



The Ghost Writer

MAY 2005

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

October through March
1st & 3rd Tuesday, 2nd Saturday
also: 11/26 & 12/27
no reservations until September

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

none scheduled

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

NOTES

WEBSITE. *We need an experienced volunteer to work on the website. Phone Marya at (239) 695-2905 or email to our address.*

Thanks to all our members who turned out on April 2nd at the Panther Refuge and volunteered their time to work on the new boardwalk there

Mike Needs Help!

If you know of a student looking for volunteer work this summer, Mike wants someone to type up his wildlife sightings (like the ones in MO-ZONE) into an Excel data base on his new computer.

Have a great summer!

M•O•Z•O•N•E

SEEN AROUND THE STRAND

For the first time in his 11 years here, Mike Owen saw an **Indigo Bunting** in the Fakahatchee. On April 26, he and Jill Waisley were in Dan House Prairie and spotted the male beauty around 3:15pm. Ranger Steve Houseknecht also saw it around the same time of day on May 5. Other interesting birds that have been observed are: **Great White Heron** near the Faka Union Canal on 3/31; **Yellow-Billed Cuckoo** by Jill and Karen Relish on 5/2, by Mike on 5/6 near West Main and on 4/20 near Jones Grade; **Swallow-Tailed Kite** on 4/5 flying over Four-Stake Prairie, three in the same place on 4/25, on 4/26 over the office and on 4/16 by Jim & Niki Woodard; **Red-Tailed Hawk** on 4/25 at Four-Stakes Prairie and on 5/11 a pair over Dan House Prairie and another pair on NoName Prairie. Mike and Jill are taking part in the Breeding Bird Point Count which will monitor the impact of Everglades Restoration.

Ranger Steve saw four pairs of adult **Florida Mottled Ducks** with 7 or 8 juveniles in a marsh on US41 west of SR29 on 5/2 and immature **Bald Eagles** have been reported on 4/1 near Lake Gloria by Don Harmon, on 4/10 near the Boardwalk, and soaring over Dan House Prairie on 5/11 which may have been one of our Boardwalk nestlings. Niecy Falls saw an adult Bald Eagle near the office on 4/29.

There were **Deer** sightings on 4/1 on East Main (a yearling) and on Janes' Drive (a female); eating new grass in the burnt area of Dan House Prairie on 4/5 (doe & yearling, two adults), 4/25 (deer & doe) near Janes' Drive and on 4/20 near Jones Grade. Some unusual mammals were a **Bobcat** crossing the Union Road on 4/26, **Green Anole** on 4/21 near the office and on 4/16 near Dave's house; an **Oak Toad** on 4/25 in Dan House Prairie; three **Manatees** in the Barron River Canal (north of US41 and east of SR29); and 33 (thirty-three) **Alligators** of all ages at Ballard pond on 4/1. The Woodards got a fleeting glimpse of a probable **Panther** on 4/16 between Gates 9 and 12 around 10:00am.

Mike saw a live **Rough Green Snake**, for the first time in at least two years, on 5/11 north of Gate 1 and a **Cottonmouth Snake** on 4/20 on Jones Grade. He also noted on 4/5 near West Main a **Giant Sphynx Moth**, the pollinator of Ghost Orchids. All we need now is some rain, to encourage the orchids and to discourage more wildfires.

To volunteer for wildlife observation or to report sightings, phone Fakahatchee's resident biologist Mike Owen on (239) 695-2886

THANKS to Everglades Island Properties and Snook Publications for printing our newsletters and membership brochures.

Letter from FOF President John Elting

As we near the end of another 'season' in the Fakahatchee, I want to thank all of our members for their financial support and, in particular, those members and directors who devoted countless hours on behalf of the Friends. Some of those individuals I have noted previously: Allen and Elsa Caldwell, Betty Foster, Marya Repko, Jim Woodard; others deserve note: Franklin Adams, Barbara Brown, Signe Backus, Bill Mesce, Jennifer Adams Mitchell, Bud Scott, Sarah Skoglund, Nelson and Caryl Tilden, and Jerry Winters.

Our 2004/2005 season was a success due to the efforts of these people and others. I hope that next year even more members will step forward and volunteer their time. *We need your help!*

Our membership has grown over the last year and we now have close to 300 members. Our partnership with the Panther Refuge has been a success with new members added to both organizations and volunteers helping with projects on both sides of I-75.

Both our boardwalk and swamp walk programs went extremely well despite low water conditions. The boardwalk was crowded and the swamp walks booked solid. Our canoe trip program is up in the air for next season. Without the rangers' participation, we will need guides from our membership to ensure the program continues.

The Park and the Friends have tentative plans, subject to Park approval, to construct or renovate two volunteer facilities: Cypress House on the north end of the Park, and a campground facility for tents and trailers at Port of the Islands. Hopefully, work on these two facilities will begin this summer.

On Tuesday, May 3rd, the board of the Friends of the Fakahatchee met with Mike Murphy and Robert Wilhelm from the State Parks Department District #4 to discuss the proposed visitor center at the junction of I75/SR29 as outlined in the Unit Management Plan. We voiced our unanimous opposition to the proposed center; in particular, to the resurfacing of Jones Grade and the construction of three new boardwalks. We are receptive to new signage and an interpretive center at or near the existing ranger station, but remain steadfast in our opposition to anything that would threaten the pristine nature of the Preserve. Mr. Murphy said that he would respond to the Board as soon as possible.

Finally, I wish to thank, on behalf of the entire membership, those Board members whose terms are up but who will continue to serve the Friends in various capacities. Our historian Franklin Adams, our tireless secretary Betty Foster, past-president and devoted member Patty Huff, Jack Horner who has kept us solvent and financially honest.

I would also like to welcome our new board members: Connie Bransilver, Rick Cruz, Frank Denninger, Jennifer Adams Mitchell, Bud Scott and Nelson Tilden. All of these new directors have served us well in various capacities and I'm sure will continue to do so in the future.

Annual Members' Meeting

About 20 members gathered on May 7th at Port of the Island for the Annual Meeting. Topics discussed included: the talk with Mike Murphy from District headquarters, sale of artwork in the Park office, design for T-shirts and hats, better communication with the public, and liaison with Park staff. After Committee reports, the main business of the meeting was the election results for the Board; all six candidates were confirmed. A list of the full Board is in the *What are We? Who are We?* section on the last page of this newsletter.

The meeting concluded with an informative lecture by Franklin Adams about Mel Finn, who he knew personally. President John Elting presented the Annual Mel Finn Award to someone who has "been fighting for years" to preserve our wilderness. Much to his surprise, the recipient this year was Franklin himself.

MEL FINN AWARD

by Allen Caldwell

Each year at the Annual Members' Meeting, the Mel Finn Award is presented to the Friends of the Fakahatchee Strand member who, during the past year, has dedicated his or her time to benefit the Strand in the true spirit of Mel Finn.

Mel Finn (1916-1971) was a Miami lawyer and conservationist whose personal crusade was to save the Fakahatchee Strand from being overlooked as "just another Florida swamp", and to convince the State to fund acquisition for preservation.

Finn knew that despite the environmental damage caused by extensive logging that occurred in the 40s and 50s, Fakahatchee was home to rare and endangered fauna and flora, including 43 species of native orchids, 14 bromeliads, the Florida panther and the Everglades mink. He took it upon himself to raise awareness among environmental groups and politicians, and did not waver until he could arrange for and lead a delegation of political dignitaries into the swamp to see for themselves, just how special the Fakahatchee is. Unfortunately, his dream was not realized until after his death, but his tenacity is what ultimately led to the Fakahatchee becoming a state preserve.

Some years back the Friends of the Fakahatchee dedicated a plaque to Mel Finn. It is located prominently on a stone in front of the Park office.

FRANKLIN ADAMS GETS MEL FINN AWARD by Marya Repko

It is so appropriate (and probably way overdue) that Franklin Adams was recognized with our only award, not only for what he has done this year but for a whole lifetime dedicated to conservation in Florida.

His biographical notes read like a catalog of groups dedicated to preserving what is special in South Florida: Friends of the Everglades, Big Cypress Nature Center, Florida Native Plant Society, Florida Wildlife Federation, Picayune State Forest Liaison Committee, Friends of Florida State Forests, Conservancy of Southwest Florida and, of course, Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve.

But, before that last one, add Save the Fakahatchee Strand Swamp Committee. It was here that he was involved with Mel Finn, from the 1960's onward and helped to show the bigwigs around the Strand in April 1970, a turning point in the committee's quest to preserve the Fakahatchee.

Franklin was born in Miami and was introduced to the Everglades by his father, a surveyor in the newly-established National Park. They came to our area to hunt and fish when Franklin was a child and then in high school he read Marjory Stoneman Douglas' book *River of Grass*. He finally met the famous "mother of the Glades" at Dade Junior College and eventually became a trusted member of "Marjory's Army", driving her to meetings and heading the Collier County branch of Friends of the Everglades. She wrote in her autobiography *Voice of the River* that he became "one of the most effective environmentalists in Florida" and "a wonderful speaker".

On his professional side, Captain Franklin Adams is a guide but that is hardly a complete description of his "day job". He meticulously restored the historic 36-foot wooden cabin cruiser Albatross-II which is docked on the Barron River and offers wildlife and birding as well as fishing tours. His paper qualification is USCG Master Native Florida Guide; he does not advertise that he received the National Hall of Fame Award from the Izaak Walton League of America or the Guy Bradley Award from the Collier County Audubon Society.

Although Franklin has retired from the FOF Board after serving the maximum two successive terms, he will continue as historian – which is apt since he observed and/or influenced much of our past.

Field Study Report

by Jack Berninger
(eberninger@netscape.com)

Distribution and Population Count of Hand Fern (*Cheiroglossa Palmata*) in Fakahatchee Strand.

On January 28th, 2005, my wife Elaine and I conducted a population count of the Hand Fern. The population in the location we examined is limited to a small section of approximately 1000 meters. It will be interesting to see if the population expands with increased water flow into the Strand.

All were found on 20 different Sabal Palms in a stretch of about 1000 meters. This is the best distribution I am aware of in the Fakahatchee.

Some concerns that need investigation:

1. Poison Ivy as a limiting factor on *Cheiroglossa*?
2. Why is *Cheiroglossa* limited to such a short section?
3. Why is it found along one tram in greater numbers than along other trams?
4. What dew point factors regulate *Cheiroglossa*?

We love the Fakahatchee and will continue the Hand Fern study each year.

We are also interested in doing a field study of Bird Nest Fern (*Asplenium Serratum*) but only know of one specimen. Do any members have information on other populations?

BOARDWALK NEWS

A work crew consisting of Ranger Dave Henley and volunteers Caryl & Nelson Tilden, Signe Backus, Jerry Winters, and Bud Scott rebuilt 18 feet of the boardwalk in two days. As Jerry said "we only have half a mile more to go, so we definitely need help next season!".

Ranger Steve Houseknecht and office assistant Niecy Falls met with Jerry, Signe, Caryl and Nelson to plan the handling of future tours on the boardwalk and a possible children's program.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 270 paid-up members, 82 of whom have become associated with the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge. Unfortunately, we dropped 25 delinquent members who did not send in their renewals and 9 people who indicated that they wished to be dropped. Notices for those who joined in the second quarter are being sent with this newsletter.

The geographical distribution of our membership is: Naples (74), Everglades/Chokoloskee (28), Miami (22), Ft Myers (21), Marco/Goodland (12), Bonita Springs & Estero (12) with some members as far away as St Pete and the Palm Beach area. There are also a few out-of-state addresses without winter homes in Florida.

We save about \$77 on each issue of the newsletter because 209 members receive their copies via the Internet. *If we do not have your email address*, please send it to FOF_90@hotmail.com

NEWS GROUP NOT OURS!

The Yahoo news group listed under the name **Fakahatchee_Friends on the Internet** is not officially associated with us. Any messages left there for swamp walks or canoe trips are not monitored by our organization.

Newsletter Production

We welcome articles or ideas from members. Let us know what you would like to read about: more nature observation? organizational matters? developments at the Park? news from other State and Federal Parks?

If you have read a book that you recommend, please write a short review for us. Or, if you have been on an interesting trip, write an open letter describing what you saw that may be relevant to Fakahatchee members.

Contact Marya at our email address or by phone on (239) 695-2905 or send your article to P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139.

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		

ANNUAL FOF MEMBERSHIP

date _____

Please make check payable to "FOF" and send to: **FOF Membership, P.O.Box 35, Everglades City, FL, 34139**

Individual (\$15) Family (\$20) Business (\$40) Patron (\$100) Benefactor (\$500)
 associate membership with Friends of Florida Panther Refuge (add \$5.00)

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MONTHS AT ALTERNATE ADDRESS:

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