

S1 Day Paddles - Blackwater River

Kennedy Bridge to Cotton Bridge Park Paddle Information Sheet

Description: This winding stream flows through the unspoiled Blackwater River State Forest, with trees often forming a dense, shady canopy over the river. High bluffs occur in some sections where pine and cedar trees tower above paddlers. The water is coffee colored by naturally occurring tannins, the reason why Creek Indians called the river “Oka Lusa” (“black water”). White sandbars provide plenty of options for camping or picnicking. Plan a trip for weekdays or during Florida’s pleasant winter months to avoid crowds.

Skill Level: Intermediate

Distance/Approximate Time: 10.9 Miles/4.5 Hours

Launch Site: Kennedy Bridge Paddle Launch

Takeout Site: Cotton Bridge Park Paddle Launch

Special Considerations: Paddlers should check stream flow data and weather conditions before embarking on a trip. The Blackwater River can rise very quickly and make paddling difficult and conditions dangerous. Many of the access sites are remote with unsafe overnight parking; consider parking and shuttle with a local outfitter listed below. Best paddled when the River Gage (https://waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/uv/?site_no=02370000&PARAMeter_cd=00065,00060) is between 2.5’ and 5’. Glass containers are prohibited on the river.

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.