

S15UK Day Paddles - Upper Keys

Cowpens Cut Paddle Information Sheet

Description: This relatively long paddle is challenging due to the open water paddling involved. “The Cowpens” were named because manatees (or sea cows) were penned inside this mangrove area until ready to eat. It is part of the Intracoastal Waterway that runs along the bayside of the upper Keys. There is a chance of seeing free range manatees cruising thru this area. Probably more interesting to paddle thru is Toilet Seat Pass which parallels the Cowpens but closer to shore. Hundreds of toilet seats, painted with funny sayings or names of families or groups, often commemorating an anniversary or birthday, line the channel.

Skill Level: Intermediate

Distance/ Approximate Time: 7.2 Miles/3 Hours

Launch Site: Tavernier - Plantation Tropical Preserve Paddle Launch

Special Considerations: Watch for speeding boats thru both the Cowpens and Toilet Seat Pass. Both channels are plenty wide to share but it is unwise to drift along carelessly in the middle of the channel just in case a boat comes thru on plane. The tide thru Tavernier Creek can be strong but it is not that difficult to paddle against should you need to do so on one direction of this trip. Not recommended on windy days.

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.