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CANOEING & KAYAKING

FLORIDA

4TH EDITION



Johnny Molloy



MENASHA RIDGE PRESS

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

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OVERVIEW MAP



The Central Panhandle





PART TWO THE CENTRAL PANHANDLE

12 APALACHICOLA RIVER

◆ **OVERVIEW** Once overlooked as a paddling destination, the mighty Apalachicola—which drains the also-mighty Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers—flows south from Lake Seminole, then brawls south over 100 miles to Apalachicola Bay. Much of the river’s free-flowing journey traverses remote terrain, where overflow swamps and protected lands of the Apalachicola National Forest, as well as other public properties, conspire to keep the powerful waterway out of the public eye and enjoyed mostly by locals, who tour the river and utilize the floating houses you will see in places.

Yet paddlers have discovered this now-official state paddling trail, which has arguably the fastest current in Florida. I have paddled the river from the town of Chattahoochee over 100 miles to the town of Apalachicola on the Gulf and proclaim it a fine paddle-camping adventure. Sandbars and wooded public lands make finding campsites easier than in other places in the highly populated Sunshine State. Numerous landings make shorter trips possible, however.

Fall through spring is the best time to paddle the Apalachicola—the temperatures are down, the motorboaters are mostly absent, and you can enjoy fall colors or spring’s reemergence while on this wide waterway. The Apalachicola is wide throughout and open to winds and sun.

Upon leaving Hopkins Park in the town of Chattahoochee, the Apalachicola is already powering south, unleashed from Lake Seminole. On this upper stretch, the river passes under two busy roads and by a power plant yet stays in relatively remote terrain. Then it speeds below the high bluffs of Torreya State Park and later other highlands, such as Alum Bluff, before

The Central Panhandle

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rolling to Bristol. South of here, the river becomes even more remote, traversing vast segments of untamed terrain, especially below the confluence with the Chipola River. Side tributaries beckon, but the Apalachicola speeds on, passing a must-stop at Prospect Bluff Historic Site. The lowermost part of the river includes confluences with multiple tidal streams and channels, but if you stay with the Apalachicola River, you will end up at the historic seaside town of Apalachicola, a Florida paddling adventure of the first order.

Along the way you will see mile markers, wing dams, and dikes, vestiges of the attempt to make the river navigable for commerce. In our age, however, the Apalachicola River is a designated National Recreation Trail, or blueway. Visit tinyurl.com/arpts for a downloadable guide that notes scenic sights, ramps, and side streams. Try this big river out, and it will make you rethink the paddling possibilities of waterways big and small.

📍 **MAPS** APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST (U.S. FOREST SERVICE); APALACHICOLA RIVER BLUEWAY (FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION/FLORIDA DESIGNATED PADDLING TRAILS); USGS CHATTAHOOCHEE, SNEADS, ROCK BLUFF, BRISTOL, BLOUNTSTOWN, ESTIFFANULGA, ORANGE, DEAD LAKES, WEWAHITCHKA, KENNEDY CREEK, FORBES ISLAND, JACKSON RIVER, WEST PASS, APALACHICOLA

A

Chattahoochee to Estiffanulga Landing

Class	I
Length	42 mi
Time	Varies
Gauge	Online
Level	44 ft (maximum)
Gradient	0.5 fpm
Scenery	A

12A DESCRIPTION The Apalachicola River is formed where the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers converge, now submerged by Lake Seminole. The river then gushes from Woodruff Dam and is a huge waterway with a generally robust flow—Florida’s largest by volume—even though the water comes from Georgia and Alabama. The banks are often woodlands, with sandbars on the insides of bends. The first big bluff comes below the I-10 bridge. Deer and other wildlife are abundant. Birds, from songbirds to raptors, hover around the river corridor. Sandbars are abundant at lower water levels.

After 10.0 miles, float below the perched Historic Gregory House at Torreya State Park. Landings are well spaced along this section.

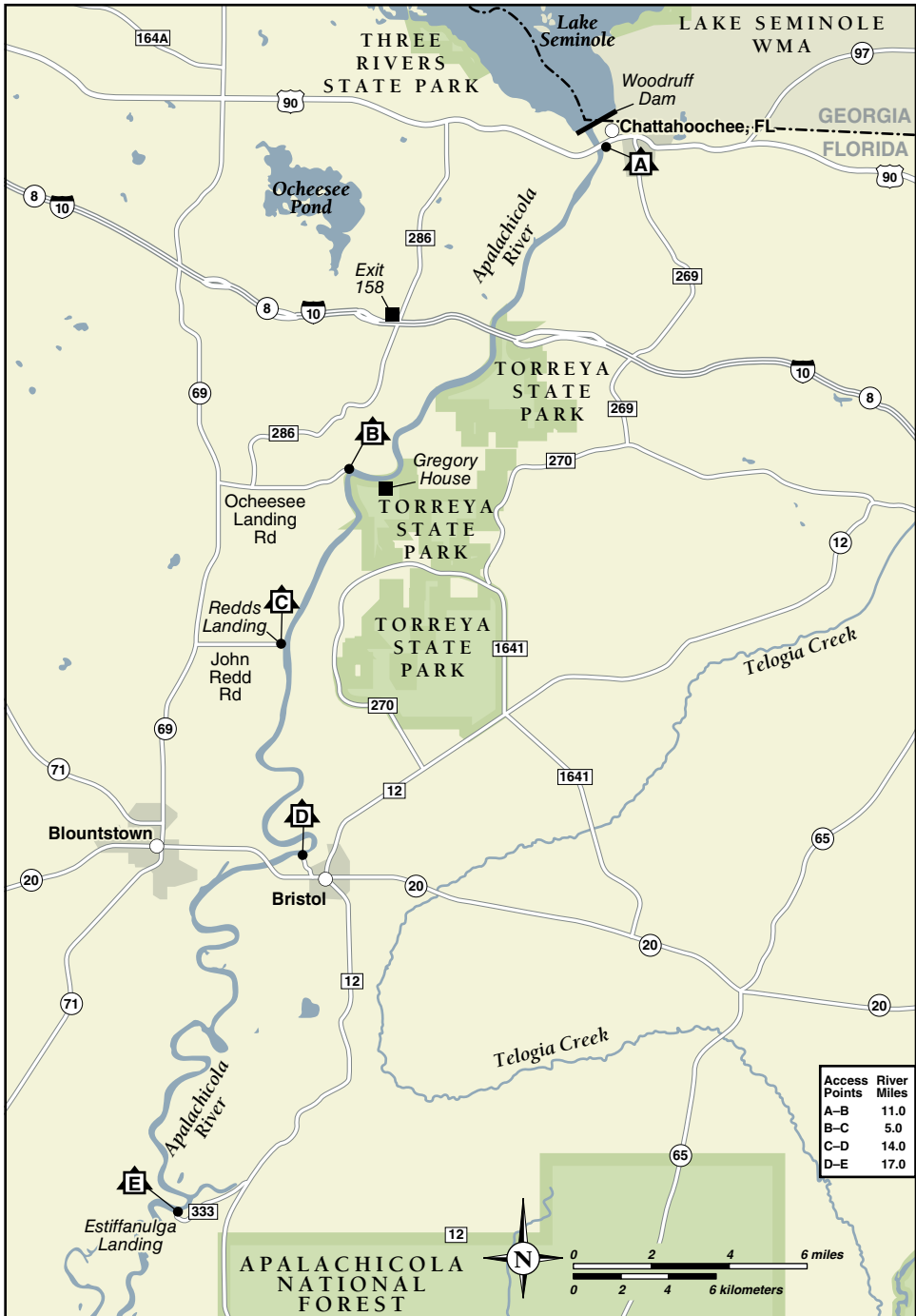
Ocheese Landing comes in a mile below the Gregory House. Pass beneath Bluff Rock before coming to Redds Landing on the west side of the waterway. Before reaching Bristol, paddle under the most impressive bluff of all: Alum Bluff. The landing in Bristol is off River Road.

📍 **SHUTTLE** To reach Estiffanulga Landing from the intersection of FL 20 and County Road 12 in Bristol, take CR 12 south 8.4 miles, then turn right onto CR 333. Follow it 2.0 miles to turn right again on Northwest Joe Red Shuler Road. Continue 0.4 mile to the boat ramp. **GPS COORDINATES: 30.308076, -85.040027**

To reach the uppermost put-in at Hopkins Park from downtown Chattahoochee, take US 90 West 0.1 mile and turn left onto River Landing Road. Follow the road 0.4 mile to a ramp on the Apalachicola. **GPS COORDINATES: 30.700751, -84.857261**

📍 **GAUGE** Find real-time water levels and flow rates at waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/rt. The relevant USGS gauge is Apalachicola River at Chattahoochee, Florida. There is no minimum runnable level. The maximum recommended runnable level is 44 feet.

Apalachicola River A: Chattahoochee to Estifanulga Landing



B Estiffanulga Landing to Apalachicola

Class	I
Length	69 mi
Time	Varies
Gauge	Online
Level	Below 5.5 ft (optimal)
Gradient	0.5 fpm
Scenery	A+

12B DESCRIPTION A bluff rises below Estiffanulga, but generally the banks are lower, the river bends more, and the shores become even more remote. Overflow swamps and low, willowy banks become more common, keeping the corridor wild. Side channels along the main shore are more numerous. Reach civilization at Gaskin Park, where the Chipola Cutoff links the Apalachicola with the Chipola River. You'll see floating houses along the banks. Pass Sand Mountain, a large deposit of grains, 6.0 miles below Gaskin Park, then pass the lower, main entrance of the Chipola River 10.0 miles beyond Sand Mountain.

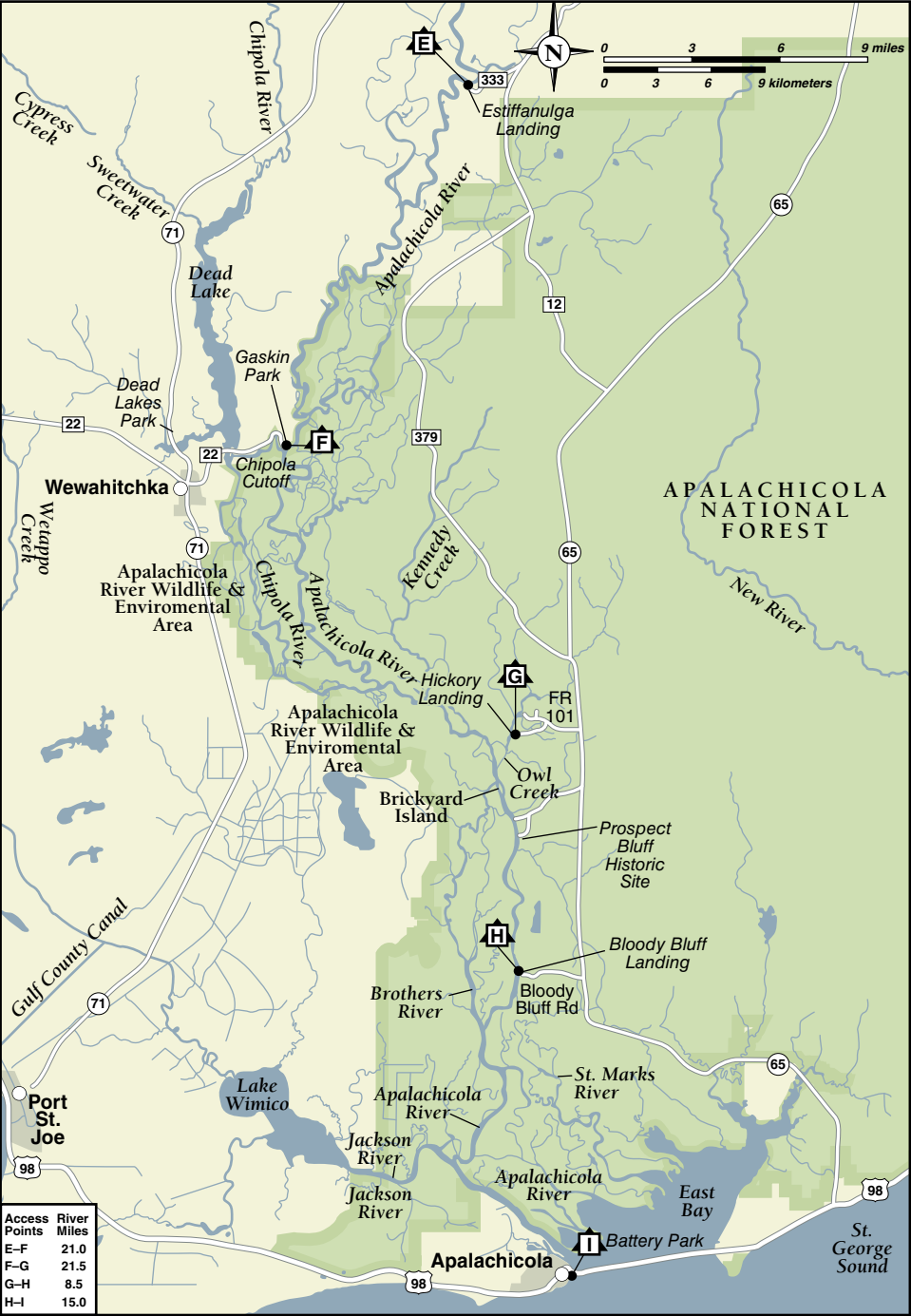
Several alluring streams, including Kennedy Creek and Brushy Creek, flow forth from the national forest on the east bank. Hickory Landing is located 1.5 miles up Owl Creek, where there is an Apalachicola National Forest campground.

Three miles below the mouth of Owl Creek, stop at Prospect Bluff Historic Site, which contains the ruins of two forts. The first was built in 1814 by the British during the War of 1812. Upon their return to England for negotiations, it served as a settlement for the Black and Indigenous people they had recruited to protect the fort in their absence. Officially called Prospect Bluff, this settlement was also known as the Negro Fort. The fort was destroyed in 1816 by the American military, killing most of the residents. Two years later, a second fort, Fort Gadsden, was built and named under the direction of Major General Andrew Jackson in the First Seminole War. It sat dormant from 1821—when Florida became a US territory—until 1862, when the Confederate army took it over during the Civil



SANDBARS ADORN THE INSIDES OF BENDS ON THE APALACHICOLA.

Apalachicola River B: Estifanulga Landing to Apalachicola



This map of Taylor County, Florida, displays a network of major roads including US Highways 19, 90, 221, 98, 27, 319, 10, 31, 41, 75, 145, 6, 51, and 26, as well as State Routes 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25. Key geographical features include Lake Iamonia, Little Lake, and the Econfina River of Taylor County. Major rivers shown are the St. Marks River, Aucilla River, Wakulla River, Suwannee River, and Steinhathee River. Towns and locations marked include Tallahassee, Monticello, Greenville, Madison, Drifton, Perry, Mayo, Fish Creek, Tennille, Cross City, and Steinhathee. The Gulf of Mexico is to the south, and the border with Georgia is to the north. A scale bar indicates distances in miles (0 to 15) and kilometers (0 to 15), and a north arrow is provided.

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23 Wacissa River	p. 105	26 Steinhatchee River	p. 113



PART THREE THE BIG BEND

21 WAKULLA RIVER

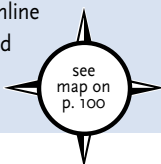
◆ **OVERVIEW** Here's your chance to paddle the waterway that emerges from the world's largest and deepest freshwater spring. That is saying a lot and is a point of pride for Florida paddlers. The Wakulla is a large river originating at Wakulla Springs, with Indian Springs, Sally Ward Spring, and McBride Slough also contributing their crystalline waters. Wakulla Springs is now a first-rate Florida state park.

Indigenous people came to Wakulla Springs for thousands of years, and visitors still come to see the massive upwelling and abundant wildlife along the river and to stay at a celebrated lodge near the spring. Manatees are spotted year-round. Once privately held, the clear-as-air springs and adjacent deep forests were once used as the backdrop for many a movie. As such, the springs and the first 3 miles of the river were fenced in just above FL 365. This fence—kept in place by the state when the springs became a state park—prevents access to the first 3 miles of this navigable-to-boats stream. The old Tallahassee–St. Marks Rail-Trail runs parallel to the Wakulla and provides an alternative shuttle option for hikers and bikers.

◆ **MAPS** USGS CRAWFORDVILLE EAST, ST. MARKS

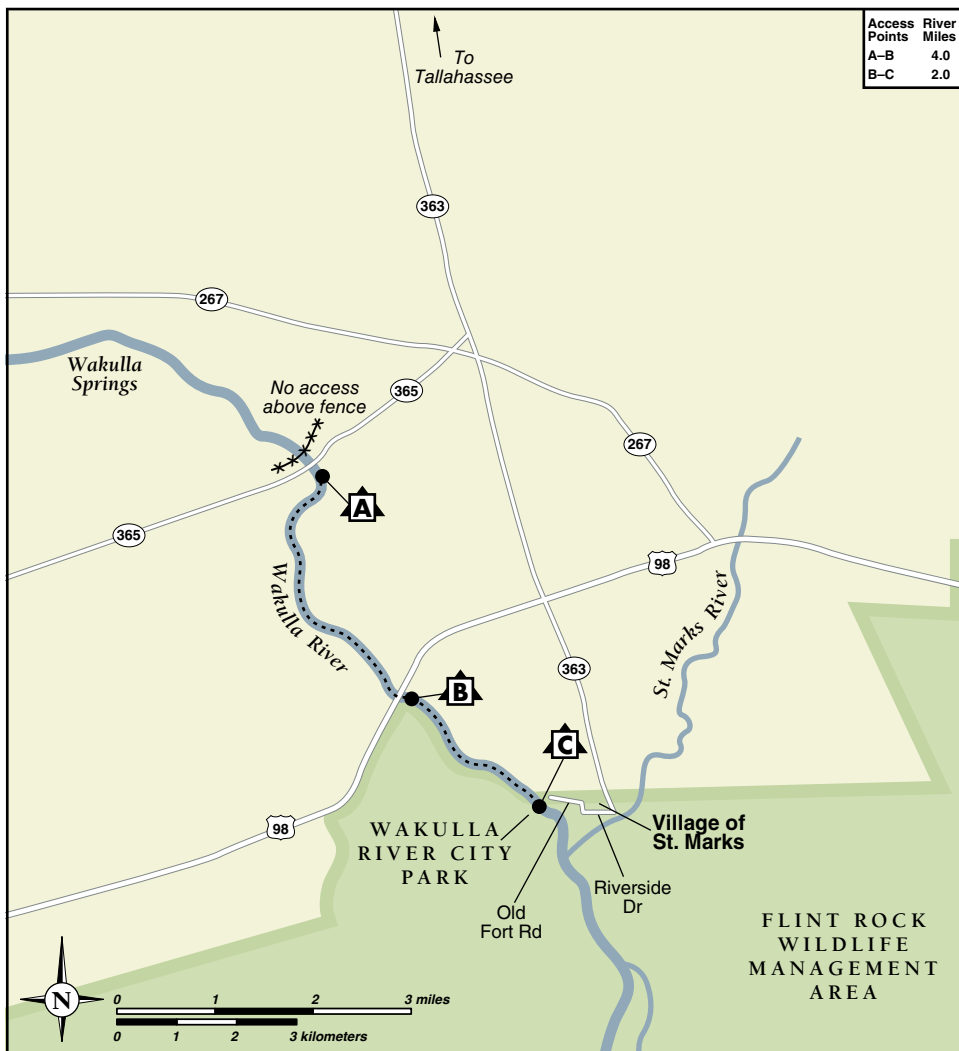
FL 365 to Wakulla River City Park

Class	I
Length	6 mi
Time	3 hr
Gauge	Visual, online
Level	Spring fed
Gradient	0.2 fpm
Scenery	B



21 DESCRIPTION The Wakulla River is a designated Outstanding Florida Water, and this section is a state-designated paddling trail, deservedly so. Because the river can be busy with motorboaters and anglers in the summertime, winter offers a superior paddling experience. Paddlers can put in and take out at the FL 365 bridge by simply paddling downstream

Wakulla River: FL 365 to Wakulla River City Park



and returning up the river, especially since the current tends to flow mildly. The clear water of the wide stream enhances your underwater wildlife-viewing opportunities. The Wakulla flows around several islands, but the deep, broad nature of the river allows you to choose which side of the islands to paddle on. It is 4.0 miles from FL 365 to US 98. A public access point is located on the southeast side of the US 98 bridge, next to an outfitter. It is 2.0 miles farther to the takeout at Wakulla River

City Park, on the east bank. Below here, the Wakulla flows into the St. Marks River, which continues to the Gulf of Mexico.

SHUTTLE To reach the takeout from the intersection of US 319 and Woodville Highway/FL 363 in Tallahassee, drive south on FL 363 for 15.8 miles to reach a T-intersection in the village of St. Marks. Turn right on Riverside Drive and, in 0.2 mile, turn left on Old Fort Road. Follow the road west 0.4 mile—the

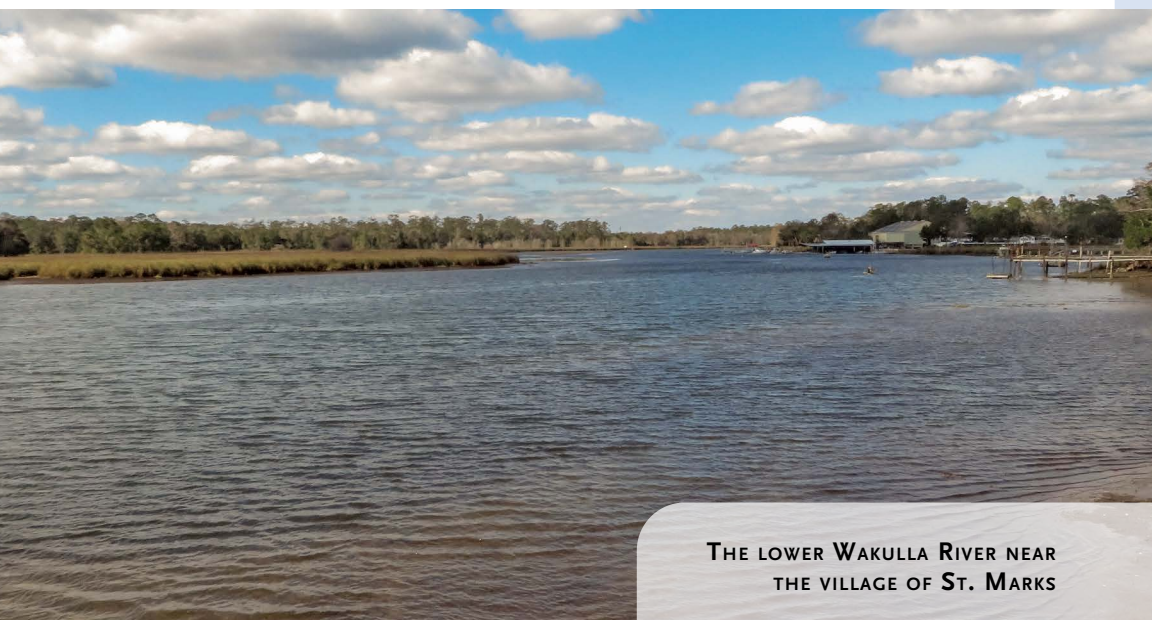
name changes to Yacht Lane past the intersection with Fire Escape Road. Just past the St. Marks Yacht Club on your left, make a quick jog right on City Park Avenue to end at Wakulla River City Park, which has a dock and paddler access. **GPS COORDINATES: 30.155498, -84.212438**

To reach the upper put-in from Tallahassee, take FL 363 South 10.2 miles. Turn right (west) on FL 267, then turn quickly left (south)

on Shadeville Road/FL 365 and follow it 2.2 miles to the bridge over the Wakulla River. The ramp is on the west side of the bridge.

GPS COORDINATES: 30.213156, -84.262040

📍 **GAUGE** The Wakulla River is spring fed and paddleable year-round. Find real-time water levels and flow rates at waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/rt. The relevant gauge is Wakulla River near Crawfordville, Florida.



THE LOWER WAKULLA RIVER NEAR
THE VILLAGE OF ST. MARKS



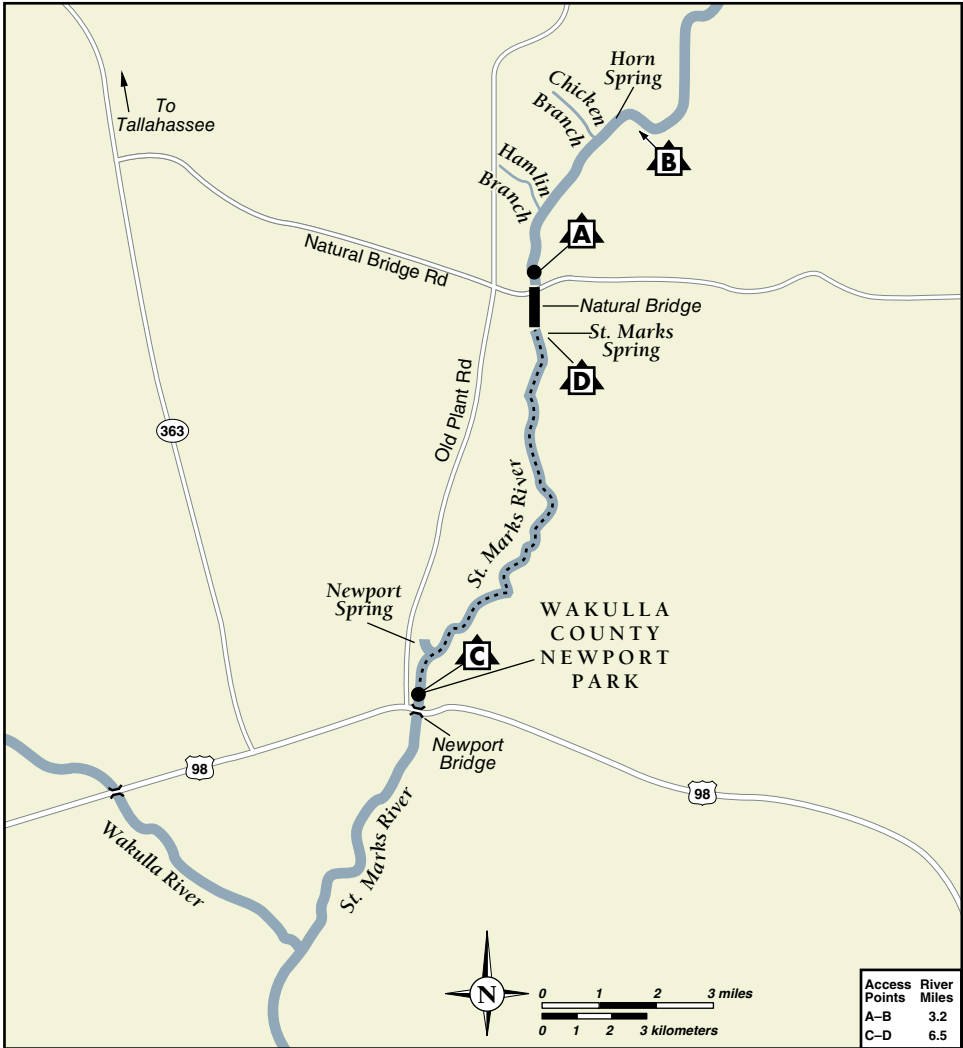
22

ST. MARKS RIVER

📍 **OVERVIEW** The St. Marks River flows through swampy terrain with a preponderance of cypress, magnolia, palm, and other lowland vegetation. The color of this clear, blue-green river results from its limestone bottom, and it has a variety of waterweeds above and below the surface. The current is mild, making it possible to paddle upstream easily.

The uppermost reaches of the St. Marks River drain ponds north of US 90, but the river there is a minute stream, protected within St. Marks River Preserve State Park. The St. Marks becomes truly riverine—and paddleable—when clear Horn Spring flows about 350 feet to feed it. Flowing freely and boldly for 2.5 miles, the St. Marks promptly exits to the underworld, flowing underground, below the renowned St. Marks Natural Bridge, an aboriginal river

St. Marks River A–B



crossing and the site of an 1865 Civil War battle that kept Tallahassee as the only state capital east of the Mississippi that remained in Confederate hands. Below the natural bridge, the St. Marks rises and stays aboveground for its final 11 miles to merge with the Wakulla River and flow 3 miles to the Gulf of Mexico.

Several springs in the area of the natural bridge are also reoccurrences of the St. Marks River. These include Natural Bridge Spring and at least four springs in the Rhodes Springs group. They rise in an area with dense vegetation, swamp, and karst features such as sinkholes and solution tubes. The river does not have a well-defined riverbed until about 0.75 mile south of Natural Bridge Road at St. Marks Springs; this area is closed to public access.

A Natural Bridge to Horn Spring and Back

Class	I
Length	6.4 mi (round-trip)
Time	3.5 hr
Gauge	Visual
Level	Spring fed
Gradient	0.5 fpm
Scenery	A

22A DESCRIPTION You begin this segment by paddling upstream from Natural Bridge to Horn Spring, then back downstream, since access roads to Horn Spring are closed. Despite the short segment and upstream paddle, the lush riverside woodland—rife with impressive cypress trees amid deep swamps—offers paddlers an eyeful of gorgeous Big Bend beauty. The current is fast in places, the river being only 30 or so feet wide, and you will navigate a blowdown or two, but the scenery is worth it.

Waterweeds cover the lower end of the sink, and you have to put in above them. The river is 80–100 feet wide at this point. Heading

upstream, pass a house on your right, then enter wooded swamp that is protected on the right bank as NATURAL BRIDGE BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC STATE PARK and on the left as PLANK ROAD STATE FOREST. The river narrows the farther up you go. The stone-and-sand bottom is clearly visible, along with swaying underwater vegetation. At 1.3 miles, the stream splits around a couple of small islands. At 1.5 miles, Hamlin Branch enters on river left. At 1.8 miles, pass pilings of a very old bridge. By 2.0 miles the stream is but 20 feet wide and entirely canopied.

Reach the Horn Spring group after 3.2 miles. Two adjacent springs actually comprise the milky-blue spring. The main spring is larger, about 80 feet across and 30 feet deep beneath overhanging trees. The smaller spring is about 30 feet in diameter. Their combined flow puts the river into *St. Marks River*.

In addition to the flow from Horn Spring, coffee-colored yet partly spring-fed Chicken Branch adds its flow, entering the west bank just below Horn Spring's inflow. Additional spring seeps and dark streamlets add volume to the river and riverside swamps. Keep your eyes



THE ST. MARKS RIVER FLOWS THROUGH LUSH, DEEP WOODS EN ROUTE TO HORN SPRING.

open for magnificent wide-based cypresses towering over a wealth of trees, namely palms and magnolias, on your return to the put-in.

❖ **DIRECTIONS** To reach the put-in/takeout from the intersection of US 319 and Woodville Highway/FL 363 in Tallahassee, drive south on FL 363 for 4.6 miles. Turn left (east)

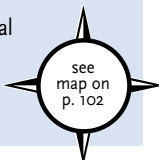
on Natural Bridge Road and drive 6.2 miles to Natural Bridge Battlefield Historic State Park. The access is on the left, 0.2 mile beyond the battlefield monument. **GPS COORDINATES:** 30.285229, -84.149749

❖ **GAUGE** Horn Spring feeds this section, keeping it paddleable year-round.



B St. Marks Spring and Back

Class	I
Length	13 mi (round-trip)
Time	3 hr
Gauge	Online, visual
Level	Spring fed
Gradient	1 fpm
Scenery	B



22B DESCRIPTION Due to lack of public access at St. Marks Spring, this paddle is also an out-and-back proposition. Paddlers head upstream from the Newport Bridge for a round-trip of about 13.0 miles. Allow ample time to paddle up and mostly float back down, and check the current flow rate against historical averages before engaging in a trip here.

The clear and gorgeous river emerges wide and fairly fast from St. Marks Spring but then narrows and slows down a mile below the upwelling. High banks alternate with swampy shores. About a mile above Newport Bridge, watch on the west bank for the inflow of Newport Spring, once known as Brewer Sulphur Spring. Located 0.3 mile up a run from the St. Marks River, the spring was once the site of an 1800s spa. The remote resort advertised the spring's highly pungent sulfurous waters

as a medical cure. A hotel, cabins, and a dance hall once graced the spring, now left to nature and occasional locals. Tides moderately influence current speed and water levels on this lower section of the St. Marks, sometimes exposing rocky shoals that can make paddling upstream a little more challenging.

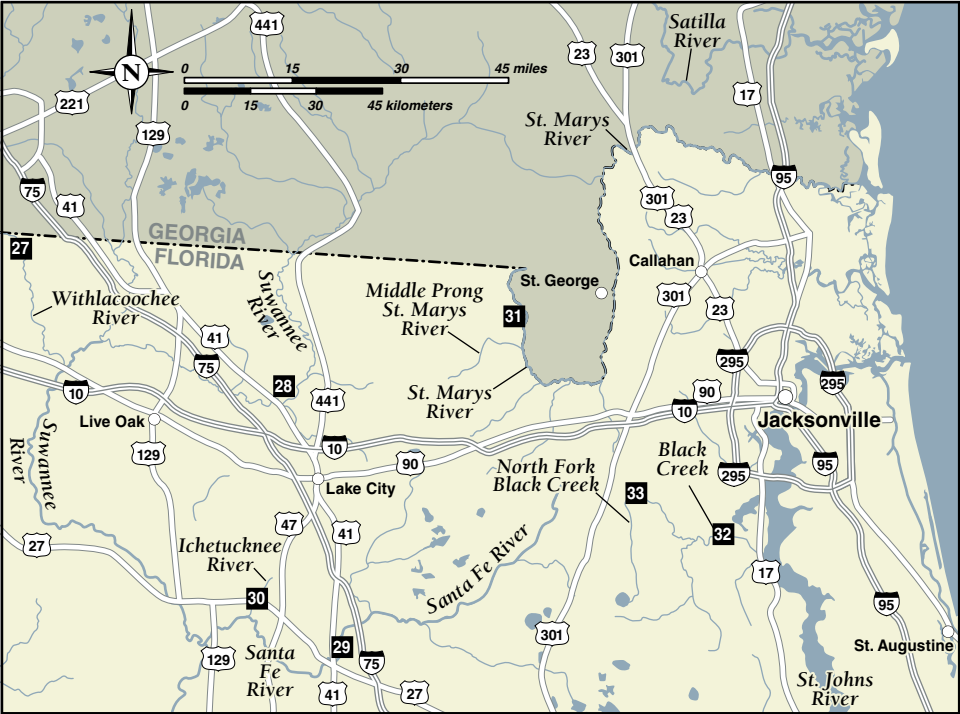
It is 5.0 miles below the Newport Bridge to the confluence of the St. Marks and the Wakulla River. Motorboaters ply this stretch of scenic waterway, making it less desirable for paddlers.

❖ **DIRECTIONS** To reach the put-in/takeout from the intersection of US 319 and Woodville Highway/FL 363 in Tallahassee, take FL 363 South 13.9 miles to US 98. Turn left on US 98 East and drive 2.5 miles, crossing the Newport Bridge over the Wakulla River; just past the bridge, turn left to access the boat launch at Newport Park. **GPS COORDINATES:** 30.199233, -84.177677

❖ **GAUGE** This part of the St. Marks is fed by St. Marks Spring and is paddleable year-round. Find real-time water levels and flow rates at waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/rt. The relevant USGS gauge is St. Marks River near Newport, Florida.



The Northern Peninsula



The Northern Peninsula

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PART FOUR THE NORTHERN PENINSULA

27 WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER (NORTH)

◆ **OVERVIEW** This is one of two rivers named Withlacoochee in Florida; they're commonly referred to using both their shared name and their locations. A large and significant tributary of the Suwannee, the northern Withlacoochee River is a state-designated paddling trail with Georgia beginnings. It drains lands northwest of Valdosta and meanders south for 70 miles before entering the Sunshine State.

Not surprisingly, the Withlacoochee resembles its mother stream, the Suwannee: limestone outcroppings border high banks where coffee-colored waters flow steadily past flanks of tupelo and cypress trees, broken by occasional shoals that can liven up a paddle. These rocky shoals make the Withlacoochee more suited to smaller boats. However, you may see local anglers vying for bass, bream, and catfish from johnboats.

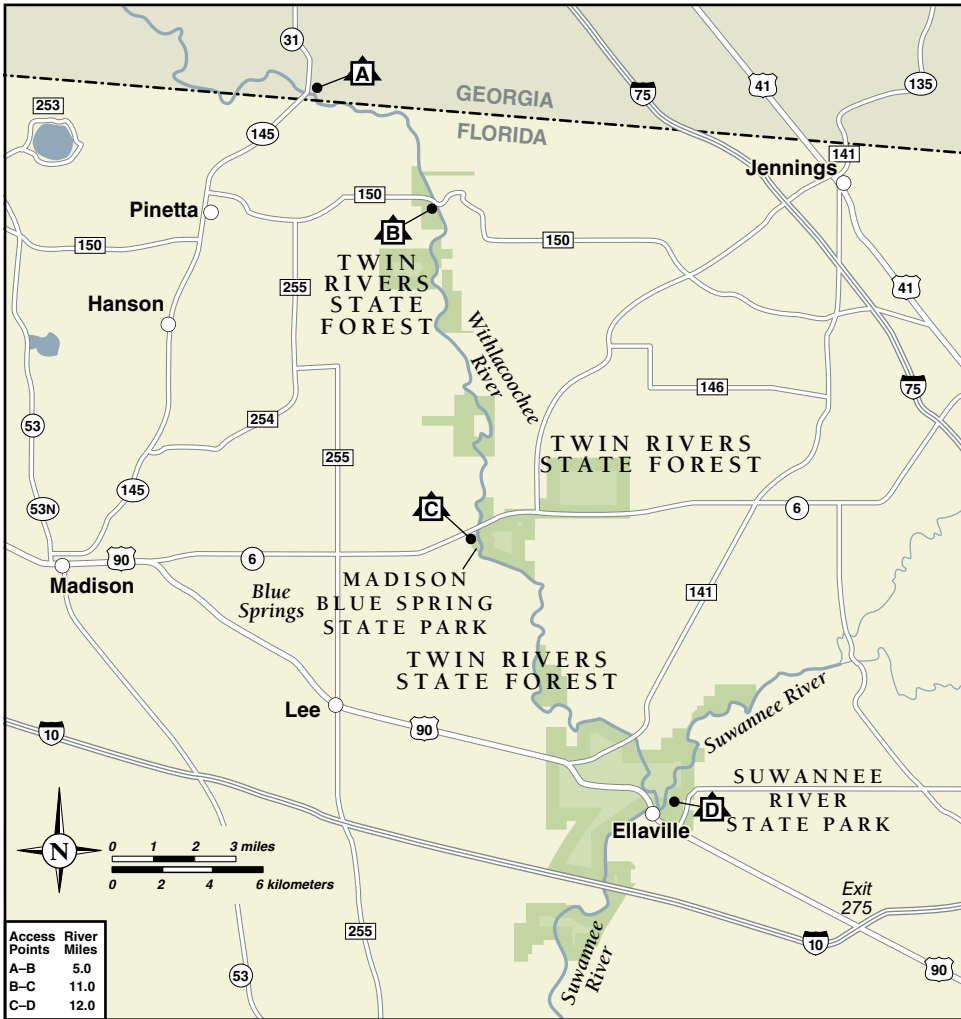
The Withlacoochee also mimics the Suwannee with clear and alluring springs along its banks. Madison Blue Spring is a good example. Located near FL 6, this spring served as a source of drinking water for Indigenous people and early Florida settlers and is now the main attraction of Madison Blue Spring State Park, which protects the spring. Yet another spring called Suwannacoochee—appropriately melding the names of the Suwannee and the Withlacoochee—is located on the west side of the “With” just above its confluence with the Suwannee. A public swimming pool was once fed by this spring. You can even see what's left of the pool by the river.

The Withlacoochee does not enjoy the wealth of sandbars found on the upper Suwannee; therefore, paddling campers have to look harder for campsites—that is, get out of the boat and physically look—and that includes along the high riverbanks where live oaks, pines, magnolias, and birches are found.

A significant yet noncontiguous portion of the riverbank lies within Twin Rivers State Forest. Look for boundary markers and camp within these public lands.

◆ **MAPS** SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL BOAT RAMPS & CANOE LAUNCHES (SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT); USGS CLAYATTVILLE (GEORGIA); USGS PINETTA, OCTAHATCHEE, ELLAVILLE (FLORIDA)

Withlacoochee River (North): Georgia State Line to Suwannee River State Park

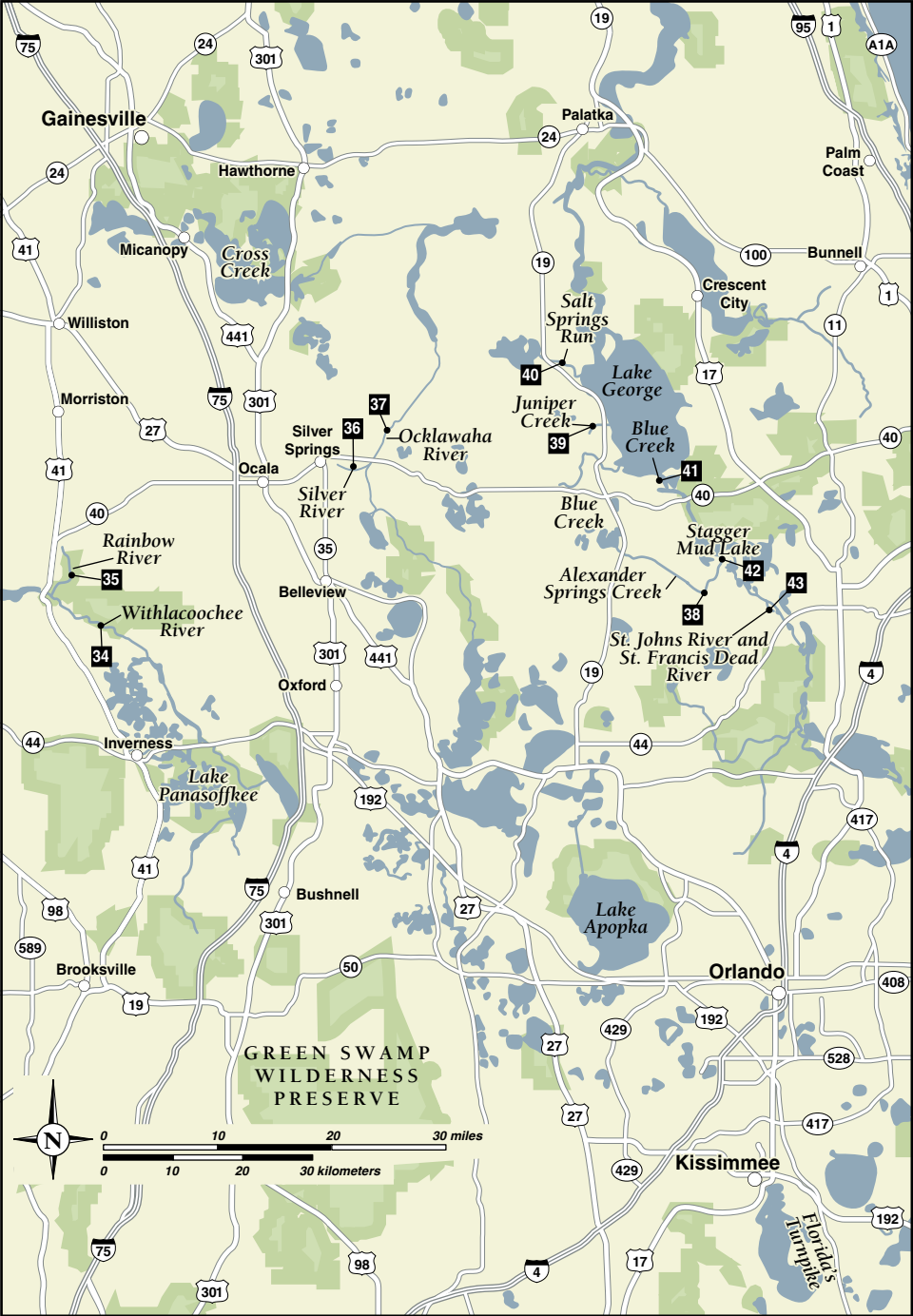


Florida–Georgia State Line to Suwannee River State Park

Class	I–I+
Length	28 mi
Time	Varies
Gauge	Online
Level	54 ft (minimum)
Gradient	1.5 fpm
Scenery	B

27 DESCRIPTION There happens to be a boat ramp almost exactly on the Florida–Georgia line, on County Road 145, and this launch marks the beginning of the designated Florida state paddling trail. That being said, the Withlacoochee is paddleable in the Peach State from its confluence with the Little River down to the Florida border. Paddlers who like

The Central Peninsula





PART FIVE THE CENTRAL PENINSULA

34 WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER (SOUTH)

◆ **OVERVIEW** You have to wonder how two rivers in Florida ended up with the unlikely name of Withlacoochee, but such is the case. This Withlacoochee River, commonly referred to as the Withlacoochee River South, has many faces, from a high-banked, narrow stream to a wider, slower waterway bordered by swamps to a swift and winding wilderness waterway to remote natural lakes where birdlife is abundant. Some sections are lined with houses, while others are as far from civilization as you can get in 21st-century Central Florida. The river is a designated Outstanding Florida Water.

The Withlacoochee South can be floated in its entirety with good planning, or it can be divided into sections. Much of the river is bordered by the Withlacoochee State Forest, conservation easements, watershed-recharge lands, or wildlife preserves. Its most remote reaches border the wildlife-rich Tsala Apopka lakes, connected to the Withlacoochee by channels and waterweed-rimmed ponds. The river extends 100 miles long, with 84 miles of quality paddling, almost all of which are part of a state-designated paddling trail. I have done the entire river in one trip and found it a rewarding adventure.

The headwaters emerge from the Withlacoochee River Swamp, then flow west and north before becoming paddleable near the community of Lacoochee. From here, the waterway reveals changing faces as it heads north—yes, north—to Dunnellon, the end of the line for most


The Central Peninsula

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paddlers. The river beyond Dunnellon enters an artificial lake, Lake Rousseau, then continues to the Gulf at Yankeetown as a straight-line channel, a legacy of the abandoned Cross Florida Barge Canal.

From Lacoochee to Dunnellon, not only does the actual waterway change, but the shores and banks change as well, ranging from wooded swamps to high-banked hardwoods and pines to live oak-clad bluffs to grassy lakes and cypress sloughs. In populated areas, you will observe docks in various states of repair, behind which stand dwellings of comparable status.

Usage along the river also varies greatly, from populous parcels where outfitters run kayaks, canoes, and tubes during the warm months to shallow, weedy lakes left only to paddlers and the occasional airboat.

 **MAPS** WITHLACOOCHEE STATE FOREST (FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES); USGS LACOOCHEE, ST. CATHERINE, WAHOO, NOBLETON, RUTLAND, LAKE PANASOFFKEE NW, STOKES FERRY, DUNNELLON SE, DUNNELLON

A

Lacoochee Park to Nobleton

Class	I
Length	27.5 mi
Time	Varies
Gauge	Phone, online
Level	38 ft (minimum)
Gradient	0.7 fpm
Scenery	B

34A DESCRIPTION The put-in at Lacoochee Park is located in the Richloam Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest, giving you 2.0 miles of wilderness floating before emerging at the County Road 575 bridge. However, that put-in is questionable for leaving your car for an extended period. At CR 575, a paddle livery offers better parking and can shuttle you to the top if you want to go the whole way.

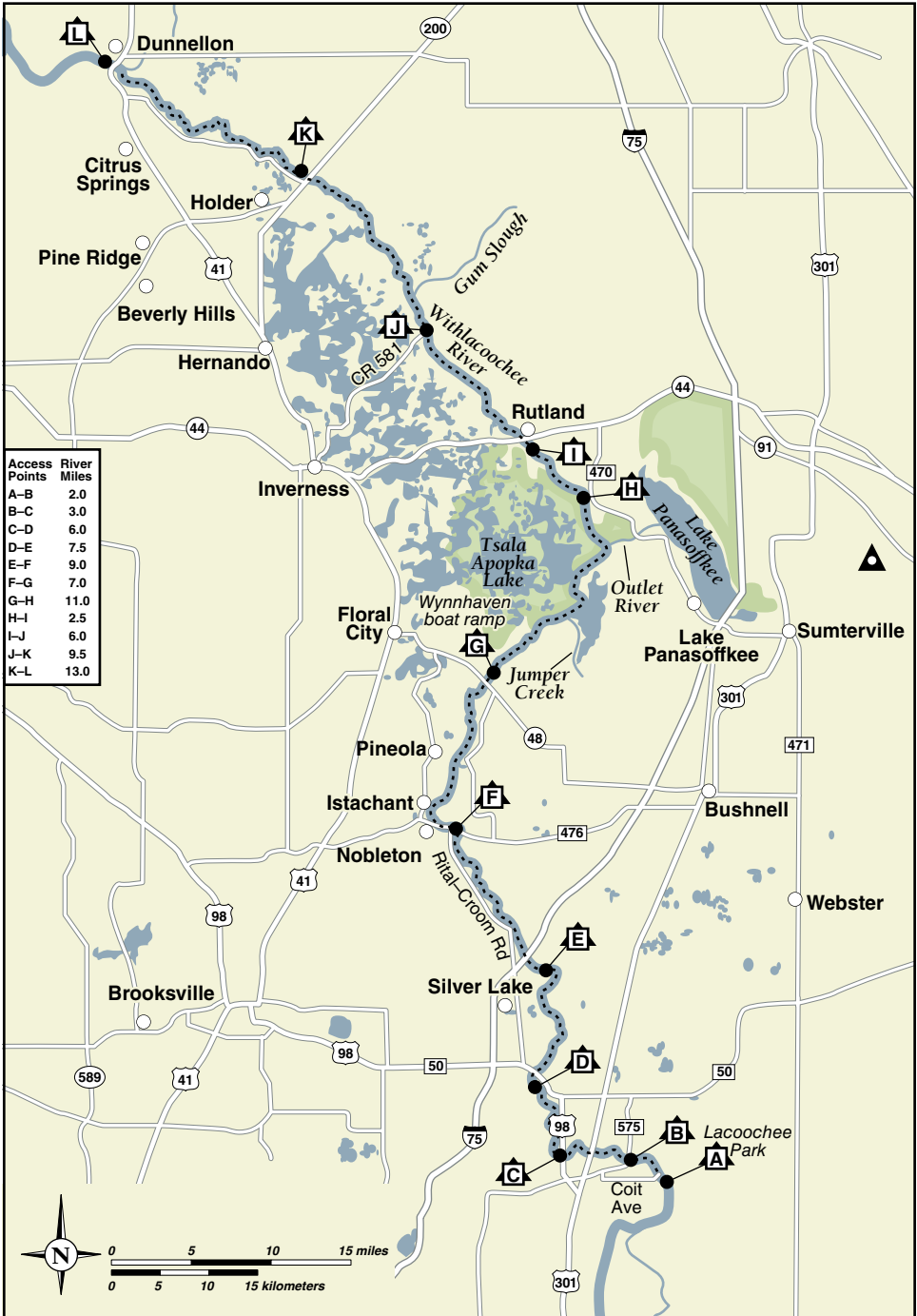
Starting at Lacoochee Park, a moderate current pushes the 35-foot-wide waterway over rocky shoals under 10-foot-high banks of live oak, pine, and palmetto. Cypress lines the stream. Houses border the river much of the way until the US 98 North/FL 50 bridge, 9.0 miles downstream from CR 575, during which you will pass under US 301 and US 98 South. It is 6.0 miles from US 98 South to

the US 98 North/FL 50 bridge. Shortly after US 98 North/FL 50, state-forest land along the left bank makes camping possible but is far from a wilderness experience. Watch for a sulphur spring on river left about a mile past the bridge. Avoid ingress and egress at this redone bridge.

It is 7.5 miles from US 98 North/FL 50 to Silver Lake. The river has widened to 50 feet, with lower banks, some swamp sloughs, and more sandbars. However, limestone continues to present itself, and cypress trees and their strange knees continue to display amazing shapes. You will pass several state-forest recreation areas ahead. Before reaching Silver Lake, you will come to Crooked River Campground 5.0 miles past the FL 50 bridge, and River Junction Campground 1.5 miles farther. The Little Withlacoochee enters on river right here, and you can actually paddle it to the campground.

Beyond River Junction, the main Withlacoochee widens, then flows into Silver Lake, a scenic body of water marred by the overhead crossing of I-75. Silver Lake Campground, part of the Silver Lake Recreation Complex, is situated on a hill on the west shore of the lake, a mile beyond River Junction. As with much of the state forest in this area, hiking

Withlacoochee River (South) A–C: Lacoochee Park to Dunnellon



trails border the river. Download a state-forest map and consider using some of these paths in combination with your paddle.

It is 7.5 miles from Silver Lake Campground to CR 476. Leaving Silver Lake, the river narrows but remains wide and slow. Watch for the official primitive Croom Canoe Camp on the left bank below the bridge. A mile past Silver Lake on your right, pass the Iron Bridge Recreation Area, with picnic tables and a boat launch, near old bridge pilings. Ahead, pass under a power line, then enter a swampy section where the river further narrows and becomes swift and canopied. Watch for the river split and signed channel leading right to Hog Island Recreation Area, with a fine campground, potable water, a boat ramp, and

a picnic area, which you reach 1.5 miles past Iron Bridge Recreation Area.

The two channels merge quickly past Hog Island, and paddlers swiftly flow through a winding cypress swamp. Houses become evident and the river widens at CR 476, especially on the right bank. An outfitter operates just past the CR 476 bridge; however, Nobleton Wayside Park, just around the corner from CR 476, offers a public canoe/kayak launch.

◆ **SHUTTLE** To reach the lowermost takeout in Nobleton from the intersection of FL 44 and US 41 in downtown Inverness, take US 41 South 15.6 miles to Lake Lindsey Road/CR 476. Turn left on CR 476, and follow it east 5.2 miles to Nobleton Wayside Park, just before



BIRDLIFE IS ABUNDANT ON THE LAKES OF THE MIDDLE WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER (SOUTH).

the bridge over the Withlacoochee River. **GPS COORDINATES: 28.646963, -82.262269**

To reach the uppermost put-in from the takeout, continue east on CR 476. After 9.3 miles, turn right on US 301 and head south 10.9 miles to FL 50. Turn left on FL 50 and head east 1.0 mile to CR 575. Turn right (south) onto CR 575, and follow it beyond the bridge over the Withlacoochee River 2.9 miles to Durden Road. Turn left (south) on Durden

Road and, after 0.4 mile, turn left on Coit Road and follow it east 1.6 miles to a high bluff bordered in concrete posts, overlooking the river.

GPS COORDINATES: 28.463827, -82.135333

◆ **GAUGE** Find real-time water levels and flow rates at waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/rt. The relevant USGS gauge is Withlacoochee River at Nobleton. It should read a minimum of 38 feet.



B Nobleton to Rutland

Class	I
Length	20.5 mi
Time	Varies
Gauge	Online
Level	38 ft (minimum)
Gradient	0.2 fpm
Scenery	B+

34B DESCRIPTION From Nobleton Wayside Park, the river displays a new face, widening to enter and exit several shallow and waterweed-bordered lakes, where alligators, wading birds, and raptors can be found among the cypresses that ring the still waters.

Enter Lake Townsen, part of a regional park, a mile beyond Nobleton Wayside Park. Skirt around small islands on the north end of the lake. The river narrows, and houses resume in places, yet pasturelands rise on the right bank. Watch for the remains of an old bridge ahead. Open onto Lake Annie 4.0 miles past Lake Townsen. Swampy banks line the shore and the river beyond. Open onto cypress-bordered Lake Nelson 2.0 miles downstream of Lake Annie. The river narrows a bit, and you reach the Wynnhaven boat

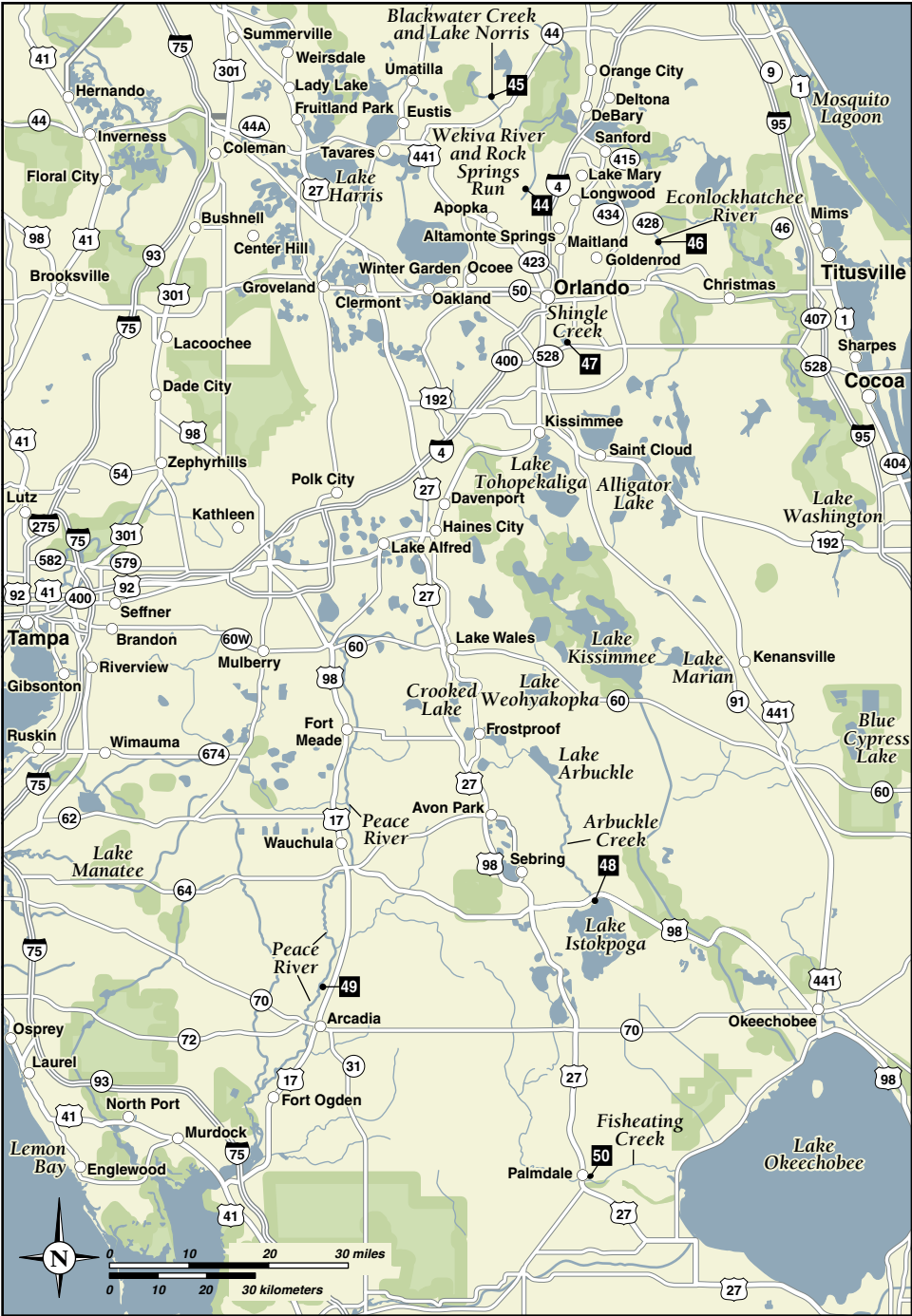
ramp on the east side of the FL 48 bridge, 7.0 miles past Nobleton and CR 476.

After FL 48, swampy shores continue to keep back riverside development, and the Withlacoochee enters the Tsala Apopka Lake region, a series of lakes and swamps with little current except where the river splits into small channels among islands. The locale exudes old, wild Florida—the *real* Florida, where birds are as populous as people in cities. Paddle campers will find campsites rare, due to the lack of high ground.

Enter mile-long Bonnet Lake about a mile downstream of FL 48. Pass Trails End RV Park landing on the west bank, where the river narrows again. The banks are now the public lands of Flying Eagle Preserve and Withlacoochee State Forest. It is 13.5 miles from FL 48 to FL 44.

You can find some dry land suitable for camping near Board Island, a half mile beyond the north end of Bonnet Lake. Here, a smaller channel splits left as the main river keeps straight. Follow the smaller channel a short distance to high ground cloaked in live oaks and palms on the left bank. This high ground is actually on the mainland just west of Board Island. The GPS coordinates for Board Island are **28.748883, -82.213883**. Airboats become more common in this stretch of shallow waters.

The Central Highlands





PART SIX THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

44 WEKIVA RIVER AND ROCK SPRINGS RUN

◆ **OVERVIEW** Rock Springs Run and the entire Wekiva River are state-designated paddling trails, and the Wekiva River is a designated Outstanding Florida Water. These surprisingly untamed waterways draw in paddlers from greater Orlando and beyond; thus, they can be crowded during the warm months and on weekends. Protected parklands and preserves keep the banks of the crystal-clear streams wild and natural, despite the proximity of civilization. Semitropical Florida wetlands are highlighted by palm, cypress, and live oak draped in resurrection fern and Spanish moss. It is truly an oasis amid ever-expanding greater Orlando.

The lowermost portion of the Wekiva River, segment C, is bordered by the Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park, but be aware that to run this segment you must paddle the final 2 miles on the St. Johns River, which is very broad and developed.

◆ **MAPS** WEKIVA RIVER/ROCK SPRINGS RUN PADDLING GUIDE
(FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION/FLORIDA DESIGNATED
PADDLING TRAILS); USGS SORRENTO, SANFORD SW, FOREST CITY

The Central Highlands

44 Wekiva River and Rock Springs Run	p. 181	47 Shingle Creek	p. 192
45 Black Water Creek and Lake Norris	p. 185	48 Arbuckle Creek	p. 194
46 Econlockhatchee River	p. 189	49 Peace River	p. 198
		50 Fisheating Creek	p. 204

A Kings Landing to Wekiva Island

Class	I
Length	8 mi
Time	4 hr
Gauge	Visual
Level	Spring fed
Gradient	1.2 fpm
Scenery	A

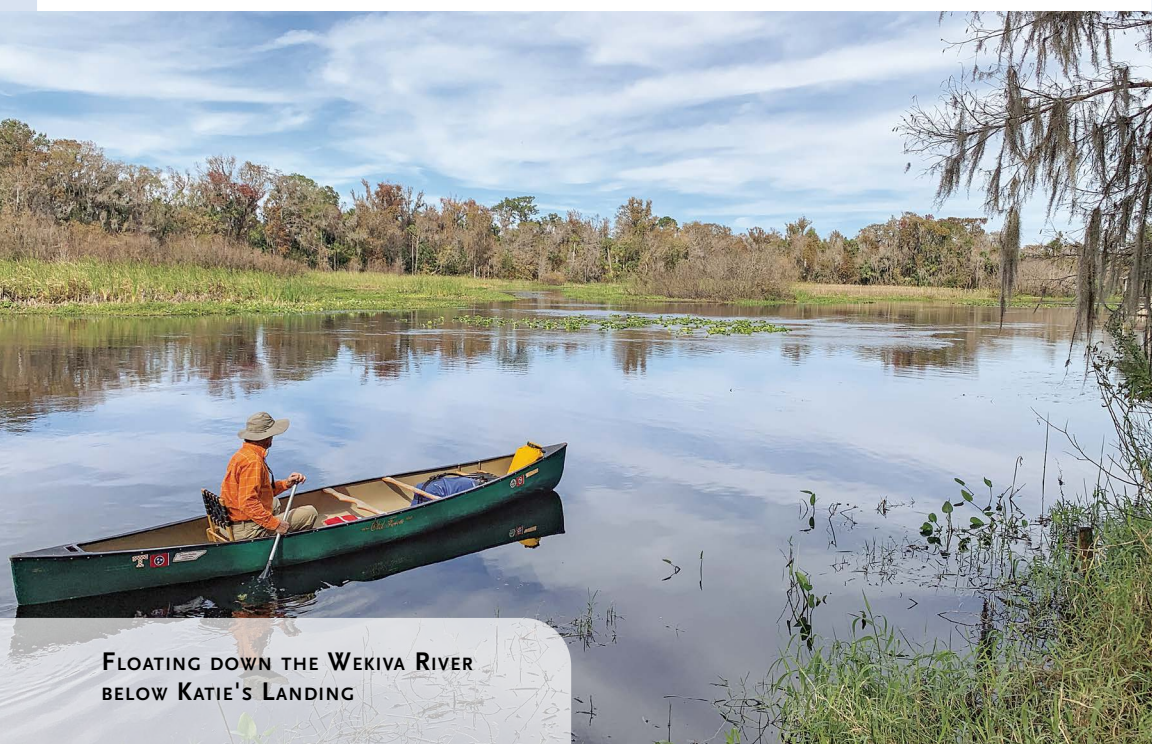
44A DESCRIPTION From Kings Landing, paddlers must first navigate a small canal to reach Rock Springs Run. From the canal, join the deeply channeled, 40-foot-wide run, bordered by lily pads and waterweeds. These weeds clog the shores, creating an effective channel 10–15 feet wide. Bring your short kayak, paddleboard, or a canoe to negotiate the twists and turns, and try to avoid summer weekends, when other paddlers and tubers make for a crowded waterway.

The first 4.0 miles of the run are archetypal Florida waters, protected as Wekiwa

Springs State Park and Rock Springs Run State Reserve. Few will course through this stream disappointed: a wealth of native vegetation rises along the shores, complete with a tree canopy. Four designated and reservable backcountry campsites enhance this designated state paddling trail (call 407-553-4383 for reservations).

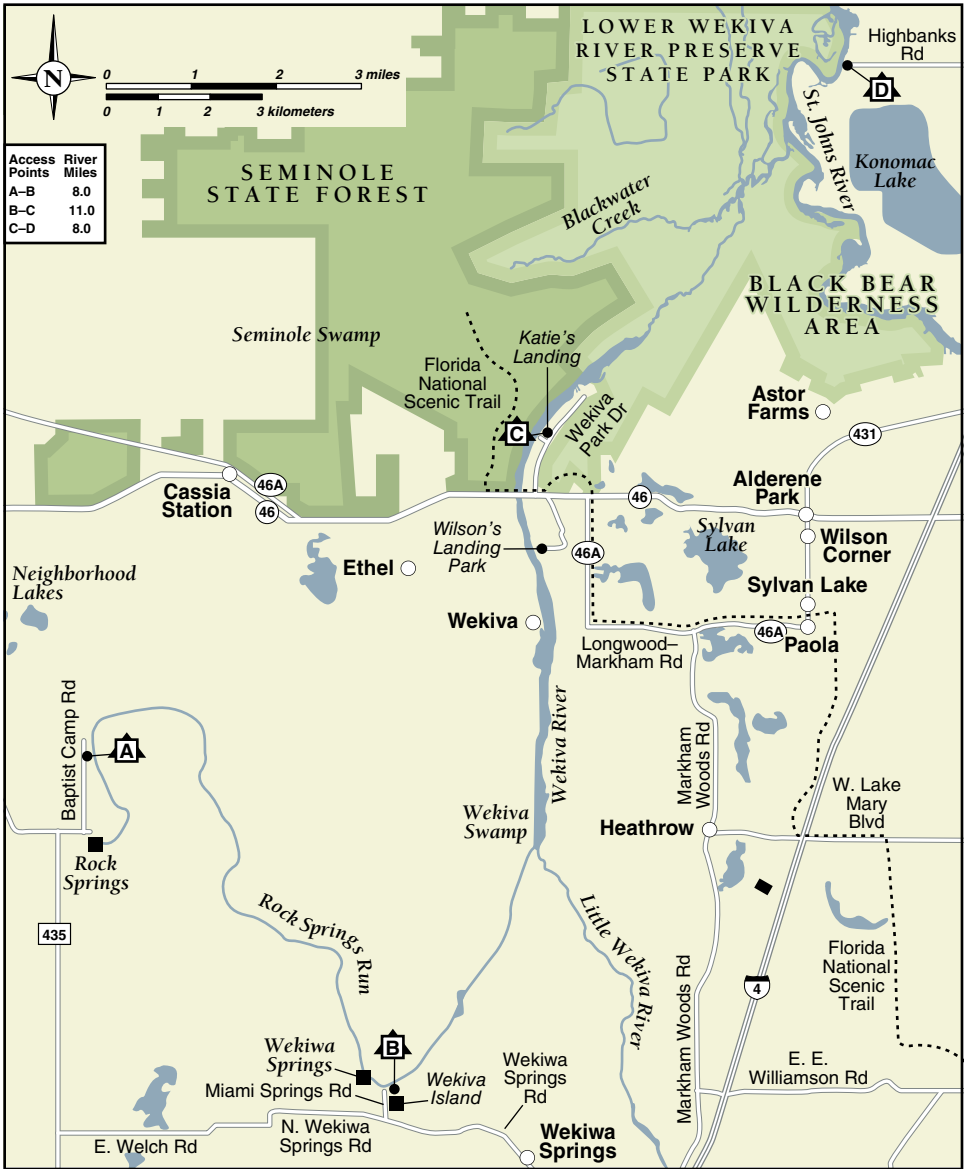
After these first 4.0 miles, Rock Springs Run widens up to 100 feet and shallows, with a sand bottom between flowing waterweeds. Big Buck, Indian Mound, and Otter Camp campsites are clustered between 4.5 and 5.3 miles. The river eventually narrows again and subsequently deepens under tree canopy.

Paddlers may turn right and paddle up to the entrance to Wekiwa Spring upon reaching the confluence with the Wekiwa River. This is the location of Wekiwa Springs State Park, which has camping, as well as canoe and kayak launching facilities that provide an alternate takeout (for a fee). Despite the current, the half-mile paddle up to Wekiwa Spring is well worth the energy expended.



FLOATING DOWN THE WEKIVA RIVER
BELOW KATIE'S LANDING

Wekiva River and Rock Springs Run A–C: Kings Landing to High Banks Landing



Shortly below the confluence of the Wekiva River and Rock Springs Run is Wekiwa Island. This is a privately owned public-access facility with kayak, paddleboard, and canoe rentals; a restaurant; a store; and a dock. An access fee is charged.

SHUTTLE To reach the Wekiwa Island takeout from the intersection of US 441 and Park Avenue/FL 435 in Apopka, drive north 2.3 miles on FL 435 to East Welch Road. Turn right on East Welch Road and, in 2.8 miles, turn left (north) on Wekiwa Springs Road. In

3.2 miles, turn left (north) on Miami Springs Drive to reach Wekiva Island, 0.5 mile farther.

GPS COORDINATES: 28.713368, -81.444243

To reach the King's Landing put-in, backtrack on East Welch Road to FL 435. Turn right (north) on FL 435 and, in 3.5 miles, turn

right (east) on East Kelly Park Road; continue 0.3 mile and turn left on Baptist Camp Road. Continue north 0.8 mile to King's Landing.

GPS COORDINATES: 28.768504, -81.503804

🔗 **GAUGE** Rock Springs Run is spring fed and runnable year-round.



B

Wekiva Island to Katie's Landing

Class	I
Length	11 mi
Time	6 hr
Gauge	Visual, online
Level	Spring fed
Gradient	0.9 fpm
Scenery	B

44B DESCRIPTION After you leave Wekiva Island marina, the Wekiva River turns north. River width varies from 50 to 150 feet, occasionally splitting around islands. Watch for the Buffalo Tram designated campsite on river left, 2.3 miles downstream from Wekiva Island. The right bank is protected as Wekiva River Buffer Conservation Area, while the left bank is within the confines of Rock Springs Run State Reserve.

The Little Wekiva River enters from the right a little more than a mile past the Buffalo Tram campsite. Here, the Wekiva expands to more than 300 feet. A few miles from the Little Wekiva, watch the left bank for a canal linking the river to Wekiva Falls, a private tourist attraction that offers canoe and kayak rentals and fee-based landing access. This shallow, grassy area continues to FL 46.

Wilson's Landing Park is on the right about a mile beyond Wekiva Falls. It has a takeout, restrooms, and water. The FL 46 bridge is not far downstream, as is the newer

Wekiva Parkway toll-road span. The Katie's Landing takeout, part of Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park, is on the right about a mile beyond FL 46.

🔗 **SHUTTLE** To reach the Katie's Landing takeout from Exit 94 off I-4, take FL 434 West 0.2 mile to Markham Woods Road and turn right (north). Drive 7.4 miles and turn left (west) on Markham Road. In 1.3 miles, turn right (north) on Longwood–Markham Road and follow it 1.5 miles to FL 46. Turn left (west) on FL 46 and follow it 0.6 mile to Wekiva Park Drive. Turn right on Wekiva Park Drive and follow it north about a mile to Katie's Landing, on the left. **GPS COORDINATES: 28.828630, -81.411831**

To reach the put-in from the takeout, backtrack to FL 434 on Markham Woods Road. Turn right (west) on FL 434 and, in 0.7 mile, turn right (north) on Wekiva Springs Road. Follow Wekiva Springs Road 3.2 miles to a stoplight at Miami Springs Drive/Hunt Club Boulevard. Turn right (north) on Miami Springs Drive to reach Wekiva Island, 0.5 mile farther. **GPS COORDINATES: 28.713368, -81.444243**

🔗 **GAUGE** The Wekiva River is spring fed and runnable year-round. Find real-time water levels and flow rates at waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/rt. The USGS gauge helpful in determining flow rates for any given day is Wekiva River near Sanford, Florida.



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