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Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

A National Scenic Byway

The Black Bear Byway and Early Native Americans

By: Jim Thorsen

The majority of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway was originally the home to a native American tribe called the Timucuan. According to history, the earliest evidence of their presence dates back from around 3000 BC. When one travels along the Byway or visits the number of Springs, a mystic thought is to wonder how this group of Native Americans lived and survived in a forest landscape that we would not recognize in our modern world. History has told us that their name is from a Spanish pronunciation of the Timucuan word “*atimoqua*” which means “lord” or “chief.” The Ocala National Forest, which occupies a large portion of our Byway, is derived from a Timucuan word “*ocalli*” which means “big hammock.” This large group of Timucuan lived in Northeast and Central Florida and Southeast Georgia. We do know that a primary village called “Ocale” was located between the Ocklawaha River and the St. Johns River. In fact, early history accounts in 1539, explorer Hernando de Sota visited the Timucuan in this Ocale village.

From personal observations, history books, archeologists and studies, the Timucuan have maintained a close association to the Black Bear Byway in a number of ecological, agricultural, medicinal and recreational techniques that are still used today. Some of these scientific relationships today include:

- Use of fire on the landscape. We know that Native Americans used fire to clear land for crops, drive out wildlife for hunting, promote new tender vegetation and many other reasons. The Timucuan did something different with their long-term use of fire – they changed the soil type on different sites. A good example is on the Byway with the sand pine scrub ecosystem and the longleaf pine/wiregrass ecosystem. Both of these vegetation types are on a *Astatula* soil series which is a very deep sand and has high percolation rates. The difference is in the longleaf pine areas where there is a small dark color layer of silt particles six to eight inches in depth. This attributes to a layer of charcoal (ash) that has created enough holding capacity for water to be stored in this soil. Evidence can be seen in the longleaf pine islands and observed in the Paisley Woods area along County Road 445 leading to Alexander Springs. So, what did the Timucuan do that contributed to this? It is believed that in the very early days, Timucuan used those areas for travel routes to camps, villages and certain hunting grounds. As they traveled, they used fire extensively over time to burn the woods for easy walking access and comfortable conditions during the year. Thus, the use of intense fire changed the soil condition and promoted a different vegetative landscape.

- When the Spanish explorers first saw the Timucuan, they were amazed at their size - very tall, muscular and healthy. They farmed the land and planted corn, beans and other vegetables. Their diet included what they planted along with lots of fish, venison, alligator, wild fruit and nuts. One important food staple that has been found from excavating cultural resource sites is the saw palmetto berries (*Serenoa repens*) mixed in the clay pots that the Indians used to eat their meals. The saw palmetto berries were almost in every dish along with fish, corn, nuts and fruits. It is believed that the Timucuan understood the importance of the saw palmetto berries for nutrition and to stimulate their appetites. Today these berries are used as a supplement to improve urinary tract problems, aid in kidney and thyroid issues and contain active compounds that may benefit good health. Thus, some of this scientific evidence in a small way can be traced back to the Timucuan.
- The last fact has to do with a very important resource on our planet. What is one important resource that is used for recreation? Water! Almost every body of water in Florida and especially along the Black Bear Byway, exhibits evidence of a historical cultural resource site. Alexander Springs is a perfect example. When archeological inventories were completed, this site proved to be a social gathering place, a shopping mall, a religious venue and much more for the tribes. The St. Johns River served as a travel avenue and for the Timucuan, it was their interstate. Today water is still the number one attraction for recreational activities in the State of Florida. Thus, in a small way, through many generations we can reflect on the value of how our Florida waters served the Timucuan.

As we travel and enjoy the sites along the Byway, let's not forget the legendary Timucuan Native American people and what they unknowingly left us to study about their way of life and customs that we use, even today.



One of the Famous Engravings
Based on Jacques le Moyne's
Drawings Showing a Timucuan
Chief

NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.....Jim Thorsen

I am proud to announce that our new Kiosks from our grant is now complete and we have a total of nineteen kiosks along our Byway. The new kiosks are located at the Essex Restaurant just east of Astor in Volusia County, the Volusia Speedway, Silver Glen Springs and Mill Dam Recreational Area. If you are nearby any of these locations on the Byway, please visit the new kiosks and the unique information they provide.



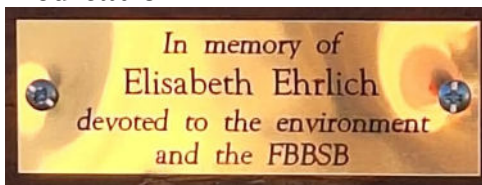
Silver Glen Springs Kiosk

We are still trying to gain new members and donations to help with future projects. Please visit our website and discover the Florida Black Bear Byway. Our website is: www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org Our Byway wants to continue to provide the visitors and residents the best knowledge of why we need to keep the environment clean, safe and enjoyable!

Currently, Florida Black Bears are emerging from their so called “dens” and “quiet period” and will be feeding on vegetation, insects and small animals. They will definitely raid beehives for the high energy honey!! Enjoy our upcoming Spring weather!!

Jim Thorsen, Chair thor1505@aol.com

Elizabeth (Beth) Ehrlich Kiosk Dedication



Beth was a founding member and major contributor to the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway until her passing in 2016. On March 18th 2025 the FBBSB Kiosk at the Essex Restaurant in Astor was officially designated the **Beth Ehrlich Memorial Kiosk**.



On hand for the dedication from left Tom Rose, Jim Thorsen, Tony Ehrlich and Nikki Thorsen. Also attending (not pictured) Beth's daughter Pauline.



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

There are several clear flowing springs on the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway. Those springs maintain a constant year round temperature, summer and winter, the water temperature is the same. Do you know what that temperature is? Email your answer to tomrose43@gmail.com

Congratulations to Lisa Varner of Ocala, Fl. She was first in with the correct answer to the January byway question. Lisa knew that the major military activity conducted on the byway is the US Navy's bombing practice at the Pinecastle Range in the Ocala National Forest.

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

Board Meetings: Our next meeting is **Tuesday, April 8th** at the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville. **Visitors are welcome.** Attending a board meeting is a great way to learn more about the byway. Please let us know if you would like to attend and I'll get the details to you. 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.

Officers: Jim Thorsen, Chairman - Kristee Booth, Vice Chair - Nikki Thorsen, Secretary. **Board of Directors:** Tony Ehrlich, Georgia Turner, Mike Cross, Janet Lewis, Daniel Olds, Tom Rose

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