

Port O'Connor Paddling Trail Guide

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I. Bay: Espiritu Santo and Matagorda Bays

II. Trail Name: Port O'Connor Paddling Trail

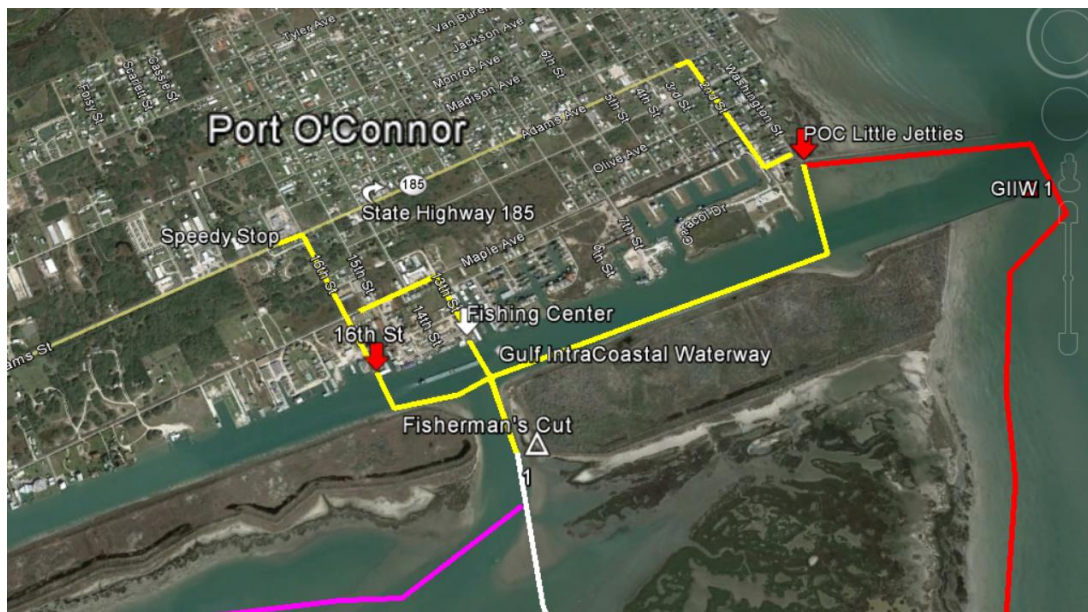
III. Important Numbers

Calhoun County EMS	911 or	361-552-1140
Calhoun County Sheriff	911 or	361 553-4646
US Coast Guard Port O'Connor		361-983-2616
Operation Game Thief / TPWD Game Warden		800 792-4263
Sign Maintenance POC Chamber of Commerce		361-983-2898

IV. Driving Directions to Access Points

The Port O'Connor Paddling Trail has three options for launching: 1) Little Jetties is the official start point and offers the closest launch for the Pass Cavallo Jhook Trail; 2) the Fishing Center, a privately owned boat ramp and bait stand—it offers the closest access to Marker #1; and 3) the 16th Street Launch is a “work in progress” but available if used with caution.

A. Put-in Sites:



1. **Little Jetties**- corner of S Washington & Commerce Streets
Latitude: 28.444772°N Longitude: -96.402161°W

The Little Jetties site is located on public right of way where Washington Street dead-ends into the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. A small parking lot is available. The closest public restroom is located at Kingfisher Park on Park Street.

Directions as driving into town:

- a) Continue east on Hwy 185 / Adams Street to S 2nd Street.
- b) Hwy 185 turns right at S 2nd Street; make the turn right.
- c) Continue on Hwy 185 / S 2nd Street for 4 blocks.
- d) Turn left on Commerce Street.
- e) The Little Jetties put-in is at the intersection of Commerce Street and Washington Street and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIW).
- f) The Pass Cavallo Trail heads east around the south jetty (GIW 1). Marker #1 of the Matagorda Island Trail is 1.1 miles west in the GIW at Fisherman's Cut.

2. **The Fishing Center** – 303 W Water Street at corner of S 13th
Phone 361-983-4440
Latitude 28° 26.318' N Longitude, 96° 24.841' W

The Fishing Center is a privately owned boat ramp and bait stand offering a ramp and parking. Fishing supplies, snacks and drinks, and ice are available for purchase. A restroom is available in the store. The Fishing Center offers the closest access to Marker #1 at Fisherman's Cut (0.9 miles closer than Little Jetties) which provides access to the 'Back Bay' system.

Directions as entering town:

- a) Turn right on S 16th Street (at Speedy Stop Convenience Store).
- b) After several blocks, turn left on Maple Street, then right on 15th Street.
- c) The Fishing Center is located at the corner of 15th Street, Water Street, and the GIW.
- d) To get to Marker #1, paddle across the GIW and enter Fisherman's Cut.

3. **16th Street Launch**
Latitude: 28.437706°N Longitude: -96.417198°W

16th Street dead ends to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and offers the closest free launch site to Marker #1 at Fisherman's Cut, providing access to the 'Back Bay' system. Several parking sites are available on the street at the TPWD Coastal Fisheries office (418 S 16th Street). Private property is on the left side of the street. Park your vehicles in the small area on the right side only. The site has no amenities. When launching, be cautious of the concrete rubble both at water's edge and submerged—it presents a hazard to you and your kayak. It is worth your time to examine the launch from the sea wall near the boat house on the left (east) side to see their location before launching.

Directions as entering town:

- a) Turn right at 16th Street --at Speedy Stop Convenience Store.
- b) The launch site is four blocks on 16th Street, next to the TPWD Coastal Fisheries office.
- c) Marker #1 is about 200 yards east (left) on the GIW in Fishermen's' Cut.

B. *Take-out:*

Most paddlers launch and take out at the same site.

For those paddling the Matagorda Island Trail to the Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area there is primitive campsite available, but there is no automobile access to Matagorda Island.

V. Local Attractions

Port O'Connor, Texas (POC for short) is a small fishing village on the Texas Coast a little more than half-way between Houston and Corpus Christi and south of Victoria. It is often known as the **"Best Kept Secret on the Gulf Coast"** for its relaxing, laid-back atmosphere, and numerous fishing and boating venues.

Link to Chamber of Commerce Web site for places to eat and stay fishing and shuttle services: <http://portoconnorchamber.com/>

Kingfisher Park offers a family friendly sandy beach with picnic facilities, restrooms, a beach shower, and a fishing pier. The park provides access to the beach for swimming, fishing, paddling, and wind surfing. It is located at the intersection of Park Avenue and Monroe Street.

Boggy Bayou Park offers excellent wade and kayak fishing, paddling and birding opportunities. It is located at the northern end on N 3rd Street, at W Taylor Avenue. Boggy Bayou provides a shallow and protected lake that is an excellent location for beginning paddlers.

Powderhorn Ranch State Park and Wildlife Management Area is coming soon. It includes 17000 acres of undeveloped ranch land with 6 miles of frontage to Matagorda Bay. See: <http://tpwd.texas.gov/newsmedia/releases/?req=20140821a>

Little Jetties offers excellent fishing and birding. It is located at the corner of S Washington and Commerce Streets.

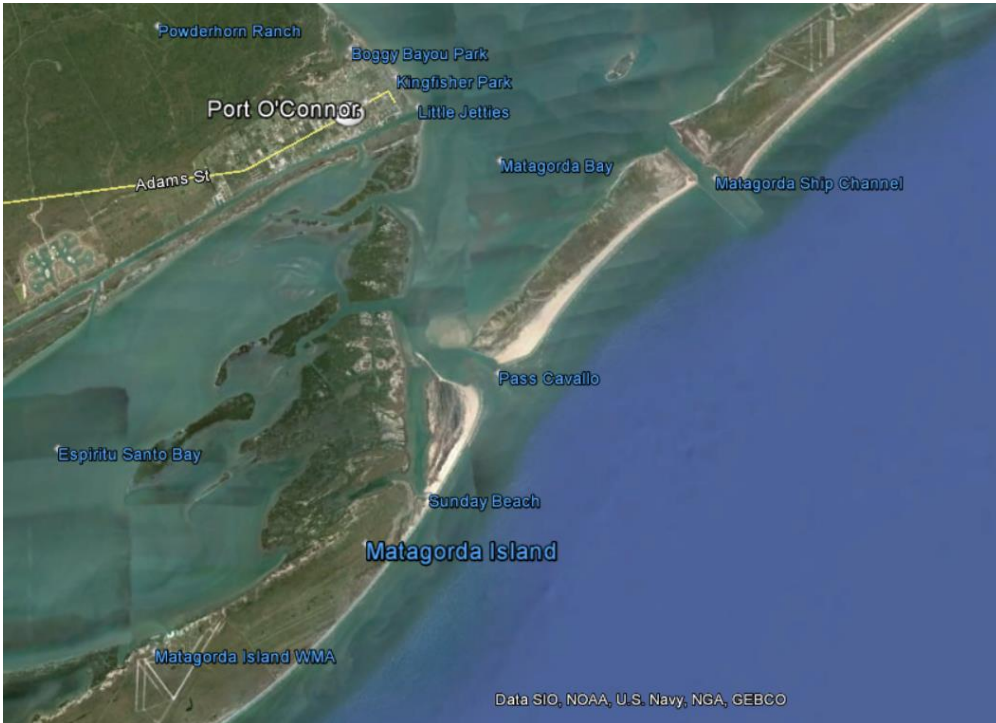
Sunday Beach is located on Matagorda Island and is accessible by private boat or kayak—see paddling trail description for info.

Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area occupies 7325 acres (29.64 km) on the northeastern end of the island. (See: http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/wma/find_a_wma/list/?id=48)

The remainder of the island is devoted to wildlife refuge operated by US Fish and Wildlife as part of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge, including Matagorda Island, is the winter home of the endangered Whooping Crane. See <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/aransas/>

Matagorda Island Lighthouse has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of The Interior.

Note: Matagorda Island is accessible only by boat. See the POC Chamber web site link for a listing of private shuttle services:



Fishing and Hunting

Port O'Connor offers several bait docks, many places to acquire a license and fishing and hunting guides to help you find the most productive spots. See the Chamber web site link above.

Town Events and Festivals

1. April- Crawfish Boil at Kingfisher Park
2. May – Warriors Weekend
3. Independence Day Weekend –Fireworks at Kingfisher Park
4. December – Parade of Boats on the GIW

For detailed information on town events see the Port O'Connor Chamber of Commerce website at www.poroconnorchamber.com

VI. Trail Partners

TPWD
POC Chamber of Commerce
Calhoun County
West Side Calhoun County Navigation District
San Antonio Bay Partnership

VII. Rental and Shuttles

Dolphin Kayak and Water Sports offers kayak rental and guide service.
1408 W. Adams St (highway 185), POC, 77982; 361-553-1521

www.dolphinkayak.net

alan@dolphinkayak.net

POC Chamber also lists the following shuttle services to Matagorda Island:

Reel Fishing Guide Service

Contact Capt. Tink for your shuttle to Matagorda Island--361-920-2746
361-920-2746

Capt. Kirk Morgan Guide Service

Capt. Kirk supplies transportation to and from Matagorda Island. Click to see our website

<http://www.captkirkmorgan.com>

R&R Guide Service

Capt. Jim Reed---Matagorda Island Shuttles, Kayak Transportation, Bay Fishing Charters, Island Shuttles, Birding; Bay Cruises. Established in 2004, give us a call 361-648-5688 or 361-648-5877 or email ---jimreed3@gmail.com

VIII. Trail Description and Landmarks

A. *Paddling Trail Overview*



The Port O'Connor Paddling Trail consists of a series of interconnecting trails totaling about 38 miles along the shores of Espiritu Santo and Matagorda Bays and through their boundary saltwater marsh Mules Slough / Fish Pond. The Trail offers opportunities to paddle several hours, all day, or several days—and opportunities to bird, fish and relax. Below are eight options for routes / loops of varying distances:

- Matagorda Island Trail down the spine of the system from Marker #1 to the Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area and its primitive camp site just past Marker #35—a distance of nearly 12 miles one way from Little Jetties Launch. A round trip, depending on the return route taken, would total over 24 miles.
- Pass Cavallo J-hook Trail from Little Jetties to historic Pass Cavallo—a distance of approximately 5 miles one way; or continue on to Sunday Beach, a total distance of about 7 miles. Round trips would total 10-18 miles, depending on return route.
- Barroom Bay Trail loops from Marker #1 west along the shores of protected Barroom Bay and back along the opposite shore— an excellent day paddle with a total distance of about 6 miles from Marker #1 and back.
- The Saluria Loop passes near the remains of the Old Coast Guard Station destroyed by Hurricane Carla in 1961 with a distance approaching 9 miles from Little Jetties Launch.

- The Fish Pond Loop follows the Matagorda Island Trail into Fish Pond, then loops east and north into Mules Slough—a distance of about 12 miles from Marker #1 and back.
- The Mules Slough Loop follows the spine trail into the shallow, protected saltwater marsh with a distance of approximately 12 miles from Marker #1 and back.
- The Big Pocket Loop turns west before looping back into Lighthouse Cove and Fish Pond and returning on the Matagorda Island Trail—about 16 miles from Marker #1 and back.
- The Sunday Beach Loop takes the Jhook Trail from Little Jetties, continuing on past the Jhook to Sunday Beach. The return is through Fish Pond to the Matagorda Island Trail then back via Saluria Bayou to Little Jetties - distance of about 17 miles.

Each is described in more detail below along with paddling mileage, sites/landmarks, fishing opportunities, and primitive camping opportunities.

Paddling distances to Marker #1*

From Fishing Center	0.3 miles
From Little Jetties	1.1 miles
From 16 th Street	0.5 miles

*The paddling distances given in the trail discussion are from the stated starting point. If starting at a different launch, the distance will vary accordingly

Safety Issues

Key to the safety and enjoyment of Paddling Trail is attention to the weather conditions. Wind is the biggest hazard. Port O’Connor is subject to periodic strong winds: southerly in the spring and summer and northerly in the winter and spring. Lightning can also pose a threat; you should not venture out when lightning storms are about.

The following link provides seasonal weather trends for Port Lavaca, 25 miles to the north: <https://weatherspark.com/averages/31273/Port-Lavaca-Texas-United-States>. Wind direction and strength statistics by month as well as typical temperature highs and lows are included.

For current weather conditions:

<http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=28.4433899&lon=-96.4769877&site=all&smap=1&searchresult=Port%20O%27Connor%2C%20TX%2077982%2C%20USA#.VJ23TP-ACd>

The weather can change rapidly, especially from northerners in Fall through Spring, so pay attention to the forecast. Getting caught on the Trail by a strong northerner can be life threatening.

Also, current tidal conditions and forecasts are available at: <http://tidesonline.noaa.gov/geographic.html>. Generally speaking, tides above 1' will allow you to paddle throughout the Paddling Trail, and those below 0.0' may require you to pull your kayak across occasional shallow spots.

Paddling speed varies based on experience, weather conditions and the kayak chosen. Paddling into a head wind will be significantly slower. An experienced paddler can average 2 miles an hour in moderate wind conditions, and is likely twice as fast as less experienced paddlers. Keep track of your time and location so that you can estimate your paddling speed. If you are out in the Spring, Summer and early Fall, prevailing winds will be in your face on the way out; with a tail wind allowing a quicker return. In the Winter, late Fall and early Spring, northerners can cause a sudden wind shift and a head wind to return.

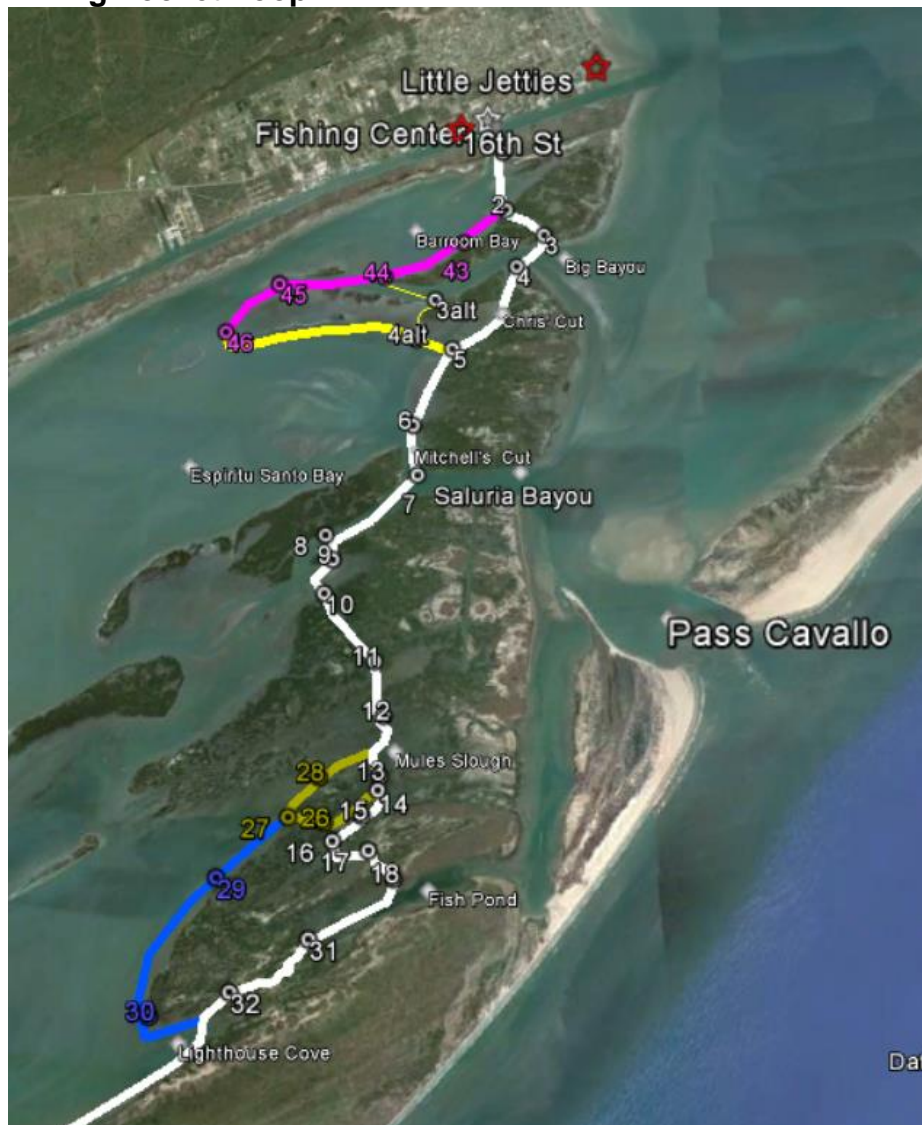
Regardless of the forecast, it is recommended that you always take the following gear:

1. Requisite life jacket and whistle
2. Paddling shoes that can handle oyster shells and mud
3. Hats, sunglasses and sunscreen
4. Rain jacket
5. Extra bottles of water and extra snacks
6. Mosquito repellent
7. A charged and water protected cell phone with Coast Guard's contact number or VHF radio on USCG Channel.
8. A map of the paddling trail system
9. Leave route and schedule with a friend

Another potential hazard is interaction with power boats. Power boat traffic is most busy on summer or holiday weekends, and much less so on weekdays in non-summer months. Remember, the marked kayak trail is not exclusively for the use of paddlers. In particular, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway can be very busy with industrial barge traffic, fishermen and others in power boats, and with sail craft. So be careful and be courteous: look both ways before entering power boat channels and paddle on the side of the boat channel where you can. If paddling in groups, stay in single file in the narrow parts of the boat channel.

B. Paddling Options

1. Big Pocket Loop



The Big Pocket Loop takes the Matagorda Island Trail nearly to Matagorda Island WMA then loops into Big Pocket at Lighthouse Cove, then back to the Matagorda Island Trail at Marker #12 for the return.

The Matagorda Island Trail begins at Marker #1 in Fisherman's Cut. Paddle south toward Little Mary's Bayou Marker #2. **Note that Little Mary's Bayou can be very busy with power boat traffic.** A less busy route involves paddling west along the south shore of Barroom Bay to Makers # 43, 44, 45, and 46 then taking the Bill Day Interconnect east toward Marker #5. If the tide is high (0.7' or above) a shortcut to Marker #5 can be taken at virtual marker #3alt to #4alt). The alternative route

adds 2.3 miles, or 0.5 miles if the short cut across the oyster reef can be taken.

At Marker #4 enter Chris's Cut. It can be busy as well so paddle along the shore grass line to the south (left). The boat traffic is unable to pass outside of the green markers to the west due to the flats in this area.

At Marker #5 turn south across the grass flat toward Marker #6 and Mitchell's Cut, then west in Saluria Bayou. Watch for Atlantic bottlenose dolphins that frequent this area.

Look to the east at Saluria Bayou and see the remnants of the Old Coast Guard Station. It was operable until Hurricane Carla in 1961 and then moved to the mainland. Saluria Bayou was also the site of a thriving community founded in 1847, but destroyed by hurricanes in 1875 and 1876.

Both Mitchell's Cut and Saluria Bayou, with their deep water passes, provide excellent fishing for trout, redfish, black drum and gaff top.

At Marker #8, turn south to Markers #9 and #10 and into the West Oil Well Cut. The man made channel was dredged in the 1950 to drill oil wells – the wells long since abandoned. Marker #11 at the end of the channels is the marks the entrance into Mules Slough—for both paddlers and power boats. If the tide is low, a sand flat between Markers #11 and #12 may have to be walked.

Mules Slough offers excellent fishing in the entrance channel, sea grass flats, mud potholes, small island shorelines, and occasional oyster piles that make for prime habitat for redfish, drum, trout and flounder. Shore birds and water fowl are plentiful, particularly in fall and winter.

The Matagorda Island Trail continues south through Mules Slough, turning southwestward at Marker #14 into a shallow bayou that winds toward a deeper tidal channel that connects into Fish Pond. Note a sharp turn to the east at Marker #17.

Marker #18 marks the paddling trails entrance into Fish Pond, a deeper lake. Sunday Beach and old Pass Cavallo lie to the east. Fish Pond is aptly named. Fish the deeper drop offs or the shallower grass flats to the west. Marker #31 lies to the west at the back end of Fish Pond.

After Marker #31, the Trail enters a winding half mile long bayou that connects to Lighthouse Cove. Watch for redfish along the grass line or under the kayak. Just past Marker #32, enter into Lighthouse Cove. Fish

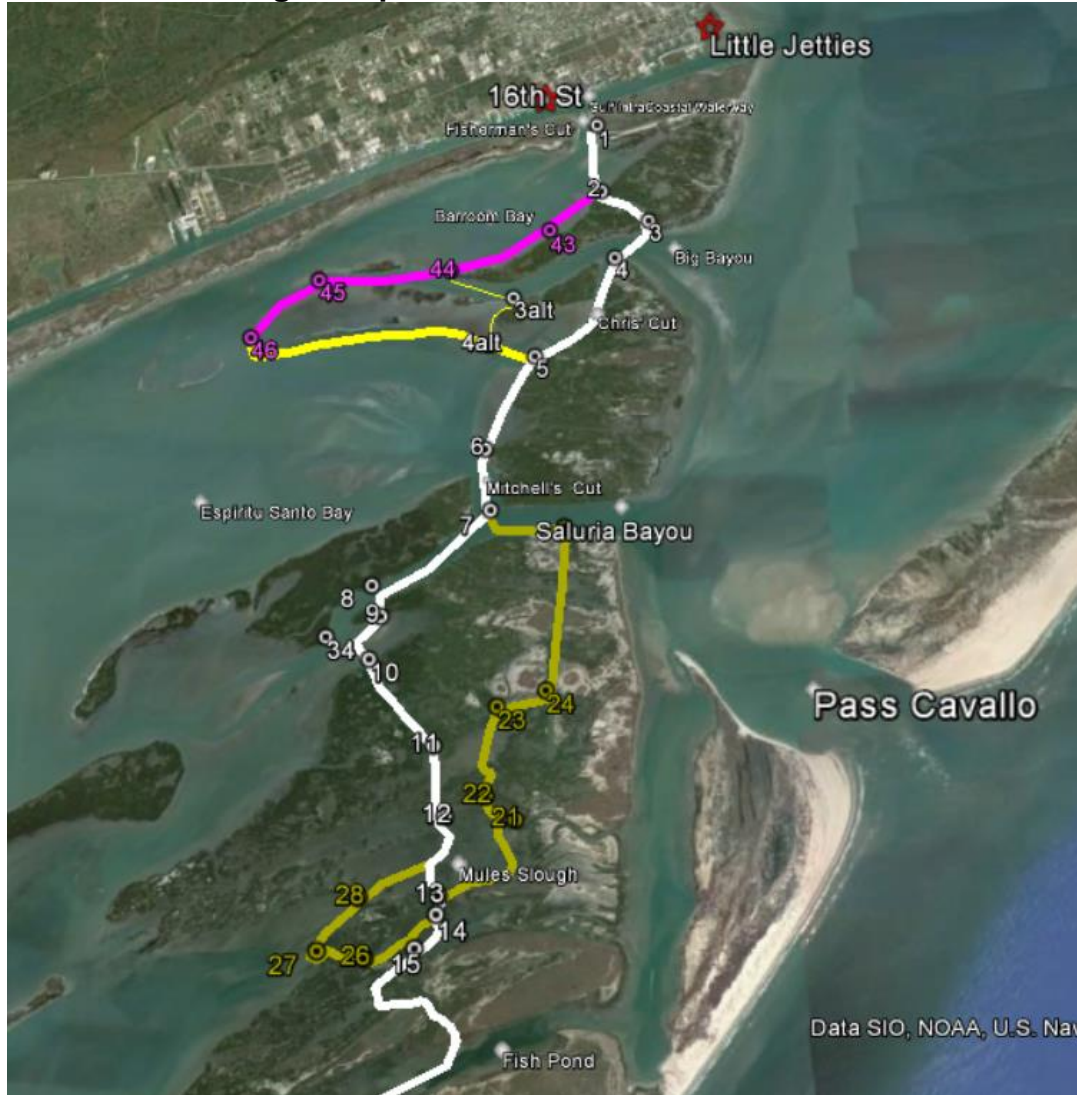
the shallow flats back to the east or the drop offs to deeper water. A good view of the Matagorda Lighthouse is to the south.

Marker #30 lies on the western tip of the north Lighthouse Cove shore. Paddle around the grass point and northeastward along the Big Pocket shoreline. Continue to Markers #29, #27, and then #28, before intersecting the Matagorda Island Trail near Marker #12.

Alternatively, at Marker #27, follow the bayou on your right as it winds back into Mules Slough near Marker #15.

Distances: Marker #32 about 8 trail miles from Marker #1 along the Matagorda Island Trail -- before considering the Little Mary Bypass. The Big Pocket Loop is estimated at 16 miles round trip – again with the extra mileage associated with the Bypass (+0.5 to 2.3 miles one way).

2. Mules Slough Loop



Paddle the Matagorda Island Trail from Marker #1 as described for the Big Pocket Loop Trail above. At Marker #12, head westward toward Markers 28, then #27. At Marker #27, enter the bayou that empties into Big Pocket from the east—a sharp left turn-- and paddle about 0.3 miles to Marker #26. Paddle the shallow sea grass filled lake eastward past Marker #15 and toward Markers #14 and #13 on the Matagorda Island Trail. Watch for wading shorebirds and tailing redfish.

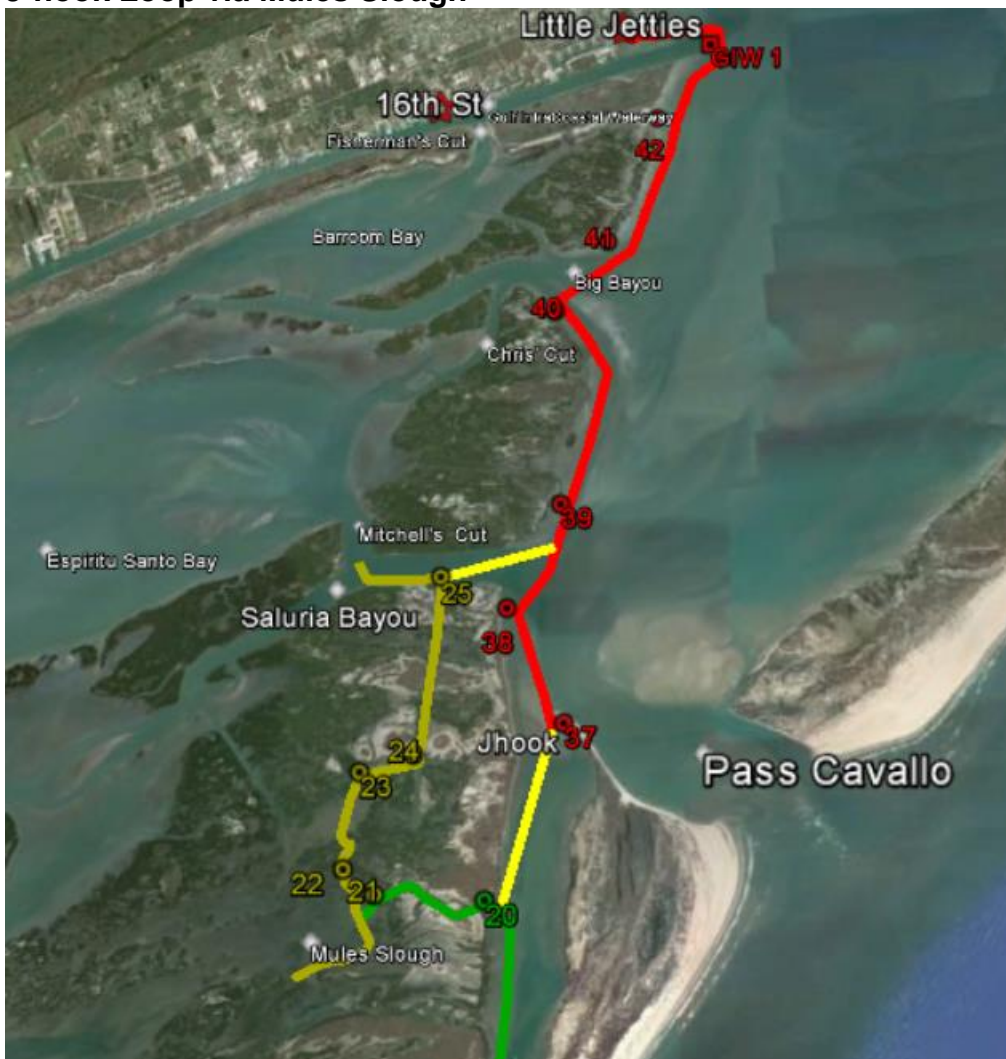
At Marker #13, turn east and paddle along the north shore of the brushy ridge. Follow the ridge and the cove shoreline back to the north. Marker #21 marks the bayou that enters the marsh from Sunday Beach Cove.

Continue paddling north; Marker #22 is at the entrance to a shallow slough. Continue paddling until an apparent dead end—but look left (west) for the route into the next shallow lake (no trail markers exists here).

Marker #23 is just north and is the entrance to the East Oil Well Cut. Paddle back to Saluria Bayou at Marker #25, then west to rejoin the Matagorda Island Trail at Marker #7.

Distances: Marker #12 is about 5 miles from Marker #1. The Mules Slough Loop as described is about 12 miles before considerations of the Little Mary's Bypass. (See discussion of bypass in Big Pocket Loop.)

3. J-hook Loop via Mules Slough



The Paddling route described is via the J-hook Trail, launching from the Little Jetties. Crossing the GIW can be the most difficult part of the trip. Paddle east along north jetty. Once the Waterway is clear of barge and boat traffic, paddle around the South Jetty (GIW 1). Note that a strong east or southeast wind and

an outgoing tide, along with boat traffic, can result in a rough crossing. Once around and back closer to the west shoreline of Matagorda Bay, the outer sandbars offer a degree of protection from the waves. (Note that if winds are strong, the Matagorda Island Trail with a connection to the Fish Pond Trail offers a more protected paddling route.) Paddle south along the shore line. Marker #42 marks the remains of the Old Canal's wooden jetties. The Old Canal was first dredged in the 1930's, but relocated north to its current location and deepened in the 1940's. The shoreline and its sandbars and guts offer excellent fishing.

Marker #41 is just north of Big Bayou, a natural pass into Espiritu Santo and San Antonio Bay to the west. Mailboat and Steamboat Passes provided historic access to the Guadalupe River and points west. Today, the GIW carries much of the tidal flow and Big Bayou is marked by numerous sandbars, and good fishing.

Past Marker #40 is across Saluria Bayou, site of the Old Coast Guard Station—remains from Hurricane Carla in 1961. Saluria was also a thriving port and town site until the hurricane of 1886 destroyed it. (Doc McAlister's *The Ecology of Matagorda Island* provides an excellent synopsis of Matagorda Island and Saluria history.) Saluria Bayou connects Espiritu Santo and San Antonio Bays to the west with Pass Cavallo and the Gulf to the south.

Paddle past the old Coast Guard Station to Marker #38, along the shore toward the J-hook at Marker #37, a distance of about 5 miles from the launch. The J-hook is the northern tip of Matagorda Island. The Pass lies to its east. Historically, the also Pass ran to the west along the main shoreline, but dredging of the Matagorda Ship Channel several miles to the east diverts tidal flow from the natural Pass Cavallo to the jettied Ship Channel. Lower tidal flows has resulted in a shallower, narrower, more sandbar prone Pass.

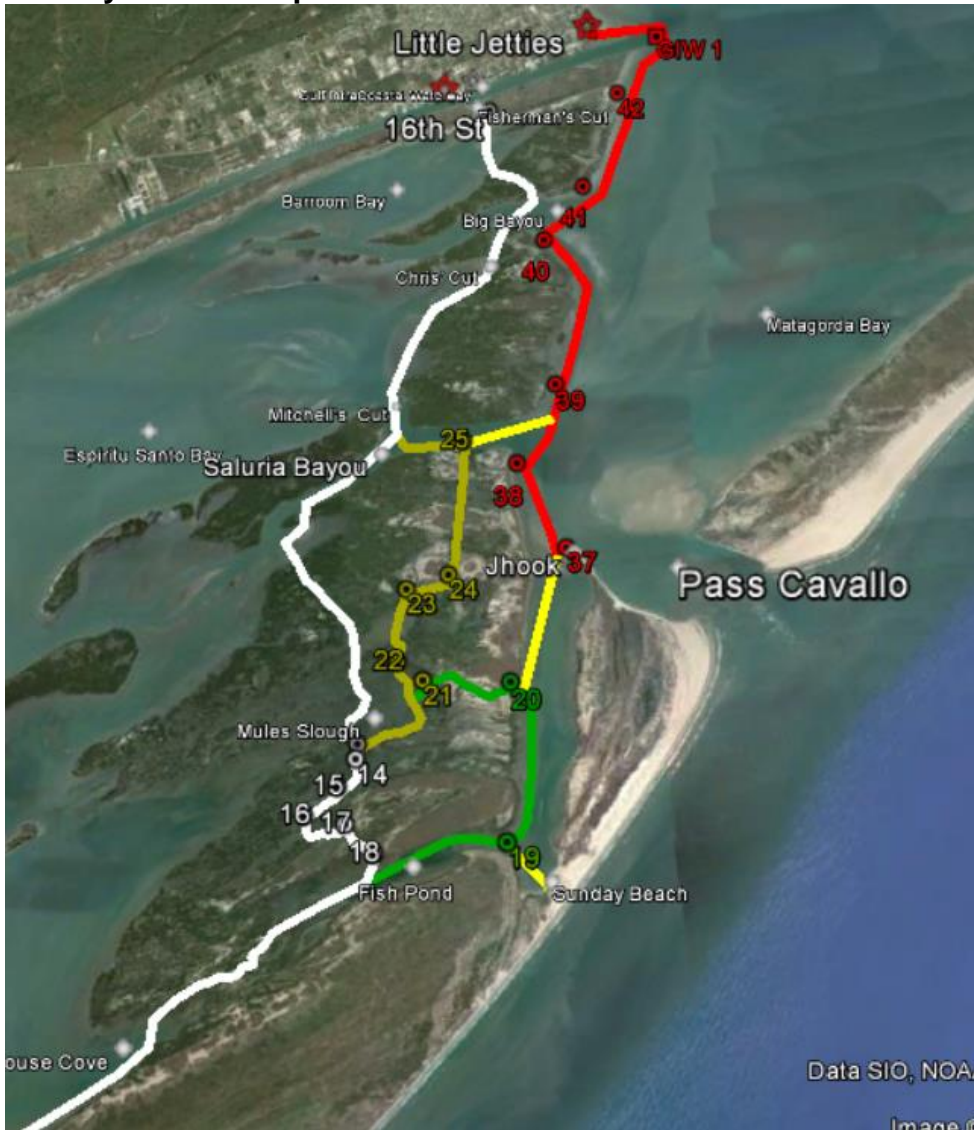
J-hook offers an excellent picnic spot. Excellent fishing and birding to both sides. Atlantic bottlenose dolphins frequent the area as well. If the weather and wave conditions permit, you can paddle into the Pass to the Island Beach. Or hike the Pass beach to stretch your legs. Be cautious of boat traffic on busy days at J-hook as they must pass through a narrow straight near the point to avoid running aground.

Return by continuing south via the Sunday Cove interconnect to Marker #20 on the Fish Pond Trail. Enter the bayou to the west and paddle into Mules Slough at Marker #21. Turn north; Marker #22 on the Mules Slough Trail is at the entrance to a small shallow slough. Continue paddling until an apparent dead end—but look left (west) for the route into the next shallow lake (no trail markers exists here).

Marker #23 is just north and is the entrance to the East Oil Well Cut. Paddle back to Saluria Bayou at Marker #25. Turn east back toward the Old Coast Guard Station and back to town via the J-hook Trail.

Distances: Marker #37 is over 5 miles from the Little Jetties. The return trip will be longer. The round trip is about 13 miles

4. Sunday Beach Loop via Pass Cavallo J-hook and Fish Pond Trails



The start of this loop is the same as the J-hook Loop.

Sunday Beach lies south of the J-hook, at the end of the cove that was once the main Pass channel—continue south from Marker #37, past Marker #20 (at a natural bayou entrance into Mules Slough to the west) and Marker #19 (at a natural bayou entrance to Fish Pond) to Sunday Beach on the southeast end of the cove.

Fish in the cove or in the surf. Walk to the dunes to the south and north; the Gulf Beach is a quarter mile across the sand. The Matagorda Island Lighthouse can be accessed with 3 mile hike (one-way) down the Gulf beach, then a short hike inland to the site.

Return via the Fish Pond Trail; at Marker #19 head west into Fish Pond, then Marker #18 on the Matagorda Island Trail. Marker #18 is at the entrance to a bayou that connects into the Mules Slough saltwater marsh. Continue back along the Matagorda Island Trail to Marker #13, then east along the Mules Slough Trail to Markers #21, 22, 23. Note fishing opportunities on the sea grass flats, mud potholes and oyster reefs.

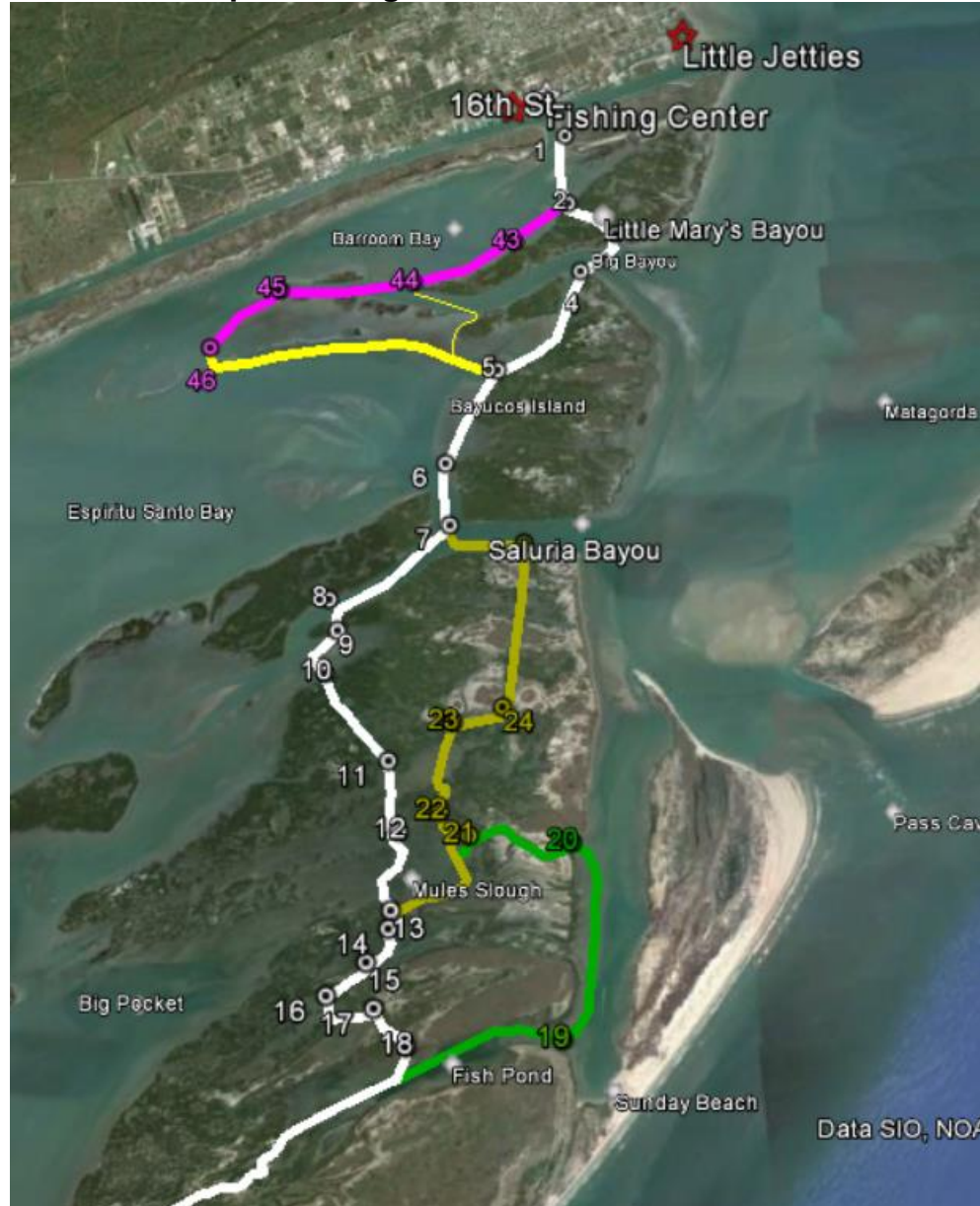
At Marker #23, enter the East Oil Well Cut, a manmade channel from the 1950's. Note abandoned oil facilities on the route.

At Marker #25, paddle east in Saluria Bayou back toward Marker #39 and the J-hook Trail for the return to the Little Jetties launch site.

Note an alternative route is to continue on the Matagorda Island Trail to the GIW at Marker #1—it provides a more protected alternative if there are strong east or southeast winds.

Distances: The distance to Sunday Beach is a little over 7 miles from Little Jetties, one way. The round trip via the described route is about 17 miles.

5. Fish Pond Loop via Matagorda Island Trail



Paddle the Matagorda Island Trail from Marker #1 to Marker #18. Marker #18 marks the paddling trails entrance into Fish Pond, a deeper lake. Fish the deeper lake drop offs or the shallower grass flats to the west. Paddle east to Marker #19, at the entrance to Fish Pond.

Popular Sunday Beach is just beyond and further to the east. A short hike from Sunday Beach allows access to the Gulf beach. The route from Marker #19 to #20 on the Fish Pond Trail is the old Pass Cavallo, before the formation of the J-hook to the east.

Paddle north toward Marker #20, and then enter the bayou heading west. Connect with the Mules Slough Trail at Marker #21; continue on it to Marker #25 as described in the Mules Slough Loop, and rejoin the Matagorda Island Trail at Marker #7 for return.

Distances: Marker #19 is over 7 miles from Marker #1. The round trip as described is about 12 miles.

6. Saluria Bayou Loop

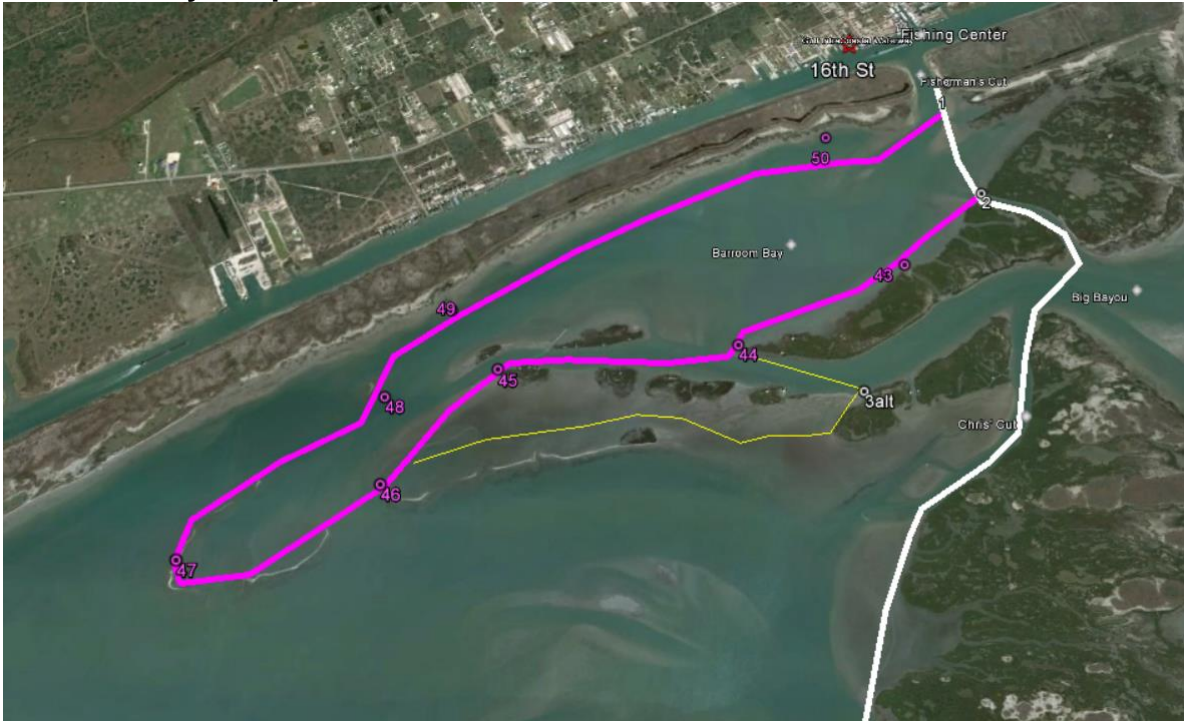


The paddling route described begins at Little Jetties and follows the J-hook Trail to Marker #39, located on the north shoreline just north of Saluria Bayou. Paddle west toward Marker #25. The return trip can be made via the Matagorda Island Trail—paddle west to Marker #7, then north along the trail to Marker #1. To reach the Little Jetties paddle east in the GIW for a little over a mile.

Alternatively, at Marker #3, continue east around the Big Bayou north shoreline to Marker #41 and back to the Little Jetties via the J-Hook Trail.

Distances: The paddling distance to Marker #25 is about a little over 4 miles. The roundtrip distance for either route is about 9 miles.

7. Barroom Bay Loop



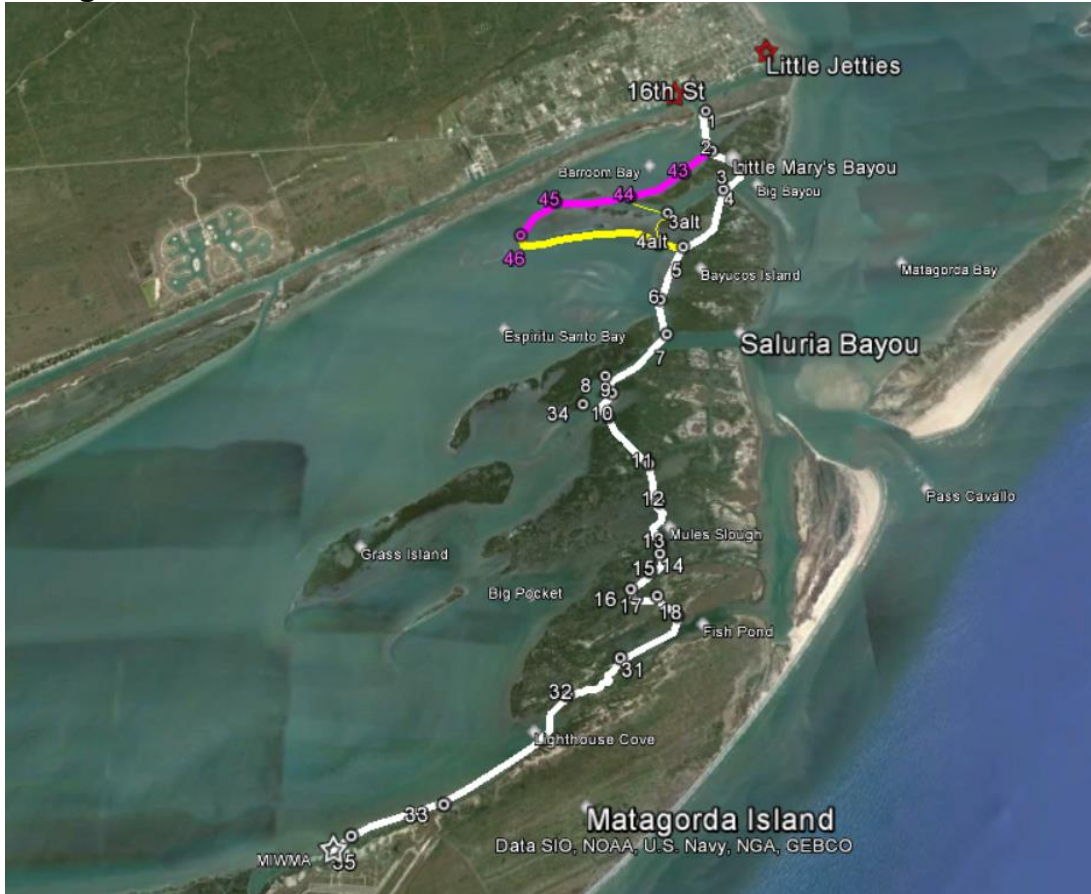
The Barroom Bay Trail offers a relatively protected paddle that stays closer to town. From Marker #1, head west along the north shoreline of Barroom Bay to Marker #50, then #49. Marker #48 is at Everett Reef. Fish the shore line or near the reef.

Continue west to the tip of Bill Day Reef at Marker #47. Here paddle into the interior of the reef complex and back east toward Marker #46. Enter the Mailboat Channel / Big Bayou at Marker #45. Paddle the channel to Marker #44, and then back into Barroom Bay. Paddle the south shore Barroom Bay back to Marker #2.

If the tide is high, consider paddling east from Marker #46 inside the reef. The area is rich with oyster and mud so a tide of 1.0' or higher is required. Virtual Marker #3alt provides the last opportunity to cut across the reef to Big Bayou; then return to Barroom Bay Trail at Marker #44.

Distances: Marker #47 is about 3 miles from Marker 1; the round trip is over 6 miles.

8. Matagorda Island Trail



The Matagorda Island Trail begins at Marker #1 in Fisherman's Cut. Paddle south toward Little Mary's Bayou Marker #2. **Note that Little Mary's Bayou can be very busy with power boat traffic.** A less busy route involves paddling west along the south shore of Barroom Bay to Makers # 43, 44, 45, and 46 then taking the Bill Day Interconnect east toward Marker #5. If the tide is high (0.7' or above) a shortcut to Marker #5 can be taken at virtual marker #3alt to #4alt). The alternative route adds 2.3 miles, or 0.5 miles if the short cut across the oyster reef can be taken.

At Marker #4 enter Chris's Cut. It can be busy as well so paddle along the shore grass line to the south (left). The boat traffic is unable to pass outside of the green markers to the west due to the flats in this area.

At Marker #5 turn south across the grass flat toward Marker #6 and Mitchell's Cut, then west in Saluria Bayou. Watch for Atlantic bottlenose dolphins that frequent this area.

Look to the east at Saluria Bayou and see the remnants of the Old Coast Guard Station. It was operable until Hurricane Carla in 1961 and then moved to the

mainland. Saluria Bayou was also the site of a thriving community founded in 1847, but destroyed by hurricanes in 1875 and 1876.

Both Mitchell's Cut and Saluria Bayou, with their deep water passes, provide excellent fishing for trout, redfish, black drum and gafftop.

At Marker #8, turn south to Markers #9 and #10 and into the West Oil Well Cut. The man made channel was dredged in the 1950 to drill oil wells – the wells long since abandoned. Marker #11 at the end of the channels is the marks the entrance into Mules Slough—for both paddlers and power boats. If the tide is low, a sand flat between Markers #11 and #12 may have to be walked.

Mules Slough offers excellent fishing in the entrance channel, seagrass flats, mud potholes, small island shorelines, and occasional oyster piles that make for prime habitat for redfish, drum, trout and flounder. Shore birds and water fowl are plentiful, particularly in fall and winter.

The Matagorda Island Trail continues south through Mules Slough, turning southwestward at Marker #14 into a shallow bayou that winds toward a deeper tidal channel that connects into Fish Pond. Note a sharp turn to the east at Marker #17.

Marker #18 marks the paddling trails entrance into Fish Pond, a deeper lake. Sunday Beach and old Pass Cavallo lie to the east. Fish Pond is aptly named. Fish the deeper drop offs or the shallower grass flats to the west. Marker #31 lies to the west at the back end of Fish Pond.

After Marker #31, the Trail enters a winding half mile long bayou that connects to Lighthouse Cove. Watch for redfish along the grass line or under the kayak. Just past Marker #32, enter into Lighthouse Cove. Fish the shallow flats back to the east or the drop offs to deeper water. A good view of the Matagorda Lighthouse is to the south.

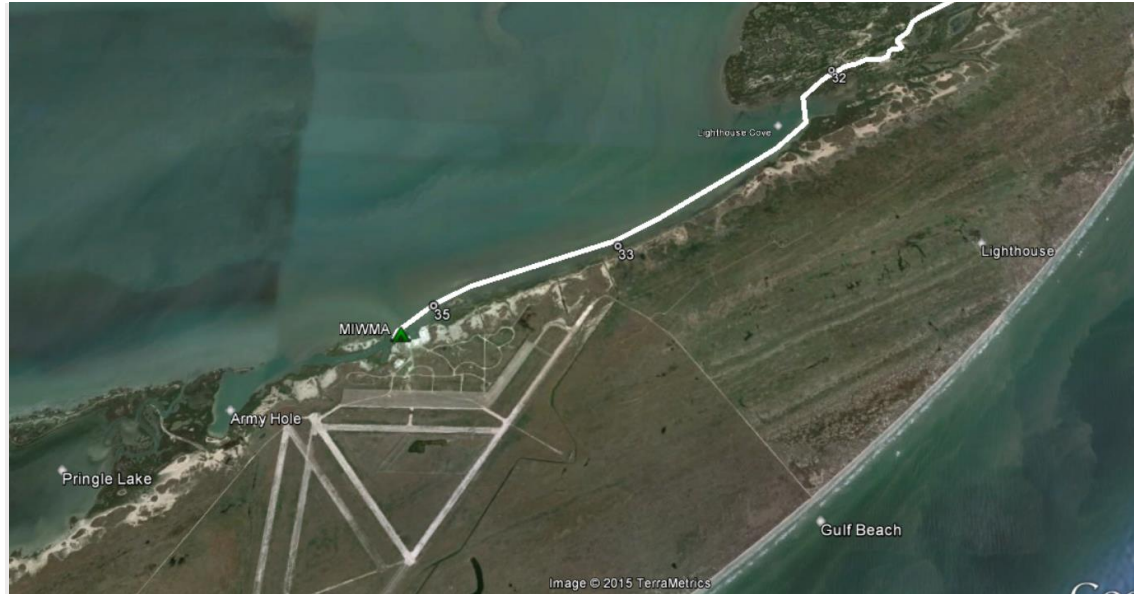
Continue southwest along the shoreline of Matagorda Island, past Marker #33. The next Marker is #35, and the MIWMA primitive camp site lies just beyond.

Distances: The MIWMA primitive camp site is nearly 12 miles from Marker #1 (one-way)- before considering the Little Mary Bypass. The extra mileage associated with the Bypass adds 0.5 to 2.3 miles one way).

Note: there is no vehicle access to Matagorda Island. See next section for discussion of the primitive campsite.

C. Multi-Day trips – Primitive Camping

1. Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area



Matagorda Island WMA has tent sites and covered tables. No potable water is available; the restroom facilities are available only during public hunts. No power is available.

For additional information contact TPWD at 979-323-9669. Their web site is: http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/wma/find_a_wma/list/?id=48

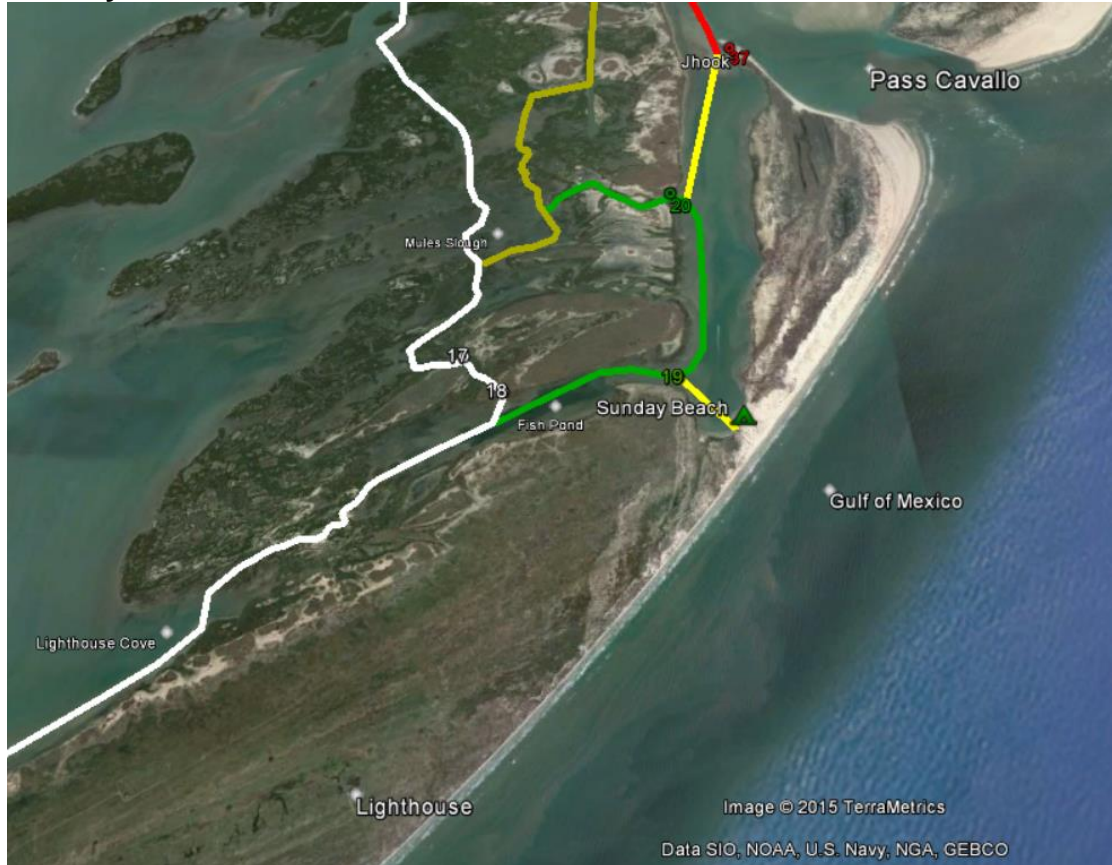
If you choose to camp overnight, you must possess either a Limited Public Use Permit (LPU) or an Annual Public Hunting Permit (APH). The permits can be purchased at any place that sells hunting or fishing licenses. For questions about rules governing use of the island, contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at 979-323-9969. Daily visitors are not required to possess any permits. Only overnight campers are required to possess a LPU or APH.

The historic Matagorda Lighthouse is a 3 mile hike along a shell road; the Gulf beach is about 2.2 miles. Additional paddling and fishing opportunities lie to the west at the Army Hole and Pringle Lake.

The paddling distance via the Matagorda Island Trail is about 12 miles.

Several outfitters offer transport services to the Island and are listed in Section V and on Chamber of Commerce web site.

2. Sunday Beach



Sunday Beach provides an excellent primitive camp site. It offers bay side fishing along the route, and access to the Gulf beach after a quarter mile hike. There are no amenities, only sand and sun and water, along with starlight and moonrise. Mosquitoes can be ferocious. Weekends, particularly in the summer, can be very busy during the day as the site offers a great place to play. Once the sun goes down, the place belongs to any brave campers, the mosquitoes and the howling coyotes.

Camp in the sand; walk to the dunes to the south and north; the Gulf beach is a quarter mile across the sand. The Matagorda Island Lighthouse can be accessed with 3 mile hike down the gulf beach, then a short hike inland to the site.

The paddling distance is a little less than 7 miles from Little Jetties, one way. Access via the Sunday Beach Loop is described above.

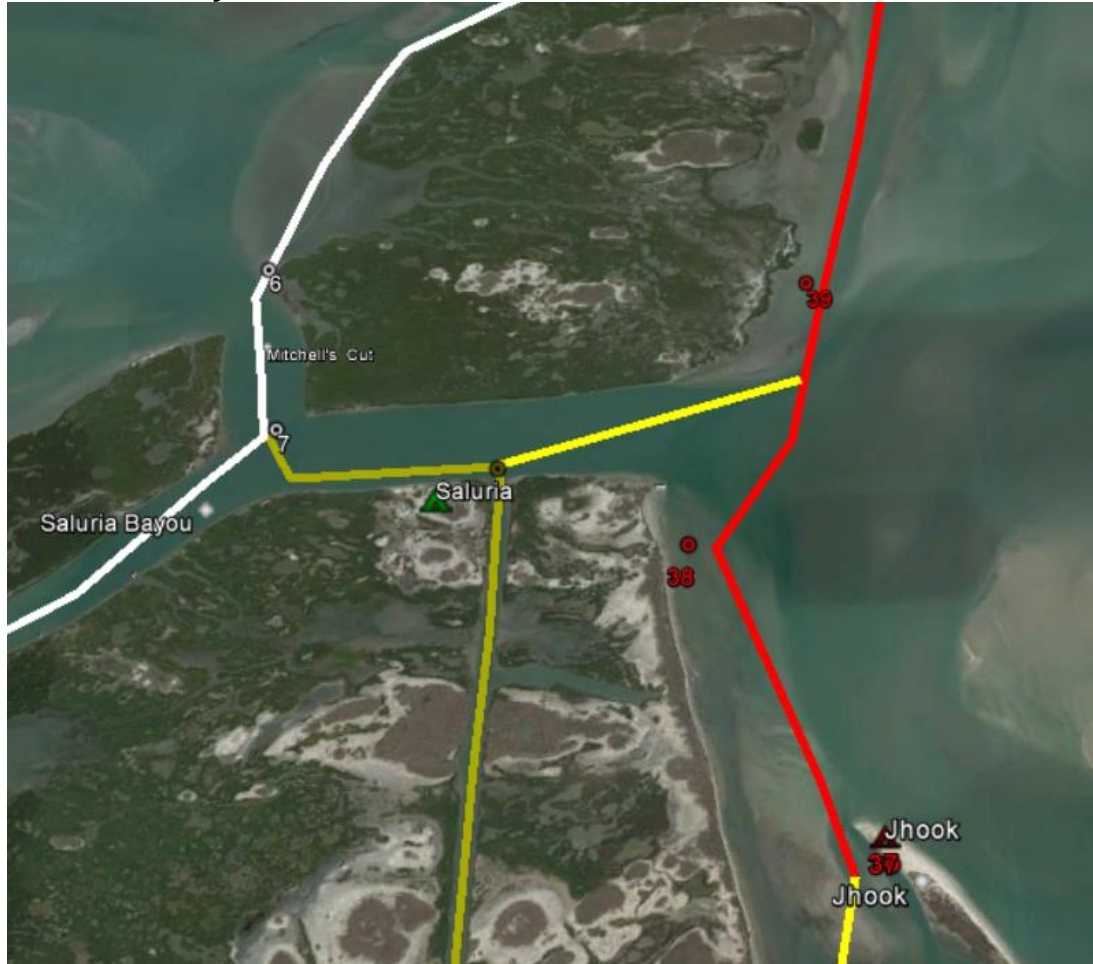
3. Pass Cavallo J-Hook



The Pass Cavallo J-hook offers an excellent primitive campsite. Pass Cavallo lies to the east, and the main channel of the historic pass to the west and south. Camp in the sand and fish in the Pass or the cove. There are no amenities, only sand and sun and water, along with star light and moonrise. Mosquitoes can be ferocious. Weekends, particularly in the summer can be busy during the day. Once the sun goes down, the place belongs to any brave campers, the mosquitoes and the howling coyotes.

The paddling route is via the Pass Cavallo J-hook Trail. The J-hook is at Marker #37, over 5 miles one way.

4. Saluria Bayou



The south bank of Saluria Bayou, just west of Marker #25, offers a sandy strand for primitive camping. As with the other sites described above, there are no amenities. Fishing opportunities exist in Saluria Bayou, the sand/grass flats along the Matagorda Bay shoreline, or in the East Oil Well cut and its access into Mules Slough.

The paddling distance is over 4 miles, one way.

D. Other Paddling opportunities out of Port O'Connor

In addition marshes along the Paddling Trail, the area includes estuaries that offer excellent paddling: Boggy Bayou in POC and Powderhorn Lake / Coloma Creek off of FM 1285 about 10 miles out of town can all be readily accessed for paddling and fishing.

About 15 miles west of POC, Charlie's Bait Camp offers paddling access to the Lagoon and Shoalwater Bay, both shallow estuaries filled with sea grasses and lots of birds—not to mention fish.

Additionally, marshes on Matagorda Island include Pringle, Conti and South Pass Lakes. Pringle and Conti offer shallow water wade fishing with an average of a foot-and-a-half to three feet of water. This marsh system is west of the Matagorda Island WMA campsite and is best access for paddling with an outfitter to transport kayaks to the back lakes.

E. Distance Details for Paddling Routes

Summary Table – Paddling Trail Mileage (approximate from Google Earth; may not reflect actual paddling miles depending on launch site chose—see Paddling Trail descriptions for better estimates).

1. Matagorda Island Trail (Spine from Marker #1)	11.6
2. Pass Cavallo / J-hook Trail (from Little Jetties)	5.2
3. Barroom Bay Trail (from Marker #1)	6.4
4. Mules Slough Trail (from Marker #12)	4.4
5. Fish Pond Trail (from Marker #18)	4.6
6. Big Pocket Trail (from Marker #27)	<u>5.8</u>
Designated Trails	38.0
7. Big Bayou Interconnect	1.1
8. Bill Day Reef Interconnect	1.6
9. Saluria Interconnect	0.6
10. Sunday Cove Interconnect	0.9
11. Sunday Beach Interconnect	0.3
12. Little Mary's Interconnect	<u>0.3</u>
Total Paddling Trail Mileage	42.8 miles

POC Paddling Trail Markers

Marker	LAT	LONG
PO1	28.43531000	-96.41206000
PO2	28.42902000	-96.41110000
PO3	28.42626000	-96.40652000
PO4	28.42286000	-96.40933000
PO5	28.41405000	-96.41571000
PO6	28.40609000	-96.41924000
PO7	28.40101000	-96.41822000
PO8	28.39493000	-96.42764000
PO9	28.39248000	-96.42655000
PO10	28.38914000	-96.42709000
PO11	28.38253000	-96.42087000
PO12	28.37730000	-96.41930000
PO13	28.37159000	-96.41913000
PO14	28.37028000	-96.41915000
PO15	28.36790000	-96.42057000
PO16	28.36553000	-96.42339000
PO17	28.36469000	-96.41950000
PO18	28.36209000	-96.41659000
PO19	28.36270000	-96.40440000
PO20	28.37665000	-96.40517000
PO21	28.37705000	-96.41354000
PO22	28.37877000	-96.41614000
PO23	28.38548000	-96.41595000
PO24	28.38671000	-96.41200000
PO25	28.39964000	-96.41170000
PO26	28.36723000	-96.42445000
PO27	28.36775000	-96.42832000
PO28	28.37148000	-96.42550000
PO29	28.36214000	-96.43513000
PO30	28.34962000	-96.44032000
PO31	28.34962000	-96.44032000
PO32	28.35183000	-96.43236000
PO33	28.33820000	-96.44939000
PO34	28.39088000	-96.43097000
PO35	28.33437000	-96.46214000
POC42	28.43749600	-96.39811900
POC41	28.42794400	-96.39990000
POC40	28.41633900	-96.40153800
POC39	28.40593000	-96.40290200
POC38	28.39832100	-96.40696700
POC37	28.38893200	-96.40035200
POC46	28.41565400	-96.44098300
POC47	28.41299600	-96.45047900
POC48	28.42042600	-96.44201700
POC49	28.42447100	-96.43828500
POC45	28.42040600	-96.43716100
POC44	28.42164400	-96.42410200
POC43	28.42562600	-96.41515500
POC50	28.43307700	-96.41837100
POCMWMA	28.33254800	-96.46450000
POCChannelMarker1	28.44350000	-96.39410000
LittleJettyLaunch	28.44480000	-96.40280000
POCFishingCenter	28.43880000	-96.41420000
FutureLaunch 16th Steet	28.43770000	-96.41730000

Note: Table below is from Google Earth layout of Trails and does not correspond identically to TPWD measured distances. It should provide sound guidance regarding incremental distances between points.

POC Paddling Trail Distances - Miles					
(as measured from Google Earth)					
Matagorda Island Trail		Pass Cavallo Jhook Trail		Barroom Bay Trail	
<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr M#1</u>	<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr L J</u>	<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr M#1</u>
1	0.00			1	
2	0.45	GIIW1	0.62	50	0.56
3	0.79	42	1.18	49	1.87
4	1.10	41	1.98	48	2.22
5	1.84	40	2.47	47	2.94
6	2.44	39	3.63	46	3.67
7	2.80	38	4.2	45	4.17
8	3.48	37	4.96	44	4.83
9	3.62	TPWD	5.25	43	5.45
10	3.91			2	5.72
11	4.51				
12	4.89	Return			
13	5.33	Sunday Cv I/c	0.86		
14	5.44	20-21	0.68		
15	5.64	21-25	1.89		
16	5.88	Saluria I/c	0.86	Barroom Bay Loop	
17	6.17	39-L J	3.63	Trail	5.72
18	6.43		7.92	2-1	0.45
31	7.10	Jhook Lp	12.88		6.17
32	7.73			TPWD	6.4
33	9.19				
35	10.00				
MIWMA	10.30	Sunday Beach fr L J		Interconnects	
LJ to 1	1.14	L J to Jhook	4.96	L Mary I/C	0.26
	11.44	Sunday I/c	0.86	Day Reef I/C	1.64
TPWD	11.6	20-19	1.03	Saluria I/C	0.55
3alt		Sunday Bch I/c	0.35	Sunday Beach I/c	0.35
Latitude: 28.419247°N		Total	7.2	Sunday Cv I/C	0.86
Longitude: -96.418183°					
		Sunday Loop via MI			
4alt					
Latitude: 28.415039°		Sunday	7.2		
Longitude: -96.419864°		Sunday bch ic	0.35		
		19-18	0.81		
Little Mary's Bypass	2.30	18-7	3.63		
		7-25	0.47	From Launches to M#1	
L Mary Bypass short cut		Saluria	0.55	Fish Cntr	0.25
2-44	0.89	39 to LJ	3.63	16 St	0.45
s/c	0.76	Loop	16.64	Little Jetty	1.14
4a-5	0.23				
less 2-5	1.39				
	0.49				

Mules Slough Trail		Fish Pond Trail		Big Pocket Trail					
<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr M#12</u>	<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr M#18</u>	<u>Marker</u>	<u>fr M#18</u>				
12		18		27					
28	0.34	19	0.81	29	0.53				
27	0.69	20	1.84	30	1.57				
26	1	21	2.52	32	2.24				
14	1.38	21-13	2.96	Plus 12-32	2.84				
13	1.5	Plus 13-18	1.10	plus 12-27	0.69				
21	2.1		4.06		5.77				
22	2.28	TPWD	4.8	TPWD	5.8				
23	2.79								
24	3.1								
25	3.99								
7	4.46								
Mules Slough Loop fr M#1		Fish Pond Loop fr M#1		Big Pocket Loop fr M#1					
1-12	4.89	1-18	6.43	1-12	4.89				
MS Trail	4.46	FP	2.52	12-27	0.69				
7-1	2.80	MS 21-7	2.36	BP loop	2.24				
MS loop	12.15	7-1	2.80	32-1	7.73				
		Loop	11.31	Loop	15.55				
				Saluria Loop					
				LJ to 39	3.63				
				Saluria I/c	0.55				
				25-7	0.47				
				7-1	2.80	7-3	2.01		
				1-LJ	1.14	LM I/c	0.26		
				Total	8.59	41-LJ	1.98		
								8.90	
POC Paddling Trail Mileage				Big Bayou Route to MIWMA					
MI	10.3			12-27	0.69				
jhook	4.96			BP	2.24				
Barroom	5.72			less 12-32	2.84				
MS	4.46				0.09				
FP	2.52								
Big Pocket	2.24								
Sunday Cv	0.86								
Sunday Beach	0.35								
Bill Day	1.64								
Saluria	0.55								
L Marys	0.26								
Total	33.86								

IX. Wildlife and Ecology

The small islands that border the trail and Matagorda Island support a wide variety of shorebirds and migratory birds, including 19 federally listed threatened or endangered species. White pelicans, brown pelicans, herons and egrets, rosette spoonbills, ducks, sandhill cranes, grebes, loons, gulls and terns, willets, curlews, yellowlegs, godwits, dowitchers, plovers and peeps are all seen – especially in the winter. The whooping crane winters on the Aransas National Wildlife refuge, including the south end of Matagorda Island and is occasionally seen foraging on the north end of the Island.

The Atlantic bottlenose dolphin is spotted along the trail, particularly in the GIW, Fisherman's Cut, Mitchell's Cut, Saluria Bayou and near the Pass.

Adding to the variety, a large herd of whitetail deer can sometimes be seen on Matagorda Island, along with the occasional alligator. Raccoons frequent the marshes, jackrabbits the dunes and coyotes and feral hogs the interior of the island.

For an excellent summary, read *The Ecology of Matagorda Island* by Wayne and Martha McAlister and published by TAMU press.

X. Fishing and Hunting

The area is known for producing redfish, speckled trout, drum and other popular fish. Trout and large redfish are commonly caught all year long. Purchase a fishing map for details.

The area is also popular with waterfowl hunters.

See the POC Chamber of Commerce web site for a listing of fishing and hunting guides.

XI. History

Matagorda Island

Matagorda Island Lighthouse Shines Again

A Matagorda Island beacon that guided ships along Texas' mid-coast before the U.S. Civil War is again lighting the way for modern mariners thanks to the recent completion of a \$1.23 million overhaul of the state's oldest operational lighthouse.

It took a little more than a year to complete the repair project that included rebuilding and shoring up the base, repainting the entire lighthouse and replacing the light room at the top. In addition, sidewalks and a restroom were added at the site that is within the boundaries of Matagorda Island State Park.

The 92-foot-tall, charcoal-colored lighthouse is actually the second such structure to be built on the eastern tip of the barrier island overlooking Pass Cavallo that leads from the Gulf into Matagorda Bay. The original lighthouse, known as the Matagorda Light Station, was erected in 1852, funded by \$1,500 appropriated by the U.S. Congress. It suffered extensive damage in the early 1860s when Confederate troops removed its Fresnel lens and tried to destroy the tower to prevent the Union Army benefiting from its guiding light.

In 1873, what remained of the old structure was dismantled and a new lighthouse erected two miles inland, using the same iron plates. At that time the red and white striped tower was painted black and a new Fresnel lens was installed. That lens, which was removed in 1977, is now on display at the Calhoun County Museum in Port Lavaca.

In 1956, electric power was brought to Matagorda Island and the light was automated. That ended the era of the lighthouse keeper, and Arthur Barr, the last of a long series of lighthouse keepers, and his family moved inland. Mr. Barr's widow, Ruth, and their daughter were among the honored guests at the Dedication Ceremony held in June. Also attending and recognized were descendants of the first lighthouse keeper, James Cummings, who, on New Year's Eve, 1852, lit the light on the first Matagorda lighthouse.

The Matagorda Island Lighthouse has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of The Interior.

For an excellent summary of the history of Matagorda Island, read *The Ecology of Matagorda Island* by Wayne and Martha McAlister and published by TAMU press.

XII. Driving Directions to Port O'Connor from Major Metropolitan areas

From Houston:

1. Take Hwy 59 south toward Victoria
2. At Ganado, take Hwy 172 south to Hwy 35
3. Take Hwy 35 into Port Lavaca
4. After the Causeway, as you enter Port Lavaca, turn left on Hwy 238--it's about 25 miles to Port O'Connor.
5. Proceed through Port Lavaca on Hwy 238 and continue south of town.
6. Turn left on FM 1285 toward Port O'Connor.
7. Turn left on Hwy 185 toward Port O'Connor
8. Continue on Hwy 185 east for 8 miles to Port O'Connor
9. Distance is about 155 miles; estimated driving time is about 3 hours.

From San Antonio:

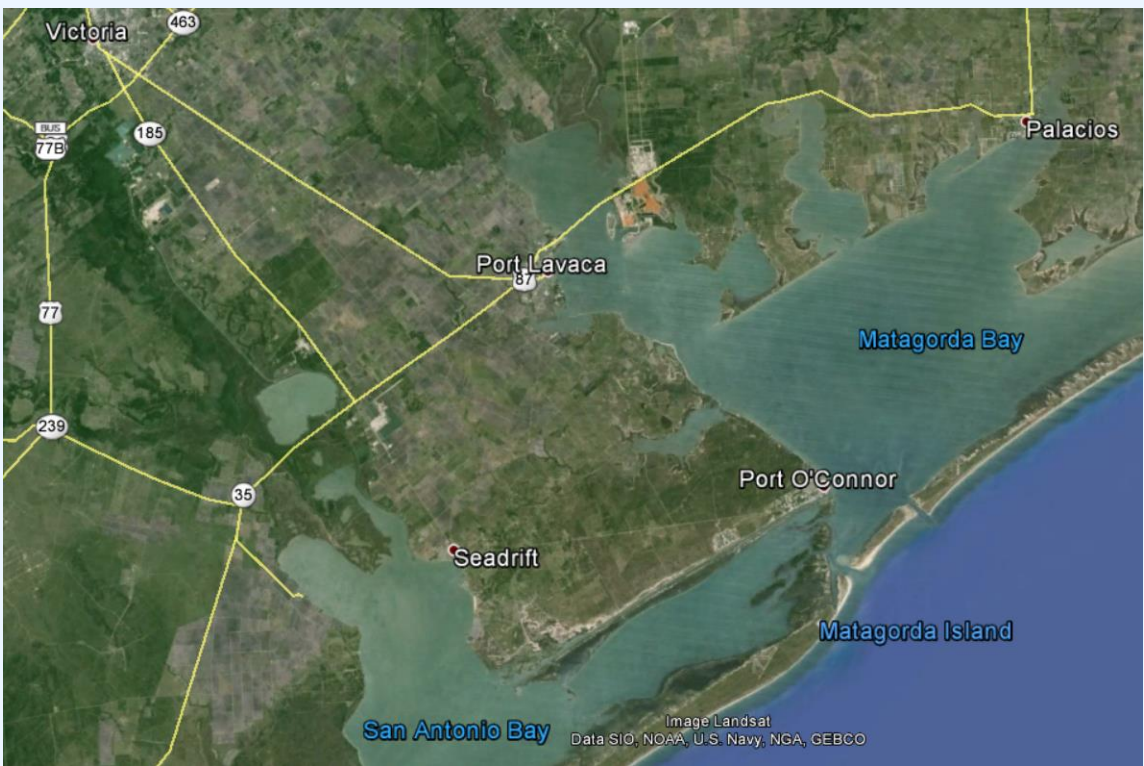
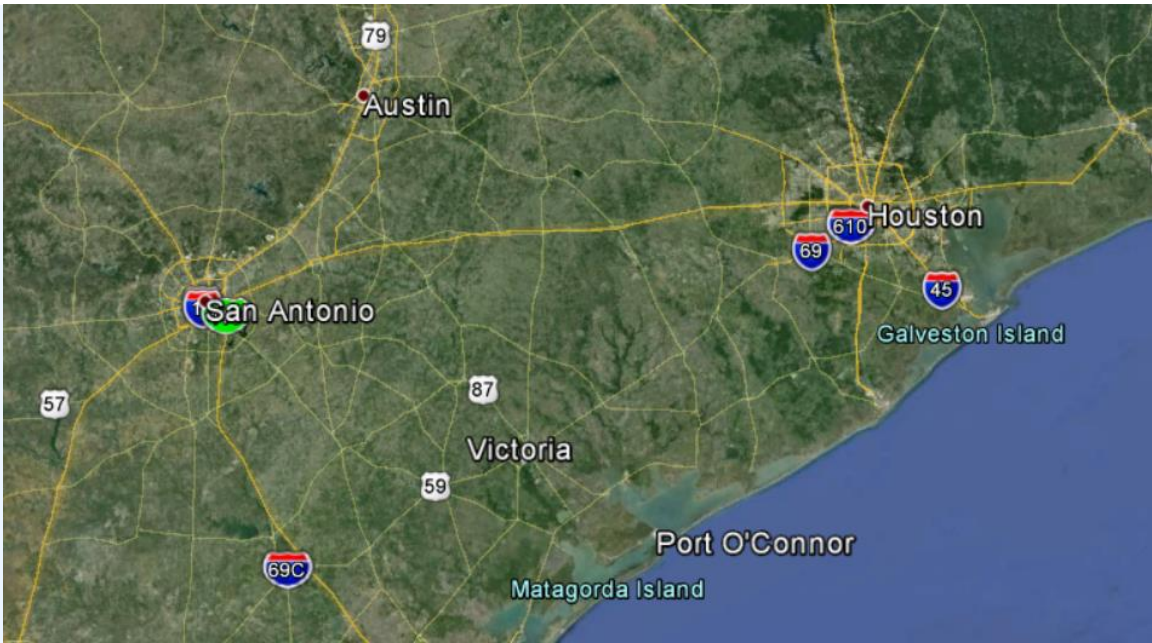
1. Take Hwy 87 east to Victoria
2. In Victoria, follow Hwy 87 until it intersects with Hwy 185
3. Take Hwy 185 southeast for approximately 26 miles to Seadrift
4. Continue on Hwy 185 east for 18 miles to Port O'Connor
5. Distance is about 165 miles; estimated drive time a little over 3 hours

FROM AUSTIN

1. Take Hwy 183 south to Victoria
2. In Victoria, follow Hwy 87 until it intersects with Hwy 185
3. Take Hwy 185 southeast for approximately 26 miles to Seadrift
4. Continue on Hwy 185 east for 18 miles to Port O'Connor
5. Distance is about 200 miles; estimated drive time is 3 ½ hours.

Distance from other cities:

- Dallas - 340 miles
- Corpus Christi - 96 miles
- Victoria - 47 miles



XIII. Safety

Rivers are ever-changing dynamic systems with inherent dangers. Follow basic safety rules such as: never boat alone, tell someone where you are going, when you expect to return, and where to call if you don't. Plan your trip and stick to the plan. Wear a Coast Guard approved Type III-V lifejacket and protective footwear. Make sure that your water skills and experience are equal to the river and the conditions. Know your limits. For more information, see the online TPWD River Safety Guide. www.tpwd.state.tx.us

XIV. Respect private property by not trespassing or littering and keeping the noise level down.

[Respect private property by not trespassing or littering and keeping noise levels down. This river is classified as navigable, which permits public use of the streambed and, if necessary, the banks to portage any hazard. Any other use of private river banks without permission of the landowner can be considered trespassing. Under Texas Penal Code \(§30.05\), criminal trespass occurs when one enters property after receiving notice not to enter. Notice includes verbal notice, a fence, sign\(s\), purple paint on posts or trees, or the visible presence of crops grown for human consumption.](#)

XV. Conservation

Coastal waters and their associated bays, estuaries and wetlands are mixing zone for fresh and saltwater. These areas not only enhance water quality by assimilating domestic waste and controlling erosion but they also provide invaluable habitat for juvenile shell and game fish (or finfish) during their early life stages. These areas also support various municipal and industrial facilities and support diverse fish and wildlife, fishing, hunting, and other recreational activities which positively affect Texas' economy. Freshwater inflows must be maintained to produce balanced salinity levels. Conservation of our bays and estuaries can be furthered through efforts to preserve and restore wetlands and seagrasses to reduce erosion, filter pollutants and improve water quality. Conservation of these areas ensures that the natural heritage of Texas is protected for future generations.

XVI. Photos







