

Managed to engineer a quick intrastate trailer trip. I was looking on craigslist for a cheap, used windsurfing rig and ran across a posting for this paddle board I had looked into before, which was ironically being sold by a shop that specializes in windsurfing. But it was over in St Pete. So my plan was to get the new board, grab a night at a nearby park, Ft Desoto, then do a windsurfing lesson the following day on the way out of town. It didn't work out exactly like that, but it was a good plan.

Map of the area...

WINDSURF SHOP

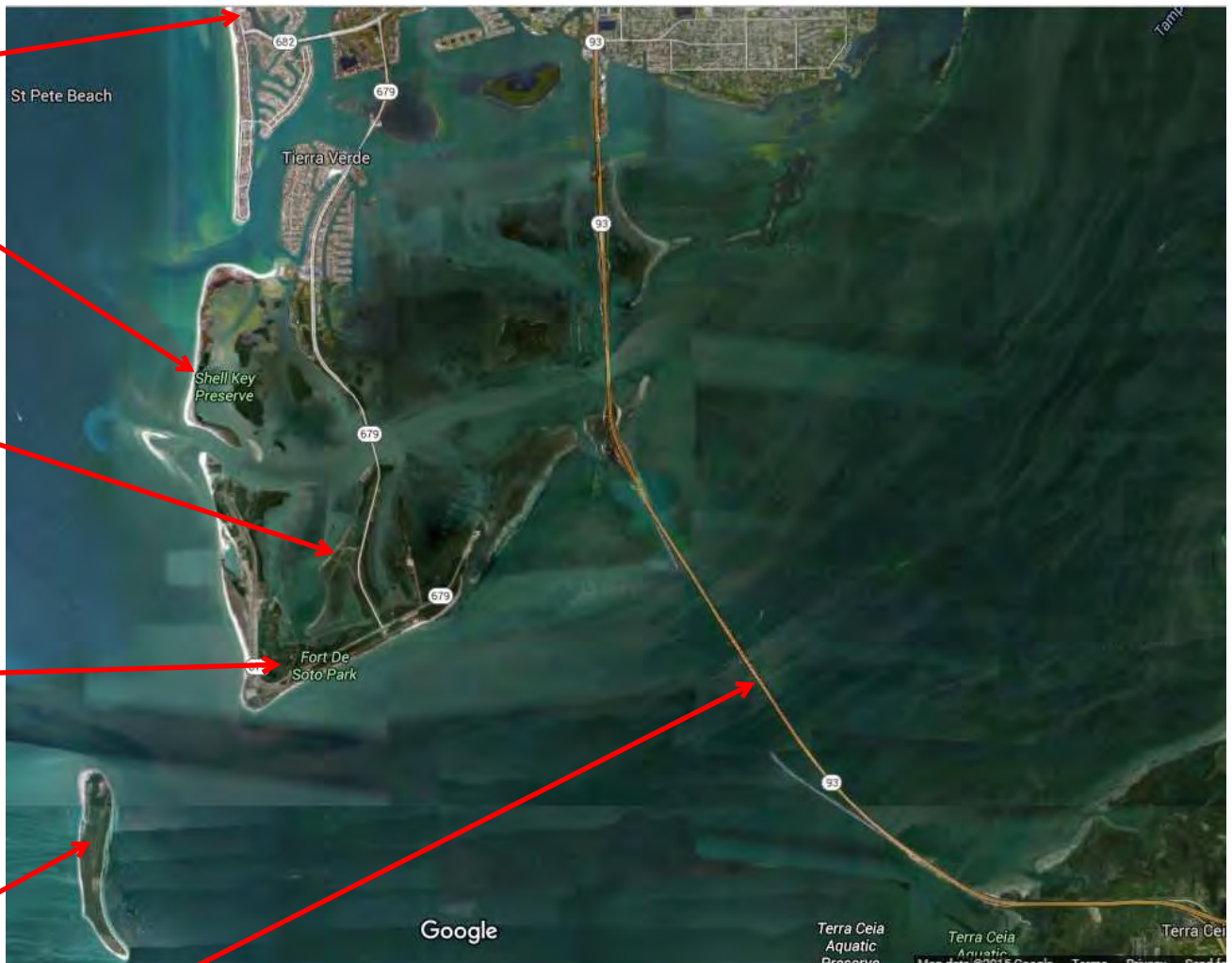
SHELL KEY

CAMP GROUND

FT DESOTO

EGMONT KEY

SUNSHINE SKYWAY BRIDGE



Picked up the board and made it to the campsite a little after 2:00. Nice spot, 3 from the end on a peninsula with water on both ends of the campsite. Crowded place. Almost 300 sites, but almost always booked up. Could only get this one for a night.



New board, or as I like to call it, the paddle-barge. It's huge, 11' long, 3' wide, 65lbs unloaded. Getting it on and off the car is not easy. But it is stable and can haul a lot of gear. \$900 retail, got this one for \$350. What's cool about it is in the back, the circle flips up into a seat back, and there's footwells, so it's setup to stand up or sit down and paddle. More of an expedition/fishing rig. The front "dry" storage bin makes a great cooler.



Somehow managed to haul this beast of a board to the water's edge. Put some gear on it to maybe do a little fishing, but mainly wanted to paddle to Shell Key. Was only a mile or so from my campsite, but the winds had a different idea. The front that pushed the hurricane away was just blowing through, and the winds were picking up. I paddled across the cove to the point you can see in the middle, but as soon as I rounded that corner it was like hitting a wall. The wind and waves would just start pushing you back. So I opted to paddle out into the wind for a ways, then sit and let the wind push me back into the cove.



After getting prepped for dinner, decided to paddle back out for the sunset, cuz, why not.



My original plan was to go to the southwest point of the park and paddle out to Egmont Key. But considering the winds I new that wasn't feasible. So got up early the next morning for Shell Key try 2 as the winds has shifted more to the west and I primarily needed to go north. But same deal as the say before. I pushed into the wind a little further this time, but it was slow going. Paddling at full speed I was barely making progress. So bailed and let the wind push me back to the shelter of the point and just paddled around a bit. Probably the highlight of the trip though. So I'm sitting there watching the mullet jump and 2 dolphins come porpoising by, pretty close maybe 20ft away. Then all of the sudden they both stop, then both come up for a big breath, and BAM! They slam into this school of mullet. The water starts to boil, fish jumping everywhere, you can see the dolphins chasing and just slashing bank and forth through the school of fish. You could almost feel the glee with which they did it.



Went ahead and went back and made and big breakfast then broke camp. Then went to the north beach of the park thinking all I'd have to do at that point was paddle across the channel to Shell Key. But nothing doing. 15-20 knot winds. Whitecaps on the very choppy water, plus the tidal current pushing through the channel. Saw one windsurfer get his gear in the water. Once he pulled up that sail he took off. But try as he might he was moving down wind, fast. He went about a half mile out and was already a quarter mile down the beach. It was at this point that I decided to pass on the windsurfing lesson. The kite boarders were having a field day though. Might have to look into that. Hit the road south across the bay over the sunshine skyway bridge (pictured below). The water may not look that bad, but Tampa bay doesn't usually look like this, with whitecaps and all.



From that point took the backroads cutting through the middle of the state back to Orlando. Takes longer but avoids driving back through downtown Tampa, which sucks normally and sucks royally with a trailer. Had to tend to a few things in town, but left the trailer setup to go to Canaveral in the morning.

Canaveral National Seashore. The more I explore this place the more blown away I am. 25 miles of pristine undeveloped coastline, most only accessible by foot or boat. Then there's the inland water. I took my short board too and checked out the surf. It was blowing up because of the hurricane off the coast. They called for shoulder to head high surf, which looked head high plus to me. I got there early and there were 3 surfers out. 2 really knew what they were doing and were tearing it up, the 3rd, not so much. After watching the 3rd one go through the spin cycle again and again, I opted to pass this day. Just wasn't up for getting beat up quite that much. Besides I already had a backup plan. This map is just the southern half of the park, just north of the space center, launch pads are just barely off the bottom of the image.

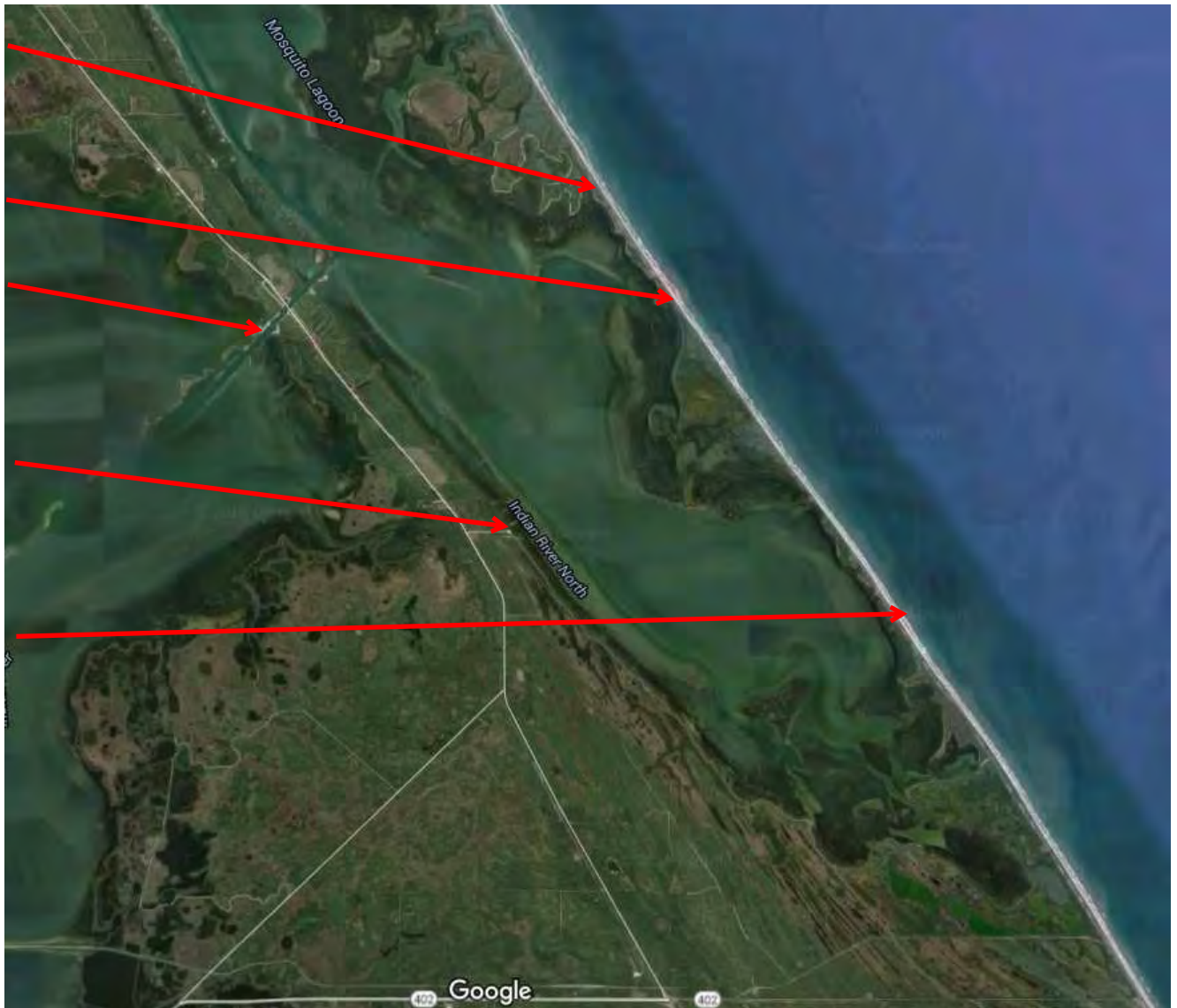
TRY 1

TRY 2

**HAULOVER
CANAL**

**BIOLAB
BOAT
RAMP**

**END OF
BEACH
ROAD**



Coming over the bridge...



My current obsession is paddling across the lagoon and finding a cut through to the beach. It is a haul over there, maybe 2-3miles, but would combine a paddling adventure with a beach trip. At that point you're probably 5 miles north of where the beach road ends, so 5 miles from anybody or anything, like having a private beach. I've only attempted it once before, put in a haulover canal and paddled across, but didn't get as far south as I'd hoped, and failed to bring my phone that trip, so damn near impossible to find your way looking at nothing but marsh and mangrove. I tried a different put-in and cut through spot this trip with my phone and was sooo close. I could hear the waves crashing, see the trail marker atop the dune, but it was all just an impenetrable wall of mangroves, below. Could have maybe hacked my way through, but didn't think the park service would appreciate that, so still searching for a clear path.



I paddled around against the coastal mangroves for a while, hoping to find a chink, but then turned back only to see what looked like rain heading my way. And had the wind partially working against me, so figured I should high-tail it back across the lagoon. Put the new board in sit-down mode to help with wind resistance and settled in for a long haul. It was fairly miserable. Started raining, wind picked up, waves washing over the board and pushing me around. It wasn't fear for you life kind of conditions, just far from ideal.

What it looked like once I got back. Can see how far it looks to the other side. Fairly intimidating, but the water is only 3'-4' deep.



Around the corner from the official boat ramp was this little take-out. Mainly had pulled the trailer in there so I wouldn't have to carry the barge. But after I got everything loaded up, cracked open a beer and chilled out in the trailer for a spell while the rain blew through. Now that's livin'. The only thing that disturbed me were the cars driving by on the gravel road. Could hear each of them slow down or stop when they caught site of the trailer. After I got back out and was about to depart a big ass 4 door, jacked up pickup truck with 4 mean as snakes looking rednecks stopped and we just staring at me and the trailer. So I waved and said hey. Immediately the one in the front gave me the peace sign and the one in the back gave me a big thumbs up and said "awesome!" And it's like that everywhere I go with the trailer. It slices through all socio-economic boundaries. Just seems to make everybody smile. For someone like me that doesn't really like to draw much attention it's a bit of a paradox, but my spiel about it is well practiced at this point and the people that do approach are unfailing nice, so it's fun. Like driving around a ray of sunshine.

