

Favorite Backcountry Hikes in the T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve

Compliments of Friends of Carlton Reserve



The Carlton Reserve offers approximately 40 square miles of hiking territory with a wide variety of habitats: pine flatwoods, seasonal wetlands, river floodplain and oak hammocks. Historical sites dot the landscape and include sites used in the turpentine and cattle industries. The Carlton may also have been home to prehistoric Indians as well as less notable characters during Prohibition. The 24,565 acres of the Reserve were purchased by special referendum for multiple uses: water resource, natural habitat and corridor for wildlife, and low impact public recreation.

In addition to the loop trails in the public area near the historic visitors' cabin, the Carlton offers many day hiking opportunities. Hikers assume responsibility for their own safety. A volunteer-generated hiking map is available from the visitors' cabin. The map is also downloadable from the Friends of the Carlton Reserve (CarltonReserve.org) website. Trail guides are also available in the cabin.

A variety of short hikes from the public area offer a quick sample of the Carlton's treasures. A grassy trail leads to a hunter's camp where you can picnic in a shady hammock with towering oaks, intersected by a seasonal stream. To sample some of the Carlton's other treasures, you can follow a variety of loop trails, logging roads, firebreaks, power line and waterline easements or meander in the footsteps of the area's first settlers along pioneer trails that crisscross the area. Guides (one page each) are available for hikes that last a few hours to all day.



If you have the time and energy, hike to Myakka River State Park or a historic cowboy camp, turpentine camp, or World War II Victory Garden. Countless hammocks, flatwoods and wetlands provide a home for turkey, deer, wild hogs, coyotes, armadillos and alligators and even the rare Florida panther whose presence was documented in the Carlton in 2001 and 2010. The Reserve abounds in wading birds; local birdwatchers count hundreds of native and migratory species every year. Pick up a map and hiking guide and join us in this crown jewel of Sarasota County Parks for a privileged view of pure Florida.