



The Ghost Writer

JANUARY 2007

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

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1st & 3rd Tuesday

2nd, 3rd, & 4th Saturday

cost: \$35 (\$30 members)

reservations (239) 695-2440

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Saturday: Dec 9,

Jan 13, Feb 17, Mar 10, Apr 14

cost: \$45 (\$40 members)

reservations (239) 695-2440

MEMBERS' DINNER

talk by Mike Owen

Saturday, Jan 20, at 5:30pm

Seafood Depot, Everglades City

phone (239) 695-2905

"Eternal Everglades"

photos by Rick Cruz

January 7 through 31

Everglades National Park

Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center

SR-9336, Homestead

"Biking thru Iceland"

illustrated talk by Tim Andrus

Friday, Jan 12, at 6:30pm

Rookery Bay NERR

see www.rookerybay.org

Annual Birding Festival

January 19-21, 2007

Rookery Bay NERR

phone (239) 437-6130 ext. 213

see www.rookerybay.org

"WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE"

That is the title of a presentation that biologist Mike Owen will give on **Saturday, January 20**, during a dinner meeting. This is the first of a series of exciting events planned for members.

Mike's talk will cover the importance of water in the Fakahatchee, especially in relation to our rare plant life. He has been studying the area since he came here in 1993 and has made some interesting observations.

Although born in Georgia, Mike grew up in St Petersburg, has been interested in biology ever since he can remember, and graduated from the University of South Florida in Tampa. He was a ranger in Koreshan State Park before moving to the Fak. Although he has taken additional courses at FGCU, he says "*my classroom is out doors*".

The **special members' evening** begins with dinner at the Seafood Depot Restaurant in Everglades City. Please arrive around 5:30pm for the buffet at 6:00pm. The cost is \$20 per person and includes a choice of main course, salad, veggies, plus desert and coffee or tea. You can also renew your membership and bring friends who would like to join.

Numbers are limited. Please reserve by phoning (239) 695-2905 or emailing FOF_90@hotmail.com.

CALL FOR HELP FROM NEIGHBORS

Collier Seminole, our sister State Park just up the road towards Naples, is planning their annual "Native American and Pioneer Festival" which takes place this year on the weekend of **February 17-18**. The event includes a re-enactment each day of the Third Seminole War, live music, and demonstrations of traditional crafts.

The Friends of Collier Seminole have asked us for help. They need volunteers to direct traffic, collect entrance fees, serve ice cream, set up the sound system, and generally be available for the little jobs that make a festival run smoothly.

If you can help, please phone Chad Lach at (239) 394-3397 or email him at chad.loach@dep.state.fl.us.

Long before the Panthers Came ...

The Marco Island Historical Society invites the public to a talk on **Tuesday, January 9**, about pre-historic animals (mammoths, mastodons, giant sloths and saber-toothed cats) in Florida and their environment. The speaker is Greg McDonald, Senior Curator of Natural History with the National Park Museum Management Program in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The talk takes place at 7:30pm (arrive at 7:00pm for refreshments) in St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 1101 North Collier Boulevard, Marco Island. For more information, phone Cindy Anderson at 239-393-0656.

Biking the Fakahatchee

By Patty Huff



Most visitors come to enjoy the Fakahatchee by walking the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk or one of the Gates (old trams) off Janes Scenic Drive. There are a few of us, though, who like to experience a ride (bike ride) up Janes Scenic. In fact, it is the best way to travel through the Preserve on this particular trail before all the potholes are filled in. The traffic is light (which is always a plus for bikers) and it is easy to maneuver around the holes on just two wheels.

On Saturday, December 30, my husband Steve and I packed a picnic lunch and headed north out of Everglades City around 9:30 a.m. After leaving Carnestown, we were happy to be riding along SR-29 to the turnoff at Copeland. Since the County recently paved the highway and added shoulders to this stretch of 29, it is so much more enjoyable to watch the birds, alligators and other wildlife along the canal rather than worrying about the traffic.

It is just 7.5 miles from our home to the entrance of the Fakahatchee Strand at Janes Scenic Drive. We passed the prairie populated with blue herons, egrets and woodstorks. The swamp lilies were in bloom and the weather was perfect, a little cool with a few clouds. The most beautiful part, however, was farther along as we reached the shady area surrounded by palm trees and the vegetation of the swamp. It was almost another 11 miles before we left the Fakahatchee and entered Picayune State Forest which is undergoing major reconstruction with the first canal being filled in and then long lonely stretches of the former "south blocks." We rode on Stewart Road for 6 miles before coming to Everglades Boulevard where we biked north to I-75 and had our little picnic along on old trail road.

As we biked back, we stopped to chat with a fisherman who said he had been coming here to fish in these canals for 37 years. He said it was some of the best fishing he had ever had. He had not heard about the filling in of the canals nor the restoration of the area. He just loved to fish. We also ran into another family in a pick-up truck and they were asking us why the place was so torn up. There's a lot of work to be done to bring the Everglades back as it was a hundred years ago. As we rode back in the beautiful shady areas of Janes Scenic, we crossed paths with some hikers, one whose family had owned property in the Fakahatchee for many years. He remembers hunting and exploring the area as a child, and of diving from a platform at Deep Lake.

Fakahatchee has to be my favorite park in southwest Florida, so natural and so wonderful that it is open for all of us to explore and enjoy by whatever means we choose. For me, it's biking Janes Scenic.

FROM THE PARK MANAGER

by Dennis Giardina

In December, CSO President John Elting sent a letter on behalf of the Friends of Fakahatchee to the Florida Park Service District and Tallahassee offices outlining two of the major issues that face the Preserve: the maintenance of Janes Scenic Drive and the decay of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. Apparently his letter was taken seriously.

Bureau Chief Valinda Subic and Assistant Bureau Chief Ezell "BJ" Givens visited the Preserve on December 20 to observe the conditions of the Boardwalk and Janes Scenic Drive. John Elting and Nelson Tilden accompanied the Bureau Chiefs while we drove down Janes Scenic Drive on the big swamp buggy (hitting every bump and pot hole) and we discussed these issues and several others, including the construction of the Visitor Information Center at the Preserve office and the site of the Environmental Education Center that will hopefully be built sometime in the next five to ten years. After lunch, Nelson Tilden guided them along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, pointing out the decay of the support structure and talking about the options, short and long term to repair and ultimately replace it. Later Park Biologist Mike Owen and I visited the borrow pit lakes at the I-75 /SR-29 intersection to discuss the Unit Management Plan revision that will occur sometime in 2008.

In the weeks that have passed, one contractor has visited Janes Scenic Drive and Jones Grade Road to prepare a bid for a maintenance contract. Other contractors are scheduled to visit and bid on our road maintenance and an engineer is scheduled to analyze the structure and safety of the Boardwalk sometime this month. Valinda and BJ have only occupied their current positions since July 1, but they are long-time Florida Park Service employees and they are both very personable and communicative individuals. They have been very supportive of me personally and attentive to the needs of the Fakahatchee. I would like to thank John Elting and Nelson Tilden for their service to the Fakahatchee, bringing these and other issues to the attention of the Bureau Chiefs.

On an unrelated note: I know some of you are interested to hear about the whale shark adventure that Mike Owen and I had in November. Stay tuned...



BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden

This was a month of increasing volume at the boardwalk, with almost 5000 people coming to visit. We were also visited by our new Florida Parks District Bureau Chief, Valinda Subic, and her assistant. They got a first-hand look at the physical condition of the boardwalk and promised to send an engineer to check its structural integrity.

We were pleased to see our pair of **American Bald Eagles** return to the nest this month, and many visitors have seen them flying to and from the nest, and sitting on the nest. We are hoping to have a chick or two during the first two weeks of January.

We had two different **Florida Black Bear** sightings this month. Both encounters were accompanied by pictures. Two bears were photographed about 50 feet from the boardwalk, and another bear was standing on the boardwalk.

As our seasonal water levels continue to fall we are able to see more juvenile **alligators** basking at the gator hole, along with one or both of our resident adult females. As of now we have still had no confirmed sightings of "newborn" alligators from this past fall. With all of the additional Alligator Flag we have as a result of the increased sunlight, the newest alligators may be still hidden from view.

We have had several juvenile and adult **black-crowned night herons** on an almost daily basis, along with more **wood storks** than we have seen in previous years. We have had several large **Florida banded water snakes** which have chosen to occupy branches very near the boardwalk, giving us an opportunity to show visitors how to identify them, and especially how to differentiate them from cottonmouths. One **river otter** has recently appeared, and is particularly entertaining to visitors.

We always enjoy having Friends of the Fakahatchee out on the boardwalk, and we hope you will visit soon.



Jim Woodard took this photo (in poor light) of a pileated woodpecker on the Boardwalk on December 17. He describes it as "a beautiful bird; very large and not commonly seen".



We received this report and photo by email on Dec 3rd.
Thought you might like a few photos we took on our holiday on the 14th of November 2006 of a Florida Black Bear. She? was leisurely walking along the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk and frightened three ladies who we never saw for dust as the bear jumped up onto the boardwalk at the very end by the gator pool.

We hoped we would one day see a bear in our travels but were not expecting to share the boardwalk with it.

Martin & Hilary King, Haverhill, Suffolk, England & Lehigh Acres, Lee County FL.



Ranger Jill Waisley had a rare Christmas morning treat when she spotted a **crested caracara** (her photos above) near the rock pit. The vulture-sized bird with black head plumage can be seen in mid-Florida but this is the first time a sighting has been recorded in the Fakahatchee. It is on the Federal list as a "threatened" species.

MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 241 paid-up members plus 18 in arrears from the 4th quarter of 2006 who have been sent final reminders with this newsletter.

Renewal notices for 1st quarter 2007 have also gone out by post with the news. *PLEASE* try to pay by the end of the month so we do not have to waste postage sending reminders.

Welcome to new members:

- Bill & Ginny Marshall, Marco Island
- Michele Cooke, Miami
- Travis Kimmel, Miami
- Cody Kimmel, Miami

THANKS to Mayor Sammy Hamilton of Everglades City for letting us have our meetings in the Council Chamber.

THANKS to Glades Realty of Everglades City for printing our newsletter this month.



This woodcut entitled *Fakahatchie Swamp* by former Big Cypress National Preserve artist-in-residence Mollie Doctrow won an Award of Excellence at the Founders' Exhibit at the Von Liebig Art Center in Naples this winter.

The current artist, Karen Glaser, will present her work and experiences as an aquatic photographer on **Wednesday, January 10**, at 1:00 p.m. at the Preserve Headquarters in Ochopee.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve**, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit 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, SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

The Ghost Writer newsletter is edited by Jenifer Adams-Mitchell and Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation over 300 copies. (c) 2006, FOF. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter, including pictures, may be reproduced without permission.

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

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)

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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