

BOARDWALK NEWS

Observation Platform Replacement – Final Report

by Nelson A. Tilden, photos by Dick Hughes

In late November it was determined that the observation platform was no longer safe. Ranger Jeff Kneisley met with District 4 Construction Manager Hank Woodmancy and me to make that determination and to start the planning process. Mr. Woodmancy provided drawings for the new structure, including stronger beams and additional pilings. Ranger Jeff worked on a materials list and estimated the costs of the project.

Both Park rangers and volunteers were involved in tearing down the old structure – which was done in two days. Only six pilings remained usable and three had to be entirely replaced. Over the next few days five new pilings were installed using old-fashioned posthole diggers. This involved working in water about 3’ deep and then digging holes about 4 to 5 feet into the muck. Ranger Steven Bass did the important, but unthinkable, work of diving under the water (in an alligator hole!) to cut large roots which kept the pilings from going down far enough. Ranger Steve Houseknecht did a lot of the post-hole digging. Both rangers were invaluable in the process of putting in new pilings, including transporting many loads of crushed rock the entire length of the boardwalk. Volunteer Steve Koreny assisted in the carrying of materials, as did volunteer Glen Stacell and ranger Jeff Kneisley.

Three volunteers were present each day of the three week project. The team, which has been maintaining the boardwalk since Hurricane Wilma in 2005, consists of Dick Hughes, Bud Scott and myself. Dick was the leader of the project and made sure everything was “square and level.” We called him the “Precision man.” It was fun and challenging for us to be involved in an ambitious project of this magnitude.

Following the completion of the pilings, the new platform was built on three very large beams made of four layers of 2 X 10’s sandwiched together and measuring about 30 feet long. These were built entirely with us standing in the water because they would have been too heavy to lift otherwise. Following the beams were the stringers and railing posts, then the decking boards.

Decking the platform was done in two days. Railings were then installed using a new feature – vertical balusters. The final process was to build two new benches, one nine feet long, the other twenty feet long. The entire project was completed to meet State and ADA specifications.

In addition to the platform, we demolished and rebuilt about 20’ of boardwalk leading to the platform because that portion was also in poor condition.

The whole project was completed at 4:00 p.m. on December 21, 2011, and there were visitors on the platform as soon as we could get our tools and scrap wood picked up.

I want to thank the volunteers and Park rangers that played important roles in getting this platform back open for our visitors. Park Manager Renee Rau deserves many thanks for making the project a priority, when so many other things were demanding ranger time.

Visitors have been very complimentary about the new platform. We were happy to have it open by Christmas and are glad to have it available for our high tourist season which is about to start.



December 13, 2011



December 14, 2011



December 16, 2011

MORE photos on the next page ...

BOARDWALK NEWS

We received the following email on December 22 from Renee Rau, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve manager:

ENDLESS THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED WITH THE BOARDWALK!

I can't get over the quality of work and the quick turnaround time. Each and every one of you went above and beyond to make this happen and it looks amazing. This is certainly the best Christmas present we could give our visitors!!! The boardwalk is packed once again and you can all take credit for this major accomplishment.

I am so lucky and grateful to work with the best CSO, volunteers and staff there is!

Renee M. Rau



December 16, 2011



December 20, 2011



FIRST VISITORS, December 21, 2011

DECEMBER REPORT

The most exciting news of December is the completion of the observation platform at the end of the Boardwalk. What a big accomplishment in a short amount of time!

Boardwalk volunteers Dick Hughes, Bud Scott and Nelson Tilden put in 4 solid weeks of 9-4 work days to get the project completed in time for the holiday season. Park rangers and other volunteers pitched in to estimate and order materials, haul lumber and limestone, wade waist deep in the water, dig and line post holes and help get the project underway according to the specs of the Park Service. It required hard physical labor, a willingness to get very dirty, and the courage to work in an alligator hole with the two local 'residents' closely observing!

Thanks to park manager Renee Rau; rangers Jeff Kneisley, Steven Bass, and Steve Houseknecht; and volunteers Steve Koreny and Glen Stacell. Thanks also to Kathy Hatch and Linda Korney for providing interpretation, and Edite Highes for keeping the boardwalk swept and looking nice all the time. People come to the boardwalk from all over the world, especially during the winter season, and we appreciate everyone who contributes to their experience in any way.

The result of all this effort is a sturdy new platform worthy of the crowds that will gather during the busy winter season. Two benches, one 20 feet long, the other 9 feet, are the welcomed resting place for as many as 600 visitors a day who make the full 1.2 mile walk from their cars out and back again. The new platform and new 20 foot boardwalk section approaching it are just the beginning of what needs to happen on the boardwalk. We are very grateful for the support of the State Park and the Friends of the Fakahatchee and all the visitors who make contributions in the donation box.

We have had two panther sightings on the boardwalk during the month. One sighting by a photographer was too brief to get a picture. The eagles appear to be on eggs with hatching estimated to be in mid January. The ospreys have been seen around the nest as well as the red shouldered hawks at the nest just beyond the twin bald cypresses. Our mother alligator and 10 babies continue to be a real attraction. Clearly we have a lot to see. Come and be a part of it.

Caryl Tilden, Boardwalk naturalist



READY FOR VISITORS, December 21, 2011.
Nelson & Caryl Tilden, Bud Scott, Edite & Dick Hughes, and Ranger Jeff Kneisley, photo by Tom Maish.