

## **Segment 4**

### **Forgotten Coast**

**Emergency contact info:**

911

Gulf County Sheriff's Department: 850-227-1115

Franklin County Sheriff's Department: 850-670-8500

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

**Begin:** St. Joseph Peninsula State Park wilderness area

**End:** Gap Point Campsite, Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park

**Distance:** 57 miles

**Duration:** 5 days

**Special Considerations:** Be wary of strong winds in open water sections (which is most of the route). Currents moving through all three passes can be strong, depending upon tidal fluctuations. After Stump's Hole, you'll need to paddle along the Gulf for several miles, where the surf can pose a challenge.

A portable portage carrier is advised for the Stump's Hole land crossing.

#### **Introduction**

Vast segments of unspoiled public lands and islands are featured in this segment, from the high dunes of St. Joseph Peninsula State Park to the wild palm-lined shores of St. Vincent Island to the old-growth coastal slash pine forests of Cape St. George State Reserve. Paddlers will also enjoy the St. Joseph and Apalachicola bays, among the most productive waters in the state in terms of marine life. In addition, Apalachicola Bay

provides the majority of the state's oyster harvest, and paddlers will likely see flotillas of characteristically shaped oyster boats with their small cabins. Oystermen pull up the rock-hard oysters by hand using long tongs, a practice that has changed little in more than a century.

These two bays are encompassed by the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve, <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/sites/apalachicola/stjoseph.htm>, and the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/sites/apalachicola/info.htm>, respectively. The Apalachicola reserve is one of only 25 sites designated as a research reserve by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, designed to coordinate efforts to manage and protect the nation's most productive waters.

State lands include St. Joseph Peninsula and Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island state parks ([www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org)), Cape St. George State Reserve and St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve ([http://www.floridadep.com/coastal/sites/apalachicola/stjoseph\\_buffer.htm](http://www.floridadep.com/coastal/sites/apalachicola/stjoseph_buffer.htm)). These undeveloped lands help to protect either St. Joe or Apalachicola Bay while providing valuable wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities.

In addition, the trail traverses the massive 12,495-acre St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge (<http://www.fws.gov/saintvincent/>). Named St. Vincent by Franciscan friars in the 1600s, the island is one of the few sites where endangered red wolves are propagated and trained to live in the wild. Most of these wolves are eventually captured and released at either the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina or the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Also, given the island's history as a private hunting retreat stocked with exotic animals, large sambar deer, native to southeast Asia, still roam the island and can occasionally be spotted. They may weigh several hundred pounds each.

Many of the primitive campsites in this segment are part of the Apalachicola Bay Aquatic and Buffer Preserve Kayak and Canoe Trail, developed by staff with the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve in coordination with other government entities. These sites are "pack-it-in, pack-it-out" only, with campers following Leave No Trace principles ([www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org)). All sites are on a first-come, first-

serve policy with the exception of sites within state parks, whereupon reservations must be made through the individual parks.

For kayak rentals, shuttle support and other services, check with Happy Ours Kayak and Canoe Outpost (<http://www.happyourskayak.com/#>), Journeys of St. George Island (<http://www.sgislandjourneys.com/>), and St. Marks Outfitters (<http://stmarksoutfitters.com/>). St. Marks Outfitters also offers on-the-water boat support.

#### 1: St. Joseph State Park primitive campsites #7 to Tower primitive campsite, 12.5 miles

The St. Joseph State Park's wilderness preserve, one of only six in the state park system, encompasses the northern 7.5 miles of the peninsula (over 1,750 acres). This is an unspoiled landscape of large dunes and coastal scrub and grasslands. The preserve is accessible by foot or by boat, and circumnavigational paddlers can primitive camp in the preserve at a designated campsite with advance reservations. Call 850-227-1327 to reserve a site. Payment is due on the day of arrival and is normally paid at the ranger station, although a long-distance paddler can pay by phone with a credit card the day of arrival (\$5.00 per person per night). No fires are allowed and campers must follow "Leave No Trace" principles. Paddlers need to check in at least two hours before sunset and check out with park personnel.

There are paddler campsites that can be accessed from the bay or from the Gulf. Campsites 1, 2 & 7 can be accessed on the bay side. Campsites 3 & 6 can be accessed from the Gulf where you must hike in from the beach following marked trails and camp in the designated camping site. There is a limit of five campers per site and most sites can accommodate 2-3 small tents, with the smallest site being #1 (two tents maximum).

From the wilderness preserve, paddle through the clear waters of the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve. The shallow bay waters are homes and nurseries for numerous fish and sea animals such as sea urchins, scallops and snails. Seagrass beds are lush and abundant. Fishing and summer scalloping are popular recreational activities.

Nearing the halfway point, water and restrooms are available at the southern end of the state park at the picnic area and boat ramp (see map). Outdoor cold showers are at the beach restrooms, across the road from the park's boat ramp along the bay. The park

also offers canoe and kayak rentals. A small grocery store can be found about five miles outside the park boundary along 30E.

The Tower primitive campsite is located near a dock and abandoned fire tower. The campsite is a bare patch of sand near the tower fence. Mud may inhibit landing at low tide.

## 2. Tower primitive campsite to Indian Pass Campground, 11 miles

From the campsite, paddle a short distance to the Stump Hole canoe and kayak launch. Here, you'll have a challenging portage to the Gulf side. A portable portage cart will make this much easier. The safest route is to travel a couple of hundred yards west along the highway to where the rock jetty ends and the Gulf is easily accessible. Take extra precautions because there is a blind curve. From here, you'll paddle along the shore to Indian Pass. A welcome rest stop is the county-owned Salinas Park, where water, restrooms and picnic tables are available (see map).

The Indian Pass Campground is privately owned and has water, showers, restrooms, cabins, a swimming pool, and a small store. Fortunately, the tent camping area is easily accessible by water, enabling you to beach your kayak within easy view of your campsite. Land at the Indian Pass boat ramp and walk a short distance to the circular campground office to register before landing at the campground. Reservations are recommended, especially on weekends. Call 850-227-7203 or log onto [www.indianpasscamp.com](http://www.indianpasscamp.com).

The Indian Pass Trading Post is a couple of miles up the road, where you can sample area oysters and other seafood (closed on Mondays).

## 3. Indian Pass Campground to Government Dock Primitive Campsite, 15 miles

Paddling along St. Vincent Island on the bay side, you'll have many opportunities to land on a wild shoreline lined with cabbage palms, live oaks and slash pine. Indian pottery and oyster shells litter the shore as Native Americans utilized the island for thousands of years. Paddling along or standing on the shore, it is easy to envision the

lifestyles and foods of these early inhabitants. Bear in mind that it is unlawful to remove artifacts.

A highlight of the island shoreline is the northwestern corner known as St. Vincent Point, a scenic area where a thick grove of cabbage palm trees line the water. Evidence of sea level rise and heavy erosion is evident as many trees are being inundated. From here, you can make a beeline across open water to the Government Dock primitive campsite on Cape St. George Island. The campsite is located just inland from the second dock.

As an alternative, you can paddle south along St. Vincent Island to the West Pass primitive campsite on Cape St. George. Along this route, you can explore some of St. Vincent's large lakes accessible from the bay side, although some lakes may be closed if bald eagles are actively nesting. If taking this route, it is 13.5 miles from Indian Pass to the West Pass campsite. Or, if you paddle the Gulf route along St. Vincent Island to West Pass, it is a little over 9 miles, although this route is less interesting.

**Alternate route:** If you wish to explore more of the area's fishing culture, and to avoid unfavorable north winds, you can hug the northern shore after leaving Indian Pass and paddle to Battery Park in the town of Apalachicola, about 15.5 miles. From there, you can walk to any number of motels, restaurants or gift shops. Apalachicola is an historic fishing village where many residents still actively make their living from the sea, especially with regards to harvesting shrimp and oysters.

From Apalachicola, you can paddle across the bay six or seven miles to a number of campsites on either Cape St. George or St. George Island. If you remain on the north side of the bay, the primitive campsite near Carrabelle is about 20 miles from Apalachicola (see segment 5). You can take a rest break at Eastpoint and purchase smoked mullet near the public boat ramp (see map).

#### 4. Government Dock Primitive Campsite to Boy Scout Camp, 8 miles

The first half of this day is very scenic with slash pines that stand right up against the bay. Look for the angular cuts or "cat-faced" scars on older trees made by early workers to collect sap for making turpentine. The industry died out in the 1940s. Also,

scan the skies and treetops for bald eagles that frequent the area in cooler months and sometimes nest along the bay in large pines. Give nesting trees a wide berth.

Government Cut or Sike's Cut marks the halfway point. This is an artificial pass dredged between the bay and Gulf in 1954 that separates Cape St. George from St. George Island. As with any pass, be wary of strong currents. Just past the cut, you will pass an exclusive subdivision where docking or landing is prohibited. Proceed along the island to Nick's Hole, a wild cove, where a lone dock and hobie sailboats mark the Boy Scout camp. Land on the small beach just past the dock. This campsite has porta-potties, picnic tables, sink, and fire rings. The water may or may not be turned on. Please be respectful and keep the site clean so it remains open for trail users.

#### 5. Boy Scout Camp to Gap Point Campsite, 10.5 miles

A welcome rest stop is a sand landing on the east side of the St. George Island Bridge. Here, you can easily access stores and restaurants. A small grocery store is just east of the main road.

One option for camping is the Unit 4 campsite just east of the bridge along the bay. Primitive camping here is free and on a first-come, first-serve basis since it is outside the state park.

The first primitive campsite in St. George Island State Park is at scenic Gap Point. Gap Point is located across the bay from the state park's youth camp area and boat ramp (rental sit-on-top kayaks can be obtained here after making arrangements at entrance station). The Gap Point site has no water or facilities. There is a 2.5 mile nature trail that traverses a terrain of old-growth slash pine and large bell-shaped rosemary plants. On the trail, look for "cat faces" on the trees from early turpentine operations. The island was also used for cattle grazing and as a practice bombing range during WWII. Like most barrier islands and shorelines in the region, you may see evidence of Native American occupation which predates European contact by thousands of years. Restrooms and hot showers are available in the family campground which is located at the end of the 2.5 mile trail from Gap Point. The youth camp, across the bay from the campsite, is also

available to paddlers if not reserved by groups. There is a restroom and cold showers available at the youth camp area; check with the park about availability.

The second campsite in the state park is known as Sugar Hill. It is located 3 miles northeast of Gap Point. Cold water / outdoor showers, drinking water and restrooms are available only 200 yards southeast from the Sugar Hill campsite on the ocean side at the end of a sand trail. Camp in the designated area. Please avoid walking on the fragile dunes.

Call the park office between 8am and sunset at 850 927-2111 if you plan to utilize either of the two primitive campsites in the park or the youth camp. A small fee is required. Length of stay is limited.