

General notes:

Rev 1

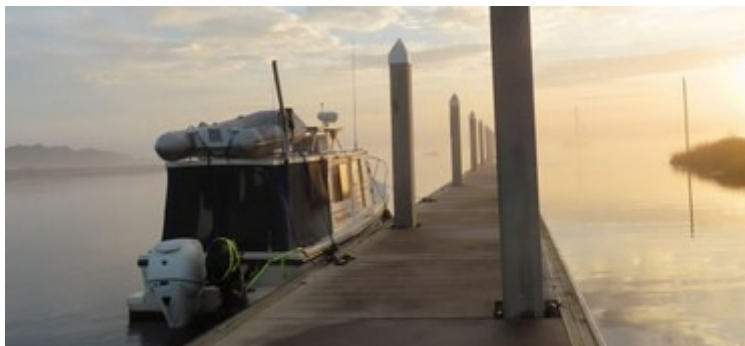
Many kudos to Dennis Robbins and Jeff Beam for sharing their tips, tricks, maps and expertise of the St. Johns with us. Our copy of the Southern 2015 Waterway Guide we inherited with our boat dedicated only a couple of breezy pages to this area and was next to useless.

- 1) We found Navionics to be hands down the better chart source than Aqua Maps for navigating the St. Johns (we carry both), especially in the shallow creeks. The depths reported in these notes are relative to our hull transponder mounted approximately 9" below the surface with 0 offset so add 3/4 foot to the depths in the text to estimate actual water depth. Our outboard motor skeg is 28" below the surface.
- 2) Jeff showed us by example that the off-river areas are truly navigable and shared his observation that you have good depths everywhere that is free from the invasive water hyacinths along the shore. We found that to be true. We didn't find any surprises in the shallower areas, we could usually "feel" our way left or right to find the deeper water without being led into a blind ally.
- 3) Dennis among other gems of wisdom shared that in his opinion the best part of the St. Johns was south (up river) of Palatka or even Lake George. No industrialization, few houses, more animals, more "Old Florida" vibe, narrower river. Definitely agree with that although we did enjoy the Lake George-to-Palatka section more than expected, maybe it was the access to civilization after a month and a half on the river.
- 4) We were warned that the FWC takes the manatee no/minimal wake zones seriously and will issue tickets for excessive speed. We did see the FWC and sheriff boats hovering around the Astor ramp area near their base on one weekend evening.
- 5) Outside of the numerous no/minimal wake manatee zones, the typical speed limit on the St. John south of Lake George is 30 day/25 night within the main channel and no wake outside the channel. We found we could see 10X more animals when traveling at hull speed. North of Lake George the channel is usually "normal safe operation".

The folks from Technomadia have run the river 3-4X in their Bayliner 4788 and we scraped some of their observations/favorite anchorages from their blogs as a framework then fleshed out with our own observations, Dennis' tips, Jeff's maps, etc. below. We also scraped some info from the Holly Bluff Houseboat guide (<https://www.hollybluff.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/hb.pdf>) which also includes some area history and animal info.

The framework starts in Jacksonville and runs upriver (south) to Sanford. We splashed midway up the river in Astor and cruised between Sanford and Palatka on the 2022 trip, but ran the entire river from the ICW to Sanford in 2024, initiating rev 1.

+++++++ Jacksonville Sisters Creek Jim King free dock, at the intersection of the ICW and St. Johns River. Free for 72 hours, public restroom at dock parking lot. Signage says only water cooled (built in) generator use allowed on dock. Muti-lane boat ramp several hundred yards south of the dock. More details on Active Captain.



+++++++Arlington Marina, just north of the Mathews/hwy 115 bridge had the cheapest fuel on the river circa February 2024 and so may be worth a stop for anyone entering the river off the ICW. Half of their slips have been damaged so they were very limited in transient dockage.

+++++++Jacksonville Municipal free Marina, **** As of Feb 2024, the marina was closed for construction and surrounded with chain link fencing***** Near the Jacksonville football stadium on east side of town, about a half mile from the downtown area. Free for 72 hours (I think they may charge for the marina whenever an event is going on at the nearby stadium), power hookups \$8.50/day but machine taking money is broken and no one at city hall knows who takes the money.

+++++++Jacksonville offers 4 free floating docks in the immediate downtown area, two on the north shore and two on the south shore.

As with the Jim King and Municipal Marina docks, all the downtown docks have the same 72 hour limit and water cooled only generator policy. These downtown docks are serviced by water taxis at various times which have their own yellow painted face dock areas that need to be avoided. The Landings dock also has a painted face dock area for emergency boats.

All of the downtown docks except the YMCA dock are in a particularly narrow section of the river that we observed to get lumpy with weekend boat traffic. Additional details and other opinions available from the Active Captain community notes.

The town has fielded numerous “Downtown Ambassadors” that we saw on bikes along the Riverwalks and providing direction assistance at the Metro stations. From the dtjax website the ambassadors “provide extra eyes and ears on the street seven days a week. We work closely with the City of Jacksonville to clean and maintain our public realm and to report safety violations. And, as Downtown’s hospitality team, we work with local businesses, attractions and Visit Jacksonville to make DTJax a more friendly and welcoming place.”

The library, visitors center and destroyer Orleck are all on the north bank and within walking distance of the downtown docks although coming the south docks would require using the free metro to cross the river.

North bank docks:

The two docks on the north shore are on the 2 mile long pedestrian Northbank Riverwalk that winds it’s way along the riverfront. There is a public restroom building (sinks, toilets, no showers) with outdoor exercise area under the Acosta bridge midway between the two docks on a section of the Riverwalk called the “corkscrew”, a spiral ramp that carries the path up and over the adjacent railroad tracks.



A) Jacksonville Landings free dock, Very long face dock right at Main Street bridge on the N bank of the river. **** As of Feb 2024, at least a section of the face dock was being taped off in preparation for construction of large adjacent parcel along the river front that is expected to take 1-2 years**** Very convenient to core of downtown but subject to greater pedestrian and homeless traffic on the Riverwalk and tire noise from the Main St. bridge. Free downtown metro shuttle station 2 blocks north, the “Corkscrew” restroom is several hundred feet to the west of the dock.



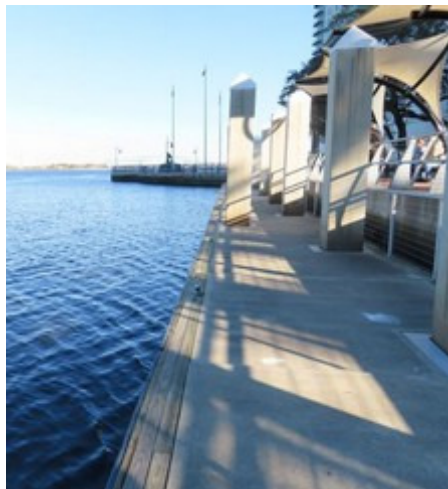
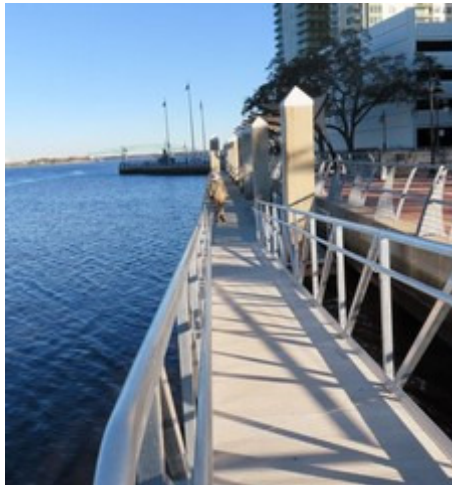
B) Jacksonville YMCA free dock is by far our favorite of the downtown docks. Two ~25’ slips parallel to shore on SW side and one “indented” 30’ face dock pocket perpendicular to shore on NE side. The outside SE face dock on the river side is reserved for the water taxi. We preferred the “indented” dock to better minimize rolling from the boat wakes (not all boats honored the no wake zone which continues west out to the I-95 bridge). The “indentation” or pocket is about 6’ wide on the river end so requires being comfortable with peeling yourself off almost perpendicularly from the dock against a flood current or waiting for slack or ebb tide. Quieter, less pedestrian traffic, good exposure to sun, Fresh Market grocery and many restaurants 1 block away. The public restroom is ~4/10th mile to the east just over the “corkscrew” hump.



The south bank docks:

The two docks on the south bank of the river are on the 1-1/4 mile long Southbank Riverwalk in the shadow of tall hotels and condo buildings. A restroom is reported to be 400' east of the Southbank Riverwalk dock but we cannot confirm.

A) Jacksonville Southbank Riverwalk free dock, East end of smaller dock shared with water taxi on south bank of river just east of Main St bridge. The area is in almost constant shadow of tall buildings so solar panels have limited use, at least in the winter season. Some traffic noise from Main St. bridge. Free downtown metro shuttle station 2 blocks south.



B) Jacksonville Friendship Park free dock. East end of smaller dock shared with water taxi on south Bank of river west of Main St. bridge. Some traffic noise from Main St. Bridge. Free downtown metro shuttle station 2 blocks away. Have not reconnoitered.

+++++++Whiteys fish camp on Doctors Lake, 12 mi south of Jacksonville, west side

+++++++Black Creek 8 miles further S on west side of river, good anchorage in oxbow 1.5 mi up creek. Isle of Palms Marina at entrance to creek, the St Brendons Isle's physical mail forwarding facility across the street from the marina.

+++++++Green Cove Springs City Dock, 5.3 mi further S on west side of river, \$20/nite for slip with power or anchor out and dinghy to docks. Dock is protected from N by small metal breakwall. We found some power pedestals had damaged receptacles so verify before getting fully settled. Winn Dixie couple of miles north of town.



Public restrooms (sink and toilets) in park between dock and public pool (pool is closed in winter). The spring run begins near the public pool building and flows through the pool and park to the river.

+++++++Governors Creek anchorage, west side boat ramp with shore access to strip mall with several restaurants and shops. Dinghy up the creek to park for access to walks.

+++++++Solano Cove anchorage, east side, 10 mi S of Green Cove Springs.

+++++++Palmo cove anchorage, next to abandoned dock and abandoned restaurant. Technomadia went ashore at free neighborhood dock.

+++++++Deep Creek Anchorage 18 mi south, east side. Conflicting charts, go slow, anchorage at first bend.

+++++++Palatka, "The Azalea City". ***** As of early Feb 2024 the large boat free dock below was gated off with a sign saying "Construction Area Keep Out" and the two boats tied were seen with fresh sheriff stickers threatening to be towed away within 30 days. As of mid-Feb 2024 we have heard the gate to the dock has been removed.*****

Larger boats (>17') tie up at the bird poop stained floating city docks to the west near the boat ramp (see update above), smaller boats tie up at two docks to the east near the bridge. Free for two nights w/ new city park restroom open during the day.



Alternatively the Boathouse Marina fixed docks w/ old but clean restroom/showers/laundry for \$1/ft, 30 ft min., \$5/nt for electric, \$2/load laundry.



All the docks are adjacent to the historic housing and business part of town, restaurants (“Velchoff’s Corner” which is working out of a foodtruck and patio behind their under-development building was good), bakery/cafe (“Rusty Duck” was good), cafe (“Magnolia Cafe” just reopened and was decent), Azalea City brewery, the oldest diner in Florida “Angels Diner”, Dollar General w/ packaged/canned/frozen food (no fresh fruit/veg), a small grocery” Family Market” has some fresh fruit/veg within a 6 block radius.

The Boathouse marina was a boat construction facility way back when and they built the 16 guest, 56’ long, double decker fishing boat lodge “Noahs Ark” in 1929 which now again resides on the marine railway behind the office building awaiting a restoration effort. The boat towed ~6 dinghies to various fishing areas then served as a floating fishing lodge.



The Ravine Gardens State Park is 1 mile SW via sidewalk from the marina. The park is a 1933 WPA project built around the confluence of two small spring runs that join at the 1886 Palatka Water Works facility, now an environmental center which has it’s own separate entrance nearby. The park has several miles of trails running at 3 different levels: at the base of the ravine along the spring runs (in pic below), midway up the sides of the ravine which are covered with azaleas and on top around the rim of the ravine. Pedestrians \$2



+++++++Corky Bells Fish & Steak, Couple of miles up the river from Palatka on river bend north of daymark 6. Reasonably priced/quality restaurant similar to Red Lobster chain but with a larger menu. We confirmed still allows free overnight docking with meal but docks are very busy on weekends.

Double sided 250' long floating cement dock with cleats but no hookups, per Dennis plenty of depth and room for a Rosborough to turn around to dock on the inner side for storm protection..



Small liquor and medium sized grocery store, McDonalds (for b'fast the following morning? Corky Bells doesn't do b'fast) across busy highway 17, traffic light w/ pedestrian crossing 100 yds along sidewalk to the west of restaurant. Access to highway sidewalk is available through parking lot from west side of restaurants' patio deck (you don't have to pass through the restaurant building to get back to the dock with your booty, just walk across the patio deck like you own the place).

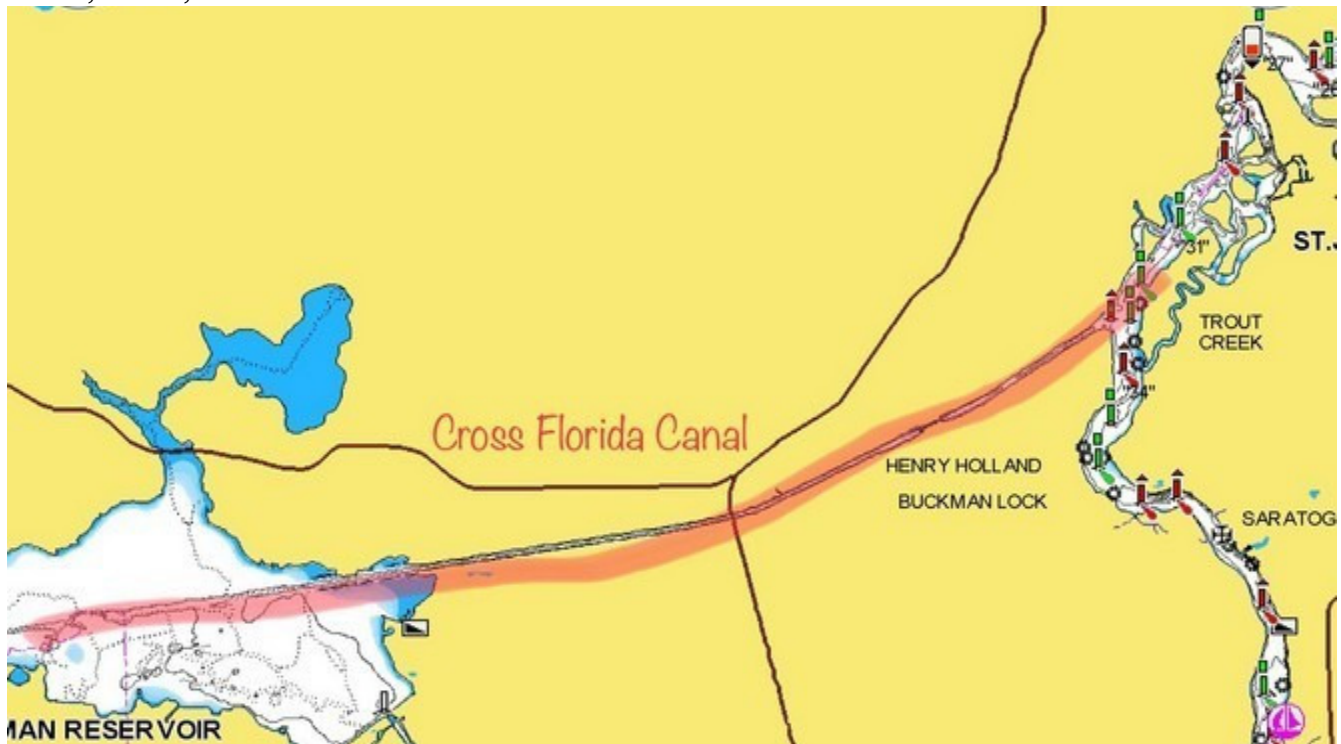
+++++++Murphys Creek, very long oxbow on east side of St. Johns, approximately between daymark 16 & 26. Three identified Active Captain anchorages on the creek have similar attributes: undeveloped shore isolation and good protection. Creek is strangely devoid of animals including birds, we saw one alligator at the southern entrance and maybe a couple of birds on a warm, sunny day.

+++++++Murphy'Island Free Dock. Located on the St. Johns side of the island just west of the northern most "bump". Picnic tables and fire pits. Details on Active Captain.



+++++++Seven Sisters Islands. Two identified Active Captain anchorages, 1 & 2, far enough off the river to provide good protection from wakes between daymarks 30 & 31. We favored the southern anchorage, #1, as it is surrounded by islands with no houses visible. Northern anchorage, #2, has eastern exposure through wide channel to neighborhood on mainland.

+++++++Cross Florida Canal, west side of river south of Seven Sisters Islands. Incomplete canal system to west coast of Florida. De-authorized by the Federal Gov't and turned over to the state Office of Greenways and Trails. Navigable bypasses around the remaining incomplete Eureka Lock at west side of lake possible for <3' draft depending on water levels. Did not attempt, Active Captain entry from 12/21 says the Henry Holland Buckman Lock 1.6 miles from river entrance has sign "lock up at 6:45A, 7:45A, 10:45A& 1:15P".



+++++++Welaka City Dock (Bryants Wharf) free dock, midway between daymarks 48 & 50. Short (20') fingers on north side plus face of T dock and tight south side of main dock (in the shadow of a currently closed restaurant and it's associated courtesy dock). Little protection from boat wakes on the river which has no limits in this area. Outer T dock section was closed for maintenance during our visit in Feb 2022. The south side face dock was reportedly reserved for CG Auxiliary on Fri-Sun at one time but that is not currently indicated on dock. That south facing dock could be tricky due to close

proximity to (currently closed) restaurant dock and potential cross currents depending on wind and tide state. Did witness a Ranger Tug 27 (with bow & stern thrusters) successfully dock on south side with adverse wind and current.



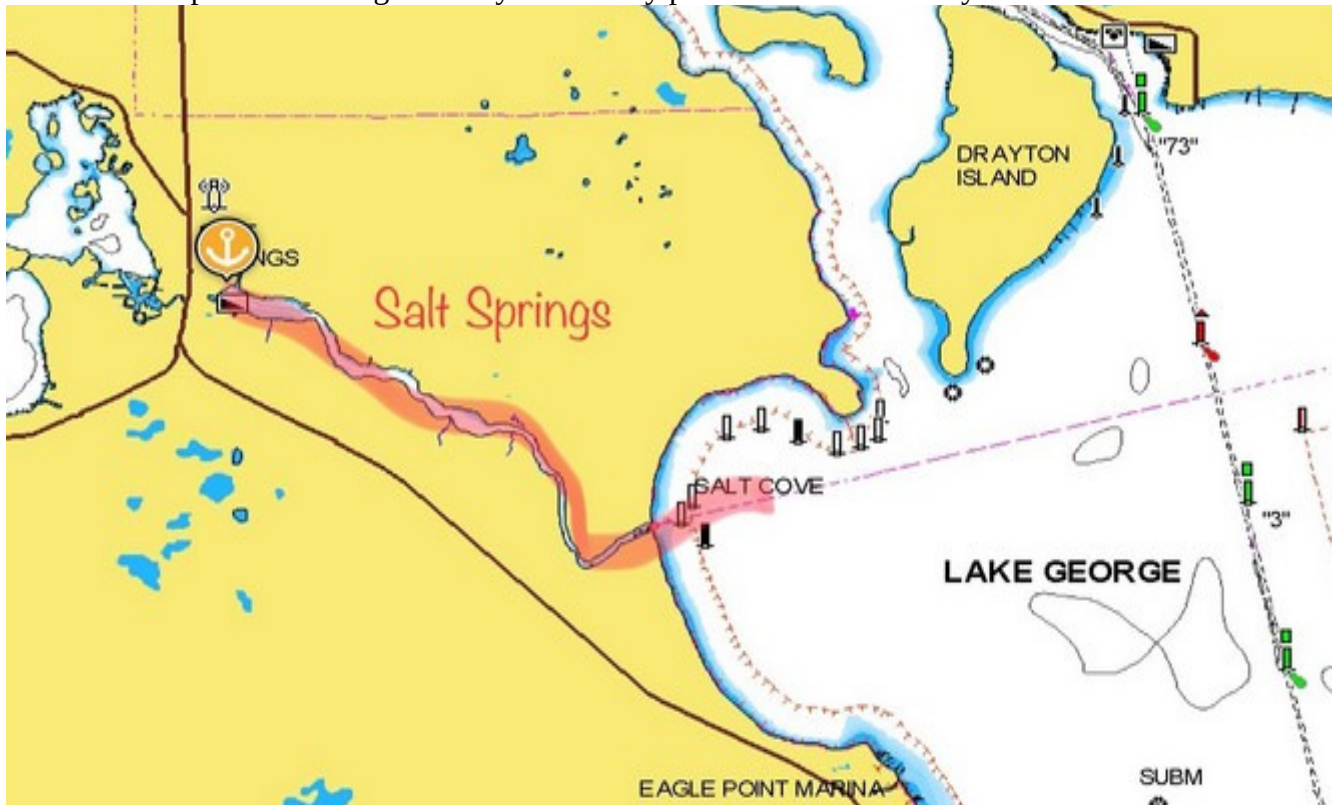
Small restroom in white building 150' up the hill from dock open during day. The shower reported a couple of blocks away at the top of hill at tennis court and playground area is currently locked but one restroom is open. We found the one restaurant in town: "Shrimps R US and More" deserved it's good reputation. Dollar General store w/ prepackaged/canned/frozen groceries (limited fresh fruit/veg) is up the hill 8 blocks from the dock on Elm St. Pic above is looking west at the city docks while standing in the shadow of the restaurant with the encroaching docks immediately to the left.



+++++++Lower Oklawaha River. Navigable for 8 miles to foot of dam. Numerous snags west of bridge and 4' depth to the dam reported by Active Captain in 3/21. Did not do.
+++++++Black Point anchorage just north of Lake George, west side. Can tuck in a little further to the west than the Active Captain location for some protection from N winds otherwise an open roadstead in a large bay but far enough from the river channel to provide some protection from wakes. Shore to

north and west sides of bay seems undeveloped, south side has one house, far distant east side across river channel is lined with houses.

+++++++Salt Springs, off NW corner of Lake George. Clear but salty spring resurgent ~4 miles up run from lake. Entrance bar, reported to be sand, ranges from several hundred to 1,000 feet from shore and is ~2' deep on what we consider to be a nominal day. There is a minimal wake zone within 1500 feet of the west shore of Lake George so you will be going slow in this area anyway. Feel your way across the bar to the entrance using a W to NW heading from lake. The deep hole shown on Navionics chart north of the entrance appears to have been filled over time. Note the western rim of Lake George water levels reported to be significantly reduced by persistent southwesterly winds.



Once over the shallow bar and within 150' of shore, the depth is 3-4' into the entrance and through the ~3/4 mile long no wake zone portion of the channel then increases to 5-8' to the spring headwater basin where the depth drops again to ~3-4'. The speed in the channel between the no wake zone at the entrance and the anchorage basin is unrestricted but there are manatees going back and forth to the springs so we were considerate with our speed.

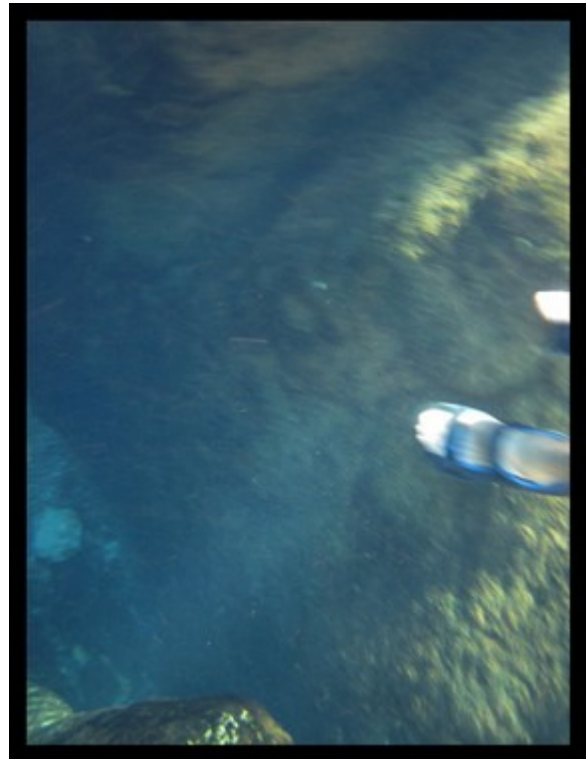
A small marina concessionaire selling ice, ice cream bars, drinks, t-shirts, & sunglasses on the S side of anchorage is accessible by a dinghy landing beach on the right (west) side of the waterfront. A National Forest restroom with flush toilets is 100' behind the marina building and there is an artesian spring pouring from a plastic pipe near the dinghy beach that we witnessed several folks filling gallon jugs from but is labeled as "untested and untreated". There are a couple of restaurants where the NF concessionaire road intersects hwy 19 about 1/2 mile from the dinghy beach.

We accessed the campground area (not visible from the anchorage) on the north side of the basin by an informal dinghy landing area to the left of the kayak/small boat launch ramp. That area appears to be

un-monitored and has access to the tent and RV campsites several hundred feet further inland. There is a sign posted at the ramp not to tie to trees or set an anchor on land. No pets.

The headwaters of the spring is in the “no power boats/no boats” barricaded pool off the SW corner of spring basin. The unusual spring boil is at the extreme western end of pool, water emanates from several 15-30’ deep pits and fissures in a rock formation which otherwise lies just waist deep under the water surface. Blue crab and mullet are visible in springs.

Pic below left shows waist deep water only several feet from one of the spring boils emanating from a 15’ deep pit seen under person treading water in right pic below.



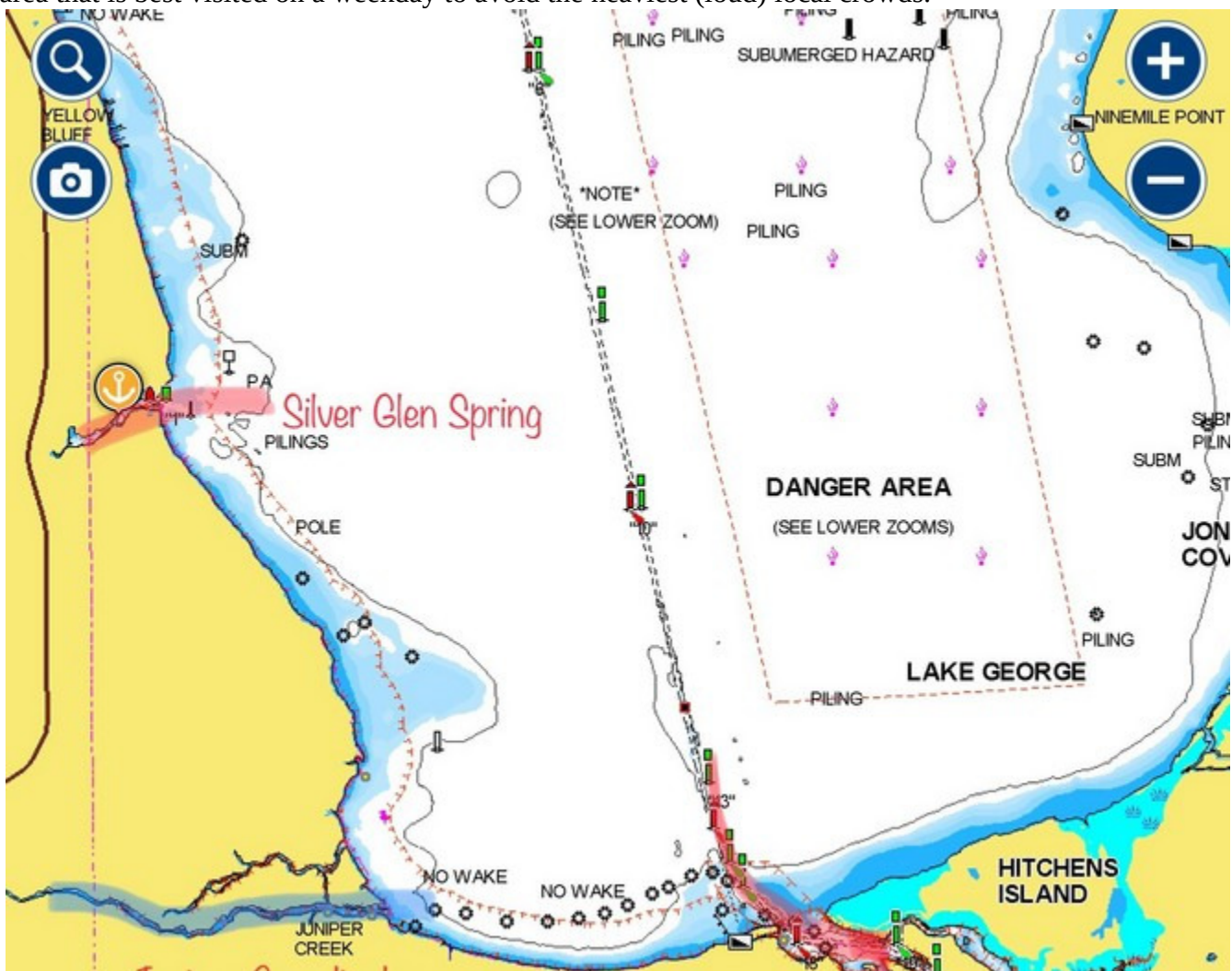
It's free to swim in springs from a boat, \$8/pp M-F, \$11 S-S fee to make landfall and access the day use area of the park and seemed to be less heavily monitored than Silver Glen Springs below. Pic below from Jeff's boat is looking west across barricades past small palm island into the concrete wall lined spring pool area. Water depth on left side of pool is waist deep or less all the way to back wall of spring, the right side is deeper. The small marina is off the left out of frame, the kayak ramp is off to the right also out of frame.



The water in the anchorage basin is fairly opaque but teems with fish and manatees on cold days. We woke up to this lounging manatee one morning.



+++++Silver Glen Springs, 2/3rds down west side of Lake George (9.9 miles from Black Point anchorage). Half mile long crystal clear spring run with ~waist deep water at headwaters anchorage area that is best visited on a weekday to avoid the heaviest (loud) local crowds.



Leave the Lake George channel between daymarks #6 & 10. Use caution at reported rock 2,000' N of #13 when northbound in the channel. The west side of the lake is a minimal wake zone within 1500' of shore and the depth rapidly drops from 10' to less than 5' at that transition.

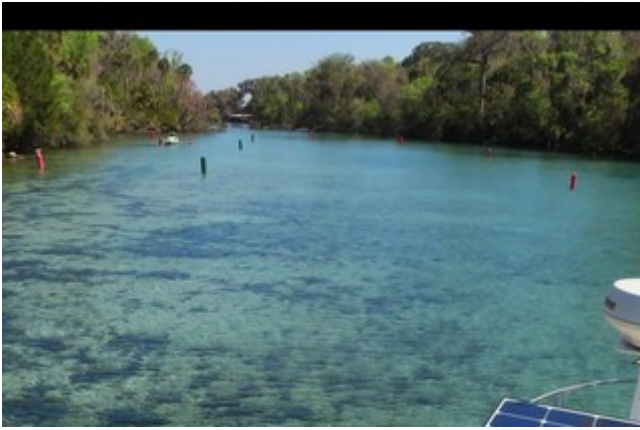
The entrance to the spring run is guarded by several small islands and we easily saw 3' over the shallowest spots at the entrance bar when entering 50' west of the "minimal wake within 1500' of shore" sign that is SE of the entrance. The big island right at the entrance is known by locals as "dog poop island" and is the only (legal) place in the run to take dogs ashore.

Leaving that sign, use a WNW heading towards the green entrance buoy-- the spring run outflow channel appears to have drifted S compared with the chart. The bar is reported to be more rocky than the Salt Springs bar so use particular caution when crossing. As above, the western rim water level of Lake George can be reduced by persistent southwesterly winds.

Once inside and after passing a large lodge facility on the south side of the channel, the channel bifurcates near the spring headwaters into a densely buoyed pair of channels making an oval racetrack pattern. Boats anchor in center of the oval in 3-4' and short pontoon boats, houseboats and runabouts drive ashore around the perimeter although as of Feb 2024 the north shore has been blocked off with white stakes for restoration. The pic below left is looking west up the spring run at the point where the channel bifurcates while a bunch of manatees were floating out the run. Pic below right is a manatee swimming in anchorage area near the spring basin between the two channels and shows the white stakes protecting the north shore. Water depth in both pics is 4-6'.



The pic below left is looking east back toward Lake George from the center of the oval in ~4' of water showing some of the buoy pairs of the channels. The shallower northern channel is on left, the recommended deeper southern channel is on right. Pic below right is looking northwest into the swimming area beyond a semi-permanently anchored houseboat in the anchorage that flies banners advertising slushies, hot chocolate and corn dogs for sale. Note those pics were taken on a mid-week morning when the anchorage was unusually empty.



A secondary anchorage is at a small bay on the southern side of the channel about midway or ¼ mile towards the lake so would require a kayak or dink to commute to the springs. We saw an alligator near this area so we wouldn't swim at that anchorage but Dennis swears it's safe to do, lol.

It is easy waist deep wading across the main anchorage and the northern channel all the way to the 15-20' deep spring crater of the headwater basin. The spring basin is beyond the outer "power boats keep out" barrier then an inner "all boats keep out" barrier strung across the run. 72°F water felt fine after 1 minute immersion on a sunny day.



Swimming at the springs is free but going ashore is \$8 M-F, \$11 S-S payable "up the hill" at the entrance station-- paid guests wear color coded wrist bands and the area appeared to be monitored by staff volunteers in neon green t-shirts at the two access points between the springs and the day use area. No pets allowed onshore.

We stayed until mid-morning on a Saturday on our last visit to get a flavor of what the (in)famous weekend crush looks like. Calling it a zoo would be an insult to animals, the atmosphere was like a state-fair-on-a-holiday weekend. The battle of the bands began around 8:30A and was temporarily resolved by 9:30 at about 95dB as the "winner" with a sound system so power hungry that it required the idling of his engine to power drowned out all the other music that was still being played in the background. The 100 jet skis nudged along the perimeter of the anchorage got to listen to his selection

of music bluetoothed from his phone while some boats reanchored depending on their musical tastes. Try to visit during the week if you want to enjoy the springs.

+++++Juniper Creek dinghy trip. Located between Silver Glen Springs and Volusia Bar at the south end of Lake George. Did not do from the lake but did spend two nights in our boat on our trailer at the headwaters at the National Forest campground. Note: the campground had several water points to take on water but there were no hookups of any type at the sites so you must be self contained including power.



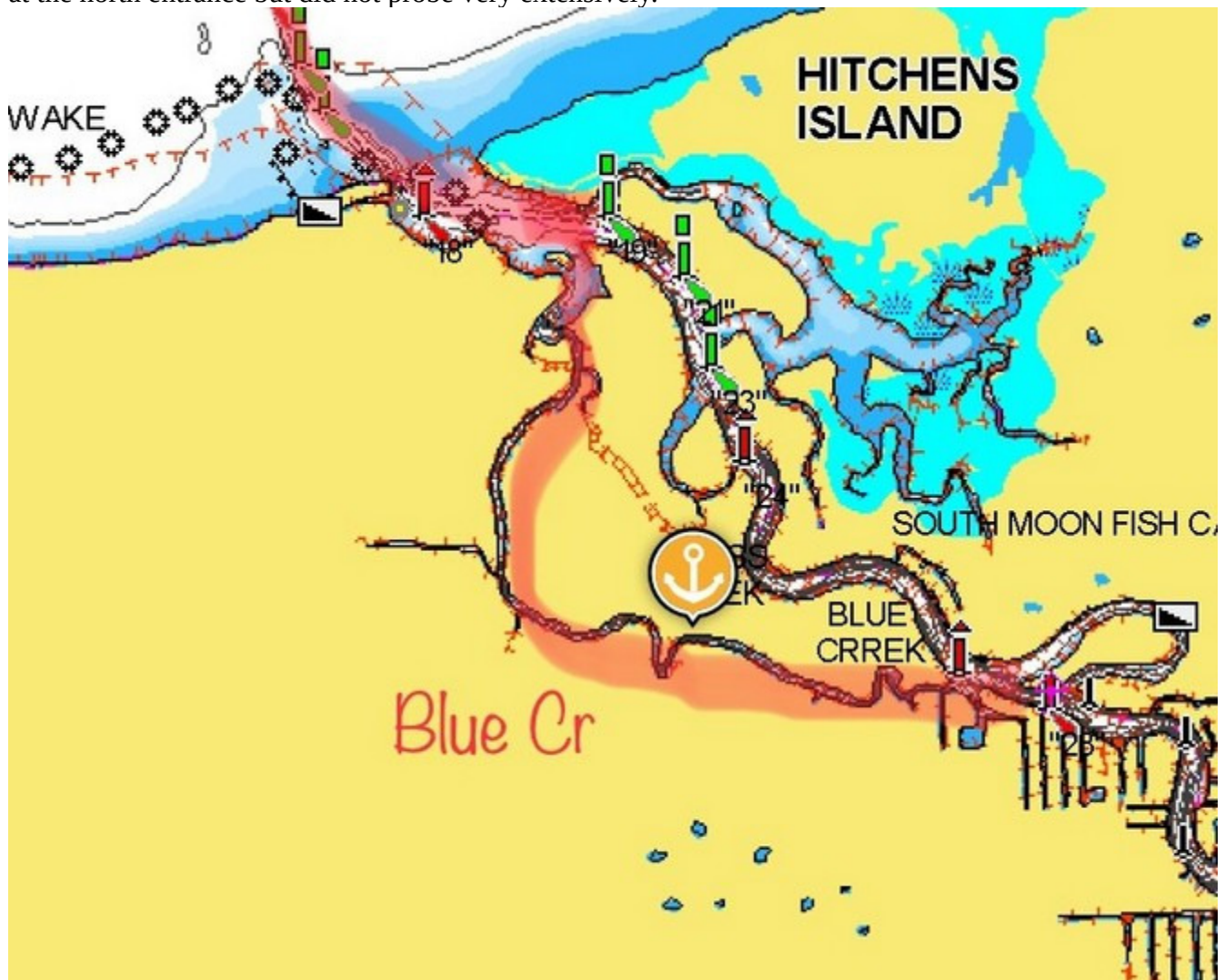
Don't know how far UPSTREAM you could go with a dinghy or kayak-- the end at the campground was very narrow and we were told the run had a significant current downstream of the second spring inflow. DOWNSTREAM from the kayak launch at the day use area is available but the video we've seen of a portion of the trip does show a very narrow spring run.



The main spring pool is lined with a concrete wall with ~3 terraced levels to sit on and to stow your gear while swimming. Much of the seating area around the perimeter of the pool is shaded most of the day.

+++++++Volusia Bar, southern end of Lake George. When heading north at marker 19 do not cut the corner, look to the west side of the river and go to marker 18 then head north to marker 17. Pass between the fences and stay in channel. There is plenty of depth in the channel but also rocks on either side of the jetties. Quoted by Hontoon Bluff as the most dangerous part of the river for their houseboat renters.

+++++++Blue Creek "jungle cruise", ~2 to 5 mi north of Astor between daymarks 26 & 19. 99.9% of creek is 6-8+' with no overhanging branches as in Hontoon jungle cruise below. The depth at the north entrance of the creek was about 4' out into the river but note the NW aligned peninsula jutting from the island appears to be extending it's shoal out into the St. Johns channel so avoid crossing it too quickly if heading back east up the river from this end of the creek. As of Feb 2024 we saw only 2-1/2' depth at the north entrance but did not probe very extensively.

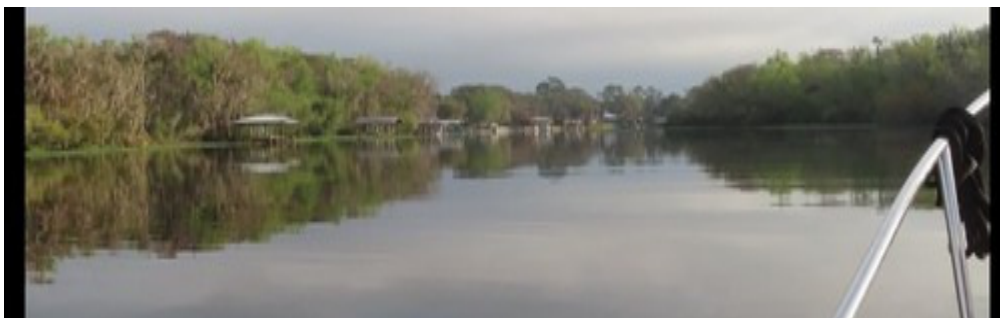




Some of the built up areas on this creek appear to be "Old Florida" structures tucked under the trees and provide an interesting counterpoint to the more modern houses elsewhere on the river. Lots of alligators and birds given the close proximity to Astor. More actual birdhouses in the trees than the birdhouse canal of the Hontoon Island jungle cruise below. Pic below of Jeff's boat is near the southern creek entrance and is typical width of the couple of narrowest areas. Plenty of depth to pass other boats in areas like these.



+++++++Morrison Island anchorage at daymark 28, ~2 mi north of Astor. The oxbow has a few houses and a small campground/marina out of sight around the backside of the creek but the wide part where the anchorage is (near the river entrance) is quiet and hundreds of yards from any houses. Makes convenient jumping off point for Blue Creek jungle cruise or Silver Glen Springs above. Technomadia recommended dinghying up to the Blackwater Inn (now Drifters Riverfront Bar & Grill) on SW side of the bridge, one recent persons report was mixed. Extremely sticky mud. Pic below is looking back into oxbow from the anchorage.



+++++++Astor. At the hwy 40 bridge, a couple of marinas, one waterfront restaurant with dock (Drifters Riverfront Bar & Grill, previously Blackwater Inn, see comments above), two land based recommended restaurants within easy walking distance (Sparkys Place & Rose Garden Cafe), Post Office, Ace Hardware with propane refill and Circle K.

++++++Astor ramp. Just south of the hwy 40 bridge, two ramps separated with nice aluminum finger dock and large parking lot across the street with porta-potties and trash dumpster. Can be busy at times, especially weekends. The new floating dock 20' to the north of the launch ramp (right side of pic below) is for fishing only and has a railing on all sides. The Ace Hardware store has on site propane refill and is immediately adjacent to the ramp parking lot.



+++++Shell/Lundgren Island anchorage at daymark #3, ~2mi south of Astor, between the island and eastern shore so reasonable protection from wakes on the river. 15' deep pool off middle of the island has the most wake protection with 7-8' depth on either north or south end of that pool.

Small landing beach on protected east side kept up occasionally by local volunteers, rope swing, folding chairs, picnic table, brick fire ring, state park type charcoal grill, homemade open air outhouse. We confirmed Technomadia's observation that the out outhouse was not always used and some toilet paper was sprinkled around the island. Popular with houseboats and pontoon boats to beach.

This time of year we never saw more than 1 boat at a time and 75% of the time we had the anchorage to our selves. Handy place to anchor out close to the Astor launch ramp, we spent 7 nights there at various times waiting for boat parts and mail. Pic below is looking west toward landing beach from the extreme southern end of anchorage, St. Johns river is running left to right beyond island.



+++++DeLeon Springs SP. When the airdraft board at the highway 44 bridge (Deland/Whitehair bridge) reads 16' or less (higher water), 95% of the trip to the park is at least 4'+ of depth, most of the channels and lakes are at least 6-8'. An "eco tour" pontoon boat runs hour long trips daily out of the DeLeon state park dock. We saw numerous general fishermen hooking whatever and john boats netting for Tilapia in the park basin around us. There is plenty of room to pass in the channel and I mention these other boats only to emphasize that these are navigable waters when the level is right. But there are a couple of creek bars at the channel mouths of the lakes have shoaled to ~2.5' when the airdraft at the bridge is 16'. We found the Navionics chart depth to be pretty accurate.



There are two ways to get to the park from the St. Johns by boat: through Lake Dexter starting at daymark 13 on the river or up the Highland Park Canal at daymark 38 on the river. The Highland Park Canal route to Lake Woodruff (that route following Jeff's boat in pic below) was shallowest at the southern entrance of Lake Woodruff.



The Lake Dexter route to Lake Woodruff was shallowest at an area of old piling and floating hyacinth beds at the eastern entrance to Lake Dexter.

Either route puts you onto Lake Woodruff where you can "open her up" as long as you are 1500' from shore. At the NE corner of Lake Woodruff, pass over a short shallow bar south of a few submerged pilings to enter the winding channel to Springs Garden lake. For some crazy reason, this channel is NOT a no wake zone once over the entrance bar but there are numerous manatees present at the park basin so "save a manatee".

When you pop out of the channel onto the non-swampy north end of Springs Garden Lake, you should have ~3' through the lake into the park basin. Anchor on the west side in the basin as close as you wish to the ~3' high (manmade) waterfall cascading 200 gallons per second of water out from the spring pool area located across the concrete weir to the SE. Keep an eye on your engine temp on these legs, the springs passes some clumps of algae down the run that can stick to your water intakes in the thin water areas.

The park hours are 8A to sunset and boaters are forbidden to be on the grounds outside of park hours. (We were called out by a park employee for being on the grounds 10 minutes early to the restaurant!) Dinghy/kayak over to the free day dock and tie up on the outside face of where the rental paddle boats are stored.

The Old Sugar Mill restaurant is at left of pic below, spring pool retention weir in center of pic, the park anchorage basin 3' lower with our boat at anchor on right, the entrance to basin at the extreme right. We saw both swimmers and scuba divers in the spring while we were there- 72' water



The Old Spanish Sugar Mill offers grill-your-own breakfast pancakes and/or eggs that you cook at your table. Very popular place 7 days a week so if you miss the first seating at 8A you will have an hour+ wait for a seat. They also do lunch until 4P.

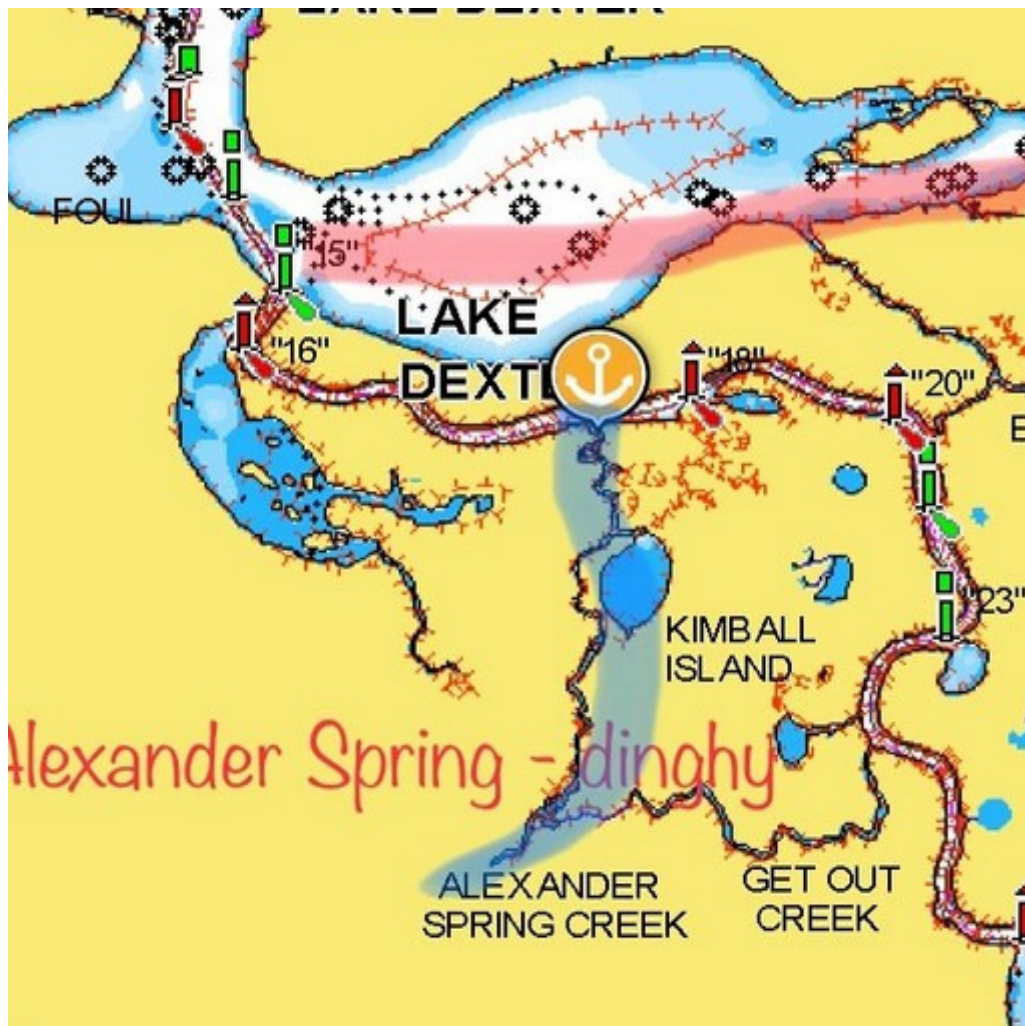
Lots of picnic tables widely scattered in the park, and a nice paved nature trail with azaleas blooming in February. No charge for boaters but we donated in the small museum showing a video of the water-skiing elephant who used to live there.



Spend the night to see surface fog lifting above the lake at sunrise and the very energetic aggregation of manatees in the early AM, a few alligators on the shore looking for small dogs or wayward children. Saw the alligator below swimming across the anchorage area around sundown. We anchored 3 nights there.



+++++Alexander Spring dinghy trip. Between daymark 16 & 18 south of Lake Dexter. Did not do.



++++Revolving Cut/Fisk Oxbow anchorage, between daymark 30 & 32. Great anchorages on either side of island, pick your side based on wind. The Fisk Oxbow side has good visibility to the SE for watching Elon Musks' Space X launches from Canaveral 65 miles away which are scheduled to occur about once per week. Pro tips: We like twilight launches the best, we could see the rocket flame and contrails better than the daylight launches. Jeff Beam turned us onto free app/website "go4liftoff" to find the rocket launch schedule-- look for the "toggle filters" to downselect the data to Florida (this covers all launches worldwide).

Anchor/dinghy/kayak to southern end of shoaled channel between the two smaller islands on the east end of the Oxbow for the best SE view above the trees to Canaveral. Even from so far away, we could just make out the fairing separation and watched the booster rockets burn then descend back through the launch contrail to about 5000' above the cape before dropping behind the trees during a twilight launch (booster returning in pic below).



+++++River Forest Oxbow anchorage, between daymarks 36 & 38. Great protected anchorages on either side of island. One house at SW end of oxbow can be out of sight from either anchorage if you pick the right spot. Good staging area for the Highland Park Canal entrance to DeLeon Springs above.

+++++St Johns Marina "North" (of the hwy 44 bridge) on the east side. Waterway Guide listing mistakenly said this marina has fuel, that is incorrect, the fuel dock is on the other side of the river at the south marina. The St John's River Grill is pretty good and has a rooftop tiki bar/dining area above the ground floor restaurant that can provide some unique "aerial" photo opportunities for your boat without the need for a drone. A complementary floating aluminum face dock out front on the river has room for ~3 Rosboroughs if you are careful but you may need to wrestle some local pontoon boats or fishermen for the space. The large marina lot on the south and east side of the marina basin previously used for dry boat storage has been "upscaled" for use as a KOA campground so the restaurant has a built in customer base and seemed consistently busy.



If you snag a slip inside the marina basin behind the restaurant or otherwise have a reason to enter it off the river (we entered once futilely looking for fuel), use caution due to the somewhat narrow (25'-30?) entrance and the diminishing river cross current as you enter that manmade cut followed by a blind 90 degree turn to starboard around the restaurant. The entrance channel to the marina basin is visible on the left side of the pic above.

+++++Ed Stone Park, adjacent to the north side of the hwy 44 bridge on east side of the river. 6 ramps, small riverside park. Doesn't look like there is any place to tie up unless you are loading and unloading a trailer.

+++++St Johns Marina "South" (of the hwy 44 bridge) on the west side of the river. Apparently owned by the same guys as the North marina, possibly the source of the confusion in fuel availability above. The only fuel dock on the river south of Palatka that sells diesel which we used for our heater. This would not be our first pick for a slip if that were a possibility, the marina seems to be all but abandoned

(their 3 story boat rack appeared empty) except for the fuel dock and some larger live aboard boats in river front slips. The nearby hwy 44 bascule bridge is in the process of being replaced with a fixed bridge on the south side of the existing bridge so there is currently lots of construction noise in the area.

+++++Shady Oak restaurant. Just south of the hwy 44 bridge directly across the river from the south marina operation. Impressed us as more of a "colorful atmosphere" type local hangout and their menu was a little smaller than St. Johns Grill. Very long wooden face dock along the river could hold ~6 Rosboroughs. The food was tasty though and there were several tables on the covered porch facing the river. We ate there when we couldn't get dock space at the St Johns Grill and were perfectly happy with our experience.



+++++Hontoon Landing Resort & Marina, directly across the river from the state park, 100 yard walk from the park ferry dock so very accessible. 18 room motel with pool, pontoon boat rental, regular sized deli that serves hot breakfasts. What we could see of the facility impressed us, seemed like a well kept mom-n-pop operation that has done well over the years and possibly would make a great place to meet and put up extended family for the Hontoon jungle cruise below.

+++++Hontoon Island State Park, ****** As of Feb 2024, the park and docks are only open during the day . Even though the park office, restrooms and showers have been restored after hurricane Ian and are available for use during the day, the on-island staff housing is still awaiting repairs so there is no staff on the island at night other than park volunteers. No nighttime staff means no overnight camping or docking. Also the free pontoon boat normally operated by the concessionaire is NOT currently serving the public because the island gift shop is also closed pending repairs******

The park is only accessible by private boat or a free park ferry across the St. Johns from a park parking lot adjacent to some nearby marinas, one of which offers deli type sandwiches. Park slip for \$18/nite + \$7 for power + tax, \$5 Reservation fee by email or phone, no reservation fee for walkups. We never saw more than one or two other boats but be aware other than the 2 end face docks and the adjacent 4 end slips, the remaining park slips are a little short at only 22'.

Alternatively, use any open dock without an orange “reserved” cone for free during the day and anchor around the corner for the night somewhere on the Dead River just to the north starting at daymark 50. No admission charge to enter park either way, although donations gratefully accepted.

Toilet block at the head of the docks unheated but with very warm shower water (free w/ slip, \$8 for day users). Playground for any (grand)kids, picnic tables, fire ring near the docks, small museum & store and several interesting walking trails beyond the campground. We saw several docile armadillos on our walk and a bear lives on the island. The park makes an excellent staging point for the "jungle cruise" described below.

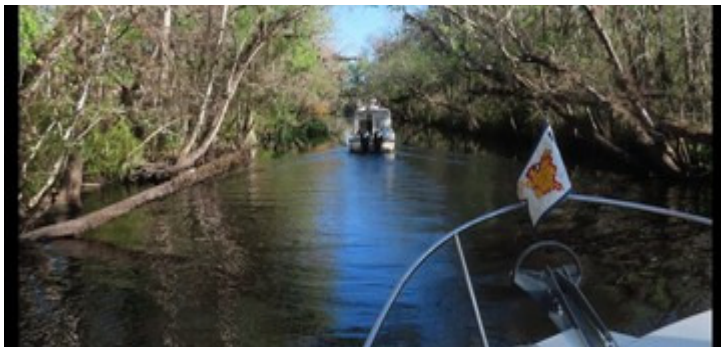
The pic below is a view out one of the two park docks from the building containing the toilet block, The Hontoon Landing Resort facility described above is on far side of the river and is visible between the two trees in the middle of the pic. The free park ferry runs back and forth just off the right edge of the pic.



+++++Dead River Hontoon Island circumnavigation "jungle cruise", between daymark 50 & 80. Circumnavigating Hontoon Island on the Dead & St. Johns Rivers naturally pairs with a visit to the Blue Springs State Park. The local custom is reported to be to do the loop counterclockwise which has the advantage of putting the Blue Springs park visit in the afternoon when the sun aligns with the spring run to best illuminate the river and the manatees in our opinion. We left Hontoon ~2-1/2 hours before lunch to do the Dead River section, had some sandwiches at Blue Springs Park, ogled the manatees for a couple of hours then cruised an hour to get back to Hontoon.



The route has no depth issues at all but the final 1/4 mile of the Dead River portion before rejoining the St. John runs through a narrow, tree canopied stretch nicknamed the "Birdhouse" canal and is reminiscent of the entrance to Ramblers hole at Don Pedro on the west coast of Florida. The biggest low hanging branches have been trimmed away and we easily made it through with our dinghy crane erect (12') by swerving a few times to dodge branches and some deadheads. Jeff graciously led us by the nose on our first circumnavigation jungle cruise around the island until we got our confidence.

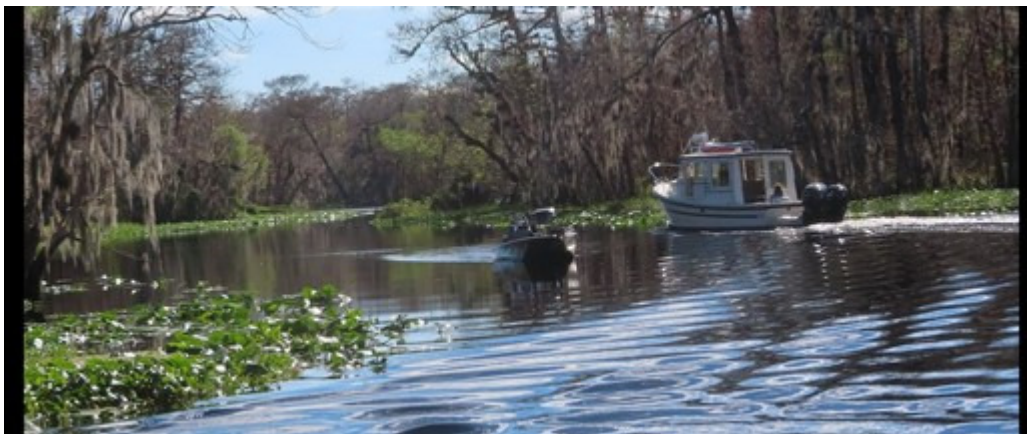


We later took some very impressed family members on the same cruise on our boat and were proudly strutting the docks as members of the "Birdhouse survivors" until our ego was deflated after discovering that the Mainship 34 "Many Moons" had also recently done the birdhouse canal on his jungle cruise in the configuration below (except with lowered VHF and flag staff). They did say they

had to push some branches aside from their flybridge and they did carry a chainsaw (which was never used).



We found the first 2/3rds of the loop on the Dead River dense with animals-- otters, alligators, turtles, numerous bird species and is best done at a slow pace to have time to locate the animals (as well as being entirely zoned all no/minimal wake areas). We found that most animals would tolerate our stopping and standing off about 1-1/2 to 2 boat lengths but any attempt to creep closer would usually result in them submerging/flying away. The pic below is on the southern end of the Dead River close to the entrance of the Birdhouse Canal and is one of the narrower areas of that river.



We found the Birdhouse canal rather void of animals which is just as well as the one or two low limbs and deadheads along the way needed to be negotiated. The Birdhouse canal is the middle of 3 horizontal canals in the area and dumps out onto the St. Johns at daymark 80. The final 1/3rd of the jungle cruise trip is on the St. Johns and runs past the Blue Springs State Park (described below) then back to Hontoon Island SP docks. That final leg on the river between the two parks has one ~1 mile long section with the normal river speed limit but otherwise the entire loop is no/minimal wake.

+++++++Blue Springs State Park, daymark 71. The concessionaire of the park runs some tour boats and a kayak rental operation on the St. Johns which occupy most of the waterfront adjacent to the spring run. There is a narrow sandy "beach" (low sand bar that fronts a varying dryness cypress swamp) to the SE of those areas that pontoon and houseboats can drive up onto but we found we could get no closer than ~5' to shore bow in with our Rosborough. We didn't feel comfortable trying to wedge stern in med style in between the houseboats and pontoon boats, many of which often had their fishing lines cast out into the river.

We anchored and dinghied in from a couple of hundred feet SW of the "beach" at the mouth of "The Lagoon" (which shoals quickly if you get too far off the river) with good holding. Two oxbows on the west side of the river ½ mile north and south of the park would also make good anchorages for visits by kayak or dinghy.

Tying off to the cypress trees is supposed to be verboten at the park but everyone seemed to do it. We pulled our dinghy ashore and set our anchor into the swamp muck for insurance against wakes. Pro tip: our dinghy got thoroughly "bombed" by vultures taking a dump from the overhanging tree branches on one visit-- you may want to bring a trash bag to protect your life vests and a sponge to wipe down your dink or kayak for the return trip. The pic below looks beyond the kayak concession out to Time & Tide at anchor, the park private boat landing "beach" is off the left edge of the pic. The St Johns River is on the right hand side of the pic partly visible through the palm fronds.



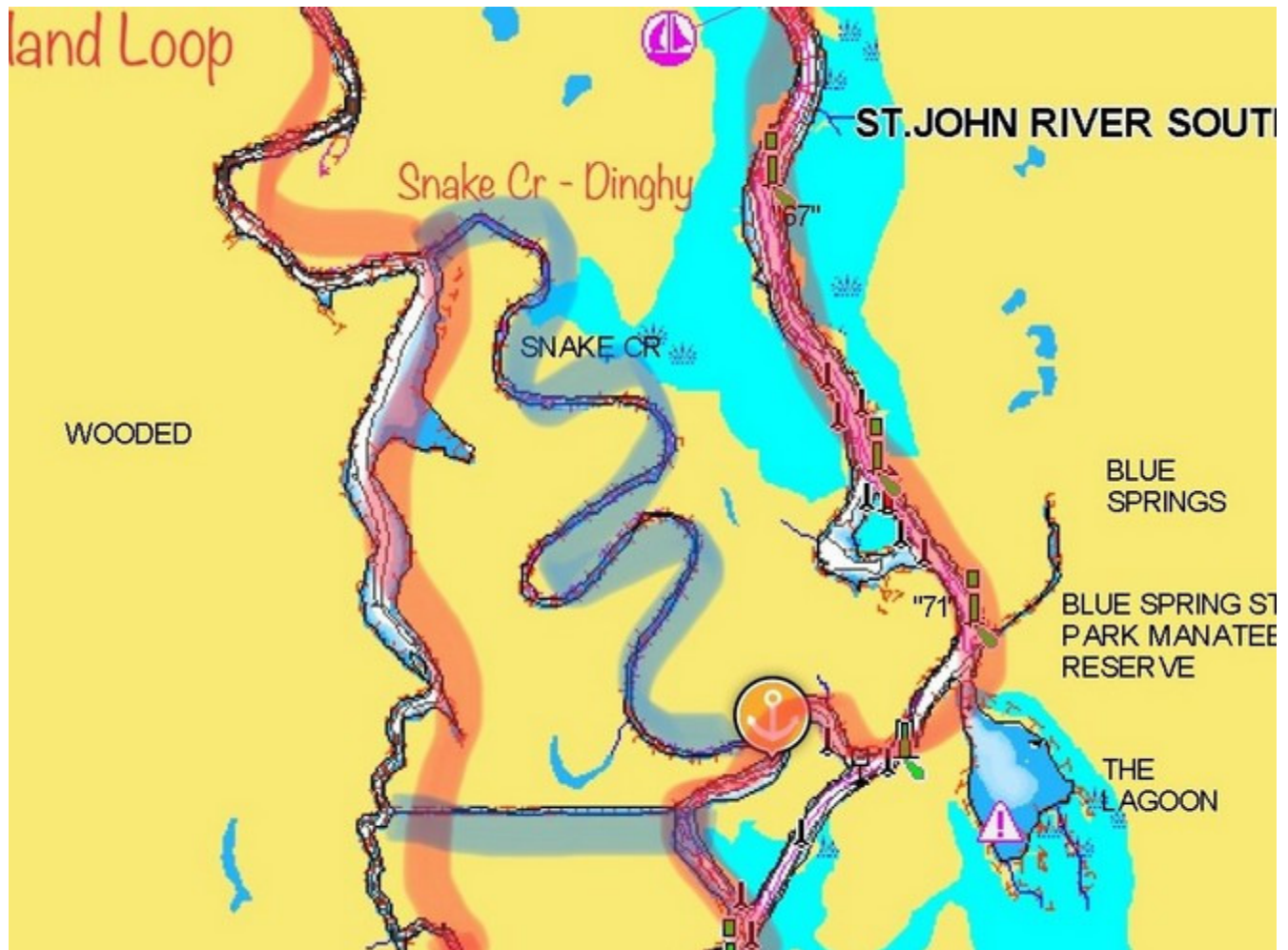
The park charges \$2 a head for boaters and there is an obvious self pay (take correct change) kiosk as you enter the park behind the kayak launch area. The park is well attended all days of the week and the number of manatees is highly dependent on the temperature- the colder the greater number. A wooden boardwalk with viewing platforms parallels the spring run from the mouth at the river 1/2 mile up to the head of the spring. We found 95% of the manatees traveled no further than 1/2 way up the run.

Unlike the tannin stained St. Johns River, the Blue Springs run is clear and the mid-afternoon sun swings around to shine down through the gap between the trees on either bank of the run to illuminate the sandy bottom. If the wind is calm, the manatees appear to be floating in midair. The manatee count taken first thing each morning the 3 days we visited ranged from 250 to over 700 and they come and go out to the river to forage so the number on the run will vary at any particular time.



The park has several restrooms and picnic areas scattered about and a cafe serving decent burgers, BBQ sandwiches and soft drinks about halfway up the boardwalk. Good interpretative signage and a volunteer docent that wanders between the observation platforms to answer questions.

+++++Snake Creek dinghy trip. Creek that defines southern boundary of Hontoon Island SP. Enter from Dead River on west side or St John River Oxbow just south of Blue Springs SP. Did not do and was told in 2024 that it was difficult to transit after hurrican Ian..



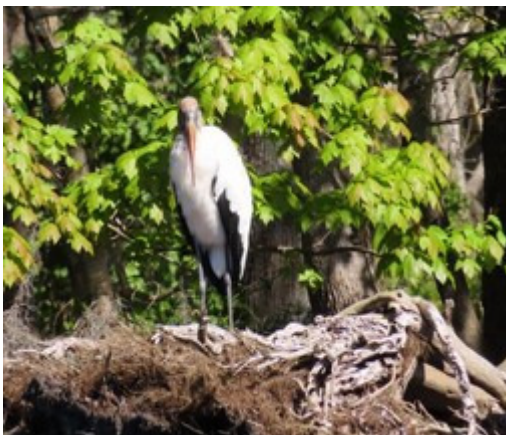
+++++Goat Island Loop jungle cruise. Just below Birdhouse Canal exit onto St John River. Similar to Hontoon Island jungle cruise but without the overhanging tree canopy of the Birdhouse Canal and was more heavily traveled including the eco tour pontoon boat from Blue Springs. We traveled southbound but more traffic appeared to be going northbound. There was plenty of room to pass other boats except when running by the islands guarding the creek at either end but those areas are short. Pic below is approaching south end island from the north, the deeper water is to the west side of the island.

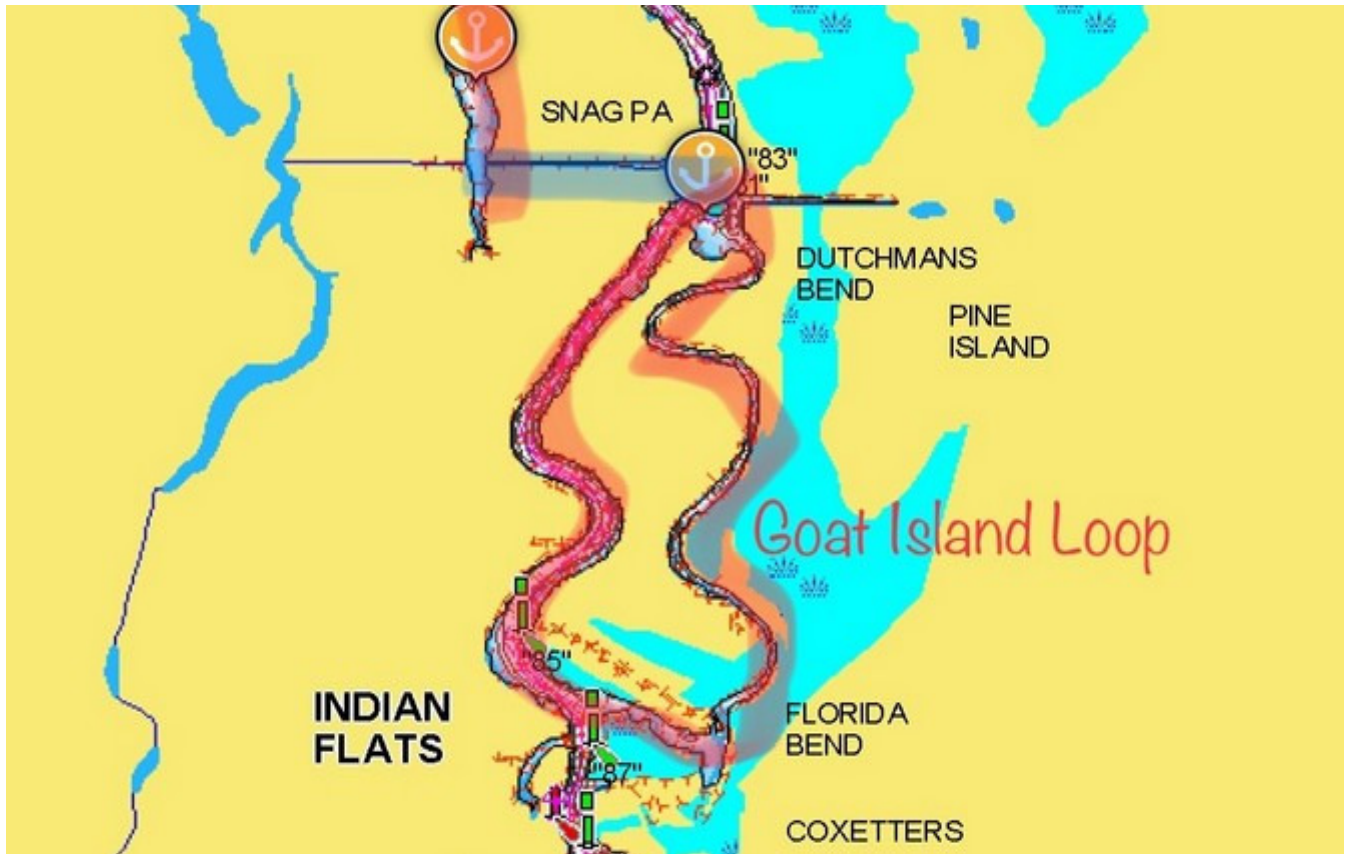


The pic below is pretty typical of the cruise and shows the normal width available to pass..



We noticed fewer turtles and alligators than we had seen on the Hontoon cruise but that may have been just the day. Or possibly due to the heavier traffic. But the number and variety of birds seemed similar to Hontoon like this Wood Stork and Great White Egret.





+++++Emanuel Bend anchorage, Technomadia said less desirable than Butchers Bend. 9.2 mi north of Sanford. Small beach and trail just north.

+++++++Butchers Bend anchorage, between daymark 109 & 111. On Oxbow bend 6.9 mi north of Sanford, a few miles off of Lake Monroe. Nice protected anchorage that widens out on the back side of the channel. The ~7 mile long Black Bear Wilderness Trail runs along through the trees ~150' inland across a mucky creek from the western shore of the anchorage. Gently sloping sandy bottom on the west side of oxbow channel (right side of the south facing pic below taken from inside the oxbow) allows you to pick your anchoring depth between 1 to 15'. An excursion paddle wheel boat (the Barbara Lee out of Sanford marina, seen heading out of the oxbow back into the St. Johns in the pic below) passes through the oxbow once per day Wed-Sun for a lunch cruise so anchor with some room for them to pass on the island side of the oxbow channel. We anchored here twice.



+++++ Port of Sanford RR bridge, about a half mile off Lake Monroe. The only bridge on the southern St John that a Rosborough needs to wait for. Our first request for a lift on the way to Sanford was without a wait, our return trip required a 20-30 minute wait for a couple of commuter and one freight

trains plus a truck on the rails to pass by. The bridge tender did keep us abreast of his rail traffic situation as we waited. If trapped on the east/south side of the bridge for an extended time, there is a ramp facility about 750' off the river to the north that has a shore side mooring wall between the ramps that could be tied up to.

+++++Monroe Harbor Marina. The marina is \$1.15/ft/day, \$5.75/ft/week with locked gates at the head of each dock. One locked small toilet block with showers for the marina (but seemed to be little used) and a laundry room in the building behind the Barbara Lee office (St. Johns Rivership Company) just off the left side of the pic below. Marina office, fuel dock and pumpout station are near the entrance of east basin off the right side of the pic. We did see a pumpout boat but don't know the particulars for that service. The tiny floating house is an Air B-n-B available for rent.



+++++Sanford, the "Celery City".The main "downtown" historic area of Sanford seemed to be centered around 4-5 blocks of 1st street (restored buildings with restaurants, shops, breweries and visitors center) which is just a couple of blocks straight south of the marina. A museum, theater, library are also within easy walking distance of the docks.

The biggest German restaurant (Hollerbach's) we've seen outside of Germany was one of the closer restaurants and very busy. Excellent Greek restaurant. One small supermarket (Jaly Fresh Market) 6 blocks from the marina should cover most needs if you are flexible about brands. A free trolley runs around the waterfront park through downtown westward to the train station where one can catch the SunRail commuter train. Larger grocery stores are further west and/or south and require a bike, bus ride (\$2 each way) or Uber/Lyft (we had typically less than 10 minute wait for a pickup). Pic below is 2 blocks north and 1 block west of marina.



+++++South of Sanford. We looked at taking some family on a cruise further south off of Lake Monroe around the river delta but the marina staff didn't recommend the trip due to shoaling on the eastern side. John Coppage went further south with a flotilla of C-Dorys during their annual rendezvous in 2018 and his trip notes are available in the Groups IO files.