



Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 9

Tampa Bay / Longboat Key

Emergency Contact Information:

911

Pinellas County Sheriff's Office: 727-582-6200

Manatee County Sheriff's Office: 941-747-3011

Sarasota County Sheriff's Office: 941-316-1201

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

FPTA Region: D

Begin: Shell Key/Fort De Soto Park

End: Anna Maria Island

Distance: 11.2 miles

Duration: 1 day

Special Considerations: Crossing Tampa Bay can be hazardous and is recommended for experienced paddlers only, and only in good weather. Strong currents, large ships, and wakes, sudden winds, and waves can all be factors in the long passage across open water. Several options are given here, depending on the weather, including taking a shuttle across the bay. South of Tampa Bay, paddlers have the choice of paddling

on the Gulf side or inside the barrier islands, although most motels for overnight stops are on the Gulf side. As with most South Florida segments, boat traffic can be heavy, especially on weekends.

Introduction

For thousands of years, dugout canoes glided across Tampa Bay and nearby coastal waters, guided by skilled Native American paddlers. Sometimes, these early Florida sailors used small sails to help speed them along on trade journeys and fishing trips, utilizing landmarks, currents, stars, and sun position to help with navigation.

Today, huge ocean liners and tankers can be seen chugging through Tampa Bay, along with numerous motorized pleasure crafts. Perhaps today's equivalent to the ocean-going dugout is a sea kayak, equipped with a foot-guided rudder, spray skirt, and sometimes a sail to make passage easier. Navigation is usually by nautical maps, compass, and GPS, but that same sense of adventure early native paddlers must have experienced can be captured.

Historic Tampa Bay, abundant birdlife, gleaming white beaches, and a Native American temple mound are highlights of this segment of the Florida Circumnavigation Saltwater Paddling Trail. The trail passes through [Boca Ciega Bay](#) and [Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserves](#). These preserves protect seagrass beds, hard bottom communities and other underwater habitats, and efforts are underway to restore seagrasses in places where pollution or boat dredging has damaged or destroyed them.

Another highlight of this segment is that paddlers can utilize alternative forms of transportation to explore areas of interest, including a free trolley system that can be utilized on Anna Maria Island.

Paddlers have several options in crossing Tampa Bay, depending upon experience level and weather. One route traverses the historic [Egmont Key State Park](#).

Along the Manatee County coast south of the bay, paddlers have the option of taking the Intracoastal Waterway or paddling the Gulf parallel to sandy beaches, depending again on weather conditions. The [Paddle Manatee](#) 75-mile network of paddling trails along the coast, bays, inlets, and rivers has been developed by Manatee County.

1. Shell Key/Fort De Soto Park to Bradenton Beach or Anna Maria/Bayfront Park, 11.2 miles

To traverse Tampa Bay from the campground, you have several options. For one, crossing the bay is recommended for experienced paddlers only in calm weather. Strong currents, large ships, and wakes, sudden winds, and waves can all be factors in the long passage across open water. In calm weather, the shortest distance is to Egmont Key (two miles from the tip of Ft. De Soto Park), and then across to Anna Maria Island.

After crossing Tampa Bay, you have two route options at Anna Maria Island. In good weather, you can paddle around the island on the Gulf side, or you can paddle along the Intracoastal Waterway through Anna Maria Sound and Sarasota Bay. There are opportunities for bathroom

breaks on both sides of the barrier islands as there are numerous public county beaches, boat launches, and private marinas.

GPS points are given for Anna Maria Bayfront Park, Holmes Beach, and Dream Inn at Bradenton Beach for reference points. One block to the west of Anna Maria Bayfront Park is the Sea Isle Motel. Since overnight opportunities are mostly on the Gulf side, one option is to paddle through Anna Maria Sound on the Intracoastal side, cut through Longboat Pass, and paddle north along Coquina Beach two to three miles to the motels at Bradenton Beach. On the Intracoastal side, you can stop at or cruise past the historic fishing village of Cortez, founded by fishermen from North Carolina in the 1880s. Being one of the last remaining fishing villages on Florida's Suncoast, Cortez is facing a number of pressures such as encroaching residential development and increased fishing regulation. If you chose the Intracoastal Waterway route, your first overnight stay location is the Lido Key Sandcastle Resort, 21-miles from Anna Maria Bayfront Park.

The beauty of staying on Anna Maria Island is the availability of a free trolley system that runs daily from 6 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., seven days a week. The trolley arrives at different stops about every 20 minutes and can take you to points of interest, shopping centers, restaurants, or simply on a sightseeing tour. Near Holmes Beach, it links to a bus that can take you to Bradenton and Palmetto for a small fee. Call 941-749-7116 for more information.

Accessible by trolley or kayak is a post office across the road from the historic Anna Maria Pier along the northern end of the island. The Anna Maria town post office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday. The zip code is 34216 in case you want to receive mail in care of general delivery.

