

Preliminary Examination of Miakka River, Fla., September 8, 1916
The District Engineer

To: The Chief of Engineers, United States Army (Through the Division Engineer)
From: The District Engineer Officer
Subject: Preliminary examination waterway between waterway between Sarasota Bay and
Miakka River, Fla.

The Secretary of War is hereby authorized and directed to cause preliminary examinations and surveys to be made at the following natural localities:

Waterway between Sarasota Bay, near Venice, and Miakka River, Fla., with a view to giving such channel dimensions as commerce may demand.

The field work of the present examination was done in October, 1916 by Assistant Engineer O. N. Bie, Engineer Department at large, from whose report, dated October 12, 1916, the following description of the locality and the desired improvement is taken:

(Paragraph of Sarasota Bay Described, omitted).

“Myakka River has its source about 25 to 30 statute miles east of the town of Sarasota and flows in a southwesterly direction until it approaches within about 8 miles of the coast near Caseys Pass; it thence changes its course to a southeasterly direction and flows parallel to the coast line and empties into Charlotte Harbor 7 miles west of Punta Gorda and about 15 miles in a straight line northeast from Boca Grande.

Preliminary examination of the lower river was made in May, 1915, and of the upper in June, 1916. The river is about 46 miles long, but the upper half is practically dry during seven or eight months each year. No commerce exists along this part of the river. The lower half may be considered navigable, but it is not used except by occasional sportsmen, fishermen, and picnic parties in canoes and small launches. For additional information on navigable extent, fluctuation of water surface, etc., see report dated September 8, 1916 on preliminary examination of Miakka River.

Proposed waterway between Venice and Miakka River.—A reconnaissance of the locality through which the proposed canal would be dug was made on October 5 and 6, 1916. As the tide in the morning of the 5th was too low to enable the De Soto, drawing 3 feet, to pass through Little Sarasota Bay to Venice, as planned, a conveyance was hired at Sarasota and assisted by r. Brunson, a guide and driver, I proceeded to Dona Bay and Roberts Bay near Venice. Skirting along the shores and zigzagging through the woods for the purpose of determining upon a suitable point of departure, we arrived at or rather near, the mouth of Knights Slough, the land being too boggy to permit us to approach it closely. Our guide informed me that this so-called slough—a low swampy strip of land inundated during the rainy season—extended from the head of Roberts Bay near Venice to the Miakka River. We followed, when roads or open woods permitted, the northerly border of this slough until we arrived at Miakka River near station 10

miles. The distance on a straight line through the swamp from Roberts Bay to Miakka River is 5 1/2 or 6 miles. After having ascertained the approximate extent and character of the swamp and located its connection with the Miakka River, we proceeded northward along the river several miles to a point west of lower lake, and thence southwestward across the prairie lands to where converging drains form Salt Creek, which (as shown on the accompanying map) empties into Dona Bay. The detour was made for the purpose of examining a line of canal said to be desired by parties owning large tracts of land along the upper part of the Miakka. A canal along this line, however, would merely give an artificial outlet into Dona and Little Sarasota Bays for the surplus water in the upper Miakka and adjacent flatwoods, and could not be used as a means of traffic for boats, barges, or other craft.

The general character of the land situated between the lower Miakka River and Dona Bay is low, flat pine land apparently not over 4 or 5 feet above mean low water plane in Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor. Scattered patches of water oak and small swamps (the latter in present wet season 1 or 2 feet deep) are also found. The soil is sand and mud, the subsoil, 5 or 6 feet below the surface, is probably marl; no sign of rock was found.

From observations made and information obtained I am of the opinion that the proposed waterway should begin at the head of Roberts Bay (the southerly arm of Dona Bay) and run in an east-southeast direction, on a straight line through or along Knight Slough toward Station 10 miles on the Miakka River. This waterway would connect Sarasota Bay with Charlotte Harbor and _____ unbroken inside passage _____ to San Carlos Bay—145 miles—would this be available. Under present conditions small vessels using the inside route _____ make an outside run of 45 miles between Big Sarasota Pass and Boca Grande.

This canal, in order to be of real benefit to commerce, should be built on a straight line; it should be 75 to 100 feet wide and 5 feet deep, at low water; the channels through Little Sarasota Bay would necessarily require dredging to an equal depth, and a few shoals (sandbars) in Miakka River would have to be dredged.”

(Description of proposed canal and support of project omitted)

(The report continues, and another description of the river is introduced by the following statement):

The Miakka River, between Knight Slough and the river mouth, has a least depth of 2 1/2 feet at low water on one broad sand flat, and 3 feet on several other parts. The river, above the point where the Cowpen Slough route would strike it, has but a small low-water discharge, which ceases altogether in dry seasons. The following description of this portion of the stream is taken from the report of an examination made in June, 1916, and quoted in my report of September 8, 1916, on Preliminary Examination of Miakka River, Fla.,

“From Miakka City to Rocky Ford, a distance of 18 miles, measured on a straight line, and perhaps 25 miles, measured along the crooked river bed, only an irregular chain of shallow pools exists in the present dry season. During and for a few months after the rainy season, or from July to October or November, the chain of stagnant pools becomes a free flowing and at times a

raging river, overflowing its banks and inundating many square miles of rich but undeveloped farming lands. During normal rainy seasons, the river rises from 6 to 8 feet where it is confined between high banks, and 2 to 4 feet where it flows unrestricted through low prairie lands. In its course through the prairies two lakes called upper and lower lakes have been formed in range 20 east, township 37 south. The upper lake covers about 2 square miles at the present low stage and the depths vary from 2 to 5 feet; the lower lake is about 1 mile square and so shallow that birds (cranes) were seen wading all over it. The river bed above the upper lake and the slough connecting the lakes were dry during our examination. I was informed by our guide and others that the lower lake has in past years been entirely dry.

From the lower lake to Rocky Ford are several shallow pools, puddles, and hog wallows, but the greatest part is entirely dry.

As a river does not actually exist in the present dry season above Rocky Ford, but only intermittent shallow pools separated by sand bars 1 to 3 feet high mark the course of the river bed, we were able to run the motor cars in this dry river bed for several miles, and but for the snags and overhanging trees, where the river during rainy season flows between comparatively high banks instead of spreading over the low prairies, we could have traveled at least one-half of the distance between Miakka City and Rocky Ford in this manner. We crossed the river several times in our cars, sometimes in 1 or 2 feet of water, but generally over dry banks. Only in one place did we find a water pool of sufficient depth and extent to warrant our using a boat and taking soundings; depths ranging from 2 to 11 feet were found here. The smaller pools, varying in length from a few feet to one-fourth or one-half mile were so shallow that depths could be ascertained either by wading or by observations from the banks.