



Indian Point Paddling Trail



Overview:

Begin at Wakulla Beach Boat Ramp. Paddle east, behind John's Island, passing islands topped with Sabal Palms, into the protected waters of Big Pass. Enter the St. Marks River at Indian Point and continue upriver to the city of St. Marks. End at St. Marks Boat Ramp.

Considerations:

This route is in protected waters, except for the short distance between John's Island and Big Pass. It should be taken on an incoming tide, which will make the stretch up the St. Marks River much easier. Reverse the trip on an outgoing tide.

Focus:

Fishing for Sea Trout and Red Fish is excellent near shore and there is ample opportunity to explore the inlets along the way.

Distance:

8.7 miles, 4.5 hours.

Put In:

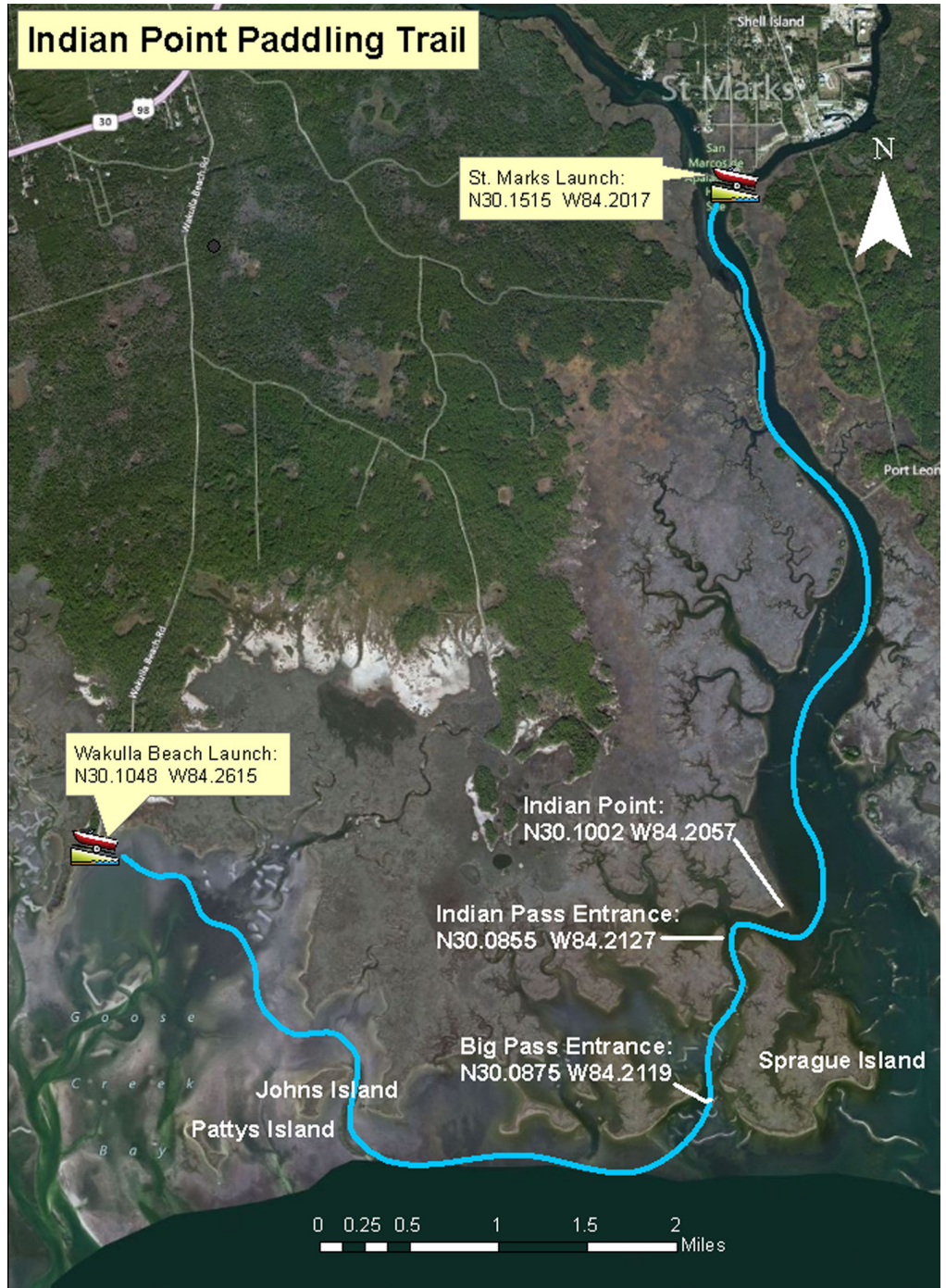
Continue east on US 98. Before crossing the Wakulla River, turn right (south) onto Wakulla Beach Road. This is a graded, dirt road through the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The beach and boat launch is at the end of the road. There is interpretation and parking.

Take Out:

From Wakulla Beach Road, continue east on US Highway 98. Turn south at the intersection with Port Leon Dr. (SR 363) to the City of St. Marks. Follow signs to San Marcos de Apalache Historical State Park, which is before the city park, with boat launch, restrooms, pavilion, trash cans, and parking. Put in on the grass next to the ramp.

Expertise:

Intermediate and up.



Apalachee Indians

Apalachee Indians in the 16th century vigorously resisted European advances into their lands. Disease spread to native people after Spanish Conquistadors Pánfilo de Narváez in 1528 and Hernando de Soto in 1539 arrived with hundreds of explorers, livestock, smallpox, and measles. Believing that Spanish Catholic friars had some kind of magic against diseases, friars were invited into native communities to establish small missions. The string of missions between St. Augustine and Tallahassee relied on natives for food and labor; some were enslaved. Many were Christianized. British colonial attacks on Spanish Florida in the 1700s obliterated the missions and most of the Apalachee Indians.



City of St. Marks

St. Marks is one of the oldest ports in Florida with a history that can speak of Apalachee Indians, Spaniards, Britons, generals, devastation, wars, industrialization, and tenacity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, thousands of deer and cow hides, cotton, tallow and other local goods were stored in warehouses along the shallow St. Marks River. Its strategic location served Spanish inland missions and rancheros. This sheltered location provided a safe place for a Spanish fort at the confluence of the rivers, the Fuerte San Marcos de Apalache, now a state historic park.

Warehouses filled as goods arrived on the first railroad from Tallahassee to St. Marks (and Port Leon). The location was known to early Spanish explorers who sailed from the vicinity near the lighthouse in 1528, only to disappear at sea, except for four, including Narvaez's treasurer Cabeza de Vaca. As settlers moved in after 1821 to establish Magnolia upriver, they had all but forgotten Gen. Andrew Jackson's attack on the fort and hanging of two British subjects in 1818. A U.S.

Customs House was built in 1837. St. Marks took shape as hurricanes obliterated Port Leon, but particularly after the Civil War. A fire destroyed the business section in 1868. The destroyed warehouses were not rebuilt.

Today the city retains much of its 1950s charm with lodging, gas, marinas, restaurants, city parks, guides, a state park, and recreational trail to Tallahassee along the old railroad right-of-way.

Salt Works

Hundreds of small salt works dotted this shoreline during the American Civil War, 1861-1865. Sea water was boiled for Confederate contraband such as beef and fish to fill the urgent need for salt. Sites were isolated to be difficult to locate and approach.

Union picket ships spotted smoke at day and fires at night. Raids were a constant menace. In 1864 one Union raiding party, supported by shelling from the USS Tahoma, destroyed "seven miles" of saltworks between the St. Marks lighthouse westward to Goose Creek and Shell Point. Millions of dollars were lost to financiers who employed enslaved people to build and operate many of these works. White workers in the salt business were exempt from military service.

Clapper Rail

Many of the salt marsh's inhabitants are seldom seen. However, you can't miss hearing the clack-clack-clacking of Clapper Rails. Clapper Rails are 14.5" long, with a wingspan of 19". They are large, long-necked, and long-billed brownish birds. Their neck and chest are greyish with back and wingtips streaked with black. Watch for them along the edge of the marsh grass as they weave in and out looking for food.

