

More information is available

for this trail and tourism in the

area at Explore Louisiana North.

Acknowledgements:

www.lsuagcenter.com/agritourism

Northeast Louisiana: Outdoor Series is a project

Trail narrative by John Ruskey, Quapaw Canoe Co.

of the agritourism program at the LSU AgCenter.



Louisiana Water Trails

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

The Tensas River creates a natural wonderland of big trees and spectacular wildlife through the middle of northeast Louisiana. The Tensas is legendary for its natural history of red wolves, Florida panthers, ivory-billed woodpeckers and Louisiana black bears. Unfortunately, out of that list, only the black bear remains.

The best way to experience the natural wonders of the Tensas River is by canoe, kayak or pirogue. Paddlers will be humbled by giant cypress trees and thrilled with birding, flourishing flora, frequent turtle and gator sightings and many signs of the Louisiana black bear. During winter, bald eagles may

The Tensas River flows out of Lake Providence and meanders south before it descends into the expansive woods of the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge.

# Appropriate Vessels:

Canoes, pirogues, kayaks or stand-up paddleboards are ideal for the river trails and lakes. Choose a vessel you can pick up and maneuver with ease. Motorized boats are allowed on the Tensas River but are not practical during low water levels. On the refuge lakes, no motors over 10 hp are allowed.

Bad Weather: Avoid open water paddling on a lake in thunderstorms or high winds. Be especially cautious with cold water conditions.

Precautions: Carry plenty of water and sun protection. Bring maps and this guide packed in a waterproof container. Watch for spiders and snakes, as well as gators sunning themselves or swimming. Learn about the different poisonous plants, which sometimes drape over branches or climb up tree trunks.

# Louisiana Water Trails - Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

Two trails are on lakes that inhabit old channels of the Tensas

The visitor's center at Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge should be your first stop before embarking on any water travel inside the refuge. Consult someone at the main desk for permits

is a convenient place to stop and stretch your legs. It's an easy

aide of the bridge Even if you are not exiting here, the ramp

ramp is found (right bank descending) on the downstream

cypress trees. When the river channel starts curving back

LIOSSTOAdS BIld ge Boat Hamp (RBD Mie3)

scenes from the Hobbit or the Lord of the Ringsl

Lypress Knee brand Lanyon (LBDMile 22)

(7.1 sim (188) Searqu'd bie W ytinisteM

southward, you're almost to the Crossroads Bridge. The boat

A half mile downstream you paddle past an other hall way of

leftth rough at hick grove of gnarly cypress knees. You can

banks, you might notice a ravine entering the river from the

After several more stretches of thick trees and steep, muddy

near its grown as a maternity ward during the winter months.

gands monumental, and mother bears use a cavity formed

columns of a temple. The first of these is almost dead but

rising from the riverbank (right bank descending) like the

distinctive spiraling buttresses emerging out of the water.

of the river, you have to maneuver around it. Look for the

Not far below "Big Twirly" is another hallway of big cypress

walk to parking on the road.

N32.3 48803, W91.315552

N32.35556, W91.326048

N32,356882, W91,335942

River Gage: "Tensas River at Tendal" http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph. php?wfo=jan&gage=tdgl1

- Below 6: Too Shallow.
- . 8-14: Ideal. • 15-19: Fast Water. Some Caution Required.
- Visitor's Center GPS: N32.318201, W91.382174



Above 20: Dangerous. Advanced paddlers only.

RBD - Right Bank Descending LBD - Left Bank Descending

> warbler and in digo bunting also enjoy the river. and egrets. Songbirds, such as the prothonotary

## Uverhanging big Cypress (RBD Mie1.5)

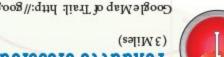
and cypress for an iron bridge crossing the bayou. Mississippi River bend. Scrutinize the banksideprivets extending deep into the Tensas, following an andent of Judd Bayou, Judd Bayou is a narrow drainage Several hundred yards south you will pass the mouth

Nouth of Judd Bayou (RBD 600 yards)

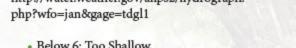
mussel-shell beds, evidence of a healthy river. you downstream, and there are several patches of rich smong young trees, palmettos and cypress knees and to the top of the river bank. Pack and board your canoe

N32.37477, W91.341802 Put-in: Tendal Landing (RBD near Judd Bayou)

Google Map of Trail: http://googl/maps/bucn







tri-colored herons, green herons, little blue herons the bears are dimbing their favoritetrees. Watch for but the careful observer will notice scratch marks where plack bears and gators! You probably won't see bears, populations of cypress knees. Keep an eye out for rising steeper and higher on either side with large paddlep ast some mature cypress and see the banks curtains of wild grapevines and other ivies. You will pecans and hickories, in many places draped over with through deep forests and overhanging privets, oaks, Next, the river swoops southward and then east ward K12755938, W91.337513

N32.37 1043, W91.344 107

set off Long reflections of trees and wedges of sky beckon Park and put in at Tendal Landing, Carry your vessel down

> biggest trees and the most abundant wildlife. beautiful section of the Tensas River with the Tendal to Crossroads Bridge is the angle most

Tendal to Crossroads Bridge

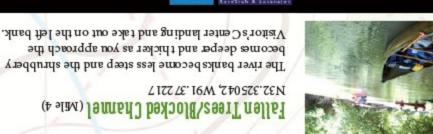
On a map you will notice graceful loops, which begin in small radial turns and then grow in size as the river coils into giant loops that are actually ancient channels originally carved by the violent floods of the Mississippi. You will be amazed by the directional changes as you make your way down. In one section, the river channel loops around 20 miles to make 2 miles of southerly gain!

that have been isolated by the changing nature of the river and are now charming still water pools ringed by deep forests drenched with the aroma of cypress/hardwood forests.

and information about current water conditions and landings.

# en is the best time to paddle?

Spring and fall are the best seasons for outdoor activity in northeast Louisiana, but you can enjoy it anytime. You will want to avoid river travel here during hunting season. Consult an official Louisiana hunting calendar and the refuge brochure for permitting when you make your plans.

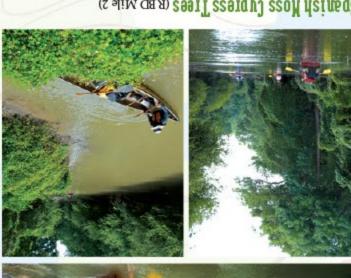


NOTE: This might change after then ext high water. other side of the blockage, then resume your journey. among at hick grove of shr ubs and carry your can oe to the (mile 4) necessitating a short portage. Make your landing bank Debris has accumulated around these fallen trees, Below the un-named bayou, trees have fallen from the right N32.325042, W91.372217

(e.e. slim crax) voyed be me N-nU to AtvoM

congregation of cypress knees in low water. landing, although the bankside is crowded with a thick that spills into the river. This would be a good place for a of young cypress trees and the mouth of an un-named bayou At mile 3.9 the shrubber y op ens up momentarily in a grove 22494E. 19W ,8132EE. LEN

Spanish Noss Cypress Trees (R BD) Mile 2)











of mature cypresses drap ed with spanish moss are seen. and cypress knees undernearh. Not har downstream a grove descending) buttressing into the water with a display of roots monumental cypress leans over the channel from (left bank the geometric flourishes of the palmetto fronds. At mile 1.9 a canyons of foliage. Look for the scaly sides of hickories and Several miles downstream theriver descends deeper into

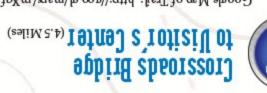
> 232.3 34.5 W91.342.65 5 Uverhanging Lypress Tree (LBD Mile 1.9)

you can paddle and enjoy shade on hot days. create enticing tunnels of vegetation through which an rubs un dern eath. During low water, these thick vin es Towering trees crowd the banks with smaller trees and channe, which opens up into a succession of long pools. Paddle downstream toward the gently meandering river

thick mud will be encountered at base of the ramp. to the boat launch. At low water (below 8 on the Tendal Gage), Park on the west side of Mill Road and carry your vessel

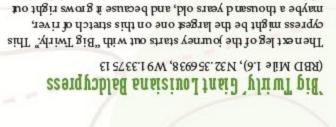
(RBD near Judd ge Boat Hamp (RBD near Judd Bayou)

Google Map of Trail: http://goo.gl/maps/m/Agf





X32.348803, W91.315552



# Louisiana Water Trails – Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge



Africa Lake

(2.3 Mile Circumnavigation) Google Map of Trail: http://goo.gl/maps/BBoc

## Africa Lake Boat Launch N32.349893, W91.388526

Africa Lake follows old channels of the Tensas River in the deepest woods of the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. The lake curves through canyons of tall trees growing along its steep, muddy banks.

A complete loop might require an hour of continuous paddling, although you certainly will want to spend more time enjoying the striking scenery, especially the gators and birds. Visit during October-December when the cypress needles turn brick red and stand out in striking





## Classic Cypress with Full Crown N32.346825, W91.390153

Keep following Africa Lake west. You will pass a classic Spanish moss and reaching out in all directions. At normal lake levels, you can get close and perhaps make a landing at the base of this giant.

#### Africa Lake Picnic Area N32.34482, W91.39049

You will soon notice a metal staircase on the east bank 500 yards from the boat launch. It's a great place for a picnic, but no bathrooms are available. Up the staircase there is an area perfect for resting and enjoying a picnic lunch or snack.

#### Rooty Cypress N32.344595, W91.39372

Continuing west, you will come around the S-shaped bend of the lake. There's a giant bald cypress, towers upward and commands the eastern bank.

#### **Cupress Twins** N32.344683, W91.393948

Just past "Rooty Cypress" more giant cypresses rise, the "Cypress Twins," whose combined root base is wider than the length of a 16-foot canoe! Don't be tempted to turn around just because you can see the end of the lake. If you do, you will miss the thickest and biggest stand of cypress.

#### End of the Lake, Cypress Cathedral N32.340728, W91.398227

that becomes an impassable bayou at lake's end. Paddle in a short way for an unforgettable experience. You will feel like a visitor in a land of the giants. Pecan Cave

"Cypress Cathedral" towers upward from a shallow inlet

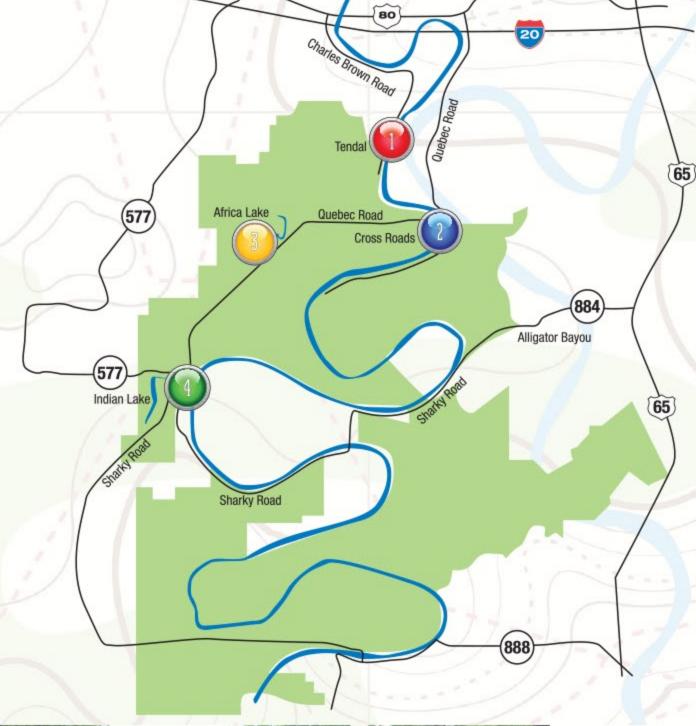
## N32.350898, W91.390698 Continue to the far northern end and look for the two caves

of foliage. The west bank cave is created by a pecan tree,

and on the east by a big cypress. Paddle into these caves for shade and the amazing views through the leaves. Overhanging Red Oak

## N32.350703, W91.390222

This is one last tree to note. It's a giant red oak overhanging the lake from west bank. You can paddle under the large overhanging branches and look for wildlife.















## Indian Lake (2.95 Miles)

Google Map of Trail: http://goo.gl/maps/mboeD

#### Indian Lake Boat Launch N32.289672, W91.45144

the shoreline.

Put in at base of ramp and paddle south into the clear waters of Indian Lake. Follow outside edge for glimpses of animals and plants in the forest and possible alligator sightings. Egrets, herons and other wading birds commonly are seen flying over or fishing from

Halfway along its length, Indian Lake makes an elbow bend slightly south-southwest. Keep paddling to the far end of the lake where a small tributary enters behind a peninsula. Paddle a short way up this tributary or turn around and head back to the parking area. For a change of scenery, paddle down the opposite side.





# Large Cypress Tree

N32.276925, W91.454555

A large cypress tree stands in the water at the elbow bend on the west bank. You can paddle up to its base and photograph the interesting array of fluted buttresses and sharp knees.

South End of Lake W32.270078, N91.457552

## Further Exploration Around Indian Lake: Lick Bayou

N32.289743, W91.451323

Paddle under the bridge near the Indian Lake landing and follow the bayou upstream through a canyon of wild hibiscus, that gives way to a cypress and bottomland hardwood forest. Otters and beavers make their homes along the bank, and turtles and snakes often are seen.

#### Indian Bayou to Tensas River N32.288947, W91.450067

Follow lake edge northeast into a striking inlet that narrows into a snaky bayou that leads down to the Tensas River. You will encounter snags, fallen tree obstructions and other obstacles along the way. Close encounters with spiders, snakes, gators and poison ivy also are possible. 1.5 miles total. For the adventuresome only. Not passable during low lake levels.



