



Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail Segment 21

Indian River/Pelican Island

Emergency contact info:

911

Indian River County Sheriff's Office: 772-569-6700

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

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

FPTA Region: J

Begin: SL13

End: IR9A

Distance: 23.6 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. 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.

Introduction

Covering the middle section of the Indian River Lagoon, considered to be North America's most diverse estuary, this segment incorporates premier state and county

parks, federal land, numerous spoil islands, and a traditional fish camp. Paddlers are almost guaranteed to spot sea turtles, manatees, dolphins, and a wide variety of birdlife.

Several highlights are along this route; the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, where paddlers can cruise along the small island rookery that marked the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Sebastian Inlet which links the Indian River Lagoon with the sparkling Atlantic Coast. Paddlers can land in safe waters of the State Park and visit sandy Atlantic beaches on foot if desired.

This segment also covers the Indian River - Malabar to Vero Beach and the Indian River - Vero Beach to Ft. Pierce Aquatic Preserves. The purpose of both preserves is to highlight the ecological and economic importance of the Indian River Lagoon since the entire natural system is estimated to generate more than \$800 million in annual revenue for the local economy. Preserve efforts have helped to reconnect mangrove marshes and seagrass beds that act as nursery grounds to 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 Lagoon.

This guide covers some of the spoil islands available for camping. Free downloadable maps to spoil islands can be accessed at the Spoil Island Project or fosifl.org web page. The maps clearly identify where camping IS permitted (recreational islands) and IS NOT permitted (conservation islands). Leave No Trace principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide.

1. SL13 to IR25, 15.2 miles

From SL13 to IR25, the ICW is lined with spoil islands offering places to take a break and stretch your legs. There is also a county-run kayak launch at Round Island Park along with restrooms and water.

Several islands along the ICW are available for camping. Since the Spoil Island Project converts some camping spoils into bird sanctuaries, it is recommended to access current maps at the Spoil Island Project or fosifl.org or contact the Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserve/IRLAP 772-429-2995 for a current list of available spoils for primitive camping. IR25A primitive camp is located on the south end of the spoil island.

2. IR25 to Island IR9A, 8.4 miles

As you head north, you can follow the narrowing ICW on the east side of Pine Island, or you can paddle on the shallower west side and avoid most of the boat traffic.

North of the Wabasso Causeway, where you can take a rest break with full amenities, hug the shallower eastern side of the lagoon along several scenic islands. Eventually, you'll come to tiny Pelican Island, part of the [Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge](#). This island was the last known brown pelican rookery along the east coast at the turn of the twentieth century. Diligently defended by German immigrant Paul Kroegel, he convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to formally protect the island in 1903, helping to spawn the national wildlife refuge system. Today, the system comprises 540 units in all 50 states and includes American Samoa, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Johnston Atoll, Midway Atoll, and several other Pacific islands.

While you can't land on Pelican Island, you can observe the birds from a safe distance. Use a camera zoom lens or binoculars to keep a football field distance between you and wildlife when possible. Besides pelicans, you may also spot wood storks, anhingas, cormorants, American oystercatchers and several types of wading birds. The [Great Florida Birding Trail](#) has many sites along this coastline where the quiet, observant paddler can see a multitude of bird species, especially during spring and fall migration.

Across from Pelican Island, you'll find multiple spoil islands, including IR9A. The bird sanctuary spoils are clearly marked, so avoid them. One spoil island prior to IR9A, is IR13, with a picnic table and a deep lagoon where manatees have been known to visit. The next few islands north of IR9A are part of the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. A nearby boat ramp in the town of Sebastian will enable you to access several restaurants and paddler-friendly [Captain Hiram's Resort](#) within easy walking distance. Biologists have noted that the area between Pelican Island and Sebastian Inlet is a nursery ground for juvenile green sea turtles.

Another choice for camping, or a good rest stop, is [Sebastian Inlet State Park](#). The park is located 3 miles north of IR9A on the eastern side of the ICW. If camping, the best place to land is opposite the boat ramp where you can carry or wheel your kayak a hundred yards or so to a campsite. For camping reservations, visit [Reserve Florida State Parks](#) or call (800) 326-3521.

In 1715, a Spanish fleet laden with gold and silver from Mexico and Peru wrecked in the vicinity of the park. More than a thousand sailors made it to shore. Some died from exposure to the elements, but many more would have perished if not for the generosity of Ais Indians. When salvagers from Havana finally arrived, they recovered only half the treasure. Modern-day treasure hunters found a sunken ship laden with gold and jewelry. The McLarty Treasure Museum is located within the [Sebastian Inlet State Park](#) off A1A and highlights the shipwreck and treasure salvage. A second museum, the Sebastian Fishing Museum, tells the history of the area's fishing industry.

Just past the state park is another campground with full amenities, Long Point County Park (see map). Reserve a site online or call 321-952-4532.

Yet another camping option in the vicinity is Donald MacDonald County Park, less than two miles up the Sebastian River. Camping at the shaded campground is on a first-come, first-serve basis. Call 772-589-0087 for more information.