

# Econfina Creek Paddling Trail



## Econfina Creek Trip Planning

**Counties:** Bay, Washington

**Nearest towns:** Panama City

**Trip length:** 24 miles

**Mileage:**

**Mile 0--Scott Rd. Bridge**

**Mile 11--Walsingham Park**

**Mile 16.5--Econfina Canoe Livery**

**Mile 18--SR 20 Bridge Canoe Launch**

**Mile 24--SR 388 Bridge**

**Difficulty:** Easy (lower section) to difficult (upper section)

**Skill level:** Beginner (lower section) to expert (upper section)

\*\*The provided mileage data is approximate (rounded to the nearest 0.5 mi) and shouldn't be relied upon for navigation.

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**(Access Point 1) Put-in:** Scotts Rd. Bridge

**Nearest town to put-in:** Panama City      **Miles from put-in:** ~ 35miles

**Directions to put-in:** From US 231, turn west onto Scott Rd (dirt), located ~0.1 miles north of the intersection of US 231 and CR 167. Follow Scotts Rd ~4 miles to the bridge. Leaving a car overnight at this spot is not recommended; check with the local outfitter for shuttle options

**(Access Point 2) Put-in:** Walsingham Park (Northwest Florida Water Management District)

**Nearest town to put-in:** Panama City      **Miles from put-in:** ~35 miles

**Directions to put-in:** From SR 20 turn north on Strickland Road (~1/3 miles west of the SR 20 bridge over Econfina Creek). Continue on Strickland Rd. until it "T's" into another dirt road, bear left and continue to Hampshire Rd. Turn right and continue to Walsingham Bridge Rd. Turn right on Walsingham Bridge Road, cross the small metal bridge and follow signs a short distance to the park. From SR 20 to the park is ~7 miles of dirt road driving that is best suited for 4-WD vehicles.

**(Access Point 3) Put-in:** Econfina Creek Canoe Livery

**Nearest town to put-in:** Panama City      **Miles from put-in:** ~25 miles

**Directions to put-in:** From SR 20, turn north onto Strickland Road (~1/3 miles west of the SR 20 bridge over Econfina Creek) and follow ~1 mile to the outfitter (dirt road).

**(Access Point 4) Put-in:** Canoe Launch at SR 20 bridge (NFWFMD)

**Nearest town to put-in:** Panama City      **Miles from put-in:** ~ 25 miles

**Directions to put-in:** Located about 7 miles from the intersection with US 231, the parking area is located on the northeast side of the bridge over Econfina Creek. A boardwalk leads ~100 yards to paddle craft launch.

**(Access Point 5) Take-out:** SR 388 bridge

**Directions to take-out:** From US 231, turn west onto SR 388 in Youngstown. Follow ~8 miles to the bridge over Econfina Creek. Parking overnight is not recommended here; check with local outfitter for shuttle options.

**Topo maps (USGS quads):** Compasslake, Gap Lake, Bennett, Bayhead

**Gazeteer page:** 31, 47

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## **Outfitters within 20 miles of trail:**

Econfina Creek Canoe Livery,  
5641-A Porter Bend Rd.,  
Youngstown, FL 32466  
850-722-9032

<http://www.floridaparks.com/canoerts/econfinacreekcanoelivery.htm>

**Shuttle service offered:** Call outfitters

## **USGS link (water level info):**

<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/fl/nwis/uv?02359500>

Call outfitters if website for USGS not functioning.

**Break / Lunch areas:** Easy to come by during low and normal water levels.

**Camping options:** The Northwest Florida Water Management District owns the majority of the land bordering the river. There are four designated primitive campsites along the river in the Walsingham Bridge vicinity that operate on a first come, first served basis. There is also a group site at Blue Springs, which requires a reservation and a fee (call 850-539-5999).

## **Other lodging:**

Bay County Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.co.bay.fl.us/>,

<http://www.panamacity.org/>

Washington County Chamber of Commerce <http://www.washcomall.com/>

Jackson County Chamber of Commerce <http://www.jacksoncounty.com/>

**Food/Beverage restrictions:** No alcohol at the NFWFMD park and launch sites

## **What to expect on the river:**

**Tidal influence:** No

**Pull-overs:** Pull-overs are frequent from Scott's Ferry to Walsingham Bridge especially in low water. It may take 8 -10 hours to paddle this stretch depending on degree of deadfall and water level. Downstream from the outfitter, pullovers are rare.

**Low branches:** Occasionally.

**Narrow water:** Yes, above Walsingham Bridge, at low water levels < 2 feet the river rushes through narrow shoots that are narrower than the width of a canoe.

**Shallow water:** Yes, above Walsingham Bridge during low water.

**Strong currents:** Yes, above Walsingham Bridge. After heavy rains, the current is very strong along the entire length of the river.

**Rocks:** No

**Houses:** Very few.

**Shoals:** Yes, above Walsingham Bridge

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**Tight turns:** Yes

**Open water:** No

**Springs:** Yes. 11 named springs and spring groups occur in a 4.75 mile stretch of river, beginning 0.75 miles above the Walsingham Bridge and ending 0.5 miles south of the SR 20 Bridge. For more information, visit the Northwest Florida Water Management District's Econfina Creek Springs Inventory page at <http://www.nwfwmd.state.fl.us/pubs/wrsr04-02/index.html>.

**Potable water sources:** Econfina Creek Canoe Livery.

**Wildlife:** In the upper reaches of the river, where the banks are exceedingly tall, it is difficult to view wildlife. In the lower parts of the river, paddlers can find songbirds, wading birds, turtles, snakes, beavers, butterflies, dragonflies, and squirrels.

**Natural communities:** Beech-magnolia hammock. The entire length of the river is lined with Appalachian vegetation that is not normally found in Florida. Titi and mountain laurel reach out over the river under towering beech, magnolia, cypress, maple, white oak, sweetgum, and tupelo trees.

**Portages:** No.

**Swimming:** Yes.

**Motorboats:** No.

**Expect at parking:** Scotts Rd. Bridge

- **Parking fee:** No. Roadside parking is not recommended for overnight use.
- **Bathrooms:** No
- **Hours of operation (gates close):** All hours
- **Camping:** No
- **Camping fees:** N/a
- **Crowds:** No
- **Boat Ramp:** No
- **Potable water source:** No
- **Canoe/kayak launch:** Yes

**Expect at parking:** Walsingham Park (NFWMD)

- **Parking fee:** No
- **Bathrooms:** Yes – portable toilet
- **Hours of operation (gates close):** All hours. Not recommended for overnight parking.
- **Camping:** Yes (primitive, first come first served).
- **Camping fees:** N/a
- **Crowds:** No
- **Boat Ramp:** No
- **Potable water source:** No
- **Canoe/kayak launch:** Yes.

**Expect at parking:** Econfina Creek Canoe Livery

- **Parking fee:** Call outfitter
- **Bathrooms:** Yes
- **Hours of operation (gates close):** Call outfitter
- **Camping:** No

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- **Camping fees:**N/a
- **Crowds:** No
- **Boat Ramp:** No
- **Potable water source:** Yes
- **Canoe/kayak launch:** Yes

**Expect at parking:** Canoe Launch at SR 20 Bridge (NFWFMD)

- **Parking fee:** No
- **Bathrooms:** Yes
- **Hours of operation (gates close):** All hours.
- **Camping:** No
- **Camping fees:** N/a
- **Crowds:** No
- **Boat Ramp:** No
- **Potable water source:** No
- **Canoe/kayak launch:** Yes. At the end of a ~100 yard boardwalk.

**Expect at parking:** SR 388 Bridge

- **Parking fee:** No.
- **Bathrooms:** No
- **Hours of operation (gates close):** No gates. Not recommended for overnight use.
- **Camping:** No
- **Camping fees:** N/a
- **Crowds:** No
- **Boat Ramp:** Yes
- **Potable water source:** No
- **Canoe/kayak launch:** No

## **Cultural and historical features along the trail:**

Being a reliable source of fresh water, Econfina Creek has hosted human visitors for thousands of years, long before the arrival of European settlers. Paleo-Indians, direct descendants of the humans who crossed the "land bridge" from Asia to America over 12,000 years ago, are thought to have lived near Econfina Creek, which then was not a flowing river, but a series of watering holes. When the Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century, Apalachee Indians were prevalent in this area.

## **Notes:**

Econfina Creek is one of the most outstanding waterways in the state. With most of its banks under public ownership, paddling down the creek is truly a wild experience, with few signs of human habitation and an abundance of wildlife and native vegetation. While the creek is ever-changing on a monthly basis, it is mostly thought that the river is easiest to paddle when the gauge at Scott Rd. Bridge reads 2-4 ft. After heavy rains, the river is too dangerous to paddle due to strong currents and log jams. Avoid paddling the river when water levels reach nine feet.

The upper 11 miles of the trail (between Scott's Bridge and Walsingham Park) is one of the most difficult stretches of river in the state and should be attempted by skilled paddlers only. At times when the water level is low, pull-overs are very frequent due to shallow areas and fallen trees spanning the waterway. Paddlers should allow 8 - 10 hours to complete this section during low water. When the water is normal to high, the current moves very swiftly through narrow chutes that require advanced skills to navigate safely. However, this section of the trail is also quite beautiful, with few signs of

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civilization and an interesting array of Appalachian vegetation (mountain laurel, beech trees, etc.) mixed in with the plants typical of riparian ecosystems in Florida.

Below Walsingham Park, Econfina Creek showcases the wonder of karst topography, which is land that is shaped by the process of dissolving limestone, creating springs, sinkholes, caves, and rock outcrops. The springs along the creek create unique freshwater ecosystems that support a variety of unique animals. An underwater cave along Econfina Creek hosts a species of cave snail that has only been found at this location. It feeds on wood carried into the cave by beavers.

The Florida National Scenic Trail follows the banks of Econfina Creek for about 10 miles, crossing it twice on handmade footbridges.

The parking areas along the creek are remotely located and are not considered safe for overnight parking. For multi-day trips, the safest place to leave vehicles is at the Econfina Creek Canoe Livery.