



The Ghost Writer

Newsletter of the Friends of Fakahatchee

The Ghost Writer – February 2019

Save the Date!

Saturday March 23, 2019 – 4:00PM

Annual Members Meeting and Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

This year we are combining these two events on the same day. Both events will take place by Lake Harmon on March 23, starting at 4 PM and lasting until the last person leaves. The events are free for all FOF members, all volunteers, all Park Staff. You may call 239-695-1023 if you have any questions. Please RSVP at FOF_90@hotmail.com no later than March 19.



President's Message

by Glen Stacell

President, Friends of Fakahatchee

Our new online Adventure Store presents all the ways visitors can experience the Fakahatchee – now in one place.

In the past, our website listed FOF swamp walks and tram tours but not the paddling, hiking, and biking tours offered by local private tour companies. Now, with our new role as the Park's master concessionaire, you can book the Friends' adventures and those offered by our permitted tour companies by clicking the orange [Tours and Adventures](#) button on any page of our www.orchidswamp.org website.

The FOF is responsible for assuring the quality services offered by the firms listed in the Adventure Store. We issue permits and collect fees from them, with the lion's share of the permitting revenue reinvested in the park, its facilities and our conservation and education programs.

There are five Permitted Commercial Operators now listed on our website:

Everglades Day Safari — Owner Pete Corradino operates a fleet of six vans. His permit is for tours at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk which is a stop on his full-day tours that include air boat rides, lunch and more.

The Ivey House — This Everglades City landmark is one of the largest tour operators in the area through its Everglades Adventures business. Its permit is for paddling the East River and tours at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk .

Wild Lime Adventures — Operators Ben Ruby and Stacy Wolfe offers a wide variety of eco-adventures on both Florida coasts. Their permit is for tours at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk tours and swamp walks. Their full-day tours include lunch and other Everglades stops.

Adventure Paddle Tours — Operator Kyle McKenzie has a permit for paddling in the East River and Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk tours. Kyle specializes in

Naples Bicycle Tours — Certified Florida Master Naturalists lead three-hour bicycle tours through the Fakahatchee on level, hard packed roads and trails. Participants ride high-quality geared bicycles and are provided with helmets, binoculars, snacks and water.

In the near future we will feature the latest permitted company, North Carolina Outward Bound School. NCOBS conducts experiential education programs to people of all ages and walks of life aimed at discovering strength of character, ability to lead and desire to serve.

I hope you will take the time to check out the Adventure Store, spreading the word with your friends, and helping make our new venture a success.



Executive Director's Report

by Francine Stevens

Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

Some important news to report this month!

First, it is with great pride that we announce that the Florida State Park Service has recognized FOF volunteer Dino Barone as a Parks 2018 Volunteer of the Year – Park Resource Management. We are grateful for Dino, who drives across the state from the East Coast on most weekends. Dino brings a can-do attitude and relentless stamina, all the while rallying volunteers for the everlasting workload ahead. Our sincere congratulations to Dino for his exceptional accomplishment! I close this announcement by whispering that Howard Lubel and Dino were also awarded the "Team of Two" award, I am whispering this news to respect Howard's wishes that all attention and congrats be focused on Dino!



Second, this year the Board of Directors approved combining the Annual Members Meeting with the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic on Saturday, March 23 at 4 PM. Over the past four years the April Annual Members Dinner Meeting attendance has diminished, while the Appreciation Picnic attendance has increased. Combining events will enable us to announce the results of the election and introduce the Officers and new Board members to more people. See above how to RSVP for the combined free event by lovely Lake Harmon.

Regarding our Elections, we will be sending out the voting ballot to elect Board of Directors members on March 1st with a return deadline of March 18th.

For news on the Boardwalk, I first want to extend my gratitude to Dick and Edit Hugues who are back volunteering on the Boardwalk, unobtrusively keeping it in good repair. They probably noticed that Dave Boesche has not been seen welcoming visitors on the Boardwalk lately, due to knee replacement surgery in early February. We wish him a prompt recovery and hope he will be back on the Boardwalk sooner rather than later.

I also wish to extend a special thank you to Cindy Liberton of Next Steps Collective. Cindy is essential to all the updates and improvements we request of her for the FOF website, the latest being the new Adventure Store pages. Cindy is also tasked with the time consuming assignment of creating the Ghostwriter, making sense of all news sent to her in order to present an interesting and attractive newsletter.

Please enjoy all the news including **Franklin Adams' letter commemorating the FOF 20th Anniversary.** Franklin thought this would be of interest to all members who could not attend the FOF 20th Anniversary Celebrations in December. We have provided a summary within our newsletter along with a link to the full letter published on our website.

Dino Barone named Florida State Parks 2018 Volunteer of the Year – Park Resource Management

Our own Dino Barone was awarded the Florida Park Service statewide Outstanding Adult Volunteer Award for Park Resource Management in a ceremony held on the 6th February. Congratulations to Dino for this recognition of his dedicated hard work!

Pictured: Chuck Hatcher, Assistant Director, Eric Draper, Parks Director, Volunteer Extraordinaire Dino Barone, proud Park Manager Steve Houseknecht, and District 4 Chief of Parks Valinda Subic



News from the Strand



Calling for Volunteers: The race is on!

The Everglades Ultra Marathon is on March 9, and numerous volunteers are needed. Volunteer positions include Publicity, Friday Afternoon Check-in and Meeting, Race Start, Aid Stations on Race Day, Medical, Finish Line and Awards Support, and Post-Race Clean-Up.

Visit <https://evergladesultras.com/index.php/register3/volunteers> for details and sign-ups. You can also reach out to Race Director Bob Becker by calling 940 439 2800, or contacting Park Volunteer Coordinator Mike Duey at michael.duey@FloridaDEP.gov

Faka-Hackers join forces with Faka-Amblers

by The Alligator Ambers and Dino Barone

Even with vehicle constraints, a total of 28 volunteers showed up to work in the park the weekend of February 9, 2019. 15 Alligator Amblers from the Florida Trail Association – aka Faka-Amblers – joined 13 Ultra marathoners/Fearless Faka-hackers to tackle the preparation for the upcoming Everglades Ultra Marathon on March 9.

After 3 recons the FTA Alligator Amblers have steadfastly worked on the Gate 18 trail that intersects with Gate 16 (Mud Tram). The Amblers worked on the trails 3 different days with much appreciated chain saw help from Fakahatchee volunteers Ken Kaprielian and Paul Joslyn. Fearless Fakahacker Coordinator Dino Barone got the group set up and then sprayed the dreaded Caesar weed at Mud Tram. Dino and Paul also went out an additional 1/2 day recon-ing and chain sawing.



A selection of committed volunteers: Dr. Paul Joslyn, Steven Bass, Vince Lombardi, Peggy Phillips, Jim Phillips, Howard Schaub, Dr. Ruth Stillwell, Jerry Nash, Elena Nash, Dino Barone, Bob Becker.

*“Victory! The trail has been transformed and is now clear
and a pleasure to walk on.”*

– Fakahatchee Park Volunteer Coordinator Mike Duey

You too can volunteer your time and talents!
See how at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

FWC Commanders Visit the Fakahatchee



On January 23rd Patrick Higgins and Steve Houseknecht conducted a day-long team building exercise for South Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) law enforcement commanders enjoyed by all. It included a UTV tour of the park, a stop at the Fakahatchee Hilton for lunch and for most of the participants their first swamp walk. Above, keeping a wary eye over their shoulders; Captain Mitts Mravic – head of our local Naples Field Office, Major Alfredo Escanio - FWC South Region Bravo Commander, Captains Jay Marvin & Alberto Maza from Maimi-Dade, and Captain David Dipre from the Florida Keys.

The Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, Twenty-Five years later

By Andrew Tyler, Friends of Fakahatchee Board Member



Early in 1994 our family took an ‘enforced vacation’ and we made our first visit to Southwest Florida. At that time we lived in the Boston area, and in an area already renowned for snowy and sometimes very cold winters, 1993-1994 was particularly harsh. One day in mid-January, Karen found water dripping on her head in the middle of the night! It turned out that a remodeling project undertaken by the previous owners of our house had failed to insulate a heating pipe in the attic space. The weather was cold enough that this pipe had now frozen and ruptured. Consequently, we found ourselves in a cold house, with a ten-month old child and without heat.

After receiving the plumber’s diagnosis the next morning we decided to call the travel agent (this was before one could book internet holidays). Our request was that they find us somewhere in the continental United States where it was warm and with

a beach for preference. The result was a package offering to Marco Island, a place that neither of us had heard of previously. The package trip was gladly accepted and warmly enjoyed by us all.

As a part of that visit we took ourselves off to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk and our visit was recorded in a photograph taken by Karen, showing David and me enjoying our hike. I’m sure the location is familiar to all of the Friends, but this was roughly four years prior to the organization’s founding.

Roll on twenty-five years, Karen and I now reside on Marco Island and this Christmas season we were blessed with a visit from both our sons. Recognizing the significant anniversary of our first trip, we included a Christmas Eve family outing to the boardwalk and we recorded our visit in pictures once again.

As well as David and me looking twenty-five years older, we also took a picture of the four of us. As it turned out, Brian, our younger son, was also with us on the original 1994 Marco Island getaway, but we didn’t know it at the time!

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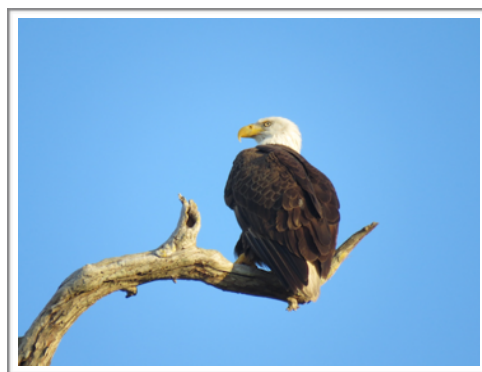


The family shot celebrates that event and also sets us up so that when we celebrate the 50th Anniversary we will have this as a memento. This time our walk was topped off by a magnificent Bald Eagle arriving on a tree at highway end of the Boardwalk.

We hope that the forthcoming twenty-five years are as kind to our family and to the Friends of the Fakahatchee as the previous, and that we can once again share our celebration with you.

Best wishes for 2019 to all.

Andrew Tyler and family



Seen in the Strand

Fabulous Swamp Walk with Mike Owen

Ruth Brooks contacted the Friends of Fakahatchee to arrange a swamp walk for a group of friends residing on Sanibel Island.

"After a year of excited anticipation, I finally got to take a swamp walk in Fakahatchee Strand with Mike Owen.



"My expectations were high as my friends and I waded in to the sparkling clear water, stepping into a world few are lucky enough to see. There were amazing epiphytic plants clinging to every tree, making it a treasure trove of mosses, ferns, airplants and orchids. Mike's enthusiasm and energy fueled our excitement and wonder, resulting in every expectation being more than exceeded"

– Ruth Brooks

Two Nights in the Fakahatchee

Beth Boesche-Taylor and David Taylor enjoyed a one-night at the Fakahatchee Hilton that was auctioned off at the Friends' 20th Anniversary Luncheon. Here is their report.

"Our evening at the Fakahatchee Hilton was an incredible experience. The way the light changes and various animals cycle through the day and night is incredible. From watching small rookeries fill up for the night, to the cues the barred owls get when the full moon rises, is stunning.

During our stay at the Hilton we enjoyed learning about the property and it's history from co-owner Craig, a peaceful time on the dock, and identifying over 53 plants species on our longest foray yet on the East Main Trail. We are so grateful to have had the experience of spending a night in Fakahatchee, especially after having hiked it every year for 15 years."



Francine Stevens, Beth Boesche-Taylor and David Taylor, and Glen Stacell



La Raw, Mina, and Kit Kitchen. The family also enjoyed a one night stay at the Fakahatchee Hilton that was auctioned off at the Friends' 20th Anniversary Luncheon.



Kit Kitchen and Craig Britton. Thank you Craig for your help to raise funds and making very happy campers !

"We really enjoyed being out and away so deep in the swamp. Heard the owls in the evening and the morning squawks of the daytime birds as we woke up. Lots of gators and some no-see-ems and skeeters, but no panther for us. Craig is most generous to allow the Friends to have this as a money-raiser. Thank you so much for helping us get in and out. Even the light rains could not dampen our spirits."

Our best wishes, Kit, La Raw and Mina

From little acorns grow

by Patrick Higgins

As you stroll the boardwalk in downtown's Naples Preserve that winds through a 9½ acre mix of pine flatwoods and oak-rosemary scrub, you pass the prostrate hulk of what was the US National Champion Myrtle Oak. Sadly, its reign didn't last long, as it was only recognized as such by American Forests, the organization that maintains the nation's registry of big trees in January 2017, and it succumbed to Hurricane Irma in September of the same year.

This got me thinking whether we had any big oaks in our park, so I decided to ask Fakahatchee's oracle, Mike Owen. From his encyclopedic memory he instantly suggested there were some up Janes Scenic Drive around mile 5.25.

My schedule didn't allow me to investigate this until a few weeks later when Jim Winger and I had only 2 guests registered for our Introductory Tram Tour and Swamp Walk. On these rare occasions, rather than cancel we usually lay on a private tour using a Polaris. This allows us to provide a very special experience for our visitors and gives us a change of pace as well as an opportunity to go deeper into the park, varying the slough we visit.

So armed with tape measures, we kidnapped Canadians Carole and Lee, and went off in search of big oaks before our swamp walk. Sure enough, only 160 feet short of Mike's five and a quarter miles we spotted a couple of what appeared to be impressive laurel oaks 26 yards to the east. Reaching them involved crossing the borrow ditch and a little bush-whacking. The first order of business was to confirm what species of oak we were dealing with. This led to me thinking out loud whether they were diamond leaf or laurel oaks. The live leaves were too high up to sample, so we had to rely on leaf fall on the ground, examining them to see how much they broadened towards the middle. After checking several sources on our return, I determined the two species are probably one and the same, and our trees were indeed laurel oaks (*Quercus laurifolia*).

Being English, oaks have always held a special place for me. Perhaps in the mists of time I'm descended from druids who worshipped them. Certainly, as a child I wore an oakleaf and acorn crest on my school blazer and climbed their massive boughs in grey flannel shorts. I've sat under the very same oak as Elizabeth I when she learnt of her sister Mary's death and that she was now Queen. I grew up with stories of defeated kings hiding in oaks and regularly stalked fallow deer, albeit with binoculars, amongst the ancient oaks of Hatfield Forest that date back to Norman times.

Since becoming a Floridian I've come to admire Florida's live oaks. Infuriatingly I've heard northern in-comers too often refer to them disparagingly as not real oaks like our ones back home. I even read the minutes of one HOA which had recently taken over control from the developer, complaining that they had been saddled with 500 of these not real oaks and their first order of business would be to remove half of them. In Naples everything is so new it's hard to find a specimen more than 25 years old. They obviously haven't seen the majestic large specimens draped with Spanish moss further north.

Our oaks provide many ecosystem services, including food and shelter. Their dense foliage helps conceal nests from predators and their cavities and bark provide homes for many creatures. Their leaves support a huge insect population, which in turn support gleaning birds and woodpeckers. But most importantly they are the source of acorns which are a high carbohydrate food for a variety of mammals, especially for white-tailed deer, a principle prey of the Florida's panther. And they do this at the very time of the year when the prairie grasses are at their least nutritious.

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The canopy of a large laurel oak 5 and bit miles up Janes Scenic Drive festooned with southern needleleaf. Photo by Patrick Higgins.

From little acorns grow *continued* ...

But back to the task at hand. Convention is that you measure a tree's girth at breast height (in the US that's at 4.5 ft and in the rest of the world at 4.3 feet – Americans must have been taller when they set this standard). Determining breast height is not as simple as it sounds unless the tree is growing on flat parkland. Our ground was uneven, and so we used the halfway point between the upper and lower levels for our start point. Once this was established, we wrapped our soft tape around the first tree. Having extra hands helped. We came up with a circumference of 7 feet 2 ½ inches. Impressive, but not a national champion as there's a laurel oak in Hillsborough County's that over 18 feet. We then moved on to the next one a further 25 feet in. Its girth measured 9 foot 8 inches, but its trunk had been snapped halfway up, so it couldn't compete in canopy spread and volume.

I usually determine a tree's height with a tangent height gauge – an inexpensive sextant-like handheld plastic instrument incorporating a level and a mirror that eliminates the need for complicated calculations. But because our tree was in the midst of dense forest and the road was higher than the forest floor, I couldn't use it. However, our guest Lee did some impressive mental trigonometry, and came up with a height of about 80 feet. You don't argue with people who do mental trigonometry!

What I'm hoping is that after reading this, many of you will come back with reports of larger oak trees elsewhere in the park that we can investigate. Incidentally the National Champion Royal Palm, with a girth of 76 inches and height of 82 feet (in 2012), is located about half a mile further up Janes Scenic Drive from our oak, and 110 yards to the east.

Membership News

**– Excerpt –
Talk Given in Celebration of the 20th Anniversary
of the Establishment of the Friends of the Fakahatchee
December 7, 2018**

by Franklin Adams, Everglades City

[*Editor's note:* you can read Franklin's comments in their entirety on the FOF website, <http://orchidswamp.org/20th-anniversary-talk>]

We are gathered here to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Friends of the Fakahatchee as a Citizens Support Organization, a partnership with the State of Florida Park Service. The Florida Park Service was established in 1935 by the Florida legislature with the annual budget of \$25,000. WOW! (well, back then \$25,000 went a lot further than it does today).



Over the years the Park Service's annual budget has increased considerably but many feel that the budget is still inadequately funded by the legislature. Because of this shortfall Friends groups or CSOs are critically important to the Florida State Parks system. Friends of Fakahatchee and other Friends groups pick up the slack, fill in the holes, open trails and advocate for improved educational opportunities like the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. I am talking about you folks. You make the difference by your dedicated efforts and support at all levels of the Friends of Fakahatchee.

Well how did this Friends group come about? I was not involved but this is what I have been told by a few of that small group of individuals who were there when it happened.

It all began with Mr. Greg Toppin who was the Manager of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park in 1998. (We are delighted that Greg and Joann are here with us this afternoon to celebrate. It's been awhile.) Like other Florida Park Managers, Greg was short on needed staff and funding and realized that he needed a Friends group to help out. (Especially since the Fakahatchee was the largest unit in the Florida Park System). I was told by Barbara Lewinski that Greg Toppin put up a notice in the Everglades City

20th Anniversary continued ...

post office asking that anyone interested in the Fakahatchee attend a meeting at the Copeland Baptist Church to discuss establishing a Friends group. *continued >>*

Those attending that first meeting were Alan and Elsie Caldwell, Bill and Pam Mesce, Barbara Lewinski, Cindy Hackney and Roger Dykstra (and there may have been others). The decision was made to form the Friends. On May 4, 1998, the articles of incorporation were signed by Alan & Elsie Caldwell, Greg Toppin, Barbara Lewinski, Brian Donohue & Roger Dykstra.

On June 10, 1998 the CSO agreement was signed by Fran P. Mainella, Director of the Florida Division of Recreation and Parks who later went on to become the Director of the National Park Service. Barbara Lewinski was the new Secretary, and Roger Dykstra the first President of the Friends of Fakahatchee. Elsie Caldwell was a founder would later become president of the FOF.

The new Friends group wasted no time in getting to work. Invasive exotic plant removal began soon and continues today. Barbara recalls them doing a take down of an old trailer that a ranger had resided in, removing the furniture and contents in preparation for an improved residence. What that small dedicated group began is carried forward by you all today. Raising funds for equipment, a swamp buggy, a much needed pole barn, maintaining Janes Scenic Drive, hand clearing trails and trams, educational swamp walks, moonlight tram adventures and the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk to name a few. *Keep it up Friends!*

Does your employer have a “Matching Gift” program?

Several of our members have taken advantage of their employer’s matching program (General Electric, Exxon Mobil) for donations to not-for-profit organizations by sending us the “matching” form. We do the rest – it’s that easy! We have revised our Membership Form with a reminder. Please visit <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>

Become a Friend of the Fakahatchee
Visit <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>

Annual Fund appeal to build the Pole Barn continues

You can still donate to the Pole Barn Project which will protect the FOF and Park equipment and vehicles. Give via PayPal through our website at <http://orchidswamp.org/>. If you prefer to mail a check, download the 2018 ANNUAL FUND APPEAL FOR POLE BARN form at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/>. Either way, many thanks for your ongoing support of the Park!

Members make a difference.

Welcome to new members ESJ Enterprise, Naples; Mina Doemer, Brookings SD; Paul and Patricia Bisset, Naples; and Mark and Debi Estabrook, Naples. We now have 336 members.

Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

Lifetime Protectors

Kit & La Raw Maran

Lifetime Family Members

John & Pauly Kaiser
Tom & Judy Maish
Noel Nation
Van & Jane Sayler
Glen & Laura Stacell

Lifetime Individual Members

Karen Berkley
Rita Bleasdale
Warner Blow
Elsie Caldwell
Peter Haffenreffer
Don Harmon
Susan Hauze
Patty Huff
James Nici
Wendy Becker Payton
Ken Shapiro
John Spengler
Carol Vartanian



If you haven’t yet opened your free AmazonSmile account, please take a few minutes to do so. Visit

smile.amazon.com, then choose the Friends of Fakahatchee as your charity to receive the donations from your purchases. To get there quicker, go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/59-3511352> which is our direct link. This works for your shopping all year round, and when more FOF members join in the donation parade, we’ll see more money for our Park. Thank you!

Ghost Rider Tram Tour/Swamp Walk

"Our tram tour/swamp walk was led by volunteer ecologist Patrick Higgins. His good sense of humor and his British accent were charming. He was very knowledgeable about the history of the land, the different ecosystems and their interdependence. We saw deer, birds, turtle, alligators, snakes, orchids and lots of bromeliads. The water was cool but clear and no mosquitoes. We have lived in the Everglades part time for over 30 years and this is one of the all time highlights of that time."

– wanderingspoonbill



Friends of Fakahatchee Board

President – Glen Stacell
Vice President – Tom Maish
Secretary – Ken Shapiro
Treasurer – Scott Geltemeyer
Paul Joslyn
Donald Leonard
Tom Maish
Andrew Tyler
Executive Director – Francine Stevens

Stay up to date with what's seen in the Strand on our FOF Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>

Miss an issue of the Ghostwriter? Visit the archives at <http://orchidswamp.org/about-fof/the-ghost-writer-archives/>.

Our mailing address is:
Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.
PO Box 35



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.

The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is currently edited by Next Steps Collective, LLC, which also manages the Orchidswamp.org website. Contributions to Ghost Writer that relate directly to the business and purpose of the Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. are welcome. Please write news@orchidswamp.org, subject line: Ghostwriter.

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