



Goose Creek Bay Paddling Trail



Overview:

Begin at Shell Point Beach. Paddle east along the shore past Walker Creek and Live Oak Island. Follow the shoreline of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge to explore Goose Creek Bay and creeks. End at Wakulla Beach Boat Ramp.

Considerations:

There is open water at the beginning, which can be choppy in windy conditions. Goose Creek Bay is sheltered. Best taken on an incoming tide.

Focus:

Photography, birdwatching, fishing. This is a very scenic route, with many inlets such as Shepherd's Spring, to explore.

Distance:

6 miles, 3 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:

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.

Expertise:

Intermediate and up.



Wakulla Beach Land Development Company

State Senator Henry N. Walker, Sr., owner and operator of the Wakulla Times and a prominent merchant, rancher, and politician, also created a modern highway system in the 1920s. Wakulla Beach, with an abundance of game, was envisioned to attract sportsmen and settlers to the new East Goose Creek community. Relying on local knowledge of long-time Black residents, the bay's famous mullet run employed "spotters" from their Hyde Park community, adjacent to East Goose Creek. A few houses survive as in-holdings in today's St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. East Goose Creek and the three hotels, as well as any earlier traces of human presence, have faded into memory.

Hyde Park

Confusion reigned at the end of the second Spanish Period in 1819. Indians and black Spaniards living near the shore and north along the Wakulla River faced a new reality: slavery, Indian removal and American laws. Hyde Park, a traditional black enclave servicing the needs of the Spanish fort and trading posts along the Wakulla River, developed into a proud community now mostly hidden by the dense new-growth forests. Legend has it that Creek Prophet Hillis Hadjo (Prophet Francis) accompanied British soldiers to London, taking along his son to request help against encroaching Americans. His daughter Millie saved an American soldier and was rewarded with a Congressional Medal of Honor. Many Blacks escaped American advances to this hidden area from the Apalachicola River in the 1800s. They learned the ways of subsistence from the remaining Creek-Seminoles, passing this knowledge on to later arriving white fishers.

Shell Point

Historically described as high land ideal for recreational purposes, Shell Point was a high shell midden and fishery. It was dredged in the 1950s to create canals and a marina basin. Along the eroding beach, one occasionally finds relics of peoples living here thousands of years ago. The area

is known for its over-abundance of archaeological sites. Most of Shell Point today is a planned coastal community favored by sailors, with a public beach. None of the former middens, fishery, nor the 20th-century motel, marina, and restaurants, exist. Public facilities include parking, picnic pavilion, and restrooms. On windy days this is a popular spot for sailing and wind surfing.

Bottle-Nosed Dolphins (Porpoise)

Dolphins are mammals, which nurse their young. They are common in Apalachee Bay and can grow to 8 feet in length and weigh between 430-600 lbs. Dolphins search for food through a use of sonar called "ecolocation." They send out clicks, and echoes come back. They also hunt in groups and drive prey onto mud banks. They eat between 15-30 lbs. of fish and other sealife each day. Calving season



usually peaks in May and Dolphins normally have just one calf about every two to three years. The calves are about 3-1/2 to 4 ft. long and weigh a little over 40 lbs. They will suckle from their mother for 1-1/2 to 2 years and swim with her for another 3-8 years. The calf "surfs" in the mother's slipstream as they swim so it can keep up. Dolphins communicate with a variety of sounds like clicks, moans, whistles, and squeaks...not through their mouth, but their "blowhole" in the top of their head. Adult males hang out by themselves or with one or two dolphin buddies while females and calves mingle with groups of close to 15 others.

