

# Florida Sea Islands Paddling Trails

## A Paddling Guide

### Where the Waters Meet

Shrouded by a light fog as an early morning high tide rises over vast salt marshes, a lone kayaker slowly moves with the current on the St. Johns River. Ahead of the kayak an osprey dives into a school of finger mullet and snares one in its talons, barely rippling the water's mirror-like surface. The only sounds are those of nature; sounds familiar to Timucuan Indians, sounds of birds, of the wind blowing through the marsh grasses, and the water lapping against the shore

Four rivers and their salt marshes plus several barrier islands create the perfect location in northeast Florida for exceptional coastal saltwater paddling. The trails in this guide will give you an opportunity to enjoy the tranquility of estuaries and tidal creeks, observe a vast array of birds and wildlife, learn the history of early cultures and settlement of this region and most importantly, relax and appreciate the interplay of water, light and land.

### About This Guide

This guide provides information about paddling trails in the salt marsh, estuarine, and sea island ecosystems of four rivers located in the Timucuan Trails State and National Parks. Timucuan Trails State and National Parks is a ground breaking formal partnership created in 1999 between federal, state, city, private and corporate landowners that provides visitors with seamless experiences across adjoining management areas. The partnership is a national model for multi-jurisdictional cooperation between park managers. This unique partnership of land managers is responsible for the waterways, lands and facilities that are included in this guide. To learn more, log onto: <http://timucuantrailwaterwayguide.org/>

This guide is intended to be a stand-alone paddling resource for the northeast Florida area. Paddlers are encouraged to also reference the *Florida Circumnavigation Saltwater Paddling Trail* ([www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/saltwater.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/saltwater.htm)) which includes northeast Florida in Segment 26 of the saltwater trail. These two valuable guides provide paddlers with the information necessary to plan a paddling trip for a few hours or several days. The distance of each trail identified on the maps is an estimate based on computer measurements. Available amenities are listed for all sites. General characteristics of the trail are listed, but all paddlers should be aware that conditions quickly change and all safety procedures must be followed to assure a safe trip. Paddlers are responsible for knowing your own capabilities and limits and the conditions of the water for each trip. The paddling routes described here include 10 saltwater trails and 2 freshwater-brackish creek trails.

All designated access sites are on public property. Please do not trespass on adjacent private property that is not part of the blueway. If you make stops between designated access sites, please follow the directions in the guide to avoid trespassing on private land.

### The Environment

## **Climate**

Northeast Florida has a temperate climate and a delightful change of seasons not found in other Florida areas. Year-round sunshine and blue skies offer mild weather, making a visit to Northeast Florida pleasant, whatever the season.

Average annual temperature: **72.8 degrees**

Average year-round high: **78 degrees**

Annual number of sunny days: **226**

### ***Average Monthly Weather Information***

<b>Month</b>	<b>Midday High (F)</b>	<b>Evening Low (F)</b>	<b>Surf Temp.</b>
January	68.1	44.0	57
February	69.0	46.3	56
March	75.0	51.2	61
April	79.0	56.9	70
May	84.7	62.1	76
June	89.3	69.1	80
July	91.4	71.9	83
August	90.7	71.8	83
September	87.2	69.0	83
October	80.2	59.3	75
November	75.6	52.2	67
December	72.3	50.4	60

The above information was provided by the National Weather Service in Jacksonville, FL and is based on data compiled from 1964-96. For more information on local weather and tide conditions visit <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/jax/index.shtml>.

## **Sea Islands**

There are four sea islands (Amelia, Big Talbot, Little Talbot, Ft. George) listed in this blueway guide that are part of a chain of more than 100 low islands off the Atlantic coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northeast Florida, extending from the Santee River to the St. Johns River. The St. Johns, Ft. George, Amelia, St. Marys and Nassau Rivers all enter the Atlantic Ocean in this area of northeast Florida. The barrier islands, marshes, channels, and tributaries are considered to be the southern extension of the St. Marys Meander Plain known as the "Sea Islands". This name is derived from the barrier chain, which is separated from the mainland by meandering tidal creeks resulting from fluvial and tidal sedimentation in derelict lagoons or coastal-parallel marshes between beach ridges.

## **Salt marshes**

The most prevalent plant community paddlers will encounter is the coastal salt marsh. Salt marshes are beds of rooted plants that develop along the shorelines of estuaries where wave

energy is low. To the casual observer, a salt marsh looks like a monotonous expanse of grass and water. In reality they are a highly complex and intricately balanced ecosystem, fragile yet also very resilient. In terms of biomass production (animal and plant) salt marshes are one of the richest ecosystems on earth. Another fascinating aspect of salt marshes is that they are an environment in constant motion that is noticeable to one's eyes. As the tides rise and fall, fish, birds and other animals move in and out of the salt marsh creating an exciting symphony of sight, sound, and motion.

## **Maritime Forests**

Upland areas and larger islands are dominated by an environment known as Maritime Hammock Forests. This environment got its name from "Maritime" meaning "near the sea" and "Hammock" meaning "shady place." This type of forest is dominated by a mixture of hardwood trees such as live oaks, slash pines, holly, hickory, magnolia, and southern red cedar. Two species of palm trees are also common; the tall sable palms and the lower growing saw palm. Very little light penetrates to the maritime forest floor so wildflowers are not abundant. However vine-growing plants are common and wild grape vines prolifically grow reaching high into the forest canopy.

## **Freshwater Swamps & Creeks**

Freshwater swamps are formed by underground springs that discharge water at a slow and steady flow creating creeks that eventually empty into brackish estuaries. The dark color of these creeks is the result of plants and decaying matter turning the spring water brown, much the same as when one puts a bag of tea into a glass of water. The pungent earthy smells of fresh water creeks and swamps are the smell of life ending and beginning its grand cycle. Paddlers will observe huge cypress trees, fragrant native azaleas, and brilliantly blooming lilies, orchids and bromeliads along the creek banks. Freshwater swamps and creeks abound in animal life and the lucky paddler may encounter turtles, raccoons, otters, alligators and endless varieties of birds.

## **History & Culture**

### **Pre European Contact**

The earliest occupation of the northeast coast of Florida dates back to 4000 B.C. The people came to be known as the Timucuan Indians after European contact in the late 1500's. The Timucuan were a group of 12 independent chiefdoms that spoke the same language and occupied southeastern Georgia and northeastern Florida. The individual chiefdoms were comprised of 20 to 30 villages each. The villages were built along the rivers and creeks; the average distance between them, by water, was two miles. Each village was governed by a chief who was subordinate in power to the regional chief who ruled as Supreme Lord of the immediate geographical area.

Of these Timucuan chiefdoms, the best known were the Saturiwa, who occupied the lower course of the St. Johns River and the coastal area from the mouth of the St. Marys to south of St. Augustine. These people and their culture were inseparably connected with the estuary and coastal uplands. Their religion and ceremonies reflect a lifestyle tied not to agriculture but to hunting and gathering.

The Timucuans and their ancestors left behind large refuse heaps known as shell middens. These middens are valuable cultural resources that archaeologists study to learn more about the Timucuans lifestyle. The remains of food from midden deposits indicate that sheepshead, mullet, black drum, and catfish were the most utilized fish. Shellfish included mussels, whelks, clams and oysters. Some of these middens are island-sized. Please treat them as treasures from the past and do not dig into them or disturb the midden structure in any way.

## **Post European Contact**

The arrival of Europeans over 400 years ago resulted in exploration, colonization, agriculture, and commerce under the flags of France, Spain, Great Britain, the Confederacy, and the United States. In 1564, French Huguenots (protestants) seeking religious freedom constructed a fort along the St. Johns River (which they had named the River of May; hence the name Mayport) and named the area “la Caroline” meaning “the Land of Charles” in honor of their king. This settlement became the first permanent European colony in what would become the United States. Fort Caroline National Memorial preserves the legacy of the French colony and educates the public about this period of history. The Timucuan Preserve Visitor Center, located at Fort Caroline National Memorial, serves as the primary orientation center for the 46,000 acre National Park site.

Fort George Island was named for Fort St. George, a 1736 fort built to defend the southern flank of Georgia when it was a colony. It has been a site of human occupation for over 5,000 years. Some of the significant sites on the island are the shell middens from Indian settlements, Fort St. George, Kingsley Plantation, the Mission of San Juan del Puerto, and the Ribault Clubhouse. Fort St. George and San Juan del Puerto exist only as archaeological remains and are not accessible to the public.

Kingsley Plantation was built in the late 1790’s and was used as a cotton plantation from approximately 1800 until the Civil War. Structures include the main house, kitchen house, and numerous slave cabins. This site represents the most extensive remains of any cotton plantation in Florida.

One of the deepest natural ports on the east coast, Fernandina Beach was a perfect area to construct a Third System Seaport Fortification. Fort Clinch is a third system (masonry) fortification. Its construction started in 1847 and continued for 20 years. The Confederacy held the fort from the beginning of the Civil War until March 3, 1862 when the Union took the fort and held it until the end of the war. During the Civil War, Third System Fortifications became obsolete due to the development of more precise rifled barrel weapons. Although no battles were fought here, it was garrisoned during both the Civil and Spanish-American wars. During the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps began preserving and rebuilding many of the structures of the abandoned fort. Fort Clinch State Park was established in 1935 and today the fort is a living museum with guided tours and reenactments.

## **Prepare for the trip:**

## **Currents & Tides**

Ask any veteran salt marsh paddler what is the most important thing you need to know in order to have a good time paddling in the estuary, and most will say “understanding the tides.”

### ***Ride the Tide:***

In order to safely navigate Timucuan’s waterways paddlers must have some knowledge of currents and tides. The safety of any paddler is greatly compromised if stranded by a falling tide. Tide forecasts may be found in local newspapers or television weather reports, or on NOAA weather radio. Know the times of the tide stages for the location of the particular blueway trail to be paddled that day. Tides rise and fall every six hours to create an environment that is in constant motion. Plan your trip to coincide with either the rising or falling tides as suggested in the individual descriptions for each trail. Your enjoyment of the inshore waters will be greatly enhanced.

## **The Intracoastal Waterway-ICW**

The ICW flows south along the west side (Amelia River) of Ft. Clinch then continues south across the Nassau River and into Sawpit Creek and Sisters Creek and then crosses the St. Johns River and joins Pablo Creek. Several of the trails listed in this Guide contain sections that include the ICW. Paddlers must be aware of the motorized boats that use the ICW and at all times observe the Coast Guard regulations governing the right of way procedures between motorized and non-motorized boats.

## **Safety Equipment & Precautions**

Before you go paddling make sure your boat and equipment are in good working order. Be sure to carry basic safety equipment and know how to use it correctly. Always leave a float plan with someone prior to your trip, even a day trip. Do not go anywhere in the Preserve without a map. Know your capabilities and your limits and those of your paddling partners.

### **Basic Safety Equipment:**

- Personal flotation device (PFD) & whistle. Florida law requires all paddlers to carry both.
- First aid kit, insect repellent, sunscreen, hat, snug-fitting shoes, sunglasses.
- Sponge, bilge pump, or water bailing device
- Knife.
- Drinking water (1 gal/person/day) and food.
- USGS Quad sheet or NOAA chart (or both) and a tide chart, consult daily weather forecast.
- Spare paddle.
- Survival Kit: waterproof matches, flare, knife, repair materials (duct tape) and tools.
- Personal medications.

### **Emergency Contacts:**

- City of Jacksonville: 630-city
- County sheriff for Duval & Nassau: 911
- Timucuan Preserve (National Park Service): 904-251-5568
- Talbot Islands State Park: 904-251-2320
- Ft. Clinch State Park: 904-277-7274

- U.S. Coast Guard: 904-564-7531

### **Stewardship**

The rivers and salt marshes are vital habitat for wildlife, waterfowl, fish and shellfish. Enjoy your paddle and help preserve the resources by practicing the Leave No Trace principles.

- Plan ahead and prepare.
- Dispose of waste properly. Take out what you brought in.
- Leave what you find. Leave all natural and cultural features as you find them.
- Respect wildlife. Always observe wildlife from a distance. Never feed wild animals. Many of the sandbars and islands support feeding and nesting birds. Keep your distance from these areas.
- Be considerate of other visitors. Don't bring the city to the water. Leave loud music at home.
- Respect private property. Do not trespass.
- Camp only in designated areas and minimize your impacts.
- Observe regulations of jurisdictional agencies regarding licenses & permits for camping, boating and fishing.
- To report fish and wildlife violations, call 1-888-404-3922

### **Fishing**

A Florida fishing license for either salt, or fresh water, or both, is required for persons 16 years of age and older (free for Florida residents 65 or older). Visit <http://myfwc.com/license/> to purchase a license or to obtain more information. Call 1-888-347-4356.

In the brackish inshore waters the most popular fish are redfish, spotted sea trout, flounder, sheepshead, black drum, stripers, and even the occasional snook. Typically creeks through Jacksonville's marshlands have lots of flooded grass, mud flats, and oyster beds, which are ideal for sight-fishing tailing and backing redfish.

Inshore kayak anglers use everything from live bait techniques on spinning tackle, to plugs, bucktail jigs, and plastic jerkbaits on bait casting equipment, to fly-fishing gear. Common live baits inshore are shrimp, mud minnows, finger mullet, and blue crab. The most popular weapon of choice for live bait fisherman is definitely live shrimp on a jig (a weighted hook), although dead shrimp can be effective too.

Paying attention to the tides is a must. In Jacksonville the bite usually seems best on the outgoing tide and the first of the incoming, when baitfishes are more heavily concentrated. The tides in north Florida swing anywhere from 4'-6' twice a day and these tidal swings produce a lot of water flow. Use the tides to your advantage on longer trips – for example you may let an outgoing tide take you from your launch to a favorite creek to fish the low tide and first of the incoming tide, then let the incoming tide help you return to the launch location.

### **Public Launch Sites**

The following sites are the primary access points for the blueways listed in this guide. As noted, some may have fees and other requirements.

1. **Alimacani Boat Ramp.** *From Jacksonville* –North on I-95 to SR 9A and exit to Heckscher Drive/SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly) and drive past Huguenot Park. Approximately ½ mile past the park, exit to right at the sign for the boat ramp before crossing the bridge. *From Amelia Island* - South on A1A past Amelia Island Plantation toward Jacksonville, over Nassau Sound bridge, past Big and Little Talbot Island State Parks, over next bridge, go 2/10 mile and turn right at jug handle U-turn, head back towards bridge, exit right at boat ramp sign before bridge. No fee. Launch area is a sand/shell beach. Portable toilets, picnic shelter/grill, no water, no phone.
2. **Big Talbot Islands State Park.** *From Jacksonville:* North on I-95 or SR 9A, exit to Heckscher Dr/SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly) about 20 miles to Big Talbot Island State Park’s northern end. Turn left just before crossing the Nassau Sound Bridge. *From Amelia Island* – South on A1A, over Nassau Sound Bridge, to the first right turn after the bridge and Big Talbot Island State Park boat ramp. \$3.00 user fee. Launch area is a concrete ramp with floating dock. Restrooms and water fountains available.
3. **Cedar Point Boat Ramp.** *From Jacksonville:* From I-95 or SR 9A, exit to Heckscher Dr/ SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly). Proceed to first traffic light east of State Highway 9A and turn left onto New Berlin Road. On New Berlin Road, travel approximately 3.8 miles and turn right (east bound) at the “Y” intersection onto Cedar Point Road. Travel 6 miles on Cedar Point Road. Launch is a dirt ramp on dirt road to left before end of pavement. *From Amelia Island* - South on A1A past Amelia Island Plantation toward Jacksonville, over Nassau Sound bridge, past Big and Little Talbot Island State Parks, go 18 miles, turn right at New Berlin Rd. On New Berlin Road, travel approximately 3.8 miles and turn right (east bound) at the “Y” intersection onto Cedar Point Road. Travel 6 miles on Cedar Point Road. Launch is a dirt ramp on dirt road to left before end of pavement. No fees. No restrooms, food, water, or phone. Access to Cedar Point Creek, Horseshoe Creek, Hannah Mills Creek, and the ICW.
4. **Deedee Bartels County Boat Ramp.** *From Jacksonville:* North on I-95 to exit 373 (Callahan/Fernandina Beach/A1A). East on A1A/SR 200 for 16 miles to the intersection of Atlantic Ave and A1A. Right on Atlantic left on 14<sup>th</sup> St. Continue 2 miles to boat ramp at end of road. Launch is sandy beach. No fee. No phone, water, or restroom.
5. **Dutton Island (marked as Pine Island on USGS topographical maps).** East on Atlantic Boulevard (SR-10), cross the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW), Mayport Road exit, left at third traffic light onto Dutton Island Road, follow to Dutton Island Preserve. Follow road to left to launch area. Launch is a floating dock. No fees. Trash cans and restrooms available.
6. **Long Island Outfitters.** *From Jacksonville:* From I-95 or SR 9A, exit to Heckscher Dr/ SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly) and drive past Little Talbot Island State Park. 1/2 mile past entrance to the Park turn left at kayak/sign for Kayak Amelia. *From Amelia Island* – South on A1A, over Nassau Sound Bridge, 4.5

miles on right at kayak/sign for Kayak Amelia. Fee: \$1/person. Launch is gravel ramp and a floating dock at low tide. Phone, water, restroom, picnic shelter.

7. **Melton Nelson Boat Ramp on A1A in Yulee.** *From Jacksonville:* North on I-95 to exit 373 (Callahan/Fernandina Beach/A1A). East on A1A/SR 200 toward Yulee, about 4 miles, the boat ramp is on right. *From Amelia Island:* west on A1A/SR200, boat ramp is 5.5 miles past ICWW bridge on left. Launch is concrete ramp. No fee. No restrooms, food, water, or phone.
8. **Palms Fish Camp.** *From Jacksonville:* From I-95 or SR 9A, exit to Heckscher Dr/ SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly). Proceed on Heckscher Drive for 3.8 miles from 9A. Palms Fish Camp is on the left side of Heckscher Drive just across Clapboard Creek. *From Amelia Island -* South on A1A past Amelia Island Plantation toward Jacksonville, over Nassau Sound Bridge go 13.8 miles to Palms Fish Camp on right. No fees. Launch is a concrete ramp. No restrooms. Parking is limited.
9. **Pumpkin Hill Road.** *From Jacksonville:* From I-95 or SR 9A, exit to Heckscher Dr/ SR 105. Follow northbound signs for Heckscher Drive (actual direction is easterly). Proceed to the first traffic light east of State Highway 9A and turn left at New Berlin Road. *From Amelia Island -* South on A1A past Amelia Island Plantation toward Jacksonville, over Nassau Sound bridge, past Big and Little Talbot Island State Parks, go 18 miles, turn right at New Berlin Rd.

From either direction, once on New Berlin Road, travel approximately 3.8 miles and turn right (east bound) at the “Y” intersection onto Cedar Point Road. Proceed east on Cedar Point Road for 4.7 miles and turn left (north bound) onto Pumpkin Hill Road. Proceed to end of road and park. Near the end of the pavement, look for a series of bollards and a grassy trail to the right. The crushed shell launch area is located approximately 200 yards from the road. Carry your boat or use dolly wheels to the launch area. No entrance fees. Portable toilets and trash cans. No water, no phone.

10. **Thomas Creek Preserve.** *From Jacksonville:* North on I-295 to Exit 32 for Lem Turner /State Road 115. North on Lem Turner approximately 5 miles. Right (east) on Lannie Road (traffic light). Travel approximately 3 miles and turn left (north) onto Ethel Road. Ethel Road goes through the Montgomery Correctional Center and ends at the launch site. *From Amelia Island:* west on A1A/SR200 to SR 301 in Callahan. Turn left (south) on SR 301 and travel approximately 0.1 mile and turn left (south) onto SR115/Lem Turner. Travel approximately 4 miles to Lannie Road (traffic light). Left (east) on Lannie Road. Travel approximately 3 miles and turn left (north) onto Ethel Road. Ethel Road goes through the Montgomery Correctional Center and ends at the launch site.  
No fees. Launch is a paved ramp or creek shoreline. No restrooms or trashcans.

## **Paddling Routes**

### **1. Dutton Island**

**Length:** 4 miles



**Put in/Take out:** South end of Dutton Island (marked as Pine Island on topographic maps).

**Route:** West from launch to the ICW. Paddle north on the ICW about 200 yards and turn eastward into De Blieu Creek at the #15 channel marker. (\*\*\*)Note on a low tide take the second entrance into the creek). It is about 1000 feet north of the southern entrance). Continue northward by selecting the largest creek you can take. About a mile north of Dutton Island, turn east into a canal that runs east-west. From this point take San Pablo Creek north to the Wonderwood Bridge. Turn around is at the Wonderwood bridge.

**Highlights:** With quick access from the city, this trail offers views of a healthy salt marsh, lots of bird life, good protection from the wind and powerboats, excellent fishing and a feeling of remoteness even within this urban area.

**Trail extensions:** Proceed north beyond the Wonderwood Bridge on San Pablo Creek to Chicopit Bay if the tide is above mid height. Chicopit Bay has lots of nice creeks to explore and the fishing is renowned!

## 2. Clapboard Creek

**Length:** varies

**Put in/Take out:** Palms Fish Camp, 6359 Heckscher Drive

**Route:** Launch at Palms Fish Camp and proceed north on Clapboard Creek. The creek is fairly wide and heads nearly due north. At approximately 2.25 miles the creek turns to the NW while smaller creeks continue north and east. Head NW for approximately ½ mile. At this point Clapboard Creek continues to the north/northwest. Fitzpatrick Creek heads due north. If there is sufficient tide, you can land on the east end of Pescatello Island where there is a small clearing and a picnic table. If the tide is low, you can proceed on Clapboard Creek to the western end of Pescatello Island. (Note: Pescatello Island is not named on topographic maps. If you see a dock, you have gone too far and missed Fitzpatrick Creek).

**Highlights:** North from the bridge the creek is fairly wide and it can be very windy. Fitzpatrick Creek narrows quickly and is known for good fishing. There are no opportunities to get out of your kayak on this trail, since there are no beaches or sand bars.

**Trail extensions:** Numerous creeks fork from Clapboard Creek and offer additional paddling routes. Cedar Point Creek is to the east ¼ mile after the launch. On a high tide it is possible to work your way to Browns Creek, but the lack of land marks make getting lost a very real possibility.

## 3. Alimacani to Kingsley Plantation

**Length:** 4 miles (roundtrip)

**Put in/take out:** Alimacani Boat Ramp

**Route:** Paddle north on Ft George River, at 1 mile river turns west (left). Continue 1 more mile to Kingsley Plantation, on south bank. Kayak beach is before the wooden bulkhead that is directly in front of the Plantation. This beach is the only place without oyster beds. Walk approximately 250 feet along shoreline to the Plantation house. Return by same route.

*Ride the tide:* plan trip with high tide mid-trip— start the trip on an incoming tide, near the top of the tide. After spending an hour or so at the Plantation, use the outgoing tide (after the tide has started to fall) to return to Alimacani boat ramp.

**Highlights:** Historic sites of Kingsley Plantation and Ribault Club. The Ribault Club is ½ mile from launch on the west bank. The Ribault Club is several hundred feet away from the shoreline, but you will catch glimpses of a large white building adjacent to a small cove on the western shoreline. There is a sand boat ramp here for access. Pelicans, egrets and herons are frequently in the small cove next to the boat ramp and migratory shore birds are seen on the sandbars just north of there. There are many sandy beaches on the eastern shoreline of the Ft. George River that are great for swimming. Numerous sand bars along this route also add lots of places to stretch and swim.

**Trail Extension:** From Kingsley, continue west toward the ICW, and at the junction with the ICW turn south into Garden Creek. Another opportunity is Mud River which is across the Ft. George River from Kingsley, but it is not accessible at low tide.

#### 4. Cedar Point to Kingsley Plantation

**Length:** 4 miles round trip

**Put in/Take out:** Cedar Point boat ramp

**Route:** Horseshoe Creek to Sister's Creek [a.k.a.the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW)]. On a high tide, go east straight away from the boat ramp, and a shallow arm of the creek will take you to the ICW. If less than a high tide, go right to the south arm of Horseshoe Creek that goes south and east to the ICW. On the ICW, go north approximately 0.7 miles to Channel Marker #72. Turn east into the Ft. George River. Be careful not to turn east too soon or you will be in the smaller Garden Creek. Ft. George River is over 600 feet wide. Garden Creek is only 200 feet wide at its mouth and quickly narrows.

Paddle east on Ft. George River approximately one mile to Kingsley Plantation on the south bank. Paddle past the wooden dock located in front of Kingsley, to the sandy beach. This sandy area is the only place along the shoreline without oyster beds. Tour the plantation and retrace your route back to the Cedar Point boat ramp.

**Highlights:** Cedar Point and Kingsley Plantation are both sites of historic and cultural interest.

**Trail extensions:** Continue east on the Ft. George River, approximately 1.5 miles past Kingsley Plantation to Ribault Club. Landing/launch area is a sandy beach. Water and rest rooms are up the hill at Ribault Club. Turn around at Ribault and return to Cedar Point.

#### 5. Long Island Outfitters to Alimacani

**Length:** 3.5 miles

**Put in:** Long Island Outfitters

**Take out:** Alimacani boat ramp

**Route:** Launch from Long Island Outfitters and paddle south on Simpson Creek. Where creek joins the Fort George River continue south (left). Alimacani boat ramp is on west shore near bridge. *Ride the tide:* best on an outgoing tide (or reverse direction on incoming tide).

**Highlights:** Simpson Creek cuts between Big & Little Talbot Island State Parks. A salt marsh creek bordered by live oaks dripping with Spanish moss. There are a few side creeks that can be explored but be

careful not to get stranded in the mud on a dropping tide. The eastern bank (Little Talbot Island) of the Fort George River is sandy and great for swimming. Weekend motorboat traffic can be busy in warmer weather. Simpson Creek is very shallow at low tide.

## 6. Little Talbot Island -- Circumnavigation

This trip is suggested only for paddlers with open water experience. This route may have winds, waves, open water and strong currents. Before attempting this route, check with local experts on current and predicted conditions.

**Length:** 13 miles

**Put in/take out:** Alimacani Boat Ramp

**Route:** Depending on the weather and tide this route can be run either creek first or ocean first. Seek local expert advice as to predicted winds, waves and currents. To start ocean first, paddle under bridge from launch and go east toward the ocean. Follow coastline of Little Talbot Island, around northern tip and into Nassau Sound. Stay left and continue south between sandbars and into Simpson Creek (make sure to stay right at entrance, Myrtle Creek breaks off to left and is only passable at the highest tide). Paddle under A1A Bridge *and past the outfitters* and south to Ft. George River. Paddle south (left) on Ft. George River to return to Alimacani boat ramp. When running this creek first, leave launch and paddle north on Ft. George River, enter Simpson Creek and bear left at the Simpson / Myrtle creek junction. Follow coastline of Little Talbot Island.

**Highlights:** Simpson Creek is the division between Big and Little Talbot Island State Parks. The ocean side of Little Talbot has 5 miles of wide white beaches and few visitors, except for during weekends in the summer. The north end of the island is a frequent stop for migratory shorebirds. The shallow side creeks off Simpson Creek are popular spots for roseate spoonbills, wood storks and ibis. Don't get stranded in them on a dropping tide. Long Island Outfitters is an optional take out. Restrooms, cold drinks and some supplies are available

## 7. Long Island Outfitters to Big Talbot

**Length:** 5.5 miles

**Put in:** Long Island Outfitters

**Take out:** Big Talbot Island boat ramp

**Route:** Launch from Long Island Outfitters and paddle north on Simpson Creek. At mouth of creek, enter Nassau Sound and paddle northwest along shoreline of Big Talbot Island State Park. Pass under A1A Bridge and the adjacent fishing bridge (watch out for fishing lines!) and turn west into Sawpit Creek. Boat ramp is on left. *Ride the tide* – plan trip with low tide occurring mid-trip. Current goes out (north) from put in, then catch incoming tide in Nassau Sound.

**Highlights:** Views of salt marsh and oyster beds and an undeveloped shoreline. About 2 miles from launch is Half Moon Bluffs, an impressive cliff etched by water and wind. Where Simpson Creek meets the Nassau Sound there are sandy beaches good for swimming (note: water on the ocean side may have steep drop offs and swift currents). Roseate spoonbills, wood storks and oyster catchers are frequently seen feeding in the shallow water. At the northern end of Big Talbot Island is another bluff and 'Dead Tree Beach' with the remains of old oaks bleached by the sun.

**Trail extensions:** Paddle under the small bridge and past the take out on Sawpit Creek and on to the ICW and bear right around Sawpit Island. This 2.5 mile circumnavigation route has few places to stop but the short beach on the ICW side is a great location for shark's tooth hunting.

## 8. Pumpkin Hill Creek

**Length:** 2 miles to the south or a variable distance northward

**Put in/take out:** north end of Pumpkin Hill Road

**Route:** Upstream/south – you can paddle southward to the highway bridge over Cedar Point Road on a high tide. If tide is less than “high”, you will be forced to halt your progress about one half mile short of the bridge.

North to Tiger Point, approximately 2 miles from the launch, on the west side of the Creek. A small sandy area (unimproved) provides a landing place for kayaks and allows access to the hiking trails in the city-owned Betz-Tiger Point Park

**Highlights:** There is very little development on either side of the creek. On low tides the number of wading birds is usually high. Eagle and osprey nests are located in the area and opportunity to observe either species is good. Pumpkin Hill creek offers outstanding kayak fishing especially on falling tides.

**Trail extensions:** At Tiger Point, Edwards Creek branches off from Pumpkin Hill Creek to the west. Paddlers can continue westward for several miles to explore various creeks and open water areas. Another extension is to continue north on Pumpkin Hill Creek about 5 miles until it joins the Nassau River.

## 9. Upper Thomas Creek

**Length:** 6 miles round trip

**Put in/take out:** Thomas Creek Preserve

**Route:** Upstream (left from the boat ramp). This is a narrow and winding creek with overhanging trees. Take the first fork to the right after launching to eliminate an oxbow route. The oxbow adds about 1/3 mile. There is a small landing where a dirt road comes in from the right bank (Nassau County side) about 2 miles from the start. This is the only spot to get out of your kayak. Paddle up the creek approximately 3 miles until it becomes too narrow and brush clogged to proceed.

**Highlights:** A scenic black-water creek that flows through an undisturbed freshwater hardwood swamp area with opportunity for many sightings of wildlife. This swamp has cypress, bays, oaks, maples, and spectacular native Florida azaleas that bloom in early spring. Due to the narrowness of the creek, fallen trees may block or partially block the route.

**Trail extensions:** Downstream, the creek widens slightly and becomes dominated by vegetation more associated with salt water. Due to lack of exit options, you will need to make a round trip back to your starting point.

## 10. Lofton Creek

**Length:** North trail –4 miles round trip, South trail – 3 miles round trip

**Put in/take out:** Melton Nelson boat ramp on A1A in Yulee.

**Route: North route** – Right from launch. The north section of creek is narrower and may have fallen trees blocking trail. About 1.5 miles on left, Pages Dairy Rd comes close to water, and is

the only place where paddlers can get out for a stretch. Paddle another 0.5 mile to an old cypress tree on the right that is at least 6 feet in diameter. This is the turn-around point.

**South route** - Left from boat launch. This section of creek is wider with development on the east bank. There are no good places to stop on this route. About 1.5 miles from ramp are power lines overhead and shoreline vegetation shows a gradual transition to salt marsh habitat. Creek continues on about another 10 miles where it meets the Nassau River. Turn around at any point.

**Highlights:** This is a black water creek with a tidal change of 1-1.5 feet. Cypress, sweet gum and other trees line the banks and give good protection from wind and sun. Alligators are occasionally seen, as well as raptors, otters and herons. There is always something blooming; pickerel weed, mallow and wild azaleas decorate the water's edge. This is the place to go in the fall to see color on the trees.

## 11. Amelia Island to Egan's Creek

**Length:** 5 miles round trip if you go all the way to Atlantic Ave

**Put in/take out:** Deedee Bartels boat ramp

**Route:** from launch site to the Amelia River/ICWW and paddle south 1/4 mile to mouth of Egan's Creek on left. The creek goes east and then bends south (to the right). It ends at Atlantic Avenue 2 miles from Amelia River. *Ride the tide* – plan this with high tide mid-trip to ride current in and then back out.

**Highlights:** An eclectic route that mixes past and present. Submarines from King's Bay Navy Base in Georgia enter the ocean through Cumberland Sound just north of the put-in. Piles of ballast stones from the 1800's shipping fleets are visible just north of the boat ramp. The entrance to Egan's Creek is 1/4 mile south of the put-in. The busy Amelia River gives way to the quiet salt marsh of Egan's Creek and its alligators, otters, roseate spoonbills, dolphins and manatees.

Further south on the Amelia River are the large container ships in the Port of Fernandina. Smurfit – Stone paper mill is the end destination for all those trucks on the highway carrying pine logs. Kraft paper to make corrugated boxes is produced here. Looking more like a New England port, the Fernandina Harbor is visible south of the mill.

**A note about Cumberland Island** – Many people want to paddle across to Cumberland Island from Amelia Island. This trip can be treacherous at times and requires good planning and open water skills. Strong currents, standing waves that can become 3-5 feet within minutes and tankers or submarines that *cannot* stop if you get in their path are some of the things to consider before attempting to paddle across to Cumberland Island.

## 12. Amelia Island to Tiger Island

**Length:** 3 miles round trip

**Put in/take out:** Deedee Bartels boat ramp

**Route:** Paddle 1/2 mile across the Amelia River/ICW to Little Tiger Island. Follow the shoreline northwest to the mouth of creek on Tiger Island. Reverse direction to return.

**Highlights:** Tiger Island is one of a group of salt marsh islands west of the north end of Amelia Island. Dolphins and manatees (summer) are frequently seen here. Navigation maps and a compass are a must when exploring the areas west of Tiger Island.

**Trail extensions:** From boat ramp paddle west across the Amelia River/ICW and head south 1.5 miles to Lanceford Creek. This continues west for about 3 miles then turns south for another 2 miles. *Ride the tide* – plan this route with high tide mid trip.

## Parks & Preserves

Coastal Aquatic Management Areas:

- **The Nassau River-St. Johns River Marshes and Fort Clinch State Park Aquatic Preserves** are a unique Florida representative of the "Sea Islands" usually associated with southern Georgia. A chain of sandy barrier islands, occasional inlets, and a combination of sounds, rivers, and extensive coastal marshland characterize this area. The preserves encompass approximately 66,000 acres of open water, marshes, tidal creeks, rivers, and tree islands. The communities of aquatic and wetland plants within these preserves stabilize geologic features, create organic material that fuels the estuarine food web, and provide protected habitat for spawning and juvenile fish development. These areas are also home to many roosting and nesting water birds. They can also act as buffers to help filter pollutants and protect upland areas from storm surge. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Coast and Aquatic Managed Areas manage both aquatic preserves. The aquatic preserves overlap the boundaries of the Timucuan Preserve and some of the state parks.

Florida State Parks: [www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org)

- **Amelia Island State Park:** **Contact:** 904-251-2320 [www.floridastateparks.org/ameliaisland](http://www.floridastateparks.org/ameliaisland)  
Fees: \$1/person entrance fee. Hours: open 24 hours/daily. Horseback tour reservations, contact the Kelly Seahorse Ranch, (904) 491-5166. Tours are given four times daily.
- **Betz Tiger Point Preserve:** The 548-acre preserve is part of the Timucuan Trails State and National Parks partnership and is open to the public for walking, biking, horseback riding, and enjoyment of the natural setting.
- **Big Talbot Island State Park** is primarily a natural preserve and a premier location for nature study, bird watching, or photography. The shoreline is unlike any other in Florida. Centuries of wind and water have eroded the island, creating a 20-foot bluff along the shore. The park's famous boneyard beach is covered with the skeletons of live oak and cedar trees that once grew near the ocean. A boat ramp provides access for fishing and touring the salt marshes. Visitors can picnic on the bluff overlooking the water and then visit the beach to sunbathe or stroll along the shore. Hikers can walk along one of the park's two trails and experience the diverse habitats.  
Contact: 904-251-2320 [www.floridastateparks.org/bigtalbotisland](http://www.floridastateparks.org/bigtalbotisland)  
Fees: entrance--\$1/person; picnic at Bluff-- \$2/vehicle; boating launch fee--\$3. Open daily 8a.m. to sundown and boat ramp is open 24 hours.
- **Fort Clinch State Park:** **Contact:** 904-277-7274; [www.floridastateparks.org/fortclinch](http://www.floridastateparks.org/fortclinch)  
Fees: \$5/vehicle (maximum 8 people). Camping available-- Reservations 1-800-326-3521, Reserve America ([www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com)), \$23.98/night. 6-mile trail for hikers and

bicycles. Open daily 8 a.m. to sundown. Daily tours with period reenactors depicting garrison life bring the fort to life for visitors.

- **Fort George Island Cultural State Park:** A key attraction is the recently restored Ribault Club. It was built in 1928 and marketed to wealthy Northerners and the Jacksonville elite. It was an early attempt to develop Florida's real estate and tourism potential. The Club faltered through the Depression and World War II. It was sold several times, used for a variety of purposes, and finally boarded up and left as a distant reminder of what once was. The Florida Park Service restored The Club and this historic landmark now serves as a gateway to the Timucuan Trail. Fees: none. Open daily. Contact: 904-251-2802. [www.floridastateparks.org/fortgeorgeisland](http://www.floridastateparks.org/fortgeorgeisland) Ribault Club: Fee: none Services: Visitor Center for Fort George Island, educational exhibits and bookstore open Wednesday – Sunday, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. [www.floridastateparks.org/ribaultclub](http://www.floridastateparks.org/ribaultclub)
- **Little Talbot Island State Park** has more than five miles of beautiful, white sandy beaches, and is one of the few remaining undeveloped barrier islands in Northeast Florida. Maritime forests, desert-like dunes, and undisturbed salt marshes on the western side of the island allow for hours of nature study and relaxation. The diverse habitats in the park host a wealth of wildlife. River otters, marsh rabbits, bobcats, and a variety of native and migrating birds can be seen here. Anglers find excellent fishing in the surf and tidal streams. Bluefish, striped bass, redfish, flounder, sea trout, and sheepshead are common catches.

Contact: 904-251-2320. [www.floridastateparks.org/littletalbotisland](http://www.floridastateparks.org/littletalbotisland) Fees: \$4/vehicle (maximum of 8), \$3/single occupant; \$19/day full service camping. Reservations: 1-800-326-3521, Reserve America ([www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com)). Contact the Ranger Station if you plan to leave a vehicle overnight at the parking lot of Amelia Island State Park or if you plan to use the Myrtle Creek launch site for day-use and camping.

- **Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park** is 4,000 acres of contiguous coastal uplands in Duval County. The uplands protect the water quality of the Nassau and St. Johns Rivers, ensuring the survival of aquatic plants and animals and providing an important refuge for birds. Wildlife is abundant and ranges from the threatened American alligator to the endangered wood stork.

Contact: 904-696-5980. [www.floridastateparks.org/pumpkinhill](http://www.floridastateparks.org/pumpkinhill) Fees: none. Open daily 8a.m. to sundown. Features of the park include 5 miles of multi-use trails for equestrian, hiking, off-road biking. Canoe/kayak launch.

City of Jacksonville Parks and Recreation Department: [www.jaxparks.com](http://www.jaxparks.com)

- **Dutton Island Park and Preserve:** Hours: sunrise to sunset. No fee.
- **Huguenot Memorial Park:** is approximately 314 acres and includes the Alimacani boat ramp. The majority of the site is comprised of beaches and dunes. A sand spit peninsula along the Atlantic Ocean has been designated as a Critical Wildlife Area by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and is considered to be a premier birding site.

- **Thomas Creek Preserve:** The park is part of the Timucuan Trails State and National Parks partnership and is jointly managed by the City of Jacksonville and the St. John's River Water Management District. The 1,498-acre park is open to the public for enjoyment of the natural setting and access to the creek, which is a tributary of the Nassau River. Open: 24 hours daily. Fee: none.

National Park Service: <http://www.nps.gov>

- **Kingsley Plantation:** Fees: None. Open daily 9:00 – 4:45, free admission. 904-251-3537. Self-guided tours or scheduled guided interpretive tours with rangers. Book sales, bathrooms and drinking water are available: <http://www.nps.gov/timu/>.
- **The Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve** is managed by the National Park Service, and is named for a Native American tribe that once inhabited the area. The 46,000-acre preserve encompasses wetlands, upland forests, and historic sites. Paddling trails for day trips are available in the preserve. To learn more log onto <http://www.nps.gov/timu/>. Six state parks are also partially or completely included in the aquatic preserves: Amelia Island, Big Talbot Island, Fort Clinch, Fort George Island, Little Talbot Island, and Pumpkin Hill.

The Nature Conservancy <http://www.nature.org>

- **Machaba Balu Preserve:** the preserve is located within the vast estuary that stretches between the St. Johns River and Nassau Sound in northeast Florida. The tidal salt marsh and over 76 maritime hammock, pine and shell islands look much the same today as they did over four hundred years ago when Europeans first settled here. Machaba Balu's 9,500 acres of marshes and islands support many rare plants and animals, including roseate spoonbills, wood storks, painted buntings, manatees and sea turtles. The name Machaba Balu, Timucuan for *saved or preserved marsh*, honors the cultural and historical significance of the preserve's location. The preserve is situated adjacent to many other protected lands and is a part of the Great Florida Birding Trail's (East Section) "Gannett Cluster" sites. The area is well-suited for exploration by kayak and canoe and is part of The Conservancy's St. Marys River/ Sea Islands Program.
- To contact the local NEFL Program staff, please call 904-598-0004. Located at 45 West Bay Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202

The North Florida Land Trust

- For information on Pescatello Island  
24 Cathedral Place, Ste 310  
Saint Augustine, FL 32084-4465  
Phone: (904) 827-9870 Fax: (904) 246-9441

Public Camping sites:



1. **Tiger Island, southern end:** Primitive Camping. Reservations: contact Fort Clinch State Park.
2. **Fort Clinch State Park:** Reservations 1-800-326-3521, Reserve America ([www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com)), \$19/night.
3. **Little Talbot Island State Park:** Reservations 1-800-326-3521, Reserve America ([www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com)), \$19/night.
4. **Huguenot Memorial Park, City of Jacksonville:** Reservations: 904-251-3335. Fee: \$5/tent site; \$7/RV site and riverside site. Taxes not included.

#### Outfitters:

Kayak Amelia/Long Island Outfitters  
888-30-kayak 904-251-0016 [www.kayakamelia.com](http://www.kayakamelia.com)

#### Partners:

City of Jacksonville  
Florida State Parks  
Kayak Amelia/Long Island Outfitters  
National Park Service  
North Florida Land Trust  
The Nature Conservancy

#### Links

- **Florida Birding Trail:** [www.floridabirdingtrail.com](http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com)
- **Florida Circumnavigation Saltwater Paddling Trail:** [www.floridagreenwaysandtrails.com](http://www.floridagreenwaysandtrails.com)
- **Florida Office of Greenways & Trails:** [www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt) 850-488-3701
- **Jacksonville Fishing Information:** For more information on kayak fishing in Jacksonville including detailed launch and fishing spot details: [www.JaxKayakFishing.com](http://www.JaxKayakFishing.com).
- **NOAA Charts:** are available at most area fishing tackle shops and boating supply stores.
  - **Regional and Local Paddling Trails:** Florida Circumnavigation Saltwater Paddling Trail ([www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/saltwater.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/saltwater.htm)) ; Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail ([www.](http://www.) ); Paddle Manatee ([www.co.manatee.fl.us](http://www.co.manatee.fl.us)) ; St. Johns American Heritage River ([www.xxx](http://www.xxx)); Volusia County/St. Johns River trail: <http://volusia.org/parks/paddling.htm>; Suwannee River (lower) Canoe Trail: [www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt)

## **Acknowledgements:**

The following people helped to write, design and create this guide to make it available for the public.

### **The Nassau River-St. Johns River Marshes and Fort Clinch State Park Aquatic Preserves**

Amy Kalmbacker  
Nicole Robinson

### **Florida Park Service**

Kristin Ebersol  
Robert E. Joseph  
Clif Maxwell  
Elizabeth Pavlinsky  
Nathan Rezeau  
Maureen Watson

### **City of Jacksonville Parks and Recreation Department**

Kelley Boree

### **National Park Service**

Richard Bryant  
Carol Clark  
Roger Clark  
Charlotte Gillis  
Barbara Goodman  
Brian Loadholtz  
Craig Morris  
Daniel Tardona

### **The Nature Conservancy**

Hallie Stevens

### **Long Island Outfitters/Kayak Amelia**

Jody Hetchka  
Ray Hetchka

### **Jax Kayak Fishing**