

Northeast Florida

Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park

One of Florida's Original State Parks

Real Fun in the Real Florida

The extraordinary craftsmanship of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) endures today in stone foundations and hand-hewn beams in the buildings and cabins that are enjoyed by thousands of visitors every year.

Three **campgrounds** offer 74 sites that accommodate both tents and RVs and provide water, electricity, **picnic tables** and ground grills. **Primitive camping** and a **group camping** area are also available. Sixteen furnished **cabins** — original CCC, block style and modern—overlook Little Lake Johnson. Each sleeps four to six persons and is equipped with refrigerator, stove, a double bed and hide-a-bed. Some have a wood or gas fireplace. Linens and kitchen utensils are provided.

Freshwater sports include **canoeing** and **swimming**. Freshwater anglers can reel in bass, bream and speckled perch.

The park has four marked **hiking** trails. The **Ridge Trail** meanders along the upper ridge of the ravine between the ravine and the grist mill site. From this viewpoint, hikers can see the contrasts between the sandhill and the ravine communities.

The **Loblolly Trail** loop begins and ends at the mill site and winds past the largest loblolly pines in the park. The shortest trail, the **Fern Loop**, begins at the ravine stairway and passes by the headsprings of Gold Head Branch. A portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail traverses the park and takes approximately two hours to hike.

History & Nature

One of Florida's first state parks, Gold Head Branch became part of the Florida state park system in 1935. The property was donated by Mike Roess and developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was launched in 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to combat unemployment during the Depression. In 1935, twenty-five seasoned craftsmen from Company 2444 were sent to the Gold Head site where they were joined by hundreds of CCC youth and established Camp SP-5. Together they planted

trees, cleared areas for campsites, built roads and constructed many of the buildings still in use today at the park. The state park was officially dedicated on April 15, 1939.

This 2,366-acre park is located on rolling sandhills in an area known as the Central Florida Ridge, remnants of ancient dunes formed over thousands of years by rising and lowering sea levels.

The park contains 12 natural communities, ranging from very dry habitats—such as sandhill, pine and scrub communities—to basin marshes, seepage slopes and sinkhole lakes. Most of the park is made up of pine sandhills, which provide habitat for American kestrels, American bald eagles, white-tailed deer, turkeys, gopher tortoises, fox squirrels and pocket gophers.

Gold Head Branch ravine, formed by seepage springs, divides the park and has been designated a *State Natural Feature Site*. About 65 feet deep and 1.5 miles long, the cool, moist ravine is covered by a dense canopy of loblolly pines, hickories and magnolias. The steady trickles from these seepage springs eventually join at the bottom to form Gold Head Branch, which meanders through the park and empties into Little Lake Johnson.

Directions

Located on State Road 21, six miles north of State Road 100 between Keystone Heights and Middleburg.

Park 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.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and well behaved at all times.
- Fishing, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.

- Alcoholic beverage consumption is allowed in designated areas only.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- For camping information, contact Reserve America at (800) 326-3521 or (866) I CAMP FL or TDD (888) 433-0287 or visit ReserveAmerica.com.
- 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
Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park
6239 State Road 21
Keystone Heights, FL 32656
(352) 473-4701
FloridaStateParks.org