

Biozone 1: Suwannee Sound and Atsena Otie Key

Paddlers leaving Cedar Key and heading toward the beach at Atsena Otie cross a 15-foot-deep shipping channel. The openness to the Gulf and distance from the mouth of the Suwannee

make the water more salty and less variable than in small creeks and enclosed areas. Algae (note the cloudy water) or submerged



vegetation on shallow grass flats contribute to biological productivity. Clam farming around the Cedar Keys is testimony to the highly productive food chain. A varied underwater landscape and long and diverse food chains support a variety of predatory fishes and good recreational fishing.

Biozone 2: The Beach on Atsena Otie Key

Sand beaches result from wave action, and wet sand has qualities that make it essential for certain animals. Capillary action causes water to completely



surround each grain, and water-filled spaces between them provide secure habitats for the microscopic eggs and larvae of species such as horseshoe crabs. Note the snags at the upper end of the beach, where erosion has removed sand from the tree roots and the 3-foot-tall prehistoric shell midden.

Biozone 3: The Cut

The shallow channel cutting Atsena Otie in two presents a far different aspect from the beaches. Sheltered and too shallow to traverse at low tide, the cut is a patchwork of marsh, mud banks, oyster bars and mangroves. This relatively quiet environment supports populations of salt marsh mosquitos, which feed ravenously on warm-blooded prey, including people. If you don't paddle through the cut, you can view it from land by leaving your boat on the beach near the pier, braving mosquitos, and following the half-mile-long trail to the cemetery. From there you can see the cut, and at low tide you may see fiddler crabs, herons, egrets and shorebirds.

Spotlight: Mangroves

Mangroves are tropical trees that are damaged by frosts, and killed by severe freezes. Most seen here are relatively cold-tolerant black mangroves. The Cedar Keys are the northernmost outpost where mangroves persist. To the south, they are increasingly dominant, becoming

forest-like and replacing salt marsh. Like marshes, mangrove forests create a complex environment.



Projections from their roots (called pneumatophores) help carry oxygen to roots and shelter invertebrates and young fishes. Seeds which are fully germinated when shed float to new sites, where they take root.

ATSENA OTIE PADDLE

Visit the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge by Water

A saltwater paddle to a historic island town and cemetery.

Length: 2.8 miles or 3.3 miles depending upon paddling around or through the island.

Time: 1-1.5 hours. Paddlers should add an additional hour to explore the island.

Skill Level: If wind conditions are less than 5 mph, paddle is suitable for beginner or inexperienced paddler. Basic navigation skills are required to navigate through the island.

NOTE: Bring insect repellent – mosquitoes are fierce!



Visit FriendsofRefuges.org for more information

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Start/Finish
launch from beach

N29° 8.2166"
W83° 1.7621"

DIRECTIONS TO LAUNCH SITE

Once you have entered Cedar Key on SR 24, turn left on 2nd Street and continue 3 blocks to the city park on the Gulf. Launch at designated area from the beach.

CAUTIONS

At low or mid tides, oyster bars prohibit passage through the island. Navigation should only be attempted during high tide.

Paddle should not be undertaken in winds greater than 10 mph.

Wear your PFD.

BIOZONE 1

- Magnificent Frigatebird
- Bottlenose Dolphin
- Brown Pelican
- Black Skimmer

BIOZONE 2

- Shell Midden
- Horseshoe Crab
- Shorebirds
- White Ibis

N29° 7.5961"
W83° 1.6561"

High tide only

N29° 7.4519"
W83° 1.4232"

N29° 7.2485"
W83° 1.9213"

BIOZONE 3

- Black Mangrove
- Black Needlerush
- Fiddler Crab
- Great Egret

N29° 7.0141"
W83° 1.5735"

Atsena Otie Key is one of the 14 islands that make up the Cedar Key National Wildlife Refuge, a unit of the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System. It is nearly due south from the launch site at Cedar Key's city-nourished beach. Sand is steadily eroding from the northern and western margins of Atsena Otie and being deposited on the southwest. Uplands on the northwest and southeast parts of the island are forested, while the shallow cut separating them is covered mostly by black needlerush and black mangrove trees.

