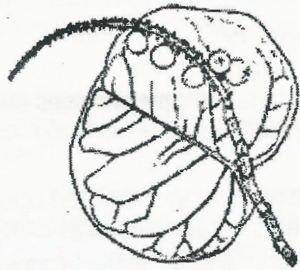


Coastal Hammock Trail

Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park



Live Oak



Sea Grape



Wax Myrtle



Red Bay

Welcome to Fort Pierce Inlet State Park's Coastal Hammock Trail. Coastal hammocks represent one of the rarest plant communities in Florida. We invite you to walk this trail where an original piece of Florida has been preserved for our park visitors to enjoy.

The points of interest along the trail are numbered and described by the corresponding paragraphs in this booklet. Take a leisurely walk down this shady path and enjoy ...*the Real Florida*.

1. Hammock: The origin of the word "hammock" has been traced to a Native American word "hamaca" which means "cool, shady place." Early settlers of Florida later used the word "hummock" to indicate areas that were slightly higher in elevation from the rest of the land. Today, the term hammock is used to describe hardwood forests of broad-leaved habitats that are typically higher in elevation than surrounding areas. A hammock is a densely shaded closed-canopied forest. Coastal hammocks are composed of three layers: the canopy, the understory and the ground layer.

2. The Canopy: The tops of broad-leaf trees such as live oaks, cabbage palms and red bays, form the canopy or "roof" of the hammock. The canopy provides shade, minimizes temperature variations and retains moisture.

3. The Understory: When an opening in the canopy occurs, smaller trees, shrubs, vines and saplings begin to grow toward the sunlight. Typical sub-canopy species found here include wax myrtles, sea grapes, strangler figs and wild coffee. The surrounding mature trees will also grow to fill in the new opening of the canopy.

4. The Ground Layer consists of seedlings, young saplings, leaf litter and debris. Fungi, bacteria and wood-boring insects break down the old leaves, branches and tree trunks and return the elements to the soil. As fallen and dead plant matter breaks down, it enriches the naturally sandy soil with much needed nutrients. These added nutrients provide support to a wide variety of plants and animals that live in the hammock.

5. Gumbo Limbo (*Bursera simaruba*) Gumbo Limbo is sometimes called the 'Tourist Tree' for its red, peeling bark. Gumbo Limbo grow very quickly in an opening of the forest canopy. The name "Gumbo Limbo" comes from the Spanish "Goma Elemi" which refers to the sticky, gum-like sap.

6. Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*) This understory shrub has glossy, quilted-looking leaves. In the fall and winter, it exhibits clusters of shiny red berries that resemble coffee berries. While they are related to coffee, these seeds, when brewed, do not make a good cup to drink.

7. Wild Lime (*Zanthoxylum fagara*) This small understory tree has hooked spines and irregularly shaped branches. Its leaves when crushed have a lime like smell. Native to South Florida and the Caribbean Islands, it is one of several tropical plants that grow here.

8. Strangler Fig (*Ficus aurea*) One of only two ficus species native to Florida. Strangler figs grow in dark forests where competition for sunlight is intense. Their seeds are usually dispersed by birds who drop the seeds in cracks and crevices along the bark of other trees and germinate. These seedlings grow downward and envelope the host tree while also growing upward to reach the sunlight in the canopy opening.

9. Hercules Club (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*) The botanical name of this tree translates to "yellow wood of Hercules." This relative of the citrus family is sometimes called the "Toothache Tree." The bark of the Hercules Club contains a natural topical Novocaine, and when chewed, numbs the mouth, teeth and tongue. This practice was used by Native Americans and early settlers for medicinal purposes, primarily to seek relief from toothaches.

10. Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) On the other side of the path, you can see this understory shrub. It has beautiful light green leaves, clusters of small pink flowers in the spring and summer and clusters of purple berries through the fall and winter. The birds will eat the berries, but because of their high acid content they need to 'age' on the stem for a while. There are often reports of birds acting strangely after they eat the berries.

11. Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) Derived from the saw-like teeth along the leaf stalks, the saw palmetto trunks usually creep along the ground. Thus, the height of the plant is usually the length of the leaf. The small reddish-black fruits provide food for a variety of wildlife.

12. Exotic Species are a serious threat to tropical coastal hammocks. Seeds from non-native plants may be brought in by birds, winds or tides. The excellent growing conditions of the hammock provide the opportunity for non-native species to invade the ecosystem. Since non-native species have no natural enemies in their new habit, they must be treated and removed by Park Rangers.

13. Sabal Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) This palm is also named the Cabbage Palm and is the state tree of Florida. This variety of palm is remarkably resistant to coastal conditions such as cold temperatures, high winds, fire, salt spray and drought.

14. Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) The southern live oak is the only temperate hardwood species to appear regularly in coastal hammocks. This large hammock tree can live for as long as 100 years. Its horizontal branches can spread into a canopy of 100 feet or more in diameter.

15. Red Bay (*Persea borbonia*) Native to the Southeastern U.S., this large tree provides a lot of cover to the coastal hammock as it can reach 50 ft. in height. The glossy leaves emit a spicy fragrance. Red Bay is related to the bay leaves used in cooking. This species is currently threatened by a non-native insect, the red bay ambrosia beetle, which transmits a laurel wilt disease.

16. End of the Trail – Barrier islands, and the coastal or maritime forests that cover them, play an important role in protecting the mainland from damaging wind and ocean swells during storms. This disappearing habitat is a seasonal stopping place for many migrating birds but is home year-round for many animals such as raccoons, foxes and bobcats. The animals and insects are dependent upon the shelter and food the hammock provides. The loss of habitats, like the coastal hammock, will have a lasting negative impact on all these dependent creatures and on those of us who live and visit these beautiful natural places. As development continues upon the barrier islands, only a small number of coastal hammocks remain. The Florida Park Service strives to preserve these delicate natural environments for all the state's residents, visitors and future generations to enjoy.

Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the state park directly.

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