

The Ghost Writer

Fall 2003

Newsletter of Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve
Home of the Ghost Orchid

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Board & Membership Meeting

Friday, October 10, 5:30 pm
Community Church Annex, Everglades City
All members are encouraged to attend!!

8th Annual Butterfly Count
Picayune Strand State Forrest and
Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve
Saturday, October 18
Meet at the Preserve Office at 8:15 am

Swamp Walks

Oct 7, 28; Nov 4, 15, 25; Dec 2, 20, 30
For reservations, call Preserve Office
(239) 695-4593
Limited to groups of 15
Fee: \$15/person or \$10 for FOF members

East River Bird Count

Meet for 1 hour once a month
US 41 Tamiami Trail 5.2 miles west of SR 29
Call Mike Owen at 695-2886 for dates

Guided Canoe Trips

Nov 1 and 22; Dec 6, 27 starting at 9:00am
Equipment provided; limited to groups of 10
Fee: \$25/person or \$20 for FOF members

Florida State Parks Festivals & Events

Telephone: (850) 245-2157
Website: www.FloridaStateParks.org

Membership News

If you are still receiving your copy of *The Ghost Writer* by post, we would appreciate having your email address so we can save postage & paper. Using the web will also help get the newsletter to you wherever you may be traveling. Contact Marya at FOF_90@hotmail.com.

Welcome to the following new members:
Stephanie Cain, Pat and Mike Clinch, Mr. and Mrs. Shaun Floyd, Stan and Virginia Kanning, Fred Mitchell, Dave Mueller, Peter Nolan, Jonathan Rich and Carlos and Lola Solis.

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As usual Mike Owen has lots to report from his outings in the Fakahatchee. During his quarterly "frog call survey" on the evening of July 14, Mike and his assistant Karen Relish saw a *gray fox* at Gate 4 and a black bear at Gate 18 along Janes Scenic Drive. A few days later on July 19 he spotted a *panther* going east just 5 ½ miles north of the fire tower on Janes Scenic at 9:33 am, and in August saw tracks heading west at the K-2 trail. Mike reports that Greg Toppin was at Gate 7 the morning of Sept. 2 and viewed two *Everglades mink*. On Sept. 25 Karen and Mike observed their first-of-the-season *American Bittern*, a large swamp bird, which migrates from Minnesota and Wisconsin. He's also heard lots of *Limpkin wading birds* during the evening hours. They feed on snails, and Mike describes their sound "like a lady screaming" in the night. He says the police have been called to the scene when people are unaware of the birds' calling! Ranger Steve discovered road-kill just before Gate 7 on Sept. 27 of a two-toed *amphiura* (big salamander) almost two feet in size. This is a rarely observed amphibian, and Karen will be delivering it to the Univ. of Florida in Gainesville for their specimen research projects.



Dave Henley and Mike Owen talking with a visitor at the Fakahatchee Booth at Clyde Butcher's Gallery



Jack Horner leading a swamp walk during the Big Cypress Gallery Labor Day Weekend Gala
(see article on next page)

Star-Gazing Party a Big Success on Aug. 29

For the 25 or so people who braved the early stormy skies and a few mosquitoes, we had quite a treat in viewing Mars and the other planets with the three high-powered telescopes provided by Bill Fries and the Everglades Astronomical Society.

As the skies darkened, the clouds cleared and the Milky Way and all the stars were in their splendor. Mars was truly a bright sight to see. We were able to view the "mountains" and "valleys".

Thanks so much to Bill, Rick and Mike for taking time to transport all your equipment for us to see this once-in-a-60,000-year experience!

If you're interested in more information on the EAS, call Bill Fries at
(239) 394-7295
or visit their website:
www.naples.net/clubs/eas

Report on Clyde Butcher's Labor Day Weekend Gala

Greg Toppin and Dave Henley volunteered at our booth and informed visitors about the wonders of the Fakahatchee. Mike Owen and Jack Horner, assisted by Karen Relish, led **hundreds** of swamp walkers on hikes throughout the trails behind the Big Cypress Gallery. There was good weather and just a little drizzling rain on and off, but it did not dampen the spirits of all who attended and participated in all the festivities.

On Sunday there was a special tribute to Oscar Thompson. His photographs are on sale at Big Cypress Gallery with many beautiful scenes of the Fakahatchee that Oscar loved so much. Jeff Ripple was there participating in the weekend gala and to exhibit his beautiful color photographs.

Niki and Clyde Butcher have started the *Friends of Big Cypress Preserve*. Call (239) 695-2428 for information.

Annual Butterfly Count

On Saturday, October 18, there will be a 4 to 5-hour guided trip through the Picayune Strand State Forest and Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve for the 8th Annual Butterfly Count. If you are interested in participating in the butterfly count, meet at the Preserve Office at 8:15 am. Mike Owen will be there and you'll join the group with the Picayune Strand at the north end of Everglades Boulevard. You'll spend approximately two hours in the Picayune and then travel into the Fakahatchee to continue the count for another two hours, ending approximately at 1:30 pm.

For more information, call the Preserve Office at 695-4593 or Mike Owen at 695-2886.

Panther Survey

Please visit our website to get an updated copy of the current population size and distribution of the Florida Panther, as documented by the Florida Panther Refuge.

What Are We?

The Friends of Fakahatchee is a Citizen Support Organization of the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, an entity of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The Preserve comprises over 80,000 acres of land of the Big Cypress Swamp and is about 15 miles long by 5 miles wide, bordering US-41, I-75 and SR-29. The Fakahatchee Strand is the largest cypress strand in the world and its slough is the deepest in the greater Everglades.

OFFICERS

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Secretary: Kerrie Chobot, Everglades City
Treasurer: Jack Horner, Fort Myers

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