

Inverness



Inverness The Heart of Citrus County

Inverness

Citrus County, FL

Incorporated: 1919

Population: 7,200

www.inverness-fl.gov

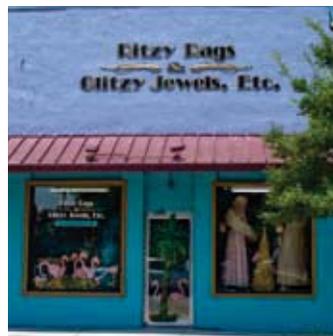
Florida Trail trailhead: Whispering Pines Park

Story and photos by Sandra Friend

Named for its counterpart in Scotland, the county seat of Citrus County is a hub for outdoor recreation. Hiking, biking, paddling, and fishing are pursuits you'll see right downtown. On a recent visit, I watched a seaplane float up to the shore at Wallace Brooks Park as families picnicked under the trees and anglers waited for a tug on their lines at the fishing pier. Tsala Apopka Lake, a meandering chain of waterways that makes up one of the state's largest lakes, defines the northern edge of the city. At the southern boundary is the Citrus Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest, where hikers have more than 43 miles of trails to explore in sandhills, scrub, and rugged karst terrain. Caves and sinkholes pockmark the landscape, creating fern-lined bowls and tantalizing tunnels frequented by cavers. Amid it all is seven square miles of city bisected by biking and hiking trails, including the Western Corridor of the Florida Trail and the Withlacoochee State Trail.

Park downtown and step out of your car to come face to face with a building that looks like it's straight out of Back to the Future. Elvis roamed these halls, and you can too. Built in 1912, the yellow brick Citrus County Courthouse succeeded the original wooden courthouse that stood among longleaf pine and wiregrass. In 1961, the movie "Follow That Dream" included a courtroom scene filmed on the second floor. Surrounding the courthouse are county office buildings and the shopping and dining district, with coffeehouses, restaurants, and fun shops like Ritzy Rags & Glitzy Jewels, where 1940s music, funky flamingos, and a giant high-heeled chair set the tone for vintage clothing and whimsical local art. Poke around

Citrus County Courthouse



Above: Ritzy Rags & Glitzy Jewels

Right: Stumpknockers-
Home of great fried
mushrooms.





Old Inverness Train Station



**Above Right: Old Caboose,
Withlacoochee**

**Bottom Right:
Suncoast Bicycles Shop**



a few blocks to find not one but two excellent used bookstores: the Book Worm is focused on paperbacks, while Rainy Day Editions showcases great Florida books and hardcover gems.

Within a block of the courthouse, the outdoors awaits. Right behind the Citrus County Sheriff's Office, Cooter Pond Park provides a quiet place to stroll along a marsh-lined pond. Puzzles and games built into the boardwalk provide a distraction for children while you're scanning the surface of the pond for turtles, herons, and coots. Continue west to Wallace Brooks Park, where a step off the Withlacoochee State Trail leads you to a boardwalk meandering beneath cypress and red maple along the shores of Henderson Lake, part of the Tsala Apopka chain. The Liberty Trail boardwalk connects to Liberty Park, where a trailhead for the Withlacoochee State Trail awaits, sporting restrooms, water fountain, bike racks, and an outfitter – Suncoast Bicycles – right across the trail, where you can rent a bike and be on your way. Here, too, is the historic railroad depot, now the popular Two Sisters Family Restaurant, a cozy café with home cooking just two feet off the trail.

Drive a couple of miles west on SR 44 and you'll encounter Whispering Pines Park, where a new segment of the Florida Trail is the newest addition to this popular urban getaway. Frisbee golf, swimming, ballfields, playgrounds, and quiet picnic spots are all tucked away in this forest of pine, a northerly extension of Withlacoochee State Forest. Follow the orange blazes south to enter the Citrus Tract, where a connector trail leads you to the 43-mile Citrus Hiking Trail. Take a day hike on the A Loop or plan a long weekend of backpacking along the perimeter to experience special places like Lizzie Hart Sink and Stagecoach Pond. Holder Mine and Mutual Mine Campgrounds offer inexpensive getaways for day hikers. On the north side of the city, CR 581 (E Turner Camp Rd) leads to Potts Preserve, a wild outpost between Tsala Apopka Lake and the Withlacoochee River. This Southwest Florida Water Management District Preserve offers more than 12 miles of hiking, with trails created and maintained by the Suncoast Chapter. Walk through river bluff forests, haunting cypress swamps, and meadows reforested with pine. South of downtown Inverness, Fort Cooper State Park recalls a chapter from the Second Seminole War, where in April 1836 a bedraggled battalion of sick and injured soldiers walking to Tampa stopped to regroup and recuperate and hastily built a wooden fort to defend themselves when the Seminoles

AROUND INVERNESS

WHAT TO DO:

Bike the Withlacoochee State Trail

Suncoast Bicycles Plus
322 N. Pine Ave
1-800-296-1010
www.suncoastbicycles.com

Hike the Florida Trail System Citrus Hiking Trail

Potts Preserve
Whispering Pines Park
1-877-HIKE-FLA
www.floridatrail.org

Enjoy the city parks of downtown Inverness

Cooter Pond Park
181 Hwy 41 South
Liberty Park
286 N. Apopka Avenue
Wallace Brooks Park
399 E. Dampier Street

WHAT TO SEE:

Historic Courthouse Museum

1 Courthouse Square
352-341-6429
www.cccourthouse.org
Mon-Fri 10-4

Fort Cooper State Park

3100 S Old Floral City Rd
352-726-0315
www.floridastateparks.gov/fortcooper

WHERE TO STAY:

Central Motel

721 US 41 S
1-800-554-7241
www.centralmotel.com

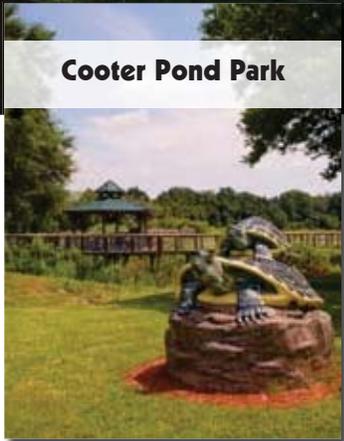
Magnolia Glen Bed & Breakfast

7702 E Allen Dr.
352-726-1832



Liberty Trail Boardwalk

Whether you launch a canoe at Wallace Brooks Park or picnic under the pines at Whispering Pines Park, our Gateway Community of Inverness provides plenty of outdoor pursuits to keep you busy on a winter weekend.



Cooter Pond Park

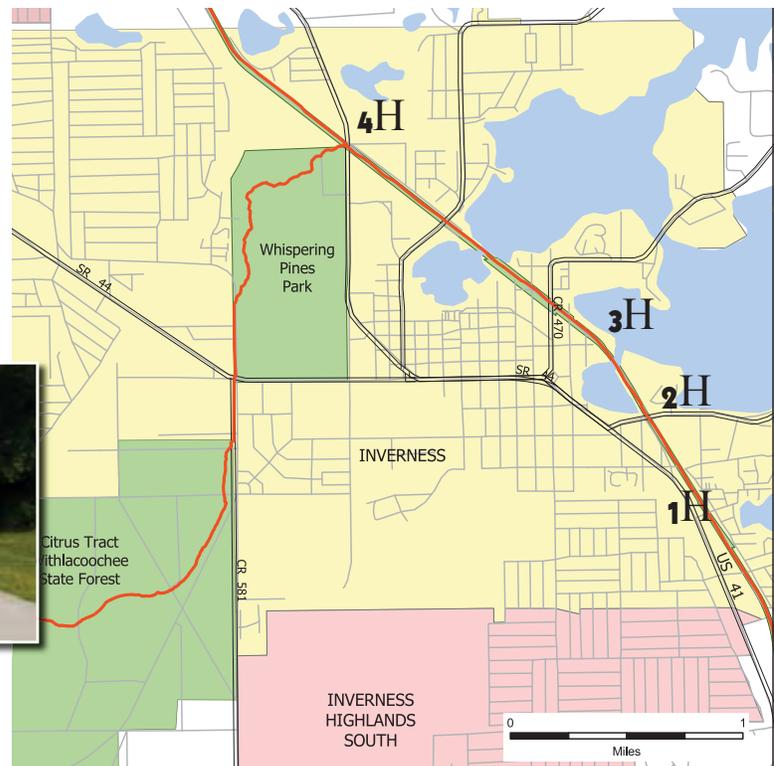
attacked. Nature trails wind through sandhills, pine flatwoods, and marsh habitats, and a segment of the Old Fort King Road leads you to a replica of the fort.

Whether you launch a canoe at Wallace Brooks Park or picnic under the pines at Whispering Pines Park, our Gateway Community of Inverness provides plenty of outdoor pursuits to keep you busy on a winter weekend. Load up the pack, paddle, and bike for a visit to one of Central Florida's quietest outdoor recreation getaways.

A member of the Society of American Travel Writers and the Florida Outdoor Writers Association, Sandra Friend is the author of Orlando & Central Florida: An Explorer's Guide and numerous books on hiking in Florida. Learn more at www.sandrafriend.com

Florida Trail Access Points Near Inverness:

1. Central Motel
2. Tunnel
3. Wallace Brooks Park
4. Whispering Pines Park



Withlacoochee State Trail



Whispering Pines Park