



Explore Undiscovered North Florida

The Big Bend Scenic Byway will Transport You to a Different Time and Place through its Wildlife, Waterways, Woods, and Way of Life

Apalachee Bay "Inside Passage" to Spring Creek

From Bottoms Road, paddle north on the inside of Piney Island following the coastline of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, passing Skipper Bay, into Oyster Bay. You can take a short cut to Spring Creek via a small creek, or you can round the point and take Spring Creek north. Follow this beautiful palm-lined creek for about one mile until it narrows. In spring, look for blooming Purple Flag Irises, clusters of Yellow Senecio flowers, and the white blooms of Duck Potato. Watch for Bald Eagles, Osprey, White Pelicans, Ibis, Herons and Egrets, and even Roseate Spoonbills. Around the exposed Oyster Bars you'll see a variety of shore and wading birds, most prominent of which are Oyster Catchers. Take time to explore several high magnitude springs near Spring Creek, which connect with Wakulla Springs to the north.

Trip Overview

- Saltwater Paddling
- Photography, Birding, Fishing, Wildlife
- Self or Guided
- 8 miles including Spring Creek/6 miles straight paddle 3-5 hours
- Picnic Lunch
- Advanced Beginner and Up
- Paddling Near Shore
- Tidal, Shallow Water
- Easy Entry, Exit

Stop at Skipper Beach

N 30.04807
W 84.36011

This stretch of sand and shell in the Wildlife Refuge is a perfect place to rest or for a picnic lunch. You can follow the road which leads through a dense hardwood hammock to the bridge over Skipper Creek.



Directions

Put In: Bottoms Road Boat Ramp on Porter Island. Begin this trip here on an incoming tide.

N 30.01583
W 84.36823

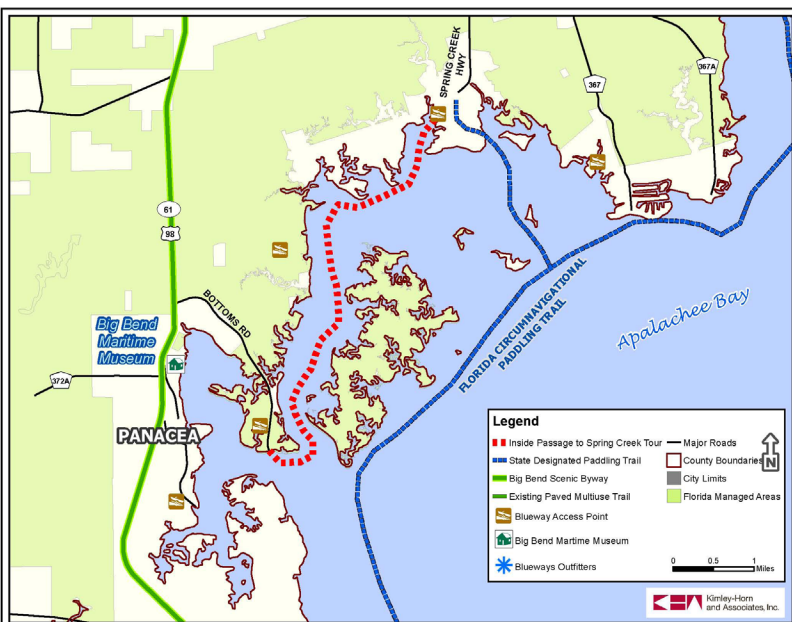
In Wakulla County, take the Scenic Byway's Coastal Trail East (US 98) to the south past Medart to the coastal waterfronts community of Panacea. Before entering Panacea, turn left (east) onto Bottoms Road, indicated by a Byway and Great Florida Birding Trail sign with arrow. This dike road passes through Dickerson Bay in the Panacea Unit of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. There is ample parking at the launch point at road's end.

Take Out: Spring Creek boat landing adjacent to the RV Camp. If this trip is reversed, begin here on an outgoing tide.

N 30.07999
W 84.32978

From Bottoms Road, take US Highway 98 north for 4.3 miles. Just before the intersection with US Hwy 319 in Medart, turn right onto Jack Crum Drive for 3.7 miles to CR 365. Turn right on CR 365 for 2 miles to Spring Creek. Turn left on Ben Willis Road for 1 mile to the Marina. Parking is available.

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Maritime Heritage Trail Interpretation - Inside Passage to Spring Creek

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Interpretation

Estuarine Ecosystem

This ecosystem begins just offshore in the shallow waters of the Apalachee Bay. Water flowing from the salt marshes enters the bay where vital sea grass beds and oyster bars exist. The sea grasses, which thrive in the shallow water, produce oxygen necessary for all the other animal life that lives in this area.



salinity for oysters, thanks to the number of freshwater springs and streams. Oysters can't survive in fresh water and in saltier water they are attacked by predators, parasites, and diseases. Oyster bars provide habitat for a multitude of invertebrates and fish, including Sponges, Anemones, Whelks, Worms, Barnacles, Blue Crabs, Stone Crabs, Pinfish, Sea Trout, Spot, Black Drum, and Mullet.

Fishing

For saltwater anglers there are endless choices along the route, so pack a rod in your kayak or canoe. Some popular inshore species are Spotted Sea Trout, Sheepshead, Flounder, and Redfish. Late fall and early winter is the best time to fish for Sea Trout, although they bite all year long. Redfish can be found in some of the same places as Sea Trout. Your best bets are oyster bars at change of tide and the mouths of creeks with oyster bars leading into marshes.

The grasses also provide habitat and protection for a number of different species of sea life. Additionally, this unique area of the Bay is extremely valuable for water birds and other aquatic predators because it serves as a nursery for fish and shellfish. More than 80% of the commercial seafood catch, both by weight and species, along the Florida Gulf Coast is dependent on such estuaries.

Oyster Bars

Oysters live in colonies (bars) along the route. Watch oystermen, or "tongers," as they harvest oysters in the same manner as they have for a century. Standing in their small wooden boats, which are about 20-23 feet long, they use long tongs that look somewhat like two rakes attached scissor-style. They will walk back and forth along the railing of the boat moving the tongs together and apart to loosen the oysters from the bars. Once loosened, the oysters are hauled into the boat for sorting. Oyster bars exposed at low tide are also dined on by a variety of wildlife. Look for pairs of American Oystercatchers (easily recognized by their shrill call, red legs, and long black chisel bill), as well as other shorebirds, wading birds, and Raccoons. Apalachee Bay has just the right





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Bottoms Seineyard

N 30.02401

W 84.36643

Seining for mullet was once a popular endeavor and is now almost a lost art. People were drawn to the shallow waters of Apalachee Bay to catch the fat fish using large seine nets. The



nets were set up on beaches with shallow water and a bottom free of obstacles, to avoid snags. Men rowed their boats into the water and played out nets up to 600 ft. long. Then they waited. When the striker, who usually scanned the bay from a tower, called "Come ashore!" the men strained at their oars as they rowed for shore, trapping the fish. Others pitched in to draw the fish-laden net onto the beach. Then all hands began the work of removing the catch and preparing the mullet for smoking or salting. The sizes of mullet runs at area seineyards were impressive, with reports that "40 barrels were brought in with one pull of the seine." The seineyards operated in the fall and were a source of income for the owner as well as a place for people to relax and meet friends. Farmers from as far away

as Georgia – a journey of several days by wagon – came to barter hams and other farm produce for barrels of salted mullet. Many barrels of salted fish were also sold and shipped to feed farmhands or turpentine workers, and for home use. Several seineyards operated along this route, including Bottoms Road and Skipper Bay. Bottoms Road is one of the few remaining spots where seining for mullet is still practiced – but with much smaller nets set by hand.

Pine Forests and Turpentine

Historically, one of the most important industries of the Big Bend region was turpentine. As the first European settlers arrived in the Middle Atlantic states and gradually moved south into Florida, they brought with them a keen appreciation of the value of turpentine and other pinesap products for naval stores—in an era still dependent on wooden sailing vessels—



and for multiple other uses such as printing ink, wax thinner, polishes for leather and furniture, and laundry glosses. The industry was based on back-breaking hand labor. Workers in the pine forests collected the precious pinesap, running drop by drop into tin cups from horizontal cuts in the tree bark. Look for these "cat-faced" pines along the route you are traveling.

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