



# The Ghost Writer

**JANUARY 2006**

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

## EVENTS

### **GUIDED SWAMP WALKS**

January 3, 14, 17, 21, 28  
February 7, 11, 18, 21, 25  
March 11, 18, 21, 25  
April 4, 8, 15, 22, May 2, 13  
*reservations required!*  
*phone (239) 695-4593*

### **GUIDED CANOE TRIPS**

**schedule to be announced**  
*We need qualified volunteers to lead canoe trips. Phone John at (239) 395-3760*

### **MEMBERS' MEETING**

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

**Seafood Festival**  
**Sat/Sun, February 4/5**  
**Everglades City**

**Native American & Pioneer Festival**  
**Sat/Sun, February 18/19**  
**Collier-Seminole State Park**

**Volunteer Appreciation Weekend**  
Florida Park Service  
**March 24-26**  
Paynes Prairie Preserve  
see [www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org)

## PANTHER TALK

Park Manager Dennis Giardina will present an illustrated talk about his experiences with Florida panthers at the Members' Meeting on Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup>. Here is his introduction:

*I will be giving a presentation about capturing Florida panthers called Panther Capture 101. I have worked with the Florida Fresh Water Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Big Cypress National Preserve Panther Capture Teams since 2002 and my role has been that of the team tree climber. Although the Florida panther population has continued to increase over the past ten years since eight Texas cougar females were introduced, and the general health of the panther population has improved with the injection of their diverse, vigorous genes, it is still a geographically isolated population vulnerable to pathogens like the Feline Leukemia Virus, intra-specific aggression, human development, habitat fragmentation and increased traffic on rural roads*

*The panther population south of Lake Okeechobee may be reaching carrying capacity as more panthers compete for less territory (with often fatal results) and their migration options are becoming extremely limited. In the short term future, as more people choose to live and recreate in "panther habitat", panther recovery and management will focus more upon assuring that humans live and act respectfully of Florida panthers and that Florida panthers remain wary of and avoid us.*

Coffee will be served before the meeting starts and there will be an informal gathering for lunch in the restaurant at Port of the Islands after the lecture. Members are invited to join and order from the standard menu at their own expense. Port of the Islands is the pink building complex between Everglades City and Naples on the south side of US-41 (Tamiami Trail).

We would appreciate knowing how many people will attend the talk and the lunch. Please phone Marya at 695-2905 or email to [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com) to make reservations.

***We need volunteers to give out brochures and sell T-shirts at our booths during Seafood Festival and at the Native American & Pioneer Festival. If you can help, phone Marya at (239) 695-2905.***

## Notes from the Park

by Dennis Giardina, Manager

There are two items that I would like to mention in the newsletter; one is **grant writing**. Natural resource managers are starting to realize that there is a lot of grant money available to supplement the budgets that governmental organizations provide them. I would like to see the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve set an example for and lead the rest of the state parks in this area. Currently, the following grant proposals are in various stages of preparation and/or have been submitted:

- DEP, BIPM to contract a crew to treat **Brazilian pepper** along the southwestern border and along East Main, West Main, Mud and K-2 Trams (**\$100,000**). I have sent an e-mail to Drew Leslie to find out when we can expect this to begin.
- National Science Foundation, to hire and equip two **biological positions** for five to ten years (**\$400,000 to \$800,000**)
- National Geographic Society, to renovate a portion of the **wooden building** that is part of the former shop to provide for the office needs of the Park Biologist and the two NSF funded Biologists, storage for their equipment and vehicles, space for a laboratory and herbarium (**\$35,000**)
- USDA, National Resources Conservation Council's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, for the restoration of the **pine rockland habitat** in the northwestern section of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP, to facilitate fuel reduction, exotic plant removal, sabal palm thinning and possibly the reintroduction of red-cockaded woodpeckers (**\$35,000**)
- Division of Historical Resources, to systematically survey the **archaeological sites** at the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve SP with the help of the State Archaeologist Office (**\$25,000**).

New Ranger Jill Waisley has been instrumental in developing these grant opportunities and she, Mike Owen and I have spent many hours writing, rewriting and hammering out the details. Stay tuned

The other thing is that I would like to thank the active Friends for being **active**. Here is an example of the value of active volunteering. I was given the following instructions from Tallahassee for analyzing the cost of rebuilding the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk after Hurricane Wilma: "calculate \$185 to \$200 per linear foot". If you take the 63.5 feet of total decking and support structure replaced and multiply it times \$185, that equals \$11,747.50 If you take the 660.5 linear feet of railing replaced and drop it down to a moderate estimate of \$100 per linear foot that would equal \$66,050. Based upon this guidance, I would say that the active volunteers from the CSO Friends of Fakahatchee with help from the staff of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park rebuilt the hurricane-damaged Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk in one month, the value of which I estimate to be **\$77,524.50**

## TRAVELERS' TALES

by Tom and Judy Maish

What does the name Borneo suggest? Impenetrable forests, exotic animals, modern cities? The answer: yes to all three.

The major Cities of Malaysian Borneo (about half of the Island) are prosperous, modern and bustling: the Colonial town of Kuching, where the British White Rayah, Sir James Brooke & family ruled much of the Island for generations; Kota Kinabalu a "Naples" on the South China Sea; and several others all reflect the modernity and prosperity of Malaysia.

But a few miles outside the "burbs" you begin to step back in time. For a cultural experience; book into an authentic Iban Longhouse. Here families have private sleeping quarters; but, life revolves around the communal living room and 30 families lived together in this one. It was quite a novelty for our group of 16 new best friends; sleeping butt to jowl in the open longhouse and sharing three early Borneo bathrooms.

The Iban are quite friendly and are making the adjustment from a hunting, gathering life to farming.

Heading inland to Mt. Kinabalu, the largest peak in S.E. Asia and a wonderful area for birds and wildflowers. Orchid's aplenty and abundant. The Rafflesea (world's largest flower at 2-3 foot in diameter) grows in shaded areas.

Into Mulu National Park to visit Deer, Lang and other extensive caves that have only been explored by modern man since the 1970's. Huge underground systems with millions of bats streaming out in long lines each sunset.

We continue our travels to Orang-Utan sanctuary of Sepilok, where orphan and injured Orangs are nursed to health and taught to return to the wild. Orangutan translates to "men of the forest" - hence the term the "wild men of Borneo"?

Next, an eco-lodge on the Lemanak River. Now it starts getting more interesting. Although much of the area close to the River is planted in palms, grown for oil, the edges of the river are being protected. The result is a haven for wildlife. The proboscis monkey (with the long nose) is here and nowhere else on earth. Gibbon & numerous different families of primates all live along the river. Birds galore including Helmeted Hornbills and Rhinoceros Hornbills, Borneo's most spectacular bird.

Saving the best for last was the trip to the 275 square mile preserve of Danum Valley. After a 2-hour ride on dirt logging roads, through fantastic Diptocarp forest, one arrives at the Danum Valley Lodge. Rounding a bend on the way in we startled a Sumatran Rhinoceros (very rare!). Gibbon, Mouse deer, Lemur and finally in the wild - 'the Man of the Forest', the Orang! The trees of the Diptocarp forest towered up to 300 feet and were just starting to bloom. Walking on cable catwalks 100 feet up in the tree canopy gave an unusual view of the forest and its inhabitants.

All good trips end, but the memory lingers still.

## The Hitchhikers

by Yvonne Koolhof

In 2004 the Monarch Butterfly Society sent me seed packages of milkweed since, traditionally, this is the plant of choice for the Monarchs to lay their eggs. Unfortunately, we saw no sign of them and few other butterflies.

By August we were loading our truck and trailer to leave for the Virginia mountains. Being keen herb gardeners, we took a few herbs in pots with us. Two weeks later, six Monarch larvae appeared on our parsley – and quickly devoured the lot. I was duty-bound to continue feeding them their gourmet diet and bought more parsley until the day they were ready to pupate. We placed the pots in a woodland area and the next day the larvae were gone.

This year, the Monarchs were late and we saw fewer of them. According to a newscast, two-thirds of their Mexican habitat had been destroyed. The milkweed remained untouched. We repeated our trek to Virginia, armed with our herbs, only to find once more we had new guests!

The moral of this story? If you love the Monarchs as well as parsley, be ready to share.



*Photos of alligators at Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk courtesy of Nelson Tilden.*

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson Tilden

Based on our new electronic counter, we have had over 3200 visitors during the month of December. The volume was particularly high over the Christmas holiday break, with one day exceeding five hundred.

While there is no way to tell for sure, based on our observations of the pair of eagles, our best guess is that we should have eaglets hatch during the first ten days of January (Caryl saw them mating on November 27). In addition to our resident adult female alligator, we have several generations of juvenile alligators at the gator hole, but only 10 or 12 in this year's clutch, which is smaller than usual. We have regular sightings of raccoons, white-tailed deer, otter, red-bellied turtles, and a few snakes.

***We would really appreciate having more volunteers to greet visitors as they approach the Boardwalk. You do not need specialist knowledge ... just a cheerful smile to welcome people. If you can help, phone Jerry & Signe at (239) 389-7384.***



## SWAMP WALK SIGHTINGS

John Elting reports nothing unusual on the recent swamp walks. He did see the tracks of a panther with kitten and what he suspects is an *automeris io* moth which he rescued from drowning. He also observed a water moccasin near K2.

## NEW WEBSITE

We are proof-reading the draft website and hope to release it soon. If you would like to submit digital photographs with a resolution of 300dpi or greater, email them to FOF\_90@hotmail.com as a .JPG file attachment.

## MEMBERSHIP

We have 283 members. Renewal notices for the first quarter and reminders for the fourth quarter are included with this newsletter. Don't forget that postage goes up on January 8 so please send your check in before that or bring it to the meeting on January 7.

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## THANKS!!!

TO *Vicky Nagle* for ordering & organizing our hats, T-shirts, and other merchandise.

TO *Everglades Island Properties* and *Snook Publications* for reproducing our newsletter

TO founding members *Allen & Elsa Caldwell* for curating our scrap book

TO the students of *Venice High School* for raising \$408 which they are donating to help with the purchase of radio telemetry equipment used for tracking panthers

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## Jones Grade Clear-up

by Jim Woodard

**Saturday, 12/10:** we met Russ Clusman, Nelson Tilden, Rick Cruz, Signe Backus, Jerry Winters, and Dennis on Jones Grade. The road is now clear about 3/4s of the way from the first gate to East Main. This is about 1/2 to 2/3s of the distance from the second gate to East Main. Judging from what I see, it ain't getting any easier from here on. Saw no wildlife - not so much as a frog.

**Saturday, 12/17:** Jones Grade was cleared to East Main (gate 12) and north to Pennington Post. The total distance now clear is roughly 3 miles. Pennington Post from East Main to the western boundary now remains to be done, about 4 more miles. My sincere appreciation to Russ Clusman who put in his third of three work days, as did Niki and I. We were joined by Kevin Piotrovicz, Jean Bub, and Board Members Frank Denninger and Jennifer Adams-Mitchell. Most notably, we were assisted by Ranger Dave Henley and his friend John Deere who is welcome on all future clearing efforts.

*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.

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		