

Page 1 of 7

Northeast Florida

# Fort Cooper State Park

*On the shores of beautiful Lake Holathlikaha*

## Real Fun in the Real Florida

Fort Cooper State Park offers a spot for relaxing, hiking, nature study and learning about history.

When water levels permit, the 160-acre, crystal-clear Lake Holathlikaha is popular for fishing and swimming. Paddleboat and canoe rentals are available but private boats are not allowed on the lake. A volleyball court and a horseshoe pit are available.

As part of the Great Florida Birding Trail, the park offers more than five miles of self-guided trails

with excellent bird and wildlife viewing. A trail extension connects the park to the multi-use paved Withlacoochee State Trail that runs along U.S. 41 and the eastern border of the park.

Park visitors can enjoy the picnic facilities and playground under the hardwood hammock near the lake. A covered pavilion and BBQ pit may be rented.

The Lake Lodge is an ideal setting for small gatherings. This rustic building with air conditioning, heat and a fireplace can accommodate up to 50 people. A small kitchen can also be rented.

Youth and primitive tent camping is available for groups up to 20 people at the southern end of Lake Holathlikaha. Call the park at (352) 726-0315 for reservations.

Join us every year in March for the Annual Fort Cooper Days event, complete with reenactment skirmishes that took place here in 1836 during the Second Seminole War between militiamen, Army recruits and Seminoles.

## **History & Nature**

The park is named for Major Mark Anthony Cooper, commander of 380 First Georgia Battalion Volunteers plus an artillery company of a few army regulars. In April 1836 Major Mark Anthony Cooper built a fort near the lake's edge to protect the sick and wounded left behind by General Scott as he continued on his way to Fort Brooke, which is now Tampa. Major Cooper was ordered to hold his position and await relief troops in nine days. By the third day the Seminoles, led by Osceola and other

Chiefs, discovered Major Cooper and his men. They kept them under constant daily attacks. On one occasion the Seminoles tried to storm the fort with a force in "excess of 500 warriors." After 16 days, with provisions running out, a relief column returned to support the troops.

Due to Major Cooper's vigilant leadership during the two week siege, the Georgia Battalion sustained about 20 men wounded, but lost only one man. It is unknown how many casualties were taken by the Seminole warriors. Fort Cooper was utilized as a reconnaissance, observation and dispatch post until 1842 by various U.S. Army detachments.

The park's diverse natural areas provide a refuge for many plants and animals. The inland woods feature hammocks of hickory, oak, magnolia and sweet gum. Beyond is the sandhill community—a

dry, open forest of long leaf pines and turkey oaks. Sightings of deer, turkey, opossum and bobcat are common. Owls, herons and cardinals are frequent seen in the park.

## **Directions**

Fort Cooper State Park is located off U.S. 41, on South Old Floral City Road, two miles south of Inverness.

## **Guidelines**

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected. Collection, destruction or disturbance is prohibited.

- Primitive Group Tent camping is available. Contact park office for more information.
- Pets are welcome in the park as long as they are on a leash no longer than 6 feet. They are permitted in the picnic area, hiking trails and playground but are not allowed on the beach area, in the water or in our primitive campground.
- Fishing, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the ranger station.

## **Contact Information**

Florida State Parks

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Division of Recreation and Parks

### **Fort Cooper State Park**

3100 South Old Floral City Road

Inverness, FL 34450

(352) 726-0315

[FloridaStateParks.org](http://FloridaStateParks.org)