



Tide Creek Paddling Trail

Overview:

Begin at Levy Bay Boat Ramp. Head south through Tide Creek, passing under Mashas Sands Bridge into Ochlockonee Bay. Upon entering the Bay, head west, passing under the Ochlockonee Bay Bridge, then cross the Bay (1 mile) to the other side. End at Ochlockonee Bay Boat Ramp in Franklin County.

Considerations:

Sheltered and tidal, best taken on a high, outgoing tide. The first 2 miles are protected and winding. The last mile, across Ochlockonee Bay, is in open water, which can be choppy if it's windy.

Focus:

Explore the vast tidal marsh system. Birding is very good, including Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, Clapper Rails, Harriers, and Marsh Wrens.

Distance:

3.5 miles, 3 hours. It is 2 miles from the launch site to Ochlockonee Bay.

Put In:

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, benches, and parking. Launch on sand next to ramp.

Take Out:

At the Ochlockonee Bay Boat Ramp in Franklin County, located at the south end of the Ochlockonee Bay Bridge, with restrooms, trash cans, and parking. There is easy entry next to the floating boat dock.

Expertise:

Intermediate and up.



Ochlockonee River, Bay, and Community

Eventually emptying into Ochlockonee Bay, the Ochlockonee River originates in southwest Georgia. It flows through the Red Hills, Talquin State Forest, Lake Talquin State Park and the Apalachicola National Forest, and past Ochlockonee River State Park. Here it is tidally influenced and a mixture of fresh, brackish, and salt water flows in and out of the Bay. The River is 206 miles long and the Basin measures 2,450 square miles. The tranquil bayside community of Ochlockonee Bay offers restaurants, fishing supplies, deli food, coastal home rentals, RV camping, a gas station, and liquor store.

Great Blue Heron

Our largest and heaviest heron (L 46" WS 72" WT 5.3lbs.) is one of the most vocal, calling frequently in flight. Generally solitary, it hunts fish and other animals while wading slowly in quiet waters.

Northern Harrier

Slender and buoyant with an owl-like facial disk, the Northern Harrier is usually seen coursing low over fields or marshes looking for small birds and mammals. Once scared into the open, it captures its prey with a sudden pounce. The bird has long wings and tail, and is easily recognized by a very noticeable white rump patch in all plumages.

Tidal Flats

Tidal flats are also known as mudflats (because their surface soils are muds brought in by channels from uplands) and intertidal zones (because they are between the tides, exposed at low tide and flooded at high tide). We may not see much besides mud when we look at tidal flats, but many animals see breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Tidal flats are essential refueling stops for migrating shorebirds. A world of invertebrate animals lives in and on that mud, including Tube Worms, Sand Dollars, Burrowing Shrimp, Sea Cucumbers, and assorted Mollusks and Crabs. Not only are there lots of species, there are also thousands of animals per

square foot. These invertebrates live on tiny bits of leaves and stems of both land and aquatic plants that are brought into the mudflats in freshwater channels or by tides. The invertebrates become food for fish and birds. When the tide comes in, fish come with it to feast; when the tide goes out, birds dig in.

Crabbing

Crabs are harvested using a variety of methods. Recreational crabbers, or "chicken neckers," may only use a piece of bait tied to a string while commercial watermen use crabpots or trotlines. Commercial watermen prefer to use various types of oily bait fish, eel, and bull lip. Some watermen use frozen fish because it tends to break down (decompose) faster than fresh, which seems to attract more crabs. Most



crabbers carry several items with them on the water. A dip is essential to scoop up stray crabs. A wooden bushel basket is a good for storing caught crabs (all seafood stores buy and sell crabs "by the bushel"). Also helpful are thick crabbing gloves and a culling stick measuring 5 inches, point-to-point, which is the minimum legal keeper size. It is easy to tell the difference between a male and female blue crab. Males have blue claws and, like most humans, female blue crabs "paint their fingernails" (i.e., the tips of their claws are "painted" red)!

