



Parks, Recreation and Conservation *The Heart of Hillsborough*

www.hillsboroughcounty.org/parks



Upper Tampa Bay Park

FACILITIES

Due to the environmentally sensitive nature of the park property, development has been kept to a minimum. Group picnic shelters adjoin an open field and smaller shelters are provided for family use. A playground is centrally located. Nature trails and boardwalks provide access to the undeveloped areas. A nature center houses interpretive exhibits on the park environment and a classroom building is provided for the environmental education programs of Hillsborough County Schools and Hillsborough Community College.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

NATURE STUDY- Self guided nature walks and interpretive displays allow visitors to pursue this activity at their own pace. Both the Parks Department and Hillsborough Community College offer interpretive programs to the public. For more information, inquire at the visitor center or call 855-1765.

PICNICKING- Shelters with tables and grills and conveniently located restrooms have been provided for picnickers. Picnic shelter rentals are available by calling the rental hotline at (813) 931-RENT (7368).

CANOEING- A canoe launch provides access to the extensive mangrove swamp wetlands on the park's eastern boundary.

FISHING- Salt water fishing is permitted in the park.

GROUP CAMPING- A primitive area is available on a seasonal basis for organized groups- weather permitting.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS- This park has been designed to accommodate special Populations.

PARK POLICIES

PRESERVATION- Regulations prohibit the picking of flowers, the injuring, capturing or feeding of wildlife and the destroying or removal of plants, rocks or any other objects

from the park.

INTOXICANTS- Intoxicants are not permitted in Hillsborough County Parks.

PETS- Pets must be on a six foot hand held leash and must be well behaved at all times. Pets are not allowed inside buildings or on board walks and cannot be tied to stationary objects.

MOTORIZED VEHICLES- All motorized vehicles must remain on paved roadways. Parking is permitted in designated spaces only.

COURTESY- Discourteous behavior, such as playing loud music, is not permitted in the park.

HOURS- The park opens at 8:00 a.m. and closes at 6:00 p.m. daily. The park will be closed on Christmas Day Hillsborough County Regional Parks provide a wide range of outdoor activities in a variety of natural settings.

BACKGROUND

Upper Tampa Bay Park is a 596 acre peninsula bordered on the east by Double Branch Creek and on the west and south by Old Tampa Bay. Man has been drawn to this area for thousands of years by its biological richness. Indians harvested shellfish in such quantities that the discarded remains can be seen today as shell mounds which lie throughout the park. The arrival of the European man in the 16th Century spelled disaster for the Florida Indians. Over the next 250 years they suffered war, disease, and slave raids which drastically reduced their population. When Florida fell under British rule in 1763, the last remaining natives fled to Cuba with the Spanish. The park property has changed little since those early inhabitants left. The sea level has been rising by about one foot every 100 years. Hunters and fishermen have been the most frequent visitors. Cattle grazed here and pine sap was collected for turpentine. Until recently, however the area has received very little attention. As its communities changed from Indian villages to major cities, Tampa Bay has always been an attractive place for people to live because it provided abundant food, recreational opportunities and waterfront living. As a result its shores are now almost completely surrounded by urban development. Recently it has become apparent that some aspects of this development have had a devastating effect on the health of the bay, threatening those very qualities which made it a desirable place to live. Dredging and filling of wetlands and water pollution from sewage and stormwater runoff are now known to be major causes of a serious decline in food production and water quality. The site of this park was once to have been a housing development, but recently gained knowledge of the importance of preserving coastal wetlands resulted in its development as a park.

NATURAL HISTORY

The park environment contains a rich diversity of natural habitats which result from a

subtle interaction between two factors, moisture and salinity. The ground surface is nearly flat with the highest elevation in the park only six feet above sea level. As a result, much of the park becomes flooded during extremely high tides which may occur several times each year. The communities of plants and animals which exist in these areas must have some degree of salt tolerance to survive. Most of the rest of the park is dominated by pine flatwoods characterized by scattered slash pines and a dense understory of shrubs. The level ground is poorly drained and becomes saturated with water during the summer rainy season. On the other hand, during the dry spring months, very little moisture is available, requiring inhabitants of the flatwoods to be able to tolerate both extremes in their environment. Scattered throughout the flatwoods are shallow ponds which provide habitat for aquatic plants and animals. These ponds may have been depressions formed by wave action when shallow seas covered this area sometime in the past, or they could have resulted from dissolving of the limestone bedrock, which underlies the sand and clay of the park, by slightly acidic surface water. These ponds provide improved drainage for the surrounding areas, and for this reason hardwood trees are often found growing around them. As the ground slopes gently toward the bay, the pines and palmettos give way to shrubs and grasses which can survive occasional flooding by the brackish waters. Closer to the shoreline one often encounters a strip of sand devoid of all vegetation. This is a salt barren, a shallow depression where extra high tidal water is trapped and evaporates, concentrating the salt in the soil and discouraging most plant life. Beyond the barrens lies the shoreline, where the tides ebb and flow on a daily basis. The shore line is occupied by mangrove trees and salt marsh grasses, which convert the rich nutrients of the estuary into the food which sustains all the other organisms found there, including man. This park was created to preserve these natural features which are disappearing at a rapid rate. The Parks Department hopes that by providing an opportunity to participate in outdoor recreational experiences in such an environment, visitors will gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for such areas.

The Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation, and Conservation Department is an equal opportunity agency and offers all persons the benefits of participating in each of its programs and competing in all areas of employment regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap or other nonmerit factors. For more information about Hillsborough County's Regional Parks, write or call:

Parks, Recreation and Conservation

10119 Windhorst Road
Tampa, Florida 33619
Phone (813) 635-3500

Upper Tampa Bay Park

8001 Double Branch Rd.
Tampa, FL 33635
Phone (813) 855-1765

ABOUT UPPER TAMPA BAY PARK

Founded in 1982, Upper Tampa Bay Park is located at the northern tip of Old Tampa Bay and is one of 11 regional parks in Hillsborough County. The park, a 596 acre peninsula bounded by Mobbly Bay on the west, Double Branch Creek on the east, and Old Tampa Bay on the south, has a variety of land features which include freshwater ponds, pine Flatwoods, salt marshes, oyster bars, salt barrens, oak hammocks, and mangrove forests.



A Nature Center featuring aquariums, interpretive exhibits, and informative displays of local flora and fauna which includes live fish, snakes, and turtles is open to the public. A classroom building is provided for environmental

education programs of Hillsborough County schools and Hillsborough Community College. While most of the park has been preserved in its natural state, many recreational facilities are available to visitors including fishing piers, boardwalks, nature trails, outdoor pavilions, picnic tables, grills, a playground, and a canoe launch.

THE TAMPA BAY ESTUARY

Located on Florida's central Gulf coast, the Tampa Bay estuary is Florida's largest, encompassing 398 square miles at high tide. The bay supports one of the world's most productive natural ecosystems where salt water from the sea and fresh water from rivers and uplands mix, serving as a nursery for young fish, shrimp, and crabs.



More than 70% of all fish, shellfish, and crustaceans spend some critical stage of their development in these near shore waters. As many as 40,000 pairs of birds, from the familiar brown pelican to the colorful roseate spoonbill, nest in Tampa Bay every year. Others, including sandpipers and white pelicans are seasonal visitors. The bay is also home to dolphins, turtles, and manatees. After decades of pollution, Tampa Bay is coming back to life, again assuming its position as the shimmering economic and environmental centerpiece of vibrant Southwest Florida.

Special thanks to the Tampa Bay Estuary Program who provided funding to make possible the marking of these two canoe trails.



CONTACT US:

Upper Tampa Bay Park
8001 Double Branch Road, Tampa, FL 33635
prc@hillsboroughcounty.org

TEL.: 855-1765



855-1765



**CANOE
TRAIL GUIDE**

**UPPER TAMPA BAY PARK
PARKS, RECREATION AND CONSERVATION**

NATURE CENTER RUN

Nature Center Run, .3 miles long with only 4 trail markers, begins at the canoe launch behind the Nature Center and directs boaters to the main channel of Double Branch Creek.



DOUBLE BRANCH RUN

Double Branch Run, 2.9 miles long with 14 canoe trail markers, starts at a small, unimproved boat launch at the east end of State Street (off site) and guides paddlers southward through mangrove islands to the mouth of Double Branch Creek which flows into Old Tampa Bay.

PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

- Know the weather and the tides.
- Wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) or life jacket.
- Dress properly including long sleeved shirt and proper footwear.
- Protect your eyes with sunglasses secured with a neck strap.
- Take sunscreen, insect repellent, and plenty of water, even on cool days.
- Carry proper equipment like spare paddle, bow/stern lines, first aid kit.
- Stow small items (food, camera) in waterproof dry-bag tethered to boat.
- Refrain from standing up in a canoe.
- Don't paddle alone.
- File a float plan.

