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"We must all have a great sense of responsibility and not let things happen because everyone takes the comfortable view that someone else is looking after it. Someone else isn't looking after it."

– Rachel Carson



great blue heron



osprey

"I enter a swamp as a sacred place – a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature."

– Henry David Thoreau



fiddler crab



ducklings

"We do not inherit the earth from our fathers, we are borrowing it from our children."

– David Brower
(longtime executive director of the Sierra Club)



manatees



dragonfly

"Puffy cumulus clouds sail above the horizon bounded by islands, marsh, and an azure space of sky and water. I am insignificant in this space, but I am a part of it nonetheless."

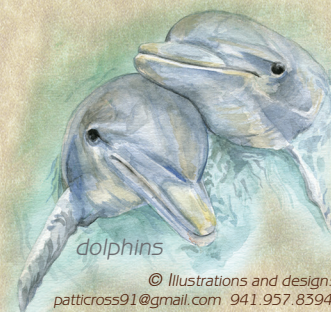
– Jeff Ripple



snowy egret

"The sky clears... and up comes the sun like a god, pouring his faithful beams across the [swamps] and forest, lighting each peak and tree....clothing them with the rainbow light, and dissolving the seeming chaos of darkness into varied forms of harmony. The ordinary work of the world goes on...."

– John Muir
(founder of Sierra Club in 1892)



dolphins

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Jacksonville

INTRACOASTAL SALT MARSH

Paddling Guide



Mike Winklebrook

INSPIRATION

Our paddling guide includes the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) and associated creeks from its intersection with the St. Johns River south to the Duval County line. Easily accessible for half-day or longer trips by paddlers of all skills and ages, this distinctive waterway is primarily bordered by expanses of pristine, protected salt marsh, pine islands, swamp, and hammock communities. Five nature preserves are found along its path: Dutton Island Preserve, Riverbranch Preserve, Tideviews Preserve, Castaway Island Preserve, and Cradle Creek Preserve.

SAVING SPECIAL PLACES – JACKSONVILLE'S PRESERVATION PROJECT

These preserves are part of Preservation Project Jacksonville – the brainchild of former Mayor John Delaney. The Preservation Project began as a land acquisition program designed to direct growth away from environmentally sensitive lands and waters. The project also sought, by taking sensitive land out of risk of development, to improve water quality and create public access to the natural and historically significant areas of our community. Due to unprecedented partnering with other governmental entities, environmental organizations and private landowners, Jacksonville was able to acquire over 82 square miles of pristine Old Florida, forever saving it from development. Jacksonville now has the largest urban park system – 84,000 acres – in the country.

HISTORY OF THE INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

Spencer Midden and Timucuan

Europeans arrived in Florida in 1562. For over 10,000 years before Jean Ribault first sailed down the St. Johns River, people lived right here, in what would later be called Timucuan territory. The oldest known coastal village site on the American eastern seaboard is Spencer's Midden, just north of Dutton Island. Radiocarbon dating indicates the site was occupied 5,500 years ago. Villagers harvested oyster, coquina, small estuarine fish, and deer. Archaeologists are discovering these people had a much more sophisticated cross-continental trading network and spiritual culture than was reported in the past.

Pablo Creek and the Construction of the ICW

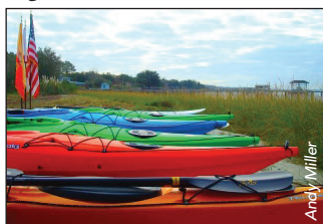
Up until the late 1800's Pablo Creek meandered south from the St. Johns River before veering west back into the cypress trees of what is now the Dee Dot Ranch in St. Johns County. In 1881 four St. Augustine entrepreneurs formed the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company in order to design and construct a canal connecting Pablo Creek and all the natural lagoons and rivers between Jacksonville and Miami. The Florida legislature encouraged the construction of the commercial blueway and gave one million acres of public land to the company to facilitate the effort. The legislature required the waterway to be at least 50 feet wide and not less than 5 feet deep at mean low tide. The work began in 1883 and was finally completed in 1912. The ICW as we know it today – a minimum of 125 feet wide and 12 feet deep at low tide – was completed in 1965.

Mythic Illanda

As you paddle north under the Atlantic Blvd. Bridge, look to the east and scan the shore of Atlantic Beach for about as far as the eye can see. This is the mythic land of Illanda. Once a Florida boom dreamer's eye envisioned a modern Venice to be constructed here. In the early 1920's his advertisements spoke of "an exquisite suburb of islands" with a hotel, yacht club and land set aside for schools and churches. The Venetian element was to be the network of canal waterways traversed by the residents in paddle boats and gondolas. The land which is now Dutton Island would have been "Plaza Illanda," modeled after the magnificent Plaza San Marco in Venice, Italy. The dreamer/developer advertised "public baths like imperial Rome" where "leisured conversation is mingled with the latest chit-chat about books and sports." The apartment homes were to be "tropically-tiled roofs and subdued Spanish structures which rise above their mirrored reflections on the dark smooth waters before them. Over all, rising like the vaulted dome in a great cathedral, will be the liquid blue of a Florida sky." In 1929 the Great Depression came. The idea for the Venetian development was abandoned and the vision of Illanda was scattered to the four corners of memory. Fortunately, we still have our cathedral – the liquid blue Florida sky.

THE MAGIC OF THE SALT MARSH

Salt marshes can be breathtakingly beautiful, particularly in the late afternoon when the warm light of the sun turns the grasses to the color of topaz. Our salt marshes are flooded twice a day by the highest tides in Florida. Winding creeks penetrate the marshes like arteries and veins. Waiting patiently in eddies or in the depths at the mouths of the creeks are large fish, ready to feast on the lower members of the food web floating quickly toward them. As low tide arrives, one can see muddy tidal flats extending from the marshes. Shorebirds flock to the flats and probe the mud with their tool-like beaks looking for fiddler crabs and other mud-dwellers. When the tides reverse, flooding the oyster bars and salt marsh, all kinds of organisms move in, using the marshes' vegetation for food and cover. The moving water is the magic facilitator – exchanging nutrients and organisms between the marsh and the surrounding estuarine environment. All living things in the salt marsh are hearty survivors – they must be able to withstand fluctuations in levels of water, salinity, temperature, wave energy, and oxygen. Since these waters are so shallow, their temperatures can vary from below freezing on a winter night to subtropical the following day at noon. Some days are calm; others see fearsome winds blow in off the ICW. Spending time in the salt marsh opens a treasure for the senses.



Andy Miller

POPULAR SPORT FISH

FLOUNDER

HABITAT: Channel edges on sandy bottoms near tidal passes and docks.

FISHING: Use live shrimp, sand fleas, sardines, pinfish or

TIPS: jigs bounced slowly along the bottom as you drift.

SEASON: All year.

SIZE: Minimum 12", 10 fish per person per day allowed.



REDFISH (RED DRUM)

HABITAT: Near docks and pilings, deeper holes in seagrass beds, oyster beds and channels during the warmest and coolest months.

FISHING: Use live shrimp fished on bottom or free-lined, soft-

TIPS: bodied jigs bounced slowly along bottom, or small gold spoons.

SEASON: All year.

SIZE: Not less than 18" or more than 27", 1 fish per person per day allowed.



SHEEPHEAD

HABITAT: Near bridges, docks, seawalls, pilings or any underwater structure.

FISHING: Use live shrimp, sand fleas, or small crabs on small hook.

TIPS: Fish just off the bottom and on first tug, strike hard.

SEASON: All year.

SIZE: Minimum 12", 15 fish per person per day allowed.



SNOOK

HABITAT: Canals, tidal creeks, and other deep, warm waters in cool months; near tidal passes, mangrove fringe and along the beaches in warmer weather.

FISHING: Use live shrimp, small mullet, live pigfish, sardines, jigs or

TIPS: minnow-like lures, either free-lined or on a bobber.

SEASON: Closed December 1-February 28 and May 1-August 31.

SIZE: Not less than 28" or more than 33", 1 fish per person per day.



SPOTTED SEATROUT

HABITAT: Seagrass beds during moderate water temperatures, deeper waters during warmer and cooler months.

FISHING: Use live shrimp, pigfish, soft-bodied jigs or

TIPS: minnow-like lures, either free-lined or on a bobber.

SEASON: Closed November-December.

SIZE: Not less than 15" or more than 20", 4 fish per person per day, only 1 fish per person may be more than 20".



Fish illustrations by Diane Rome Peebles.
Provided by the Florida Fish & Wildlife
Conservation Commission

Please note that fishing regulations change frequently; check with authorities for current size limits and closed seasons by visiting www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/

This paddling guide is brought to you by the Public Trust Environmental Legal Institute of Florida, Inc. (Public Trust), in partnership with the City of Atlantic Beach, the City of Jacksonville, the City of Jacksonville Beach, Kayak Amelia, Kayak Adventures Florida, Jax Surf and Paddle, and Visit Jacksonville.

The mission of the Public Trust is the zealous protection of the Preservation Project properties as well as other federal and state protected lands and waters, and the promotion of the use and enjoyment of these natural areas. More extensive information about the history and ecology of this area, accessible parks, areas to visit, interesting features, critters, and tides, as well as printable maps and links to partner and other websites, a calendar, and messageboard may be found at: www.jaxintracoastalpaddling.org

Copies of this guide may be requested from the Public Trust or its partners (or via the website).