

Hi, Everyone. I have taken several weeks' leave to replace some body parts and therefore been in the hospital, then with home health. But I do want to share some of my recent visits to the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk.

Let's start at the beginning (no this is not the Von Trop's). The parking lot - not much change there, but the gravel isn't as loose as usual so I can't track which gator is going in and out of which lake. I especially like showing the kids the tail dragging marks; to be totally honest, I like them as well. But we seem to have only one in the front area, a female gator. She is still looking good, active, enjoying a fish lunch every once in a while and posing for numerous pictures. Wouldn't it be fun to discover where and in how many e-mails she has been featured?

As we walk in we find empty pamphlet/information holders. I mention this because I volunteered to re-fill them every week. This is keeping two ladies happy. Our Executive Director, Francine, because someone is actually doing this activity, and Patti (my understanding wife) because my collection of flyers/folders and general information is moving OUT of our garage and into the hands of others. Enjoy them when you can.

I always enjoy the gravel walk down to the boardwalk. Let's see if we do the same things.

1. Stop at each opening to view the water for whatever critter may be on display. Gator, bird, fish, snake, turtle, squirrel or raccoon, you just never know.
2. Stop and read the information signs and pictures of more critters. The pictures are great and always make me think of how many swamp things I may see this day.
3. Ponder the gravel path. Have you ever really looked at it? It's not gravel! Actually it is the basis of how the Everglades work!

This is more or less solid limestone, up to 2,000 ft deep in places, that actually was at one time the bottom of a sea full of fish, shells and plants, all compacted over many, many years to form this layer. There are some passage ways thru this limestone so that the fresh rain water, can seep thru and down into our aquifer. That is what cleans, filters and purifies our drinking water. Eat your heart out Culligan Man; Mother Nature had this idea first!

Stop here next time and see how many fossils you can find. Better yet, for the grand kids - or an adult male that acts like a grand kid (me) - take a look at the posts installed for the chickee hut right before the boardwalk. When they drilled the holes a bunch of this mix came out. All kinds of fossils can be found, and these are older than dinosaurs!

Now we are starting on the actual boardwalk. The original boardwalk was built by Lester Norris in 1957 shortly after he quickly purchased the 640 acres to prevent it from being logged. He built the Boardwalk and later donated the land to the state. That was a lot of feet, paws, claws and snake skins ago.

Many times, being the first person on the boardwalk at break of day is a mixed bag of..... thrills. What has been there overnight? What evidence is left behind? What might still be there, having a lazy start to the day? I usually have my ears, eyes, camera and whistle at the ready. Just have to keep their purpose in mind!

Please note on your right there is a now-dead cypress tree. There is no bark! The 160 MPH winds and rain from hurricane Irma's visit turned into a powerful pressure washer and removed the bark. We actually lost very few Cypress trees in that storm. They have evolved several defenses for hurricanes. That will be a lesson for another time.

As you walk along, within your first 50 yards on your left is a nice sign. Yes, we again have the Bald Eagle family, and the two babies are doing well. One cool day I could only see Mom's head above the nest. She likely had been keeping the eggs warm all night, but no Dad was in my field of vision. All of a sudden she lets out her best screech/twitter and, sure enough, Dad landed on a branch. Some vocals back and forth and he leaves again. Within 15 to 20 minutes he returns with what appeared to be a mouse or rat. Oh boy, the initial conversation was nothing to this tirade. She was NOT happy with lunch! He left again to return with a nice fish and an apology. She certainly liked the fish more than the mouse. Peace returns to the family.

I tried to take a picture less than two weeks ago, but I was too slow on the draw, so you have to imagine. Picture if you will, both parents perched above the nest on the dead branch. They were twittering back and forth which is a very pleasant sound, as they both looked at the now hatched chicks. I could just picture them saying, "They are so beautiful when they are asleep." Being a parent myself, there will be some times when the kids are not asleep and not so beautiful. But still and always special!

Sorry to say my new shoulder has had enough of typing. Time to apply my new friend the ice bag. So, I bid you goodbye and I hope to pick this up again next issue. Keep me posted with what you find at the boardwalk.