

Crooked River Lighthouse Lens Again Burns Brightly



Cape St. George Light and Keeper's House Museum

Florida's Forgotten Coast is home to four unique and historic lighthouses.

The oldest, a masonry tower built in 1842, is located in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge overlooking beautiful Apalachee Bay. The newest, the fourth reconstruction of the Cape St. George Light, was completed in 2008 on St. George Island. The graceful red and white skeletal Crooked River lighthouse near Carrabelle Beach features a park space with a playground for children. The Cape San Blas Lighthouse, now located in downtown Port St. Joe, includes two keepers dwellings saved from the sea and lovingly refurbished.



Each Forgotten Coast lighthouse tells a story of Florida's maritime heritage and the commitment to preserving history for future generations.

Cape San Blas Lighthouse Original and Current Location in Port St. Joe



St. Marks Lighthouse Yesterday and Today

Explore North Florida's Historic Maritime Beacons

When you are visiting the Florida Panhandle in the north-western part of the Sunshine State, take a day to visit the four spectacular lighthouses on the "Forgotten Coast." From east to west, see the St. Marks Lighthouse in St. Marks, the Crooked River Lighthouse in Carrabelle, the Cape St. George Light on St. George Island, and the Cape San Blas Lighthouse in Port St. Joe. The directions can easily be reversed if you are traveling from west to east. Allowing for an hour stop at each lighthouse, the trip will take about six hours (not counting a lunch stop).

The St. Marks Lighthouse in the beautiful St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is accessed by turning south off US Hwy 98 onto CR 59 in Newport, FL. The lighthouse is located six miles from the Refuge Visitor Center. The tower is closed to climbing but the restored Keeper's Quarters are open the first Friday and Saturday of each month, 10am - 4pm.

From St. Marks, head back to US Hwy 98 west through the town of Carrabelle to the Crooked River Lighthouse in Carrabelle Beach. A historic marker on the north side of the highway designates the entrance to the lighthouse park. The Crooked River Lighthouse Tower is open, weather permitting, for climbs Wednesday through Friday from 11am - 4pm, Saturday from 9am - 4pm and Sunday from 1-4pm. The cost for climbing the lighthouse is \$5 per person.

About 25 minutes west of Carrabelle on US Hwy 98 is the town of Eastpoint, and the turnoff onto State Road 300 which leads across a 4.2 mile bridge to St. George Island and the Cape St. George Light. The lighthouse and Keeper's House museum and gift shop are open daily March through October 10am - 5pm; Sunday noon - 5pm; closed Thursday. Winter hours are daily noon - 5pm; closed Thursday.

From St. George Island, head back to the mainland and US Hwy 98 west through Apalachicola to the city of Port St. Joe, about a 45-minute drive. The Cape San Blas Lighthouse is open for climbing Wednesday through Saturday from 11am - 5pm EST. Call to ask about extended summer or holiday hours and be sure to visit the Sleeping Beauty Gift Shop, near the lighthouse.

Check each lighthouse's website for updates.



LIGHTHOUSE DRIVING TOUR on Florida's Forgotten Coast



ST. MARKS . CROOKED RIVER

CAPE ST. GEORGE . CAPE SAN BLAS

St. Marks Lighthouse

In Wakulla County, the second oldest lighthouse in Florida still stands sentinel over the shores of Apalachee Bay. Constructed in 1842, the picturesque whitewashed masonry tower and keeper's quarters rest securely on a base of limestone rock taken according to local legend, from nearby Fort San Marcos de Apalache. It is located on the north side of Apalachee Bay on the east side of the entrance to the St. Marks River.

Eighty-five steps spiral up the brick tower to the lantern room; the first seventy-two are wood and the last thirteen are iron. The tower walls are four feet thick at the base, tapering to 18 inches at the top. The historic Fresnel lens, installed in 1867, was removed for preservation in 2014 and is on display in the refuge visitor center. Over the years oil, kerosene, and electricity have powered the lamp which could be seen up to 15 miles.

In 1931, the St. Marks Migratory Bird Refuge was created around the St. Marks Lighthouse and a road to the lighthouse was constructed. In 1960, the light was automated and eliminated the need for keepers. A modern solar powered light was installed in 2000. Ownership of the St. Marks Lighthouse was transferred from the US Coast Guard to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2013. The restored Keepers House is open monthly and for special tours and events. Call the refuge for more details.



Photo: Teresa Darragh

Location: Visitor Center, 1255 Lighthouse Rd. St. Marks, Florida 32355. The St. Marks Lighthouse is located at the end of Lighthouse Road in the main area of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.
Contact: (850) 925-6121

Crooked River Lighthouse

For 120 years Crooked River Lighthouse has been a guiding light for sea travelers navigating the treacherous pass between Dog and St. George Islands. Today the lighthouse, one of two remaining in Franklin County, stands on the mainland where the light was originally built in 1895, replacing the three short-lived beacons destroyed by hurricanes on Dog Island. The 103-foot iron and steel structure was decommissioned by the US Coast Guard in 1995 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Carrabelle Lighthouse Association and the City of Carrabelle acquired the landmark in 2001 and created a public park surrounding it. An acrylic reproduction of the tower's original 4th order Fresnel lens beams nightly. Nestled in a coastal forest habitat, the park is the trail head of the Carrabelle Beach bike path and features a picnic area. A replica of the Keeper's House serves as a historic museum and gift shop and the original station washhouse is also on the grounds.

The Lighthouse and Museum are managed by the Carrabelle Lighthouse Association. Tower climbs are \$5. All climbers must be 44 inches tall. Scheduled tours are available upon request. An enchanting birthday celebration, Lantern Fest, is held annually, the 3rd weekend in October.



Photo: Lou Kellenberger

Location: 1975 US Hwy 98, Carrabelle, FL 32322. Located approximately two miles west of the Carrabelle bridge at Carrabelle Beach.
Contact: (850) 697-2732
www.crookedriverlighthouse.org

Cape St. George Light

The Cape St. George Light, the second of two remaining Franklin County lighthouses, stands at the center of St. George Island. It is the fourth reconstruction of the historic lighthouse that was originally built on what is now Little St. George Island. The first lighthouse was erected in 1833 near West Pass. Damaged by storms, it was dismantled and reconstructed in 1848 at Cape St. George. The second lighthouse fell during a hurricane in 1851 and a third lighthouse was completed in 1852, again using materials from its predecessor, but positioned further inland from the water's edge. For 153 years the Cape St. George Light valiantly served mariners well, but beach erosion ultimately caused its collapse on October 21, 2005.

Dedicated volunteers salvaged more than 22,000 original bricks from the rubble and with extensive community support and public and private funding, the Cape St. George Light was successfully rebuilt and opened to the public on December 1, 2008. A replica of the original Lighthouse Keeper's House features a museum and gift shop. Museum exhibits tell the story of the lighthouse and its keepers and, in 2016, added a replica of the Third Order Fresnel Lens - the original of which operated from 1867 to 1949. The lighthouse is open daily except Thursday. Climbing fees are \$5 for adults; \$3 for children. Climbers must be 40 inches tall.



Photo: Lou Kellenberger

Location: 2 East Gulf Beach Dr., St. George Island, FL 32328.
Contact: (850) 927-7745
www.stgeorgelight.org

Cape San Blas Lighthouse

The Cape San Blas Lighthouse in Gulf County was built more than 130 years ago when Congress appropriated \$8,000 to erect the original structure. It was designed to guide vessels around the shoals running out from the Cape using the sole beacon that could be seen for up to 10 miles offshore.

Rich with history, including an attack by Union Troops in 1862, the structure has survived a series of blows from storms, winds and high surf throughout the years. Tropical Storm Isaac reclaimed the remaining shoreline forcing the lighthouse to close temporarily in 2012.

In honor of its historic and iconic presence, the City of Port St. Joe successfully moved the lighthouse to its protective shores on St. Joseph Bay on July 15, 2014 to preserve and maintain the beloved structure. The lighthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 7, 2015. On October 10, 2018, both keeper's quarters sustained damage from Hurricane Michael.

The Cape San Blas Lighthouse and Gift Shop are located at 200 Miss Zola's Dr. in Port St. Joe overlooking beautiful St. Joseph's Bay. Tower climbs are available (\$5 for adults, \$3 for children over 44 inches tall and under age 12). The Gift Shop offers souvenirs and a display of paintings of all Florida's lighthouses, by artist Mary Alice Cullifer.



Photo: Bill Fauth

Location: 200 Miss Zola's Drive, Port St. Joe, FL 32456. One block off US Hwy 98 in downtown Port St. Joe.
Contact: (850) 229-1151
www.capesanblaslight.org