

GOINGS ON 'ROUND THE PRAIRIE

May 2004

JulieAnne Tabone, Park Services Specialist

1. The Prairie has received a good deal of recognition from the state over the past few months:
 - *Jim Weimer, the Park Biologist, Resource Manger of the Year
(money awarded will be used to treat willows on 441, opening up the view)
 - *Harold Nugent, Volunteer of the Year
(Mr. Nugent was recently a guest speaker at Ranger Academy!)
 - *The Knap-In and Primitive Arts Festival, Special Event of the Year
(Big success this year, 100 vendors, 5500 guests, lots of fun)
 - *Harold Glisson, Davis Productivity Award
(His hard work saved the state close to 100K)

The Old Florida Heritage Highway Council will be congratulating the Prairie at their annual meeting on May 14th, at the Goodwin Lumber yard at 5pm. All are invited.

2. **FRIENDS.** The FRIENDS annual meeting was held on May 5th at Hickory Ranch. Thanks to Barabara Mollison and Julie Henderson, the extraordinary hospitality committee, for the delicious spread. FRIENDS welcomed many new members and it was good to get together for a social event. The board was elected and includes: George Edwards (Pres.), Harold Nugent (Vice Pres.), Julie Henderson (Sec.), Katherine Rajczi (Treasurer), Reed Brown, Chris Flagg, Barbara Mollison, Mary Rhodes, Frank Saier, and Robin Spaeth. The new website www.prairiefriends.org was unveiled. Encourage everyone you know to visit the website and get involved! We also viewed the new FRIENDS/Paynes Prairie presentation that will be taken out into the community next fall as part of the FRIENDS membership drive.

We have all seen George Edwards around the Prairie quite a bit over the last few months while he served as interim FRIENDS president. So let's get to know him a bit...
A geologist by trade, George spent a good part of his career as Chief Geologist for Corning, Inc. chasing down raw materials to make such products as Corningware. Work on these minerals took George to projects on all continents except Antarctica. He retired a few years ago, and finding retirement a bit quiet, started his own consultancy (www.ghedwards.com). George and his wife, Lee, moved to Gainesville in 1998, in part so they could ride their bikes year-round. George has served on a number of 501(c)(3) boards, and currently serves as a Trustee of a national scholarship program. George has served as Chair of a City/County advisory board, and now George and Lee are officers of the Gainesville Cycling Club.

3. **FROGHAT.** The Friends of the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail have been out there supporting the trail. Their latest workdays involved assisting with the railbed restoration project on the north rim and continuing efforts to improve trail safety. Addition stop warnings have been painted on the trail at the 234 intersection.
Next workday – the WEEDOUT
Saturday, May 8th, at the Alachua Lake Overlook trail intersection.

FROGHAT has a big special event planned, Saturday June 5th . **Yulee Days Celebration 10K Trail Race and 2.5 mile Fun Run** – “Celebrate the 150th anniversary of the building of the Yulee Railroad and enjoy the natural beauty of one of Florida’s most scenic rail-trails. Proceeds will go toward Trail enhancement and maintenance, and the development of more athletic events in North Central Florida.” They are looking for participants, volunteers, and sponsors, so join in the fun.

If anyone would like more info on trail workdays, the Yulee run, the FROGHAT sunset bike rides, or how to join, please visit www.froghat.org.

4. **VOLUNTEERS.** New faces over the past few months:

Tracy Culpepper – Visitor Center volunteer, Thursday mornings

Jeannie Bobroff – Visitor Center volunteer, Sunday afternoons

Robin Spaeth – Visitor Center volunteer, FRIENDS board member, and working on both the grant and membership committees for FRIENDS

Eric Flagg – Trail monitor 2 evenings per week on Bolen Bluff Trail

Steve Emmett – Opening the Gainesville Hawthorne Trail gates every morning Monday through Friday. Very helpful!

New UF volunteers doing miscellaneous project include **Lara Ippolito, Jeff Weinberger,** and **Ron Dowdy.**

We have all run into new FRIEND and volunteer **Dominick Martino** out there on the Prairie. He is here almost every day with his camera and the Prairie wildlife has been putting on quite a show! He has donated 100’s of high-quality, artistic images to be used for educational and outreach purposes by the FRIENDS and the Prairie.

Please welcome these folks!

Our OUTSTANDING camphosts and Hickory Ranch site volunteers have all left for the season. Why doesn’t anyone stick around for a Paynes Prairie summer? Hmmm...

Thanks to Robin and Eileen Beckett, David, Patti, and Jessie Wessling, Pat Rhoads and Keven Ward, Lawrence and Barbara Roth, Paul and Darlene Lane, and Jack and Thelma Bousfield.

Sweetwater Clean-up projects have wrapped up for the season. Literally, TONS of trash has been removed. Thanks to all the volunteers for their time and energy. Next clean-up..this fall.

Volunteers and interns are needed here at Paynes Prairie. Information has been posted to our website and also the FRIENDS website. Take a look and spread the word.

(www.floridastateparks.org/paynesprairie or www.prairiefriends.org)

5. The grass has grown back lush and green outside the Visitor Center following successful prescribed burns in the area. The bison and horses have been frequently making appearances. Now people believe that the bison DO EXIST. Stop by the Visitor Center and see the photographs taken by Dominick of the bison and horses in the last 2 months. There is a notebook of images that go to show why this is the place for fantastic wildlife viewing.

6. **INTERPRETATION.**

“What’s in Bloom” posters and handouts are now in place at some of the trail kiosks (currently at La Chua and Chacala; Visitor Center and Gainesville Hawthorne Trail coming soon). Ransford Pyle, staff, and myself have been collaborating on this ongoing project.

The regularly scheduled ranger-led activities have concluded for the season, although I am looking into the possibility of a few “special” hikes and bike rides (maybe moonlight programs?) for the coming months. I will keep you posted.

Our visitor center displays haven’t been updated in over 20 years. It’s time for a facelift. Brian Polk, head of interpretation out of Tallahassee, paid the Prairie a visit and it looks like we are taking steps towards making some changes. Money has been allocated by the state to start the “planning” phase. At this stage we are gathering input from multiple sources, including a visitor survey and suggestion box that will be in place starting very soon. I encourage everyone to share their thoughts and feelings with me regarding the visitor center.

On and offsite educational programs have been in FULL swing over the past few months. Since January, staff and volunteers have given park programs to close to 1500 people.

Go TEAM!

We now have our very own digital projector and laptop. Not only does this take us one step closer to doing campground programs next fall, but it also expands everyone’s resources for putting together on and offsite programs. I recently used the set-up at the Florida Museum of Natural History and it was fantastic. A photograph database (our slides, park digital photos, and Dominick’s wildlife imagery) is in development and will be available on the laptop and also on a workstation in the Ranger Station when the renovation is complete. All of the slide programs I do will be available for everyone’s use. Stay tuned...when everything is up and running we will have a half-day training session.

Friends of the Gainesville Hawthorne Trail, Lars Anderson, staff, and myself are moving forward in the development of a self-guided, illustrated brochure/map for the trail. The purpose of the brochure is to tell the story of people and the railroad; highlight significant historical happenings; and provide a tool for navigation. The selection of "stops" not only correlates to what happened where, but also to features of the trail where users tend to naturally pause (overlooks, crossings, natural features). This brochure will also help to improve our GHT kiosks. EXCITING.

7. **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. Quick updates:**

* Culverts are being repaired on the prairie basin.

* Exotic removal continues – coral ardisia (coral berry) and camphor trees have been removed around the Visitor Center and chinese tallow treatment continues on the northside of the prairie

*Prescribe burn efforts continue – weather-permitting we hope to burn the clear cut area (past pine beetle infestation) on the park drive and also some of the uplands. Jim and staff have been preparing firelines.

8. **MEDIA AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH.** Over these last few months, Paynes Prairie has been fortunate to have received a great deal of positive coverage from NPR, SKY radio, TV20, the Gainesville Sun, the Alligator and other periodicals. Some stories to note, Barabara and Lawrence Roth were featured on the cover of the Gainesville Sun telling the story of being a camphost in Florida State Parks, JaneAnne Bailey-Blakney's excavation of Paynes Town was highlighted in the Local and State section of the Gainesville Sun, and TV20 News covered the Sweetwater clean-up project. Plus, see the attached story about Jim Weimer.

Paynes Prairie staff participated in the Air Potato Round-up, the Step-Up Florida Ride for Healthy Living, the Women for Wise Growth/Alachua County Environmental Protection Dept. Watershed Tour, and the Florida Museum of Natural History Animal Fair. Pat and I spent a morning on the Gainesville Hawthorne Trail on horseback patrol welcoming in 100's of Bike Florida riders. These were folks from all over the country. Volunteer Jan Powell attended the Poe Springs Water Festival with live alligators. Harold Nugent has done alligators programs at schools, libraries, and festivals non-stop! And last month Ranger John Lakich was invited to be the Ranger Assistant at the 62nd Ranger Academy. Yes, busy times!

9. Staff updates:

- *Welcome back to Ranger PK Snellen and Ranger Lathy Green.
- * Ranger Dave Coen, OPS Brenna Daniels, and OPS Mironda Phillips are no longer with us. We wish them luck in their new endeavors.
- *We currently have 3 OPS positions available. Please spread the word.

Thanks everyone for all that you do! In appreciation, Lars Anderson and I are working on putting together a sunset paddle on the Lochloosa at Cross Creek for volunteers and staff...we may wait until fall when things cool down and thunderstorms aren't threatening...we will see...stay tuned for details.

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