

Doggin' Northwest Florida

***The 50 Best Places
To Hike With Your Dog
In The Panhandle***

DOUG GELBERT

illustrations by

ANDREW CHESWORTH



Cruden Bay Books



There is always a new trail to look forward to...

**DOGGIN' NORTHWEST FLORIDA: THE 50 BEST PLACES
TO HIKE WITH YOUR DOG IN THE PANHANDLE**

Copyright 2008 by Cruden Bay Books

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Cruden Bay Books
PO Box 467
Montchanin, DE 19710
www.hikewithyourdog.com

International Standard Book Number 978-0-9815346-1-9

*“Dogs are our link to paradise...to sit with a dog on a hillside
on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden,
where doing nothing was not boring - it was peace.”
- Milan Kundera*

Ahead On The Trail

No Dogs!	14
The 50 Best Places To Hike With Your Dog	15
Camping With Your Dog	104
Your Dog At The Beach	115
Index To Parks, Trails And Open Space	116

Also...

Hiking With Your Dog	5
Outfitting Your Dog For A Hike	9
Low Impact Hiking With Your Dog	12

Introduction

Northwest Florida can be a great place to hike with your dog. Within a short drive your canine adventurer can be climbing seaside dunes that leave him panting, trotting in rolling pinelands, exploring the estates of America's wealthiest families or circling lakes for miles and never lose sight of the water.

I have selected what I consider to be the 50 best places to take your dog for an outing in Northwest Florida and ranked them according to subjective criteria including the variety of hikes available, opportunities for canine swimming and pleasure of the walks. The rankings include a mix of parks that feature long walks and parks that contain short walks. Did I miss your favorite? Let us know at *www.hikewithyourdog.com*.

For dog owners it is important to realize that not all parks are open to our best trail companions (see page 14 for a list of parks that do not allow dogs). It is sometimes hard to believe but not everyone loves dogs. We are, in fact, in the minority when compared with our non-dog owning neighbors.

So when visiting a park always keep your dog under control and clean up any messes and we can all expect our great parks to remain open to our dogs. And maybe some others will see the light as well. *Remember, every time you go out with your dog you are an ambassador for all dog owners.*

Grab that leash and hit the trail!

DBG

Hiking With Your Dog

So you want to start hiking with your dog. Hiking with your dog can be a fascinating way to explore the Florida Panhandle from a canine perspective. Some things to consider:

Dog's Health

Hiking can be a wonderful preventative for any number of physical and behavioral disorders. One in every three dogs is overweight and running up trails and leaping through streams is great exercise to help keep pounds off. Hiking can also relieve boredom in a dog's routine and calm dogs prone to destructive habits. And hiking with your dog strengthens the overall owner/dog bond.

Breed of Dog

All dogs enjoy the new scents and sights of a trail. But some dogs are better suited to hiking than others. If you don't as yet have a hiking companion, select a breed that matches your interests. Do you look forward to an entire afternoon's hiking? You'll need a dog bred to keep up with such a pace, such as a retriever or a spaniel. Is a half-hour enough walking for you? It may not be for an energetic dog like a border collie. If you already have a hiking friend, tailor your plans to his abilities.

Conditioning

Just like humans, dogs need to be acclimated to the task at hand. An inactive dog cannot be expected to bounce from the easy chair in the den to complete a 3-hour hike. You must also be physically able to restrain your dog if confronted with distractions on the trail (like a scampering squirrel or a pack of joggers). Have your dog checked by a veterinarian before significantly increasing his activity level.

Weather

Hot humid Florida summers do not do dogs any favors. With no sweat glands and only panting available to disperse body heat, dogs are much more susceptible to heat stroke than we are. Unusually rapid panting and/or a bright red tongue are signs of heat exhaustion in your pet.

Always carry enough water for your hike. Even the prime hiking days of late fall through early spring that don't seem too warm can cause discomfort in dark-coated dogs if the sun is shining brightly. During cold snaps, short-coated breeds may require additional attention.

Trail Hazards

Dogs won't get poison ivy but they can transfer it to you. Some trails are littered with small pieces of broken glass that can slice a dog's paws. Nasty thorns can also blanket trails that we in shoes may never notice. At the beach beware of sand spurs that can often be present in scrubby, sandy areas.

Ticks

You won't be able to spend much time in Florida woods without encountering ticks. All are nasty but the deer tick - no bigger than a pin head - carries with it the spectre of Lyme disease. Lyme disease attacks a dog's joints and makes walking painful. The tick needs to be embedded in the skin to transmit Lyme disease. It takes 4-6 hours for a tick to become embedded and another 24-48 hours to transmit Lyme disease bacteria.

When hiking, walk in the middle of trails away from tall grass and bushes. And when the summer sun fades away don't stop thinking about ticks - they remain active any time the temperature is above 30 degrees. By checking your dog - and yourself - thoroughly after each walk you can help avoid Lyme disease. Ticks tend to congregate on your dog's ears, between the toes and around the neck and head.

Water

Surface water, including fast-flowing streams, is likely to be infested with a microscopic protozoa called *Giardia*, waiting to wreak havoc on a dog's intestinal system. The most common symptom is crippling diarrhea. Algae, pollutants and contaminants can all be in streams, ponds and puddles. If possible, carry fresh water for your dog on the trail - your dog can even learn to drink happily from a squirt bottle.

At the beach, cool sea water will be tempting for your dog but try to limit any drinking as much as possible. Again, have plenty of fresh water available for your dog to drink instead.

🐾 Rattlesnakes and Copperheads, etc.

Rattlesnakes and their close cousins, copperheads, are not particularly aggressive animals but you should treat any venomous snake with respect and keep your distance. A rattler's colors may vary but they are recognized by the namesake rattle on the tail and a diamond-shaped head. Unless cornered or teased by humans or dogs, a rattlesnake will crawl away and avoid striking. Avoid placing your hand in unexamined rocky areas and crevasses and try and keep your dog from doing so as well. Stick to the trail and out of high grass where you can't see well. If you hear a nearby rattle, stop immediately and hold your dog back. Identify where the snake is and slowly back away.

If you or your dog is bitten, do not panic but get to a hospital or veterinarian with as little physical movement as possible. Wrap between the bite and the heart. Rattlesnakes might give "dry bites" where no poison is injected, but you should always check with a doctor after a bite even if you feel fine.



🐾 Black Bears

Are you likely to see a bear while out hiking with your dog? No, it's not likely. It is, however, quite a thrill if you are fortunate enough to spot a black bear on the trail - from a distance.

Black bear attacks are incredibly rare. In the year 2000 a hiker was killed by a black bear in Great Smoky National Park and it was the first deadly bear attack in the 66-year history of America's most popular

national park. It was the first EVER in the southeastern United States. In all of North America only 43 black bear mauling deaths have ever been recorded (through 1999).

Most problems with black bears occur near a campground (like the above incident) where bears have learned to forage for unprotected food. On the trail bears will typically see you and leave the area. What should you do if you encounter a black bear? Experts agree on three important things:

- 1) *Never run. A bear will outrun you, outclimb you, outswim you. Don't look like prey.*
- 2) *Never get between a female bear and a cub who may be nearby feeding.*
- 3) *Leave a bear an escape route.*

If the bear is at least 15 feet away and notices you make sure you keep your dog close and calm. If a bear stands on its hind legs or comes closer it may just be trying to get a better view or smell to evaluate the situation. Wave your arms and make noise to scare the bear away. Most bears will quickly leave the area.

If you encounter a black bear at close range, stand upright and make yourself appear as large a foe as possible. Avoid direct eye contact and speak in a calm, assertive and assuring voice as you back up slowly and out of danger.

Alligators

Alligators are found in marshes, swamps, rivers and lakes as well as neighborhood drainage ditches and canals - anywhere you see water is potential gator habitat. Use common sense and do not allow your dog in waters where alligators may be lurking. Don't walk your dog close to water if you can avoid it.

If you see an alligator on land, just walk your dog away from the area - although they can scurry 30 miles per hour for short distances, alligators do not run down prey on land. They may run on land to escape danger or protect a nest but will not come after you if there is an escape route to the water. Make sure you give him one.

Outfitting Your Dog For A Hike

These are the basics for taking your dog on a hike:

▶ **Collar.**

A properly fitting collar should not be so loose as to come off but you should be able to slide your flat hand under the collar.

▶ **Identification Tags.**

Get one with your veterinarian's phone number as well.

▶ **Bandanna.**


Can help distinguish him from game in hunting season.

▶ **Leash.**


Leather lasts forever but if there's water in your dog's future, consider quick-drying nylon.

▶ **Water.**

Carry 8 ounces for every hour of hiking.

 *I want my dog to help carry water, snacks and other supplies on the trail. Where do I start?*

To select an appropriate dog pack measure your dog's girth around the rib cage. A dog pack should fit securely without hindering the dog's ability to walk normally.

 *Will my dog wear a pack?*

Wearing a dog pack is no more obtrusive than wearing a collar, although some dogs will take to a pack easier than others. Introduce the pack by draping a towel over your dog's back in the house and then having your dog wear an empty pack on short walks. Progressively add some crumpled newspaper and then bits of clothing. Fill the pack with treats and reward your dog from the stash. Soon your dog will associate the dog pack with an outdoor adventure and will eagerly look forward to wearing it.

🐾 *How much weight can I put into a dog pack?*

Many dog packs are sold by weight recommendations. A healthy, well-conditioned dog can comfortably carry 25% to 33% of its body weight. Breeds prone to back problems or hip dysplasia should not wear dog packs. Consult your veterinarian before stuffing the pouches with gear.


🐾 *How does a dog wear a pack?*

The pack, typically with cargo pouches on either side, should ride as close to the shoulders as possible without limiting movement. The straps that hold the dog pack in place should be situated where they will not cause chafing.

🐾 *What are good things to put in a dog pack?*

Low density items such as food and poop bags are good choices. Ice cold bottles of water can cool your dog down on hot days. Don't put anything in a dog pack that can break. Dogs will bang the pack on rocks and trees as they wiggle through tight spots in the trail. Dogs also like to lie down in creeks and other wet spots so seal items in plastic bags. A good use for dog packs when on day hikes around Northwest Florida is trail maintenance - your dog can pack out trash left by inconsiderate visitors before you.



 *Are dog booties a good idea?*

Although not typically necessary, dog booties can be an asset, especially for the occasional canine hiker whose paw pads have not become toughened. Most Florida trails are soft under paw but in some places there may be broken glass or roots. Hiking boots for dogs are designed to prevent pads from cracking while trotting across rough surfaces.

 *What should a doggie first aid kit include?*

Even when taking short hikes it is a good idea to have some basics available for emergencies:









- ▶ 4" square gauze pads
- ▶ cling type bandaging tapes
- ▶ topical wound disinfectant cream
- ▶ tweezers
- ▶ insect repellent - no reason to leave your dog unprotected against mosquitoes and biting flies
- ▶ veterinarian's phone number

"I can't think of anything that brings me closer to tears than when my old dog - completely exhausted after a hard day in the field - limps away from her nice spot in front of the fire and comes over to where I'm sitting and puts her head in my lap, a paw over my knee, and closes her eyes, and goes back to sleep. I don't know what I've done to deserve that kind of friend."

-Gene Hill

Low Impact Hiking With Your Dog

Every time you hike with your dog on the trail you are an ambassador for all dog owners. Some people you meet won't believe in your right to take a dog on the trail. Be friendly to all and make the best impression you can by practicing low impact hiking with your dog:

-  Pack out everything you pack in.
-  Do not leave dog scat on the trail; if you haven't brought plastic bags for poop removal bury it away from the trail and topical water sources.
-  Hike only where dogs are allowed.
-  Stay on the trail.
-  Do not allow your dog to chase wildlife.
-  Step off the trail and wait with your dog while horses and other hikers pass.
-  Do not allow your dog to bark - people are enjoying the trail for serenity.
-  *Have as much fun on your hike as your dog does.*

The Other End Of The Leash

Leash laws are like speed limits - everyone seems to have a private interpretation of their validity. Some dog owners never go outside with an unleashed dog; others treat the laws as suggestions or disregard them completely. It is not the purpose of this book to tell dog owners where to go to evade the leash laws or reveal the parks where rangers will look the other way at an unleashed dog. Nor is it the business of this book to preach vigilant adherence to the leash laws. Nothing written in a book is going to change people's behavior with regard to leash laws. So this will be the last time leash laws are mentioned, save occasionally when we point out the parks where dogs are welcomed off leash.

Visiting Florida State Parks

State park pet rules: "Pets are permitted in designated day-use areas at ALL Florida State Parks. They must be kept on a hand-held leash that is six-feet or shorter and be well-behaved at all times. Pet owners are required to pick up after their pets and properly dispose of their droppings. Pets are not permitted on beaches or playgrounds, or in bathing areas, cabins, park buildings, or concession facilities."

State forests and wildlife management areas in Florida allow hunting. If you can only hike with your dog in such places during hunting season, outfit yourself and your dog in blaze orange and stick to the trails. Hunting season coincides with prime hiking season after September but often is restricted to specific days of the week so plan your dog's outings accordingly.

No Dogs

Before we get started on the best places to take your dog, let's get out of the way some of the parks that do not allow dogs at all:

Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve

Eglin Air Force Base

Perdido Key State Park

St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge



O.K. that wasn't too bad. Let's forget about these and move on to some of the great places where we CAN take our dogs on Northwest Florida trails...

*The 50 Best Places
To Hike With Your Dog
In Northwest Florida...*

I

Torreya

State Park

The Park

Hardy Bryan Croom, a planter and naturalist of some renown, began amassing land in northern Florida in the 1820s and in 1833 purchased 640 acres of the Lafayette Land Grant for what would become Goodwood Plantation. While exploring from his cotton plantation, Croom discovered one of the rarest conifers in the world along the banks of the Apalachicola River. He named the small evergreen “torreya” after the botanist Dr. John Torrey.

It would turn out the torreya was native to only five other spots in the world - one in California, four in Japan and China, and on the bluffs of the Apalachicola. Croom’s own botanical career would be cut short in 1837 when he perished with 89 others aboard the *S.S. Home* off the coast of Cape Hatteras in the Racer’s Storm, one of the most destructive hurricanes of the 19th century.

During the Great Depression, workers in President Franklin Roosevelt’s “Tree Army,” the Civilian Conservation Corps, developed the park.

The Walks

On the way to nowhere, your dog will thank you for making the special trip to Torreya State Park. This is the best one-hour workout your dog can get in Northwest Florida, hiking across terrain more familiar in Appalachian foothills. Indeed, the mix of hardwoods thriving at the various elevations in the park conspire to whip up Florida’s best display of autumn colors.

There are two hiking loops at Torreya, each about seven miles around. Along the Apalachicola River the *Rock Bluff Trail* dips and rolls through ravines

Liberty

Phone Number
- (850) 643-2674

Website
- floridastateparks.org/torreya

Admission Fee
- Vehicle parking fee

Park Hours
- 8:00 a.m. to sunset

Directions
- *Rock Bluff*; from Exit 174 off I-10, head south on SR 12. Turn right on CR 1641 and continue to the park entrance at the end.

Bonus

The Apalachicola River, Florida's largest, was a vital transportation link throughout the 1800s. During the Civil War, this critical passage was guarded by a six smoothbore cannon located on Rock Bluff. You can still see remains of the gun pits as you work across the *Rock Bluff Trail*. The Gregory House that now dominates the bluff once stood across the river at Ocheesee. It was built in 1849 by Jason Gregory, the dominant planter in Calhoun County and a popular rendezvous spot for Confederate troops. After the war the plantation fell into disrepair and when the park was being developed it was disassembled, carried across the Apalachicola on barges and restored.

with some climbs that may set your dog to panting. Several park roads and connecting trails can be used to dissect this loop into manageable chunks.

That is not the case with the *Torreya Challenge* in the eastern section of the park. Once you cross the stone bridge with your dog you won't see the trailhead again for several hours. Your dog will think she has left Florida on this scenic ramble.

Trail Sense: There are mapboards at the parking lot and the trails are reliably blazed.



This is the only place your dog will see the rare torrey tree. Mature trees can still be seen in the park, especially in ravines. These saplings are being raised in captivity.

Dog Friendliness

Dogs are permitted on the trails and allowed in the campground where poop bags are provided, but can not go in the Yurt area.

Traffic

Don't expect much of it - serious trail users only need apply.

Canine Swimming

Streams you encounter are best suited for splashing.

Trail Time

Several hours.

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park

The Park

Topsail Hill is the most intact coastal ecosystem in all of Florida. The state moved to protect this unique natural area by purchasing 1,637 acres here in 1992. There are 14 identifiable ecosystems, including freshwater coastal dune lakes, wet prairies, scrub, pine flatwoods, marshes, cypress domes, seepage slopes and 3.2 miles white sand beaches - the remnants of quartz washed down from the Appalachian Mountains.

Topsail Hill gets its name from the landmark 25-foot high dune that resembles a ship's topsail.

The Walks

Topsail Hill is the best place that you can take your dog for an extended hike along the Gulf of Mexico. The trail of choice is the *Morris Lake Nature Trail*, a 2.5-mile balloon route laid out through ancient coastal dunes. The dunes trail is wide open and exposed to the elements so bring plenty of water for your dog on a hot day and since every step of the way is across glistening white soft sugar sand, your dog will get a workout any time of the year. In fact, look for iron tracks laid down during World War II that allowed heavy trucks to travel across the thick sand when these dunes were used as a bombing range.

Morris Lake is one of three freshwater coastal dune lakes on the property. These rare oases are found only along the Gulf Coast in America and while tempting to visit for your dog, are inhabited by alligators. The trail climbs briefly into a Florida shrub community where your dog can find some shade among the sand pines and shrubby oaks before finishing along the Gulf of Mexico beach.

Walton

Phone Number
- (850) 267-0299

Website
- www.floridastateparks.org/topsailhill/default.cfm

Admission Fee
- Vehicle entrance fee

Park Hours
- 8:00 a.m. to sunset

Directions
- *Santa Rosa Beach*; the main entrance is on CR 30A, one mile east of US 98, but the entrance of choice for most dog owners will be via Topsail Road from US 98, west of the junction with CR 30A.

Bonus

In the days of sailing ships, turpentine was critical to the upkeep and preservation of wooden boats. The word turpentine derives from the terebinth tree, from whose sap the spirit was originally distilled. In early America, the tree of choice for turpentine was the old growth longleaf pines found across the South. To get the sap to flow, a deep V or "cat face" is cut into the side of a tree and gathered in a clay pot hung from a nail in the tree. The sap is then boiled and the turpentine residue collected. You can see cat face scars on trees still living in the preserve.

If your dog isn't spent from an hour on the Morris Lake dunes there is more hiking available in the other direction to Campbell Lake. This trail can also be accessed from the main entrance and campground and your dog won't be allowed to finish the entire 5.2-mile loop (it tracks along the beach) but she can reach the broad, flat lakeside.

Trail Sense: A trailmap and interpretive brochure can be found at the trailhead and directional signs decipher the faceless dunes.

Dog Friendliness

Dogs are allowed on the trails and in the campground but not on the beach

Traffic

Foot traffic only and you won't encounter many casual strollers deep into the dune system.

Canine Swimming

Alligators live in the lake but your dog can step in to cool off.

Trail Time

Several hours.



Your dog will find the best dunesland biking on the Gulf Coast at Topsail Hill Preserve.

3

Leon Sinks Geological Area

The Park

Leon Sinks is in the heart of the Woodville Karst Plain, a vast area of porous limestone bedrock that stretches for 450 square miles from Tallahassee south to the Gulf of Mexico. The terrain is shaped by rain and groundwater that dissolve the limestone to form sinkholes, swales and underground caverns. The limestone was formed millions of years ago from ancient coral reefs and shell deposits.

Above ground Leon Sinks is administered by the Apalachicola National Forest. The karst plain is still evolving; acidic water continues to dissolve underlying limestone and when cavities become large enough, the surface layer collapses and new sinkholes can form at any time.

The Walks

The trail system at Leon Sinks is a four-mile loop that links the *Sinkhole Trail* and the *Gunswamp Trail* (sinkholes are formed by the underwater aquifer, swamps are created by surface water). A *Crossover Trail* separates the two into a stacked-loop for canine hikers who don't want to experience the entirety of this vibrant community.

The *Sinkhole Trail* connects more than a dozen sinkholes, some dry and some filled with water. Boardwalk observation decks provide close-up views. The deepest is the Big Dismal Sink at 130 feet. Keep a close hold on your dog around these sinks - they have steep walls and dogs - and people - have drowned at Leon Sinks.

Leon

Phone Number
- (850) 926-3561

Website
- www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida/recreation/index_apa.shtml

Admission Fee
- Parking fee required

Park Hours
- 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Directions
- *Tallahassee*; seven miles south of the city on the west side of US 319.

Bonus

In 1988 local volunteers undertook the extremely hazardous task of exploring and mapping the underwater cave system lying behind the opening at the front of Hammock Sink. When the divers were finished they had mapped over 41,000 feet of passages from Sullivan Sink to Cheryl Sink and identified six spectacular limestone rooms spacious enough to hold a six-story building. Years later a link between Leon Sinks and Wakulla Springs to the southeast was also discovered. The mapping project confirmed that the Leon Sinks underwater cave system is the largest known in the United States.

Except for traffic noise you can't ever quite shake, this is one of the best hikes you can take with your dog in Northwest Florida. From the tupelo gum swamps to the sandy ridges you cannot find a more diverse plant world along the trail. At Big Dismal Sink alone more than 75 different plants cascade down the sink's conical walls.

None of the underground limestone penetrates the ground so the trails are paw-friendly sand and a joy for your dog.

Trail Sense: Maps are available and the trail is marked and signed at junctions.



Your dog will savor the airy wiregrass community on the sandy ridges at Leon Sinks Geological Area.

Dog Friendliness

Dogs are welcome to hike at Leon Sinks and they keep a plastic water bowl at the trailhead water fountain for a hot, thirsty trail dog.

Traffic

Foot traffic only and light visitation.

Canine Swimming

No.

Trail Time

More than one hour.

4

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

The Park

St. Marks NWR was established in 1931 for wintering migratory birds, and over 300 species of birds have been recorded on the refuge, with 98 species nesting on-site. There are 14 active bald eagle nests spread across the park's 68,000 acres. St. Marks includes coastal marshes, islands, tidal creeks and the estuaries of seven Florida rivers.

The Walks

Dogs are not allowed on most national park trails and one of the reasons given is that they might harass wildlife. Yet dogs are often permitted on the trails in national wildlife refuges - and that is the happy case at St. Marks.

The star walk for canine day hikers is the *Mounds Pool Interpretive Trail* that dips in and out of woods around freshwater and salt marshes. Highlights include close-up looks at Cabbage Palms, the Florida state tree. At the lighthouse the *Levee Trail* and *Cedar Point Trail* introduce more hardy plants adapting to the whipping winds and salt spray. Your dog will only have to deal with the potentially harsh conditions for about one mile.

There are several other short trails to sample on the St. Marks Unit or you can pull the car off to side and create your own routes on the open levees and old logging roads. You can wander for hours on these primitive walking trails and not see another trail user.

Nearly 50 miles of the *Florida National Scenic Trail* snakes through the wildlife refuge, traversing a greater variety of forest types and wildlife communities than any other North Florida stretch of the cross-state trail. In addition to several miles in the St. Marks Unit, you can travel west on US 98 to the

Wakulla/Jefferson

Phone Number
- (850) 925-6121

Website
- www.fws.gov/saintmarks

Admission Fee
- Vehicle parking fee

Park Hours
- 8:00 a.m. to sunset

Directions
- *St. Marks*; at the end of SR 59, three miles south of US 98, east of Newport.

Bonus

The St. Marks Lighthouse got off to an inauspicious start in 1830 when its walls were discovered to be hollow instead of solid and the builders were charged with deliberate fraud against the United States.

Calvin Knowlton rebuilt the tower (with the only wooden staircase in any Florida lighthouse) and the light was properly commissioned in January 1831.

In 1842, with its base threatened by erosion, the original brick tower was dismantled and rebuilt further inland - just in time for the Great Hurricane of 1843 with its 10-foot storm surges. Every building in the area was destroyed except the lighthouse. The 82-foot tower has remained stout ever since, even withstanding a Confederate attempt to blow it up during the Civil War. The last keeper retired in 1960 and now an automated St. Marks Light guides mariners across 15 miles of Apalachee Bay.

Wakulla Unit and the Panacea Unit, each of which also have several miles of the *Florida Trail*.

Trail Sense: There are maps, signs, brochures and trail markings to help you navigate the 75 miles of trail here.

Dog Friendliness

Dogs are allowed to use the refuge trails.

Traffic

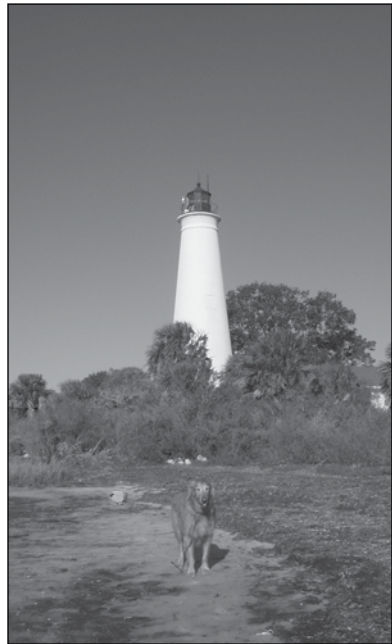
Foot traffic only on the *Florida Trail* sections; horses and bikes are permitted on the primitive road/trails.

Canine Swimming

Alligators thrive in the ponds and pools around the refuge levees; the area is marshy but there is access to the Gulf of Mexico near the lighthouse.

Trail Time

A full day is possible.



The St. Marks Lighthouse has stood strong on this spot through over 165 years - surviving more than 100 storms.

Gulf Islands National Seashore – Naval Live Oaks

The Park

Live oak trees, prized for their rot-resistant and incredibly dense wood, have long been the lumber of choice for building durable sailing ships. Sixth President John Quincy Adams considered the United States Navy, which he called “our wooden walls,” to be of critical importance in defending America from foreign invasion and in 1828 he started the country’s first tree farm here for the single purpose of growing live oaks for shipbuilding.

Now a unit of the Gulf Islands National Seashore, the Naval Live Oaks area preserves 1,400 acres of forested terrain between Santa Rosa Sound and Pensacola Bay.

Santa Rosa

Phone Number

- (850) 934-2600

Website

- www.nps.gov/guis

Admission Fee

- None

Park Hours

- 8:00 a.m. to sunset

Directions

- *Gulf Breeze*; on US 98, east of town.

The Walks

There are more than seven miles of hiking trails in these historic forests. The *Brackenridge Nature Trail* is a good place to start on the south side of US 98 where exhibits identify plants and describe how live oaks were used in shipbuilding. Laid out in a figure-eight, this lush, narrow pathway runs along a bluff above the Santa Rosa Sound. You can also leave behind the casual strollers and continue down the 1.2-mile *Fishing Trail* through the thin strip of live oak forest.

Across the highway, your dog can stretch out on the sandy and wide *Andrew Jackson Trail*, a two-miler that runs the entire length of the Naval Live Oaks property. This time-worn path is a remnant of the Pensacola-St. Augustine Road, the first road connecting East Florida to West Florida. Congress ponied up \$20,000 of 1824-money to build the road when Florida was still a territory.