



Explore Undiscovered North Florida

The Big Bend Scenic Byway will Transport You to a Different Time and Place through its Wildlife, Waterways, Woods, and Way of Life

Sink and Springs Tour

This two-part tour explores the fascinating world of “Karst,” a unique geological feature of the Byway. The term is applied to terrain that rain and groundwater have changed by dissolving underlying limestone bedrock. The porous limestone bedrock was formed long ago from ancient coral reefs and shell deposits. Groundwater and rain have dissolved the limestone to form sinkholes, swales, and underground caverns. The Woodville Karst Plain runs from Tallahassee southward to the Gulf of Mexico.

Overview

Leon Sinks Geological Trail

- Fee: \$3.00 (passes accepted)
- Restrooms, Parking Lot
- Interpretive Materials, Kiosks
- Interconnected Trails:
 - Sinkhole** - 3.1 miles marked by a blue blaze;
 - Crossover** - 0.5 miles marked by a white blaze, and;
 - Gum Swamp** - 2.3 miles marked by a green blaze
- Unpaved Trails (wear appropriate shoes)

Wakulla Springs State Park

- **Fee:** \$6.00 per vehicle, 2-8 people; \$4.00 single occupant
- **Boat Tour Fees:** \$8.00 per adult, \$5.00 per child, 12 and under
- Open: 8:00 a.m. until sundown, 365 days. Call (850) 561-7276 to verify tour boat schedule.

Start with the self-guided walk along the **Leon Sinks Geological Trail** in the Apalachicola National Forest. Then drive 10 minutes to the world famous Wakulla Springs, which is connected to Leon Sinks by underground conduits. Wakulla Springs is an excellent example of a first magnitude karst spring, pouring forth an average of 2,900 gallons of water per second from a vent 140 feet deep. In an ongoing scientific research effort, one of the most advanced in the world, divers have mapped at least 16 caves extending from Wakulla Springs, some with caverns 45 feet high and 120 feet wide, and some 1,800 feet long.

Lunch: Have lunch at the Wakulla Springs Lodge, built in 1937 by financier Edward Ball. The lodge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has many interesting features, most notably a hand-painted ceiling.

Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park is a memorable destination. It boasts picnic grounds, hiking trails, and an historic lodge with a movie background second to none, including a number of “Tarzan” films. But what makes it Florida’s number one natural attraction is the clarity, natural significance, beauty, and depth of its spring. Ranked #1 in the world, it can best be seen on the river boat tour. The 40-minute boat ride is a three-mile downstream loop



among majestic bald cypress trees. The park guides make sure you not only see the spring, but have unforgettable encounters with area wildlife, including Alligators, Ducks, Manatees, Bald Eagles, Osprey, and much more! Be sure to bring a camera.

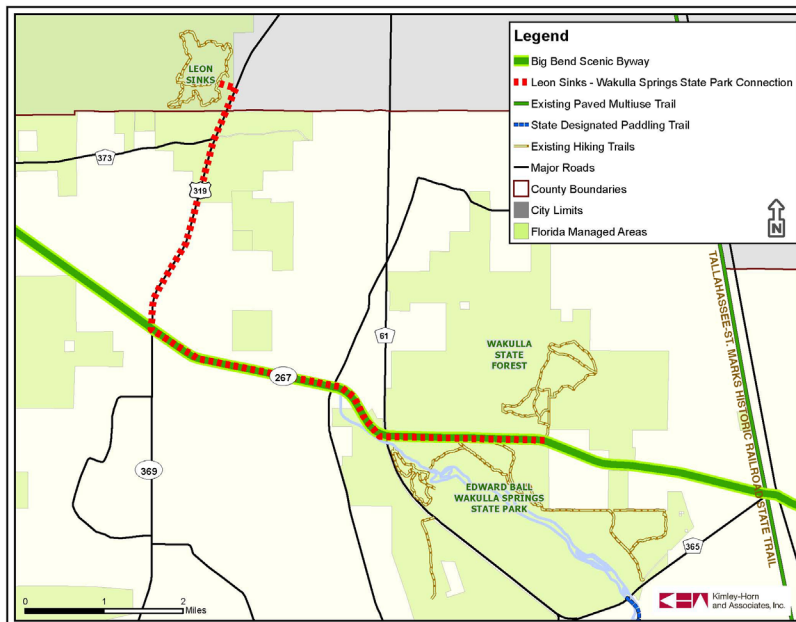
Directions

Leon Sinks Geological Area, Apalachicola National Forest (Leon County)

From Tallahassee take US 319 south toward Crawfordville for about 7 miles. Look for the “Leon Sinks” sign on right. Turn into the entrance road and continue to the parking area. The trail head begins at parking lot.

Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park and Lodge (Wakulla County)

From Leon Sinks continue south on US 319 for 2 miles to the intersection with SR 267 (Bloxxham Cut-off). Turn left (east) for 7 miles. The park entrance is just past the intersection with SR 61. Interpretive material is available at the entrance booth and at the lodge.





Maritime Heritage Trail Interpretation - Sink and Spring Tour

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Interpretation

Karst Topography

The area of the Big Bend Scenic Byway is internationally known for its distinctive Karst geologic features. Starting from the Florida-Georgia state line and extending through several counties, the St. Marks Watershed is a dominant geographic, hydrological, and environmental feature of the Byway corridor.

Covering 1,170 square miles, the Watershed serves as a drainage basin from north of Tallahassee to the St. Marks River and ultimately to Apalachee Bay. On the north, the area is characterized by hardwood and Cypress rivers and swamps



the only natural areas in the state where you can encounter so many of Florida's resident plants and animals in one geographic area. Clean, clear water flowing from the aquifer at a constant 69 degree temperature is the essential ingredient which supports the variety of life found in and around a spring.

Fish

Florida's clear spring waters provide a natural aquarium for many of Florida's most common as well as some of the most unique fish species. Some, like the American Shad, migrate to the springs from the ocean. Others, like the White Catfish, live in the dark recesses of the springs' underwater caves, emerging only at night to feed.

Reptiles and Amphibians

A variety of reptiles and amphibians can be found in and around springs including the American Alligator, the largest reptile in North America, Suwannee River Cooters, and the Loggerhead Musk Turtle, which attains a maximum size of only five inches.

as well as numerous small lakes. On the south, the watershed is of global scientific interest for its Karst Topography, running throughout the Woodville Plain.

A porous landform, pierced by conduits and channels extending through dissolved limestone, the plain is thinly covered with low sand hills where water is quickly absorbed. Prominent Karst Topography features, created over millions of years, include sinkholes, sinkhole lakes, disappearing rivers, springs, and underground caverns, which are often filled with water. Along the Byway corridor these notable features are represented by Wakulla Springs, Shepard's Spring, Cherokee Sink, Leon Sinks, and Natural Bridge, among others.

Springs

For tens of thousands of years, Florida's springs have been hotspots of biological diversity. Based on fossils discovered during the past century, we know that the spring ecosystem once provided water, food, and habitat for many of North America's most spectacular animals including the mastodon, saber-toothed tiger, and giant sloth. Springs remain one of





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Birds and Mammals

Above the surface of the water, springs are home to many of the most recognizable mammals and birds found in Florida. Some, like the Great Blue Heron, Anhinga, White Ibis, Great



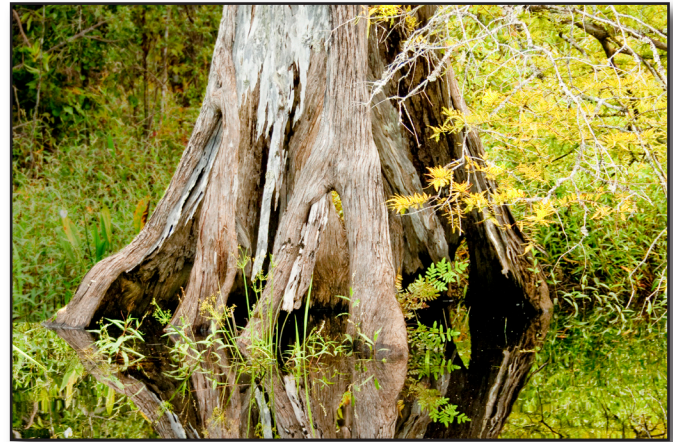
American Egret, Little Blue Heron, Deer and Otters can be found at the springs year-round. In the winter the springs, which maintain a constant water temperature of about 70 degrees, provide a warm-water refuge for species like the Manatee and a variety of Ducks.

Insects and Invertebrates

It requires a trained eye to spot some residents of springs. By far the most secretive among them are invertebrates like the Freshwater Shrimp and the albino Cave Crayfish. Often no more than a couple inches in size, these tiny animals comprise some of the rarest species in Florida.

Plants

Due to their constant year-round temperatures and stable discharges, Florida's springs support a variety of plant life, including ancient Cypress Trees, rare Orchids and Lilies, and lush underwater carpets of Eel Grass. Collectively, these plant communities nourish a freshwater food web that is among the most unique in all of North America.



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