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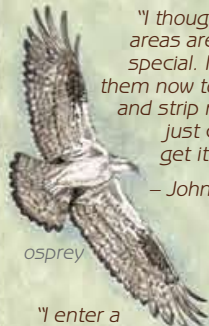


*"We must all have a great sense of responsibility and not let things happen because everyone takes the comfortable view that someone else is looking after it. Someone else isn't looking after it."*

– Rachel Carson



great blue heron



osprey

*"I thought: these areas are just too special. If we lose them now to condos and strip malls, we just could not get it back...."*

– John Delaney



fiddler crab

red drum

# Jacksonville

## INTRACOASTAL SALT MARSH

### Paddling Guide



Mike Middlebrook

#### INSPIRATION

Our paddling guide includes the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) and associated creeks from its intersection with the St. Johns River south to the Duval County line. Easily accessible for half-day or longer trips by paddlers of all skills and ages, this distinctive waterway is primarily bordered by expanses of pristine, protected salt marsh, pine islands, swamp, and hammock communities. Four nature preserves are found along its path: Dutton Island Preserve, Tideviews Preserve, Castaway Island Preserve, and Cradle Creek Preserve.

#### SAVING SPECIAL PLACES – JACKSONVILLE'S PRESERVATION PROJECT

These preserves are part of Preservation Project Jacksonville – the brainchild of former Mayor John Delaney. In 1998, Mayor Delaney was fishing on the ICW just a little north



Warren Anderson, Jr.

of the river. As he and some friends cast their lines, he realized he had never been in that area. The beauty of the place overwhelmed him. He stopped fishing and just sat in the boat, thinking how critical it was for his community not to lose the special places that still represented "Old Florida." He could not, as mayor, allow these areas to be taken over by strip malls and condos.

The Preservation Project began as a land acquisition program designed to direct growth away from environmentally sensitive lands and waters. The project also sought, by taking sensitive land out of risk of development, to improve water quality and create public access to the natural and historically significant areas of our community. Due to unprecedented partnering with other governmental entities, environmental organizations and private landowners, Jacksonville was able to acquire over 82 square miles of pristine Old Florida, forever saving it from development. Jacksonville now has the largest urban park system – 84,000 acres – in the country.

#### HISTORY OF THE INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

##### Spencer Midden and Timucuan

Europeans arrived in Florida in 1562. For over 10,000 years before Jean Ribault first sailed down the St. Johns River, people lived right here, in what would later be called Timucuan territory. Hundreds of archaeological sites dot the landscape in our area, helping scientists and historians reconstruct the culture of the Timucua.

The oldest known coastal village site on the American eastern seaboard is Spencer's Midden, just north of Dutton Island. Radiocarbon dating indicates the site was occupied 5,500 years ago. Villagers harvested oyster, coquina, small estuarine fish, and deer. The site was permanent or multi-seasonal and most likely inhabited by a number of related families.

Archaeologists are discovering these people had a much more sophisticated cross-continental trading network and spiritual culture than was reported in the past. The Timucuan collected oysters out of the same waters we do, they picked blackberries out of the same fields we do, and they looked at the same night sky in wonderment, just like we do.

##### Pablo Creek and the Construction of the ICW

Up until the late 1800's Pablo Creek meandered south from the St. Johns River before veering west back into the cypress trees of what is now the Dee Dot Ranch in St. Johns County. In 1881 four St. Augustine entrepreneurs formed the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company in order to design and construct a canal connecting Pablo Creek and all the natural lagoons and rivers between Jacksonville and Miami. The Florida legislature encouraged the construction of the commercial blueway and gave one million acres of public land to the company to facilitate the effort. The legislature required the waterway to be at least 50 feet wide and not less than 5 feet deep at mean low tide. The work began in 1883 and was finally completed in 1912.



Mick Shea

red drum



"We do not inherit the earth from our fathers, we are borrowing it from our children."

— David Brower (longtime executive director of the Sierra Club)



manatees



"Puffy cumulus clouds sail above the horizon bounded by islands, marsh, and an azure space of sky and water. I am insignificant in this space, but I am a part of it nonetheless."

— Jeff Ripple



snowy egret

"The sky clears... and up comes the sun like a god, pouring his faithful beams across the [swamps] and forest, lighting each peak and tree... clothing them with the rainbow light, and dissolving the seeming chaos of darkness into varied forms of harmony. The ordinary work of the world goes on..."

— John Muir (founder of Sierra Club in 1892)



dolphins

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to be at least 50 feet wide and not less than 5 feet deep at mean low tide. The work began in 1883 and was finally completed in 1912.

Users were charged a toll to access this original canal-connected waterway – the primary transportation system in eastern Florida, moving agriculture and lumber. The Canal and Transportation company made a profit in only one year, 1925 - the height of the Florida land boom.

Like many corporations established to exploit the land boom in the early 1920s, the company went bankrupt. Meanwhile, Floridians had been encouraging the U.S. government to take over responsibility. Since the feds would take on this massive project only if the state would provide the land, the Florida legislature purchased the canal in 1927. That year the legislature created the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND), a special taxing district covering the east coast counties. FIND's function was, and is, to ensure the maintenance and improvement of the ICW. A state and federal partnership was formed, and FIND has worked with the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Congress to determine appropriate widths and depths of the ICW, which measures 374 miles from Nassau County to Miami-Dade. The ICW as we know it today – a minimum of 125 feet wide and 12 feet deep at low tide – was completed in 1965. The ICW must be periodically maintained through dredging because it is subject to shoaling (sediments moving into the channel).

### Mythic Illanda

As you paddle north under the Atlantic Blvd. Bridge, look to the east and scan the shore of Atlantic Beach for about as far as the eye can see. This is the mythic land of Illanda.

Once a Florida boom dreamer's eye envisioned a modern Venice to be constructed here. In the early 1920's his advertisements spoke of "an exquisite suburb of islands" with a hotel, yacht club and land set aside for schools and churches. The Venetian element was to be the network of canal waterways traversed by the residents in paddle boats and gondolas. The land which is now Dutton Island would have been "Plaza Illanda," modeled after the magnificent Plaza San Marco in Venice, Italy.



Mick Shear

The dreamer/developer advertised "public baths like imperial Rome" where "leisured conversation is mingled with the latest chit-chat about books and sports." The apartment homes were to be "tropical-tiled roofs and subdued Spanish structures which rise above their mirrored reflections on the dark smooth waters before them. Over all, rising like the vaulted dome in a great cathedral, will be the liquid blue of a Florida sky."

In 1929 the Great Depression came. The idea for the Venetian development was abandoned and the vision of Illanda was scattered to the four corners of memory. Fortunately, we still have our cathedral – the liquid blue Florida sky.

### THE MAGIC OF THE SALT MARSH

Salt marshes can be breathtakingly beautiful, particularly in the late afternoon when the warm light of the sun turns the grasses to the color of topaz. Our salt marshes are flooded twice a day by the highest tides in Florida. Winding creeks penetrate the marshes like arteries and veins. As waters flow out of the marshes, many small creatures get swept away, pulled toward the sea. Waiting patiently in eddies or in the depths at the mouths of the creeks are large fish, ready to feast on the lower members of the food web floating quickly toward them. As low tide arrives, one can see muddy tidal flats extending from the marshes. Shorebirds flock to the flats and probe the mud with their tool-like beaks looking for fiddler crabs and other mud-dwellers.

When the tides reverse, flooding the oyster bars and salt marsh, all kinds of organisms move in, using the marshes' vegetation for food and cover. Redfish come in to feed, their tails thrashing the surface as they nibble after fiddler crabs down in their muddy burrows. The moving water is the magic facilitator – exchanging nutrients and organisms between the marsh and the surrounding estuarine environment.

All living things in the salt marsh are hearty survivors – they must be able to withstand fluctuations in levels of water, salinity, temperature, wave energy, and oxygen. Rains and runoff repeatedly dilute the salt with fresh water, a constant change. Since these waters are so shallow, their temperatures can vary from below freezing on a winter night to subtropical the following day at noon. Some days are calm; others see fearsome winds blow in off the ICW.

Spending time in the salt marsh opens a treasure for the senses. At low tide, the wind blowing across the Spartina grass sounds like wind on a prairie. The mighty blue heron shatters the quiet with a loud crackle when she is disturbed enough to fly away. One can hear the tiny, high-pitched rustling of the herds of fiddler crabs as they flee a perceived predator.

The marshes are filled with smells – of the sea's salt, of Spartina grass, of a little iodine, of the cycles of life. These smells are wonderful to the locals, somewhat surprising to the new visitor.

And of course, there is nothing like the sight of several beautiful egrets, taking off from the mudflats, slowly flapping their long white wings above the brown-green marsh grass, as they bank a turn and head out toward another fishing spot in another tidal creek.



Mick Shear

This paddling guide is brought to you by the Public Trust Environmental Legal Institute of Florida, Inc. (Public Trust), in partnership with the City of Atlantic Beach, the City of Jacksonville, the City of Jacksonville Beach, and Kayak Amelia.

The mission of the Public Trust is the zealous protection of the Preservation Project properties as well as other federal and state protected lands and waters, and the promotion of the use and enjoyment of these natural areas. More extensive information about the history and ecology of this area, accessible parks, areas to visit, interesting features, critters, and tides, as well as printable maps and links to partner and other websites, a calendar, and messageboard may be found at:

[www.jaxintracoastalpaddling.org](http://www.jaxintracoastalpaddling.org)

Copies of this guide may be requested from the Public Trust or its partners (or via the website).