

Another Florida Paddle Adventure

Bill Smith 2023

I recently made a January trip to Florida so I decided to take a kayak along for the ride. As it turned out, I only had one day to paddle so I recruited my brother Phil and brother in law Jim to paddle Rock Springs Run which is classified as a wild river. Both Jim and Phil recently bought homes near Orlando but neither had paddled in Florida yet. I am not sure if Jim ever paddled before but Phil owns a fleet of Pungo kayaks since he spends his summer living on a lake in Michigan. Rock Springs Run is just north of Orlando and was one of my favorite local paddles when I lived in Florida. Rock Springs Run is a beautiful river with gin clear water, a decent current and plenty of wildlife considering it is only ten miles from one of the largest tourist attractions in the world. It was common to see black bears, alligators, deer and several species of wild birds. The river is not very wide and with the vegetation in the water the paddle path is limited. The river also follows a windy path so plenty of maneuvering is required. This river meets the Wekiva River about one mile below its headwater at Wekiva Springs State Park.



Campgrounds to Wekiva River Juncture

water which really got him going. We reached the takeout shortly after without any more incidents. During this trip we did pass with an arm's length of an eight point buck, several Limpkins and herons. Jim told me after that now that it is over he had a fun trip and may consider doing it again.

If you ever find yourself in that area I highly recommend this paddle. You can launch from Kings Landing and take out at Wekiva Island on the Wekiva River. This is an eight-and-a-half mile trip.

Kings Landing, 5722 Baptist Camp Road, Apopka, FL 407-886-0859
 Wekiva Island, 1014 Miami Springs Dr, Longwood, FL 407-862-1500
 Wekiva Springs State Park, 1800 Wekiva Circle, Apopka, FL

My first hint that Jim was petrified of alligators was during the ride to the put in. He started by asking if I thought we would see any gators. I told him I expect to see up to a dozen but that he had nothing to worry about since hostile gators are extremely rare-not sure that was reassuring to him. Jim grew up in the city of Detroit and I observed over the years that people from an urban environment have a stronger fear of wild animals. After launching from Kings Landing we proceeded to travel down the river. We covered about three miles before seeing our first alligator but then the flood gates opened and we were in constant view of them so Jim's anxiety level was increasing. As it turned out we passed a minimum of forty and maybe as many as fifty gators. Most of the alligators were in the three foot to six foot range with a few over eight feet. I didn't have the heart to tell Jim that the most dangerous alligators are in the five to six foot range which we passed plenty of. About two thirds of the way to the take out we stopped at a campsite along the river. Jim was so careful to avoid stepping in the river that he flipped his boat, this really stirred up his fear. After getting underway again we passed through a narrow passage created by a downed tree which also had a seven foot alligator resting on top and within an arm's length of the passage. Jim was so careful to avoid the gator that he bumped the log and the gator jumped in the

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We all become a bit wiser and excited to be on the water again. We need your input to make *The Chesapeake Paddler* the best it can be.

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