



Segment 4 Forgotten Coast

Emergency contact info:

911

Gulf County Sheriff's Department: 850-227-1115

Franklin County Sheriff's Department: 850-670-8500

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

FPTA Region: B

Begin: St. Joseph's Bay State Buffer Preserve's Deal Tract primitive campsite

End: Gap Point Campsite, Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park

Distance: 52.8 miles

Duration: 4 days

Special Considerations: Be wary of strong winds in open water sections (which is most of the route). Currents moving through all three passes can be strong, depending upon tidal fluctuations. After the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve's canoe and kayak launch, a portable portage carrier, is advised for the Stump's Hole land crossing. From there, you'll need to paddle along the Gulf for several miles, where the surf can pose a challenge.

Introduction

Vast segments of unspoiled public lands and islands are featured in this segment, from the wild palm-lined shores of St. Vincent Island to the old-growth coastal slash pine forests of Cape St. George State Reserve. Paddlers will also enjoy St. Vincent Sound and Apalachicola Bay, among the most productive waters in the state in terms of marine life. In addition, Apalachicola Bay provides the majority of the state's oyster harvest, and paddlers will likely see flotillas of characteristically shaped oyster boats with their small cabins. Oystermen pull up the rock-hard oysters by hand using long tongs, a practice that has changed little in more than a century.

These two bays are encompassed by the massive 12,495-acre St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge and the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, respectively.

Named St. Vincent by Franciscan friars in the 1600s, the island is one of the few sites where endangered red wolves are propagated and trained to live in the wild. Most of these wolves are eventually captured and released at either the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina or the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Also, given the island's history as a private hunting retreat stocked with exotic animals, large sambar deer, native to southeast Asia, still roam the island and can occasionally be spotted. They may weigh several hundred pounds each.

The Apalachicola reserve is one of only 25 sites designated as a research reserve by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, designed to coordinate efforts to manage and protect the nation's most productive waters.

Many of the primitive campsites in this segment are part of the Apalachicola Bay Aquatic and Buffer Preserve Kayak and Canoe Trail, developed by staff with the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve in coordination with other government entities. These sites are "pack-it-in, pack-it-out" only, with campers following Leave No Trace guidelines. All sites are on a first-come, first-serve policy with the exception of sites within state parks, whereupon reservations must be made through the individual parks.

For kayak rentals, shuttle support, and other services, check the Franklin County website or Happy Ours Kayak and Canoe Outpost, Journeys of St. George Island, and St. Marks Outfitters which also offer on-the-water boat support.

1. St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve's Deal Tract primitive campsite to Indian Pass Campground, 13 miles

The St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve's Deal Tract primitive campsite is located on top of an ancient sand ridge that overlooks the St. Joseph Bay. There is a covered picnic shelter with a kiosk that shows the way to the primitive camping area. No fires are allowed, and campers must follow "Leave No Trace" principles.

From the campsite, paddle south a short distance to the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve's canoe and kayak launch. Here, you'll have a challenging quarter-mile portage to Stump Hole on the Gulf side. Portage wheels will make this much easier. The safest route is to travel the bike trail southeast along 30E for a quarter mile and cross 30E at the small public beach where the riprap ends. Do not attempt to cross over the high riprap! The boulders are large, steep and can be slippery. From here, you'll paddle along the Gulf shore to Indian Pass. A welcome rest stop is the county-owned Salinas Park, where water, restrooms, and picnic tables are available (see map)

The Indian Pass Campground is privately owned and has water, showers, restrooms, cabins, a swimming pool, and a small store. Fortunately, the tent camping area is easily accessible by water, enabling you to beach your kayak within easy view of your campsite. Land at the Indian Pass boat ramp and walk a short distance to the circular campground office to register before landing at the campground. Reservations are highly recommended, especially on weekends. Call 850-227-7203

The Indian Pass Trading Post (a.k.a The Raw Bar) is a couple of miles up the road, where you can sample area oysters and other seafood (closed on Mondays).

2. Indian Pass Campground to Government Dock Campsites, 13 miles

Paddling along [St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge](#) on the bay side, you'll have many opportunities to land on a wild shoreline lined with cabbage palms, live oaks, and slash pine. Indian pottery and oyster shells litter the shore as Native Americans utilized the island for thousands of years. Paddling along or standing on the shore, it is easy to envision the lifestyles and foods of these early inhabitants. Bear in mind that it is unlawful to remove artifacts.

A highlight of the island shoreline is the northwestern corner known as St. Vincent Point, a scenic area where a thick grove of cabbage palm trees lines the water. Evidence of sea-level rise and heavy erosion is evident as many trees are being inundated. From here, you can make a beeline across open water to the [Government Dock primitive campsites](#) on Cape St. George Island. The campsites are located just inland from the second dock.

As an alternative, you can paddle south along St. Vincent Island to the [West Pass primitive campsites](#) on Cape St. George. Along this route, you can explore some of St. Vincent's large lakes accessible from the bay side, although some lakes may be closed if bald eagles are actively nesting. If taking this route, it is 13.5 miles from Indian Pass to the West Pass campsites. Or, if you paddle the Gulf route along St. Vincent Island to West Pass, it is a little over 9 miles, although this route is less interesting. If you visit the West Pass or Sike's Cut on the east end of the island, please be aware of the closed areas for nesting shorebirds from about March-August. The threatened snowy plovers, Wilson's plovers, American oystercatchers, and terns are nesting on Little St George Island. From Apalachicola, you can paddle across the bay six or seven miles to several campsites on either Cape St. George or St. George Island.

Alternate route: If you wish to explore more of the area's fishing culture, and avoid unfavorable north winds, you can hug the northern shore after leaving Indian Pass and paddle to Battery Park in the town of [Apalachicola](#), about 15.5 miles. From there, you can enjoy a [Historic Apalachicola Walking Tour](#) and select all types of quaint bed and breakfast inns, motels, restaurants, and gift shops. Apalachicola is a historic fishing village where many residents still actively make their living from the sea, especially with regard to harvesting shrimp and oysters. From Apalachicola, continue on the alternate route to Carrabelle.

3. Government Dock Primitive Campsites to Nick's Hole Campsites, 8.0 miles

The first half of this day is very scenic with slash pines that stand right up against the bay. Look for the angular cuts or "cat-faced" scars on older trees made by early workers to collect sap for making turpentine. The industry died out in the 1940s. Also, scan the skies and treetops for bald eagles that frequent the area in cooler months and sometimes nest along the bay in large pines. Give nesting trees a wide berth.

Government Cut or Sike's Cut marks the halfway point. This is an artificial pass dredged between the bay and Gulf in 1954 that separates Cape St. George from St. George Island.

There are two campsites on the bay-side of the island about 400 yards west of the cut. The sites are located back from the bay shore about 100 yards and nestled behind palmetto bushes. There are large stone fire rings marking the spot. As with any pass, be wary of strong currents. Just past the cut, you will pass an exclusive subdivision where docking or landing is prohibited. Proceed along the island to [Nick's Hole](#), a wild cove where there are two primitive campsites just past the observation platform and hand launch site on the right. Land at the launch site. There are no restrooms but there is a water spigot and fire rings.

4. Nick's Hole Campsites to St. George Island State Park/Gap Point Campsite, 10.5 miles

A welcome rest stop is a sand landing on the east side of the St. George Island Bridge. Here, you can easily access stores and restaurants. A small grocery store is just east of the main road.

One option for camping is the [Unit 4 campsite](#) just east of the bridge along the bay. Primitive camping here is free and on a first-come, first-serve basis since it is outside the state park.

There are two primitive campsites in [Dr. Julian G. Bruce, St George Island State Park](#) at scenic Gap Point (see map). Gap Point is located across the bay from the state park's youth camp area and boat ramp (rental sit-on-top kayaks can be obtained here, after making arrangements at the entrance station). The Gap Point sites have no water or facilities and are located almost a half-mile apart from each other. There is a 2.5-mile nature trail that traverses a terrain of old-growth slash pine and large bell-shaped rosemary plants. On the trail, look for "cat faces" on the trees from early turpentine operations. The island was also used for cattle grazing and as a practice bombing range during WWII. Like most barrier islands and shorelines in the region, you may see evidence of Native American occupation which predates European contact by thousands of years. Restrooms and hot showers are available in the family campground which is located at the end of the 2.5-mile trail from Gap Point. The youth camp, across the bay from the campsite, is also available to paddlers if not reserved by groups. There is a restroom and cold showers available at the youth camp area; check with the park about availability.

A third primitive campsite on the bay side is known as Sugar Hill. It is an exposed site next to a well-used trail, located 3 miles northeast of Gap Point. Cold water/outdoor showers, drinking water, and restrooms are available 200 yards southeast of the Sugar Hill campsite on the ocean side at the end of a sand trail. Camp in the designated area. Please avoid walking on the fragile dunes.

Call the park office between 8 am and sunset at (850) 927-2111 if you plan to utilize any of the three primitive campsites in the park or the youth camp. A small fee is required. Length of stay is limited.