

Paddling Route Seven: Welaka to Mud Spring Loop

Put In and take out: Town of Welaka soft landing at the end of Palmetto Street, Welaka, FL.

Distance: 6.9 miles

Difficulty: Intermediate

Estimated Time: 4 hours

Description: There is plenty of safe and secure parking at the launch site in downtown Welaka. This is classified as an intermediate paddle because half of the distance covered is within Little Lake George and wind can be an issue, especially if out of the south. Although this paddle includes one Bartram Trail Site (BTS-19 Mount Hope) it targets two popular Putnam County paddling destinations that the Bartrams never mentioned in any of their narratives: the mouth of the Ocklawaha River and Mud Spring. Mud Spring is within the Welaka State Forest and is a popular local swimming hole and picnic area. There is a \$2 user fee for going ashore at the Spring and a drop box so be sure to take cash.

After launching, paddle directly across the River to the west shoreline. Watch for boat traffic when crossing the channel. Follow the shoreline south to the mouth of the Ocklawaha River, about a mile from the launch. If time and distance are not constraints, a short paddle up the scenic Ocklawaha River is well worthwhile. After passing the Ocklawaha continue south to the mouth of Bear Creek then re-cross the St. Johns to the south tip of Beecher Point. Follow the east shoreline to the center of Mud Creek Cove and the mouth of Mud Spring Creek. Continue up the run past the minor tributaries that join it on the right. There is a small dock at Mud Spring landing. The Spring itself is separated from the Creek by a berm and the discharge flows into the Creek through a culvert and can typically can be heard before reaching the dock; an audible signal that this rewarding destination is near.

Despite the “No Swimming” signs posted at the Spring, these signs are ignored by the locals who frequent this popular swimming hole. There are sheltered picnic tables located near the Spring. There is no public access road to the site which can only be reached by a mile-long trail from the parking area on SR 309, or by water.

Retrace the outbound route as far as Beechers Point but this time continue downstream following the east shoreline. After rounding the Point look for the BTS-19 Marker. Continue following the east shore north (downstream) back to the launch site.

Coordinates

Welaka Soft Landing: 29° 28.756'N 81° 40.499'W

Mouth of the Ocklawaha: 29° 28.217'N 81° 41.442'W

Mouth of Bear Creek: 29° 28.052'N 81° 41.511'W

Mouth of Mud Creek: 29° 27.467'N 81° 39.897'W

Mud Spring: 29° 27.651'N 81° 39.685'

Bartram Trail Site 19 – Mount Hope: 29° 27.970'N 81° 41.110'W