaboard to the Chesapeake Bay. It is part of a National Park Service/multi-state effort that created a Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail.