

# Upper Chipola River Paddling Trail



**Access Point 1: Christoff Landing**  
N: 30.849918 W: -85.259389






**Access Point 2: Florida Caverns State Park Take Out**  
N: 30.816502 W: -85.234094

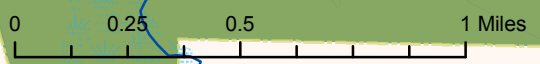
BUMP NOSE RD

Baltzell Springs

CAVERNS STATE PK RD

Florida Caverns State Park

-  Chipola River Paddling Trail
-  Springs
-  Canoe/Kayak Launch
-  Florida State Parks
-  Florida Conservation Lands
-  Wetlands



## Upper Chipola River Paddling Trail

The Upper Chipola River Paddling Trail is a shady, unspoiled waterway that meanders about 4.5 miles before ending in [Florida Caverns State Park](#) near Marianna. Numerous clear springs dot the river and colorful wildflowers adorn the banks in spring and fall. This remote stretch of the Chipola River is a site on the [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail](#) with excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. Be sure to bring a camera and binoculars, and a fishing pole to try your luck catching the river's tasty freshwater fish.

The original [Chipola River Paddling Trail](#) begins below Florida Caverns State Park at Yancey Bridge (SR 166) and flows 51-miles to its designated ending at Scotts Ferry on SR 71.

### The paddling experience

Trip length: About 4.5 miles from [Christoff Landing](#) downstream to the Florida Caverns State Park, no other public access points

Difficulty: Easy to moderate, depending on log jams and water levels

Skill level: Beginner to intermediate.

The paddling trail begins at Christoff Landing where it may be possible to paddle about 1.5 miles upstream, depending on water levels and downed trees, to visit the historic [Bellamy Bridge](#), site of colorful local ghost legends.

Portages may be necessary depending on tree deadfall, especially after storm events. Accessing the river at SR 162 bridge is not recommended as the dirt road is rough and rainy conditions may require carrying boats and gear through thick muck.

The trail ends at boat ramp near a small bridge on Blue Hole Road inside Florida Caverns State Park. A short distance downstream of the boat ramp the river disappears into a submerged cave, re-emerging a 1/4 mile later. As a result paddling is not allowed past this 'natural bridge'. The portion of the river that continues downstream follows a man-made cut that was made decades ago in order to allow logs to be floated downstream. This feature has since become clogged with downed trees and is now preserved as wildlife habitat.

It is possible to rent canoes from the state park office at the entrance and paddle upstream and back. Be sure to visit Baltzell Springs, about 1.2 miles upstream from the park boat ramp on the east side of the river. No trespassing on private lands especially around springs please!

**Access points:**

1. Christoff Landing *Directions from Marianna: From intersection of US 90 and Pennsylvania Ave, turn right (north) and drive 5.2 mi. (name soon changes to Bumpnose Rd.) Turn right (east); the launch site is 0.3 mi. ahead.* [Map](#)
2. Florida Caverns State Park *Directions from Marianna: From intersection of US 90 and Jefferson St (SR 166/CR 167), head north (it becomes Caverns Rd); the entrance is approx. 2.7 mi. on the left (west) side of the road.* [Map](#)
  - State Park admission fee
  - Gate/campground hours: 8 a.m. to sundown
  - Improved concrete boat launch on Blue Hole Drive

**Outfitters & shuttle service**

- Canoe rentals from the Florida Caverns State Park office, 850- 482-9598
- Bear Paw Outfitters <http://bearpawescape.com/> 850-482-4948

**Water level info:** [http://waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/uv?site\\_no=02358789](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/uv?site_no=02358789)

**Rest/picnic areas:** Covered pavilion near Christoff Landing, Florida Caverns State Park

**Camping options:** Camping is not allowed along the river. Primitive camping with picnic pavilions is available near Christoff Landing on North Florida Water Management District property. No fees but [Reservations required](#). Camping is also available at Florida Caverns State Park - [Reservations](#)

**Lodging in Marianna area:** <http://visitjacksoncountyfla.com/lodging/>

**Wildlife:** Variety of birds, alligators, otters, turtles and snakes. An array of freshwater fish species

**Natural communities** include bluffs, upland glades, upland hardwood forests, upland pines, floodplains, alluvial streams and spring-run streams. The special natural features of the state park are related to the karst topography characteristic of the Marianna Lowlands.

### **Cultural and historical features along the trail:**

At the Florida Caverns State Park stop by the Visitors Center and tour the caves (No tours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays). These caves have a long and interesting geologic history beginning about 38 million years ago when sea levels were much higher and the southeastern coastal plain of the United States was submerged. Shells, coral and sediments gradually accumulated on the sea floor. As sea levels fell, these materials hardened into limestone. During the last million years, acidic groundwater dissolved crevices just below the surface creating cave passages large enough to walk through. Dazzling stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone and other fragile cave-drip formations were by a similar dissolving process by the naturally acidic rainwater. The park's bluffs, springs and caves are referred to as karst terrain, and the caves provide habitat for the blind cave crayfish, cave salamanders and three species of cave roosting bats.

Native Americans and early Spanish expeditions used the 'natural bridge' at the paddling trail's end point as a crossing point on the Chipola River. It was also used by Andrew Jackson's troops in 1818 during the Seminole Indian Wars. Christoff's Landing was historically where a ferry carried passengers across the river.

The steel framework of the historic [Bellamy Bridge](#) is about 1.5 miles upstream from Christoff's Landing and is the setting for several colorful ghost stories. The Bellamy Bridge Heritage Trail is about a half mile walk and can be accessed from the parking area on CR 162.

### **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Florida Caverns State Park**

The land that comprises a large part of Florida Caverns State Park was acquired on October 11, 1935. Work on the tour cave and structures within the park were completed by members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Projects Administration. Both groups emerged from President Roosevelt's New Deal, established in 1933 to provide jobs to men during the Great Depression. Tireless hours of work went into the development of the park, which included many aspects beyond the cave. Progress continued on the park until 1942, when the United States joined World War II and funding was cut to the CCC and Works Progress Administration programs. Florida Caverns State Park was officially opened to the public in 1942 and the men who helped develop this park unquestionably left their mark. A walk around the 1,300-acre park reveals the remnants of a fish hatchery, a beautiful Visitor Center that houses the gift shop and museum, a 9-hole golf course and much more.