

S15LK Day Paddles - Lower Keys

Sawyer Key/Tarpon Belly Paddle Information Sheet

Description: This is a twelve-mile round trip into open water. You will mostly be following Cudjoe Channel. A stop at the Tarpon Belly Keys can be used as a rest stop and a chance to determine if the weather (or your stamina) is conducive for a trip to the Sawyer Keys. There was a shrimp farm attempted at the Tarpon Belly Keys in 1967 so the two dredged canals are from this short-lived project. The spoil banks from the dredging provide landing areas which many people use as picnic spots. From the Tarpon Bellies, head for Riding Key, the southernmost key in the Sawyer Keys complex. Important: all the passes between the Sawyer Keys are closed to protect nesting birds so you can only circumnavigate the group. As you paddle counter-clockwise, there are some tide pools to explore on the northeast corner, sandy beaches on the Gulf of Mexico facing shore, and rich tidal flats on the western shore – look for sharks, rays and tarpon. On your return trip, use the blimp to guide you back to the launch site.

Skill Level: Advanced

Distance/Time: 14.5 Miles/7 Hours

Launch Site: Cudjoe Key - Blimp Road Ramp

Special Considerations: Cudjoe Channel has very strong current so avoid the deepest sections and you won't have to work so hard. When tired on your return, if the tide is with you, paddle on the Cudjoe Channel side of the flat. If it is against you, use the western side.

Skill Level Definitions

Beginner: New to paddling and may need tips and or instructions about paddling strokes, safety procedures, and entering/exiting kayaks. Comfortable on short trips of 1 to 3 miles on protected waters, when wind does not exceed 5 mph.

Novice: Paddlers acquainted with basic paddle strokes and can manage kayak handling independently in winds not exceeding 10 mph on protected waters. Comfortable on trips up to 6 miles.

Intermediate: Paddlers with experience in basic strokes and some experience on different venues, including some open water. Comfortable on trip distances of 6 to 10 miles, winds not exceeding 15 mph.

Advanced: Seasoned paddlers who possess skills and experience to paddle all venues and conditions. Experienced in self-rescues. Should be comfortable paddling more than 10 miles in a day.

NOTE: Great care has been taken to ensure this guides accuracy, but weather, tides, and water conditions can change rapidly and create hazardous conditions. These maps are for visual reference only, please consult NOAA Charts for navigation. Paddlers should have all proper safety equipment and check conditions before departure. All paddlers should always wear PFDs while on the water, and leave a float plan. There are inherent dangers in any paddle sport. There are special hazards along the Florida coast due to shifting tides, changing wind and weather, shallow waters, and treacherous bottoms with soft mud, rocks, and oyster bars. It is up to each paddler to be aware of these dangers, to accept and be prepared for the risks involved, and to be certain they have the skills to safely paddle in these conditions.