



Florida Trail Association

HAPPY HOOFERS

HOOPLA

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[www.hoofers.floridatrail.org](http://www.hoofers.floridatrail.org)

The Happy Hoofers Chapter encompasses Broward County. Monthly Meetings Second Thursday of every month@7:15 P.M. Except June/July/August Fern Forest Nature Center 201 Lyons Road South Coconut Creek, FL 33063

Piecing Together A Dream

By Edward Talone

All photos courtesy of Jim Kern

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 had 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 was born. Its' 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."



Inside This Issue:

Piecing Together a Dream	1-5
In Memoriam	6
FTA Awards	6
Chairs Corner	7
Officers & Committee Chairs	7
New Members	8
FYI	8



**Kern and Smith get underway**

Over the next year plus, Jim worked hard trying to promote the idea of a magazine. A dummy issue was created in an attempt to attract advertisers. However, this experiment failed. Now, it is March 1966 and the time has come to make the trail a reality.

On Tuesday March 1, 1966, Jim Kern and McGregor Smith, a writer for the Miami Herald, took the first steps on the Florida Trail. The location was the L-28 Tieback Canal just west of Forty Mile Bend on US 41. Jim looked jaunty with a bright yellow shirt. His mind was filled with ideas. "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 US 41, then it turned north. To their right were the Everglades, interspersed with Seminole villages, to their left the Big Cypress. 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. He 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 because the next FT segment was unique. For 8 miles an airboat carried them across the Everglades through the Miccosukee Indian Reservation. They

landed at a junction where 3 canals came together and headed along the L-28 canal. Just ahead, McGregor Smith was rescued by a fisherman and headed home. This 14 mile leg took Jim through a part of the Big Cypress Preserve and onto Seminole lands.

Next, the route followed roads past an airfield and then joined the North Feeder Canal. After 7 miles the Seminole lands gave way to those of US Sugar. For the next 27.5 miles, sugar cane was prominent to the east. Finally, another 4 miles brought Jim to Clewiston. Along here Jim had to ford a canal. This would become a regular feature of his early explorations.

In Clewiston, Jim restocked and checked into a small motel. The next day, after a necessary jog east, Jim reached the levee atop Lake Okeechobee. The next 21.9 miles followed the Lake, except for a detour through Moore Haven, where he was joined by Dade Thornton, President of Tropical Audubon Society, and a troop of boy scouts. Jim knew Fisheating Creek was close, so he turned west on a branch of the Herbert Hoover Dike. After 7.4 miles, canals were left behind as Jim headed into the swamps. Fortunately, he was above Rock Lake and found a crossing of Fisheating Creek that was only waist deep. After just over 5 miles, he reached Palmdale. It was Sunday. Thornton and the scouts headed back to Miami. There, Jim was joined by Ross Allen, who owned a reptile show at Silver Springs east of Ocala, and two young associates. The foursome followed a wet route along the creek with some minor fords. Thankfully, since it was winter, a front blew through, so the bugs were down. Everyone collected Spanish Moss for bedding and to stay warm. One meal for the Scouts featured armadillo, fixed by Allen.

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, and now traveling alone, Jim reached a dirt two track called, oddly enough, Footman's Trail. Just after he joined it, a large bull decided to block the way. After a long standoff, Jim edged by. Despite this experience most of us would have stuck to the trail. Jim, after just over a mile, struck due north into who knows what. Seven rough



**Kern on Spanish Moss**



**The first blaze**

miles later Florida Highway 70 came into view and camp was made in a stand of pine. From here, the route stayed north, following the Mid-Florida Ridge. The ridge runs north to south for 150 miles through the center of the peninsula. Jim followed it as best he could, occasionally dealing with a fence.

Passing through Hen Scratch he made his way along the ridge eventually emerging near Highland Hammock State Park. Upon reaching the park, the initial hike was over, but things were just getting started!

Jim Kern painting 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. The first FT blaze ever was placed at the start of the W.J. Janes Scenic Drive on a telephone pole. 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 and 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; that they would be back, that, a few relocations would be needed, and 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 destination was Juniper Springs, and this was reached without difficulty.

This section of trail would be unremarkable except for what transpired in 1968. That year Jim convinced club member Fred Mulholland to build a "showcase" piece of trail that he (Jim) could show others. It would be a dry, pleasant walk where he could point out scenic wonders like Juniper Prairie. Fred did just what Jim asked. The problem was he did it too well. Fred put as much trail as he could on dry ridges of sand pine. This would make maintenance easier. Well, up until now the Forest Service paid scant attention to FTA. They were just some nuts who wanted to have a hiking trail. However, once Fred finished the 27 mile trail to Juniper Springs it was walked by a forester. His response was swift and sure. Logging was their main business and the ridgetops were where the big trees were. The Florida Trail would have to go. The Forest Service moved in and routed the FT off many ridges and into swampy areas. This meant bridges and boardwalks. This was done, but in time the boardwalks were damaged and failing. The government response to this was, "it's your trail, you take care of it." Well, FTA was not happy and ideas flew back and forth. Finally, a compromise was reached. If FTA would go in and haul out the pieces of broken boardwalk, then the Forest Service would haul them away, AND build new the trail. This was done, and the trail you see in Ocala today is essentially that route.



**At Sumatra, FL**

Appalachicola - 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 Appalachian National Forest without a trail. Well, the first three days were hell. Pushing through titi, mud and muck. They crossed enough clear areas to make progress but they were being beaten. Finally, they emerged on the road they were looking for. Sitting there in an old truck was a native Florida Cracker. 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. They made it the rest of the way to Sumatra, Florida, their planned destination. Note to those reading this who have been there; The segment that the three bushwacked was through, or near Bradwell Bay. They did it with no marked route. Nothing else needs to be said.

*Postscript: 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 have to walk."*



### **Jim Kern in cypress dome**

Lykes brothers who was out skeet shooting with friends. They owned a business empire that included food packing and shipping. They were the largest landowner in Florida. I guess Jim's meeting them was inevitable.

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 Fort 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 Tom Montoya (Later FTA President), his wife Jackie, Ben McPherson and Doug Deane, decided to tackle the Suwanee River. 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 with nothing but a Florida state highway map to go by! The vegetation was thick, but each carried a machete. 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 ax 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.

### Back to Corkscrew Swamp

The point of this trip was to extend the blazes north from Corkscrew Sanctuary. Again the going was wet at first (See photo), but now Jim was starting to get into pastureland and citrus groves. This meant fences, and since the style of these trips was to "just go" the fences had to be crossed, or crawled under. Well, one afternoon Jim Kern, FTA President, and Charlie Topmiller, who owned a Miami TV station, were crawling under a barbed wire fence. When doing this (I have) you hope for 3 things; 1. Avoid the barbed wire, 2. There are no curious creatures, and, 3. No one is out skeet shooting. Jim and Charlie were just dusting themselves off when they heard any unmistakable sound followed by the dreaded words "what do you think you are doing here?" The questioner was one of the

## 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 and in places the going was straightforward.

Jim must have felt quite a bit of satisfaction as he approached the ford of Fisheating Creek. 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...

What Happened to These Places and People?

Appalachicola NF - After many years of hard work, the trail here was completed in 1987. There has been an annual "Swamp Tromp" through Bradwell Bay for many years.

Ocala NF - The trail here was built twice, first by FTA and then by the Forest Service. The latter was completed in 1974. It is a popular trail, both for its' beauty and because it is the driest part of the entire FT'.

Suwanee River - FT maintainers will always have their hands full because of the flooding that is endemic 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 going strong. Jim reports that he never again crawled under one of their fences...at least knowingly!

And so, the original explorations ended a couple of years after they'd begun.

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. Jim smiled to himself and stepped back. By 1980, the trail was open across all three National Forests. Lake Okeechobee was first hiked in 1992. This has become an annual tradition. In 1998 the Seminole Tribe and US Sugar opened up their lands making a thru connection between Big Cypress and the Lake a reality. In 2000, the long awaited route across Eglin AFB opened. Starting in 2000, a series of rail trails and well placed wilderness parcels have resulted in a magnificent route around Orlando. In 2001, a walkable bridge opened across the Apalachicola River resulting in an unbroken trail for the first time. This opened up trail projects all across the Panhandle which continue today. The gaps are steadily closing.

*It's 2019 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 and magnificent wetlands that would spark dreams in any adventurer. He even has a fire tower, which you can climb to survey the incredible landscape. Jim is 84 now but climbs the 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. The Florida 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!

*Postscript*

*The first blaze is gone now, although you can still walk the Jane's Scenic Byway and the trails of the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve. Most of the route from here to Palmdale was the route of the FT through 1975. In fact, the first 150 continuous blazed miles of Florida Trail originated from this historic point. Now the trail lies to the east, but most of this route could still be followed today.*

*Much of Jim's amazing first hike in March 1966 is still the Florida Trail.*

**Note: This story was edited and confirmed by Jim Kern in February 2019.**

## In Memoriam.....



**L to R:  
Allen Fitzgerald, Nancy Christensen,  
Lou Adams, Lynn Thompson 1991**

I regret to inform you that Nancy Christensen has passed. She has resided at John Knox Village in Pompano in the recent past. Nancy was one of the original founding members of the Happy Hoofers in 1983 and used to be very active with Florida Trail. She was elected the first activity chair in 1984, coordinating all of the activity leaders and activities. In 1985 she was elected the Happy Hooper Chair. She was an activity leader, and enjoyed paddling and camping with the group. Nancy was also active with Audubon.

There were no other details released, so I don't know of any service or celebrations for her life. If details become available, I will pass them to you. If you know of someone else that knew Nancy, please forward this to them.

-Lynn Thompson

## FTA Awards

**Congratulations to Happy Hoofers Chapter members' for receiving 2018 FTA Award. The recipients were nominated by their chapter, and the FTA Awards Committee select the recipients. We are very proud of the chapter's members and thank them for their service and support not only to the Happy Hoofers Chapter but also to the Florida Trail Association.**



**Mary Halferty -  
25 Year Anniversary**



**L to R; David Denham - Lifetime Achievement, Dave Robinson - John Weary Trail Worker, Kathy Bonvouloir - Special Service, Barbara Johnston - Special Service, Kay Ferrara - Special Service**



**Mike Thompson - Activity Leader + 25  
Year Anniversary  
Lynn Thompson -  
25 Year Anniversary**

The FTA Mission - The Florida Trail Association builds, maintains, protects, and promotes the unique Florida National Scenic Trail (Florida Trail), along with a network of hiking trails throughout the state of Florida. Together with our partners, the Association provides opportunities for the public to contribute to meaningful volunteer work, engage in outdoor recreation, and participate in environmental education.

## Chair's Corner



This is my second go around as Chair of the Happy Hoofers Chapter. The first time I served for 5 years (2008 – 2013) and currently am completing another term (2 years). The role of a Chapter Chair is to oversee the chapter operation which means "to watch over and direct in order to ensure a satisfactory outcome or performance". To achieve that satisfactory outcome requires the dedication of chapter members who have stepped up to ensure that the chapter is strong and well organized.

There are many areas of the chapter – Activity, Trails, Membership, Financial, Hospitality, Programs, Publicity, Communication (Newsletter, Social Media) that are a crucial part of the chapter. Each area is overseen by a dedicated "leader" and they comprise the "leadership team" of the chapter. It is the leadership team that makes the decisions for the chapter, and "ensures a satisfactory outcome or performance". That outcome/performance includes activities for the members, maintenance of the hiking trails to ensure that they are usable for the public, scheduling speakers for the chapter's monthly meetings, notification of meetings and events, recruitment of members, refreshments at the chapter meetings, publishing a newsletter to keep the members informed of activities, speakers, etc. In other words - it takes a "team" to run a chapter. The list of the "leaders" is below. I hope that when you have a chance that you thank the leaders for their time and hard work in support of the Happy Hoofers Chapter and the Florida Trail Association.

It is the great chapter's "leaders" that makes my position as Chair easier to "watch over and direct" the chapter's operation. The chapter's leadership team makes the Happy Hoofers chapter one of the strongest in the Florida Trail Association. I am proud to be a part of the Chapter's "leadership team".

Kay Ferrara - Chapter Chair

## Chapter Officers and Committee Chairs

Chapter Chair	Kay Ferrara	954 609-4727	KayFerrara@bellsouth.net
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	Mike Thompson	561 290-9984	lamathompson@hotmail.com
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Historian	Robert Grosswald	305 948-2904	RGKayak@aol.com



**WELCOME,**  
New FTA/Happy Hoofers Members!!

Marvin Wiener  
Lee Wiener  
William Laing  
Gerald Piette  
Anthea Winterwind Bey  
Vera Stein

Membership Information

To become a member of the  
Florida Trail Association complete  
membership application and make checks  
payable to  
Florida Trail Association and mail to:  
Florida Trail Association, 1050 NW 2nd  
Street, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32601,  
Telephone 1-877-445-3352 / 352-378-8823  
Online for Membership at  
[www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org)

**BECOME AN ACTIVITY LEADER**

*Do you enjoy interacting with people? Do you enjoy sharing your knowledge of the outdoor environment? Would you like to be an Activity Leader? An Activity Leader not only organizes and plans activities but educates and shares their knowledge of the environment in order to help members and friends to enjoy and appreciate the nature that surrounds them. Training will be provided along with opportunities to learn and become certified in first aid, wilderness first aid, CPR, chainsaw operation and other training opportunities.*

*The Activity Leaders will be meeting on August 4<sup>th</sup> to plan the activities for the 2019 – 2020 activity season. If you are interested in becoming an Activity Leader or just want to see how the chapter's activities are planned, you are welcome to join us.*

*For more information on how to become part of the chapter's leadership team – contact Lynn Thompson, Activity Coordinator at [mal2thom@bellsouth.net](mailto:mal2thom@bellsouth.net) or call (954) 850-3668.*

**Florida Trail articles & photos are welcome**

Submissions for the next Hoopla are due by  
October 1, 2019 to:  
[elizabethkbrown2015@gmail.com](mailto:elizabethkbrown2015@gmail.com)  
(Please include the names of all people shown  
in photographs and articles 500 words or less).  
Editor reserves the right to edit/modify all  
submitted articles for allowable space.

