



Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

A National Scenic Highway

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The Lake Eaton Sinkhole, Journey to the Center of the Earth

by Tom Rose

Photos by Tom and Diana Rose

In Jules Verne's science fiction classic, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, German professor Otto Lidenbrock leads an expedition to the center of the earth. Along the way they encounter numerous challenges including pre-historic animals and natural hazards.

Venturing into the Central Florida earth via the Lake Eaton Sinkhole may not equal the adventure of Lidenbrock and his crew exactly, but it is a completely unique opportunity to explore a beautiful area of the Ocala National Forest.

The man-made improvements make this forest adventure easy and comfortable. The location is well marked with US Forest Service signs. There is an improved parking area just off FR 05 which runs off of FR44 which runs off of CR 314A. You have the option of a 2.2-



Hiking trail through Scrub Oak leading to the sinkhole.

mile round trip or a 1-mile round trip hike to the sink hole. Either way it is a pristine pathway through the scrub oak, sand pine, and palmetto to the sink hole itself. Walk softly and stay alert for possible wildlife sightings that could include deer, bear, squirrel, turkey, and scrub jay.

Now we're ready for our journey into the

into the earth, 80 feet into the 450-foot-in-diameter crater known as the Lake Eaton Sink Hole.



The stairway makes the journey into and out of the crater easy & comfortable.

Here again the Forest Service has made the descent/ascent as easy as possible. A boardwalk and stairway (188 steps) lead gently downward with a couple of landings with benches for rest stops and finally to a platform at the bottom. Just the stairway engineering and construction is an amazing feat in itself when one notices that the structure is made on the side of a very steep grade.

A sinkhole forms when water erodes the limestone deposits beneath the earth's surface causing the surface to cave in, leaving a deep hole. They also form as a result of drought



Probably the world's biggest "terrarium."

which makes the limestone brittle and un-supportive of the earth on top. The Lake Eaton sinkhole is estimated to be about 100 years old. The vegetation on the floor of the sinkhole is quite different than that of the surrounding forest due to the dampness from hold-

ing moisture.



The Lake Eaton Sinkhole,

Journey to the Center of the Earth Continued

It is a lush and dense floor and the larger trees such as oaks, hickory, and magnolia grow very tall and thin as they reach for the light; an occasional wild orchid can be found in their growing season as well.

In 4 hours or less you can experience a great wilderness adventure on the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway and you'll learn something about the real Florida and her sinkholes.

History of Florida Black Bear Festival, a
brief History

By Tom Rose



Festival Logo

In 1908 President Teddy Roosevelt dreamed of a vast wasteland in Central Florida that could become a treasured National Forest. He took action and created The Ocala National Forest. Ninety years later, in 1998, two unique individuals dreamed of a family-friendly small town festival that would educate people about the

Florida black bear and the bear habitat of The Ocala, at the same time providing a family fun event with forest tours, food, and entertainment. They went to work and created The Florida Black Bear Festival.

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It all began when Laurie Ann McDonald with The Defenders of Wildlife and Christine Small with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were together at a FWC meeting and came up with the idea of an event focusing on the Florida black bear. The protected bear population was growing and encounters with the human population, also growing, had become frequent. A program was needed to educate people on how to live with the bears, securing the food and garbage that attracts bears. The towns in the vicinity of the Ocala National Forest were studied and Umatilla, long known as the gateway to the Forest, was selected as the ideal location. Other local leaders joined the effort: Jim Thorsen, District Ranger with the U.S. Forest Service, Judy Gillin with the FWC, Tim Scobie, Umatilla City Manager, and Martha Hartman, President of the Umatilla Chamber. All brought their organizations and talents to the table. The idea was to present the bear as an amenity rather than a problem. The intention was to be educational, teaching the community how to live with the bears.

The by-product would be the economic boost for the town, bringing in visitors for the festivals, many who would return to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational opportunities of the Forest, the rivers, and lakes.

They were successful from the beginning, with the very first Florida Black Bear Festival drawing some 1,500 visitors. The basic format has remained centered around bear education and forest field trips along with arts and craft vendors, wildlife and nature writers, food and musical entertainment. The festival has grown over the years with more attractions and vendors. Attendance estimates now run up to 8,000.



Susan Martin, Exec. Director, Umatilla Chamber of Commerce, managed festival since 2004

The festival is managed by the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce, Susan Martin, Executive Director. Partners are the US Forest Service, Defenders of Wildlife, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway, and the City of Umatilla.

The Florida Black Bear Festival has become the signature event for the City of Umatilla and the premier wildlife conservation event for all of Central Florida. Umatilla is now an official Gateway City for the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway. This is a celebration of the real Florida, an opportunity to experience the Florida of the past. The Festival, the Forest, and the bears that we enjoy today are a tribute to the visionaries and those who joined their vision in 1908 and 1998.

The FBBSB has a booth at the Festival each year. At this year's Festival, 56 folks boarded buses for our 2-hour tour of the Byway, with stops at Alexander Springs, the FBBSB kiosk by the Blackwater Inn, and the Bartram Oak on the east bank of the St. Johns River. Along the way, interpreters Jim Thorsen and Tom Rose pointed out items of interest and explained significant places.



Actor Dustin Lavine played the role of William Bartram.



History of Black Bear Festival, a brief history

Continued

As an added treat, the buses were met at the Oak by an actor portraying 18th century botanist William Bartram, reciting from Bartram's journals about the flora and fauna he found in Florida on his explorations.

If you have never attended, it is a must. If you have come in the past, you'll want to come back. It is always the same so you'll know what to expect, but always different enough so you'll see something new. Mark your calendar for the 14th annual Florida Black Bear Festival, March 30, 2013. For more information you can contact Susan Martin at the Umatilla Chamber umatilla@umatillachamber.org.

New Byway Website

Video Channel and Phone Apps

By Phil Davis (Sail Forth Productions)

The FBBSB website is getting a facelift and is being expanded. The new site content was up in early June. Additional content is still being collected, as well as additional photos and videos. When you go to the home page, a series of full-screen photos cycles by, so a visitor can sit and watch the slideshow and get a good feel for the area and Byway before ever having to read a word. The Four Types of Travelers information and organizational scheme will be added also. (floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/)

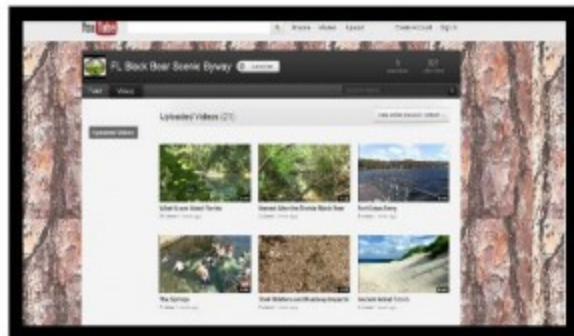
An FBBSB subcommittee is helping direct these efforts along with Sail Forth Productions team. The subcommittee consists of Mike Woods (CME Chair), Robert Chandler (Lake County), Susan Martin (Umatilla), Doneda Cole (Putnam County), Kristee



Welcome Page

As part of the website redesign and phone app project currently underway, the Sail Forth Productions team has also developed a **Florida Black Bear Video Channel**. Currently, there are over 21 video clips available on the channel with plans to add several more videos in the next 2 months.

To visit the site, go to: www.youtube.com/user/blackbearbyway/videos or from YouTube, type in "Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Channel", then click on the "by blackbearbyway" text link under the main video title on



Splash Screen

the list. This will open up the splashpage.

The "Discover Wild Florida" 25-minute video produced for the Byway is available on the FBBSB Channel in two parts, because YouTube service only allows videos less than 15 minutes.

A number of clips from the main video are available on the **FBBSB Channel**. This gives viewers a chance to look at information they prefer and the in the order they prefer. Look for clips about:

- Rick Tonyan on whip cracking
- Dana St. Claire on Cracker Style architecture
- The secret of Grits (shot at Jan & Al's Riverside Café on SR 40)
- The Yearling Trail
- The Fort Gates Ferry
- Jim Thorsen on Scrub Jays
- Marjorie Harris Carr & the Greenway

In the first week alone there were over 300 viewings of the videos. As of the beginning of June there were 821 viewings. These videos will also be available from the FBBSB website.

In July, look for the video with **Dustin Lavine** portraying **William Bartram** at the Bartram Oak, filmed during the Florida Black Bear Festival.



*New Byway Website
Video Channel and Phone Apps*

Continued

Look for fishing and hunting guidelines and a tour of the natural springs along the byway. And we'll also be adding a **funny clip of tipping a canoe** on Juniper Run – with some advice on how to avoid tipping – taken in April on one of our Byway adventures.

Upcoming FBBSB Phone Apps will provide travelers with much of the same content from the website. There will be two Phone Apps: (1) the Main Phone App will be available free to download on phones; and (2) an Add-on Phone App will be available for a nominal fee. This second phone app will have more details and more video.

Sail Forth Productions is the engineering firm that created our Master Plan. Phil Davis is the manager of this project

Profile Joan Bernat



Photo by Tony Ehrlich

Joan Bernat likes to go fast. She always has. She got her first 3-speed bike at the age of 9, by 15 she was an avid cyclist. She discovered downhill skiing later in life, but likes that, too. She thinks fast as well, graduating from college with a BS in Computer Science and a BS in Business Administration in just three years.

Her energy carried over into other sports. In high school she played varsity softball for 4 years and the team won All State in her last year. She played varsity tennis at Kean College, moving up to the number 1 position in her second year.

She grew up in New Jersey and after graduation, worked for several firms there as a program/analyst. A project leader on several projects, she supervised from 2 to 15 people.

But her love affair with cycling and mountain biking continued. In New Jersey, she rode several "metric centuries"

(tours of 60 miles), then rode a "double century" in Ohio, 110 miles from Columbus to Portsmouth on a Saturday, the next day 110 miles from Portsmouth back to Columbus.

Her affinity for the outdoors, gardening, photography, and writing led her and husband Paul to move to Lake Weir, Florida in the late 1990's where biking can be done year round. She was nominated for the Education of the Year Award from the Florida Bicycle Association. Joan is on the National Mountain Bike Patrol advisory board and is a member of the International Mountain Bike Association National Mountain Bike Patrol.

Four years ago while summer camping in Idaho, she mountain biked in Stanley, then traveled to Moab, Utah, for 3 weeks. "My fondest memory there," she writes, "was the Slick Rock Trail. When on the mountain bike there is often the need to focus on where to place your front tire that often overshadows Slick Rock's surrounding beauty. If you let your eyes wander you will discover intricate features and shapes in the petrified sand dunes that comprise the Trail. There are pockets of sand-support tenacious shrubs and potholes with microcosms of life awaiting the next rainfall. The Trail crosses an elevated platform of sandstone bound by the cliffs of the Colorado River. Back-dropping the bleak desert-like terrain is the alpine beauty of the La Sal Mountains on the eastern skyline."

Decisions? These are made quickly, too. A few years back at the Pioneer Settlement Annual Jamboree, Joan visited the Black Bear booth. Impressed, she asked if she could volunteer. Our webmaster at that time wanted to move on and Joan stepped in. She also volunteered to produce and publish this Newsletter. Her enthusiasm led to fund-raising, a term as an at-large member of the Executive Committee, and various other projects with the FBBSB.

Does her volunteer high stop there with the FBBSB? Not hardly. Other interests include: Take a Stock in Children Cycle for Success; Marion County Park and Recreation trail maintenance, Korean War Veterans Post 169, and editing the Florida Scenic Highways quarterly newsletter. She is also a licensed ham radio operator and is a member of Marion County Radio Emergency Team.

FBBSB is fortunate to have the services of this high-energy lady.

Black Bear Sightings

Photo by Tom Rose

Bicyclist Encounters Bears Near Alexander Springs!

Mike Stephens of Umatilla is a Sr. Vice President of United Southern Bank and an avid bicyclist.



Bicyclist Encounters Bears Near Alexander Springs! , Continued



Bicyclist Mike Stephens pedals faster than the average bear.

Mike rides regularly on the trails of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway. Here is his story of a recent (June 2012) bear encounter.

"I almost ran into three bears last night on the Paisley Woods Trail near Alexander Springs. The Ocala

Mountain Bike Association (OMBA) is in the final process of officially vol-

unteering (signing the proper paperwork...) to maintain the Paisley Woods Trail which is connected to the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway. (A number of us have been "unofficially" maintaining the trail for years). I was out doing some riding and trail maintenance, removing dead fall from the recent storms on the Northern/Alexander Springs loop last night, when I came within 10 feet of three sleeping bears. I was riding at a fairly good pace and the bears were behind a bush from the direction I was riding, so I didn't see them until I was right beside them. The wind was in my face and I was riding fairly quietly by myself so they didn't see or smell me and had no idea I was about on top of them until it was too late. I didn't even see them until I heard a rustling in the bushes beside the trail and turned around to look back. It appeared to be two large cubs and an adult but, quite honestly, I didn't pause to look that closely as my only goal, once I knew they were bears, was to get up to max speed as quickly as possible and hold that speed for as long as possible! They appeared to have been huddled together under the bush sleeping and were very startled by my appearance. On the return trip I also saw a bunch of deer, and a large pine snake shaking its tail like a rattle snake. A very interesting night on the trail/Black Bear Scenic Byway!"

FBBBSB CME/Workshop Meeting

Schedule for Remainder of 2012

As noted in the last Newsletter, meetings for the remainder of the year will be at different locations. Dates and places are shown here. For more information, go to our website. These are public meetings and we hope readers will attend some of the meetings.

<u>July 19, 2012</u>	<u>CME Meeting</u>	<u>Pittman Vistors Center</u>
August 16, 2012	Workshop	Lake George Ranger Station
<u>Sept. 20, 2012</u>	<u>CME Meeting</u>	<u>Settlement, Barberville</u>
Oct. 18, 2012	Workshop	Settlement, Barberville
<u>Nov. 15, 2012</u>	<u>CME Meeting</u>	<u>Putnam (To be determined)</u>
Dec 20, 2012	Workshop	Lake George Ranger Station

Our Friends

Gopher

Tom Kays, Kristee Booth
George & Judy Hemingway
Joan Carter , Sherri L Miller
Bob Day, Marion County
Parks&Natural Resources

Sand Skink

Stacy Stader , Dawn Piers
Debbie Fischer, Elizabeth
Black, Marion County BOCC,
Eustis Chamber of Commerce,
Firestorm Airboat Tours (Mike
Dickens)

Bob Cat

Bob & Rennie Finck
Connie Hunkapiller
Capt. Ernie Brundage
(St. Johns River Tours)
John Duckworth (Dam
Dinner)

Scrub Jay Company

First Green Bank , Bill &
Tina Nordle (Blackwater
Inn), Laurie MacDonald
(Defenders of Wildlife)

Florida Panther

Mike Palozzi , Lynn & Mike
Woods, Astor Community
Association, Astor Area
Chamber of Commerce,
Lake Cogeneration, Ltd,
Carl Ludecke (Old Mill
Stream & Charlie Johnson
Builders)

Manatee

Greenway Bicycles, City of
Umatilla, Scott & Carol
Bayer ,dts, Kimley-
Horn&Assoc.,Sail Forth Pro-
ductions, Noranne Downs
Bill &Tina Nordle (Blackwa-
ter Inn)