

Paddling Route Five: Seven Sisters Islands Lower Store Loop

Put In and take out: Hermits Cove Marina- 482 Cove Drive, Satsuma, FL.

Distance: 5.4 miles

Difficulty: Intermediate

Estimated Time: 3 hours

Description:

Don't be alarmed by the appearance of Hermits Cove; despite its generally unkempt grounds, it is a safe and friendly place. The put-in, located behind the Hermits Cove Marina, is a concrete ramp and the drop-off is steep so use caution. You will need to cross the St. Johns River twice so use caution and check the weather before launch. Motorized boat traffic is likely but sparse. There are no take-outs along the route. Restrooms are located in the pub.

Seven Sisters Islands create a navigational maze within the St. Johns River so use of a map and compass or other navigational aid is essential to follow the trail and not become disoriented. Although the route outlined on the map is recommended, there are a number of alternate routes through the islands that will allow you to reach the historic site of Spalding's Lower Store at Stokes Landing.

The recommended route is a loop that covers two Bartram Trail Sites. It is mostly well sheltered and can be paddled even under windy conditions. Although the full loop is about 5.4 miles and can be covered in under three hours, it can be easily halved by paddling only the route from Hermits Cove Marina to the site of Spalding's Lower Store (BTS 13) and back along the same route. The inclusion of the Trout Creek portion of the loop allows for a visit to the mouth of the ill-fated Cross Florida Barge Canal in addition to the unique experience of paddling the unique old-Florida Trout Creek itself.

Launch at the boat ramp at Hermits Cove Marina. Paddling to the right, exit the canal and look for the BTS 12 marker on the east shoreline. From this marker, paddle west through the islands towards the main channel of the St. Johns River. Cross the River into the Stokes Landing channel on the west shore. There are several channels on the west shore in this reach, however the correct one is easily identified by the industrial buildings at Stokes Landing which can be seen from the River. Enter the Stokes Landing channel and look for the BTS 13 marker on the west shore which shows the location of Spalding's Lower Store.

Leaving BTS 13, paddle west between the island and the west shore and cross the River to the east shoreline (Trout Island). Paddle along the shoreline past the entrance to the ill-fated Cross Florida Barge Canal (on the west shore about one mile south of BTS 13) and enter Trout Creek which is located just upstream (south) and across the River from the entrance to the Barge Canal. This small creek provides a scenic view of rustic Florida and typically teems with wildlife. At the first fork in Trout Creek, choose the channel on the right. Follow this channel back to the Bartram Trail Site marker (BTS 12) and the canal to the launch point.

Coordinates:

Hermits Cove Marina Boat Ramp: 29° 34.525'N 81° 40.704'W

BTS 12 Seven Sisters Islands: 29° 34.515'N 81° 40.757'W

BTS 13 Spalding's Lower Store: 29° 34.331'N 81° 41.918'W

South Entrance to Trout Creek: 29° 33.208'N 81° 41.845'W