



The Ghost Writer

DECEMBER 2005

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc.

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

December 6, 10, 20, 27
January 5, 14, 21, 28
February 7, 11, 18, 25
special groups on request
reservations required
call (239) 695-4593

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

schedule to be announced
We need qualified volunteers to lead canoe trips. If you are interested, please phone John at (239) 395-3760

MEMBERS' MEETING

Saturday, January 7
at 10:30a.m.
Port of the Island
Speaker: Dennis Giardina,
Fakahatchee Park Manager
RSVP to (239) 695-2905

THANKS!!!

- to Rick Cruz for donating part of the profit from the sale of his photographs taken in the Fakahatchee
- to the Oyster House for hosting our board meeting on November 19th

HURRICANE NEWS

by John Elting, President of Friends of Fakahatchee

We have had three or four swamp walks since Hurricane Wilma, and, needless to say, we have seen considerable damage throughout the Preserve. The good news is that the damage was somewhat localized; some areas were severely impacted while others were relatively untouched. This may be accounted for in part by the fact that hurricanes often contain some tornado action, which is very precise and limited in scope.

There is considerable blockage of tramways off Janes' Scenic Drive although Gate #7 is clear and Gate #12 (East Main) is passable up to the Ballard Camp at the lakes. Mike Owen and I concur that we have probably lost 10 to 20% of our bromeliads. In 'Catbert' Slough west of East Main, all but one or two of eight *catopsis berterponiana* survived and look to be in good shape. The sloughs south of 'Catbert' look good although Bill Mesce and I have not followed them any considerable distance. West Slough has a lot of downed branches and the going is a bit tougher, but the orchids held up well. BMJ Slough took more of a beating and we will not conduct swamp walks there in the foreseeable future. The K-2 tram has been cleared all the way, and the damage is minimal in the sloughs.

Our wildlife sightings on swamp walks have been few - no deer, bear, mink or otter although Dennis Marlin saw a **panther** on the north end of Janes Scenic Drive and Steve Houseknecht spotted one on October 2nd on Janes' at 8:45 AM. We have seen more **butterflies** now than during a comparable period last year. Niecy and Jill have seen **bobcats**, one at Route 41 and one on Janes'. **Fish-eating spiders** have been abundant on K-2, but nearing the end of their season.

Bill Mesce and I are scouting new areas for swamp walks and participants can look forward to new adventures. This is an excellent time to visit the Preserve post-hurricane and observe the regeneration going forward.

Holiday Greetings and Best Wishes for a Healthy, Peaceful New Year !

Notes from the Park

by Dennis Giardina, Manager

The 10th Annual Exotic Species Workshop for Southwest Florida, co-sponsored by the Park and the Panther Refuge, was held on December 7th at Rookery Bay. The day was packed with 14 speakers, experts presenting short talks about various topics, from Melaleuca to Bromeliad Weevils. Attendees included John Elting, Caryl & Nelson Tilden, Jerry Winters and all the Park staff. The T-shirts and hats donated by the Friends as door prizes were greatly admired.

The boardwalk (see photo below) was re-opened one month almost to the day after Hurricane Wilma destroyed a lot of it, thanks to the leadership of Nelson Tilden. I would also like to thank Bill Paquin (our new active volunteer), Rick Cruz, Bill Mesce, Bud Scott and John Elting for their help with the boardwalk, hurricane prep and clean up, clearing of Jane's Scenic Drive and East Main Tram, and the Woodards, Tom Maish, my mother and her husband Lou and Dan London with their efforts to clear Jones' Grade Tram last Saturday. I hope I didn't leave anyone out.

Lastly, thanks to the staff for working very hard under extremely trying circumstances, doing an incredible amount of work. We've received a lot of compliments about the boardwalk, Jane's Scenic and East Main Tram being cleared and reopened so quickly.



HURRICANE TALES

by Franklin Adams

A few of you have inquired about the old boat. We had been watching Wilma for several days as it slowly moved towards the Yucatan area hoping it would not come our way. Eventually, it moved out into the Gulf and began to recharge its power and to pick up speed. By Saturday morning it was the prudent thing to move the boat away from the dock on the Barron River in Everglades City while there was sufficient water depth to go to a hurricane hole. My daughter Heather, grandson Michael, and my brother John helped me. We took the boat into the entrance of Panther Creek which had a high and thick canopy of mangroves and buttonwoods that I knew would shelter the boat somewhat from the full strength of the winds. Multiple shock lines were run to the biggest mangrove trees and a storm anchor with plenty of chain was set out. After about four hours we had completed preparations and we boarded my little Orlando Clipper tin can and returned to the dock in Everglades.

After the passage of Wilma we were cutting down trees off my truck and opening the driveway all day Tuesday while wondering about the old boat. There was a curfew in Everglades and much of the town was covered with salt water and that slippery gray marl mud that storms bring into this area so we decided to go to Everglades early Wednesday morning. My son Jonathan (JT), grandson Michael, and I were cleared to enter Everglades at the checkpoint on SR-29. Reaching my brother John's house on the river we pumped out my tin can, cleaned out the marl as best we could, installed the outboard and headed up the river to see how the Albatross II had fared. It was a beautiful fall morning. As we moved up the river past the fish houses, all the crab boats looked ok. Aluminum pontoon boats and modular homes had not done well, as you would expect. Turning off the Barron River we headed the short distance to the mouth of Panther Creek. Rounding the curve we were relieved to see the old boat afloat back in the creek. After dragging numerous blue crab traps out of the mouth of the creek and cutting down mangroves from off and around the boat we were finally able to rig lines and "walk" the boat close enough to the creek entrance to start the engines and, gratefully, head home. The only damage was a ripped-out wood window frame on the starboard side and scrapes and gouges from tree limbs on the planking. We were very fortunate!

The Albatross II is a 36-foot wooden cabin cruiser which was built locally in 1951 and lovingly restored by Captain Adams. It is used for fishing, birding and nature tours. This article was taken from an email sent on 11/8/2005.

We welcome articles for the newsletter. If you have read a good book that would interest our members or traveled to another environmentally endangered area, please send 300 words or less by mail or email.

EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT

From: Nelson Tilden
Sent: Saturday, November 26, 2005 2:00 PM
Subject: Boardwalk is open!

I am happy to report that as of 12 noon, Saturday, November 26, the Boardwalk is open for business. It is completely repaired, all the old boardwalk materials have been removed and the Boardwalk has been cleaned. This is a month earlier than we first thought and it is due to the hard work of several volunteers and the rangers. Park manager Dennis committed all the resources necessary to get the job done and he was personally involved with helping. Ranger Steve carried much of the lumber from the beginning of the Boardwalk to our "staging area" at the twin bald cypress trees. Ranger Dave spent several days assisting with the construction and his hard work is very much appreciated. Ranger Jill also helped carry lumber to the site.

Many thanks to Board members Bud Scott and Jerry Winter for their help with the construction. I was fortunate to recruit two of my neighbors from the Port of the Islands RV Resort, Dick Hughes and John Ridley, who contributed several days of hard work. Caryl Tilden and Signe Backus were involved with the cleanup of the Boardwalk.

AND, SOME OF THE REPLIES:

Congratulations! The people of Florida are lucky that you are here, willing, and able to take direct action to keep a beautiful tract of land open for all. Thank you, M A Altieri, 11/27/2005

Please pass around our many thanks to all angels. Shaun Floyd, 11/26/2006

Fabulous ... I know those volunteers worked hard too ... isn't it wonderful when everyone chips in. Marney Reed, 11/26/2005

BOARDWALK REPORT by Nelson Tilden

There were 27 different areas where railing needed to be replaced. Some areas required replacement of both top boards in addition to the middle railing, while others required top railings only or middle railings only. Some areas required replacement of the railing on both sides of Boardwalk, while some sections did not. The shortest replaced section was 5.0 feet in length and the longest was 27.0 feet. The total length of replaced railing was 660.5 feet.

There were six sections where decking and the underlying stringers were destroyed. The total length of decking replaced was 63.5 feet.

FROM AN EMAIL DATED 11/28/2005

Dear Mr. Tilden,

Thank you, the rangers, and the other Friends of Fakahatchee for your prompt repair of the boardwalk. Until yesterday, we were about 1500 miles away, or we would have joined in as well.

We were just sick when we heard of the damage. That 1/2 mile is our favorite place in all of Florida -- if not the entire world. When we move along the boardwalk, into that magical setting, my wife and I feel as though we have been transported back to Eden. We usually camp in Collier Seminole State Park for a while each year, primarily so we can visit the boardwalk.

We often make it a point to come early in the morning, ahead of the other visitors. Sometimes it is foggy -- what a magnificent way to escape the world. We are personal friends with the mama gator, the egrets, the Great Blue, the ibises, the turtles, and their neighbors in the pond. Even the occasional snake is part of the special welcome from this special place. And who can describe the magnificence of the cypresses?

Forgive us if we tell only a select group of very close family and friends about the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. The stewardship provided by the Friends of Fakahatchee is very much appreciated.

*Thank you again,
Richard I. Hofferbert*

If you would like to greet visitors to the Fakahatchee Boardwalk at on US-41, please contact Nelson & Caryl Tilden at (239) 394-6588 or Signe Backus & Jerry Winters at (239) 389-7384.



NEW WEBSITE

Our website is being redesigned by the professional firm Exploritech of Naples and should be ready for testing within a few weeks. The picture above is a mock-up to give us an idea of the style and content of the site.

If you would like to submit digital photographs with a resolution of 300dpi or greater, please email them to FOF_90@hotmail.com as a .JPG file attachment.

MEMBERSHIP

We have 281 members, including 1 Benefactor and 23 Patrons. We save over \$80 in postage for each issue by sending the newsletter to 220 email addresses.

Welcome to new members who joined this fall:

- Helen Hayes, Bonita Springs
- Matt Perez, Miami
- Carol Vartanian, Sarasota



Jones Grade Clear-up

by Jim Woodard

On Saturday, December 3, we cleared Jones grade to a point beyond the second gate. Nelson Tilden and Tom Maish met Niki and me and worked the tram, photo attached. We were joined by Dennis, his mother and her husband, who were here visiting. I can't believe he works on Saturday. I want to thank them all for an outstanding job; we could not have done it without them. We will make another stab at it as soon as we can and would appreciate any help we can get.

Just past the second gate was the very fresh skeleton of a full-grown deer. It appeared to have died less than 24 hours prior. Every scrap of meat was gone to the bone with no indication that the vultures had found it. There wasn't enough left for the ants. Dennis is of the belief that a panther or bobcat was the perpetrator.

If you want to help, you can contact Jim by email at Woodardlaw@aol.com.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, a 501(c)3 corporation, is the Citizen Support Organization of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, the largest cypress stand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades. Its 80,000 acres are bordered by I-75 (Alligator Alley), US-41 and SR-29. Its neighbor north of I-75 is the Florida Panther Refuge, with whom Friends may share associate membership.

The Ghost Writer newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell, Patty Huff and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of approximately 400 copies.

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| OFFICERS: | President – John Elting | Vice-President – Allen Caldwell | | | |
| | Secretary – Betty Foster | Treasurer – Patty Huff | | | |
| BOARD: | Jenifer Adams-Mitchell | Signe Backus | Connie Bransilver | Elsa Caldwell | Rick Cruz |
| | Frank Denninger | William Mesce | Allison Nist | Bud Scott | Nelson Tilden |
| | Jerry Winters | Niki Woodard | Jim Woodard | | |