

Canoeing

The Mississippi River's delta in Louisiana consists of wetlands. Within the Barataria Preserve are marshes, swamps, and natural levee forests. Interlacing these landforms are bayous, canals, and trenasses open to canoes, or to *pirogues*, the flat-bottomed, keel-less canoes used throughout south Louisiana. Canoeing in the Preserve is a wonderful experience for novice and expert alike but the old adage, "know before you go" is essential to make the experience a pleasurable one.

- ◆ No registration is required to paddle on your own--the waterways are open at all times. Before setting out on your trip, inform either the canoe rental, a friend, or a relative of your expected time of return.
- ◆ Check water levels at the visitor center--some waterways are not passable during periods of low water.
- ◆ Three canoe launches are within the Preserve-- Bayou des Familles in the Pecan Grove area (check the gate closing time!), Twin Canals and Lower Kenta Canal.
- ◆ State law requires each person in a boat to have a life preserver.
- ◆ Never stand in a canoe, keep your weight low and centered. If you capsize, just stand up--in most places the water is shallow. In deeper water, remain with the canoe--it floats.
- ◆ Do not attempt canoe travel during a lightening storm
- ◆ Bring a first aid kit, rain gear, insect repellent, drinking water, a sun hat and sunscreen, and a flashlight for evening trips.
- ◆ Please leave plants and animals as you find them. Harassing, collecting, or feeding any animal can cause direct harm or stress for the animal and reduce its chances for survival. Picking plants removes seeds necessary for the plant to reproduce, food sources for the wildlife, and flowers for other visitors to enjoy.
- ◆ Fishing is allowed within the Preserve with a valid Louisiana state-fishing license.
- ◆ Paddle out what you paddle in. This includes any "biodegradable" trash.
- ◆ Do not bring audio equipment with you; experience the natural sounds around you.
- ◆ Other than the picnic area grills, open flames are not permitted within the Preserve.
- ◆ Strive to enable others to explore and enjoy the Preserve as you have.

The Waterways

Bayou des Familles

Length: 3.6 miles (5.8 km) distance through Preserve 3/4 mile (1.2 km) canoe launch to Bayou Coquille

Bayou des Familles, some 2,000 years ago, was a major tributary of the Mississippi River, carrying the sediments, which built this portion of the delta. Families of Canary Islanders, Isleños, settled here briefly in the late 1700s. Hurricanes and floods eventually drove them away, but the bayou's name, *des Familles*, French meaning "of the Families," immortalizes their brief sojourn along the bayou's banks. Today, cut off by the great river's meandering, the bayou is now a shady, lazy waterway. Bald cypress and water tupelo now stand in the filled channel. Along the way, watch for lines of bubbles as huge alligator snapping turtles pull themselves along the murky bottom or observe barred owls sitting in the trees.

Bayou Coquille

Length: 1.1 miles (1.8 km)

If you were to live in a wetland area, a prime location would be the convergence of Bayou Coquille and Bayou des Familles. The natural levee formed by these two bayous created some of the highest ground in the region. This bayou is named for the mounds of shells (middens) visible along its banks. These shells provide evidence of human settlement. Clams were a major part of the American Indian diet in this region. When the French moved into the area, they named the bayou, *coquille*, their word for shell.

Bayou Coquille is the passage to the swamp. Water tupelo and bald cypress cast shadows over the bayou. Old stumps of enormous cypress, remnants of logging times, are seen along the route. If paddling toward Kenta Canal you will take a sharp left turn and notice the channel is much deeper. This is because you have left the bayou and are now in a logging "cut," dug by a logging company to float cypress out of the swamp. The natural outlet of the bayou is straight ahead, but is only passable during high water.

Lower Kenta

Length: 2.5 miles (1.6 km) 1/4 mile (0.2 km) Bayou Coquille to Kenta bridge

One end of lower Kenta is emptying into Bayou Barataria--part of the Intracoastal Waterway. Fifty yards in from the bayou is lower Kenta canoe launch. A local name for the canal is "Priest Canal" from the Catholic church nearby. Kenta was the first name of a woman, who with her husband and family, established a sugar cane plantation in the mid to late 1800s. The canal was dug to transport goods and supplies and also for drainage for the plantation. Near the canoe launch are ditches dug to drain the plantation fields now boarded up. Other than these it is difficult to ascertain the plantation. Later, in the early 1900s the canal was used to float cypress. Today, this is a relaxing float filled with life. Great blue herons, great egrets, and white ibis can be seen quietly searching for food. Kenta canal is also a good chance to see alligators. Often you will only see their eyes and snouts above the water's surface. Estimating the number of inches between the eyes and the end of the snout is in relation to how long they are in feet. The Marsh Overlook Trail borders Lower Kenta leading to the Kenta footbridge. At the base of the Kenta footbridge is a platform to dock, stretch, and view the freshwater marsh.

Upper Kenta

Length: 1.25 miles (2 km) Kenta footbridge to Twin Canals

In the late 1950s an oil company dredged this portion of Kenta canal. The building seen from the canal looking north is One Shell Square, the tallest building in New Orleans. In the spring and summer on hot, humid twilight nights it is difficult to talk because of the frog chorus. There are several species and each has its own distinct voice. This is also a great area to view alligators sunning along the banks. Vultures and hawks may be circling overhead. Along the way are "cuts" dug by oil exploration companies. There were several exploratory wells dug in the 1940s-70s, though little or no oil or gas was discovered.

Twin Canals

Length: 3/4 mile (1.2 km)

The Twin canals were dug in the 1970s to develop a subdivision. The project developed legal problems and was not completed. A pumping station built near the parking lot, would have drained water from the south canal, lifted it over the levee, and dumped it into the north canal (the navigable canal). Today, there are black willow, live oak, hackberry, wax myrtle, and many other trees establishing themselves on the manmade levee. This is the prime area for bank-side fishing within the Preserve. Near the intersection with Upper Kenta is an open marsh. Quite often in the spring and fall you can see huge flocks of wading birds.

Trenasses

The freshwater marsh is made up of grasses, rushes, sedges, and other aquatic plants growing together in a dense floating mat, called *flotant*. Approximately a foot under the mat is open water. Pathways have been dug through the flotant in order to maneuver through the marsh. These passageways, wide enough for one pirogue or canoe at a time, are called trenasses (a colloquial Cajun French word). These paths are accessible only during high water and may be choked with plants during the summer months.

Access to the main trenass in the Preserve is via Tarpaper Canal. Enter from Kenta Canal into Tarpaper and you will see an opening in the spoil bank on your left. That is the entrance into the world of the marsh. Paddling through the trenasses enables you to experience the wide variety of life found in the freshwater marsh: nutria, otter, alligators, and birds--sandpipers, herons, egrets, ibis, kingfishers, and gallinules.

The following waterways are open to motorized boats as well as canoes.

Motorized boat traffic is very light on the open waters within the Preserve.

Pipeline Canal

Length: approximately 5.5 miles

Named for a submerged oil pipeline, which passes through the Preserve, Pipeline canal was dug in the 1950s to transport oil exploration equipment. Today, the elevated spoil banks of the canal have caused bottomland hardwood trees to grow in the freshwater marsh surroundings. Generally, paddlers venture 1/2 - 1 mile down the canal from the Kenta canal footbridge. The farther south you paddle the wider the canal becomes and eventually intersects with Bayou Segnette Waterway.

Tarpaper Canal

Length: approximately 3.5 miles

Former hunting/fishing camps constructed of tarpaper are the cause for this canal's unique name. Much like Pipeline canal, Tarpaper also lies within the freshwater marsh. It is a favorite canal for many of the people who fish from a pirogue.