South Florida National Parks
Biscayne, Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Parks
Big Cypress National Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Parks Guide

The Official Guide to National Parks in South Florida
Dry Season, December 2003 - May 2004

Surviving A Quiet Disaster

"On the day hell came to Lake Okeechobee, Vernie Boots built himself a windmill. He found a boat propeller, impaled it on a fat nail and pointed the toy at the rising wind. He was 14... On Sept. 16, 1928, the only thing between the wood frame Boots home and the massive lake was 300 feet and a 4-foot-dike constructed of mud. When dawn broke, and the hurricane had passed, his father and mother and brother were gone, dead by drowning. He and two brothers survived the storm by clinging to debris and floating two miles into the Everglades."

--Jeff Kinkenberg, *St. Petersburg Times,* July 12, 1992

Hurricanes and flooding are among the natural events that helped shape the South Florida ecosystem, which is dominated by the Everglades. But hurricanes can be deadly. The 1928 storm left an official body count of 1,836, and some estimates say as many as 2,500 people were killed. Storms also cause economic devastation, wiping out homes, farms and businesses.

During the '20s, '30s and '40s, when 22 hurricanes hit, Florida was rapidly developing. Tourism boomed. By 1947, when two hurricanes and three tropical depressions left everything under water from Lake Okeechobee southward, people were clamoring for flood control.

A vast network of canals, levies and floodgates was built throughout South Florida, so the destructive power of water could be managed. This manipulation of the water system, combined with development, has had disastrous results for South Florida parks and preserves. Ironically, more manipulation is planned to help revive the natural system.

Wet and Dry Seasons

In South Florida, there are really only two seasons — wet and dry. More than temperature, it is summer rains and winter drought that define the rhythms of life.

During hot summer days, trade winds blow warm, moist, tropical air over the ocean. As the air hits the warmer land, it begins to rise creating thunderstorms. The rains fall into large basins that make up the Everglades ecosystem, creating vast, shallow wetlands. The water begins to flow toward the sea.

Late in the fall, as cooler weather sets in, the hot summer sun that pulled water into the steamy atmosphere becomes less intense. Northern fronts push through South Florida, reducing humidity. The rains begin to diminish, and the waters begin to dry up.

A Vast System

The Everglades ecosystem used to begin just south of Orlando, in the Kissimmee River Basin. A meandering river filled, flooded, and spilled into Lake Okeechobee. The lake overflowed and water flowed southward, dropping 6 inches each mile, in a wide and shallow swath 50 miles wide, 80 miles long. Most large wetlands receive water and nutrients from associated rivers overflowing their banks in the wet season. But not the Everglades — this "sheet flow" of water, fed by rains and Lake Okeechobee, is the only wetland of its kind in the world.

Continued on page 9

As early as 1850, there were notions of draining the Everglades ecosystem to make the wetlands "useful" by converting them to farmfields and communities.

South Florida National Parks...

... protect coral reefs, fragile estuaries, sub-tropical forests and some of the largest natural areas east of the Mississippi River.

... are home to a variety of temperate and tropical plants and animals that co-mingle nowhere else within the United States.

... provide a wide range of recreational opportunities for visitors and residents.

... are interconnected by water flowing through Florida from Kissimmee to the Keys.

... are special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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Check out the *South Florida National Parks Trip Planner* for details on park facilities.

Big Cypress National Preserve

Big Cypress National Preserve Offers New Opportunities to Visitor

Big Cypress National Preserve

Established in 1974
729,000 acres

Important Information

Mailing Address
HCR 61, Box 110
Ochopee, FL 34141

Phone
Toll-free 24 Hour Emergency
(800) 788-0511
Big Cypress Visitor Center
(239) 695-1201
Big Cypress Hunting Information
(239) 695-2040
Report hunting violations immediately to
(800) 788-0511

Website
www.nps.gov/bicy

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

South Florida National Parks Guide is published as a service to park visitors by the Florida National Parks and Monuments Association (FNPMA).

The National Park Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior, was established in 1916 to manage a growing system of national parks. Today, the National Park System consists of 388 units. National Parks, National Preserves, Seashores, Monuments, Historic Sites, Lakeshores, Battlefields, and others make up a great repository of national treasures entrusted to the National Park Service. In South Florida, nearly 2.5 million acres of pineland, prairie, tropical hardwoods, mangrove forests, estuaries and coral reefs and historical sites are preserved for this and future generations. Their scientific, recreational, aesthetic and educational values are limitless.

Experience Your America

Big Cypress has several ongoing projects that will provide safer access to areas along Highway 41, increase opportunities to view wildlife and allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of the national preserve. Not all projects will be completed during the 2004 season, so stop by the Big Cypress Visitor Center to check on our progress.

The Kirby Storter Boardwalk
Winding its way across the sawgrass prairie, through a dwarf cypress forest, and into a mysterious cypress strand, this 1500-foot boardwalk will provide a glimpse of the swamp previously seen only by those who dared to wade into the neck-deep waters. A platform will overlook a pond in the center of the cypress dome, providing opportunities to view the unique animal and plant life found here while soaking in the sounds of the swamp.

Sweetwater Strand
Five and one half miles south of Monroe station on the Loop Road, visitors will find the slough at Sweetwater Strand. Once completed, a small viewing deck will highlight this favorite spot for viewing birds, otters, Big Cypress fox squirrels, alligators and other wildlife. The boardwalk, benches and new parking area will allow visitors to spend more time relaxing next to the peaceful water while taking in the scenery.

Gator Hook Strand
Also on Loop Road the new Gator Hook Strand Trail will provide day hikers with a chance to go back in time. The trail follows the path of an old logging tram built above the water and used as a railroad track during the logging days in the '30s and '40s to haul out the huge old- growth cypress trees. The 2-mile trail will have boardwalks across areas of the tram that were removed to allow water to flow freely in the strand.

Oasis
The Big Cypress Visitor Center at Oasis is also scheduled to get a face-lift. The building will be spruced up and the parking lot will be expanded to include many more spaces for visitors.
New entrance and exit areas will be safer for pulling on and off of the highway. A hanging boardwalk over the north edge of the canal will provide a safe area to view the many alligators that frequent this spot during the winter.

H.P. Williams Roadside Park
As the canal next to the Turner River Road dries down during the winter months, wading birds, alligators and other wildlife gather here, providing excellent wildlife viewing. The road begins at the H.P. Williams Picnic Area just off Highway 41. Visitor access within the picnic area has recently been improved. When complete this site will have a new restroom, a large parking area and a new boardwalk along the bank of the Turner River Canal.

Turner River Canoe Access
Those who have paddled the river know what a treat it is to drift past towering cypress, pond apple forests, wide open prairies, and through winding mangrove tunnels. However, the launch site has always been the most difficult part to maneuver, as it is small and too close to the dangerous highway. A new access area is under construction and will provide plenty of parking, a picnic area, a canoe/kayak launch ramp, and a restroom. Ranger-led canoe trips will depart from this site every Saturday during the season.

Grass Pink

Little Red Riding Hood - Clamshell Orchid

Sky Flower

Ghost Orchid

Discover the Fragile Gems of the Swamp

A drive through Big Cypress National Preserve in the spring and summer months is sure to awaken the imagination. As you travel along the Tamiami Trail, tiny blurred dots in a spectacular array of color catch your eye — aquamarine, rose quartz, sapphire, citrine, or garnets — beguiling glimpses of precious gems.

Curiosity piqued? You have just discovered the true jewels of the swamp: the **incredible wildflowers of the wetlands!**

Those with time and a sense of adventure may wander off the highway onto a scenic network of gravel roads to explore these riches. Turner River, Upper Wagon Wheel, and Birdon Roads provide the perfect means to enjoy the Preserve's bounty at a safe, slow speed and take advantage of numerous photo opportunities. The roadsides are sprinkled with marshmallow, black-eyed Susan, blue-eyed grass and Small's flax. Pineland Petunia, tick seed and false foxglove sneak up through the saw palmettos in the pinelands. The prairies become a sea of grass pinks, swamp lilies, glades lobelia, prairie milkweed and yellowtops undulating in the gentle breeze.

Farther along the road you may encounter yet another environment, the deeper waters of the cypress swamp. Summer thunderstorms fill the dry swamp with cool, clear water that quenches the thirst of the wildflowers and rejuvenates the parched land. Tall cypress trees thrive in this wet environment. Their brilliant emerald leaves tower overhead, and are reflected in the mirror-like water below. Cypress branches are laden with what appear to be large nests, but in fact are bromeliads. Long, ruby red bracts tipped with petite, amethyst florets emerge from the center of each air plant.

Dare to venture from the safety of your car to explore the mysterious swamp! This journey may produce wet feet and muddy shoes, but the payoff is priceless. Sloshing through the crystalline water, you produce miniature waves that lap against the stems of ten petal sabatia, floating hearts, and pickerel weed. You may even find the rarest of gems in the swamp—the wild orchid. Once plentiful, orchid hunters collected these elusive plants, as rare and valuable as the jewels they emulate. Sought by collectors for their beauty and hunters for their cash value, many species of orchid almost disappeared from the swamps.

Now protected, wildflower enthusiasts consider a chance to photograph the cigar orchid, clamshell orchid, night blooming orchid or even the elusive ghost orchid in their natural setting a priceless treasure. Please take only photographs and memories to preserve the swamp's riches for the discovery and delight of many generations of explorers to come.

Get Out There
Explore for Wildflowers

The Turner River Road (CR 839), Upper Wagon Wheel Road (CR 837), and Birdon Road (CR 841) loop is a 17-mile drive accessed from the Tamiami Trail (Hwy 41). This driving tour is a great place to look for wildflowers year-round.

For more information on types of wildflowers in the preserve, where and when to see them and road conditions call or stop by the Big Cypress Visitor Center. **Remember, all plants and animals are protected in Big Cypress National Preserve and all national park areas.**

Paddlers Find New Adventure in Turner River's Old Channel

Recent restoration efforts have brought the Turner River channel back to life. Today it is a favorite destination for canoeists, kayakers and other adventurers. Only two decades ago, the Turner River was drying up, dying, due to water being rerouted by developers.

Water doesn't just vanish in Florida – it gets routed somewhere else, usually with the help of a canal and levee. The Turner River Road and Turner River Canal were installed in the late 1950s by hopeful developers to do just that – divert the water.

The river had once served as a vital ecological link interlacing tidal mangroves, marl prairie, and cypress forested wetlands. It had been used by panthers, wading birds, and enjoyed by canoeists. But then in a few short decades it vanished.

The canal was engineered to drain water, and to drain it fast. Whereas the old shallow riverbed once meandered through the swamp's spongy terrain, the canal detoured water down its deeply trenched and "straight as an arrow" channel and flushed it quickly out to tide. By the time the dry season rolled around in November, there was simply no more water left to be drained. For months on end saltwater tides would flow farther inland than ever before, especially during storms, bringing with them mangroves and other salt tolerant vegetation.

Some effects were more subtle and only revealed over time. Adjacent swampland dried out prematurely, allowing for wildfires and exotic plants to gain footholds into the stressed environment. Downstream coastal waters became overloaded with huge pulses of freshwater after storms. Meanwhile, just a quarter mile away from the dying river, the newly dug canal became a favored stopping point for travelers along Tamiami Trail (at HP Williams Picnic Area), largely unaware of the canal's ecological impact on the wildlife they hoped to view.

And so could have ended the Turner River story, perhaps just another chapter in the bygone book of "Old Florida" lost to the march of progress. Fortunately, starting in the late 1980s, the staff of Big Cypress NPres began a series of restoration measures to return flowing water to the river.

The first step involved retracing the ancient path of the river. The next step required plugging portions of the canal to slow down the volume of water escaping to tide, and then re-diverting this water back towards the river through conveyances under the roadbed. The restoration project ended by filling in the southernmost mile of Turner River Canal near the HP Williams Picnic Area. A sign describing the river restoration now marks the spot for visitors traveling along the Tamiami Trail.

The restoration efforts have turned the page to a new and happier chapter for the river, the adjacent swamp, the wildlife and the paddle enthusiasts that enjoy the corridor. Today the restored river corridor, again a healthy link between a diversity of habitats, provides a vibrant opportunity for adventurers seeking a "hands-on" experience through the Big Cypress Swamp and estuarine mangroves.

While canoeing the Turner River you travel along a vital link of fresh water within the Everglades system. Water flows from the Big Cypress Swamp, through the river, into the 10,000 Islands Estuary.

Get Out There
Canoe the Turner River

To explore the Turner River – on your own or with a park ranger – contact the Big Cypress National Preserve Visitor Center at 239-695-1201 or the Gulf Coast Visitor Center of Everglades National Park at 239-695-3311. Both centers can provide information on local canoe rentals and shuttle services. Big Cypress National Preserve offers ranger-led canoe trips along the Turner River during the dry season (December through April). If you have your own canoe or kayak you can do the trip on your own.

Slogging through the cypress forest — on your own or with a ranger — is one of the best ways to explore and learn about Big Cypress National Preserve.

Big Cypress Ranger-led Activities Winter 2004

Big Cypress Activities	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Swamp Walks* (Sat. 10 a.m., Sun. and Mon. 1 p.m.)	X	X					X
Canoe Trips* – 9:30 a.m.							X
Campfire Programs – Monument Lake, 7:00 p.m.							X
Campfire Programs – Midway, 7:00 p.m.						X	
Bicycle Trips* (2nd Sundays @ 10:00 a.m., 4th Sundays @ 1:00 p.m.)	X						
Wildlife Talks – H.P. Williams Picnic Area	X			X			

Swamp Walks *
Discover what is out there during this 2 hour exploration! Wear long pants and sturdy shoes you can get wet and muddy. Bring change of clothes and shoes for your ride home. Limit 20 people. Reservations required.

Canoe Trips *
We will provide canoes or bring your own for the 4-hour trip . Route and duration varies due to weather, tides and ranger's preference. Reservations required.

Campfire programs
Topics will vary by ranger's choice. Bring a lawn chair and insect repellent. No need to make reservations, just drop on by.

Bicycle Trips at Bear Island *
Bring your own sturdy bicycle to tour a variety of Big Cypress habitats. These 4-hour trips depart from an access point north of I-75, off Highway 29. Limit 15 people. Reservations required.

Wildlife Talks at H.P. Williams Picnic Area
Join a ranger or volunteer to learn about your preserve's natural history. Stop by with questions and for a closer look at the wildlife through the preserve's spotting scope.

Biscayne National Park

Established in 1968 as Biscayne National Monument; rededicated and enlarged as Biscayne National Park in 1980.
173,000 acres

Important Information

Mailing Address
9700 SW 328th St.
Homestead, FL 33033–5634

Phone
Dante Fascell Visitor Center
(305) 230–PARK
24 Hour Emergency
(305) 247-7272
Toll-free 24 Hour Emergency
(800) 788-0511

Concessions
Biscayne National Underwater Park, Inc.
(305) 230-1100

Website
www.nps.gov/bisc

For-casting for Biscayne Bay: From Wishes to Fishes

Pondering the beauty of our nation's natural wonders such as mountains, caves and coral reefs renders us in awe from the aesthetics and from considering the actual formation of such magnitude that took thousands of years. These reflections surface when we experience these natural wonders first hand and often leave us with many mixed emotions. We feel an increased respect for jagged mountains that came before us or are humbled to realize we will never live long enough to see a redwood tree go from sapling to maturity. A coral polyp might grow into a six-inch piece of elk horn coral by the time our great grandkids graduate from college. However, do not let these patient old souls of nature fool you. Change is constant. Whether through ecological or human processes, it never takes leave. Sometimes, it is possible in a lifetime to see vast bodies of water, floating grasslands, barrier islands and historic estuaries transform-once, twice or more! Of course when these habitats change, so do their inhabitants.

Biscayne Bay has experienced many changes, and human "old timers" from the area tell great fish stories about large hauls of snook, redfish, oyster and shrimp that are sparsely found or no longer exist in the bay today. Of course, half of a good fish story is in the telling, and the other half is in the believing. However, when reviewing the past century of Biscayne Bay, one has to wonder if there is validity in some of those fantastic tales. Many of these anglers were "flats" fishermen that used long, flat, non-motorized wooden boats and long poles to maneuver around the shallows of the bay - a cultural tradition in South Florida. During these golden age days of fishing, older folks may also remember stopping over at one of the many fresh water upwells that supported life for island dwellers, casual boaters and fishermen. Back then, Biscayne Bay was a true estuary.

Today, even though Biscayne Bay is still considered a very popular recreation spot, a protective nursery for hundreds of infant and juvenile creatures as well as an eye popping, bio-diverse paradise, it is not exactly the same estuary that storytellers remember. Even though some of the bay's original marine species were able to withstand a wide range of salinities, some were not and declined when the true estuary vanished, largely due to the irregular fresh water flows that have been manipulated over time.

As mentioned in the lead article, in the late 1940's life and population needs began to change drastically in South Florida and eventually, these changes played out physically in the control of land and water and in the lifestyles of residents. Other impacting circumstances that evolved over the last sixty years are increased marine debris, combustion engines, pollutants and over-fishing.

At present, efforts being made through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and development of Biscayne National Park's Fisheries Management Plan and General Management Plan aim to preserve and restore as much of Biscayne's natural and cultural heritage as possible.

The main purpose of the Fisheries Management Plan is to protect and perpetuate the park's fishery resources and increase the quality of the park visitor's fishing experience. Some high expectations from the plan include ensuring that the 10,000-year-old tradition of fishing in the bay will continue for generations to come. Its focus also includes developing strategies to maintain healthy populations of the more than 500 species of fish in Biscayne Bay and to return part of the resource back to the days of healthy and bountiful shellfish, red fish and snook as well as other native species.

The plan is being developed cooperatively by the park and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) with input from other government agencies, universities, community leaders and the public.

The General Management Plan, which also brings together multiple stakeholders, is a road map toward a sustainable future of the entire park and resources that will be used for the next 15-20 years. Expectations for this plan include preserving the third largest reef tract in the world and continuing to provide the beautiful vistas and soundscapes that many Miami-Dade residents think of as their "front porch" experience.

Still today, the tradition of fishing Biscayne Bay is being handed down to the next generation. Many local families come to Covey Point, next to Biscayne's Dante Fascell Visitor Center, to try their luck.

This dream evokes strong emotions among some area fishers, divers and eco-watchers.

Citizens, who have participated in the development of the General Management Plan by voicing their opinions and sending their comments to the National Park Service, had much to say. However, their core messages were clear—action, conservation, communication, education and preservation. One participant wrote, "the remote quality of the Keys should be preserved" Park managers were told to "protect important breeding habitat for fishing populations," "provide more access for those without boats," "keep natural resources as close to pristine as possible while allowing public use," " restore historic water flows," "do more boater outreach" and "enhance educational opportunities…in a way that reveals to people the value of a healthy marine ecosystem, which contributes to the survival of the entire planet".

These public expectations are not only some of the hopes and wishes for our nation's future in South Florida; they are part of the mission that drives the National Park Service.

These are lengthy processes for sure, however, by meeting at the table with researchers, neighbors, critics and idealists alike, far reaching, long lasting, realistic, shared visions of what is possible in our lifetime and beyond, are likely to emerge. If you would like to be a part of these exciting public processes that will change some of the future into past-positively, stay tuned to the park's website, www.nps.gov/bisc for updates. Someday, the whopper of a tale you will tell for your descendants will be one of our nation's great success stories, a true story of survival and change for the better.

A Closer Look at Biscayne's Treasures

The majestic beauty of the crystal waters of Biscayne Bay, the blue skies above and the palm trees and mangrove forests that line the coast are a magnificent sight to behold. These tropical treasures are preserved in Biscayne National Park and represent a piece of "old Florida" as remembered by early residents and visitors to the area. As rare as this undeveloped scenery is to present day South Florida, this is only the beginning of what the park has to offer.

Biscayne is a place of transition and a study of contrasts. Here, freshwater meets saltwater as the bay and ocean merge. It is this critical mix of fresh and salt water that is essential in maintaining the health of the bay and the park's tropical ecosystem composed of mangrove forests, an estuarine bay, the northern most Florida Keys and coral reefs. The variety of life forms, both on land and in the water, deserves a closer look.

While each of the park's four distinct environments contributes its complexity and beauty, it is the coral reef that is the most intricate and fragile ecosystem in the park.

The waters of Biscayne National Park house a portion of the world's third longest coral reef system and some of the best-preserved reefs in Florida. Composed of limestone built up over thousands of years, coral reefs form unusual underwater forests and caverns that are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems on earth. Neon-blue gobies, multicolored parrotfish, white grunts and yellow–striped porkfish create a striking scene against the backdrop of swaying purple sea fans and golden-brown elkhorn corals. It is possible to catch a glimpse of any of the hundreds of fish species that circulate through Biscayne's waters any time of the year. This vibrantly colored underwater world is astonishing to explore and is the essence of Biscayne National Park.

Snorkeling allows for entry into the stunning underwater world of Biscayne's coral reefs. Here, snorkelers explore a "forest " of elkhorn coral.

Get Out There
Discover Biscayne

In the water
Since 95% of Biscayne National Park is underwater, actually getting in can be the best way to explore the park. The park's seagrass beds and coral reefs can offer spectacular sights and diversity of life.

On the water
But you don't have to get wet to appreciate the bay. Exploring by boat, canoe, kayak or sail board provides an unforgettable journey. Glass bottom boat tours are offered daily.

From dry land
If you prefer to stay on the land the Dante Fascell Visitor Center offers plenty of options. Park videos and three-dimensional exhibits allow you to view the park's wonders. Picnic tables, grills, a boardwalk and fishing jetty offer additional recreational options at the visitor center grounds. Park staff can guide you in your exploration or, ask to borrow a "Discovery Pack" which contains a variety of activities and tools to help you and your family explore the park.

Biscayne National Park Ranger-led Activities

Dante Fascell Visitor Center
Tour the park's visitor center exhibits, videos, and gallery. Open daily, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Spectrum of Life
Biscayne's mangrove shoreline, estuarine bay, isolated keys, and coral reefs are all introduced in this 12-minute video. Shown daily upon request between 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Experience the tranquility of Elliott and Boca Chita Keys, the park's two most popular subtropical islands, and experience a slower pace and quieter place, often referred to as a piece of "Old Florida."

Ranger's Choice
From porch talks to short walks, learn about Biscayne's diverse resources with a park ranger.

Boat Tours
Guided glass-bottom boat tours, island and sunset trips, snorkling and scuba diving excursions are all great ways to experience Biscayne. Call (305) 230-1100 for more information and to reserve your trip.

Canoe and Kayak Trips
Take a two-hour journey along the mangrove shoreline. Provide your own boat, or rent one at the discount rate of $15.95. Call (305) 230-1100 to reserve a canoe or kayak.

Family Fun Fests
Three hours of hands-on activities for kids and kids-at-heart! Each month features a different theme. Complete them all and you'll earn a special button!

Gallery Exhibits
National Parks have inspired artists for over a century. Changing exhibits in our visitor center gallery highlight the work of contemporary artists who continue that long tradition.

Discovery Series
Discover a few of our hidden resources in this free adult lecture series held at the

Biscayne Activities	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
The Spectrum of Life	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Boat Tours	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ranger's Choice	Check at Visitor Center for times and location.						
Gallery Exhibits	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family Fun Fest (First Sunday of each month through May.)	X						
Canoe/Kayak Trips (2nd & 4th Saturdays, monthly through April)							X
Discovery Series (3rd Wednesday of each month through April.)				X			

Biscayne's Dante Fascell Visitor Center exhibits offer visitors the opportunity to explore mangrove estuaries, rich seagrass beds, and vibrant coral reefs of the park's underwater world — from dry land.

Established in 1947
1,508,570 acres

Important Information

Mailing Address
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, FL 33034–6733

Phone
Headquarters
(305) 242–7700
Everglades 24 Hour Emergency
(305) 247-7272
Toll-free 24 Hour Emergency
(800) 788-0511
Flamingo Visitor Center
(239) 695-2945
Gulf Coast Visitor Center
(239) 695-3311
Shark Valley Visitor Center
(305) 221-8776
Key Largo Ranger Station
(305) 852-0304
Campground Reservations
(800) 365-CAMP

Concessions
Everglades National Park Boat Tours and Canoe Rentals *in Everglades City*
(239)695-2591,
from Florida only
(800)445-7724
Flamingo Lodge, *including the marina, boat tours, and rentals*
(239)695-3101
For reservations only
(800)600-3813
Shark Valley Tram Tours
(305)221-8455

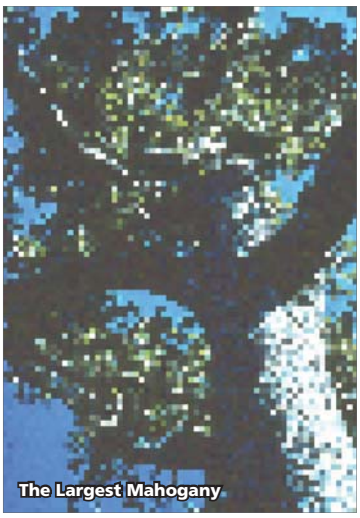
Website
www.nps.gov/ever

Everglades National Park

The Legacy Lives On: Exploring Everglades National Park – Then and Now

Nowhere is the diversity of Everglades plant life more evident than the rare and endangered tropical hardwood hammock. Rising just a few feet above the surrounding sawgrass prairie, an interesting variety of wild plants and animals make their home in these isolated "islands" of dry land.

The following article (taken from the March 1953 issue of ***Everglades Natural History***) describes the discovery of the largest mahogany tree in the United States, spared the logger's axe by its isolation, within one of these fragile habitats just over 50 years ago.


The Largest Mahogany

1953: The Largest Mahogany Tree

by Taylor R. Alexander

That the Big Mahogany Hammocks in the Everglades National Park should have remained undiscovered and unspoiled so late as the spring of 1948 is one on the most remarkable facts in the botanical history of south Florida. The author and his colleague were the first botanists and perhaps the first white men to enter these remote and venerable cathedrals of plant life. The article below tells of the magnificent mahoganies there and the lush vegetation which decorates their great limbs. —Editor's note

To see the largest mahogany tree one has to be prepared for a hard two and a half mile hike through sawgrass. Mahogany trees are associated with jungle territory and the big trees of the Park are located in "hammocks" that are the nearest approach to jungle growth to be found on the U.S. mainland. The hammocks appear as dark, rounded mounds of trees low on the horizon and, as one walks, individual hammocks gradually take on form until a dark wall appears to spring abruptly from the sawgrass prairie. In season hawks rise from their nests to scream their warning and fresh deer tracks tell the intruder that he has disturbed the peacefulness of the expansive area.

As one enters the hammock by following a deer path through the dense, tangled growth, peace and stillness return. The jungle opens and overhead is the canopy of tall trees; tropical mahogany and temperate zone Virginia oak. Large vines grow everywhere and royal palms, cabbage palms, Paurotis palms, and saw palmetto add to the tropical appearance. Air plants – bromeliads, orchids, and ferns – grow in profusion on living limbs and fallen tree trunks. Strangler figs are everywhere. Underneath, the accumulation of leaf litter and leaf mold is deep and the impression is that here nature has been at work unhindered for years. Here the tropical plants meet their temperate neighbors. Here the salt marsh plants of nearby Florida Bay meet the fresh water plants of the Everglades. It is a transition zone and it is unique.

The largest mahogany found to date [in the Park] has been reported by the writer to the American Forestry Association as the largest of its kind in the United States. Botany classes from the University of Miami have photographed, measured and studied this tree for several years. It has an estimated height of seventy feet and is well preserved.

Here in south Florida mahogany is "King of the Forest." Now that these trees are protected in this area they should become even more spectacular in centuries to come.

2003: Mahogany Hammock Trail

The lush mahogany hammocks still inspire awe within the protected boundaries of Everglades National Park. But their isolation, which once hid the large mahoganies from loggers, cannot protect them from today's mounting environmental pressures. Ecosystem declines have made hardwood hammocks an extremely endangered feature of the remaining Everglades.

To allow more visitors a chance to venture into this once remote hammock a boardwalk was eventually built. Over the years, hurricanes and damp rot damaged the boardwalk and the great mahogany tree. This year, the park opens the reconstructed trail through this celebrated hammock after many years of partial closure.

The largest mahogany still stands — battered and topped by storms — as a symbol of the besieged Everglades. No longer isolated, we hope exploration of this fading giant and its vanishing habitat will promote understanding and appreciation of its fragile yet enduring features.

Mahogany Hammock Trail

Get Out There
Explore Everglades Habitats

The Mahogany Hammock Trail is one of several short trails along the park road from the park entrance to Flamingo. Each trail allows you to explore a different habitat within the Everglades.

Park entrance fees funded the $300,000 reconstruction project to replace the entire boardwalk in the Mahogany Hammock, making it wheelchair accessible, adding five rest stops with benches, and interpretive signs in both English and Spanish.

A Ranger in Paradise — Reflections from a Wilderness Journey

Finally a chance to leave it all behind — no phones, no email, no television! I am excited to begin my camping trip in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness, one of the largest designated wilderness areas east of the Mississippi River. I load up my kayak with supplies for my three-day journey and set off. As I feel the calm waters of the vast Everglades estuary ripple beneath my paddle, I am reminded of what Marjory Stoneman Douglas said; "There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they always have been, one of the unique regions of the Earth; remote, never wholly known."

I am neither the first to paddle this remote watery wilderness nor the last. I often wonder what it might have been like to navigate without the aid of a nautical chart or compass, upon which I am highly dependent. For thousands of years, people ventured through this very maze of islands and rivers. The Calusa Indians traveled in hand-carved, dug-out canoes made from local pine or cypress trees. They steered by the stars and knowledge handed down through the generations. These early people depended on the wealth of life from the estuary. As I paddle through the winding creeks I am humbled by how they were able to find their course and what skills sustained their way of life.

The people of the past might recognize the very route I am paddling but would find the surrounding landscape greatly changed. As I cruise up the Lopez River, I feel at peace and yet sad for this great wilderness. It is the downstream recipient of a long chain of complex environmental problems resulting largely from the growing population of South Florida. I am reminded of what swamp resident Glen Simmons said in his memoirs: "When you're speeding along on the expressways and there's little to see but buildings that are getting thicker and bigger all the time, do you wonder what was here just a few years ago? Although it's not commonly known, it was a wilderness just a hundred years ago, and a man could lose himself mentally for days without meeting anyone."

The author, Sarah Davis, exploring part of the 99-mile Wilderness Waterway. Pick up a wilderness trip planner from any visitor center within the park to learn more about planning an excursion. (Photo by David Hammel)

This is exactly what I am seeking — a place to lose myself for days. I value this in the wilderness and work to protect it as a park ranger of Everglades National Park. As I continue paddling through the glistening waters my mind begins to wander and let go of the stress built up over the last few months. The waters are calm and the tide is in my favor giving me a little push going up river. Finally I glide to my first campsite, a chickee platform suspended over the dark waters, and prepare to set up camp.

Later, after three days of exploration and reflection it is time to leave. As I break camp, somewhat hesitant to head back home I stare in awe at the still waters of the Gulf, smooth as glass. A manatee pops its nose up for a breath and dolphins frolic in the distance. Paddling through the subtle beauty of the Everglades, an overwhelming sense of tranquility engulfs me, that most elusive and important of the senses that I only encounter when outside in nature.

What will become of this great wilderness? I hope the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, started by the state and federal government in the year 2000, will help save this area from destruction — and its headwaters from further development. Many people are only just beginning to realize what is at stake and understand the true value of wild areas. I would love to stay longer on the water, but I know I must return—not just to answer my emails, but to help save this special place.

Everglades National Park Ranger-Led Activities

Flamingo Area (239) 695-2945

Morning Canoe Trip** (8:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.)
Reservations required. Call the Flamingo Visitor Center or stop by for more information.

Slough Slogs (various times and dates)**
Reservations required. Contact the visitor center to learn more about this off-trail hike through the Everglades waters.

Naturalist Knapsack (30 minutes)
From manatees to mosquitoes, discover what makes the Everglades like no other place on earth. Check at the Visitor Center for time and location.

Gulf Coast Area (239)695-3311

Boat Tours* (1½ hours)
Discover the 10,000 Islands, where the land meets the sea. Tour offered every half hour, duration 1½ hours. Led by a Park Ranger or concession naturalist.

Eye on the Everglades (30 minutes)
Join a ranger for a ½ hour talk on Everglades National Park's ecology, history or other issues. Meet at the visitor center chickee.

Canoe Trips*
Join a ranger for a four-hour exploration of the mangrove estuaries of the 10,000 islands. Reservations required. Fee charged. Call the Gulf Coast visitor center for more information.

*** Concession fees apply. Program may be led by park ranger, volunteer or concession naturalists**

Royal Palm Area

Anhinga Amble (1 hour)
Anhinga, alligators and Florida gar can all be seen on this guided tour of the Anhinga Trail. Meet at the Royal Palm benches.

Ranger's Choice (afternoons)
Contact the Coe visitor center to join a ranger talk or guided walk through one of the diverse habitats of the Everglades, such as the Hardwood Hammock or Pineland.

Pineland Bicycle Tours**
Slough Slogs**
These fee-based programs may be available throughout the season. Please check at the Coe visitor center for times, locations, reservations and fee details.

Shark Valley (305)221-8776

Tram Tour* (2 hours)
Venture into the heart of the Everglades with a concession or park service naturalist. Trams depart on the hour. Fee charged.

Shark Bytes (30 minutes)
Join a park ranger for a "hands-on" talk about the little-known aspects of the Everglades. Meet behind the visitor center.

Slough Slogs**
Reservations required. Contact the visitor center to learn more about this off-trail hike through the Everglades waters.

**** Denotes fee-based ranger-led activities.**

Everglades Activities	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Flamingo Area, 12/23/03-3/30/04							
Morning Canoe Trip, 8:30 a.m. **	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Slough Slogs **	Check Visitor Center for times and locations						
Naturalist Knapsack, 4:00 p.m.							
Gulf Coast, 12/21/03 – 4/19/04							
Boat Tours * (various times)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Eye on the Everglades, 1:30 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Canoe Trips (routes vary) 10:00 a.m.	X						X
Royal Palm Area, 12/15/03 – 4/19/04							
Anhinga Amble, 10:30 a.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ranger's Choice, afternoons	Check Visitor Center for times and locations						
Pineland Bicycle Tours **							
Slough Slogs **							
Shark Valley , 12/28/03 – 3/30/04							
Tram Tours * (various times)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shark Bytes, 1:15 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Slough Slogs ** 1:00 p.m.							X

Availability of programs is subject to change.

Dry Tortugas National Park

Dry Tortugas National Park

Established in 1935 as Fort Jefferson National Monument; rededicated as Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992.
64,700 acres

Information Inquiries
40001 State Road 9336
Homestead, FL 33034–6733
(305) 242-7700

Website
www.nps.gov/drto

Fort Jefferson — Gibraltar of the Gulf

Why build a fort in the middle of nowhere? Fort Jefferson was built to protect one of the most strategic deepwater anchorages in North America. By fortifying this spacious harbor, the United States maintained an important "advance post" for its ships patrolling the Gulf of Mexico and the Straits of Florida. Nestled within the islands and shoals that make up the Dry Tortugas, the harbor offered ships the chance to re-supply, refit, or simply seek refuge from storms.

"A naval force designed to control the navigation of the Gulf could not desire a better position than… the Tortugas."
—Commodore John Rogers, 1829

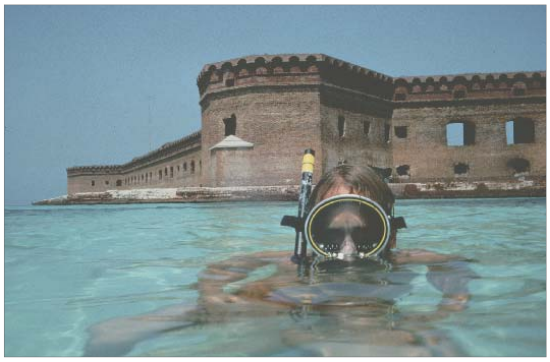
The location of the Tortugas along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes was its greatest military asset. Though passing ships could easily avoid the largest of Fort Jefferson's guns, they could not avoid the warships that used its harbor.

In enemy hands, the Tortugas would have threatened the heavy ship traffic that passed between the Gulf Coast (including New Orleans, Mobile and Pensacola) and the eastern seaboard of the United States. It could also serve as a potential staging area, or "springboard," for enemy forces. From here they could launch an attack virtually anywhere along the Gulf Coast.

A Powerful Deterrent
Poised to protect this valuable harbor was one of the largest forts ever built. Nearly thirty years in the making (1846–1875), Fort Jefferson was never finished nor fully armed. Yet it was a vital link in a chain of coastal forts that stretched from Maine to California. Fort Jefferson, the most sophisticated of these, was a brilliant and undeniable symbol that the United States wanted to be left alone. Though never attacked, the fort fulfilled its intended role. It helped to protect the peace and prosperity of a young nation.

During the Civil War, Union warships used the harbor in their campaign to blockade Southern shipping. The fort was also used as a prison, mainly for Union deserters. Its most famous prisoner was Dr. Samuel Mudd, the physician who set the broken leg of John Wilkes Booth.

Abandoned by the Army in 1874, the fort was later used as a coaling station for warships. In 1898, the USS *Maine* sailed into history, departing the Tortugas on its fateful mission to Havana, Cuba. Though used briefly during both world wars, the fort's final chapter as "Gibraltar of the Gulf" had long since closed.



Once a formidable barrier, deterring entry into the Gulf of Mexico by enemy ships, today the Fort serves a centerpiece amid crystalline waters and protected coral reefs, enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year.

Get Out There

Way Out There

Dry Tortugas National Park is a remote cluster of islands 68 miles west of Key West. It is accessible by sea plane or ferry only. Check the ***South Florida National Park Trip Planner*** or NPS staff on information on how to get out there.

Secrets about Sharks Revealed in the Tortugas

Scientists are using the heavy concentration of nurse sharks in the Dry Tortugas to help unravel the mysteries of shark behavior. Since 1992, biologists Dr. Jeff Carrier and Harold (Wes) Pratt have returned each summer to the Tortugas. Using a small arsenal of monitoring devices, Carrier and Pratt focus on the complex mating and courtship behavior of nurse sharks. Their long-term study is unprecedented. It is the first time that the mating behavior of sharks has been documented in detail in the wild.

The study took a leap forward in 1996, when the National Park Service agreed to close the nurse shark mating and nursery area to boats during the mating season. Carrier of Albion College, and Pratt, a marine biologist at the National Marine Fisheries Service laboratory, are now able to immerse themselves in their research. Prior to their ground breaking work in the Tortugas, biologists had to rely on chance encounters in the open sea. This closure represents the only one of its kind in the world.

New technology, including National Geographic's *Critter Cam*, has spearheaded the research. *Critter Cam* is a lightweight camera attached to the dorsal fin of the shark. Used successfully for the first time in the Tortugas, the camera recently recorded images of shark mating behavior never before seen on film.

The ongoing study has revealed some important clues. It is now known that nurse sharks (Ginglymostoma cirratum) grow very slowly—often less than 3–5 inches per year. Since females are not sexually mature until they reach nearly eight feet in length, they must survive more than twenty years before they are able to mate and reproduce. This slow growth rate, combined with their late maturity and small number of off spring, means that nurse sharks cannot rapidly replenish their numbers. These characteristics suggest that nurse sharks are vulnerable to fishing pressures.

Nurse sharks are relatively sluggish, benign animals. Equipped with an efficient gill pump, they are able to rest motionless on the ocean bottom for long periods of time. When feeding they prefer lobsters, squid and crabs. The sucking sound of their powerful throat muscles is the most likely explanation for their common name.

Snorkelers should not underestimate the enormous power of the nurse shark. Adults range in size from seven to ten feet, and can weigh as much as four hundred pounds. Despite their passive nature, nurse sharks account for more bites than any other sharks in Florida waters. They can turn on the length of their own body, making it easy for them to bite divers who try to grab their tail or annoy them.

Nurse shark mating behavior in the Dry Tortugas. Following a complex courtship, the male must seize his partner's pectoral fin, flip her, and carry her into deeper water. (Photo by Jeff Carrier, use only by permission)

Kids Corner

Wildlife Watch

The wetlands of South Florida were once considered worthless and many wanted them drained and destroyed. Today we know that the water flowing through the wetlands is important to all life in the area, including us.

As you explore the national parks you are sure to discover much of the wildlife that depends on this flow of water. Look carefully and have a keen eye! As you see the animals to the right, check them off. Who can find the most? In what habitat did you find them?

For more activities ask for a **Junior Ranger Book** at park visitor centers.

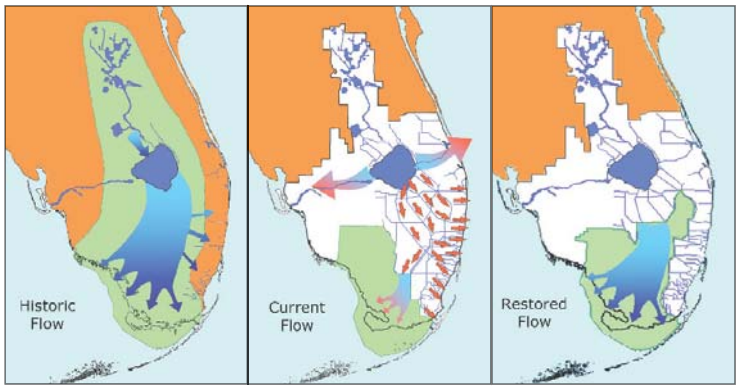
A Quiet Disaster, cont. from page 1

The natural flooding cycles caused problems as South Florida developed and more people settled here. So in 1949, Congress authorized the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project to provide flood protection and water supply to the residents of South Florida.

Today, the South Florida Water Management District, a state agency, manages over 1,000 miles of levees, 720 miles of canals, and more than 200 water control structures. The project has smoothed out the natural floods and droughts that characterized the historic water system. Water is now managed, separate from the natural system.

The Last Vestiges of Native Florida

Yet people also wanted to preserve parts of the natural system. Fort Jefferson, in the Dry Tortugas, became a national monument in 1935. Everglades National Park was dedicated in 1947. Biscayne and Big Cypress were established in 1968 and 1974 respectively. The four areas are known for their biological diversity, and the unique combination of terrestrial, marine, and estuarine life.



The National Park Service anticipates that mimicking the historic flow of water through the remaining Everglades will improve the ecological health of Big Cypress National Preserve, Biscayne, Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Parks.

Covering almost 2.5 million acres, these parks and preserves are intimately tied to the fluctuations of the wet and dry seasons. Water is intercepted before it reaches the parks and preserves. If there is too much water, flood control measures result in unnaturally high releases of water. If there is a drought, precious water can be diverted for human needs.

The results can be catastrophic to wildlife. In the summer, alligators build nests of plant materials that rise just a few feet above the water. If water levels suddenly rise, the nest is flooded and the alligator eggs do not hatch. Wading birds nest as the sheet of water begins to dry down, concentrating small fishes and aquatic insects into pools and sloughs. If a sudden pulse of water is delivered to the park causing it to rise, fishes and insects disperse and the birds either forgo attempts to raise their young or abandon chicks in the nest.

In the marine parks — Biscayne and Dry Tortugas — fresh water flowing into oceans creates estuaries, areas where fresh and salt water mix. Young fishes, shrimp, and lobsters find shelter in the fresher waters where larger predators cannot follow. In places like Florida Bay, these young feed and mature before venturing to the reefs in Biscayne and Dry Tortugas.

Early on in the construction of the water management system, it was quickly realized that water is the lifeblood of the parks and preserves, and that it must be delivered in a way consistent with natural rhythms in order for them to survive.

An Ambitious Project

In 2000, Congress passed legislation to implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). This ground-breaking statute calls for a federal-state partnership dedicated to restoring the natural system while continuing to provide flood control and water supply for the urban area – a delicate balancing act. One of the largest ecological restoration projects ever undertaken in the world, CERP is projected to last over thirty years and cost $7.8 billion.

Much of the Everglades ecosystem has been converted to agricultural lands and urban development and is now only half its original size. CERP can not bring back the original system. The goal instead is to replicate the functioning of the historic system through engineering projects built to store water during the wet season for use later in the dry season. Scientists anticipate that by mimicking the historic hydrology of the system, the timing, quantity, quality, and distribution of water, the ecological health of the Everglades will recover in turn. Most of CERP's projects — some 68 of them — will be constructed in areas north of the parks and preserves. The NPS expects that the plan will create buffer zones and water treatment areas outside the parks' boundaries that will eventually allow a more natural flow of clean water to reach NPS lands and waters.

The implementation of the plan will take time, decades in fact. During this time, NPS scientists and staff will work with state and federal agencies to ensure that the needs of the natural system are kept at the forefront of CERP decision-making. Congress, in authorizing this restoration plan, has recognized the value that the American people place on the preservation of our National Parks and the need to maintain their splendor for future generations.

Vernie Boots, survivor of the 1928 hurricane, lived through one of the worst natural disasters that the U.S. has ever seen. But, he also lived through a much quieter man-made disaster that altered an entire ecosystem that is cherished by nature lovers world-wide. CERP is our best hope — if it fails, the Everglades ecosystem may be gone forever. But if it is successful, snorkeling the reefs will still be a wondrous experience, visitors will still marvel at the studied concentration of a great egret seeking dinner, and the cavalier yet menacing alligators will continue to fascinate us.

Get Out There

Cruise the Everglades Trail

Discover more about the nature of the Greater Everglades System by traveling the Everglades Trail. Extending from the Kissimmee River through Lake Okeechobee and the Big Cypress Swamp to the 10,000 Islands and Florida and Biscayne Bay, the Everglades Trail is a driving tour telling the story of the unique Greater Everglades Ecosystem. The auto trail connects over twenty local, state, federal and private conservation sites that provide accessible opportunities to discover and enjoy this beautiful, complex, and fragile land. Along the way you will not only find wonderful opportunities for canoeing, hiking, biking and more, but also gain better understanding of the many reasons why it is imperative to restore this international treasure.

The trail is still a work in progress, although every site can be explored today! Soon, Everglades Trail highway signs along the way will direct you to the designated sites. Each site will have a green-roofed kiosk, with interpretive signs explaining where you are within the ecosystem and what recreational opportunities are available. All the kiosks and highway signs are scheduled to be in place by summer, 2004.

Meanwhile, pick up an Everglades Trail brochure in the Everglades, Biscayne and Big Cypress Visitor Centers. You can also find more information online at **www.evergladestrail.com**. This Web site links you to a variety of resources on the nature and history of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. As you drive the Trail, listen to stories of wildlife and the history of the region on a companion Everglades Trail CD, narrated by Charles Osgood. This companion CD offers recordings of diverse musical interpretations by Florida artists. Look for these CDs at sales outlets located at visitor centers along the trail.

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South Florida National Parks Guide

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This newspaper was printed on recycled paper. Please recycle.

Printed 12/2003, 100k copies, Stored @ HQs Pubs,
File: 03 04 park guide v3.indd @ SV Interp computer.

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Visit FNPMA's Natural History Mail Order Bookshelf website at:
www.nps.gov/ever/fnpma

Phone and Fax orders accepted with Mastercard, Visa, or Discover.

Joint Ventures – South Florida National Park Partners

Building a Foundation, New Trust Formed to Foster Long Term Support

A new partner is paving the way for a promising future for your national parks! The new **South Florida National Parks Trust, (SFNPT),** is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to working in partnership with the National Park Service to build community relations and raise funds in support of the preservation and restoration of Biscayne, Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Parks. One of the SFNPT's major goals is to establish, invigorate and sustain the relevancy of the parks to South Florida's diverse communities and constituencies. Fostering deep public support for the parks requires the development of strong, long-term relationships with communities, institutions and individuals who understand and appreciate these unique and vital places.

More than ever, protection of our natural and cultural treasures ... demands shared responsibility.

— Fran Mainella
Director, National Park Service

As the mosaic bedrock of this new organization, the South Florida National Parks Trust board members, who are prominent and diverse South Florida community leaders, are currently acquainting themselves with the parks' resources, employees, programs, goals and critical issues, recruiting partners, and developing long-term plans for investment and endowments. Under the distinguished umbrella of the National Park Foundation, the SFNPT was incorporated as a private, non-profit corporation in the state of Florida in 2002. With the help of a newly hired executive director and park leadership, the SFNPT board will continue to seek out key board member prospects and thoughtfully map out the organization's direction.

The South Florida National Parks Trust will provide meaningful opportunities for residents of southern Florida, and stakeholders worldwide, to participate in the protection of their cherished heritage.

Through generating and managing private funds acquired as donations, grants, gifts, gifts in kind, or endowments, the Trust will help create lasting conservation solutions by contributing to the education and enjoyment of tomorrow's visitors and the stewardship of the parks' resources.

If you are interested in helping the South Florida National Park Trust raise friends and funds to help your National Parks and nurture the quality of life for residents, visitors, and other living things in South Florida, please contact:

South Florida National Parks Trust
Executive Director
1744 SE 9th Street
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33316
(305) 458-6885
exdirsfnpt@nationalparks.org

Through funds provided by the South Florida National Parks Trust Biscayne and Everglades National Parks are able to continue offering day and camping educational programs to local fourth and fifth grade students.

Discover More

with the Florida National Parks and Monuments Association

Florida National Parks and Monuments Association (FNPMA) is a National Park Service Cooperating Association dedicated to increasing public understanding of the natural and historic values of South Florida's National Parks. Supplying quality books and educational materials to park visitors for over 50 years, FNPMA now carries hundreds of titles from which to choose.

Books, videos, DVD's, educational materials and other National Park Service themed items may be found at the Visitor Centers for Big Cypress National Preserve, Dry Tortugas and Biscayne National Parks and the Ernest Coe, Royal Palm, Shark Valley and Gulf Coast Visitor Centers of Everglades National Park. Items may also be purchased via fax, mail and on-line.

Sale proceeds are returned to the parks in support of educational, scientific, historical, and visitor service programs that would not otherwise be available through federally funded sources.

FNPMA currently funds the printing of free wildlife checklists and site bulletins within each park, as well as the complimentary park visitor newspaper - ***South Florida National Parks Guide and Trip Planner.***

FNPMA also publishes books and other products about the parks, such as ***Everglades - The Park Story,*** *Big Cypress National Preserve patch and pin,* as well as the *Everglades - Fragile as Glass Poster,* ***Pages from the Past - A Pictoral History of Fort Jefferson*** and *The Many Faces of Biscayne National Park.*

Support your South Florida National Parks by becoming an association member. You will receive a 15% discount on all purchases. Visit www.nps.gov/ever/fnpma for details on membership.

Discover more about South Florida's National Parks and help to foster the continuation of the parks' educational efforts by supporting FNPMA.

Volunteers In Parks are VIPs

One of the most successful partnerships of the National Parks involves our talented cadre of volunteers. In South Florida alone, these dedicated individuals contribute tens of thousands of hours each year to ensure the parks are safe, clean and enjoyable places to visit. Meet a few of these Very Important People who Volunteer In our Parks — our VIPs.

Big Cypress National Preserve

Several times a week last year, Ann and Jerry Marcus could be seen walking through knee to thigh deep water, dealing with heat, humidity, mosquitoes, and swamp creatures – in addition to 6th graders! Ann and Jerry helped lead the preserve's Environmental Education Program, a curriculum-based program which involves hiking through cypress strands, sawgrass prairies and pinelands to assist students in using radio telemetry, dip netting and water quality testing to conduct field experiments.

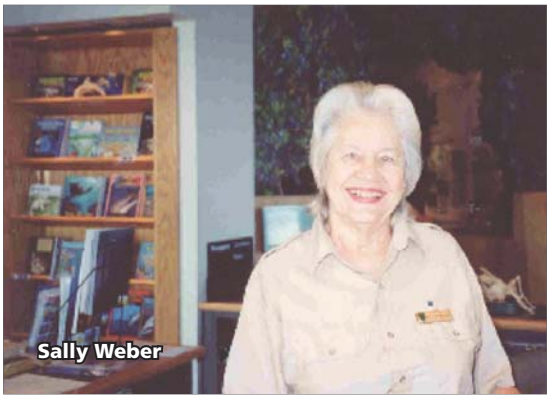
Ann and Jerry's true love for children is also shown by their choice to spend this winter in California to be near family, including over 100 foster children they helped to raise. Their enthusiasm is infectious and their kind, caring manner with the students made each one feel very special.

Ann and Jerry Marcus

Biscayne National Park

Sunday mornings just wouldn't be the same at Biscayne National Park's Dante Fascell Visitor Center without Sally Weber's smiling face to greet visitors. Since 1998, she has helped with all sorts of artistic and imaginative projects, including creating giant seashells from cardboard for the park's Family Fun Fest, designing Spanish Galleon costumes for Biscayne's Halloween festivities and painting detailed shadow boxes of the park's habitats for outreach programs. A recently retired teacher, and a former model, Sally spends a lot of time beachcombing, traveling the world with her two sons, and designing whimsical greeting cards, in addition to volunteering.

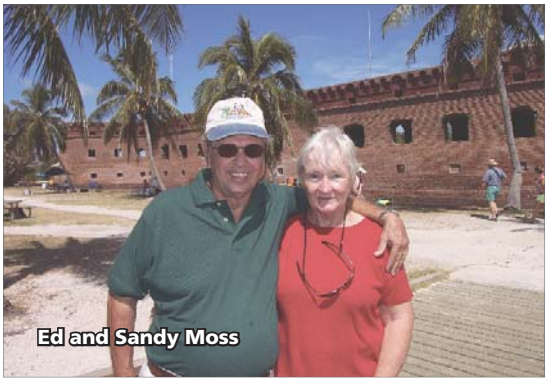
"I love working at the park because it's such a beautiful place, and I enjoy helping visitors to appreciate it too," she said. "That and the fact that I so enjoy working with such a dedicated staff that makes me feel so special." Her life-long love of Biscayne Bay and her enthusiasm for sharing her extensive knowledge of seashore life make Sally a critical part of Biscayne's team.


Sally Weber

Dry Tortugas National Park

Each year Ed and Sandy Moss of Coker Creek, Tennessee pack their bags and head for the subtropics, leaving their idyllic cabin home, nestled within view of the Great Smoky Mountains. Since 1994, Ed and Sandy have volunteered more than 5,000 hours on Loggerhead Key within Dry Tortugas National Park. Ed, a retired senior analyst for IBM, and Sandy, a former registered nurse, cannot wait to spend a month each year at their 'home away from home.'

As volunteers, their many accomplishments include helping to start the highly successful Loggerhead volunteer program, providing an inspiration for countless others who have followed. Why volunteer in a national park? For Ed it's simple: "to help with the environment and assist in maintaining a national treasure." Of course, the swaying palm trees framing the unforgettable sunsets are a nice bonus.


Ed and Sandy Moss

Everglades National Park

Albert Rivet, an energetic and dedicated local volunteer, has served as an invaluable part of the Shark Valley team since 1997. Albert escapes from his job as a computer specialist each week by "recharging" in the Everglades each weekend. Any given Saturday, you may find Albert assisting visitors, directing traffic, clearing trails, cleaning, cutting, hauling, trimming, or fixing whatever needs attention

When asked why he volunteers Albert says, "I feel like I am making a difference, helping visitors to see the importance of preserving nature's creations. Shark Valley is also an escape for me from the daily routine of my job. It is a small haven amongst an ever growing city, a place where I can clear my thoughts and reflect."

Albert Rivet

Get Out There
Get Involved and Volunteer

Volunteers in America's National Parks are, without a doubt, Very Important People! In 2002, 125,000 volunteers donated 4.5 million hours in over 380 parks across the country.

Our volunteers come from all over to help preserve and protect America's natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of this and future generations. Young and old alike give of their time and expertise to assist in achieving the National Park Service mission.

For information on volunteering in any National Park Service area across the country visit — **www.nps.gov/volunteer** — on the web.

To volunteer in a National Park in South Florida, contact:

Big Cypress National Preserve
Phone
239-695-1201
email
isobel_kalafarski@nps.gov

Biscayne National Park
Phone
305-230-1144 x3035
email
jorge_acevedo@nps.gov

Dry Tortugas National Park
email
mike_t_ryan@nps.gov
note — Dry Tortugas National Park currently has an extensive waiting list for volunteer positions.

Everglades National Park
Phone
305-242-7752
email
jackie_dostourian@nps.gov

Endangered Species in South Florida National Parks

Spotlight on the Florida Panther

Big Cypress Biologists Take on a New Challenge To Help the Florida Panther

When National Park Service staff in Big Cypress National Preserve headed out into the swamp in search of panthers in 1988, they carried only a camera and plaster for making casts. They spent hours traveling slowly over bumpy trails on all-terrain cycles, swamp buggies, or on foot, scanning any muddy spot for an imprint left by a Florida panther. Days often ended with nothing seen but tracks of deer, hogs, raccoons, and maybe a black bear. Few panther tracks were found because few panthers lived in Big Cypress at that time.

Today, when Big Cypress staff head out into the swamp, they bring quite a bit more gear. They carry backpacks with climbing spikes, medical supplies, and radio collars. Tracks of panthers are now almost commonplace. Why? Because the number of panthers in Big Cypress has increased steadily since 1995, when eight cougars from Texas were introduced to revitalize the inbred panther population.

To understand how this expanding population is faring, wildlife staff use radio-telemetry, a system in which a radio frequency secured in collars is used to monitor an animal. A team has been formed to find, catch, and collar a sample of panthers living in Big Cypress.

The NPS capture team consists of: the houndsman, who searches the swamp with dogs looking for a fresh panther trail; the Big Cypress wildlife biologist, who supervises the project; assistants who maintain the gear and climb the trees to retrieve the tranquilized panther; and the veterinarian who oversees the welfare of the animal and collects biomedical samples.

In 2003, the Big Cypress panther capture team placed new radio collars on six panthers, increasing to 13 the sample of monitored panthers in the preserve. By locating the cats three times each week from a small aircraft, they are learning what type of vegetation the panthers use while resting during the day, what other panthers they are associating with, when and where the females give birth, and how much natural habitat each panther requires. With this information, the staff at Big Cypress can make decisions on recreational use and habitat management that will promote the survival of the Florida panther.

In the first light of day in February or March 2004, you might see the team unloading their swamp buggies and gear along one of the roads in Big Cypress. They are heading into the woods in the hopes of capturing a new panther and gaining new insight into how they can keep panthers the top predator in the South Florida ecosystem.

Right - A radio-collared panther treed within Big Cypress National Preserve. Below - Wildlife Biologists and veterinarian take blood samples, weigh, vaccinate and collect other important data to learn more about the health of panthers.

The Florida Panther "How Is It Doing?"

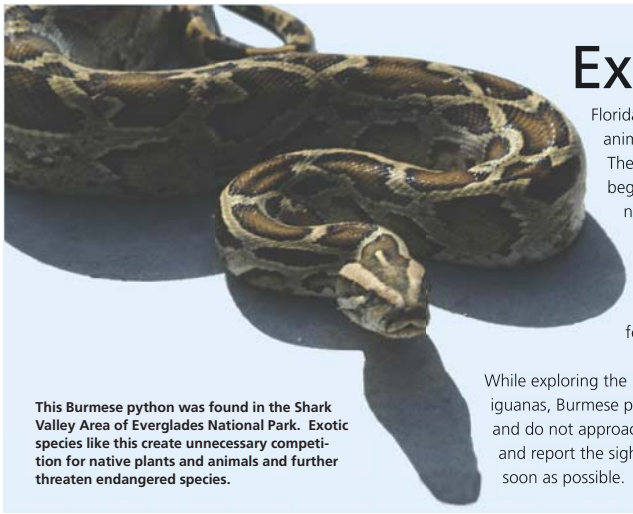
Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park are home to almost half of the 87 Florida panthers known to be alive in 2003. This picture wasn't quite so rosy 20 years ago when only a handful of panthers lived in these two South Florida parks. Panthers at that time raised few kittens and their overall fitness was marginal.

Inbreeding was believed to be a major problem. The decision to augment the genetic makeup of the panthers by adding eight female cougars from Texas to the panther population has improved the situation. Since their release in 1995, five of the females from Texas bred with male Florida panthers and have given birth to 20 kittens. Some of these kittens, in turn, have also raised families. Most important, these panther and cougar crosses are producing healthier kittens.

On a sadder note, the young panthers are having a difficult time finding their own place to live. The natural spaces in South Florida are filling up, so the dispersing panthers wander north, looking for a place with food (mainly deer and hogs) and a safe place to sleep during the day and raise their young. Too often, they get killed crossing roads.

In a 6-month period, January to June 2003, seven panthers were killed by vehicles. As you travel through Everglades and Big Cypress, take your time, not only to see wildlife, but also to avoid hitting any animal trying to cross in front of you.

As you travel out of the parks, take note of the increase in the number of roads, homes, and businesses and the few natural spaces left for panthers. You will then realize how valuable your support of the parks has been to saving the Florida panther from extinction.



This Burmese python was found in the Shark Valley Area of Everglades National Park. Exotic species like this create unnecessary competition for native plants and animals and further threaten endangered species.

Exotics Alert

Florida has over 200 species of exotic, non-native, plants and animals that have become established within our natural areas. The introduction of exotic animals and plants into south Florida began in the late 1800s and has escalated ever since. These newcomers were originally introduced as pets, food sources, ornamentals, or as biological controls. Because these species have few limiting factors here in their new home, their numbers often become unmanageable. Exotic species displace native plants and animals by competing with them for space and food. Exotics are extremely difficult to eradicate.

While exploring the National Parks of South Florida it may be possible to see iguanas, Burmese pythons, feral pigs and other large exotic animals. Use caution and do not approach these animals, take note of where and when you see them and report the sighting to National Park Service staff in area visitor centers as soon as possible.