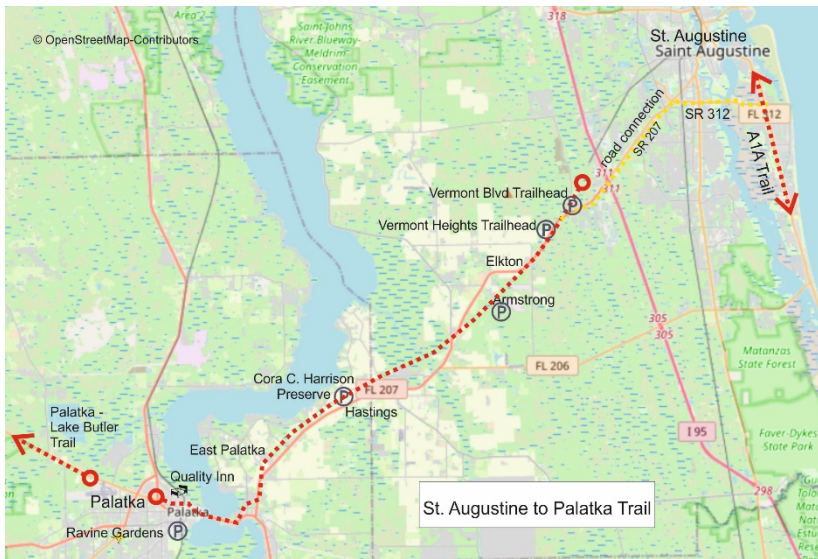


## St. Augustine to Palatka

### St. Augustine to Palatka State Trail, 22 mi

The St. Augustine to Palatka State Trail is a 19-mile paved trail that runs from Vermont Heights near St. Augustine to Palatka. It is part of the St. Johns River to Sea Loop and also the East Coast Greenway. The trail runs primarily on the old railway embankment through a beautiful hardwood hammock, only a small part goes along Rd 207 over open terrain, but separated from the road. The most eastern parking is at Vermont Boulevard.



There are very few services along this route. The friendly town of Armstrong probably has a small café, Hastings did not make a good impression.

Ultimate start railway tracks	N29 50.094 W81 23.439
Good start Vermont Blvd. Trailhead	N29 48.943 W81 24.163
Best start Vermont Heights Trailhead	N29 48.188 W81 24.682
Hastings	N29 43.163 W81 30.510
Final end in Palatka Hwy 17	N29 39.375 W81 39.352

## St. Augustine to Palatka

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**Vermont Blvd. Trailhead** (N29 48.943 W81 24.163): This small trailhead, located off Vermont Blvd., includes a kiosk with a trail map and roadside parking for only 3 – 4 vehicles. This is the furthest east that you can access the trail, as the last mile runs east and dead ends at the railroad tracks.

To the east the trail runs straight and level through a dense hammock and ends after 1.5 mi at the railway tracks.



Vermont Blvd. Trailhead



Ultimate end railway tracks

**Vermont Heights Trailhead** (N29 48.188 W81 24.682): This nice, new trailhead at SR 207 is approximately one mile from the Vermont Blvd. Trailhead. This location includes a kiosk with a trail map, only a few parking spaces, restroom and picnic area. If you want to do just a little roundtrip you can start at this trailhead and travel east to the railroad tracks. This way you have a roundtrip of 5 mi through a beautiful dense hammock.



## St. Augustine to Palatka

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**Mi 0 Vermont Blvd. Trailhead** (N29 48.943 W81 24.163). Travel southwest through dense forest.

**Mi 1 Vermont Heights Trailhead** (N29 48.188 W81 24.682). The trail now runs along SR 207, but separated from the road through open area, no shade.

**Mi 2.2** The trail crosses the road near **Elkton**, N29 47.316 W81 25.226.

**Mi 3** The trail leaves the road and goes straight and level through shady hammock again, N29 46.734 W81 25.798.

**Mi 4.7** Crossing in **Armstrong**, N29 45.724 W81 26.873. Not far is a trailhead with parking.



Armstrong Park Trailhead



Ruins of St. Mary's African Methodist Episcopal Church

## Armstrong

The community of Armstrong is one of St. Johns County's oldest African American settlements. It was originally established 1912 when 40 lots were given to settlers and was built around a sawmill. The name Armstrong coincided with the extension of the railroad tracks through southwestern St. Johns County. In the early twentieth century, the Armstrong community was a thriving agriculture town, playing a vital role in the "potato belt" of Florida that included Armstrong, Hastings, Elkton and Spuds. The community prospered through the production of potatoes and crops and with the export of timber and turpentine. Today you can see only a few houses along the main road and the ruins of the old St. Mary's African Methodist Episcopal Church from 1925.

## St. Augustine to Palatka

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**Armstrong Park** (N29 45.745 W81 26.842): This trailhead includes restrooms, parking, a picnic area and a playground. A kiosk with a trail map is located just west of this trailhead.

**Mi 7** We reach the vast farms of historic **Spuds**. Soon after we cross SR 207 with a signal, the path continues through forest and agriculture, N29 44.288 W81 28.485.

**Mi 9.5** We arrive through residential streets at **Hastings**, Main St, N29 43.163 W81 30.510.

### Hastings

Henry Morrison Flagler built tourist hotels at St. Augustine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and needed a local source of fresh vegetables for his guests, so he persuaded Thomas Horace Hastings, his cousin, to develop a farm. A small community evolved into a town, which was named for its founder in 1890. Hastings is known as the “Potato Capital of Florida” with



21,000 acres (85 km<sup>2</sup>) of potato farms, but also produces cabbage, onions, eggplant and ornamental horticulture. Hastings in 1910 was a thriving town that was a stop on the Florida East Coast Railway. Today it is a dying, run-down town with about 600 inhabitants and many houses in ruins. Parking possible along Main St.

Continue on the bike trail. At N29 42.971 W81 30.917 there is a rain shelter with picnic table and kiosk with a trail map, the **Cora C. Harrison Preserve** trailhead is a little farther at SR 207, N29 42.869 W81 30.878. This trailhead in Hastings includes a restroom, parking and a picnic area.

The trail now runs parallel to the SR 207, but separated from the road through open fields, no shade.

**Mi 13.5** The trail leaves SR 207 and runs through a forest, alternating with agriculture, N29 41.559 W81 33.948.

**Mi 16** The trail turns to the south, N29 40.238 W81 36.038. We are now near East Palatka, some farms, some industry. Just follow the marked trail.

## St. Augustine to Palatka

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**Mi 19.5 Palatka**, bridge over St. Johns River, N29 38.827 W81 37.689. Follow the trail to the right, then left through Main Street.

**Mi 21.5** Final end of the St. Augustine to Palatka Trail at Hwy 17, N29 39.375 W81 39.352. To reach the Palatka – Lake Butler Trail cross the highway to SR 100, the trailhead is after 3 miles.

### Palatka

Steamboats were the main economic driving force in the city's early years. The river is no longer a primary means of passenger transportation, but remains of strategic importance in the movement of goods and services. As with many cities in the United States, development has occurred in a radial pattern from the city center to beyond the incorporated area. Due to the historical importance of Palatka as a southeastern interior port, much of the urban development is oriented toward the riverfront. The eastern sections of the city, which include downtown and the historic districts, are characterized by a gridded street system. A significant amount of the original brick roads survived in this area. Several architectural styles are represented within the city. Victorian, Colonial Revival, Art Deco, Classical Revival, and Prairie School are all prominent building styles in the historical districts. For a short visit of the town see the historical riverfront with beautiful houses and the Ravine Gardens State Park.



At the end of Memorial Bridge are at both sides hotels, Hampton Inn and Quality Inn & Suites. I stayed in Hampton Inn, it can be recommended for a bike tour overnight.



On the southern side of the bridge, behind Hampton Inn, is a parking, N29 38.803 W81 37.722.

**Bike Shop:** Putnam Bicycles, 100 S 9<sup>th</sup> St., not far from the trail.

### Ravine Gardens State Park Bike Trail, 1.8 mi

A visit to this park is a must-do, when you are in Palatka. It is close to the historic district. Park your car and take the bike, there is a 1.8 mi paved trail through the park, closed to vehicles. There is a fee of 2 \$ per bike or 5 \$ per car with up to 8 persons.

The Park has two ravines up to 120 feet deep with steep banks at 45-degree angles with a spring-fed creek that never dries up, called Whitewater Branch. The underground water bubbling up cuts into the bank and carries the sand and soil downstream to the St. Johns River. Over thousands of years the ravines have



## St. Augustine to Palatka

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widened and deepened to what you see today. In 1933, the ravines were transformed into a dramatic garden by the federal Works Progress Administration. Some of the original landscaping still exists as formal gardens and a unique system of trails.

A 1.8-mile paved road winds around the ravines, offering visitors dramatic views. Numerous picnic sites, equipped with tables and grills, are available to visitors. The Roy E. Campbell Civic Center complex features a large covered pavilion, auditorium and meeting rooms.



The garden's peak flowering period is azalea season, January to March. The hundreds



of remaining azaleas have a "rolling bloom" and top out with about 50 – 60% of the plants blooming simultaneously. The season is variable based on weather conditions.