



A National Scenic Byway

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# Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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## The Amazing Silver Springs (Then and Now)

by Cathy Connolly

For some people Silver Springs is a memory of Aqua clear water seen on one of the World-Famous Glass Bottom Boats. But how many of you know the rich history of this mysterious and beautiful place.

Silver Springs was one of the first tourist attractions in Florida. In the 1860's, Samuel Howse bought the 242 acres surrounding the headwaters of the Silver River. The famous glass bottom boats were invented in the 1870's by Hullam Jones and Phillip Morell. The Silver Springs, Ocala and Gulf Railroad was the first railway to reach Silver Springs. This railway transported goods and people from the river landing to Ocala.



In 1880 former President Ulysses S Grant visited the area. In 1898 H.L. Anderson purchased the land from Howse. In 1909 C. Carmichael bought eighty acres of land from Anderson.

At this point, the pristine area attracted many visitors from all over the world, including filmmakers from Hollywood. President Calvin Coolidge visited the Park in the 1920's. W. Carl Ray and W.M. "Shorty Davidson" from Ocala became partners and leased land around the Springs in 1924. Ross Allen a famous herpetologist opened "The Ross Allen Reptile Institute" It attracted thousands of tourists with his reptile shows including the venomous Diamond Back Rattlesnake. In the 1930's Colonel Tooey, who operated the "Jungle Cruise", established the first colony of wild rhesus monkeys on the island. He did not realize what good swimmers the monkeys were. They soon were all along the riverbanks. Although there have been extensive efforts through the years to remove these monkeys, occasionally you can spot one along the river.



Several movies were filmed at Silver Springs. Creature from the Black Lagoon filmed in 1954. Moonraker filmed in 1979. Sea Hunt, a popular TV series filmed at the Springs from 1958 to 1961. One of the most popular series of movies filmed at Silver Springs was Tarzan starring Johnny Weissmuller.

On October of 1962, Silver Springs, including 3,900 acres was purchased by ABC-Paramount. Bartlett turned over the deer park and Ross Allen eventually sold his institute. Allen stayed on at the park until his retirement.

In 1971, Silver Springs was declared a National Landmark. ABC expanded development with new gift shops, beer pavilion and new amphitheaters and new facility for Ross Allen. ABC also developed the water park next door to The Spring. In 1989 ABC sold the land Occupied by Silver Spring and Wild Waters to Florida Leisure Attractions. A Jeep Safaris was the newest addition to the park.

In 1993 a comprehensive scientific study of Silver Springs was conducted. It included geological, paleontological, and biological studies. It is the largest artesian spring in the United States. In 1993 the State of Florida purchased the land occupied by Florida Leisure Acquisition. However, the state continued a lease with the corporation. In 1996, Ogden Entertainment acquired the lease. Concerts began at the park. Other exhibits appeared, including the white alligator, World of Bears, Panther Prowl, and a petting zoo for kids. In 1999, Steve Irwin visited the park to film segments for his documentary "The Crocodile Hunter".

On January 14, 2000, the state renamed Cypress Island as Ross Allen Island in honor of the late herpetologist who directed his institute from the 1930's until the 1970's. Later in 2000, Smart Parks, Inc acquired the lease to Silver Springs and Wild waters. In March 2002, Smartparks failed to pay the 1.2 million annual lease to the Florida Department Environmental Protection. In 2000, Smartparks sold Silver Springs to Palace Entertainment. They signed a 20-year management agreement with the state. In March Of 2004, it closed Jungle Cruise and sold the animals to the Micanopy Zoological Preserve. The cruise was renamed the Fort King River Cruise. The Palace built "The Lighthouse" ride and the Fantastic Fountains water show.

The springs began to develop problems. The overflow of fertilizer runoff and nitrates caused the overgrowth of brown algae. Increased development was drawing more water out of the aquifer. The flow of water from the springs had dropped from 510 million gallons per day to 346 million gallon per day. Fish population dropped. Pollution was taking its toll on the park. To prevent storm runoff, they moved the parking lot away from the waterway. Palace Entertainment wanted out of their lease because their profits fell considerably. Finally, Palace agreed to buyout their lease. On September 21, 2013, Silver Springs and the surrounding four thousand acres became part of the Florida State Park System. Although a great deal has happened over the last 100 years, Silver Springs still lures visitors not only for its illustrious history but its amazing beauty.



## NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.....Jim Thorsen



It's October, hopefully "cooler" weather and the time that Florida Black Bears are roaming the landscape for acorns, insects, palmetto berries and other tasty food to fill their stomachs. The Bears will be traveling to consume food for the "winter" before they start the hibernation period or in Florida, better described as a "winter lethargy" which is reduced activity. Normally, this "quiet period" starts in December and ends in early February. Of course all this activity depends upon the weather and how our Florida Black Bears feel. So, during October and November, watch for bears on the road and inform all of your friends about Florida Black Bears on the move!!

I am happy to announce that we have two new members on our Byway. They are Bryce Underhill with Urban Forestry Works in Barberville and Adam and Karen Cain with Majestic Lawn and Landscape, LLC in Cocoa, Florida. We welcome them to our organization!!

On August 12<sup>th</sup>, we had our display tent at the North Central Florida Outdoor Expo. It was an amazing show and we had many visitors to our exhibit with lots of Bear Stories!! It was an excellent connection with the people and positive education about our Byway. On November 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, we will be at the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville for the Annual Fall Festival. This is a fantastic display of arts and crafts, music and wonderful exhibits. We hope we see you at our tent for a "Florida Black Bear Encounter" on our Byway!!

We always like to hear from our partners and members. You may contact me for any information about our Byway. My cell phone is 352-455-1326 or e-mail at [thir1505@aol.com](mailto:thir1505@aol.com). We appreciate your support.

Jim Thorsen, Chair



**Do you know the byway? Be the first to answer our byway question and win a Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Tote Bag.**

**The Juniper Springs Millhouse was built in 1933 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. What was the innovative use of the original millhouse?**

**Email your answer to [tomrose43@gmail.com](mailto:tomrose43@gmail.com)**

Congratulations to Susan of Pierson, FL who was first with the answer of the last issue's question. She knew that the letters CCC stood for the Civilian Conservation Corps.

**Website & Facebook:** Learn more about the byway at our website <https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/> and Facebook page <https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/facebook>

**Next Meeting:** October 10, 2023  
(Tuesday) 2PM at the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville, FL  
Visitors are welcome. Attending a board meeting is a great way to learn more about the byway. Please let us know if you plan to attend.  
tomrose43@gmail.com

**Our Mission:** *To enhance, encourage and promote the preservation and protection of the outstanding natural, ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway for its residents, inhabitants, visitors and future generations.*



*The Byway Board July 2023 Pioneer Settlement Barberville, FL*

**Officers:** Jim Thorsen, Chairman - Kristee Booth, Vice Chair - Cathy Connally, Treasurer - Nikki Thorsen, Secretary

**Editor:** Tom Rose ..... **Contact:** tomrose43@gmail.com. Your letters, comments, suggestions and submissions are welcome.