



# Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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A National Scenic Byway

## Inside this Issue

Ditch to Nowhere	
Cross Florida Barge Canal	1-3
Member Profile	
Tom & Diana Rose	3
Still Watching	
the Grass Grow	3 - 4
Website and Other	
Tidbits	4
Bear Sightings	4
Sponsors & Friends	5
Info	6

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## Ditch to Nowhere-The Cross Florida Barge Canal

By Tom Rose

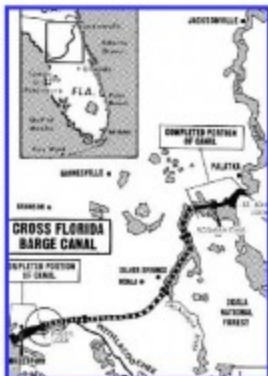
Photos by Diana Rose, Florida State Archive (Historical Photos)

*"Why fight for the Ocklawaha River? The first time I went up the Ocklawaha, I thought it was dreamlike. It was a canopy river. It was spring-fed and swift. I was concerned about the environment worldwide. What could I do about the African plains? What could I do about India? How could I affect things in Alaska or the Grand Canyon? But here, by God, was a piece of Florida. A lovely natural area, right in my backyard, that was being threatened for no good reason." Marjorie Harris Carr*

The Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway abounds in natural treasures. A primary purpose of the Byway is the protection and enhancement of those treasures, plants, animals, rivers, lakes and springs. Ironically one of the great jewels of the Byway is not totally natural, but to a great extent man-made. It is an interesting story, always highly controversial and charged with political wrangling and environmental battles for over 70 years. It is the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway which evolved from the Cross Florida Barge Canal. The Greenway provides a varied recreation area, a green pathway, crossing the center of the State from the St. Johns River near Palatka all the way to the Gulf of Mexico at Yanketown. It owes its existence to

an idea that began over 400 years ago.

Spain's King Phillip II, known as Phillip the Prudent, was sitting around the palace in 1567 sipping brandy and discussing his new world colonies with his cronies when someone said "Vamos a cavar una gran zanja en la Florida" ("Let's dig one big ditch across Florida"). It was a great idea; a canal to shorten the route of the treasure ships bringing Mexican gold and silver back to Spain. However, when the royal engineers took a look at the project they turned it down as unrealistic folly. It did not die there. In 1818 the U.S government proposed a canal as a safe route to avoid the pirates and shipwrecks of the Florida Keys. Again, the engineers said it would be too difficult and expensive. The idea resurfaced in the 30's with Franklin D. Roosevelt's depression recovery funds allocated for a cross Florida canal. "Camp Roosevelt" was established near Ocala as a construction headquarters for the Gulf Atlantic Ship Canal. The plan was to use the St. Johns River and the Ocklawaha with dredged canals linking the natural waterways to form a water path from the Gulf to the Atlantic. Work began, but the money ran out in 1936 before much progress was made.



1971 Construction map of the proposed Cross Florida Barge Canal.

The idea of the shipping shortcut across Florida looked good on paper and proponents touted the economic savings. Moreover, strategic and military features of a safe, inland crossing, plus the jobs and money the project would provide to an area suffering from the world wide economic depression, seemed a good prospect. However, not everyone thought it was such a great idea. Some environmentalists predicted dire consequences. It was said that saltwater intrusion would taint the Florida aquifer and destroy the agricultural water and the drinking water to the cut off southern part of the state. Others went so far as to predict that the Southern part would break off and float away into the Atlantic.



1950 US Army Corp of Engineers Working on the Cross Florida Barge Canal



In 1942 with our nation at war with Germany and Japan, the canal idea surfaced again

General Alvin C. Welling salutes at the May 1967 groundbreaking ceremony



Florida Scenic Highway



***Ditch to Nowhere-Cont'd***



Marjorie Harris Carr Greenway 110 mile linear park

would protect the precious freshwater aquifer. However when the war ended in 1945 the project was put on the back burner.

*"God was good to the country, but in His wisdom the Creator left some things for men to do themselves....The challenge of a modern society is to make the resources of nature useful and beneficial to the community." President Lyndon B. Johnson - 1964*

Initial funding finally came when Congress authorized \$1,000,000 in 1963. In February 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson set off the explosive charge that began construction at the St. Johns Lock (now the Buckman Lock). The Army Corps of Engineers continued to be in charge of the project. Environmentalists, led by Marjorie Harris Carr and her Florida Defenders of the Environment, continued to fight the canal every step of the way. They filed suits and lobbied against the project. Their arguments did not always stand up factually or scientifically, but they were persistent.

*"I am today ordering a halt to further construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal... A natural treasure is involved in the case of the Barge Canal—the Ocklawaha River—a uniquely beautiful, semi-tropical stream, one of a very few of its kind in the United States, which would be destroyed by construction of the Canal." President Richard Nixon, 1/19/71.*

On January 19th, 1971 President Dick Nixon took pen in hand to strike the death blow to the Cross Florida Barge Canal, signing an executive order suspending further work on the canal. When stopped it was 1/3 complete with \$74Million spent on construction and land acquisition. Twenty years later in 1991 the Barge Canal was officially deauthorized and the land turned over to the state of Florida.

*"Turning over the barge canal was sad in some respects, yet I was proud to stand up and say this is government at its best, recognizing that the needs of 50 years ago are not the needs of today...." Colonel Terrence C. "Rock" Salt, US Army Engineers - Nov 27, 1992.*

as a strategic military resource for the movement of arms and ammunition. It was assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers with a design to include a series of locks and dams that

This led to the creation of the Cross Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area, which became the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway in honor of the individual who led the fight to stop the Cross Florida Barge Canal project. In the end, the failure of the canal project probably had more to do with the projected Ocklawaha River route than any other reason. As people became aware



Scene depicting a completed portion of the Cross Florida Barge Canal near State Road 19 and the Buckman Lock.

that the Barge Canal would destroy this stunningly beautiful jungle river, it became destined to failure.

Today's Florida's Greenways & Trails stands as a tribute to Marjorie and her brave band who fought the powerful Army Corps of Engineers and others to preserve this pristine section of Central Florida and the Ocklawaha River for the pleasure and enjoyment of future generations. The 110 mile long pathway (from 3/4 to 1 mile wide) across the state is a linear park of almost 80,000 acres used by thousands for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, camping, hunting and fishing. Wildlife includes the Florida black bear, white tail deer, wild hog, gopher tortoise, wild turkey, American eagle, alligator, manatee and osprey.



Kirkpatrick (Rodman) Dam located just west of State Road 19, 14 miles south of Palatka.

*"I had no intention of making a career working with the Corps and the Cross Florida Barge Canal, it was just so interesting with almost daily changes and challenges that I stayed on just to see what would happen next." Dave Bowman, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.*

*"As I studied the Ocklawaha and spent time on the river I became convinced that saving the river and restoring the natural flow was in the best interest of future generations." George Hemingway, US Forest Service.*



### **Ditch to Nowhere Cont'd**

*"I was hell bent to build the canal, but over the years I came to realize that there had to be a better way than to destroy the Ocklawaha River." Cleveland Powell, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

To learn more about the Marjorie Harris Carr Greenway go to <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/guide/cfgtrails.htm>

### **Member Profile**

Tom and Diana Rose



**"If you come to a fork in the road, take it." Yogi Berra**

Diana Cabre (Rose) grew up in the Sailfish Capitol of the World, Stuart, Florida. She excelled in sports in high school where she was voted most athletic, lettering in swimming and tennis for the Martin County High School Tigers. She attended Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida and worked in the banking industry before becoming a mother.

Tom Rose, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, grew up in Miami and Jacksonville, Florida, where he was introduced early on to the outdoor sports that became his lifelong passion. He attended Landon High School in Jacksonville. As a youth his interests centered on hunting and fishing, camping, and the Boy Scouts, where he was a member of the Order of the Arrow. He majored in Agriculture at the University of Florida.

He began his career as an insurance investigator with Retail Credit Co., now known as Equifax Inc. While on assignment in Stuart, FL, Tom and Diana met. Within a year they were married and were transferred to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where the young couple worked hard and played hard. Diana worked in international banking in Old San Juan while Tom battled insurance fraud as an investigative manager on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix. They took advantage of the location to explore the Caribbean at every opportunity. Tom's career assignments kept them on the move, to Mobile, Alabama, where a daugh-

ter was born and husband Tom managed additional Equifax offices on islands of the Caribbean Basin including Jamaica and Haiti; Surinam and Guyana on the North coast of South America.

The family left Puerto Rico in 1976 for Tom to manage an Equifax office St. Petersburg, Florida, after which they moved to Maitland to head the office in Orlando; then to Tampa. Tom retired in 1998 and they moved to their present location, Umatilla, "The Gateway to The Forest."

Rose family activities have always centered on the outdoors and nature, including camping, fishing, and boating. Both their daughters were active in the Girl Scouts. There were many family wilderness adventures on the Ocklawaha River, the St. Johns River, and in the P. Lorillard W.M.A. tide swamp near Steinhatchee, Florida.

They have a daughter and son-in-law and two grandchildren in Sarasota, and a daughter in New York City. Diana was active in tennis and golf for years. She is an award winning and published photographer (Florida Wildlife Magazine -- 2008/2009), focusing on Florida landscapes, plant and animal life. Her work is displayed on two websites as well:

<http://digidi2.zenfolio.com> and <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/myshot/gallery/197409#/gallery/1050578/>.

Since retiring Tom has worked as a freelance journalist specializing in outdoor, adventure, and motorsports stories. His articles have been published in national, regional, and local publications. His work can be viewed on the web at:

<http://tomrosejournalist.blogspot>

Some 2 years ago they were introduced to the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway by Jim Thorsen and Tony Ehrlich. In the Byway they both found something that ignited their passion for Central Florida's woods, waters, and wildlife. They have been involved in the Byway activities ever since. Diana serves as Member-At-Large of the Executive Committee and is the Newsletter Photographer. Tom continues his journalistic work as Newsletter Contributing Editor. They are stalwart members of the FBBSB CME, generously contributing their time, knowledge, and energy.

Diana & Tom Rose have always chosen the adventuresome route, following Yogi's advice, **"If you come to a fork in the road, take it."**

### **We are still Watching Grass Grow**

By Tom Rose, Photos Diana Rose

June 8, 2011 - State Road 40 Central Tower - Ocala National Forest



## Watching Grass Grow Cont'd

One year ago, June 2010, we met with US Forestry Consultant Jim Thorsen to observe and report on the initial phase of a study of native grasses for right-of-way in the Ocala National Forest. A year later we are back in the same location for phase 2 with Jim, an FDOT crew, and a Marion County Dept. of Corrections crew.



US Forestry Consultant Jim Thorsen with Purple Lovegrass & Elliott Lovegrass.

Today we'll plant 450 Elliott Lovegrass and 450 Purple Lovegrass, the two that proved the most effective in the previous trial.

The planting area was pre-treated with Plateau (Ammonium Salt of Imazapic), an herbicide that kills bahia grass but not native grasses. The plantings are in 3 rows, 2 feet apart. The work consumed most of the day.



Grasses planted in 3 rows, 2 feet apart on SR 40 in the Ocala National Forest.

It is expected that the introduction of these native grasses to



One of workers from the Marion County Dept of Corrections planting grass

west of Central Tower on the south side of 40. Check it out.

The initial planting consisted of Elliott Lovegrass (*Eragrostis elliot*), Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*), Silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), October Flower (*Polygonella polygama*), Chapmans Goldenrod (*Solidago chapmanii*), and Lopsided Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*).

the right of way in the Forest will reduce the costs of mowing and watering and will enhance the natural beauty of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway.

You can "watch grass grow" yourself the next time you travel SR 40. It is just

## Bear Sightings

Coordinated by Tom Rose

**Docile Dumpster Diver:** I met John Bianchi of Fruitland Park, FL at the George Fest in Eustis. He told me this exciting bear story. It was early evening in the fall of 2009; about 7:15 pm. John was in his golf cart, headed for the clubhouse in the small community where he lives in Fruitland Park, FL. Then he remembered he left something on the stove, so he did a u-turn and headed back to the house. Up ahead in dimming light of dusk, he saw what appeared to be a man going through a garbage can. John is part of his neighborhood Crime Watch program so felt he should investigate further. As he approached the dark silhouetted figure, he saw it was not a man at all, but a bear. It was a beautiful black bear, shiny black fur, about 200 pounds. John felt that if this was an aggressive bear he should call the police or wildlife authorities. However, if like most Florida black bears, docile and non-threatening he just wanted to let him return to the nearby wilderness. John jumped out of the golf cart, raised his arms above his head and let out a shout, "ARAHAAAAAAA!" The bear loped away some 15 feet to a large oak tree. John raised his arms again and let out another shout. The bear stood up on his hind legs behind the oak, front paws on the tree and stuck his head out to look at John in the face, eye to eye. After a 10 second face off, the bear dropped to all fours and ran into the woods.

It was a great experience for both John and the bear. And a lesson to be learned for the community about the proper handling of garbage in bear country.

*Bear sightings are a regular feature of our newsletter. Our readers have provided some very interesting and exciting stories about their encounters with Florida Black Bears. If you have had a bear experience that you would like to share please send it to me at [tomrose43@gmail.com](mailto:tomrose43@gmail.com).*

## Website and Other Tidbits

**Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway** is going Social, please join us. **Like** our Facebook page to keep up with all the news on Facebook. We also took one step further and are now on twitter. Stop by [and](#) give us a tweet, looking forward to everyone's **like** on facebook and a tweet.

**Our master plan** festivities went very well, we had a good turn out at Astor Community Center, and also had a real good turn out at Tommy's, where redneck egg rolls were a hit.

**Florida Scenic Highway Workshop** in St. Augustine was awesome. Everyone contributed to all the discussions, and the round table at the end of the two days, was very good. Everyone came up with a lot of great ideas.

**A special** edition of the newsletter about the workshop and the master plan will be out shortly, so stay tune.