

# Discover Wild Florida

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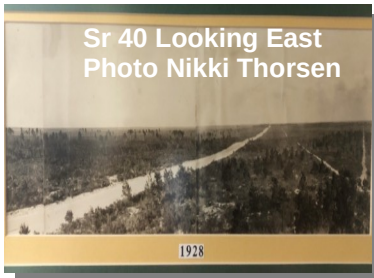
November 2021

## Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway Newsletter

“Forever on Thanksgiving day, the heart will find the pathway home.” – Wilbur D. Nesbit

### Save the Historic Central Florida Fire Tower

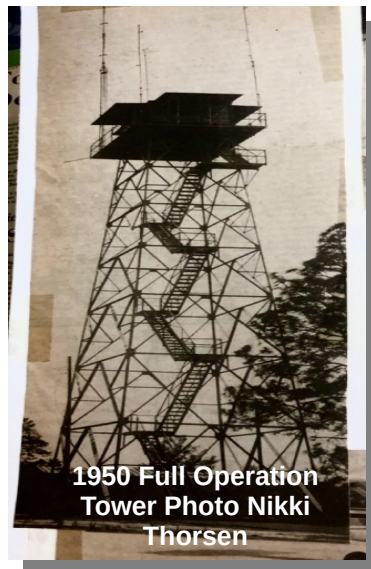
Article and Photos by Jim and Nikki Thorsen



Driving across the Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway, one cannot help but notice an eighty-foot-tall steel structure on the south side of State Route 40.

It is the Central Fire Tower on the Ocala National Forest. This historical tower has played a significant role on the Ocala National Forest which is the oldest National Forest (1908) east of the Mississippi River. The tower was constructed of wood in 1930 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC's definitely knew what they were doing because the fire tower stands on a vista that is 183 feet above sea level (pretty high for Florida!).

Over the years, the wooden tower began deteriorating and was finally replaced in 1946 with a more stable structure made of steel. The Central Fire Tower has been in existence for 91 years and overlooks the rare sand pine-scrub oak ecosystem across the Ocala Forest and was used for spotting fires.



When it was staffed, Central Fire Tower was used for locating fires and a staff person would stay for long hours watching over the Forest. When smoke was sighted, the lookout would use an “alidade” to locate the smoke.

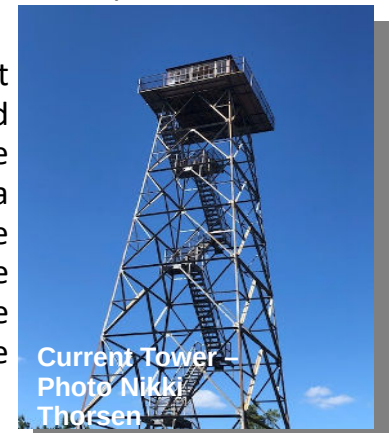
An alidade is a sighting device set on a table that measures distance and angles – very similar to a compass. When two towers viewed smoke, the lookouts would

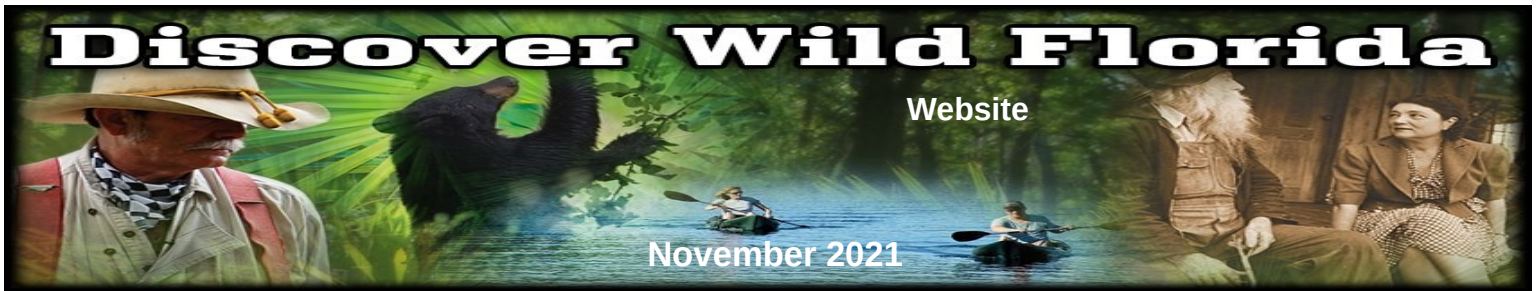


communicate with two readings on their alidades and where they intersected, thus giving a precise fire location. The lookouts would dispatch the fire location along with the color of the smoke, the approximate size of the fire and the distance from the towers. This enabled fire response crews with information for fire location and time needed to travel to the fire. What an important and valuable tool the Central Fire Tower provided.

Today, there are about 100 fire towers still standing in Florida. Many fire towers are no longer operational due to the use of updated technology such as cell phones, 9-1-1 system, aerial detection and drones. Central Florida Tower ceased operations in 1969. However, in 1985 and in 1998 which were very bad fire seasons on The Ocala, The Tower was restaffed due to massive smoke that limited air detection. It proved to be a very helpful tool during those years. With all of its history, central fire Tower is truly an icon on the Ocala National Forest.

During its retirement years, the Tower has had some light maintenance and is protected with a fence around it. People traveling along the Byway can stop in the small pull-off to view the Tower and relive the old





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## Save the Historic Central Florida Fire Tower *Cont*

days when it was so essential to protect the Forest. Currently, Central Fire Tower is deteriorating and the structure itself is in serious decline. The Tower needs our help. There are no funds to restore and save it and it is in jeopardy of being torn down.

We believe tearing it down will destroy a valuable piece of American history. The Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway Committee will be working with the US Forest Service to “Save Central Tower.” If you would be interested in helping us to preserve this icon on State Route 40, please contact our organization for more information. It would be tragic to lose Central Fire Tower on the oldest National Forest in the southeast along a National Scenic Byway. Still standing and if restored, Central Tower could be enjoyed as an educational tool and establish scheduled events to visit the tower during any given year.

Contact FBBNSB Committee member Jim Thorsen, former District Ranger on the Ocala by phone at 352.455.1326 or his email which is thor1505@aol.com or email the Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway at fbbnsb@gmail.com.



## Wings in West Volusia !!

By West Volusia Tourism

Take flight and see the best of West Volusia County on the “Wings Of The West” trail.

West Volusia’s “Wings of the West” trail gives visitors a flight path to follow in seeing not only some of the most popular classic attractions of the area, but also a fresh infusion of creative and quirky elements that make the area something to remember.



The original DeLand Wings mural, created by DeLand native and artist Erica Group, has become an iconic photo spot in downtown DeLand. Located in Persimmon Lane, the DeLand Wings started out as a simple chalk design, created quickly for a photoshoot. Following the support of the building’s owner Group was encouraged to make the mural a permanent installation, turning the mural into the ever-popular DeLand Wings. Perhaps thanks to the mural, there is a new vibe in this classic Florida downtown as artisans, retailers, brewers and restaurateurs share their wares, creativity and hospitality.



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## Wings in West Volusia, *Cont*

Also home to Florida’s first MainStreet program in 1985, DeLand was named “America’s Best Mainstreet” for 2017 and has been ranked as Florida’s best downtown outside Orlando.

Exactly 7 years after the original wings were created, a pair of “mini-wings” came along. With her son, Russ, turning 2 years old, Erica decided the time was right to revisit Persimmon Lane. “I realized there are so many parents, and pet parents, out there who would love to take photos of their child in front of the wings but can’t because of their size,” said Group. “I had to fix that, and what better time to do the seventh set than on the seventh anniversary of the first wings.”

Nearly identical to the original wings, the new mini wings are sized perfect for children.

So next time you are in DeLand check out the mini wings.



## in the know trivia

### **Name this Person**

Before this person became president of the United States, he was busy shaping Florida’s history. He led the first Seminole War, and his excursions took place in West Florida and Spanish Florida against the Seminole Indians. Two nations Great Britain and Spain were outraged by his attacks, and Spain could not defend its territory. Spain ended up ceding Florida to the United States through Adams-Onis Treaty otherwise known as the Transcontinental Treaty or the Florida Purchase Treaty, in 1819. Hence the United States named this region the Territory of Florida.

### **Christmas**

According to historians the first American Christmas took place in Tallahassee in 1539. It was celebrated by a Spanish Explorer and other members of his expedition, who happen to be staying near the capital of downtown Tallahassee. Who was this Spanish Explorer?

**Answers** to our two Trivia questions: Name that person **Andrew Jackson**, Christmas: **Hernando de Soto**

**Minutes and Newsletters** can be found on line.



Correction on last newsletter – Main article & Photos should have been by J. Maio

