

## **The Panhandle Trace; Day by Day** **Update as of Jan 2, '07**

**Friday** morning, March 30 I will meet everyone at the Kennedy Bridge at 8 AM. This is located on Kennedy Bridge Road in the Blackwater River State Forest and can be found by taking Beaver Creek Road north off state road 4 between Munson and Baker. There will be a sign to turn to the right to Hurricane Lake South campground. For out-of-towners you can either stay in a motel, and there are several in the Milton area and off I-10 on highway 87 or camp at Blackwater River State Park where I will be camping Friday night through Monday night. I recommend you call ahead or e-mail to get reservations for a camp site. This is a beautiful park right on the Blackwater River. Bring your bike, kayak and bathing suit for fun in the afternoons. If you can't make it Friday but want to come Saturday and still do the entire hike you can make up the first 8 miles on another afternoon if you want and are able. At 8:00 AM, sharp, I will take as many hikers as I can fit in my car up to the FL/AL line where the hike starts. I hope to have more transporters but if not another hiker or two will have to fill his/her car and also go to the beginning. We should start hiking by 8:30 AM this first day which is our shortest day, 8.2 miles. Hike at your own speed and when you reach your car and have it filled up you can go back to the campground. You should be done around noon.

**The Hike; At the beginning** of the hike you will find a mail box put there by the Alabama Hiking Trail Society, please sign in the log book there. The AL Trail is blazed in yellow and you will see the yellow blazes going North from where the FT orange blazes begin. This is a beautiful trail so take your time and enjoy! This trail is well maintained so just follow the trail and the orange blazes and you should not get lost. After one mile you will cross the Beaver Creek paved road and continue on the west side of the road for another 3 miles and then cross back to the east side of the Beaver Creek Road. The trail winds around Hurricane Lake with beautiful views of the lake until it crosses the dam and comes within 300 feet of the north campground where there is water and a bathroom. A good place for a short break. Less than two miles to go to the bridge and the end of this day's hike.

**Saturday** we will meet on McVay Road where the trail enters the forest. McVay Road goes north off highway 4 close to the Santa Rosa-Okaloosa county line. Be there before 7:00 AM as I want to start transporting hikers at seven sharp north to the Kennedy Bridge where we will start hiking. Those who are camping at Blackwater River State Park can follow me, leaving the campground at 6:30 AM, others can find their own way there. This is a 12.3 mile hike and hiking through the forest trail I give us 2 miles an hour average hiking time so plan on being off the trail about 1:30 PM, thereabouts. Bring water, snacks, bug spray, sun screen and extra socks and rain gear. Carry hiking stick and wear hat and boots on your feet. After the hike and a rest those that want to can go into Milton with me and eat at Reggies for supper.

**The Hike; We will start** out by crossing the Blackwater River on the Kennedy Bridge then turn right onto the Wiregrass Trail. This beautiful trail follows the river for a short way before winding a little east and though a boggy area where you will see pitcher plants and other beautiful wild flowers. Also look for blueberries but they will not be ripe yet. At 3.2 mile you will cross Honey Creek on a foot bridge. Another mile and half you will cross a dirt road and come to the junction of the Wiregrass and the Jackson Trails. Actually this is an end of the Wiregrass, you will turn south, right, onto the Jackson Trail. The blue blazes of the Jackson trail will go to Karick Lake Campground and the beginning of the Jackson Trail. Three more miles and you will cross the Blackwater River, again, on the Peaden Bridge, a great place to sit and rest and eat and put your feet in the river. You will hike over the bridge and down the road and look for the trail to turn left down a dirt road. Look for the very old cemetery on your left before you come to the first shelter on the Jackson Trail, another place to take a break if you need one. From the shelter the trail soon makes a right turn and you cross a stream on a foot bridge. At the 10.7 mile you will cross a paved road, the Beaver Creek Road. The next paved road will be McVay Road and the end of this day's hike.

**Sunday, April first,** meet at 7:00 AM on Red Rock Road where the trail crosses the road, just up the hill from the bridge across the Juniper Creek. At seven sharp I will transport hikers to the beginning at McVay Road where they will start hiking about 7:30 AM. This day's hike will be nearly nine miles so bring water, snacks, hat etc for a four hour walk or more.

**The Hike;** We will start out down the paved road to highway 4 and west on 4 to the county line road where we will turn off the highway onto the trail again, on the left. About a mile you will see the intersection with the Sweetwater Trail and soon you will cross Old Martin Road and come to the second shelter on the Jackson Trail This will be at the 2 mile point, stop for a drink. Continue through the beautiful forest following the orange blazes. A mile before the end you will cross a paved road, Sandy Landing Road. As you walk look for the mile markers I put up in '96, there are still some left up.

**Monday, April second ; We will meet at 7:00 AM** at the parking lot on the north side of Deaden bridge in the Blackwater River State Park, from there I will transport you to the beginning at Red Rock where we will start our 8.8 miles hike. I will still be camping at the state park so those that are camping there as well can follow me, leaving the park about 6:45 AM. Bring water, snack and other necessities for at least a 4 hour hike or more.

**The Hike;** This hike will be on the beautiful Juniper Creek Trail which follows the Juniper Creek southward toward the state park. There are several places where you can access the creek for a break on the white sand bars and a cool off in the clear cold water. Just over a mile you will come to the shelter where I hope you will stop and sign the log book. It is on a high bank overlooking the creek. A mile more and you can find the "football field sand bar" by taking a short detour to the right down to the creek. At about mile six you will cross Indian Ford Road where the trail will turn away from the creek but continue to be lovely with many wild flowers in bloom this time of year especially. You will soon enter the boundary of the state park and the bridge will be in sight over the Blackwater River when you end your days hike at the parking lot.

**Tuesday, April third; We will meet** at 7:00 AM at the intersection of Highway 90 and Highway 87 on the old brick road. I will be transporting hikers to the start, the parking lot where we ended the day before, so we can begin hiking by 7:30 AM. Those that are camping with me, I will leave the campground about 6:40 AM. This day's hike will be between 11 and 12 miles so even though half of it is off road walking be sure and be prepared for about 5 to 7 hours of hiking, depending on how fast you want to walk and how often and long you want to take breaks. Today I will return to the campground after the hike to take down my camp and move to the KOA on Highway 87.

**The Hike;** Leaving the parking lot in the park we will cross the Deaden bridge over the Blackwater River. Look on your right for the trail to enter the woods onto the new Hutten trail which was recently built and opened by the Blackwater trail hogs. This trail takes us off the road, where our path used to go, and into a beautiful wooded area with lots of wild flowers and views. It also adds at least three miles to our hike but makes for a more enjoyable hiking experience. When we come out onto Highway 90 and the old brick road there will be a good opportunity to stop at Harold store for a piece of pizza or ice-cream or other snack and break if you like. This will mark about the half way place as well. The rest of the hike will be, first a path alongside the highway and then cross over to the old brick road which was the original road from St Augustine to Pensacola, many many years ago.

**Wednesday, April fourth; At this point I** am going to skip over 7 miles of dangerous road walk along highway 87 with heavy traffic and construction and very little area to get off the road, right now it is not a good place to hike, though if anyone really wants to hike it they will have time some afternoon of their choosing. We will be hiking the Weaver Creek section of the Eglin Trail today and everyone hiking will need to have an Eglin Recreation pass. We will meet at 7 AM at the boat ramp over the East River on Highway 87, our ending spot, to be transported back up the highway to where the trail head goes into the forest toward Buck pond., our starting point. Today's hike will be 12.3 miles so be sure and have a day pack with water and other necessities for a good hike of between 5 to 7 hours.

**The Hike;** This is a very beautiful section of trail, especially this time of year. About one mile in we will come to Buck pond, a lovely place to stop and meditate and enjoy the view. Further on you will come to a very scenic loop blazed in blue that takes you along a trail that seems more hilly than Florida but worth the extra mile it takes. The Trail crosses highway 87 at 6.5 miles and crosses Dean Creek at 8.8 miles. The Dean campsite is a good place for a snack/lunch break. Be sure to sign in at the East Bay Hiker Registration Kiosk at the 10.4 mile mark.

**Thursday, April fifth: Today** will be a shorter day unless more of the Navarre Beach road is completed for traffic. As of today we will meet where the houses and road ends on Navarre beach at 7 AM to be transported back to the East Bay bridge where we ended the day before. We will hike on the sidewalk the first 3 miles, across highway 89 and over the Navarre Bridge. We will pass a couple convenience stores during the first three miles but if you wait until you cross the bridge there is a great bakery where we can stop for coffee and a muffin. Continuing the rest of the hike to the end of the open road where your car should be waiting for you. This day is only 8.2 miles.

**The Hike;** This is easy walking on paved sidewalk and except for the traffic noise it is also pleasant. Crossing the bridge is fun but before you cross you will pass a neat park. No one should have any trouble with this day.

**Friday, April sixth:** We will be walking between Navarre Beach and Pensacola Beach today. The shuttle will be a long one as the road is not complete from Navarre to Pensacola Beach so if you want your car at the end of the hike meet me at 6 AM at the parking lot opposite Portafino Condominiums on Pensacola Beach, the East end on highway 399. It will take at least 45 minutes to get back around to where we will start hiking. Hopefully we will start at the 7 o'clock hour. Approximately thirteen miles with a choice of walking on the beach or the paved roadway which may or may not be open for cars. This section was closed because of Hurricane Ivan for the last 2 years and is gradually getting back to where it was but the road, as of this writing, is still closed to traffic. Walking along the beach is beautiful but can be difficult over long stretches as this day will be so when your legs get tired of walking on a slant or in soft sand you can move to the road or bike trail. There may be no facilities on this day so bring lots of water, snacks, sun screen etc. to last for about 6 hours.

**The Hike;** This could be our hardest day of hiking as it is all on sand or paved roadway. The beach is beautiful and the sand is white as snow, the water blue-green and clear with the white frothy surf hitting the white sand beach. The breeze cools us in the mid day but the morning is usually cool this time of year. The quiet and solitude is wonderful! Beach combing is allowed but be careful to not pick up too many beautiful shells. Lunch/snack is wherever you feel like sitting on the sand and resting. Toward the end of the hike we will turn away from the shoreline and walk on the dunes trail which is beautiful as well.

**Saturday, April seventh: Our last day!** Meet at Peg Leg Pete's restaurant at 7 AM to be transported to the beginning of the hike at the parking lot where we ended the day before. We will be hiking thirteen miles today, all the way to Fort Pickens, and the end of the Florida National Scenic Trail! At the end we will be taken by boats back to Peg Leg Pete's for a celebration meal. Since the road to the fort is not opened to cars, only walkers and bikes, I plan on arranging for a boat or two to pick us up at the pier and bring us back.

**The Hike: The first** part of the hike you may either walk on the beach or on the path/bike trail or side of the road though Pensacola Beach. There are a few stores along the way if you walk through town and want to stop for a drink or toilet. The last seven miles is closed to traffic and there will be no facilities.

**If you plan to hike either one day or two or more or all please let me know. I have been known to walk off and leave early if I think everyone has arrived! My e-mail is [PGrant9328@aol.com](mailto:PGrant9328@aol.com) My home phone is 850-995-4267 and my cell phone which I have with me at all times though some places don't pick up well is 850-723-7924**