

On Safari – Dunedin Causeway, Dunedin Florida

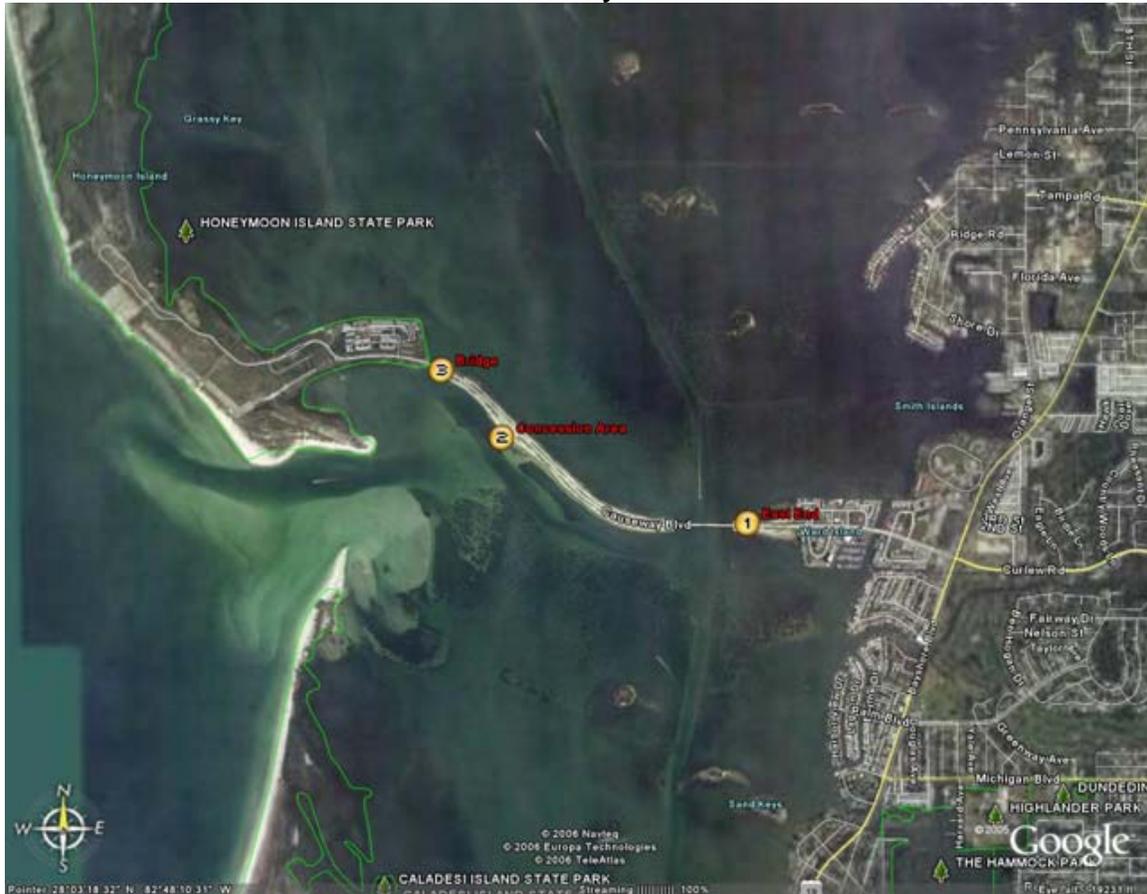


I've been living in Florida for nearly two years and one of my favorite local locations is the Dunedin Causeway. Its easy, and its close and its productive. Hmm, what more could you ask for? I imagine that I have photographed the birds along the causeway 100 times and it never is boring. Even on a slow day it is a beautiful place to visit. You are mostly going here to shoot shore birds. There are other birds of course, but getting up close to the many shorebirds is the biggest attraction. During migration there can be 1000s of birds along a 3 mile stretch!

The causeway is a short strip of road that crosses the intra-coastal between Dunedin and Honeymoon Island. On either side of the road are public access roads for boaters, fisherman, and photographers! Depending on the time of day you will either work the north (evening) or south (morning) side of the road. In most instances you will use your vehicle as a blind and drive these roads looking for interesting things to photograph.

This is also the gateway to Honeymoon Island. The park does not open until 8:00 AM and so you can shoot the shore birds in sweet sunrise light here and then go to the park when you are finished shooting the shorebirds. I sometimes don't even make in to the park! Except in spring when the Osprey are nesting. The park boasts the largest concentration of nesting Ospreys in the state. I have seen 100 Osprey inside the park during the nesting season!

The Layout



I divided the area up into 3 sections. The East End (1) is the entrance to the shooting area. The Concession Area (2) is one of the best spots. Finally, the Bridge (3) has some great opportunities.

The East End is prime habitat for Least Terns and in the spring they are all over the place here. They are fast and hard to photograph, but this is a great place for them. The nearby condos block this area from the morning sun until about 40 minutes after sunrise and so I usually peek as I drive by and make my way down to the Concession Area before coming back here to the East End. Other than the morning light issue there is nothing tricky here, pull in check it out and move to the next spot. I find that depending on people traffic the birds move all along the causeway. So if they fly off from one spot they are likely just down the beach.

The Concession Area is like it sounds, boat rentals, restrooms, snack shop. Very handy after a “strenuous” morning! East of the boat rentals the water is quite shallow and the shore birds congregate in this area. At high tide they are often within 10 yards of where you will be sitting. Even when they get spooked they usually reform and come right back in to the same spot. The birds here don’t mind vehicles, but they do get shy with people.



Lots of people fish along here and the herons and egrets will often try to steal bait fish from their buckets. You can get some nice close ups by watching for this.

Most of my “best” skimmer shots have been taken along this stretch of beach. There can be anything along this stretch of beach. There are frequently Black-hooded and Monk Parakeets, omnipresent Grackles, abundant Osprey, low soaring Magnificent Frigates. Birds are the most obvious targets here. However there are always people sailing, fishing and kayaking within easy range of the shoreline. Also dolphins are frequently seen coming and going along this channel to the Gulf of Mexico.



The bridge area is my favorite Pelican spot. They hover or even perch in the power lines and hunt the fish coming under the Causeway Bridge. When the fish are running this can be awesome. Check the Sea Grapes along here for warblers and others, Loggerhead Shrikes in particular.

Stuff

From Florida Hwy 19 take Curlew Rd west. This road ends at Honeymoon Island. The GPS coordinates are 28° 23' 03.55" North by 82° 47' 24.05" West.

Year round photo opportunities are a big plus. Easy access and close proximity to the birds. There are amenities such as restaurants and hotels within minutes.

This [webcam](#) is from neighboring Clearwater Beach. These webcams are great for checking the local weather live before heading out

Equipment

I almost exclusively use a 200-400 lens. Mine has vibration reduction and so with some support from the window, this is what I use 99% of the time. It really is best to shoot from inside your vehicle so tripods are tough unless you have a van. Popping a monopod outside the window is workable. You really don't need much more for focal length. Unless you are going for the "environmental" images you need at least 200mm for much success here.

Safariguy's Inside Scoop!

- **Check The Weather.**

The best days are those days when the wind is from the northeast. This will put the wind at your back and the birds in your face. The sun will also be to your back or slightly to the side depending on the time of the year. Finally, the best days are when the tide is coming in and high tide is around 9. This will keep pushing the birds toward shore as the tide comes in getting them closer and closer to your camera in the process.

- **Weekdays if Possible**

I know this is hard for some, but this is a popular boating and fishing area. Not to mention joggers and dog walkers. All of these people will push the birds off shore and that is not good for photography. During the week however, you may have the place to yourself.

- **Morning vs. Afternoon**

My preference is morning. I find it less crowded and the birds to be more active. If you are here in the evening then you need to reverse most of my tips. For example at night you want a southerly wind as you will be shooting on the north side of the road.

