



Kayaking the Timucuan National Preserve



One with the Environment

Shrouded by a light fog as an early morning high tide rises over vast salt marshes, a lone kayaker slowly moves with the current north of 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. In a kayak you are one with this place.

Why Kayaking?

The most rapidly growing water-sport in Florida is kayak paddling and after you have tried it you can easily see why. Compared to canoes, kayaks are easier to paddle, have less wind resistance, and glide gracefully through the water. Contrary to popular belief; kayaks are not easy to tip over, they have comfortable seats, and offer an extremely dry ride.

Over three quarters of the Timucuan Preserve's 46,000 acres is salt marsh estuary. These flooded marine grasslands are a true wilderness area with miles upon miles of

endless meandering creeks teeming with wildlife. No other watercraft gives you the stealth, stability, and security needed to explore this wilderness, as does a kayak. In a kayak you can view wildlife in a quiet, non-threatening way.

Kayaking is an ecologically low impacting recreational activity heartily endorsed by the Timucuan Preserve. Paddling a kayak is excellent exercise and provides one of the best opportunities for bonding with nature; a true Timucuan Preserve experience.

Currents & Tides

Ask any veteran salt marsh kayaker what's 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."

In order to safely navigate Timucuan's waterways you *must* have some knowledge of currents and tides. Tide forecasts may be found in

local newspapers or television weather reports, or on NOAA weather radio.

But just knowing the times of a day's tide stages is not enough. Tides rise and fall every six hours creating an environment that is constantly in motion. Once you learn to predict this natural cycle your enjoyment of our in-shore waters will be limitless.

Safety Equipment & Precautions

Before you go paddling make sure your kayak is in good working order. Are all the screws tight, bulkhead covers secure, rudder and foot controls responsive? Be sure to carry basic safety equipment and know how to use it correctly. Always leave a float plan with someone prior to going paddling. Do not go anywhere in the Preserve without a map.

Basic Safety Equipment:

-The most important piece of safety equipment is your personal flotation device (PFD). Florida law requires all kayakers to have a PFD and a whistle.

-First aid kit, insect repellent, sunscreen, hat, snug-fitting shoes, sunglasses

-Sponge, bilge pump, or water bailing device

-Drinking water and food

-Topo map or NOAA chart (or both) and a tide chart, consult daily weather forecast

-Spare paddle or paddle leash

-Survival Kit: waterproof matches, flare, knife, repair materials (duct tape) and tools.

Public Launch Sites

Alimacani Boat Ramp: located off Heckscher Dr. near Ft. George Inlet bridge, next to Bootleggers Resturant. Access to Ft. George River, no fee.

Big Talbot Island State Park Boat Ramp: located on the northwest end of Big Talbot Island off A1A. Access to Saw Pit Creek, Intracoastal Waterway (I.C.W.) north, Nassau River and Nassau Sound, \$3.00 user fee.

Cedar Point Boat Ramp: located at the southern end of Cedar Point Road. Access to Cedar Point Creek, Horseshoe Creek, Hannah Mills Creek, and I.C.W., no fee.

Fulton Road Boat Ramp: located at north end of Fulton Road in East Arlington. Access to main channel of St. Johns River, just west of Ft. Caroline N. Mem. and the Theodore Roosevelt Area, no fee.

Helen Cooper Floyd Park (Little Jetties): located off Mayport Rd. west of the Coast Guard Station. Access to Chicopit Bay and I.C.W. south of the St. Johns River, no fee.

Huguenot City Park: located off Heckscher Dr. at the mouth of the St. Johns River. Access to Ft. George River, \$0.50 user fee.

Little Talbot Island State Park Ramp: located off A1A on Little Talbot Island, near camp ground area. Access to Myrtle Creek, \$3.25 user fee.

Palms Fish Camp: located at 6359 Heckscher Dr. on the east side of Clapboard Creek Bridge. Access to Clapboard Creek and Cedar Point Creek. Parking is limited, no fee.

Simpson Creek Bridge Ramp: located off A1A on southeast end of Big Talbot Island. Access to Simpson Creek, no fee.

Joe Carlucci Boat Ramp: located on south side of Heckscher Dr. at the I.C.W. Access to main channel of the St. Johns River, no fee.

Sister's Creek Park Boat Ramp: located on north side of Heckscher Dr. at the I.C.W. Access to I.C.W. north of Sister's Creek Bridge, Hannah Mills Creek, Cedar Point Creek, and Deep Creek, no fee.

Suggested Recreational Kayak Routes

(Don't depart without a map!)

Simpson Creek Bridge to Alimacani: 2-3 hour long one-way paddle, follows a dropping tide to Alimacani Ramp. A shuttle is needed to get back to Simpson Creek Ramp because currents are too strong for a return. Alimacani to Simpson Creek Bridge for incoming tide.

Simpson Creek Bridge to Nassau Sound: 2-3 hour trip, begins at Simpson Creek Bridge and follows a dropping tide to Nassau Sound and then returns when the tide starts coming in. Option: return via Myrtle Creek.

Alimacani to Kingsley Plantation: 2-3 hour trip follows an incoming tide to Kingsley Plantation where you can beach your kayak and tour the grounds. When the tide begins to drop follow it back to Alimacani Ramp.

Clapboard Creek: Begin at Palms Fish Camp as tide is rising; follow the tide north up the creek and return as tide begins to drop. Easy to get lost or trapped by falling tide in finger creeks east of Clapboard.

Sisters Creek: Many options are available. Follow rising tide into Hannah Mills Creek or Deep Creek. Best to begin at the beginning of the incoming tide and return on the beginning of the falling tide. It is easy to get lost or trapped by falling tides in either creek.

Helen Cooper Floyd to Chicopit Bay: Launch at Little Jetties, cross I.C.W. into Chicopit Bay. Numerous sand bars at low tide offer good places

to picnic and stretch your legs. Note: return to Little Jetties is impossible at dead low tide.

Cedar Point to Kingsley Plantation: Launch at Cedar Point Ramp and paddle out Horseshoe Creek to I.C.W. Head north to second waterway to the east (Ft. George River) and paddle to Kingsley Plantation, tour park and return to Cedar Point. **Note:** the north prong of Horseshoe Creek is not passable at low tide and that there may be heavy boat traffic on the I.C.W.

Fulton Road: This dirt ramp provides access to the St. Johns River and destinations could include Fort Caroline National Memorial or across the river to Clapboard Creek. Very large boat wakes may be encountered on the St. Johns River, recommended only for experienced paddlers. Round trip back to Fulton.

Nassau Sound: Launch at State Park Ramp on Big Talbot Island on the last of the dropping tide, hug the north shoreline of Big Talbot Island and return with the rising tide. **Note:** Bird Island is not open to the public as it is a nesting habitat for rare birds.

Joe Carlucci Baot Ramp to Chicopit Bay: Launch at Joe Carlucci Sisters Creek ramp as tide is rising, cross the St. Johns River channel south to Chicopit Bay and the Theodore Roosevelt Area. Return on the falling tide. Be careful crossing the river.