



Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Segment 20

Hobe Sound/Ft. Pierce

Emergency contact information:

911

Martin County Sheriff's Department: 772-220-7000

St. Lucie County Sheriff's Department: 772-462-7300

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 24-hour wildlife emergency/boating under the influence hotline: 1-888-404-3922

FPTA Region: J

Begin: Spoil Island MC3

End: SL13

Distance: 22.3 miles

Duration: 1 day

Special Considerations: Special precautions should be taken in the narrow portions of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) regarding boat traffic; be wary of large boats and their wakes. Boat wakes often rebound off sea walls. Boat traffic is higher on weekends and holidays. Do not tie kayaks to docks along the ICW as boat wakes may cause swamping or damage; always lift them out of the water. Lack of camping opportunities and the erosion of some spoil islands are the reasons for the 20-plus miles that need to be covered each day. Leave No Trace guidelines should be followed for all primitive camping.

Introduction:

Once a place where U.S. Navy Frogmen trained for the D-Day invasion in World War II, Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park offers a great rest stop and beach. You can launch or land along a sandy stretch on the north side of the inlet near Dynamite Pointe, named for the activities of the Navy Underwater Demolition Team (see map). From here, you can access restrooms, the picnic area, beaches, and a short nature trail.

This section of the Indian River will not disappoint, offering historical sights, museums, and the Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park. While camping, you may hear a train whistle in the distance, reminiscent of Henry Flagler's historical railway.

1. Spoil Island MC3 to SL13, 22.3 miles

The Indian River is up to two miles wide in this stretch, so it is easy to avoid the sometimes busy boat channel. Only a mile and a half from MC3 along the east side of the waterway is the Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge Museum on Hutchinson Island. This fascinating historical site is worth a stop. The building, located on a rock outcropping that provides a commanding view of the Atlantic shore, is the last of ten houses built along this once remote East Florida coast in the 1800s to provide comfort and shelter to shipwreck survivors. It fulfilled its mission on several occasions.

Besides taking a museum tour, you may want to walk the beach here as it is lined with Anastasia limestone outcroppings similar to those found at the Blowing Rocks Preserve to the south. Hurricanes uncovered Native American artifacts near the museum that date back several thousand years. It is also fascinating to note that black bears once frequented Hutchinson Island and were shot and eaten by early pioneers.

A mile north of the museum is a motel opportunity, the Hutchinson Island Marriott Beach Resort and Marina. Call 772-225-3700 for more information. The resort is located east of the Stewart Causeway Park.

Take advantage of the parks near Jensen Beach for water and restroom breaks because few opportunities exist until Ft. Pierce. Just north of the Hutchinson Island nuclear power plant, several local park preserves along the eastern shore offer a scenic unspoiled view and rest stop opportunities, but no facilities. Wetlands in these parks are being restored by ditch removal and re-flooding with saltwater. Some small spoil islands in the area, once open for primitive camping, have disappeared due to storms and erosion. Fort Pierce Inlet State Park has a primitive youth/group campsite, but for regular primitive camping, you'll need to proceed north of the inlet to SL 13.

SL13 is part of the Spoil Island Project. The island is well maintained by volunteers and there is ample room for tents on the south and on the southwest side of the island. During weekends, it can get busy.