



The Ghost Writer

APRIL 2014

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee, "Home of the Ghost Orchid"

EVENTS

**MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS
for our activities at
www.fofreservation.eventbrite.com**

WET WALK & TRAM TOUR
will resume next winter

GHOST RIDER TRAM TOURS
Tuesdays and 1st Saturday at 10am
FULLY BOOKED
will resume next winter

COASTAL CRUISES
will resume next winter

BOARD MEETING
Sunday, April 13, 10:30 a.m.
Ranger Station, Copeland

PARTY FOR THE PLANET
Saturday, April 5, 9am-1pm
Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens
www.napleszoo.com
FOF will have a booth.

Everglades Bike Ride
Sunday, April 13, 7:30 a.m.
www.EvergladesROGG.org
See article in right column.

ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER
Sunday, April 13, 5:00pm
Reservations Required.
See article in right column.

ART IN THE PRESERVE
Saturday, April 19
Call Karen Relish at (239) 695-2886.
See article on page 5.

**You can download the FOF events
calendar from www.orchidswamp.org**



Saul Friess manned the grill at the Annual Picnic on March 22 at the Mesce Pavilion in Copeland. Surprise visitors were Caryl & Nelson Tilden (right in photo) talking here with Linda Koreny and Mike & Donna Owen. See the *President's Message* on page 4 for report.

ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER

The Annual Meeting & Dinner will be held on **Sunday, April 13**, when the results of the elections for Board members and Officers will be announced. There will be a report from the President about what's been happening during the year and a re-cap from the Park Manager, as well as the presentation of awards.

Featured speakers after the meeting are Patrick Higgins and Tony Marx who will talk about "The Fakahatchee through Global Eyes". Both are regular contributors to *The Ghost Writer*, including to this issue (*see page 6 and page 7*).

The event takes place at the Seafood Depot in Everglades City and costs \$35 for members, \$45 for non-members. Reservations are required; you can book online before April 8 at www.fofreservation.eventbrite.com with a debit/credit card.



Everglades Bike Ride

Work up your appetite for the FOF Annual Dinner on a Bike Ride! The rides of various lengths will take place, starting in Everglades City, on **Sunday, April 13**. One of them is a 27-mile ride on Janes Scenic Drive. The event partly benefits FOF and is organized by the Everglades River of Grass Greenway. For info and to register, see www.EvergladesROGG.org or call Patty at (239) 695-2397. Volunteers are also welcome at aid stations.

New ENP Super

Shawn Bengé has been appointed the acting Superintendent for both Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks effective March 31, 2014. Shawn will be on a 90 day assignment to fill the position held by retiring Superintendent Dan Kimball for the past ten years. Bengé has 26 years of experience with the National Park Service and comes to south Florida from Atlanta where he is the Deputy Regional Director responsible for operations and providing leadership to the Gulf Coast Cluster of national parks. Shawn was the primary agency official responsible for managing NPS oil spill response activities associated with Deepwater Horizon.



M.O.ZONE - Seen Around the Strand

On 2/15/14, Virginia Roseberry, volunteer, Mike Owen, biologist, and the attendees on the public swamp walk observed 10 **Great Egrets**, one male and female **Anhinga**, a **Belted Kingfisher**, a **Vulture**, 1 **Immature White Ibis**, and a **Great Blue Heron** along the drive to their destination. On 2/22/14 and 2/23/14, Bente Torvund, Administrative Assistant, observed a **Brown Pelican** and the next day 15 **White Pelicans** flying in formation just west of intersection SR29/US41.

On 2/22/14, around 9:30AM, Howard Lubel observed a **Black Bear Cub** out in 4 Stakes Prairie. On 2/24/14, in the late afternoon, Fred and Alyce Townsend, volunteers, observed 23 **Wood Storks** on JSD and on 2/25/14 Don Leonard, volunteer, observed 30 **Wood Storks** on the drive and in the ditches along the first mile of the Drive. On 2/28/14, Bente Torvund observed 12 **Cedar Waxwings** flying over the Visitor Center then again on 3/6/14 flying in formation over the Shop Compound.

In March 2014, multiple record-setting sightings of **Everglades Mink** have been observed along Janes Scenic Drive. *Photo below* taken by Tommy Owen on 3/4/14.

On 3/9/14, around noon, Skip Fisher, volunteer, while driving on the Krome Extension en route to Fakahatchee interestingly noted a **Doe** watching traffic from the east side of the Extension. On 3/22/14, in the early evening, Mike Owen and Jean Stenafik, visitor, observed a **white morph Short-tailed Hawk**, a **Bald Eagle**, an **Osprey**, and a **Swallow-tailed Kite** fly over the Visitor Center area. On 3/25/14, Mike Owen and Tom Trotta observed a **Coopers Hawk** dive Northeast to South over the Firetower into a tree and then 20-30 **Common Grackles** flew from the same tree away to the South.

If you want to report sightings, contact Park biologist Mike Owen or his assistant Karen Relish by phone at (239) 695-2886 or by email at FOF_90@hotmail.com



Thanks to Tommy Owen for this photo of an Everglades Mink taken in early March, as reported in the *MOZone* above. You can see more of Tommy's work at his website www.PloridaPhoto.us.



Thanks to Jim & Niki Woodard for this photo of a pine pink ground orchid taken along JSD on March 8. Jim emailed "This is one of the few orchids that can be easily seen from the road."

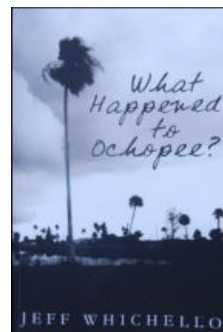
Between the Leaves

by Marya Repko



Big Cypress National Preserve was established in 1974 after pressure by environmentalists to stop the construction of the supersonic Jetport at 50-mile bend on the Trail.

What Happened to Ochopee? describes how the little village, created in 1928 as a tomato farm, was swallowed up by the park service.



Young Jeff Whichello lived with his family at the Golden Lion Motor Inn which they owned and operated. It was a vibrant social center for the area and popular stopping-off place for travelers. The building is now the preserve HQ.

Ochopee in those days provided an ideal life for youngsters, learning about nature and fishing. It was a close community without worries about urban crime.

He tells poignantly how neighbors sold their homes and moved away and the community was dispersed. Most of the businesses closed. Many of the buildings are gone.

Jeff's book is available at Shealy's Skunk Ape Center, one of the few remaining businesses in Ochopee, and at the Museum of the Everglades. You can also order a copy from Amazon, where it has had good reviews, or via his own website www.jflu.org.

BOARDWALK REPORT

by Linda Koreny

Most of the Boardwalk volunteers found March to be a relatively “quiet” month for wildlife except, of course, the two young **eaglets**. From time to time a visitor will tell me how much they enjoyed talking with Nelson and Caryl over the years about Boardwalk experiences. These readers might be as delighted as we were when Nelson and Caryl visited us this past week. I’ll let them tell you about their visit:

"After 10 years volunteering on the boardwalk and now being gone for 2 years in Arizona, we were absolutely delighted to return for a visit and attend the annual FOF picnic. It was wonderful to catch up with old friends and learn more about the plans for the pavilion. It sounds like the tram, boardwalk, swamp and boat tours are exposing many visitors to the Fakahatchee Strand.

Walking out the boardwalk, we felt like we were home again! We are so grateful to Dick and Edite and Bud and Doug for all their dedication and hard work on the repair of this fragile structure. It is truly a "labor of love"; often standing right in the swamp, and always working around the stream of visitors who of course want to go all the way to the end. Not only has a great deal been accomplished in difficult conditions, but it has been done with masterful craftsmanship. It demonstrates that the visitor donations in the 'iron ranger' are being used to improve the condition of the walkway. The obvious improvements encourage visitors to be more generous.

Thank you also to the volunteers who provide so much to the experience of our visitors – Kathy Hatch and Linda Koreny and others who are giving of their time. During our years we often received a \$100 check in the donation box that simply said, "For the love of the Fak". We certainly understood the sentiment. We felt the same way!

Of course we loved seeing the two young eagles at the nest and the alligators at the observation pond. All the wildlife and plant life were a great joy to us. We had been keeping a yearly record of the Royal Palms for Mike Owen, and it was good to see that they were all doing well. The swamp looks very healthy.

We are enjoying our home in Tucson, especially being closer to family, but the Fakahatchee will always be very dear to our hearts. Thank you to everyone, staff, board, and volunteers, who work so hard to maintain this unique and wonderful piece of the Florida wilderness. It feels good to know our time there was well spent.

Keep up the good work, Friends of the Fakahatchee. You are appreciated!"

Caryl and Nelson Tilden



WHY DOES OUR OLD BOARDWALK LOOK SO GOOD?

by Tom Maish

Well it isn't because of the "tooth fairy"!

It is a very dedicated group of THREE! Dick & Edite Hughes plus Richard "Bud" Scott are the Crew who maintain the Boardwalk each year. Of course; others pitch in from time to time, but Dick & Edite have taken the leadership since their mentor Nelson Tilden, who organized the work Crew, moved to Arizona. After Hurricane Wilma in 2005 wrecked havoc with the Boardwalk, Nelson Tilden recruited his neighbors Dick & Edite to help in the restoration to re-open the Fakahatchee's main attraction. This led to their interest in the Fakahatchee and they joined the Friends in 2008.

Bud Scott had worked on the Boardwalk with Ranger Dave Henley since 1999. Back then all work was done with hand tools. Working on the Boardwalk led Bud and Margaret to also become members of the Friends.

You may remember when the platform at the Alligator Hole collapsed and had to be completely rebuilt. Nelson led the crew with Dick; Edite, Bud and Ranger Steven Bass completely removing the old platform; designing and rebuilding the replacement which was so well constructed it was approved by the Park Service Engineer.

This season's major work has revolved around rebuilding the platform surrounding the old Cypress trees. Bud was unable to return to Florida until recently so the major work was completed by Dick with Edite working right with him. The craftsmanship is extraordinary! As Bud says, "Dick and Edite are compulsive perfectionists!" Come take a look and you will have to agree.

Dick, Edite, and Bud have been working two days each week to catch up. Unlike the Cypress platform, most work goes un-noticed. It is the major work to restore the foundation pilings that bear the load of the Boardwalk. Bud said the Boardwalk is in better shape than ever. Please note this doesn't say "forever" as the Crew is only holding the Boardwalk safely together until a new Boardwalk can be constructed.

The Friends "Iron Ranger" accepts contributions from our many visitors. This money is reinvested in material for the repairs. These materials coupled with the Crew's labor has saved the Park Service many thousands of dollars over the years.

The next time you are out on the Boardwalk say hello and THANK YOU to Dick & Edite Hughes and Richard "Bud" Scott for a job well done.

President's Message

by Francine Stevens

It has been a time of surprises since my last letter.

Boardwalk Vision project: On the 14th of March the Boardwalk Vision committee split up to attend two very important meetings; a meeting with DEP at the Oscar Scherer State Park in Osprey was attended by Patrick Higgins, Glen Stacell, Renee Rau, and myself and another meeting with Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and FDOT in Naples was attended by Tom Maish and Dr. John Kaiser – the latter is reported by Tom in the Boardwalk Vision Report below.

Patrick, Glen, Renee, and myself met with BJ Givens and Valinda Subic to attend a video conference chaired by Scott Robison in Tallahassee; also on video, Chief of Design and Construction Department Matt Mitchell along with other folks in the department. They were in receipt of the LEED recommendation report (by David Corban) and reported to agree with most LEED recommendations with a few contingent on DEP budget. Moving forward with an excellent Power Point presentation by Patrick, FOF was able to emphasize the advantage of the Cracker architecture pavilion and its location on the other side of canal instead of at the new parking site; all agreed there was NO reasonable objection to the location and approved the Cracker architecture – this was very nice surprise!

The picnic last Saturday was another nice afternoon, folks lined up at the grill attended by Saul Friess and he deserved his applause for a task well done. Nelson and Caryl Tilden

came to the picnic and that was another nice surprise! *See photos on front page.*

A private **Ghost Rider tram ride** was taking place while folks were at the picnic and I was called by Patrick Higgins and Dr. John Kaiser at the point of their return so I could meet with Phil Donahue – yes, Phil Donahue of the Phil Donahue talk show back in the days; he was accompanied by a small group of friends to ride the tram. Phil praised Patrick's interpretation and we chatted for while about the Cracker Pavilion and Boardwalk project. To have Phil Donahue on our Ghost Rider certainly was a surprise!

The Board of directors worked very hard dedicating numerous hours in March on the fiscal year budget resulting in an amazing comprehensive result. I am extremely proud of the progress we have made with the budget and want to express my most sincere gratitude to Treasurer Kathy DaSilva who has been the driving force of this much needed progress, Kathy demonstrated in very little time her great talent of listening more than talking and then speaking volume by her actions.

I will keep my letter short this month as I have a heavy work load with my real estate business and getting ready for the next Board meeting to make the transition with new Board members and preparing for the **Annual Members Meeting & Dinner on the 13th April** when we can all look forward to some fascinating stories presented by Tony Marx and Patrick Higgins who have traveled the world and yet have chosen the Fakahatchee as one of their very favorite places on the planet.

Boardwalk Vision Report

by Tom Maish, Chair

In February the Friends had an appointment at the Park with Carmen Monroy, Director Southwest District, and Mark Clark, Access Engineer, both from Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

After seeing the traffic and parking along side of US-41 they had a clear understanding of our concern.

The Friends' objective at the meeting was to demonstrate the need for FDOT to design, fund, and construct the decal lane, thereby saving the Park Service the estimated cost of \$1.0 million!

All requests to FDOT are first required to be approved by the Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Mrs. Monroy then suggested she would set a meeting for the Friends' to explain the proposal to Ms. Lucilla Ayer, Executive Director of the MPO. Coincidentally the meeting occurred on the same day as the meeting with Donald Forgione and Staff at District Four. We split our committee with Francine leading the delegation to District HQ and John Kaiser joining Tom Maish at the MPO meeting in Naples.

The MPO meeting was attended by Lucy Ayer and Suzanne Lex, Community Liaison for FDOT

John showed the Power Point presentation prepared by Patrick Higgins to lay the ground work for our request. Both ladies had many questions and some advice for us.

No promises were given, but Lucy Ayer told us to persist in telling our story to gain public support for our Vision. Other suggestions were:

- to stress the unsafe conditions of parking along the berm of US-41 with people having to walk along or cross the highway,
- tell how our construction of the Visitor's pavilion will be an economic generator for Eastern Collier,
- how the decal lane will improve the flow of through traffic on this busy highway.

John and I came away with instructions to gather more evidence to present to the MPO and FDOT. We also learned of specific programs that could be sources of funding and that there is a real possibility that the MPO and FDOT will be sympathetic to our need.

En Plein Air

by Karen Relish

On March 15, 2014, artists met for *Art in the Preserve En Plein Air* at the old Port of the Islands Hotel (Remuda Ranch, built in the 60s), on the north side of US-41 off of Union Road. It was a resort complex influenced by Mediterranean architecture and once primarily used by the Gulf American Corporation, a real estate development company responsible for developing Golden Gate Estates. The two-story, seemingly once-grand hotel is now closed, chained, and locked.

The hotel has a marble entry with a central marble fountain, an inlaid tile mural on one of the walls, a formal dining room (with tables still covered in white tablecloths), a courtyard area, a large in-ground swimming pool, indoor and outdoor bars, and even a separate adjoining building with a dance floor. It was reported that proms were once held in that ballroom. Another building with additional rooms lies off to the west.

For the artists, it was "A great experience, spending time outdoors immersed in history, art, and friendship!"



Photos taken by Karen Relish with Elizabeth Smith's camera. Notice how similar the hotel looks to the one on the south side of US-41. A "remuda" is a stable of spare saddle horses and there were stables behind this hotel at one time.

Resource Management Report

by Howard Lubel, Chair

The resource management committee has been busy working on the Ebert Foundation grant for maintaining the east main tram to the cabin, the Everglades Ultras, the harvest of endangered *tillandsia utriculata*, the central slough survey, budget preparation for the coming fiscal year and securing cost estimates for the purchase of a crew cab utility vehicle for transporting FOF volunteers on work days.

On February 21, a representative of Stahlman Landscaping in Naples was taken on a tour of the east main tram from gate 12 to the Ballard camp so that the company could submit an estimate for the clearing and maintenance work. Stahlman's detailed proposal was presented to the board and approved at the March meeting. It is anticipated that three cuts will be required in order to satisfy the conditions of the Ebert Foundation gift dedicated to keeping the tram clear. This will leave \$800 for FOF's general fund at the end of the next fiscal year.

On February 22, resource committee members served in various capacities during the Everglades Ultras. We participated as race marshals, aid station workers, photographer and medical assistance personnel. We also worked in general set up and breakdown roles. It was a beautiful day in the Fakahatchee that was enjoyed by all volunteers. Our thanks go out to those FOF members who gave their time to help with a signature event in the park.

On March 5 and 6, botanists from Naples Botanical Gardens and Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota were in the park participating in an effort to preserve the Fakahatchee's giant air plants currently being devoured by the Mexican bromeliad weevil. Park biologist Mike Owen devised a rescue plan and secured all necessary permits and authorizations, allowing for the harvest of numbers of the Fakahatchee's healthy *tillandsia utriculata* population. These plants were placed in the care of the two botanical gardens for safe keeping. When plants develop spikes, they will be returned to the Fakahatchee and reattached to their original locations so that their seeds can be distributed. During the two day event approximately 120 healthy plants were harvested for transport to the participating botanical gardens for continued care. Plants will likely be returned to the park next December. Many thanks are due to both Naples and Selby for their contributions to this preservation effort.

The annual central slough survey was conducted on March 7, 8 and 9. Members of the resource management committee and other FOF volunteers assisted the park biologist and assorted botanical experts with the collection of data important for the management of the park's resources. The three days were spent in sloughs locating, identifying and counting rare and endangered plants, trees, orchids, bromeliads and grasses. *See photo on page 6.*

Budget requests for direct park support for the FY 2014-2015 were submitted and approved by the board at the March meeting.

Lastly, the committee has secured cost estimates for a crew cab utility vehicle for use by FOF members on volunteer work days and for other necessary projects. Throughout the course of the year, the resource committee's efforts to conduct work days to assist with the maintenance of Janes Scenic Drive as well as the most popular tram trails have been hampered by the lack of vehicles to transport our volunteers. Oftentimes work parties in excess of ten persons are available to provide a day's labor in the park. Depending on the season, tram conditions, safety issues and other park needs, vehicle limitations prevent the efficient transport of these volunteers. The acquisition of a crew cab vehicle will allow our work day coordinators to transport an additional number of volunteers to and on the tram trails. As a result of board approval given at the March meeting, the resource management committee is in the process of purchasing a Kubota RTV 1140. FOF will retain ownership of this utility vehicle.

Messengers From Above - The Swallow-Tailed Kite

by Patrick Higgins

I saw my first swallow-tailed kite of the season on March 1st sailing just above the canopy of a hammock in the southern reaches of the Park. It seemed almost paper thin, flashing white then black as it effortlessly swooped, turned and soared, changing direction in an instant with slight adjustments of its scissor-like tail. Native Americans saw these birds as the Great Creator's window on our world or as messengers between the world above and ours below. For me too they have a spiritual quality and never fail to bring joy. This first sighting was a little later than usual; typically it's closer to Valentine's Day.

My excitement was heightened by the knowledge that this herald of spring had journeyed over 4,500 miles from the Pantanal, a vast Everglades-like wetland straddling the borders of Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, to nest here and then would repeat the trip home in September.

Males and females are indistinguishable in size and plumage. My kite would already have formed a breeding pair during migration with whom it had sought out a nest site in a tall tree. They usually nest in clusters within a few hundred yards of a couple of other pairs. In the Fakahatchee swallow-tails favor the very top of slash pines on Four Stakes Prairie. They lay 2 - 3 white eggs with brown splotches, needing three weeks incubation. From hatching to fledging takes another 6 weeks, although only one usually survives to this stage - the others having been killed, out-competed for food or pushed out of the nest by the first chick to hatch.

In flight Swallow-tailed kites appear petite and delicate as they perform their aerial ballet, but their wing span is over four feet. They seldom flap their wings, making flight look completely effortless. They seize prey like dragonflies and wasps midair and deftly pluck tree-frogs, anoles, small snakes, cicadas and baby birds from the forest canopy. Unlike other raptors they eat on the wing as they continue searching for

their next meal, and even drink and bathe on the wing, skimming the surface of ponds and rivers. Most of the adult's diet consists of insects, but they mainly feed vertebrates to their young. Due to their aerial prowess they have few natural enemies but are vulnerable to nocturnal predation by great horned owls.

Sadly their distribution in the United States has been steadily reduced by direct persecution in former times and continuing changes in land use and habitat loss. They now occupy less than 5% percent of their historic range with only a few thousand individuals found in the southeast, Florida and parts of Texas, making each sighting seem even more miraculous.



Swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). Photo FWC

Patrick Higgins has been tromping around the Fakahatchee since 2004 and has helped with FOF Coastal Cruises and Ghost Rider tram tours as an expert interpreter. He operates his own eco-tour company www.tropicbirdsailing.com. He is one of the speakers at our Annual Dinner on April 13.



Thanks to Rose Flynn for this photo of Central Slough Survey on March 9.

Trails Less-Travelled

by Anthony (Tony) Marx

Once you've experienced the two main hiking trails on East and West Main Trams off of Janes Scenic Drive there are others which are not signposted, but marked on the map and are well worth exploring. One such area and trail is found at the top right corner of the map on Jones Grade Road.

Nestled in the northeastern corner of the Fakahatchee and within the Preserve is a group of picturesque lakes formed from gravel pits that were dug during the building of Alligator Alley. They are linked by berms which are rough but drivable if you have adequate clearance, or otherwise mountain bike or hike.

To access this area, exit I-75 at the Everglades City/Immokalee over-pass, 16 minutes from the Naples toll; and take State Road 29 south. Only a few hundred yards down on the right there is an opening in the fence with a rough dirt track leading to the lakes, which is slated to be closed off sometime. Next to it is a rotted and almost obliterated brown wooden sign for the Fakahatchee. It is best to proceed less than a quarter mile farther, and turn right onto the first unmarked dirt road, not signposted but identified by a sturdy white mailbox with the name 'Quaile'. This is Jones Grade Road on the map.

Approximately a half mile down this road, an opening appears on the right which affords a view of the lakes, and leads to the elevated berms which divide them. If you cross the first lakes, turn left (West) on the berm which ends at a rough dirt track. This track meanders north for a quarter mile ending at the wildlife underpass which allows them to cross under I-75 even with traffic roaring overhead. It is not unusual to find a mix of panther, bear, bobcat and deer prints along this trail especially when muddy, and it is obviously one of the few opportunities for wildlife to continue north into the Panther Refuge and beyond.

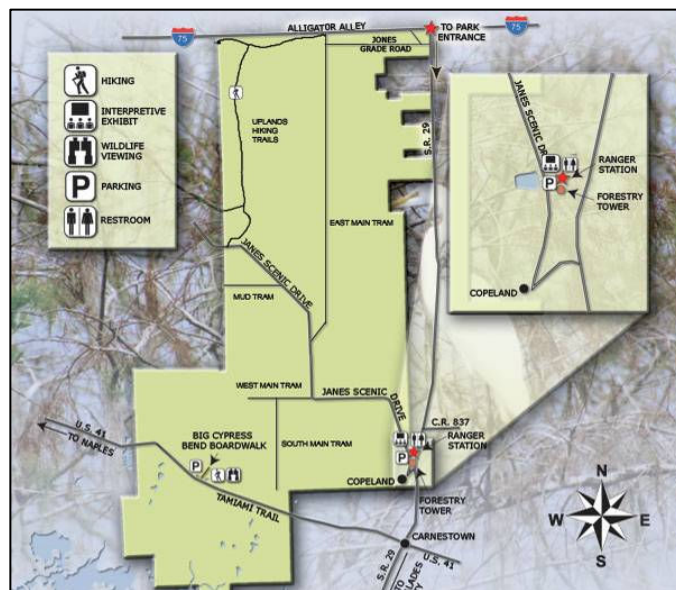
Otherwise, continue to the end of Jones Grade at a gate, a mile from State Road 29. At this point the gravel road ends. The gate has a small warning sign prohibiting unauthorized entry and does not announce that it is an entrance to the Fakahatchee Preserve, which is why it is seldom visited except occasionally by Park personnel and the few private property owners along the road. There is only parking for about three vehicles on the right before the gate. Be careful not to block it or enter the private driveway immediately left of the gate. The owner keeps the entire road well maintained at his cost and we should be as un-intrusive as possible. I have parked at the lakes and biked down. However we are still entitled to enter the preserve by walking or biking around the gate. Jones Grade now becomes a dirt double track with grass in between. Starting as a fairly easy trail to walk or bike, it gradually narrows and after 3 miles becomes rougher after reaching the junction with East Main which is seen on the map running south.

A quarter-mile past the gate the somewhat open trees and vegetation studded with cabbage palms gradually give way to taller cypress, pond apple, and other wetland trees and vegetation, while cabbage palms line the trail. There are no Royal Palms such as exist in the swamps farther south. The trail is elevated well above the surrounding forest base, and the ditch formed when dirt was used to build the berm has become a series of shallow ponds enclosed by sub-tropical trees and lush vegetation. It also is close to the Panther Refuge and tracks can be seen here and there. After a mile, a deep pond suddenly appears on the left and your arrival usually sparks a flurry of wings and splashes as Egrets and Herons rise with accompanying squawks, and perhaps an alligator disappears in a cloud of bubbles while a turtle or frog leaps from its perch on a fallen log.

The trees and vegetation now start to crowd to the edge of the trail and the tree cover extends above affording dappled or permanent shade; signaled by your GPS beeping a warning that it has lost satellite contact. This is when it is nice to have company, as you have entered a quiet and secluded environment where there is no sight or sound of human activity. The forest is silent except for a sudden splash, flutter of wings, a scamper of tiny feet and the occasional grunt of a pig frog. A hidden burst of heavy splashing or flight signals the escape of a larger unseen animal. After two miles several narrow and rocky water courses cross the trail, dry in winter and fordable in summer. In February – March a little farther on, fallen oranges in the trail announce the presence of a large wild orange tree growing next to the trail. This was once the northern spur of a tram line built to transport the cypress lumber felled nearby over 70 years ago and perhaps someone tossed away the remains of an orange which took root.

Because of partly hidden ponds both sides of the trail and especially if biking, keep watch ahead as you can come upon a basking alligator on the narrow trail. Usually they will move off when they see you but in mating season (February-April) a large male may be more aggressive and hold its ground no matter how much you wave your hands and stamp your feet. In which case keep a respectful distance and turn back. Otherwise continue on, and just under 3 miles from the gate you reach a 'T' junction. The left (south) trail becomes the northern end of the East Main Trail and continues 13 miles to gate 12 on Janes Scenic Drive, while the right (north) trail soon loops around to the west then loops south, marked on the map as Upland Hiking Trails and joins the western end of Janes Scenic Drive. Both these trails are navigable on foot between January and end of April, but are too rough and rutted to bike on. They are cleared back once a year in February prior to the annual 50 mile/50K marathon, but otherwise are steadily reclaimed by Nature.

For those seeking a little more adventure, unlikely to encounter another human being and uncertain of what you may meet, it is well worth a visit!



Tony Marx is a Florida Master Naturalist and a Board Member of Friends of Fakahatchee. He is one of the speakers at our Annual Dinner on April 13.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We have 371 memberships including 74 whose renewal was due during the 1st quarter. Membership is in the following categories:

Individual	127	Family	164
Supporter	21	Patron	43
Benefactor	1		
Lifetime	9 (see list below)		
Business	6 (see list below)		

The new "Supporter" membership has proved popular.

Thanks to Van & Jan Sayler for becoming Lifetime members.

Welcome to new members since our last newsletter:

Mary Gillies, Venice
Robert Keiser, South Miami
Sam Peters, Miami Beach
Derek & Marcie White, Yardley, PA

Note from the Editor

If anyone would like to edit and compile *The Ghost Writer*, please contact Marya at FOF_90@hotmail.com or phone (239) 695-2905.



Attendees at the Annual Picnic got a chance to see Suzanne Becker's amazing quilt and to buy raffle tickets, as well as FOF merchandise. Tickets will also on sale at the Annual Meeting & Dinner on April 13 when the lucky winner will be drawn. They are \$10 each or 3 for \$20.

What Are We? Who Are We?

The **Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is the largest cypress strand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades. Its 80,000 acres are bordered by I-75 (Alligator Alley), US-41 (Tamiami Trail), SR-29, Fakahatchee Bay, and Picayune State Forest.

The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is edited by Marya Repko with contributions from members and friends. It is issued at least six times a year and has an average circulation of over 300 copies.

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OFFICERS:	President – Francine Stevens		Vice-President – Glen Stacell		
	Secretary – Jinny Ball		Treasurer – Kathleen DaSilva		
BOARD:	Jinny Ball	Bruce Bunch	Kathleen DaSilva	Frank Denninger	Shaun Floyd
	Rose Flynn	Dennis Giardina	Patrick Higgins	John Kaiser	Howard Lubel
	Tony Marx	Ken Shapiro	Glen Stacell	Francine Stevens	Tina Streeter

LIFETIME PRESERVERS: Bruce & Janet Bunch

LIFETIME FAMILY MEMBERS: Tom & Judy Maish, Van & June Sayler, Glen & Laura Stacell

LIFETIME INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS: Warner Blow, Peter Haffenreffer, James Nici, Ken Shapiro, Carol Vartanian

BUSINESS PATRONS: EarthTech Environmental, Everglades Adventure Tours, Naples Bicycle Tours, North American Canoe Tours, Shurr Adventures, Tour the Glades

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