



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

Fabulous Fak film draws 70 to dinner

Filmmaker Richard Kern captivated 70 attendees as he narrated his Ghosts of the Western Everglades documentary film at the Everglades Adventure Center December 17. Kern's spectacular photography captured the flora, fauna and spirit of the Fakahatchee and earned the presenter an extended round of applause. It also earned him high praise from Park Biologist Mike Owen who told Kern: "Your film does the best job I have seen of capturing the magic of the Fakahatchee."



Earlier in the evening, Friends of Fakahatchee President Francine Stevens, introduced new park manager Steve Houseknecht and his staff and praised their work "for making the park a place we are proud to support." At the close of the evening, attendees crowded around Kern to chat and purchase copies of his film. As a surprise holiday gift, everyone received origami ghost orchids, courtesy of Kit Kittinger.



Francine Stevens praises park staff



Gayle and Tom Norton with Richard Kern

Pick Brazilian pepper for a holiday accent

Looking for a bright accent to perk up your holiday table display? FOF member Janet Bunch has an interesting suggestion—invasive Brazilian pepper. The plant originally made its way to the United State in the mid-1800s as an ornamental but rapidly became a troublesome invasive as its bright red berries were rapidly dispersed by birds and mammals.

When the holiday is over, Bunch says it is important to discard your Brazilian pepper in the household trash instead of with plant waste. “That way the berries will probably be incinerated, so you are making a small contribution in the fight against this invasive plant.”

To differentiate the native Dahoon holly from Brazilian pepper, Bunch offers these guidelines: Brazilian pepper has numerous peppercorn sized berries, while holly berries are larger, rounder and less prolific. Brazilian Pepper has compound leaves on each stem; holly leaves are single, have pointed tips and are much thicker and quite shiny. Brazilian pepper leaves actually smell like pepper when crushed. Dahoon holly is a protected plant in Florida and is an important food source for birds and small mammals.

As the new year begins, Bunch will take a more active role in the fight against Brazilian pepper. As a Lee County Parks volunteer she will fight the attractive invader with a pair of loppers and a herbicide sprayer.

Below, Brazilian pepper is at left, Dahoon holly is at right.



Brazilian pepper is has peppercorn sized fruit.



The native Dahoon holly is important to wildlife.

Put your talents to work on the FOF board

Interested in putting your talents to work to improve the Friends of Fakahatchee and support the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park? Consider joining the FOF board of directors. Applications are being accepted through January 27, 2017.

The Board generally meets monthly and is responsible for the operation of the Friends of Fakahatchee, raising and managing funds and working closely with park staff in the field and the office.

Members are elected to serve two year terms limited to a maximum of six years. The Board is seeking applicants who have a background in accounting, fund-raising, environmental science, communications and public relations and general management.

Please contact Ted DeGroot, ted@all-florida.com, (239) 248-8788 to nominate yourself or get more information.

TripAdvisor lets visitors share their experience

At the end of a tram ride or swamp walk, many participants thank Glen Stacell or Patrick Higgins for a great experience. Many others rush to their cars to head to their next commitment. Finding out what some of these participants think of adventures offered by the Friends of Fakahatchee is possible thanks to the TripAdvisor website.

TripAdvisor bills itself as the world's largest travel website. It allows travelers to post comments on hotels, restaurants and attractions they have visited. The site is free and anyone can post a comment about their experience. TripAdvisor has become an important resource for travelers planning their trips. Positive TripAdvisor reviews can lead to more visitors and business and negative ones can have the opposite effect.

Currently TripAdvisor lists Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park as the top attraction in Copeland, FL. This rating is obviously more impressive to folks who do not also know that it is the only attraction in Copeland.



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For the past two years, TripAdvisor has awarded the park a Certificate of Excellence based on the generally positive reviews from travelers. Here are three comments posted by different visitors within the last month:

"We would like to express our gratitude to volunteers of Fakahatchee for their great work! The preserve is really wild and beautiful and at the same time it very convenient to visiting and watching real life of wild animals! It was our first visit to Florida's swamps, and we spent one day into Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park & Boardwalk and we were absolutely satisfied. We saw huge gators, gorgeous birds, lots of lizards, a huge number of different types of plants around, and all nature was in the own harmony and balance. We definitely advise to all nature lovers to visit this place! Separately we would like to thank Patrick Higgins for his kindness, attentiveness to visitors and useful recommendations!"

"Janes Scenic Drive is very rough and should only be driven by people who have both experience of driving off road and have a high clearance four wheel drive vehicle. A alternative is the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. It is about a mile long and ends in a gator hole. It passes through some of the thickest vegetation in the area. It gives a very good idea of what the area used to look like. Some of the largest remaining cypress are in this area. An added bonus is a bald eagle nest within sight of the boardwalk."

"The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park "Swamp Walk" was probably the most exciting and memorable experience of any Florida sight seeing trip or event I have participated in over the last 10 years. I never thought I would be wading through the swamps of the Florida Everglades..not in my wildest dreams! But on this particular day I did and it will be a memory I will have forever, and I may even elaborate a bit as I tell stories of it to my friends and family. Just wading through the swamp not knowing what you were stepping on, snakes coiled up snugly in the base of old cypress trees and stumps, many types of waterbirds flying above, orchids growing throughout the wilderness of the swamp, and even saw an american gator slowly gliding around the edge of the swamp watching these odd intruders trample through their habitat. The Park staff/guides were the best! Patrick, Jim and Dee were so knowledgeable of the plants, wildlife and history of the area. All had a great sense of humor and made this experience that much better. I would recommend anyone to take this adventure as it will definitely change your understanding and reduce any fears you may have of wandering through the swamps of the Fakahatchee State Park."

Sign of optimism

Those accustomed to exceeding posted speed limits will find their tendency tested by Jane's Scenic Drive. An unscientific survey near this sign about five miles north of park offices gave the record to a Jeep ripping by at about 8 mph.

