



Office of Greenways & Trails

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 23

Tomoka/Pellicer

Emergency contact info:

911

Volusia County Sheriff's Office: 386-254-4689

Flagler County Sheriff's Office: 386-437-4116

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

FPTA Region: K

Begin: Canaveral National Seashore's County Line Island

End: Silver Lake Spoil Island

Distance: 52.1 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.

Introduction

Rich in history, ecology, and scenic beauty, this segment invites paddlers to enjoy scenes that have changed little since Timucuan Indians plied these waters in dugout canoes. The

village of Nocoroco, perhaps the largest Timucuan town, thrived in an area now contained in Tomoka State Park, a point of interest along the route. Once numbering about 40,000, the tribe's population quickly dropped after European contact due to disease and war. The last Timucuan fled with the Spanish as they retreated from the peninsula in 1763.

After Spain's withdrawal, English planters developed several large plantations in the area, such as Bulow and Mount Oswald. Boosted by skilled slave labor, the plantations raised cotton, indigo, various vegetables, and rice. The plantations also exported timber, hides, molasses, rum, sugar, and oranges. Indigo, valuable for blue dye, became a primary cash crop and some indigo plants can still be found in area forests today. Most of the plantations and associated sugar mills and other structures were burned by raiding Seminole Indians and black warriors during the Second Seminole War and were never rebuilt.

Paddlers can explore numerous islands, and shallow creeks and enjoy wide scenic stretches and numerous islands along the Tomoka Basin and Pellicer Flats.

Five outstanding Florida state parks are within reach of paddlers for exploration and enjoyment: Tomoka, Northern Peninsula, Gamble Rogers, Faver-Dykes, and Washington Oaks State Gardens.

The Tomoka Marsh and Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserves are part of this segment. These preserves are valuable nursery areas for shrimp, crabs, and fish. They are utilized by more than 120 species of fish and more than 180 bird species. The Pellicer Creek preserve, largely buffered by public lands, is one of the most pristine estuarine/riverine systems along Florida's east coast.

Leave No Trace principles should be utilized for any primitive camping outlined in this guide.

1. Canaveral National Seashore's County Line Island to Wilbur-By-The-Sea Spoil Island, 24 miles

This will be a very scenic paddle through the upper half of Mosquito Lagoon, winding around several uninhabited islands that provide numerous opportunities for rest breaks. You can continue north along the ICW, or as an alternative, you can take an old channel called Shipyard Channel or the locals call "Government Cut" just east of the Intracoastal Waterway for most of the way (see map). Callalisa Creek is also a scenic option, passable by kayak. This winding route may add a mile or so to your day. The town of New Smyrna Beach has a lively historic downtown worth visiting and a matrix of local paddling trails between Edgewater and New Smyrna Beach.

Be sure to stop at the Seminole Rest Mound, one of the few remaining shell mounds along the Atlantic Coast. Two pioneer houses stand atop the mound. The Snyder family protected this Timucuan-built mound early in the last century, while a nearby mound suffered the fate of most ancient shell mounds—it was hauled away for fill material. There is a restaurant about a quarter-mile north of the mound.

A good rest stop is River Breeze Park, operated by Volusia County. The park offers shaded picnic tables, water, and a short hiking trail. It is the site of a Colonial-era plantation. According to the West Volusia Audubon Society, the park and its environs are great for birdwatching. This is from their website: “Here, up close on a sandbar, Marbled Godwits doze and preen and luxuriate in the sunshine, shoulder to shoulder with handsome Black Skimmers. In the brackish waters of the lagoon, the birder may spot a wintering American White Pelican or a Common Loon. Reddish Egrets and Red-breasted, Common and Hooded Mergansers visit this spot and you may see American Oystercatchers. Check the area for migrating warblers before you leave.”

To more fully explore the unique and scenic Mosquito Lagoon area, proceed east from River Breeze Park along Slippery Creek, paddling around several islands. Once along the main peninsula of the Canaveral National Seashore, you can dock and stroll around the historic two-story house visible from the water. This is the restored Eldora Statehouse, a vestige of a waterway community that once thrived on these shores. When the location of the Intracoastal Waterway shifted, and a railroad was built on the mainland, Eldora slowly declined. You can hike a short nature trail through the scenic Eldora Hammock.

From Eldora, cruise about a mile along the peninsula to the Apollo Beach (Canaveral National Seashore) Visitor Center/ranger station where there are water and picnic tables.

Just after the ranger station, be sure to visit Turtle Mound, a huge midden built by Timucuan Indians over a span of 600 years. These early people would visit coastal lagoons every winter to harvest abundant marine resources, staying in camps of one or more families—25-30 people. Don’t miss the panoramic view of the lagoon and coast from atop the 50-foot mound.

Another coastal treasure is Smyrna Dunes Park, operated by Volusia County. You can land near the park entrance where the Intracoastal Waterway veers northwest and hike on a long boardwalk that spans a pristine dunes ecosystem. You can view the scenic Ponce Inlet and access some fine beaches along the Atlantic Ocean. If you paddle Ponce Inlet, proceed with caution as currents are strong and breakers will likely be encountered as you near the Atlantic.

On the north side of the Ponce Inlet, you can land on a small beach at the county park and hike to the Atlantic shore if you wish. High waves breaking over the jetty can be impressive. Due to currents and heavy wave action, it is not recommended that you paddle through the inlet to the Atlantic.

A must-stop is the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse Museum. You can land at a public ramp (see map), enjoy an adjacent restaurant, and walk less than a hundred yards to your left (facing the lighthouse) to the museum entrance. For a fee, you can explore the historic buildings on the grounds, view various Fresnel Lenses on display (used for lighting the lighthouse) and climb the spiraling staircase of the red brick lighthouse, the tallest in Florida and second tallest in the United States. The lighthouse is still in use and has had the unintended effect of limiting high-rise condominiums and motels from being built in the immediate area. Just south of the boat ramp is Volusia County's Marine Science Center, which includes exhibits, aquariums, nature trails, an observation tower, and facilities to rehabilitate sea turtles and seabirds.

Heading north from Smyrna Dunes Park, on the south side of Ponce Inlet, numerous spoil and natural islands within the wide Halifax River basin are available for primitive camping. We have provided GPS coordinates for two islands on the map (which includes Wilbur-by-the-Sea spoil island), but most islands are available unless they are obvious bird rookeries. There are two such rookeries north of Wilbur-by-the-Sea, near the Dunlawton Ave/SR421 Bridge. Roosting birds should be viewed from a safe distance (100 yards). Spruce Creek is also a state-designated paddling trail and a popular kayaking spot in the area. The wide nature of this section enables paddlers to utilize side channels and creeks and avoid the sometimes busy ICW.

Camping is on Wilbur-by-the-Sea spoil island about 6 miles north of the park.

2. Wilbur-By-The Sea Spoil Island to Tomoka Basin Spoil Island, 17.1 miles

Heading north from Wilbur-by-the-Sea Spoil Island is the Port Orange Causeway Park, a site on the Great Florida Birding Trail at the Dunlawton Ave/SR421 Bridge and can be a welcome rest stop.

While this long stretch through the urban setting of the Daytona Beach area lacks suitable islands or other lands available for camping at the moment, it offers other options such as numerous shaded riverfront parks with docks for picnics and respite and many popular waterfront restaurants with docks. Also, the River Lily Inn B&B, (386-253-5002) is easily accessible directly across from Ross Point Park in Holly Hill (just over 7 miles from Port Orange Causeway). Check for paddler discounts. You can access the shops, restaurants, and events of Daytona Beach from the downtown Riverfront Park (see map)

at the docks at Halifax Harbor Marina shops and Manatee Island paddling docks near Main Street Bridge (sunrise/sunset hours).

Near the Tomoka Basin, you'll see the first of several spoil and natural islands that stretch for a couple of miles. Since the ICW is on the narrow east side of these islands, you may want to paddle on the west side and enjoy an unfettered view of the Tomoka Basin. Most of these islands are open for camping. Try to pick a spot on the western side of the islands, out of view of houses that line the eastern shore of the river.

A visit to Tomoka State Park is highly recommended. You can access the park via a boat ramp and walk a short distance to a museum, which includes displays of the park's Timucuan and European history, as well as its ecology. You can also learn more about artist Fred Dana Marsh, creator of the park's huge statue depicting Chief Tomokie and maidens and warriors. The statue will likely be removed at a future date due to deterioration, but a replica is on display in the visitor's center. It was dedicated in 1957 and is viewed as Florida folk art. Canopied nature trails allow you to enjoy the park's renowned live oak hammocks. The park store next to the boat ramp offers snacks, some supplies, and canoe rentals.

3. Tomoka Basin to Silver Lake Spoil Island, 11 miles

After the Tomoka Basin, the Halifax River suddenly narrows and morphs into Halifax Creek, then into Smith Creek, and finally into the Matanzas River. Along the way, you can stop at Northern Peninsula State Park and access the two-mile Coastal Strand hiking trail. A short distance later, you can land at Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area and enjoy a short hike to an unmarred Atlantic beach, or if you call ahead and make arrangements/reservations, camping is always an option. The park has always been kayak/CT friendly.

Several spoil islands are available for camping near Silver Lake, although be wary of cacti in open areas. The GPS point on the map is for a suitable campsite that has been cleared. There is a tiny kayak launch on the east side of Silver Lake along a mangrove-lined canal. The launch can be muddy, especially at low tide. No facilities are available.