



ST. GEORGE ISLAND STATE PARK

Gap Point Nature Trail

ST. GEORGE ISLAND, FLORIDA

Hiking Time: 2-3 hours



You can just about count the number of Florida panhandle Gulf of Mexico beaches that welcome dogs on one paw. St. George Island, a narrow 22-mile strip of land that creates oyster-rich Apalachicola Bay, is one of those places so you can be sure many dog owners will want to make their way across the Bryant G. Patton Bridge to the park where nine miles of beaches and dunes have been spared from development.

As a bonus for canine hikers who want more than a long walk on a sparkling white unspoiled beach the *Gap Point Nature Trail* offers a 2.5-mile ribbon of sand road through slash pine forests and hearty coastal scrub. In days gone by turpentiners made their way to this island four miles offshore to tap the large pines for naval stores. Many "cat-face" scars can still be seen in tree trunks on this canine hike.

Elevation change will be minimal, save for the occasional dune, but the sugar sands will take their toll on weary legs. **As you close in on Gap Point at the end of the peninsula opportunities for Seaman to jump into the friendly waters of Apalachicola Bay will come in a flurry.** The bayside beach is studded with photogenic ghost trees and a few surviving arboreal warriors still waging the good fight at land's end. All provide perches for a variety of seabirds and ample ammunition for a game of fetch in the Gulf of Mexico before retracing the sandy pawprints to the trailhead.



TATE'S HELL STATE FOREST

High Bluff Coastal Hiking Trail

CARRABELLE, FLORIDA

Hiking Time: several hours possible



Your dog is likely to figure he is closer to heaven than hell when hiking here. Tate's Hell State Forest has only one dedicated hiking trail but it is a beauty. The *High Bluff Coastal Hiking Trail* is a linear 4-mile, natural surface pathway through a coastal scrub habitat. The ancient sand dunes have been colonized by small oaks, saw palmetto, and isolated groups of sand pines that let plenty of sunlight in along the trail. When the route drops off the ridge, the scrub gives way to shady pines.

Under paw Seaman will enjoy a soft sand and pine straw surface along the roomy path. Up above, eagles and osprey soar and a Florida black bear may even stray this far down to the coast.

Among the signature trees in Tate's Hell State Forest are several stands of the distinctive "dwarf cypress." These trees have been growing since the Civil War but are still only 15 feet tall. "Hat-rack cypress" are a puzzle to biologists - if seeds from these cypress trees are planted in another location they grow to their normal height.

And why was this Cebe Tate's "hell?" In 1875 Tate was tracking a panther that had killed some of his livestock and wandered into the swamp. After a week he burst into a clearing near Carrabelle, living long enough to murmur the words, "My name is Cebe Tate, and I just came from Hell!" His hunting dogs survived the ordeal - and probably even enjoyed the outing.