

Salt Lake WMA White Trail Hike



Start your hike from the main kiosk, which has an overview trail map, and then head straight down Powerline Road, a hardpacked limestone road nicely shaded in oaks draped in Spanish moss, following the white blazes to reach a loop out into Florida scrub-jay habitat. The road parallels power lines on both sides, passing a marsh off on the left, its drainage flowing beneath the road. Clumps of needlerush frame a scene of pines on the far horizon. At 0.4 mile, a sign says “Bone Yard to right” with a bone nailed to it, perhaps the jawbone of a cow. We saw no other bones in evidence.

The White Loop starts at 0.7 mile. Turn left onto a forest road into the pine flatwoods. As you walk down this section of forest road you have salt marsh off to the left beyond the pines, and a big open stretch of pine flatwoods on the right. The habitat transitions to a slash pine forest with lots of pines overhead. Keep alert for the blazes: at a double-blaze, the trail makes a curve to the right – not to be confused with trails that go off to the left at this point – stay on the broad forest route through the pines. White violets and yellow bladderwort cluster in a low spot on the trail as it curves past and through pine flatwoods with a thick understory of saw palmetto. A cardinal flits past. Up ahead there is a soft haze in the pines, as often happens on humid days. A double blaze at a chewed up firebreak in the forest road indicates the trail turns to the left, passing a floodplain forest.

By 1.4 miles, you pass a broad forest road off to the left going out into an open area edge of the floodplain forest. The white blazes continue to lead you along the edge of the pine flatwoods. A floodplain swamp is obvious on the right; the flatwoods to the left are very open. Just beyond treeline you hear some chatter that sounds like scrub-jays. Reaching a property boundary with private property, the trail makes a sharp right at a 4-way intersection. To the left there is an ephemeral wetland with interesting bird sounds coming from it. Making up the understory in the pine flatwoods, a scrubby mix of gallberry and saw palmetto has a bird box in the middle of it. Up ahead, the middle of the road looks sandy: you’re headed straight for the scrub.

You pass a bayhead filled with particularly tall loblolly bays and cypress at 1.7 miles. The trail rises steadily into the scrub, reaching a four way intersection of roads. The white blazes lead you off to the right, onto a road chewed up as a firebreak, and the footpath becomes the soft sand so indicative of Florida scrub. You pass forest paths on the right and the left that look a lot more pleasant than the trail you’re on, but the white blazes guide you towards a shady copse of slash pines. At the next junction, the trail goes straight ahead instead of continuing on the firebreak. It enters a more open palmetto prairie with a smattering of shade from the pines. Passing another forest road

sweeping in from the left, the trail continues straight towards another nice stand of pines in the distance.

You're now in the heart of the pine savanna, broad and open, with patches of short sand live oaks and Chapman oaks on the left, perfect habitat for the Florida scrub-jay. We didn't see them on our hike, but that doesn't mean you won't. Emerging from the pines, you see an orange tipped post off to the left. The trail continues down the forest road, coming into view of the power lines again. At 2.4 miles, you've reached the top of the loop. A forest road goes off to the left. Deeper into the scrub, there is a bat box in the distance. The trail starts curving right passing some pretty old saw palmettos rising up on their trunks out of the pine savanna, and is curving towards the powerlines. Gravel covers the footpath at a place where a bayhead swamp drains seasonally into the pine flatwoods.

At 2.6 miles you reach the power line. A double blaze here urges you to the right, heading north along Powerline Road. You can hear scrub-jays chattering in the distance. There's a bayhead swamp on the left with a large stocky, loblolly bay tree. The trail curves along the powerline and heads into the pine flatwoods on the right. Passing a small depression marsh with needlerush off to the right, the trail returns to the edge of the powerline and begins to parallel it. You see another bird box off to the left. The folks who manage this wildlife management area have done a good job with placing many bird boxes throughout the forest to encourage birds - and birders - to show up.

You walk past another depression marsh on the left in between the trail and the power line, surrounded by cabbage palms, like a little oasis. Wetlands are on both sides of the trail, just little marshes in depressions. You end up back under the power lines again, zig-zagging to the other side of them. At 3.1 miles, you pass a road coming in from the right under the power lines. The trail continues winding its way back towards the entrance on the west side of the power lines. A small slough is covered with a mat of pine pollen; a wetland area, with what looks like goldenrod past its peak, stretches off to the right towards the floodplain forest. While you wouldn't expect it on a hike to the scrub - we didn't - we startled an alligator along the next wetland, where the footpath becomes gravel to allow it to drain across the road.

Winding to the right under the power lines and back into the edge of the pine forest, the trail comes up to the junction of Powerline Road and Bear Bluff Road, which leads towards Salt Lake. Continue straight ahead; the trail stays to the west side of the power line. By 3.8 miles you complete the White Loop. Continue straight ahead, following the Powerline Road back past the Boneyard to exit. You reach the trailhead at 4.2 miles.

Directions: From I-95 exit 223, Mims, drive west on SR 46 for 0.7 mile to Turpentine Rd. Turn left. Follow it north 1.5 miles; it turns right and becomes Panther Lane. After a half mile, Panther Lane turns left and becomes Arch Road, leading right up to the entrance gate and parking area.