

# FERN FUN FOR EVERYONE

BY JACK BERNINGER

Take a stroll in the Fakahatchee Fern Capital of the U.S. along East Main (Gate12) off Janes Scenic Drive. Look for your fern brothers and sisters and take care of them, to paraphrase St. Francis.

This is an “everyone fun guide” using very common descriptive terms and identification features. You should be able to locate 19 of these ferns. Have fun!

If you wish to know more: I suggest “*FERNS OF FLORIDA*” by Gil Nelson.

As soon as you pass the gate look for the ground-growing ferns along the tram. Most are mixed together.

## **Group One:** COMMONLY CALLED SWORD FERNS WITH LEAVES (PINNAE) SWORD BLADE SHAPE OF VARIOUS LENGTHS.

Number one, simply called Sword Fern, has long blade leaves with sori (brown reproductive dots) along the edges of some leaves.

The Swamp Fern is similar to Sword but sori are located along the mid-vein of some leaves.

The Brake Ladder Fern is similar to Sword but smaller and darker green in color.

There are two types of Sword Ferns called Boston Ferns. You may be familiar with them at home. They have short blades and top ear lobes at the base of the leaves. Two types of these Boston ferns can be found along the tram..

You now have found 5 ferns.



## **Group Two:** ALL COMMONLY CALLED MARSH FERNS CONSIST OF THREE TYPES HAVING TOOTHED LIKE EDGES.

The first of these is small, 12-18 inches, narrow and usually a little lighter green in color, simply called Marsh Fern.

The Hottentot Fern is stout, large, and deep green in color. Sori (dots) like a roller coaster chain line the underside of some leaves.

The Southern Shield Fern is similar to Hottentot but less stout and the sori are along some leaf edges looking more straight line, not roller coaster.

You now have found 8 ferns.



**Group Three:** The Royal Fern is tall, usually near the water with separate tan sori stalks and leaves. It looks a little like a legume or mimmosa.

The Bracken Fern is stout with shrub like branches. Some have ear like projections on lower base of leaves.

You now have 10 ferns.



**Group Four:** Now look for ferns on the trees along the tram. You should easily find three. The Shoe String Fern is in green string clumps. The larger Golden Foot Fern has the end of the leaves resembling a turkey foot. Both are found on many Sable Palms. The Resurrection Fern is small but abundant along many tree branches. It may look dried out when there is a lack of rain. You now have 13 ferns.

**Group Five:** Next look in the water for two of the floating ferns. They are small, around ¼-inch. Water Spangle Fern looks a little like a single clover leaf lobe and sometimes mixed in with these is the Mosquito Fern with small lobed leaves and usually some red coloration. Another fern usually growing on logs, stumps, trees or the ground is the Giant Leather Fern. The dark brown sori cover some of the leaf backs making it look like a piece of leather. The Strap Fern is very common in the swamp. It grows in clumps and resembles a bunch of green straps. You now have 17 ferns.

**Group Six:** The last two are endangered (Don't Touch!). The Hand Fern can be found on two Sable Palms along the north side of the tram within 100 feet of the cabin. One is low and the larger one is high on back side of the tree. Look close. Finally, number nineteen is Psilotum "whisk fern" which is not a true fern. It is a small brush-like plant resembling a whisk broom. There is one growing in a tree notch hole on the south side of the tram just before cabin benches.

A great job if you found all 19.

You now know the sensual feeling of a new experience that comes with every walk.