

S23 Day Paddles - Lower Ocklawaha River

Bear Creek Paddle Information Sheet

Description: After launching, follow the far shore southward and turn up Bear Creek. The creek is narrow and intimate through bottomland hardwood forest with a multitude of birds and only a slight current to paddle against. The only down side of doing the loop is that unless the water is extremely low there is no good place to get out for a leg-stretch break. There are a couple of passable spots at the lower end of Bear Creek, just after entering from the St Johns, but they are not always reliable. The creek is lined with Cypress, red maple, cabbage palms and you'll see plenty of Bartram's air plants. As you paddle along all three of these waterways (Ocklawaha River, Bear Creek and the St Johns) you will see great rafts of bright green plants rising from the water. The primary plants are Spatterdock (*Nuphar advena*), a native submersive plant that provides food and protection for many species of birds, fish, insects and crustaceans, and Watershield. Gators are often seen, along with plenty of herons, egrets, limpkins and anhingas. The return is back down the Ocklawaha River.

Skill Level: Intermediate

Distance/Approximate Time: 6.2 Miles/3 Hours

Launch Site: St Johns River Welaka Ramp

Special Considerations: The St Johns is wide and can get rough on windy days. Be mindful of powerboats when crossing the St Johns.

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.