



## Explore Undiscovered North Florida

The Big Bend Scenic Byway will Transport You to a Different Time and Place through its Wildlife, Waterways, Woods, and Way of Life

### Fort and Lighthouse Tour

**B**egin the day with a brief orientation to St. Marks' rich history at San Marcos de Apalache Historical State Park. Walk the self-guided trail and visit the excellent small museum to discover the rich history of its occupations by Apalachee Indians, Spanish Conquistadors, Pirates, British Soldiers, and later Confederate Troops. Afterwards, launch your kayak at the adjacent public boat ramp and paddle downstream, following the grassy shoreline on the left (east) side of the St. Marks River.

#### Overview

- Museum/Grounds & Saltwater Paddling
- History, Photography, Birding, Fishing, Wildlife Viewing
- Self or Guided
- Paddling 5.5 Miles/3-4 Hours
- Picnic Lunch or at a St. Marks Restaurant
- Advanced Beginner and Up
- Paddling Along Shore
- Tidal, Wind, Shallow Water

In ½ mile you will reach **Port Leon Creek** (Channel Marker 48 – **N 30.130885 W 84.201670**). If time permits, enter the creek and follow this winding, scenic channel. Don't be surprised if an alligator slides into the water as you go! The creek dead ends in about ½ mile at the old Port Leon Train Trestle. The bridge no longer exists, but you can still see the old pilings. If you feel adventuresome, climb the bank on your right and follow a portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail through the pine trees to locate the few remaining remnants of the town. Return the same way and continue paddling downstream, passing spoil islands with remnants of WWII gun encasements.

**Apalachee Point Spoil Island** (Before Channel Marker 29 – **N 30.092564 W 84.192352**).

Access the island via a flat, gravel surface on the back (east) side, near the north tip. This is a perfect picnic or rest stop. The island's rocky surface supports abundant vegetation and cedar trees, and space for camping



with a fire ring. Camping is permitted for paddlers continuing along the Circumnavigational Paddling Trail, with advance permission from the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

Continue downstream into Apalachee Bay, and follow the tranquil line of salt marshes toward the breathtaking outline of the **St. Marks Lighthouse**. The water depth is quite shallow, sometimes only one to two feet, up to 1/2 mile off shore. Bald Eagles, Osprey, Great Blue Herons, and shorebirds abound and Manatees are present year round. Continue past a line of old pilings at the parking lot adjacent to the Lighthouse. Look for open spaces lined with Salt Bush to take out. After visiting the lighthouse and interpretive displays, look over the nearby ponds for Waterfowl, Herons, Egrets, Shorebirds, and Alligators.

#### Directions

**Put In:** St. Marks Riverfront Park and Launch. Begin this trip on an outgoing tide.

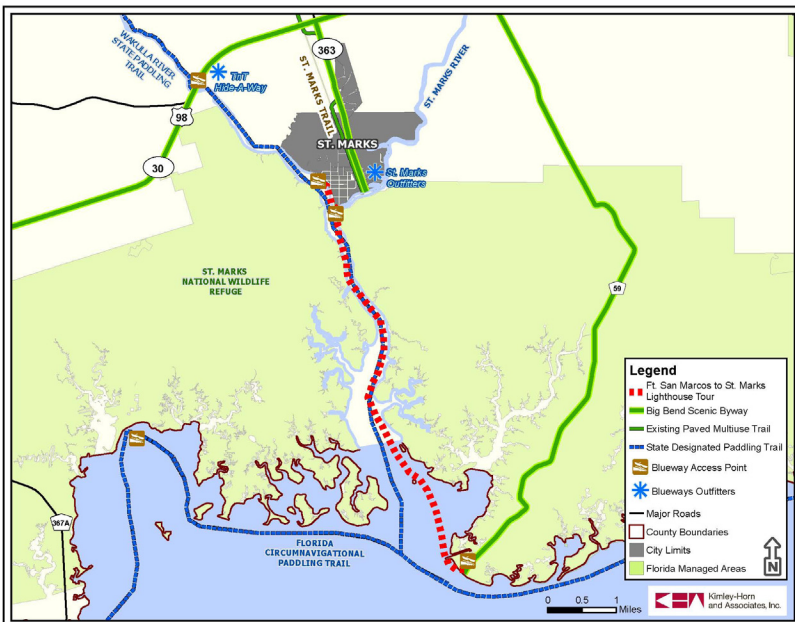
**N 30.15144  
W 84.20966**

In Wakulla County, take the Scenic Byway's Coastal Trail East (US Highway 98) and turn south at the intersection with Port Leon Dr. (SR 363) toward the City of St. Marks. Upon entering the city, follow signs to San Marcos de Apalache Historical State Park. After touring the park, put in at the boat ramp next to the park.

**Take Out:** St. Marks Lighthouse parking lot. If reversing the trip, begin here on an incoming tide.

**N 30.074219  
W 84.180164**

On the Scenic Byway's Coastal Trail East (US Highway 98), drive east past New Port, crossing the St. Marks River. Turn south (right) onto CR 59 (Lighthouse Drive) and continue through the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge to the lighthouse at the end of the road. At high tide take out here or at low tide at the boat ramp accessed by the waterway west of the lighthouse.







# Maritime Heritage Trail Interpretation - Fort and Lighthouse Tour

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## Interpretation

### San Marcos de Apalache Historical State Park

The first European known to have seen this point was Panfilo de Narvaez in 1528. In 1679, the Spanish started building the first fort on this site, using logs painted with lime to look



like stone, but pirates weren't fooled by the camouflage. They looted and burned the fort a few years later. Forts in St. Marks were later occupied by Spanish, British, Spanish again, then (for five weeks) by a force seeking to establish "the Nation of Muskogee," and Spanish yet again, before being taken over by Andrew Jackson in 1818. The fort passed back into Spanish control one more time before U.S. troops occupied it in 1821. In 1861, it was reoccupied by Confederate troops and named Fort Ward. The site became a permanent possession of the United States at the end of the Civil War.

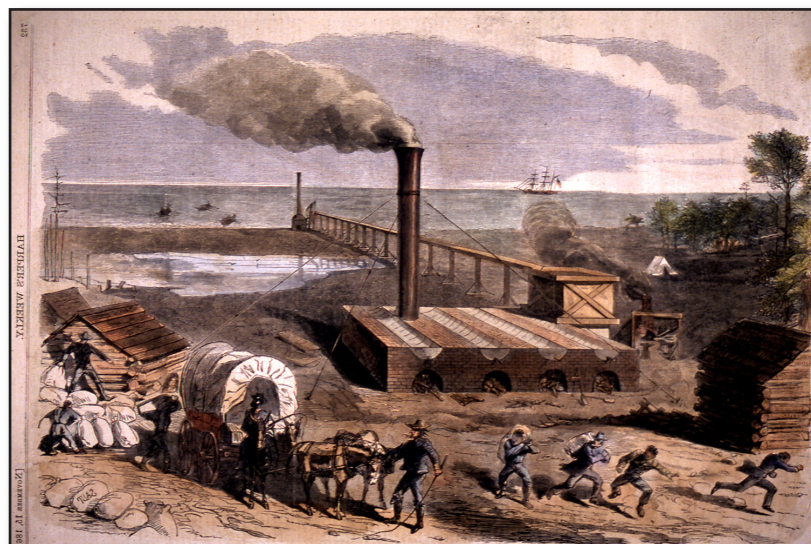
### St. Marks River Saltworks

In the days before refrigeration, salt was used to preserve meats and tan leather. When the Union blockade along the southeastern coast cut off salt shipments, the Confederacy turned to the ocean, and no area was more productive than the shallow bays and marshes of Apalachee Bay. The saltworks ranged in size from small family-run saltworks using a few iron kettles, which could hold 60-100 gallons of water set in a brick furnace to huge complexes using large boilers of up to 1,000 kettles. Salt water was boiled to a mushy consistency, which was then dried and spread on oak planks to dry in the sun. In damp weather, the salt was kept under cover and small fires helped the drying process. Early in the war, the salt industry drew little attention from the Union. Men who could produce 20 bushels of salt a day were excused from serving in the Confederacy, but the labor became just as dangerous as the front line once



the Union began targeting operations. Confederate saltworks along the St. Marks River were prime military targets. In 1864, a Union raiding party, supported by shelling from the USS Tahoma, attacked and destroyed "seven miles" of saltworks on the St. Marks River. The destruction included "455 salt kettles, 95 sheet-iron boilers, and 268 brick furnaces," comprising an estimated loss of \$2 million to the South.

Heavy storms also took a toll on the workers and the equipment. As the salt was shipped farther from the coast and passed through the hands of dealers, the price increased. In the spring of 1862, salt sold for \$3 a bushel. By autumn, the price had risen to \$16 to \$20 a bushel. Salt production attracted profiteers, and speculators purchased salt marshes to hold for future production. When regular trade resumed, the number of people engaged in its production declined in the coastal areas. Bricks, wood, kettles, and boilers that could be put to other uses were scavenged from the sites. Broken parts or materials that were too large to move easily were left behind and continue to deteriorate.







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## St. Marks River and Towns

The St. Marks River originates in the hardwood and cypress river swamps of the Red Hills area, north of the capital city, Tallahassee, and flows for 35 miles through Florida before emptying into Apalachee Bay. The river provided the basis for a lucrative cotton transport business, which in turn supported



the establishment of five towns along its banks. Newport was founded to replace Port Leon following a disastrous hurricane, and became an economic center with 1,500 inhabitants and a dozen large stores, warehouses, wharves, and stills. In the 1820s, St. Marks was an important port of entry for shipments to New Orleans and/or St. Augustine.

## A Lighthouse on Apalachee Bay

The shallow depths of Apalachee Bay and the St. Marks River made navigation treacherous. In 1828, the US Senate Committee

on Commerce recognized St. Marks as an official port of entry and the U.S. House of Representatives authorized construction of a lighthouse. In 1831, the tower's whale-oil lamps were lit. In 1835, fearing attack during the Second Seminole Indian War, a small detachment of troops were quartered near the lighthouse to protect both it and the keeper's family against hostile attack. In 1842, erosion threatened the lighthouse and it was dismantled and moved to its current location, where it survived several destructive hurricanes, including the one in 1843, which destroyed most of the town of Port Leon and caused major damage to the town of St. Marks. In 1865, Confederate troops were stationed near the lighthouse to defend the area against a Union attack. In March of that year, a Federal fleet of 16 ships shelled the vicinity of the lighthouse in preparation for landing a force. The lighthouse was completely rebuilt following the war, at which time the tower was raised to its present focal plane of 82 feet above



sea level, and the original lighting apparatus was restored. The lighthouse was automated in 1960 and remains today an active aid to navigation for vessels on the Apalachee Bay.

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