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## News from the Strand

### ***Sandpine Alliance and Fearless Fakahackers join forces to clear Mud Tram*** *by Dino Barone*

Saturday, October 21, 2017 – 6 weeks after Hurricane Irma stormed through SW Florida – Janes Scenic Drive and our hiking trails were just about cleared of fallen trees. Three contractors, their dedicated professional crews all equipped with chain saws, machetes, bobcats, truck and trailers, have been tirelessly working, cutting and clearing our maze of trails in the park.

The intrepid group of Fearless Faka-hackers on this beautiful fall day consisted of past FOF Presidents Howard Lubel and Ray Carroll, Park Ranger Steven “WWSBD” Bass, and myself, Dino 'Chainsaw' Barone. We had the unique opportunity to work with Sandpine Alliance, a group of six highly skillful professionals.

Our mission this Saturday was to finish clearing approximately 2 miles of Mud Tram. Sandpine Alliance had cleared half a mile the day before. Anyone who has spent any time on Mud Tram understands the walking challenges of rocks and cypress knees, along with the undulation of the tram. The plant community (consisting of native Hog plum trees, the thorny Smilax, and the extremely invasive Brazilian peppers, along with some poison ivy, just to spice things up a bit), also wants to leave a memorable impression.



*Members of the Faka-hackers and Sandpine Alliance getting ready to rumble on Mud Tram.*

As if this was not enough fun, during high water season Mud Tram is literally underwater, anywhere from ankle deep to mid-thigh deep in a couple of areas. Now mix in broken branches with some fallen trees, thanks to Landscaping by Hurricane Irma, and we have a party! Soooooo, Ring Announcer Michael Buffer, please bellow out your famous catchphrase... "LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!"

Chain saws come alive. The march into mayhem has begun. Two sawyers taking the lead, one cutting the left side, the other cutting the right side as they slogged along the watery trail. In places where the vegetation was impenetrable – making the trail look more like a barricade – a third sawyer would trail slightly behind, cutting the fallen materials into smaller, easier to manage pieces.

The remainder of the crew then followed with machetes and loppers on the smaller items not previously cut via chainsaw, cutting and then removing all cut materials from the tramway. Poetry in motion, as if this was a Bob Fosse choreograph

production. When the chain saws needed more motion lotion, this always appeared to be a natural time to rotate sawyers, bringing on fresh arms and legs. The march continued.

Around noon we stopped for personal nutrition fulfillment and a rest. We were soon fueled up, hydrated, rested and ready to continue. To this point we had cleared just shy of a mile, and had a little over a mile to go if we wanted to finish clearing mud tram from end to end. The gauntlet has been thrown down; the challenge was in front of us; safety is paramount. Could we accomplish the mission today?

Off we go, cutting, clearing, slogging. Rotating sawyers. Keeping the UTV close by for fuel and hydration. We passed the fourth of five ground wells on Mud Tram, a half a mile to go. It had been overcast most of the day. The cooling temperatures thanks to the shade had been beneficial. As long as we did not encounter too many large fallen trees, our goal appeared to be achievable.

We were focused. Heads held high, shoulders back, moral was solid – cut, clear, slog. The time is now 2:30'ish; we are trying to be done by 3'ish. We persist in our cut, clear, slog, repetition. About a half hour later, we finally began turning left. Arms raised high, the gate in sight – YIPPIE!!!!!!!



*Still smiling after cleaning the equipment at the end of a long, hard day!*

I would like to heartily thank the Sandpine Alliance Group: David, Brooke, Adam, Will, Victor and Jessie. Highly professional, talented, hardworking, situationally aware and ready to help. The way they prepare at the shop for the day's activities, their fluid movements with strong communication in the field, then back at the shop at the end of the day cleaning/maintaining/prepping equipment for the next deployment – truly dedicated professionals!

Volunteer opportunities in the park are diverse. Please contact Mike Duey, parks volunteer coordinator at 239-695-4593, or via email [michael.Duey@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:michael.Duey@dep.state.fl.us)

**For an overview of FOLKS volunteer opportunities, visit our website at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>**

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## Mountain of rubble cleared with prescribed burn



*Park Service Specialist Steven Bass, Park Service Specialist Mike Duey, and Park Ranger Guy DiGiovani after a long, hard day of dirty work. Thanks, guys!*



*Park Service Specialist Steven Bass on November 9, the last day of clearing gate 12 of the mountain of organic material left behind by hurricane Irma. The prescribed burn was under the supervision of Park Specialists.*