



# The Ghost Writer

MARCH 2007

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

## EVENTS

### GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday

2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday

cost: \$35 (\$30 members)

reservations (239) 695-2440

### GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

Mar 10, Apr 14

cost: \$45 (\$40 members)

reservations (239) 695-2440

### ANNUAL PICNIC

Sunday, March 11 at 11:00am

meet at Gate 12 off Janes Drive

reservations (239) 695-2905

### GRUNWALD TALK

Friday, March 16 at 7:30pm

see FHC invitation on this page

reservations (239) 695-2905

### AMAZING ADVENTURES

Expedition to Australia

Friday, March 9 at 6:00pm

reservations (239) 417-6310

see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org)

### **LAST CHANCE!**

**Thursday, March 1** is the deadline for nominations for the Board, so it is **URGENT** that you send suggestions for Directors to stand at the election to James Woodard, 17001 SW 90 Ave, Miami, FL, 33157, or [FriendsOfFakahatchee@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfFakahatchee@hotmail.com)  
For info, phone (305) 856-4559.

## GUITAR JAM AT PICNIC

Besides the roast pig, delicious side dishes, and raffle with multiple valuable prizes, an informal musical session will feature this year at the **Annual Picnic on Sunday, March 11**. It all happens at Ballard Camp, the lovely secluded cabin with alligator-filled pond which we have been invited to use by the Brittain family.

Arrive around 11:00 a.m. at Gate 12 (about 6.5 miles up Janes Scenic Drive) and you will be ferried in to the camp by swamp buggy or antique troop carrier. You can bring guests if they want to become members on the spot and can renew your own membership there. And, please don't forget your musical stringed instruments (guitar, fiddle, etc) to join in the jam!

*It is essential to make reservations!* Phone (239) 695-2905 or email.

## GRUNWALD TALK

The Florida Humanities Council extends an exclusive invitation to FOF members to attend a presentation on **Friday, March 16**, by award-winning Washington Post reporter **Michael Grunwald**, author of the book *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise*.

As part of the Florida Humanities Council's cultural tourism program, "The Gathering", Grunwald will track the political forces and evolving attitudes that have had major impacts on the Everglades over the years. During the weekend of March 16-18 "Gathering" participants will visit Everglades City to explore the history and culture of the area. Their activities will include a swamp hike through the Fakahatchee with Park biologist Mike Owen and/or a tour of the Boardwalk.

Grunwald's speech will begin around 7:30 pm at the Seafood Depot and is followed by a book signing. *Space is limited and reservations are required.* Email [FOF\\_90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF_90@hotmail.com) or phone Marya at (239) 695-2905

FOF members will meet informally at 6:00pm for a meal in the restaurant before joining the FHC group.

## OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST IN THE AREA

Thursday, March 1: deadline for Amateur Photo Contest (in conjunction with Marco CCC event on March 10), phone (239) 389-5003.

Sunday, March 4: Everglades Scenic Bike Tours with History Quiz, see [www.naplespathways.org](http://www.naplespathways.org)

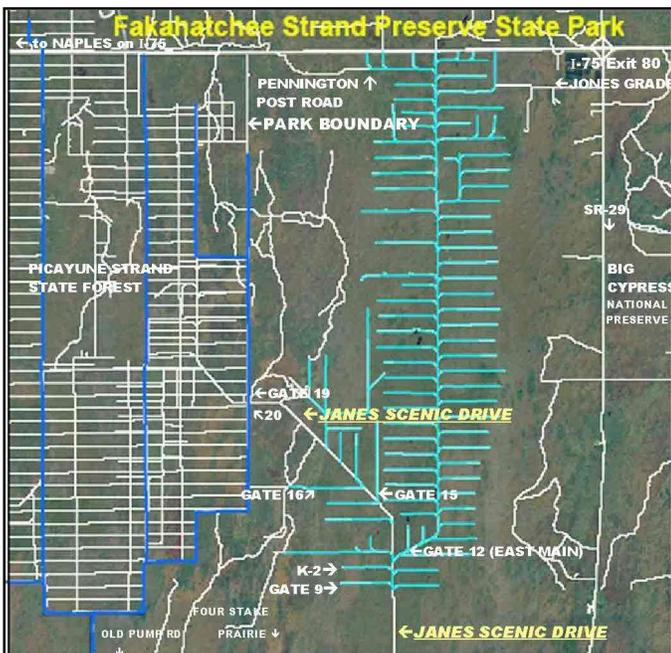
Thursday, March 8: "Cause for Paws", first event in Florida Panther Week, see [www.floridapanther.com](http://www.floridapanther.com) or phone (239) 353-8442 ext 222

Saturday, March 10: Community Conservation Celebration, Marco Island, phone Nancy Richie at (239) 389-5003

Saturday, March 24: Southwest Florida History & Archaeology Festival, Rookery Bay, phone (239) 417-6310 or see [www.rookerybay.org](http://www.rookerybay.org).



Thanks to everyone who helped with our booth at the Native American & Pioneer Festival at Collier Seminole State Park over the weekend of February 17-18: Nelson Tilden (above), Maureen Magee, Dan & Terry Wilson, Jenifer Adams-Mitchell, and Cathy Hatch. And, thanks also to the organizers (mostly volunteers from their CSO) who provided tents and tables for the exhibitors.



A new trails map has been produced from an aerial image and labeled painstakingly by Jim Woodard, who also wrote a one-page narrative describing many of the trails. Copies in black & white are available at the office but the full-color version can be printed from [www.FriendsOfFakahatchee.org](http://www.FriendsOfFakahatchee.org). Select "About The Preserve" and click on the link for the map.

## BOARDWALK REPORT

by Nelson & Caryl Tilden

February has brought increasing numbers of visitors to the boardwalk, peaking on the 18<sup>th</sup> with 560. The water levels in the swamp have continued to fall, making the **gator hole** a popular sanctuary for many diving and wading birds. Several **anhingas** and other kinds of birds have displayed their fishing skills on a daily basis.

Two adult **bald eagles** have been evident on and around the nest for most of the winter, but mid-February saw the emergence of **two eaglets** for the first time. They were most likely born during the last two weeks of January. **Red shouldered hawks** have been especially plentiful, but visible nest building has not been reported. **Barred owls** are often heard, but only rarely seen, this winter. Last winter a pair of barred owls raised two chicks in full view of the boardwalk.

A single **river otter** has been observed both at the pond by the picnic tables, and at the left pond near the end of the boardwalk. The river otter is one of the most interesting and popular sights with visitors, while the most surprising to them may be the **white-tailed deer** which they don't expect to see in the swamp. Another recent attraction was a **juvenile opossum** that lingered around the boardwalk for half an hour seemingly posing for pictures. Opossums are commonly seen around Southwest Florida, but somewhat rare in the area of the boardwalk.

In late February and March, visitors will see **railing repairs** in progress. Some railings will receive new braces to strengthen them, while many will get new tops. It is estimated that some of the current railings are more than 25 years old. We are grateful to Park Manager Dennis Giardina and the State for providing the 2 x 4's for the railing repairs. The Park has also funded two new **portable toilets** at the entrance to the boardwalk.

*Guided walks are provided upon request and anyone interested should call Caryl or Nelson Tilden at (716) 640-1336.*

## Fuzzy Wuzzy on Parade

by Jack Berninger

On February 9, 2007, Elaine Berninger, Ken Lange, and I conducted a population count of *Tillandsia pruinosa* (Fuzzy Wuzzy Air Plant) along Jones Grade in the Fakahatchee Strand. We found 34 of these plants on parade in different vehicles of various sizes. Thirty-two plants preferred the south side of the tram while only two were northerners. Why? All were found on the west side of the gate just past the gator hole.

The first one encountered was riding high 4 meters up on a south-side cypress. Following in line was one on a Myrsine, then one on a Pop Ash, and three youngsters found by Ken on dead twigs, all 1 to 2 meters above ground. These were the first youngsters found, each measuring 1 to 2 centimeters tall. Pond apple vehicles were preferred by the next two plants at the same height.

One of the right-siders on a Myrsine was trying to outshine the left-siders with a large orchid *Habineria odontopetala* two meters below on the ground.

Elaine was a persistent, good spotter and found the next group of left-siders, all traveling 1 to 2 meters above ground, two on a Wild Coffee and four on a Red Maples, followed by one on a Myrsine.

I then spotted a right-sider Big Daddy (about 18 cm. long) 4 meters high on a Red Bay. Right across from that, 1 to 2 meters above ground was an unusual *pruinosa* that had the flowering spike bract dark green in color rather than the usual red. Why? A lot of very small ants were crawling all over the plant; they may have had their nest at the base of the plant. Could the ants have affected the color?

The next plant, at the same height, was found on a dead twig.

Ken found the next "fuzzy wuzzy nursery": two baby plants on a Short Leaf Fig along with two adults, all 1 to 2 meters above the ground. The next one was on a cut branch lying on the ground under a beautiful Mackerel Sky.

We then stumbled on "fuzzy wuzzy ville", a group of ten plants consisting of six adults and four youngsters all on a 7.5cm diameter Myrsine 1 to 2 meters above the ground.

This was the end of the parade. No more were found on this part of the tram which was about a 1000 meter section. We hoped to find some in flower but all flower spikes were old, dried out, from earlier flowering. It seems, as supported by last year's count, that *pruinosa* blooms in early January.

## Field Study of Hand Fern

by Jack Berninger

The Hand Fern (*Cheiroglossa Palmata*) is an endangered species found in the Fakahatchee Strand. My wife Elaine and I have been conducting a population count with Relative Humidity measurements and Poison Ivy presence along a 1000-meter section of a tram off Janes Scenic Drive. We have found that this tram has the largest population of fern while another tram has only two specimens and a third tram has just one.

These past three years have shown a substantial decrease in the population of *Cheiroglossa* along this tram. All counts were conducted in January. The first year, 2005, had 20 ferns; 2006 had 17; and 2007 had only 11 of the ferns along the same section of the tram. The largest of the ferns was missing in 2006 which was located near a habitation site. Another plant located 5 meters away was absent in 2007. There is some evidence on two Sabal Palms of possible removal of the fern.

The comparison of populations on the south and north sides of the trams over the years is interesting.

	south	north
2005	9	11
2006	7	10
2007	7	4

Clearly, the north side had the greater loss. Hurricane Wilma and the subsequent vegetation loss in 2006 caused greater exposure to sunlight for the north-side plants since they face south. Could this have produced some of the loss?

Relative Humidity readings were taken along the tram. The R.H. readings were fairly constant 90-91% range until the first Hand Fern location; there the R.H. readings were in the 75-79% range and remained so for the next 1000 meters of the locations. As indicated these past two years, R.H. seems to be of the environmental factors regulating Hand Fern habitat.

Poison Ivy may also be a limiting factor. The ivy was found on most of the Sabal Palms but was not growing on the trees in which Hand Ferns were located; only one of these trees had a small poison ivy vine at the base.

In conclusion, the Hand Fern is declining in numbers along this tram, probably due to several factors: collecting, change in environmental conditions, and Poison Ivy invasion.

*Jack & Elaine Berninger are FOF members from Ohio who visit each winter. Apologies to them for not printing the Hand Fern study in our last issue.*

## MEMBERSHIP

We have a total of 263 members including 24 who should have renewed in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of this year. There are also 8 in arrears from the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2006 who will be dropped.

The newsletter is sent by email to 236 members, a saving of \$92 in postage for each issue. If you do not have an email address, you can still see the photos in color by using the local library computers to visit our website and look at the newsletter.

### Welcome to new members:

Bridget Donahue, Naples  
 Susan Naselli, Ft Myers  
 Barbara Jean Powell, Miami  
 Scott & Mary Ellen Winkelman, Skaneateles, NY



### "MISSING GHOST"

The picture above is the last one ever taken of the Ghost Orchid which was stolen in July, 2005, from the Fakahatchee. Less than two weeks after it was photographed, the host tree was chopped down by poachers.

The image, snapped by member Jay Staton, is part of the display of **Florida's flora and fauna at Rookery Bay** until March 8 and he has generously offered to donate 20% of the sales to the Fakahatchee.

This Ghost had been very productive, showing at least one bloom in each of the last three years. Mike Owen, Karen Relish, and Jay had taken measurements of its root growth and flower size over the years as part of continuing research on the life span of the orchids. A sad story that it has been destroyed!



### CALLING ALL MUSICIANS!!

Bring your guitar to the Annual Picnic on Sunday, March 11, and join in an informal jam session at idyllic Ballard Camp while the hog roasts and we all munch on chips with salsa. RSVP to (239) 695-2905.

## What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Inc**, 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 mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee is to aid in the preservation of this ecologically unique area and to educate the public about its importance.*

*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) 2007, 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	
	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)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

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### MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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