

Highlanders Chapter of the Florida Trail Association

Our Mission

The Florida Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes a network of hiking trails throughout the state, including the unique Florida National Scenic Trail. Together with our partners we provide opportunities for the public to hike, engage in outdoor recreation, participate in environmental education and contribute to meaningful volunteer work.

Officers & Committees

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Vice Chair, Eugene Bouley	352-314-9335		
Secretary, Carmen Pospesel	352-589-2543		
Treasurer, Diane Roesch	407-469-3638		
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Highlanders Nature Notes

Another of my favorite nature preserves is Hidden Waters in Eustis. I know some of you have been there with the Miltons. Recently I went there with my church's Nature Club (more on that later). We are always rewarded by some lucky encounter: hawks, owls, snakes, carnivorous plants or Gopher Tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*) of which there are many burrows, though not all appear active. But on this particular Sunday morning we encountered two turtles I never would have expected.

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The water in Lake Alfred had been absent for many months due to the lengthy drought (what the brochure calls a 'lake' has never been more than a medium-sized pond in the low-lying center of the preserve). We were able to walk out to the middle of it and saw only dry mud covered with a flattened layer of dead plant growth. This might account in some way for the sightings I'm about to describe.

As we walked up the trail heading east toward the stream, we were met by a couple who said there was a large turtle under the new bridge across the stream. The man said he thought it might be a Snapping Turtle. He was right! Just under the bridge, but clear enough that we could see it plainly by looking over the rail, was a common Florida Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina osceola*). It was lying in the center of the flow of water facing up-stream away from us. This stream is almost never more than an inch or two deep. What was it doing there? The time of year was winter (between December and February) so I don't think it was a female looking for a place to lay her eggs (usually done in the spring time). It had been a mild winter and many of the trees had already begun to bloom, but it was still very early for egg laying. We all stared at it for a long while, until it had enough and began to move slowly away from us. We could see its powerful legs and long, muscular tail with the saw-toothed bumps on top, making it look very prehistoric. This was the first snapper I'd seen in 20

years. They are usually submerged in water and hard to locate, even while looking right at them, due to their camouflaged coloration. The only other one I'd ever seen in Central FL was crossing a road near the Ocala National Forest east of Lake Kathryn around the year 1993.

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We were elated at our good fortune and headed up the trail paralleling the stream toward its source. When we were almost to the end of the newly built barrier fence we stopped to look deep within the ravine. There to my absolute amazement was another large Florida Snapping Turtle! I couldn't believe my eyes, and if anyone else would have told me this story I would have been very skeptical. In fact, it was so odd to see two of these unusual creatures in one day and in the same place that we

The Remarkable Hobsons

Bruce and Joan Hobson joined the Florida Trail Association in November 1991. That same month Joan took her first backpacking trip on the FT, and she turned out for her first FT maintenance hike with the Suncoast Chapter.

Many members of our chapter know that Joan has hiked the FT from end to end--not just once, not just twice, but three times! But here are some facts about her hiking accomplishments that you may not know. The first time she hiked the whole FT, from November 1996 to March 1997, she was 67. According to the FTA's records, Joan was the 14th hiker, and the second woman, to walk from one end of the trail to the other. (The first end-to-ender was Jim Kern, the founder of the FTA, who hiked it in the 1960s.)

The year after completing her first end-to-end hike Joan co-wrote, with Susan Roquemore, "From Here...to There on the Florida Trail: A Companion Guide for Long Distance Hikers." The next year she was one of several authors of "Long Distance Backpacking the Florida Trail," which included her journals as well as the journals of five other hikers.

Joan began a second complete hike of the trail in January 2000 and finished in April, 83 days later. She was the first hiker (of any gender) to complete a second hike of the entire FT. This second hike was

entertained the possibility that while we had been traveling the trail the first turtle had walked up there ahead of us! To convince myself that wasn't possible we actually went back to see it still lying in the very spot it had been when we left it. Two wild Florida Snapping Turtles in one day! I don't expect I'll ever have that opportunity again in my lifetime. -Mike Barnett

Source:

Buhlmann, Kurt, et al. *Turtles of the Southeast. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2008.*

You may contact Mike Barnett at 352-357-8476 or at nbarnett03@comcast.net

done without a hiatus; that is, she did it as a "through-hike," rather than a "section-hike." Since our trail is still under development the total length varies from year to year. On her 2000 journey she walked 1,300 miles.

In December 2004 Joan started her third hike of the whole trail. In April 2005 she took a pause, and then resumed the walk in May at Eglin Air Force Base. Five hundred yards into this phase of her hike she fell and broke her arm. Joan did some section-hiking in 2008 and got back on the trail in January 2009 to complete her third transit in March 2010. She was 79 when she completed the hike for the third time.

Since Joan finished her third hike, two more hikers have achieved this remarkable feat, but as of 2014 no one has walked the trail more than three times. That will change some day, of course, but what will never change is that Joan was the first person to hike the trail twice, and also the first to do it three times.

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Some Highlanders may not realize that Joan's exploits in the area of trail maintenance rival her hiking achievements. Between 1991 and 2000 (the year our chapter was formed) Joan performed 2,490 hours of trail work for twelve (of the 18) Florida Trail chapters. Since 2000 she has logged 739 hours of trail maintenance for our chapter. Add all her maintenance hours together and you get the astonishing total of 3,229 hours. It would take more

than eighty 40-hour work weeks to equal that number of hours.

When the Highlanders Chapter was formed Joan became the Section Leader for "Ocala South." This is a huge section of trail that is bordered by State Road 40 on the north and County Road 42 on the south. She served in that capacity until 2008.

In 2003 Joan organized a state-wide five-day work hike whose goal was to build an ADA-compliant trail from Hwy 19 to Dora Lake in the Ocala N F. This project was a predecessor of the F-Troop hikes that the FTA organizes today.

In addition Joan has given lots of administrative service to both the chapter and the state organization. She has served the chapter as vice chair and as the long-time chair of the Activities Committee. She served the state organization as "vice president, trails" for four years. She also founded the FTA's Long-Distance Hikers Committee.

In 1998 Joan received the FTA's "Cornelia Burge Award" for exceptional volunteer service. Additionally she has devoted many hours to volunteer service in the Gainesville office. She has also been honored by the U. S. Forest Service, the American Hiking Society, and the governor of Florida for her volunteer trail work.

How did Joan find time to hike the Florida Trail three times and also devote so many hours to clearing trails and serving the organization in other ways? She is an extraordinary person. Long-distance hikers usually adopt a trail moniker; Joan's handle is "Igloo." A more descriptive name for her

would be Joan "Wonder Woman" Hobson.

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While Joan was walking and clearing the Florida Trail her husband Bruce wasn't sitting around the house. Often Bruce was driving the "sag wagon" that kept Joan supplied with food, clean clothes, and other necessities while she was on her long-distance hikes. Joan notes that without Bruce's assistance she could never have completed her three end-to-end hikes. And of course Bruce escorted Joan on many trips across the state when one or the other of them was working on association business.

While hiking the trail is not Bruce's thing, maintaining the trail is. Since 2000 Bruce has given 949 hours to maintaining the section of trail for which our chapter is responsible. (That is even more maintenance hours than Joan has donated in the same period.) For a number of years Bruce was co-trailmaster (along with Joan) for the segment in the Ocala N F bordered by Forest Road 30 and State Road 40.

Bruce has served the chapter as vice chair and as council representative. Since the inception of the chapter 14 years ago he has been our aluminum-can steward, in which capacity he has raised a lot of money for the chapter.

Bruce and Joan have made enormous contributions to the Highlanders Chapter, the FTA, and the hiking public.

-Howard Pospesel

Activities for September & October 2014

Saturday

September 13, 2014, Trail Maintenance Hog Island: Meet at the entrance to the Withlaoochee State Forest at 9 AM, exit 309 off I-75 head west ¼ mile. Contact Steve Nemeth at 352-242-3876 or E-mail nematode23@gmail.com Bring hat, gloves, sunscreen, bug repellent, snacks and lots of water. Or E-mail bobbiszoo@yahoo.com

Saturday

September 13, 2014, Florida National Scenic Trail Symposium, Crawfordville, FL: 9 AM -2:30 PM. The Florida National Scenic Trail Symposium is a celebration of Florida's National Scenic Trail! The event will highlight its future plans with an active program of speakers who will take attendees through the past, present, and future of the FNST. Registration for this free program is required and a continental breakfast

and lunch will be provided. The first 100 registrants will receive a special gift!

Thursday

September 25, 2014, Highlanders Chapter Monthly Meeting: The program will be presented by Jeff Glenn our Florida Trail North Regional Representative, Leesburg Public Library, 100 E Main Street at 6 PM. Use the entrance on Main Street. Meeting room just inside the entrance to the library. Bring a snack to share and your aluminum cans to recycle. Questions? 352-787-8654 or email bobbiszoo@yahoo.com

Friday, Saturday & Sunday

October 3, 4 & 5, 2014, Wings & Wildflowers, Venetian Gardens, Leesburg: Contact Mary Ellen Milton to volunteer at our FL Trail table, 352-357-3723 or mem32735@aol.com

Saturday

October 4, 2014, Trail Maintenance Hike, Ocala National Forest: Meet before 9AM in the parking lot on the West side of Hwy 19 that is 2 1/2 miles North of the turn off that goes to Alexander Springs (Hwy 445). Please be on time as we will be shuttling to another area to work. Please bring water, insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. If you have further questions call or email bobbiszoo@yahoo.com 787-8654 Bring hat, gloves, sunscreen, bug repellent, lunch, and lots of water.

Wednesday

October 8, 2014, Trail Maintenance Hike, Ocala National Forest: Meet before 9AM in the parking lot on the West side of Hwy 19 that is 2 1/2 miles North of the turn off that goes to Alexander Springs (Hwy 445). Please be on time as we will be shuttling to another area to work. Please bring water, insect spray, hats, lunch, etc. If you have further questions call or email bobbiszoo@yahoo.com 787-8654 Bring hat, gloves, sunscreen, bug repellent, lunch, and lots of water.

Saturday & Sunday

October 11 - 12, 2014, FTA Trail Skills Training! New and current trail maintainers and land managers welcome! at the Lake Oklawaha RV Park in Fort McCoy, FL. The weekend will be a whirlwind of awesome skills, useful information, great people and food!

Wednesday

October 22, 2014, Trail Maintenance Hike, Hog Island: Meet at the entrance to the Withlacoochee State Forest at 9 AM, exit 309 off I-75 head west 1/4 mile. Contact Steve Nemeth at 352-242-3876 or email nematode23@gmail.com Bring hat, gloves, sunscreen, bug repellent, snacks, and lots of water. Or email bobbiszoo@yahoo.com

Thursday

October 23, 2014, Highlanders Chapter Monthly Meeting: The program will be presented by Mary Brooks, Public Information Officer Wekiva Parkway, Leesburg Public Library, 100 E Main Street, Leesburg at 6 PM. Use the entrance on Main Street. Meeting room just inside the entrance to the library. Bring a snack to share and your aluminum cans to recycle. Questions? 352-787-8654 or email bobbiszoo@yahoo.com