This guide is divided into 13 sections. Each section is approximately 5 miles long. The detailed maps contain mileage figures and GPS points. Distances on the map are approximate. Your results may vary.

Each section contains interpretive information about the rich cultural and natural history of the region you are passing through.

GPS coordinates are provided for campsites and side trips.

Photos of navigational aids are included where helpful.

Latitude and longitude lines are indicated in white (see next page for complete legend).

Charted oyster bars and shoals are indicated with dashed lines.

Phone icons note locations where you might find emergency help.

Water droplet icons note where you can replenish water supplies and how much to obtain.

Campsites are indicated with a tent icon.
The Aucilla River is an appropriate embarking point for the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail. It is scenic, untamed and teeming with life.

In winter, you may encounter numerous anglers trying to catch redfish and trout. These and other Gulf fish seek refuge in the river during cooler months.

Native people, too, once came here to fish, navigating the river and coast in dugout canoes. In fact, the Aucilla Sinks, an area upstream where the river channel disappears and reappears in a series of sinkholes, is where Florida's oldest human artifacts have been found. Through underwater archaeological excavations, we have learned a great deal about Florida's Paleo-Indians, the people who lived here ten thousand to fourteen thousand years ago.

As the Aucilla widens and spills into the Gulf of Mexico, the trail veers southeast along seemingly endless vistas of salt marsh and cabbage palm hammock. In October, you might spot monarch butterflies fluttering overhead on their southerly migrations. Flocks of white pelicans often zoom past in winter months, and great egrets, white as snowflakes, dot marshy expanses year-round.

Proceed downstream from the Aucilla ramp about 3 miles to the mouth of the river. Turn SE and follow the coastline about 4 miles to the entrance light of the Econfina River. Turn NE and proceed upstream about 2 miles. Look for a campsite sign on the west side of the river. Or you may paddle upstream another 0.4 miles to the Econfina Boat Ramp. Walk to the store to get information about the private campground. If you have time, paddle up the beautiful Econfina River on a high tide, or try one of the park's hiking trails. Be sure to leave Econfina with 2 gallons of water per person; next re-supply is at Spring Warrior Creek.
Like the Aucilla, the Econfina is an unspoiled blackwater river. Decomposing leaves and swamp vegetation release tannins, which give the water its coffee-colored tint.

If you paddle upriver, you’ll glide beneath canopies of cypress, gum, cedar and huge arching live oaks. In the warmer months, scan the shoreline for tall white flowers of duck potato, iridescent swamp lilies, purple spires of pickerel weed and striking red cardinal flowers. You might also spot otters, wading birds, alligators and white-tailed deer.

The Econfina River figured heavily in the Seminole Indian wars. In April 1818, seeking to capture escaped slaves and to punish Seminoles for raids into Georgia, General Andrew Jackson marched through the region with more than three thousand militia and Creek Indian allies. He skirmished with chief Peter McQueen’s band of two hundred warriors along the Econfina River, killing thirty-seven, and then marched to confront the large Seminole villages along the lower Suwannee River. Jackson’s raids later became known as the First Seminole War.

After Jackson left, Creeks and Seminoles reclaimed their Big Bend coastal homes and vigorously fought to remain during the Second Seminole War of the late 1830s and 1840s. A fort was built on the Econfina River, along with forts on the Fenholloway and Steinhatchee rivers, as part of the United States war effort. Most of the Seminoles were killed, relocated west, driven south into the Everglades or dispersed into the backwoods; then, white settlers moved in.

Return to the Gulf (about 2.4 miles downstream from the Econfina Boat Ramp or about 2 miles from the Econfina Campsite); then proceed SE along the coast about 8 miles to Rock Island, the larger of two small offshore islands. Look for a narrow rocky cove on the north shoreline to access the camping area.

As a side trip you may wish to visit the Hickory Mound Impoundment (see inset).