



Chaires Creek Paddling Trail



Overview:

Begin at the Ochlockonee Bay Boat Ramp in Franklin County, located at the south end of the Ochlockonee Bay Bridge. Paddle east along the Bald Point State Park shoreline for 1.7 miles to Chaires Creek. Travel 2 miles up Chaires Creek to reach Tucker Lake. Take out at the landing located on northwest side of Tucker Lake. Or launch from Bald Point State Park.

Considerations:

Enter Chaires Creek on high tide. This is a sheltered trip, in shallow water.

Focus:

Explore the extensive tidal creek system. Fishing in the lake and creek can be excellent. Sea Trout, Red Fish, Flounder, and Sheepshead are common catches. This is also an excellent area to cast a net for Mullet or catch Blue Crabs.

Distance:

3.7 miles, 2 hours.

Put In:

Ochlockonee Bay Boat Ramp at the south end of the Ochlockonee Bay Bridge. Or launch from Bald Point State Park on rising tide. Both have sandy launch, parking, dock, beach, toilets, and benches.

Take Out:

Tucker Lake launch in Bald Point State Park. Take US 98 south over the Ochlockonee Bay Bridge. Turn east (left) onto CR 370 for 3/4 mile to the Ranger Road on the left. This paved drive provides access to a fishing bridge over Chaires Creek and the kayak launch on Tucker Lake. Has natural dirt entry, signs, parking, benches, toilets, trash cans.

Expertise:

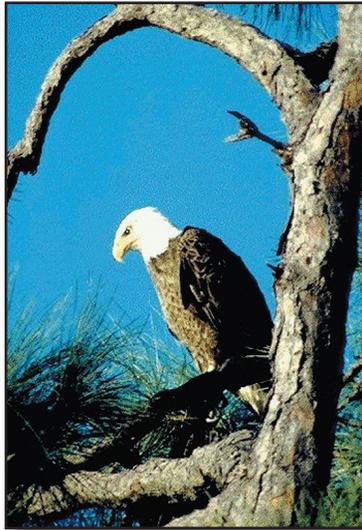
Intermediate and up. Beginners can launch and paddle around the protected waters of Tucker Lake.



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Indigenous Populations

As long ago as 14,000 years, Paleoindians lived in a local environment that was drier and less lush than today. The sea level was lower, with a shoreline as far away as 80 miles. Ancient, shallow river lowlands gradually filled with water when sea levels began rising about 8,000 years ago. Remnants of beach dunes here date back to a much older geologic time. These high, solid grounds offered perfect locations for coastal living as the former woodlands vanished. Alligators and wood storks remain as reminders of ancient life in these parts. Europeans arriving in Florida 500 years ago encountered native populations who fished, constructed canoes and nets and other means of trapping animals. The Apalachee were expert archers. Coastal populations exchanged seafood with the inland farming population near today's state capital of Tallahassee.



Bald Point State Park

Located on the eastern end of St. James Island where Ochlockonee Bay meets Apalachee Bay, this state park encompasses 4,859 acres. It offers a multitude of land and water activities, coastal marshes, pine flatwood lakes, and oak thickets that make the park a popular destination for birding and wildlife viewing. Every fall, Bald Eagles, other migrating raptors, and Monarch Butterflies are commonly sighted heading south for the winter. The variety of habitat types offer surprises.

Camp Gordon Johnston

Originally named Camp Carrabelle, it was established on St. James Island for amphibious training in World War II. It was home to 30,000 military personnel, training an estimated 250,000 troops for the June 1944 D-Day invasion in Normandy, France. It was the second largest military installation in Florida. World War II ended in 1945 and by 1948 most of the buildings were demolished. Lands transferred back to private ownership. Many former officers' family quarters are in the Lanark Village Retirement Community.

River Otter

These are the most commonly encountered of Florida's mustelids. Otters are very vocal and have a large repertoire of calls. If you are kayaking on a quiet river or stream, their bird-like chirping contact calls will often be your first indication that otters are nearby. These semi-aquatic, slender, long-bodied mammals are specialized for finding and capturing prey in the



water. The broad flattened head has numerous stiff whiskers around the nose and snout, and these very sensitive tactile hairs are used for locating prey underwater. Otters have a long muscular tail, short stout legs and thick oiled fur. Small rounded ears and nostrils close when the otter is underwater. In Florida, river otters weigh 11-31 lb. Males are larger than females. They forage alone or in pairs. They are active during the day and at night, hunting in streams, rivers, and ponds for fish, crayfish, and turtles. Otters have a high metabolic rate, an adaptation for living in an aquatic environment where body heat is rapidly lost. They need to eat 15% of their body weight a day.

Marsh Habitat

The marsh's boundaries are fluid, adjusting themselves according to storms, erosion, sedimentation, the ebb and flow and meandering of tidal creeks, and sea level changes. A salt marsh may not be much to look at, but what it does for us is remarkable. These monotonous stretches of grasses produce an enormous amount of dead plant matter, which is quickly broken down by crabs and other little creatures into tiny pieces, called detritus, which in turn feeds the young of many fish and shellfish species that end up on our tables. Blue Crabs, Shrimp, Mullet, Spotted Sea Trout, and Large-Mouth Bass spend part of their lives in these marshes. No marsh? No seafood. You can detect where the tide is strongest by which species of grass is dominant. There's Smooth Cordgrass where the marsh is flooded by tides most frequently and Black Needlerush where the tides don't reach quite as far. In transition zones between the marsh grasses and the adjacent uplands, you'll find Glasswort, Saltwort, and Marsh Elder.



Black Bear

The Florida black bear is a unique subspecies of the American Black Bear that once ranged throughout Florida but now lives in six core areas across the state. Since the 1980s, the black bear population has been expanding and the forests and interconnected greenways along Apalachee Bay provide an essential habitat. Black bears can sometimes be spotted along the ocean, foraging for crabs and turtle eggs. Local residents refer to them as "Seaside Bears;" sometimes they can be spotted dining on oyster bars at low tide. Proper storage of food, garbage, and other attractants is crucial to prevent bears from becoming accustomed to people and losing their natural fears of them. Feeding bears can lead to personal injury, property damage, and the need to destroy the problem bears.