



The Ghost Writer

MARCH 2011

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Sat

Cost: \$50 or \$60 depending on length of walk, \$15 child (\$10 discount for members)

**Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023**

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

1st Saturday

Cost \$50 (\$40 for members),
**Reservations Required.
Phone (239) 695-1023**

VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

2nd Saturday, 3rd Tuesday

**Sat, Mar 12 Tues, Mar 15
Phone the Park at (239) 695-4593**

BOARD MEETING

April 10 at 2:00 p.m.

Port of the Islands

ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Sunday, March 20, 12 noon

Cost \$10 donation

Mesce Pavilion, Copeland
RSVP to (239) 695-2905, see p.4

COASTAL CRUISE

Sunday, March 20, 3:00 p.m.

Cost \$75 per person
National Park, Everglades City
**Reservations required
Phone (239) 695-2905, see p.4**

ANNUAL MEMBERS' DINNER

Sunday, April 10, 5:00 p.m.

Port of the Islands
Details in our next issue.

SAFARI SNAPS



For Swamp Walkers at the Fakahatchee SAFARI on February 26, the highlight was the sighting of a Florida Panther, photographed by Joe Browder. It (or one similar) was also seen by Frank Denninger running down Janes Scenic Drive toward Copeland village.



Swamp Buggy riders included Kathleen Leavesley of Fifth Third Bank, our Platinum Sponsors. Photos by Marya Repko and Art Cullman.



Janet & Bruce Bunch, highest bidders for the Panther Tracking Day, went on the Nature Walk (photo by Jim Woodard). Jane Parks, who helped to save the Fakahatchee, read the official program on a tram ride.

Visit www.orchidswamp.org for events, newsletters, colored tram map, history, and more.

Croc Jam

by Dennis Giardina

One afternoon a couple of weeks ago, Deborah Jansen was driving through Fakahatchee on US 41 when the traffic slowed and she could see up ahead of her a crowd of people on the side of the road, people walking across the road and cars, stopping and pulling over. She didn't know it but she was about to be stuck in a croc jam. A big American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), was basking conspicuously upon the canal bank on the north side of the road and this time of year, many tourists and visitors prowl the back roads, looking for something interesting to photograph. Unlike American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*), crocodiles often hold their mouths open while they bask in the sun and they reveal an impressive, toothy smile but even when their mouths are closed, their teeth really stick out. After Deborah told us about her sighting, Ralph Arwood and I started searching for the croc every day after work and about a week later we found and were able to photograph it.

American crocodiles are rare visitors to Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. They are a tropical species, existing in South Florida at the very northern extent of their range, which extends out into the Caribbean, over to Central America and along the northern and northwestern coasts of South America. There is estimated to be no more than a couple of thousand American crocodiles in South Florida. They are not nearly as numerous and cold-tolerant as alligators and when severe cold fronts linger over South Florida, like during the winter of 2010, crocodiles that don't find a thermal refuge often times die of exposure. They prefer estuaries, coastal marshes and swamps that have a mix of salt water over fresh water habitats, but they do occasionally swim up rivers and canals. In 2005, Mike Owen saw a crocodile in the Barron River Canal, on the east side of SR-29, almost all the way up to I-75 where there is no tidal influence or salt water at all.

Even though there seems to be a lot of really good habitat in Fakahatchee and the Ten Thousand Islands, there are few American crocodiles here. Historically they nested from Charlotte Harbor, down into the Florida Keys and up the East Coast to Vero Beach but currently, nesting mostly occurs in Biscayne and Florida Bays, Key Largo over to Cape Sable in Everglades National Park. Although their relatives in Africa, Asia and Australia are well documented man eaters, there are no known American crocodile attacks in Florida. There is more danger of being run over by a car, trying to photograph a crocodile on the side of the road in Fakahatchee than there is from the crocodile itself. No one knows where this crocodile came from or how long it'll hang around the US-41 canals, but if you find yourself driving along that roadway and see it, watch how and where you pull over and be very careful of the oncoming traffic, while crossing or standing on the road.

To learn more about American crocodiles in Florida, go to http://myfwc.com/WildlifeHabitats/Crocodile_Index.htm

Dennis Giardina is the Everglades Region Biologist, Invasive Plant Management Section, of the FWC and was formerly Manager of Fakahatchee Strand. He is Vice-President of FOF



The top photo was sent in by Dennis with his article. The bottom photo is from member Diana Curry of Chokoloskee who snapped this open-mouthed monster in February along US-41, a few miles west of SR-29

SAFARI SNAPS



The Silent and Live Auctions attracted attention and brought in significant funds, thanks to all the donors of items and to the enthusiastic bidders. FOF President Tom Maish (left) was Master of Ceremonies in the big tent. FOF historian Franklin Adams (photographed by Dino Barone) told stories by the bonfire at the end of an enjoyable day.

President's Message

THANK YOU to all of our members who attended and supported the Fakahatchee SAFARI. Additional THANKS to our FOF volunteers; Renee and the Park Staff, Park volunteers, and volunteers from outside the membership who worked so effectively in providing a true SAFARI experience for our Guests.

The SAFARI was an unqualified success in providing wonderful interpretation of the Fakahatchee, interpretation being one of the major objectives of the Park Service. Glen Stacell, as program director, had a nice variety of activities and exhibits to showcase this wondrous environment. Speaker Clyde Butcher spoke longingly of his love of the Fakahatchee and Capt. Franklin Adams gave a fireside history lecture.

Jay Staton's silent and live auctions brought in additional interest, and income, for the Friends especially as John Elting coaxed people in bidding up prices for some very interesting items.

Elsa Caldwell built upon the success of last year with Camp amenities and a different menu.

The only distraction is that ticket sales did not meet expectations.

A special treat was the two separate spottings of Florida Panthers! Joe Browder, long time activist of the Everglades, was able to get some great photos that we hope to share in the future. No these were not staged!!

At the February Board meeting there were two significant issues passed to improve our organization. With the growth of the FOF and agenda items occurring year around; the Board voted that starting next year Board meetings will be every other month throughout the year.

The other item concerns potential liability for the FOF. Although individual members of the FOF are covered by Florida Park Service regulations; the not-for-profit corporation of the FOF is not. To protect the assets of the FOF the Board voted to purchase liability coverage for FOF activities.

Hope to see you all at the Annual Members' Picnic on Sunday, March 20 ...

All the best,
Tom Maish

THANKS to

Fifth Third Bank, Platinum Sponsors of the Fakahatchee SAFARI.



Ted & Bonnie Darrow, Paula & Fred Brothers, and Jim & Millie Sernovitz who made generous donations to the Fakahatchee SAFARI and to Jack Butts who paid for a Conservancy intern to attend.

John & Carolyn Coe, Scott & Julie Geltemeyer, Marilyn & Philip Kiep, and Theresa Elsworth for donations to the general fund.

Richard & Irene Sperber, Beaufort Kayak Tours, and Earth Spirit for donations in gratitude for special walks.

BOARDWALK REPORT

February has been a beautiful month on the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. There is enough canopy over the walkway to protect visitors from direct sunlight, and so much variety in the surroundings that people are often surprised that they have walked 1.2 miles to the gator pond and back.

Two eagle chicks (about 7-8 weeks old) are flourishing in the nest on the west side of the boardwalk. They are so large that visitors sometimes mistake them for adult eagles. Upon closer observation through binoculars or the spotting scope, however, it is clear that they do not have white heads or tails. They often perch high on the nest, probably anticipating the next meal. On the east side of the boardwalk, closer to the alligator pond, ospreys are raising chicks as well. Visitors really enjoy watching the nests through binoculars and photographing them.

The pond has been a quiet place this season with a few wading birds and our female alligator that can be seen on most days basking in the sun. An immature black crowned night heron is almost always visible as well. The surface of the pond has been covered with duckweed for about six weeks so it is very green. Now that the bald cypress trees are leafing out, we have several shades of green to enjoy out there! In the past week the fish have been more noticeable once again and more birds have returned.

The Boardwalk volunteer work crew has been hard at work this season, meeting every Tuesday morning to make repairs to the decking and railings. We are happy to have a cooperative working relationship with the new Lowe's store at the corner of routes 951 and 41. We made contact with them during their very first week and they have been responsive to our needs. They deliver lumber directly to the beginning of the wooden boardwalk, which is very convenient for the crew. Lowe's has also provided a discount on a new rolling utility cart used for carrying tools. A new battery operated power saw is a real asset to the group. Hand sawing damp lumber was both tedious and time consuming. We thank Dick and Edite Hughes, Bud Scott, Nelson Tilden and friends of this crew who often come to help. Thanks also to Kathy Hatch for her interpretive skills each week.

We have completed three of the six scheduled Elderhostel Boardwalk Tours as part of a Barry University "Road Scholar" program. We enjoy these large groups of 50 visitors at a time, and they in turn provide the FOF with a donation of nearly \$1,000 during the season. They have a lot of energy and a keen interest in our swamp forest. It certainly is a remarkable place!

Come and see for yourself.

Caryl Tilden
Boardwalk Volunteer Naturalist

Have you read a good book lately that would interest other members? Send us a review, 300 words or less.



MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 325 paid memberships plus 5 from the 4th quarter who are in arrears and 17 Introductory members. Thanks to the 107 people who have replied so far to the January renewal. Reminders are being sent to those who are due this quarter.

Welcome to new members:

- Maria-Elena Acosta, Miami
- Ann & Jim Beatty, Hinsdale, IL
- Diana Clark & Richard Lancaster, North Palm Beach
- Eleanor Creighton, Naples
- Nancy Ginocchio, Naples
- Susie Hauze, Marco Island
- Todd Radek, Spring Grove, IL
- Karl Saberg, Baldwin, MD
- Jerry & Lori Williams, Chokoloskee
- Ryan Williams, Ft Lauderdale
- Wallace Winter, Grayslake, IL

**Election for Board Members
IMPORTANT DATES**

- March 7 Deadline for nominee's biographical information
- March 21 Ballots mailed to membership (US Mail)
- April 4 Deadline to postmark completed ballots (US Mail)
- April 10 Results of Election announced at Annual Meeting

Allen Caldwell, Chairman, Nominating Committee
2600 Cardena St., Ph-3, Coral Gables, FL 33134
phone: (305) 443-2490, email: llewdlacnella@msn.com



Friends of Fakahatchee
invite you to their
ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC

Sunday, March 20, 2011

from 12:00 noon
Mesce Pavilion, Copeland
Donation \$10 per person



Live Music • Door Prizes • Great Food

RSVP to (239) 695-2905 or FOF_90@hotmail.com

The ANNUAL MEMBERS' PICNIC will be held in Copeland on **Sunday, March 20**. Guests who want to join FOF are invited to attend and become members at the door. We have decided, after suggestions last year, to ask for a "donation" of \$10 per person to cover the costs. Please let us know if you will attend. Phone Marya at (239) 695-2905 or email us.

COASTAL CRUISE

The third Coastal Cruise this season to historic Fakahatchee Island takes place on **Sunday, March 20**, at 3:00 p.m. so you have time to attend the Members' Annual Picnic and then drift along on our chartered boat to the island where you will be guided up the path to the old cemetery. A naturalist will be on hand to point out rare plants. The cost is \$75 and includes the Picnic lunch. Book online with a credit card at our website or phone (239) 695-2905.



What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress strand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades. Its 80,000 acres are bordered by I-75 (Alligator Alley), US-41 (Tamiami Trail), SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

The Friends of Fakahatchee strive to aid in the preservation of this ecologically unique area and to educate the public about its importance.

The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is edited by Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of over 300 copies.

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| OFFICERS: | President – Tom Maish | Vice-President – Dennis Giardina | | | | |
| | Secretary – Howard Lubel | Treasurer – Saul Friess | | | | |
| BOARD: | Allen Caldwell | Elsa Caldwell | Julia Cardenas | Frank Denninger | Saul Friess | Dennis Giardina |
| | Cindy Hackney | Howard Lubel | Tom Maish | Glenn Stacell | Jay Staton | Carol Swingle |

NEW ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

date _____

Please make check payable to "FOF" and send to: **FOF Membership, P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139**

- ___ Individual (\$20) ___ Family (\$30) ___ Business (\$50) ___ Patron (\$100) ___ Benefactor (\$500) ___ extra (\$ _____)
- ___ Youth (\$10) birth date: month ___ day ___ year ___ (members under 18 years old must select this)

NAME _____	EMAIL _____
STREET / P.O.BOX: _____	<u>ALTERNATE ADDRESS</u> _____
CITY _____	CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____	STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____	PHONE _____

MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

- ___ JAN ___ FEB ___ MAR ___ APR ___ MAY ___ JUN ___ JUL ___ AUG ___ SEP ___ OCT ___ NOV ___ DEC