



The Ghost Writer

FALL ISSUE, NOVEMBER 2005

NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve

EVENTS

GUIDED SWAMP WALKS

**November 8, 12, 15, and 22
December 6, 10, 20, 27**
special groups on request
reservations required
call (239) 395-3760

GUIDED CANOE TRIPS

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

NOTES

NEW PARK MANAGER

Dennis Giardina was appointed Manager of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve to replace Ralph Smith who has returned to Collier Seminole State Park where he is now the manager. See "Letter from the President" on next page.

The phone at the Copeland office is not working because of the storm. If you call 695-4593 and do not get the answering machine, it is still out of order.

HURRICANE NEWS

"Wilma" struck this area on Monday, October 24, and left considerable damage in the Fakahatchee. The Park Manager and the rangers, along with biologist Mike Owen, have been assessing the situation. At first glance, all the buildings in Copeland are in tact.

The Boardwalk will need extensive repair. The options are to completely replace it or to try to fix it. In either case, it would be desirable to add extra viewing platforms and benches along the way. Our thanks to Caryl and Nelson Tilden who rushed down from their summer home in New York to help with the assessment and cleanup.

Member Cindy Hackney emailed that when she looked around the Boardwalk on the day following the storm, both eagles and their nest were still there. She also wrote "A lot of old Virgin Cypress down, including half of what was left of the oldest tree there. But then again, hurricanes are an important part of creating these swamps that we love."

Some of the brush has been removed from Janes' Scenic Drive but the roadway itself is in bad shape. The trams and Jones Grade are currently impassable but it should be possible to clear Gates 12 and 7. Dennis, the new manager, has been working alongside rangers Steve and Dave but the task is daunting.

Fortunately, Mike Murphy at the District office of the State Parks Department has been very sympathetic and there is a good prospect of funding for some of the major work to restore the Boardwalk and to make the rest of the Fakahatchee accessible to the public again.

John Elting reports that he and Bill Mesce will be leading swamp walks as long as there are at least four people interested on the scheduled day. Canoe trips will be organized after the river is surveyed and debris is removed. Until the phone at the Copeland office is working, John will be taking reservations on (239) 395-3760.

Volunteers have spent several days clearing out brush but there is much more to do. If you can help, phone John Elting at (239) 395-3760.

The Boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend on US-41 is closed !

Letter from FOF President John Elting

This letter from John was written before Hurricane Wilma but the last paragraph is certainly still appropriate!

*It is with great pleasure that I announce that **Dennis Giardina has been appointed Park Manager** of the Fakahatchee. I have known Dennis for some time and worked with him in several capacities. We have campaigned hard for his appointment with the state and it is a good sign that they have accepted the Friends' recommendation.*

Many of you know Dennis but for those who don't, he comes to us from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Panther Refuge where he was the biology technician. He is a true friend of the Fakahatchee, a field person with great communication and leadership skills. He is well known and liked by the staff. Dennis will start October 7th and then will be away the middle of October in Central America. He will continue his work as a member of the Panther Capture Team which is a plus for the Fakahatchee and a plus for the Friends.

Dennis has a tremendous challenge in front of him and a lot of catching up to do; so, I urge all of you to offer your assistance whenever and however you can so that we can move ahead in the coming year!

In the News

Fakahatchee, and in particular the "lost orchid", had good media coverage this summer. The *Miami Herald* had an article on June 18 about Karen Relish's discovery of *Cranichis muscosa* in the Strand. She and Mike Owen were featured on **WGCU public radio and television** in September, talking generally about the Fakahatchee and specifically about the orchid. The WGCU members' magazine *Expressions* had an accompanying article with pictures by Miami photographer Rick Cruz, a director of FOF and a very active volunteer.

If there were other articles or programs that are not mentioned above, please let us know by email or post.

TRAVELERS' TALES

Summer is the time when Florida residents travel and our members have done their share. Here is a report from Dave Mueller:

On March 3, 2004 I started a hike of the Appalachian Trail at Georgia's Springer Mountain that took me as far as Hanover, New Hampshire by September 14, 2004. This past June 26, 2005 I returned to Hanover, and resumed my AT hike from the same downtown intersection, in front of Dartmouth College, where I had ended the year before. The Tuesday after Labor Day provided a crystal clear "Class One" day in which to ascend Mt Katahdin, Maine's highest mountain, and the northern terminus of the Trail.

While a two-season, 2200-mile hike generates a number of experiences, one of my favorite AT stories came out of a meeting that I had last year in Tennessee. Several hikers asked me, somewhat playfully, if I'd run into "The Axe Murderers". When I said that I'd hadn't, they would grin and tell me to watch out for them, and nothing more.

A few days later I met three elderly ladies having lunch at an AT shelter just north of Erwin, Tenn. They were armed with a pile of food and nature guide books. It was obvious that they were having the time of their lives, happily talking about, and identifying in the guide books, all of the flora and fauna they'd seen. Many of the hikers on the AT go by "Trail Names" and they asked me what my Trail name was. I explained that I only went by my real name, and then asked them theirs. They laughed and said that they were "The Axe Murderers". I said that I'd heard of their name from other hikers and asked, "How on Earth did you become 'The Axe Murderers'?" The oldest lady explained that the three of them had met through an Internet website and decided to get together for two weeks of day-hiking using an Erwin motel as a "home base" shuttle point. When she told her daughter about her plans to travel to the wild mountains of Tennessee and to meet two "strangers" that she knew through the Internet her daughter almost fainted, then exclaimed...."Mother, how could you do something like that, those women could be axe murders for all you know!"... hence the collective "Trail Name" was adopted after she told the "strangers" of her daughter's concern.

What an enjoyable trio they were! And I would meet them a second time a few days later as they did a south-bound day hike back to a trail-head where one of their cars was parked that morning.

If you have a story that you'd like other Fakahatchee members to read, please post or email it to FOF, for the attention of Marya Repko.