

S10 Day Paddles - Tampa Bay

Rattlesnake Key Circumnavigation Information Sheet

Description: This paddle is notable for its variety of paddling conditions and scenery. The paddle starts in an inner bay. In less than a quarter mile, an opening to a mangrove tunnel will appear on the left. Paddling through the mangrove tunnel with a left turn under the foot bridge will provide access to Terra Ceia Bay. Paddle across the bay toward Rattlesnake Key aiming for the indentation to the right of its western point. A search of the mangroves once across the bay will reveal a mangrove trail that leads to an inner bay and then an exit on the northwest side of Rattlesnake Key. Once in Tampa Bay, turn right to paddle northeast down Rattlesnake Key with views of the Skyway in the distance. After paddling a couple of miles down the key, be vigilant for Little Miquel Pass, a cut between Rattlesnake Key and Eds Key. Turn right into Little Miquel Pass and paddle south east through Miquel Bay into Critical Bayou. Once in Critical Bayou, look for channel markers to find the entrance to Flounder Pass which opens onto Terra Ceia Bay. Once back in Terra Ceia Bay, head southwest to return to the launch point at Emerson Point Park.

Skill Level: Intermediate

Distance/Approximate Time: 8 Miles/3.5 Hours

Launch Site: Emerson Point Park Paddle Launch from the low wooden dock or from the sloping shell beach beside the dock.

Special Considerations: Take careful note of landmarks at the entrance to the mangrove tunnel once in Terra Ceia Bay, so you can find it on your return. Best paddled at middle to high tide. Take care to stay out of the boat channel.

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.