



Mashes Sands Paddling Trail



Overview:

Begin at the Wakulla County Park's Mashes Sands Recreational Facility. Paddle east around the tip of Mash Island, following the shore along the back side. Stop at the broad white sand beach for a rest or picnic. Continue west along shoreline to Levy Bay. End at Levy Bay Boat Ramp.

Considerations:

Best traveled in low winds on an incoming tide.

Focus:

Explore the white sand beaches and oak thickets along the back side of Mash Island. Fishing near shore for Sea Trout and Red Fish can be excellent. This is a very scenic route for photography.

Distance:

6.6 miles, 3.5 hours

Put In:

Travel south on US 98 through Panacea to Ochlockonee Bay. Turn east (left) before the bridge onto Mashes Sands Road and continue to the end of the road at the county recreational facility. Kayaks are best launched on the sand beach at the entrance to the fishing pier. Parking, trash cans, and benches are available. Restrooms and picnic tables are at the boat ramp and beach.

Take Out:

Take US 98 south through Panacea. Turn right (east) onto Chattahoochee and left on Levy Bay Road. The boat ramp is at the end of the road, with restroom, trash cans, benches, and parking. Launch on sand next to asphalt ramp.

Expertise:

Intermediate and up.



Indian Mounds

Shell middens, and a large ceremonial mound, approximately 250-1,000 years old were once located along the mouth of this bay and along the shores of the Ochlockonee River. Construction of Mashas Sand Road and shell harvesting for road beds destroyed the mound.

Tar Pine

Look closely at some of these old pines for “cat faces” that attest to extensive turpentine. Rosin collected from these trees between 1870 and 1930 was distilled into turpentine. Pitch and turpentine were used in paints. Indigenous people used pitch to waterproof baskets before pottery came along, and in the making of tools.



Civil War

After Florida left the Union in January 1861 Florida's Militia was established on February 14, 1861, two months before war broke out between the North and the South. The Union (North) imposed a blockade on all sea ports in the South. The Union blockade was aimed to halt, confiscate, or destroy shipments of cotton, turpentine, lumber, beef, and other products to undercut the South's economy.

Transition Zone

Mashes Island lies in a transition zone between salt marsh and spring karst features to the east and sand hills and beaches to the west. Karst topography extends into Apalachee Bay, creating tunnels and caves of fresh water that support unique aquatic species and are popular with divers.

Great and Snowy Egrets

These widespread white egret species often gather in loose flocks and feed mainly on fish caught in open water.



The Great Egret (L39" WS 51") is tall, extremely slender, and long-necked with buffy grey legs and feet. The Snowy Egret (L24 WS 41) is small and slender with dark legs and distinctive yellow feet (golden slippers).

West Indian Manatees

Apalachee Bay and its river systems support habitat for “sea cows” or manatees. Considered vulnerable to extinction, the manatee depends on the healthy aquatic environment. An herbivore, the manatee may eat as many as 60 different plant species. It is very exciting to see these docile creatures as they graze on vegetation and swim along the shallow waters in groups. However, keep your distance when observing them. They pose no threat, except for the fact that they surface to breathe and in so doing can accidentally tip your kayak.



Willet

Large, rather heavyset wader (L 15" WS 26") with thick bill and broad, rounded wings. Striking black and white under wing pattern revealed in flight. Found in many habitats – from marshes to rocky shores—it is often seen singly on beaches.

