FOOTPRINT
Spring 2016 Volume 33 Issue 2

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ABE CHRISTIAN BLACK BEAR CHAPTER

Knee Deep in Big Cypress
Remote Maintenance in the National Preserve

Infrastructure Improvements on the FNST
Build, Improve and Repair

2016 IDIDAHIKE Fundraiser
A Photo Essay

Florida Trail Association
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The Florida Trail Association is a volunteer-based nonprofit organization focused on Florida hiking and trail building. Since 1966, the primary mission of our organization has been the care and protection of the Florida Trail, a 1,300-mile footpath across the Sunshine State – Florida’s own National Scenic Trail.

OUR GOAL
To provide outreach to our readers through informative articles that express appreciation for and conservation of the natural beauty of Florida; to inform our readers of Florida Trail Association business; and to provide information on Florida hiking and outdoor recreation opportunities.

MEMBERSHIP
If you’re not already a member, join now. As a Florida Trail member, you receive a subscription to The Footprint magazine, membership in a local chapter, a local newsletter with local activities, opportunities for outdoor skills training, participation in regional and annual conferences and more. Call toll-free 877-HIKE-FLA for more information.

ADVERTISING
Reach a highly targeted demographic of Florida outdoor enthusiasts by advertising with us or becoming a regular sponsor. Your advertising dollars directly support production and publication of this magazine and assist the Florida Trail Association in fulfilling its mission. Call 877-HIKE-FLA or email fta@FloridaTrail.org for more details.

Deadline for articles for the Winter issue of The Footprint is March 20, 2016. Deadline for chapter activities covering July - October to appear in the electronic version of the The Footprint fall issue is May 1, 2016.

OUR MAGAZINE
The Footprint is published by the Florida Trail Association, a volunteer-based nonprofit organization focused on Florida hiking and trail building. Since 1966, the primary mission of our organization has been the care and protection of the Florida Trail, a 1,300-mile footpath across the Sunshine State – Florida’s own National Scenic Trail.

CONTRIBUTORS
Contributors are welcome to submit items for our various departments as well as trail and association-related news. Please contact the editor at communications@floridatrail.org to discuss ideas for feature stories prior to submission.
“Hey, what kind of flower is this?”

Many folks in the Florida Trail community can easily identify multiple species of the flora and fauna that surround us. On the trails or on social media sites like Facebook, some take great pride in being able to name or answer questions about different species. Others have a pretty good mental map of how all the different ecological communities interrelate, and how a tip of the scale on one corner can have major effects on the entire system.

Humans also have their own ecologic society, however flawed, and it can have a major effect on the natural systems that surround and sustain us. It may be harder to see this process at work, but man-made interactions and intentions can hurt or strengthen our trails more profoundly than heavy thunderstorms or fire. For example, the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST, or Florida Trail) is subject to the “weather” of politics, legislation, competing pressures and interests, development, financial constraints, and lack of awareness or support from the general public. And that’s just for starters.

For most FTA volunteers and members, it’s probably much more fun to explore and learn about our local plants and animals than it is to pay attention to the complex human environment in which the Florida Trail must exist. People often head afield, after all, to escape from the endless buzz of the modern world. The community of hikers and trail workers tends to attract many who feel happier and saner away from the madding crowd.

Unfortunately, the modern world doesn’t stay away. While thus far trails and parks haven’t been huge issues in this year’s US elections, they are a part of larger discussions about funding, about conservation and preservation, and about national and state priorities. Those running for elected office hold intentions and beliefs that will impact the FNST and other outdoor public spaces. It behooves us to pay attention to them and to vote accordingly.

Political moods shift over time, nationally and within parties and movements. It’s very likely that the landmark National Trails System Act of 1968, which was passed “to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation”, would’ve had a much harder time moving through today’s Congress. The pro-privatization Western “sagebrush rebellion” of thirty-plus years ago has inspired recent events like the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by anti-government militants.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), started in 1965, has been a successful program that provides funding and matching grants to various levels of government for the acquisition of land and water (as well as easements) “for the benefit of all Americans.” LWCF has helped to pay for projects throughout America, including on National Scenic Trails. Until recently LWCF enjoyed fairly universal bipartisan support in Congress. Recently, however, a Utah congressman, Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, blocked reauthorization of LWCF. This same Representative has authored legislation to hamstring a President’s ability to create National Monuments, fought wilderness designation, and pushed for fewer restrictions on resource extraction from public lands. All signs point to a protracted battle to ensure National Trails and other public recreational spaces get fully supported and funded. (This political climate, and possible backlash and loss of legislative support, is one reason why the National Trails community is currently almost universally against demanding expanded eminent domain uses for trails.)

Election years certainly reinforce the notion that many people believe...
things that are radically different from others’ views. But it doesn't require polarizing issues to get people riled up and resentful; even avowed allies can have big disagreements. The people who make the FNST possible, for example, include volunteers, advocates, private and public professionals, end users, interested bystanders….all with their own biases and frames of reference. The project of building the FNST, and other trails, is made immeasurably easier when these people make an effort to step outside themselves and consider the viewpoints of their allies. Barring a huge airdrop of cash from the sky, anyway, it’s unlikely any one person or group can buy an 1100-mile uninterrupted trail corridor. And if they did, they’d probably charge quite a hefty fee to use it.

The human environment in Florida fifty years ago (and therefore also the natural environment), at the birth of the Florida Trail movement, was very different than today’s. Then, the population was around six million residents. Today, it’s over twenty million. Disney World didn’t exist (Walt died at the end of 1966, and the park opened five years later). The Florida Turnpike and I-4 had just been built, Orlando’s Beeline Expressway didn’t exist, and many cities were much smaller or nonexistent; for example, there was no Palm Coast, The Villages, Aventura, Viera, Celebration, or Weston. Millions of acres that are now gone to development were either wildlife habitat or agricultural. Building a Florida Trail through that earlier landscape was less complicated…but one could argue that now (and in the future), the FNST is more necessary for the people and wildlife of Florida.

To build a healthy “human ecology” for the FNST and other National Scenic and Historic Trails, we’ll have to successfully engage and inspire a much wider spectrum of Floridians. Expect to see and hear more about the challenges we face, and the strategies we’ll need, at the FTA 50th Anniversary Conference in Deland this October. This is not a unique challenge. The National Park Service, celebrating its centennial this year, recognizes that it will garner more protection and support for its amazing lands when its users and advocates more closely mirror the changing demographics of America. Very recently, a “Centennial Initiative” coalition of over thirty conservation, civil rights, and environmental justice groups formed to promote more diversity in National Parks and other public lands.

The FNST can be an anchoring point for thousands of Floridians to get away from that madding crowd, for a day, a weekend, or a few months. It can be a part of the satisfaction and pride of a sustainable cadre of volunteers. It can play a large and critical role in protecting a wildlife corridor through the Sunshine State. Or it can be a ghost from the past, like the many long-gone “Old Florida” attractions that sat along the highways, beckoning tourists.

It certainly hasn’t gotten easier. But it can be more rewarding. You know the drill: Please support the Florida Trail Association in our joint efforts to build, maintain, and strongly support the FNST.

Carlos Schomaker
FTA President
As I take of the reins of VP Trails from Tom Daniels, I wish to say “Thank You Tom” for your hard work and dedication to the Florida Trail Association. You shepherded many large-scale projects during your watch, and I plan to continue down the path you laid out.

The Trail Manual is one of these accomplishments. It provides volunteers and staff a guide for the uniform maintenance of trails, which ensures we provide a consistent user experience across the entire Florida Trail. For this reason, you will continue to hear me refer to the trail manual.

Tom was also a key player in the update of the Florida Trail maps that are sold through the FTA office. With the help from two dedicated volunteers and participation from all of the trail coordinators and section leaders throughout the state, we are able to offer maps with accurate and up to date information that hikers can feel confident purchasing; but those maps are only as good as the information that is provided.

We have started a new round of map updates for the 2016/2017 hiking season. The regional representatives - Jeff Glenn and Kelly Weiner - and Alex Stigliano are contacting the trail coordinators/section leaders to request feedback. The process requires that those responsible for the various FNST sections communicate to Jeff, Kelly or Alex if an update is needed. We ask that you provide a GPS (KMZ) track and any relevant verbiage for the map/data book. If you are a trail maintainer and have received an email regarding the section you handle, please help us by responding as soon as you have any updated information. If no updates are needed, please respond with that information as well. We are asking that all updates be provided by July 31st.

Thanks!

David Waldrop
VP Trails - FTA
Trail Tales
by Karl Borton, Volunteer Program Coordinator

The Florida Trail begins in Big Cypress National Preserve, where the trail winds through a wet wilderness of sawgrass prairies, hardwood hammocks and dwarf cypress swamps. It is arguably the most remote and challenging section of the Florida Trail, where only a handful of people dare to hike.

But where there's a challenge, there's also remarkable beauty. A blooming forest of Cardinal airplants, deep-water Alligator Lilies and Ghost Orchids dot the trail, while Florida Panthers, Big Cypress Fox Squirrels and American Alligators roam freely through the preserve. The area is also a prime habitat for birding and conservation photography, which attracts professionals and amateurs alike.

When we first entered the preserve we were met with ankle to waist-deep water, which sat atop the karst limestone surface. Some sections were as smooth as a sidewalk, while other sections were marked by marl trenches and the occasional ankle-breaking solution hole. This was expected but we were delighted to learn that, contrary to popular belief, the trail is not 100% submerged. Pine islands connect the trail and sit above the water table. This gave us an opportunity to rest our legs and dry out.

I admit that as a northerner I was a bit nervous to enter the swamp for the first time, but these fears quickly dissipated upon arriving at our basecamp, near 13-Mile Camp. The spot was absolutely beautiful and characterized by an endless sea of saw palmettos and sand pines. Palmettos marked the horizon as far as the eye could see, and the site was remarkably quiet with minimal interruption from the birds. The site was a tiny little oasis within the vast swamp.

Jeff Glenn’s cooking added to the camp experience and as per usual he prepared some pretty elaborate meals. As far as backcountry cooking goes, Jeff is the Bobby Flay of the Forest. He’s known to cook coconut chicken, garlic t-bone steaks and...
curried beef stew, with only a small gas grill and a few tools of the trade. It’s a talent that has earned him a favorable reputation among his volunteer trail crews.

Fueled up, we hit the trail with enthusiasm and brute force. Our crew of ten traveled light and fast with brush cutters, chainsaws, loppers and handsaws. We worked hard, ate-well (see Jeff’s Kitchen article) and told campfire stories until hiker’s midnight (8pm). While the work was hard the reward was equally as satisfying, and almost immediately we began to see the fruits of our labor. The trail opened up, the blazes shined in the distance and over the course of four days we maintained more than six miles of trail. Overall, we cleared trail just south of 13-Mile Camp to a section just past Barbed Wire Fence.

In retrospect the trip was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Not only did we catch a swamp buggy shuttle to camp, but we worked off the grid in one of the most remote sections of Florida.
Welcome to Jeff's Kitchen

Living off the grid doesn’t mean that you have to rough it. Take these recipes with you and spice up your next backcountry meal. It’s not super lightweight, but your friends will love it!

These recipes use fresh ingredients. Package spices ahead of time for the best results. Refrigerate, cool or consume all perishable food within 24-hours. Keep meat cold. If in doubt, throw it out.

**RECIPE**

**Curried Coconut Chicken**

This is a delicious recipe that is easy to make. It’s a camp favorite at FTA’s Volunteer Work Parties.

**Prep time:** 20 mins  
**Cook time:** 50 mins  
**Serves:** 10

**Ingredients:**
- 6 pounds boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into ½ inch chunks
- 3 tsp salt and pepper, or to taste
- 3 ½ tbsp coconut oil or other vegetable oil
- 6 tbsp curry powder
- 2 onions thinly sliced
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 3 (14oz) cans of coconut milk
- 3 (14oz) cans of stewed, diced tomatoes
- 2 (8oz) jars of tomato sauce

**Directions:**
1. Season chicken pieces with salt and pepper
2. Heat oil and curry powder in a large skillet over medium-high heat for two minutes. Stir in onion and garlic and cook for one more minute. Add chicken, tossing lightly to coat with curry oil. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 7 to 10 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink in the center and its juices run clear.
3. Pour coconut milk, tomatoes and tomato sauce into the pan and stir to combine. Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally; approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

Serve with rice noodles.

**RECIPE**

**Apricot-Glazed Pork Chop Hobo**

Hobos are really just an assortment of foods wrapped in foil and cooked on campfire coals – or on a grate over the coals. There is an infinite amount of recipes to follow, but try this one out for starters.

**Prep time:** 10 mins  
**Cook time:** 25 mins  
**Serves:** 1

**Ingredients:**
- 1 boneless pork chop
- 1/3 cup apricot preserves
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ onion
- 1 bell pepper
- 3 cloves garlic

**Directions:**
1. Mix together the apricot preserves, the soy sauce and any seasoning that you’d like to add.
2. Place the pork chop in the center of the sheet of foil. Spread half of the apricot sauce on top. Put the veggies on top/around the pork chop. Pour the rest of the sauce over the whole thing.
RECIPE

Gado Gado
This is an Indonesian dish that is easy to modify and can be served with fresh vegetables, meats or over pasta.

Prep time: 25 mins  
Cook time: 25 mins  
Serves: 6 to 8

Ingredients:
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 cup finely chopped onions
½ tsp salt
1 or 2 fresh hot peppers, minced, or 1 ½ teaspoon cayenne
1 or 2 garlic cloves, minced or pressed
1 ½ tablespoons peeled and fresh grated ginger
2 cups water
1 cup unsweetened coconut milk
3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 cups smooth peanut butter
2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 tablespoons soy sauce

Directions:
To make the peanut sauce:
1. Warm the oil in a covered saucepan on low heat.
2. Add the onions and salt and cook for 5 minutes.
3. Stir in the hot peppers or cayenne, garlic and ginger
4. Continue to cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. Add the water, coconut milk and vinegar; increase the heat to a low simmer and cook covered for 3 minutes.
6. Stir in the peanut butter and sugar until the sauce is smooth.
7. Bring to a simmer and cook, covered, on low heat, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes.
8. Stir in the soy sauce. Add more to taste.
9. While the sauce is cooking, prepare and steam vegetables.
10. Serve Gado Gado on a large serving platter or on individual plates.
11. Arrange steamed and raw vegetables on top; they can be warm, room temperature or cool.
12. Add some of the extras.
13. Ladle sauce over the vegetables.
Excuse me? Say what? Yes, you’ve read it correctly! That is one of the most important acronyms that you need to remember out on the trail. The FTA has many others: JHA, TCP, and EAP, but this one is entirely different. PTDLMBR is the key to keeping you and the Florida Trail beautiful, safe, and protected. It’s not just some jumble of letters meant to confuse you, it is in fact a handy way to remember the 7 Leave No Trace principles of outdoor ethics. Broken down they look like this:

**Pass The Donut**

**Left My Retired Brother!**

**Plan Ahead and Prepare**
- Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you’ll visit.
- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.
- Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
- Visit in small groups when possible. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

**Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces**
- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.
- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.
  - In popular areas:
    - Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
    - Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
    - Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
  - In pristine areas:
    - Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
    - Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

**Dispose of Waste Properly**
- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.
- Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.
- To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

**Leave What You Find**
- Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species.
- Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.

**Minimize Campfire Impacts**
- Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light.
- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
• Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
• Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

Respect Wildlife
• Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
• Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
• Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.
• Control pets at all times, or leave them at home.
• Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors
• Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
• Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
• Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock.
• Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
• Let nature’s sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

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For our trail maintainers out there these 7 principles offer quite a challenge! In fact, the entire idea of a trail goes against the idea of leaving no trace. Trail building and maintaining on the Florida Trail is loud, destructive, frightening for wildlife, and so on. So how is it justifiable? I like to think about it like healing the human body. Imagine being sick with multiple ailments (think: illegal trails, a plethora of campsites, uncontained fires, etc.) and then think of the solution. Often that might be one clean cut to heal them all; a definitive path to health. Or, just the same, a definitive path through the forest and prairie that brings all of the ailments back to one clean and managed system. A well-managed trail has the ability to minimize negative impacts to the environment by subtly controlling the way users interact with it. Designating campsites and fire pits, discouraging social trails, and routing away from sensitive areas just to name a few. As stewards of the FNST, we should do our best to keep the 7 principles in mind and make the trail look like it was placed there all by itself. And remember to pass that donut left my retired brother!
There has been a lot of work this past season to build and improve the infrastructure on the FNST. Many of these projects have been in the planning stage for several years. Florida Trail Association staff and volunteers, as well as the crew from Framing Our Community (FOC) - a non-profit construction crew contracted by the US Forest Service, worked throughout the state on a variety of projects ranging from the extremely technical to fairly simple. Other additions to the trail like campsites and pitcher pumps serve to improve access and safety to trail users.

This season saw a real surge in the amount of work accomplished on the trail to increase hiker safety, re-open closed sections of trail, and improve user access. Structures fail for a variety of reasons: age, improper construction, natural disasters, and other unforeseen circumstances. Keeping up with the large backlog of infrastructure work is no easy task. Our team relies on our prolific partnership with the public (you!) to accomplish what we can. Here, we highlight a few of these projects.

Swift Creek
Two years ago a large oak tree caused a fatal blow to the bridge over Swift Creek along the Suwannee River. The bridge was originally built by the Cracker Chapter of the FTA and was creatively constructed out of the undercarriage of an old tractor trailer. This is no creek to mess around with; the span is over 40 feet and the height over the creek is over 20 feet with both sides dropping sheer over limestone walls. It is truly a gorgeous location, equipped with a rope swing into the Suwannee and a locally famous fishing hole. Up until the reconstruction of the bridge at the original site, a two-mile road walk was required to bypass the creek. Fortunately for hikers, the road walk passed right by the camp store at Rooster’s Outfitters, a great stop for a cold drink and some local flavor.
The new bridge installed in the fall of 2015 is a gorgeous example of the bridges along the FNST. Construction was completed by FOC under the leadership of Ian Barlow with occasional help from FTA volunteers. Visible from the river, this bridge is an amazing advertisement for the trail, and it serves the local hikers as well as fishermen that come to the famous hole at Swift Creek. Most importantly, the new bridge eliminates two extra miles of trail along the road and allows hikers to fully enjoy this legendary spot along the trail.

Ocean Pond Boardwalk
Ocean Pond, in the Osceola National Forest, is really more of a lake. In the winter months, it’s not uncommon to see whitecaps forming and breaking on the shore, loud and ocean-like. Not far off of the lake and adjacent Ocean Pond Campground sits a cypress swamp that spider webs through a large part of the National Forest. The trail has always wound its way through the heart of this primeval forest via boardwalks, without which hikers would be thigh deep in water alongside cypress knees and water moccasins. After decades in the swamp, the old boardwalk was in poor shape. Rotten wood, broken boards, exposed nails covered the boardwalk. Nobody wants to see these hazards on the trail, let alone inexperienced hikers coming from the nearby campground.

The construction of a new boardwalk began two seasons ago with the removal of the old boardwalk. This alone took hundreds of hours of volunteer work. The crew from Framing our Community then took over the challenging work of construction. Over the course of two months, that team became intimately acquainted with the swamp; aptly weaving in and out of the trees like the animals that live there full time. To beat the cold, they erected framed military-style canvas tents equipped with a wood stove! The finished product is immaculate!

Campsites
There are many places along the FNST where thru hikers are forced to walk inordinately long distances between designated campsites because there are not adequate or legal places to lay out the bedroll for the night. This is something that the FTA and the US Forest Service are very aware of. We are working to alleviate this challenge. This season, in the north Florida region, three new campsites were installed to improve the user experience. Along the Palatka-Lake Butler State Trail, a rail trail which hosts almost 56 miles of the FNST, there are only two places to legally camp. One of those was added last year and one is new as of January 2016. The new campsite is located on an US Forest Service easement near the Keystone Airpark. It has been equipped with a fire ring, picnic table, and boasts beautiful sunsets.

Two campsites were also added this spring along the Suwanee River, giving hikers more options for overnight stays along that section. This is a popular destination for overnight hikers, and so providing designated campsites minimizes impact such as trash, campfire scars, and human waste in proximity to the river.

Pitcher Pumps in Three Lakes WMA
It has been said that water is to the Florida Trail what mountains are to the Appalachian Trail. Hiking in and around the numerous swamps, fresh water springs, rivers and lakes that cover the state of Florida can be both inspiring and challenging. The difficulty of traversing our water inundated terrain is rewarded with access to completely unique and incredibly bio-diverse ecosystems. Even so, there are sections of the FT that cross vast prairies that stretch across the interior of the peninsula where access to safe drinking water can be 15-20 miles apart. Because drinking water is a crucial component of trail infrastructure for long-distance hikers, the Florida Trail Association has begun working with
Florida National Scenic Trail is a federally-designated, non-motorized, recreation trail that meanders approximately 1,300 miles across some of the most beautiful, unique landscapes in the entire country. For up to date information visit the U.S. Forest Service online at http://www.FS.USDA.gov/FNST.

Framing Our Community (FOC), the US Forest Service, and various state agencies to install pitcher pumps where they are needed along the length of the FNST.

The FNST winds its way through 27 miles of prairies, marshes, cypress domes, pine flatwoods, and oak hammocks within the Three Lakes WMA. This stretch of trail boasts four primitive campsites, two of which have pitcher pumps for convenient access to shallow groundwater. This past March, two new pitcher pumps were installed. The first was at the Godwin Hammock campsite in the southern section of Three Lakes WMA. In the dry months, Godwin Hammock is miles from a source of surface water that is other than a mud puddle. A second pump was installed at the Three Lakes campsite in the northern section of Three Lakes WMA.

Using a Bobcat® outfitted with a driver attachment, the FOC crew pounded a stainless steel 2” wellpoint and 1 ¼” galvanized steel water piping to a depth of about 22 feet. This approach worked well at the Godwin Hammock campsite, but at the Three Lakes campsite a clay layer captured the well point and would not let it go. The solution was to use the same procedure, but with a smaller diameter wellpoint a few yards away from the first attempt. The average installation time was about five hours.

We are compiling a list of campsites along the FNST that could benefit from the installation of a pitcher pump. Please send your suggestions to your Regional Representative!
Abe Christian
Black Bear Chapter

Abe is a Section Leader in the Black Bear Chapter. His territory runs from Rice Creek Conservation Area to Etoniah State Forest. Formerly, he worked as a Verizon Store Manager, where he successfully completed a Lean Six Sigma project to earn an advanced management certification.

How did you hear about the FTA, and why did you join the organization?

I consider myself semi-retired and have done an insane amount of hiking in the past few years. While I began to explore Florida I began to notice the Florida Trail. I couldn’t believe that I had never even heard of it before. But as I began to explore more of Florida’s state parks, I began to notice signs and blazes to the Florida Trail. My interest was sparked. So I went to the web to learn more about this “secret trail.” To my surprise the Florida Trail was a long distance hiking trail, similar to the Appalachian Trail. Soon after, I found my first volunteer opportunity at the OHV Campsite near Fort McCoy, FL. I was not really surprised that I enjoyed the work, and I enjoyed it so much that I continued to volunteer.

Can you describe that first experience at the OHV?

To be honest with you, it was a bit nervous to show up to volunteer on my first night. I am a bit of an introvert and did not know what to expect. However, everyone made me feel comfortable and accepted me into the group. On the first work day, I was given a brush cutter, some instruction and the opportunity to clear the trail. That first day was a lot like being in the Boy Scouts when I was a kid. We were a big group of people with a common goal and we all shared in the tasks and comradery of the day.

After the second work day, a few of us hiked from the OHV to the 88 Store, where we saw a black bear. “Hawkeye”, the trail name of a fellow volunteer, was the first to see the bear and pointed out a rustling in the palmettos. I strained my eyes to get a clear view of this bear, but once I focused in, I could not believe what I saw. Not more than 40 feet away from us was a mature black bear! It was extremely close; closer than I have ever been to a wild bear. My adrenalin was pumping and as soon as we all could see the bear, the bear noticed us. I had this intense moment where I locked eyes with it, but before I could react, the bear tore off into the woods. This was a really exciting and special moment for the volunteer group. It also gave us a great story to bring back to camp.

How did you first hear about the OHV event?

I first heard about this event on FTA’s website. On FTA’s website I was prompted to use Meetup.com, where I found a lot of other volunteer events. Meetup.com is an amazing tool to find interesting events near you!

Have you done a lot of hiking?

While I have not done a huge amount of backpacking, through hiking or multi-day trips, I do enjoy my “GLW” days. “GLW” stands for Gym, Library and Without. On my “GLW” days “G” stands for gym/ workout, which includes hiking and biking. “L” stands for library, which includes reading to gain knowledge and working out my brain. “W” involves trying to reduce my life to the bare essentials, such as walking instead of driving. I am learning to live a minimalist type of lifestyle, which involves reducing the amount of things you own, and enjoying experiences instead of materialistic objects. I enjoy living in the moment. I find that “GLW” days are a big part of this minimalistic ideal, and the things that bring me the most joy are brought to the surface.

What do you love about hiking? About volunteering?

When I hike I attempt to walk an inch off the ground and breathe to the rhythm of my steps. It is a meditative state where I try to focus on my steps, pairing each breath with each step. When I do volunteer work, it is a completely different experience. It’s fast paced and task oriented. I enjoy getting out there, being useful and making a difference. Hiking is meditative, and volunteering is a way for me to give back and use my skill sets.
Do you prefer to volunteer or to hike?
100% volunteering. I enjoy feeling useful. When I volunteer, I feel like I’m accomplishing a big task. In this respect, there is a type of satisfaction that cannot be duplicated by hiking. I consider myself an athletic type of guy so I enjoy pushing my body to its limits. Volunteering allows me to work hard and feel like I have made a difference and earned my keep.

What made you want to become a Section Leader?
Bill, who is the Black Bear Chapter’s Trail Coordinator, introduced me to the concept of leading a section. After hearing about a vacancy in the chapter, I leapt at the opportunity to help be the eyes and ears for FTA. Bill has been an outstanding mentor to me and I look forward to making my section one of the best sections to hike.

Your first event was a staff-supported event. What did you like most about this support?
I like that the staff trusted me with my tasks for the event. Jeff, the North Florida Regional Representative, let me do the planning and the food shopping. He also let me make my own mistakes and gave me constructive feedback during and after my event. This was very helpful. I also appreciated that Karl, the Volunteer Program Coordinator, handled the registration process and helped me write my first email. This allowed me to focus on planning the event, rather than coordinating the volunteer effort. It really lessened the burden on me. I know it will get easier as time goes on, but for my first event it was a genuine treat to have staff support.

How do you motivate your volunteer crew?
I lead by example and energize volunteers by showing confidence in their decisions.

You mentioned Lean Six Sigma: Do you think that there’s a place for it on the Florida Trail?
The Lean Six Sigma process can be applied to a lot of situations. As long as there is data to track and a process that could be streamlined and simplified, improvements can be made using the Lean Six Sigma process. Having done my first work crew, I already see some processes that I would like to simplify for my next Volunteer Work Party. Quick things, like how I loaded the trailer could have been done more efficiently to better use the space that I had. Also I could have done a better job at estimating how many volunteers it takes to get a specific task done. It is good for companies to strive for process improvement, and I strive to improve my own efficiencies. Soon my Volunteer Work Parties will be better organized, using Lean Six Sigma.

What is your favorite trail tool?
My favorite tool is the brush cutter. It hooks on your waist, has a 10-inch circular saw and does the work of 10 volunteers in half the amount of time. It is a very effective tool and it doesn’t wear out your back.

What’s your favorite trail in Florida?
Barr Hammock is a varied trail near Micanopy, FL that includes both open levee walks and forested single tracks. There is an abundance of wildlife on the trail. It has many flowers and is a great trail for hiking or biking. However, if pressed for my favorite section of the Florida Trail, I’d say it is Steven Foster State Park. I love walking along the Suwannee River.

What advice would you give to new volunteers?
Push yourself and try. Don’t think that you can’t do it, because you can. Life is all about experiences and you should push yourself to step outside of your comfort zone. You will definitely remember those experiences.

When you’re not hiking what do you do?
I enjoy reading, riding my bike, going to the beach and gardening. I try to focus on memorable experiences with my wife, family and friends. I also enjoy volunteering at Gainesville’s Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, where I serve as the Volunteer Coordinator.

Where’s the most exotic place that you’ve hiked?
Alaska! In Glacier Park the creeks and rivers have a sparkle of gold to them. The air is so fresh and crisp, and the scenery...
is very pristine and clean. It was an amazing experience to hike glaciers and melting icebergs. I have done a few cruises in my life, but my Alaskan cruise was definitely my favorite. It was a wild experience!

**If you could only bring one item hiking with you, what would you bring?**

I have this small Dakota Angler Watch that I love to bring with me. It has a red light, alarm, compass and watch functions. It’s a cool little tool that serves many different purposes on the trail.

**Do you like hiking alone or in a group?**

I prefer to hike alone. I like to focus on my thoughts and enjoy the freedom of choosing my own adventure.

**Are you a hunter or gather?**

I’m a gatherer. I enjoy knowing a lot about my environment. I like being able to name a bunch of different plants and knowing which ones are edible or hold medicinal value.

**What’s the most dangerous experience out on the trail?**

This one time when I was at the Paynes Prairie Preserve I rode up unexpectedly upon a bobcat. I was riding my bike, looking at all the plants and flowers and didn’t expect to see it. It kind of startled me to see this big cat! Luckily it didn’t attack me. In fact, I think I startled it as much as it startled me, and then we both went on our way. This was one of my cool experiences on the trail. What a great memory!

**Do you have a trail name?**

I don’t know if I have been given a trail name per say, but during the OHV trip one of the other volunteers started calling me “A Beast” because of all the work that I got done and my “no-quit” attitude. So I’ve been signing the books at shelters and trailheads with that signature. I don’t know if it fits me, but I’ve been told that you cannot come up with your own trail name, it has to be given to you. Maybe another name will come along, as I get more hiking miles under my belt. Time will tell.
It’s 1964.
Soon, the Beatles will come to America for the first time. Some consider this a revolution. New ideas often are. America’s passion for the outdoors has been growing since World War II. During that time, as part of a secret project, members of many outdoor clubs worked with the government to develop lightweight outdoor gear in an effort to help win the war.

With lightweight gear now available, interest in backpacking as a sport began to grow during the 1960’s. Most people naturally looked to the mountains. In the West, the Pacific Crest Trail stretched from Mexico to Canada. The East offered two venerable choices as well in the form of the Appalachian and Long Trails. These three trails were long enough to inspire dreams.

Down in Florida, far from any mountains, one man had a different dream. Instead of mountains with their switchbacks and stairways, he intended to find ways to cross the swamps and vast wetlands of his adopted home state. One day in 1964, Jim Kern had an idea.

The idea actually had its roots in a hike Jim took with his brother Rich in 1961. The two walked from Clingmans Dome in Tennessee to Fontana Dam in North Carolina along the Appalachian Trail. For Rich, this was enough, but Jim only wanted more. As time went by, he thought about the AT hike and said to himself, why can’t Florida have something like that?

He began to dream.
At the same time, he had a family to support. His goal became to make a living in outdoor photography. He looked west and saw that there were at least two examples of successful outdoor magazines in Arizona and New Mexico. He again said to himself “why not Florida?”

So after much thought, on December 16, 1964, Jim Kern filed papers to create a non-profit corporation, and the Florida Trail Association was born. The Florida Trail Association’s original estimated endpoints were to be “Flamingo in Everglades National Park to a point on the Florida – Georgia line.”

He was not done yet. He also proposed the creation of a magazine to promote the natural beauty of Florida called “The Florida Trail.”

On Tuesday March 1, 1966 Jim Kern and McGregor Smith, a writer for the Miami Herald, and took the first steps on the Florida Trail. The location was the L-28 Tieback Canal just west of Forty Mile Bend on Tamiami Trail (US 41). Jim looked jaunty with a bright yellow shirt. “I remember thinking that this was the beginning of a trail the length of Florida. I wondered if this was the way to go, but it was very exciting to be underway.”

For the first 3 miles, their route paralleled Tamiami Trail, and then they turned north. To their right were Everglades, interspersed with Seminole villages, and to their left stood the Big Cypress National Preserve. The canal path was rough, with wiregrass, broken coral and fill rock. Too soon, McGregor Smith was hurting. By the time they reached the end of the first day, he had had enough. Smith described their first camp this way, “During the night a deer climbed the levee and sniffed around our camp. About 4 A.M. a cold front and rain squall blew away the mosquitos.
and almost us too." Fortunately, they were near a stopping point. Smith evacuated, and for the next 8 miles, an airboat carried Jim, now alone, across the Everglades through the Miccosukee Indian Reservation.

Back on foot, the following 14 mile leg, along the L-28 canal, took Jim through a part of the Big Cypress Preserve and onto Seminole lands. The route followed roads past an airfield and then joined the North Feeder Canal. Seminole lands gave way to those of US Sugar. For the next 27.5 miles, sugar cane was prominent to the east.

In Clewiston, Jim restocked and checked into a small motel. The next day, Jim reached the levee atop Lake Okeechobee. Except for a detour though Moore Haven, the next 21.9 miles followed the Lake. After 7.4 miles canals, the were left behind as Jim headed into the swamps. Fortunately, above Rock Lake Jim found a crossing of Fisheating Creek that was only waist deep. After just over 5 miles he reached Palmdale.

There, Jim joined up with a group of Boy Scouts and a hiker named Ross Allen, who owned a reptile show in Miami. The group followed a wet route along the creek with some minor fords. Thankfully, since it was winter, the bugs were down. Camps were interesting here as at least 2 boys built their own shelters and everyone collected Spanish Moss for bedding. Eventually, after about 20 miles of rough going, the group emerged from the swamps within sight of the village of Old Venus, and more importantly, a Coke machine!!

Leaving town to the north, Jim reached a dirt two track called, oddly enough, the Footman's Trail. Just after he joined it a large bull decided to block the way. After a long standoff, Jim edged by. Most of us would have stuck to the trail. Jim, after just over a mile struck due north into the wild. Seven rough miles later, Florida Highway 70 came into view and camp was made in a stand of pine.

From here, the route angled northwest following the Mid-Florida Ridge. Also referred to as the Lake Wales Ridge, it runs north to south for 150 miles through the center of the peninsula, reaching a max elevation of 312 ft. Dealing with the occasional fence as best he could, Jim passed through Hen Scratch, in Highlands County. He made his way along the ridge and eventually emerged near Highlands Hammock State Park. 171 miles from where he began, the initial hike was over, but things were just getting started!

THE FIRST FT Blaze
On Friday October 14, 1966, Jim took off on another journey in South Florida. He added a new wrinkle this time by blazing his route as he went. Because they were backpacking, they used a stencil and orange spray paint. This route was an old logging tramway and it allowed Jim and 4 other hikers to get deep into the Fakahatchee Strand, or so they thought. Suddenly one member called out up ahead. What he found in the middle of nowhere was a street sign! The group took photos of this bizarre sight.

This turned out to be the edge of the Golden Gate Estates. Mortified, the group turned north, still following tramways. The going was rough - canals and wet areas just kept coming. In one spot, the canal was so deep that the group built a raft and swam their gear across. In at least one other spot, the hikers had to hold their packs over their heads to keep them dry. I asked Jim if he was worried about gators during these crossings. He said, “No, we didn’t worry, but we sure should have!” The going got easier and the miles mounted. The end of this journey was Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The trip ended with three things certain: 1) that they would be back, 2) a few relocations would be needed and 3) that Palmdale was where they were headed.

Ocala
The third trip included Margaret Scruggs, who would go on to play a major role in FTA activities. On Saturday, October 29, 1966, blazing resumed near Clearwater Lake. The group carried a gallon of the signature Florida Trail orange blaze paint in a modified backpack. (see photo with large can on wooden frame) The destination was Juniper Springs.
That year Jim convinced club member, Fred Mulholland, to build a "showcase" piece of trail that he could show others. It would be a dry, pleasant walk where he could point out scenic wonders like Juniper Prairie. Fred put as much trail as he could on dry ridges of sand pine. This would make maintenance easier. However, once Fred finished the 27 mile trail to Juniper Springs, the trail was rerouted off many ridges and into swampy areas. This meant bridges and boardwalks. Working with the US Forest Service, FTA volunteers met this challenge, and the trail you see in Ocala National Forest today is essentially that route.

APALACHICOLA
On November 4, 1966 Jim Kern and two others - a counselor for Youth For Christ and one of his young charges - undertook an amazing hike. Their goal was to cross the entire Apalachicola National Forest without a trail. Well, the first three days were hell, pushing through Titi shrubs, mud and muck. They crossed enough clear areas to make progress, but they were constantly challenged by the tough terrain. Finally, they emerged on the road they were looking for. Sitting there in an old truck was a native Floridian cattle man.

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Jim relates his reaction, "He just could not understand why anyone would push through such a mess. I'm sure he thought we were crazy." The three took stock of their situation and decided to stick to sand roads from this point on. They made it the rest of the way to Sumatra, Florida, their planned destination.

The segment that the three bushwacked was through was in or near the infamous Bradwell Bay, which Backpacker Magazine named one of the nation's "Twelve Toughest Trails." They did it with no marked route, and incredible accomplishment!

An interesting side note: Two months after this hike, Jim received the following note from a man named H.L. Mercer of Greenville, Florida:

“I just bin reading about your hike over in Sumatra via Boatwright. I built a railroad in there back in the 20's. I also ripped it up in 1926. I also lost a nice horse and saddle in there in December, 1929. a black horse named Dan. So if you ever go back in there look out for him, you might not hafto walk.”

Anyway, the boys weren't arrested, but they were immediately escorted off the property and dropped off on Florida Route 80. This was the planned end of the hike at the site of Ft. Denaud. It is safe to say that the blazes in the last part of this section were not kept up.

ALONG THE SUWANEE
On Friday, November 4, 1967 Jim, along with Doug Deane decided to tackle the Suwanee. The goal was to clear and mark 28 miles, beginning at the town of White Springs.

Things got off to a rough start as Jim forgot his detailed topo maps. Undaunted, the crew started out guided by a Florida state highway map. The vegetation was thick, and each carried machetes Jim had purchased in South America. Despite their efforts, the going was slow and they fell behind schedule. This was a problem because they had a ride waiting, but only for that scheduled day. To solve it, they took Ben's pack and he ran ahead to ensure their ride.

As on their other trips they spray painted blazes, but here they also blazed some trees with the machetes. This technique was actually where the term "blazing" came from. Roads and trails back to Revolutionary War days were marked with hatchet blazes on trees.

Jim and Ben were so enthused that they went on past the planned end point for two more days reaching Suwanee State Park.

FORT DENAUD - PALMDALE
On January 19, 1968, Jim Kern led his final exploration trip. The starting point was the Caloosahatchee River near Fort Denaud. Fort Denaud was a trading post established in 1838. It was named after
French trader Pierre Denaud. This trip went through some beautiful cypress country. (See feature photo) and in places the going was straightforward (see photo7). Jim felt quite a bit of satisfaction as he approached the ford of Fisheating Creek, intersecting the route of his first trip from Tamiami Trail. When he reached Palmdale the connection was complete. There were now two established routes to the place Jim saw as an anchor.

On January 22nd, Jim and companions walked on over to Lake Okeechobee. This trip must have felt different than the others because he had been there before... And so, the original explorations ended a couple of years after they'd begun. At that time, this made Jim uneasy at first, but he soon realized it was a good thing. New ideas were coming in and others began to explore potential routes for a continuous footpath across the length of Florida. Jim smiled to himself and stepped back.

In 1983, the 98th US Congress passed legislation designating the Florida Trail as the 8th National Scenic Trail.

The American Hiking Society, Big City Mountaineers and so much more. He has used his dreams to help so many. We should all be so lucky.

Thanks Jim, see you down the trail.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE PLACES AND PEOPLE?

Appalachicola NF – After many years of hard work, the trail here was completed in 1980. There has been an annual “Swamp Tromp” through Bradwell Bay for many years.

Ocala NF – It is a popular trail, both for its’ beauty and because it is one of the driest parts of the entire FT.

Suwanee River – FT maintainers will always have their hands full because of the flooding that is common here. The struggle is worth it because of the amazing beauty. No one who has seen these dark waters and white sands will ever forget it.

Golden Gate Estates – The street sign that Jim saw in 1966 was just the tip of the iceberg. More than 29,000 lots were sold over the phone and to date less than 10% are occupied. Some call it the largest real estate scam in history. There is some good news. More than 78,000 acres are now part of Picayune State Forest.

The Lykes Brothers – Their company, now based in Okeechobee Florida, is still going strong. Jim reports that he never again crawled under one of their fences...at least not knowingly!

IT’S 2016 NOW. ONLY 2 BEATLES ARE LEFT.

Out of an idea in one’s man mind in 1966, a system of some 1,400 miles of trail now exist. More than 200 hikers have traversed the whole main route. Jim’s eyes sparkled when I relayed this news.

I visited his home which features live oaks, magnificent wetlands and a fire tower from which you can survey the incredible landscape. Jim, now 82, climbed that tower in the manner of a young man. I came here to learn of his first travels on the FT and was mesmerized by the breadth of all he has done. Jim has been an integral part of establishing the Florida Trail Association,
2016 ‘IDIDAIHIKE’ Fundraiser
A Photo Essay

The North Florida Trailblazers Chapter held its 8th annual ‘IDIDAIHIKE’ fundraiser on March 12, 2016, raising more than $4,000 for the Florida Trail Association.

Hosted near Keystone Heights, the 11-mile hike guided participants from the Camp Blanding Military Reservation to the Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park. Here the North Florida Trailblazers Chapter invited all participants to enjoy the sights and sounds of the Florida Trail.

Traveling under a canopy of hardwood and live oak trees and through open Sandhill fields, the event treated hikers to scenic views of Lost Pond, the old Magnolia State Park, Lowry Lake and the Devil’s Wash Basin. Sky blue lupine flowers were spotted along the trail and at various waypoints hikers were able to stop and read about important sites of interest. These sites highlighted the trail’s various scenic, cultural and historic values. The region is home to pristine spring-fed lakes, ravines and limestone sinkholes, that served as a set for such Hollywood films as Tigerland (2000), the General’s Daughter (1999) and G.I. Jane (1997). They also share our storied history of racial segregation in 1950’s America, displaying the remnants of the now defunct Magnolia State Park.

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHT
Magnolia State Park was built in 1957 as a companion park to Goldhead Branch State Park, which was a “whites only” park. Officials built the park to provide recreation opportunities for the black community. Although the park had fewer amenities, the beaches at Magnolia Lake were (and still are) far superior. By 1964 the Florida State Parks were fully integrated and in the early 1970’s officials closed Magnolia State Park. Today only historic remnants remain.
The ‘IDIDAHIKE’ was designed to provide easy access to nature for all types of hikers. The route included easy, moderate and hard hikes of varying lengths, with take-out points at the 3.7, 5.9 and 7.8 mile marks. Sag wagons, aid stations and support staff were also positioned along the trail to assist and transport hikers back to the event site. This design encouraged first-time and casual hikers, families and senior citizens to participate.

The event also featured door prizes, gifts donated by REI and chapter members and various photo opportunities throughout the route corridor, including photos with the famed “Mossman” sculpture – the unofficial mascot of the Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park. Mossman was an especially popular stop in the picnic area.

Thanks to the help of our volunteers the ‘IDIDAHIKE’ was a resounding success and helped introduce more than 200 hikers to the Florida Trail. The event grows larger each and every year, and we hope to add some new attractions in next year’s fundraiser. Be on the lookout for next year’s event date.

Thank you for your support of the North Florida Trailblazer’s Chapter in supporting our beloved Florida Trail.

Thank you for your support of the IDidAHike! Your support helps us fund the Florida Trail Association, the nonprofit steward of the Florida Trail.
Hikers traversed through Camp Blanding under a canopy of oaks covered in Spanish moss.

Families of all ages joined in on the fun!
Volunteers Deb Blick (front) and Darlene Altman (back) staff an aid station with water, snacks and first aid supplies. Aid stations were set up about every two miles along the route.
Once in Gold Head State Park the hike entered an area of a recent prescribed burn. These controlled burns are done every two to five years to help promote a healthy Sandhill Ecosystem.

Our “Sweeps” enjoyed the hike and were happy to help out!
In a time not so long ago, but a time gone by, the “great outdoors” was not a catch phrase for getting away from it all or escaping the world but a repository for children. Driving down the streets of yesteryear, one didn’t have to ask where all the children were; one had to be careful not to run them over as they were skipping, running, skating and biking down the byways. Kids walked to school, to the ballpark, to the drugstore, to each other’s houses. Children in the country were somewhat harder to spot. They were in the woods, across the fields, out behind the barn, out in back of the grove, or down at the fishing hole.

So, when the idea of retirement occurred to Joan Hobson, she was at no loss for what she wanted to do; she didn’t have to “reinvent” herself, but simply “rediscover” the child within who had been covered up for so long. She joined the Florida Trail Association in 1991, hit the trail a few days later, and found a new reason for being.

Joan Hobson’s exploits are legendary in the FTA. She is the first person to complete the Florida Trail three times. The first time was in 1997 at the age of 67; the second was a through-hike completed in 2000 in 83 days at age 70; and the third traverse was finished in 2010 when she was 79. She is definitely a card-carrying member of what many refer to as the Greatest Generation.

Although born and raised in the beautiful New England state of Massachusetts, Joan says that here in Florida is where her passion for hiking in the woods was kindled. Her only prior experience was day-hiking as a Girl Scout and a few overnights with a son-in-law later in life. On her first backpacking trip in Florida, she took only a quart of water for two days! Luckily, the FTA chapters in central Florida were (and still are) very active in the 90’s, with plenty of opportunities to learn about the uniqueness of hiking in Florida. There were many overnight, weekend, and three-day holiday hikes within a 100-mile radius in central Florida. From the beginning, Joan was testing equipment; as a 60-something hiker, she wasn’t going to haul anything or any single pound more than she had to. Early on, she discovered the clothing material that most effectively protects from the sun and the mosquitoes. Joan was always figuring out the easiest and best ways of doing things like she did when she was a nursing supervisor in her previous life. Her findings would be shared at frequent hiking and camping workshops. When she became a hike leader, she scheduled five 100-mile hikes a year – starting in November and going through March – with hunting season dates factored in. To this day, Joan is so familiar with hiking trails and her memory is so sharp that, as she says, she “can quickly flip through the trail in her mind” to find the exact spot she is talking of or being asked about.

When asked why she decided to hike the entire Florida Trail, Mrs. Hobson gives the standard answer of most famous (and not so famous) adventurers, “Because it is there.” The thrill of being on the trail with a goal in mind. When she talks of her love for hiking, her eyes light up and she earnestly tries to choose words that can describe the awe she feels. The beauty, the smells, the sounds, the pure immersion in a wild, pristine...
She loves the birds, but she’s not a “birder.” The profuse flowers encountered following spring, when rising warmth heads north from south Florida, are gloriously intoxicating. For Joan, that south-to-north route is preferable to starting out cold in the Panhandle.

Joan has never read “A Walk in the Woods” and never heard the sirens’ call of the mighty Appalachian Trail. Even so, her experiences rival those horror stories of fabled obstacles of the AT. She tells tales of wading through Florida swamps often knee-deep, many times waist-deep, and sometimes with holes up to the neck. Harrowing stories of pushing through briar patches and palmetto thickets and head-high sawgrass. And, of course, the FT has no snow nor mountains amounting to much – both highly sensible reasons in Joan’s mind for choosing the Florida path over that other path.

Company is welcome, and mostly preferable on the trail. But out of necessity, a lot of Joan’s hiking was done solo. Partners for long-distance hikes are not always available. Meeting up with people for certain stretches can be arranged, but circumstances change and things happen. An independent soul soldiers on regardless. Joan estimates that of the 6,000 or so miles she’s hiked in her career, 20% was hiked alone. No, not for everyone. But Joan says, “I felt very comfortable doing that – never felt alone or frightened – talked to the Lord – looked at the stars – enjoyed the beauty. It’s just amazing because you’re out there by yourself – you and the Lord – and you pay more attention to all that there is.”

Mrs. Hobson remembers walking seven full days once without ever changing clothes and never getting wet on purpose. “There’s a lot of stuff you don’t need to do!” she says. “There’s ‘making do’ with what you have and where you are and just pushing on through when there’s no other way.”
when she'd lost the Florida Trail's orange blazes, she plunked her backpack down and paced out from the pack and back in different directions until she spotted the blazes high up in the ever-growing trees. To quote Joan, "You're not lost, you just haven't got where you're going to yet."

"Igloo" is her trail name. A child of the North who was always cold, Joan champions the science of layering. The bulky figure trudging down the trail was given the choice of "Igloo" or "Polar Bear" for a moniker. She remembers being out on the Florida trail in 20-degree weather and being so cold one night that she broke all the rules and brought her little stove into the tent for a brief warmup. As all people know who live here and newcomers will learn, Florida isn't all butterflies and summer picnics.

As independent and intrepid as Joan is, she says most of what she accomplished couldn't have been done without her husband, Bruce, who passed away in 2015. Long-distance hiking was not his calling; a commitment to trail maintenance was – and aiding and abetting Joan's adventures. So he logged hundreds of miles – maybe three or four thousand – in their old van, dropping her off and picking her up days and weeks later or joining her at campsites. Back in the day, there were no cell phones to speak of, no cell towers, nor electrical outlets on the trail. As many well know, cell phones do not work on many stretches of the Florida Trail even today. To meet up with someone or let people know one is alive, destinations and times one expects to be there had to be established and communicated beforehand.

But it wasn't all traipsing up the trail into the wild blue yonder. Joan's contributions maintaining trails rival her hiking achievements. Between 1991 and 2000 Joan performed 2,490 hours of trail work for twelve (of the 18) Florida Trail chapters, and since 2000 she has logged 739 hours of trail maintenance for the Highlanders chapter. That's an OMG total of 3,229 hours if added all together! That's eighty 40-hour work weeks. For years, Joan and Bruce were section leaders for a huge portion of trail in the Ocala National Forest. For four years, she served the state organization as Vice President of Trails. Joan received the FTA's "Cornelia Burge Award" in 1998 for exceptional volunteer service. The U.S. Forest Service, the American Hiking Society, and the governor of Florida have all honored her for her volunteer trail work. "Above and Beyond" is Joan's modus operandi.

Many superlative adjectives could describe Mrs. Hobson. And to think there was a whole other successful and fulfilling life before she laced up her boots and took off into the Florida wilds. A fantastic memory helps make her a masterful teller of tales all the more engrossing and compelling because they are the stuff of adventure. And better still, they're true! The listener knows she is hearing about a life lived largely and greatly enjoyed. Going back to the roots of childhood seems not such a bad idea when contemplating a new beginning or if one is just seeking a change of scenery.
When you join the state-wide Florida Trail Association you automatically become a member of your local chapter based upon your zip code. However, members may attend the activities of any chapter and may transfer to any chapter they wish simply by informing the FTA Office.

Florida Trail activities are organized by our local chapters and are led by authorized volunteer activity leaders. Many of our activities are open to the general public so you can get to know us before you join. Activities can be found online at www.floridatrail.org. Click on “About Us” then click on the “Upcoming Events” button on the left. Local activities are usually also listed on the chapter websites, Facebook pages and Meetups. Click on “About Us” then “Our Chapters” for links to local chapter sites.

Participants in activities must sign an Assumption of Risk form and agree to accept personal responsibility for their safety and the safety of accompanying minors. Always contact the activity leader in advance for more information, to let them know you are attending, to find out any special requirements or equipment for the activity, and to check for any last minute changes.

For more information about chapters and links to websites/meetups/photos go online to FloridaTrail.org/about-us/chapters/ then select the chapter.
MY GIFT TO THE FLORIDA TRAIL DESIGNATIONS

ANNUAL FUND
Provides funds to ensure a steady income stream for Florida Trail Association operations. It's how we keep the lights on and The Footprint coming.

ENDOWMENT FUND
Provides an ongoing endowment to the Florida Trail Association from interest earnings. It is the gift that keeps on giving.

TRAIL PROTECTION FUND
Supports land acquisition and trail construction projects with the ultimate goal of protecting the trail corridor and completing the entire Florida Trail. Independently funds programs like F-Troop, trail crews, and outreach to implement programs wherever they are needed within the Florida Trail System.

MAP FUND
Provides funding for updating the Florida Trail's maps and databook.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND GIFT FORM

ORDER BY PHONE 877-HIKE-FLA ORDER BY FAX 352-378-4550 ORDER ONLINE www.floridatrail.org

Name ___________________________ Daytime Phone Number ___________________________
Address __________________________ Email ___________________________
City ___________________________ State _______ Zip ___________________________

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Please mark one of the boxes below if you are joining or renewing your membership in the Florida Trail Association

☐ Trail Steward ($35)*
☐ Trail Builder ($50)*
☐ Trail Advocate ($100)*
☐ Trail Protector ($500)*
☐ Trail Champion ($1000)*

*Includes spouse and children under 18.

☐ I do not want my address shared with FTA-affiliated organizations

Employer/Occupation ___________________________
Spouse Name ___________________________
Spouse Occupation ___________________________
Number of children ___________________________

☐ Please send a gift membership to:
Name ___________________________
Address ___________________________
City ___________________________
State _______ Zip ___________________________
Daytime Phone Number ___________________________
Email ___________________________
Ship membership package to ☐ Me ☐ New Member

I learned about the Florida Trail from ___________________________

MY GIFT TO THE TRAIL

I am making a gift to the Florida Trail Association and want my gift designated to:

☐ Annual Fund ☐ Endowment Fund ☐ Trail Protection Fund ☐ Map Fund

My gift is In Memory of ___________________________ In Honor of ___________________________

FUND AMOUNT

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SEND FORM AND PAYMENT TO:
FLORIDA TRAIL ASSOCIATION
5415 SW 13th St., Gainesville, FL 32608

MEMBERSHIP TOTAL ___________________________
GIFT TOTAL ___________________________
GRAND TOTAL ___________________________

PAYMENT OPTIONS:
CHECK: Make checks payable to “Florida Trail Association”.

CREDIT CARD: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

Credit Card Number: ___________________________ Exp. Date: ___________________________
Signature: ___________________________ Security Code (3 or 4 digits): ___________________________

To order merchandise from the Florida Trail General Store, visit www.FloridaTrail.org or call the Florida Trail office at 1-877-HIKE-FLA.
SAVE THE DATE!
OCTOBER 20-23, 2016
FTA’s Official 50th Anniversary Conference, at the Sanborn Activity and Event Center in Earl Brown Park, Deland, FL.

♦ Florida Nature Films!
♦ Special Presentations!
♦ Engaging Speakers!
♦ Activities! ♦ Education!
♦ Marker Dedication!
♦ Awards! ♦ Local Activities!

A program intended to inspire young and old, volunteers and enthusiasts alike...

Join us in celebrating a half century of accomplishments, engaging the public, and inspiring a successful future for the Florida National Scenic Trail!

More details and information to be announced soon.