

**TEN THOUSAND ISLANDS,
EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK**

February 23 - March 1, 2017
by Richard Ferguson, Marsha Dougherty, et al.

Jud Hurd organized this year's Winter Warm Water paddle trip to the Ten Thousand Islands region of Everglades National Park. It's on the Gulf coast of south Florida about 90 miles due west of Miami on Highway 41, known locally as the Tamiami Trail.



Six of the eight participants (Jud, Marsha Dougherty, Tim Fletcher, Sue Hughes, Dave Hustvedt and Clark Strickland), decided to save money by flying the redeye on Frontier to Miami. They got on the plane around 11:00, and arrived before sunup the following morning. Although they had super-cheap tickets this did not work out as well as they had hoped, with several people swearing never to fly Frontier again. To add to the insult of the plane's miserable seats, they had to wait for their rental car companies to open.

Bernie and Richard were not enthused about that flight plan, so they flew in the day before, Bernie on his United retiree benefits, and Richard on American miles. They stayed in the very comfortable Cambria Suites for about \$100, Richard's first use of Priceline. They did not tease the others too much.

Jud and his mates had trouble getting their car from the off-site Brand X rental company. When they did they stopped to get groceries and fuel for their stoves, and stomped it to the campsite on Chokoloskee Island.



On the Loop Road, off Highway 41

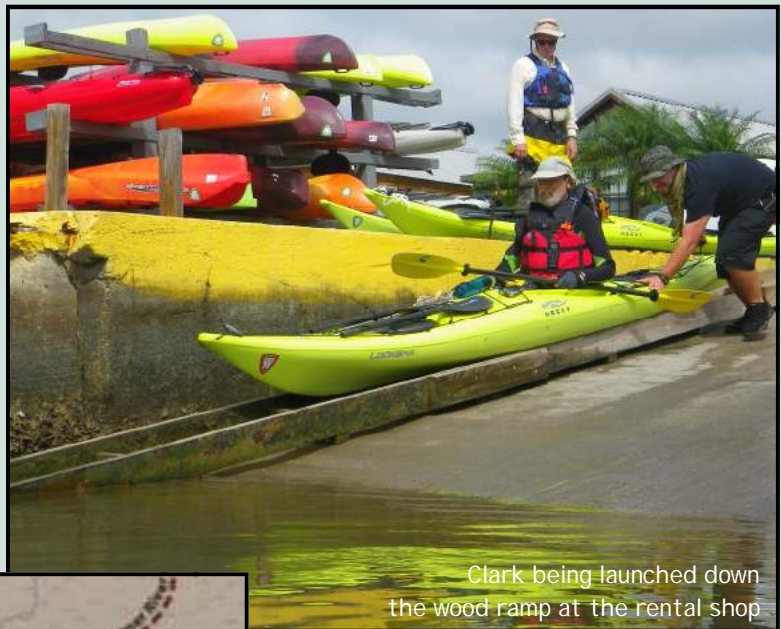
Bernie and Richard had a more leisurely morning with breakfast at a Latino restaurant on their way out of Miami, as did Sue, Dave and Marsha.

Richard and Bernie stopped in the Big Cypress Preserve visitor center, where they learned a bit about alligators. People in the other car took two short walks at the Shark Valley visitor center and then turned onto a backroad detour. They saw four types of herons within a few minutes on their walks, and lots of alligators along the road.

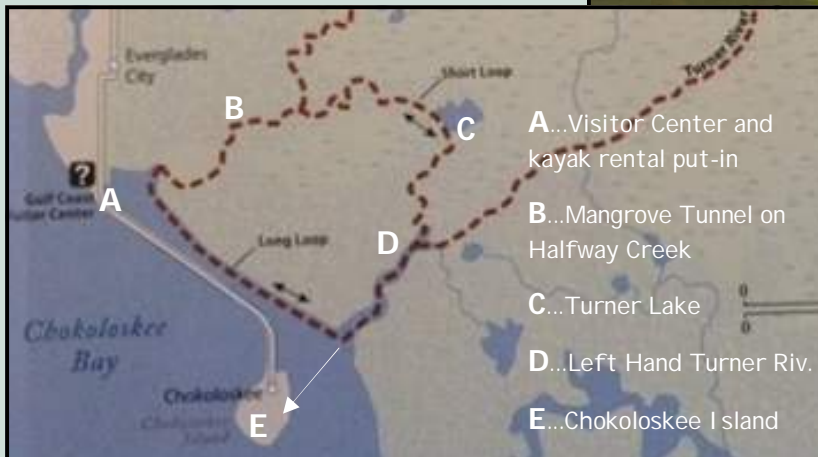
Everyone met at Chokoloskee Island Park and Marina, their campsite for the first two nights. They set up their tents and drove to Everglades City for dinner.

The next morning they went back to pick up their boats in Everglades City, after stopping by the national park visitors' center to reserve their back-country campsites.

They had decided to paddle from Everglades City up Halfway Creek, through a mangrove tunnel, and then down the Turner River, which took them back to their tents on Chokoloskee.



Clark being launched down the wood ramp at the rental shop



- A...Visitor Center and kayak rental put-in
- B...Mangrove Tunnel on Halfway Creek
- C...Turner Lake
- D...Left Hand Turner Riv.
- E...Chokoloskee Island

The bugs were fierce and everyone was very happy to have mosquito head nets. They met a guide taking some tourists up the tunnel; he said that obviously it was not their first rodeo, perhaps noting their protective gear.

It was a pretty hard day, but some thought the mangrove tunnel was magical, even if the bugs were brutal. [Find photos of this paddle on the next page.]

Since the cars had been left at the put-in, they walked to a nice dinner at the Havana Café, the only restaurant on Chokoloskee.



With all the boats, the campsite was tight the second night

MARSHA'S NOTES

Friday 2-24-17

DAY ONE: We put in about 11:20AM at the Glades Haven kayak rental in Everglades City. We all paddled chartreuse *Looksha* 17s except for Jud who had a yellow *Tsunami*.

We went up Halfway Creek which becomes a mangrove tunnel. Paddling with the tide it took two hours to get to Turner Lake. Then the tide was slack when we started out on the return trip via Left Hand Turner River back to our campsite on Chokoloskee Island.

MILEAGE: 9.2 miles.



Richard before he put on his mosquito head net



Bernie, hard to identify in his insect protection gear



Doing the limbo to get under a tree



The water was rusty looking from the tannin in the leaves



Richard, still keeping his head net handy, in front of a shell mound on the bug-free Turner River



White Ibis
on Turner Lake



At the Havana Café: Bernie,
Richard, Tim, Dave, Marsha and Clark's head

MARSHA'S NOTES

Saturday 2-25-17

DAY TWO: We put in at the Chokoloskee Island ramp at 11:30AM. Paddled across the bay to the entrance of Indian Key pass. Took a break on a small mangrove island, watched some dolphins and saw the nose of a manatee.

We left the mangrove island at 1:45PM. High tide was at 2:27 so we paddled against the tide for a while and had a headwind.

Arrived at Picnic Key at 5:00 PM.

MILEAGE: 9.3 miles.

The next day, Saturday, February 25th, they broke camp, packed all their gear and paddled across Chokoloskee Bay to Indian Key pass, a busy channel. [You can locate the pass on the map on the first page of this article.]

They stopped at a small shell beach, and watched the dolphins fish. If you see fish jumping through the air, look for the dolphin they are trying to escape. They also saw some manatees.



They had to fight a tidal current as they headed out to the Gulf, and later a headwind, to make their way to Picnic Key [F on the map on the first page] their beach camp for three nights, but when they finally arrived it was worth the work.

The sand was amazingly fine and bright white, and for the first evening they had the huge beach all to themselves.

Well, all to themselves except for the mosquitos and the no-see-ums, a type of vicious midge, that came out as soon as the sun set...and the raccoons who fought like hoodlums about stolen garbage all night long.



Camp at Picnic Key



Marsha and Jud, leaving for the Sunday morning paddle at 11:00

On the 26th they decided to take it easy, and paddle to nearby Tiger Key, where they relaxed in the shade, with just enough breeze to keep the bugs away. Some people said it was really quite pleasant; Sue thought it was so lovely it almost made her cry.

MARSHA'S NOTES
Sunday 2-26-17

DAY THREE: We leisurely paddled to Tiger Key Point and spent the day under the shade of a row of mangroves that had been pruned up to a friendly shape that allowed the breeze to pass through.

Then we returned by continuing around Tiger Key back to the Picnic Key camp.

MILEAGE: Approximately 3 to 4 miles.



Dave, Clark, Sue and Jud

They paddled over to Camp Lulu Key, just outside the park, and had a photo-op at the park sign.

Then they returned to Picnic Key. Clark saw a huge sea turtle on the way back.



Jud, Dave, Clark, Bernie, Tim and Marsha



Sunrise, low tide



Sunset



Clark and Tim's campsite on Picnic Key



The view from the porta potty at Picnic Key



Richard, Marsha, Dave,
Bernie, Tim, Clark and Sue

Back at Picnic Key there was enough daylight to enjoy a bugless happy hour in the shady mangrove clearing at the west end of the beach.

The dip was missing, as something or other always seemed to be, but they shared the chips with a perfectly ripe avocado and lots of other communal snacks.

On the 27th, they headed for Fakahatchee Key [H on the map] which at one point had been a tomato farm and a commercial fishing operation with an icehouse out on pilings. They had an easy paddle with the current. They found several gravestones, as well as a cistern overgrown with ghostly roots and gumbo limbo trees, sometimes nicknamed "tourist trees" because their red bark peels off like sunburned visitors.



Gumbo Limbo trees produce sap that early settlers used to lime birds



Like many of the islands, Fakahatchee is largely made of shells, discarded by the Calusa Indians over thousands of years.

They decided to circumnavigate the island, but when they turned towards home, they ran into a very strong current. It was all they could do, paddling as hard as they could, to make slow progress against it.



Sitting on a ledge of shells, lunch was eaten in a hurry because of the heat and the bugs

MARSHA'S NOTES

Monday 2-27-17

DAY FOUR: Put-in time unknown. Paddled with the tide to Fakahatchee Island. Took the tour, gravestones and cistern. Had a short lunch. Continued around Fakahatchee.

Passed by more cisterns, a long point, and pilings. The tide hadn't turned yet and so we paddled against the current from here and for quite some time. Got back to the channel we came in on and then the tide went slack.

Some of us went to Tiger Key Point for a break and a swim then back to camp and happy hour. Breezy and pleasant until sundown.

MILEAGE: 5.9 miles from the far side of Fakahatchee Island via Tiger Key.

The speed of the moving water was substantial in certain spots, less in others. Then the wind turned against them later, so they were tired when they got home.



Using straps to carry a boat to the water at low tide

On the morning of the 28th they headed back to Everglades City. They had to go around Stop Keys [at 1 on the map on the first page], due to low tide, but generally had an easy paddle, with the current, back to Chokoloskee Bay.

However, by the afternoon the wind picked up, and they had a harder time going across the bay, against the wind, to get back to the marina.

They turned in the boats, had a nice lunch at the Oyster House nearby and started the two hour drive to Miami.

MARSHA'S NOTES

Tuesday 2-28-17

DAY FIVE: Broke camp at Picnic Key and put in at 9:35AM, low tide. We paddled and walked around the sand bars on the near and far side of Stop Key to get to Indian Pass. We had a head wind for a while. We stopped at a beach on the lee side of a small mangrove island for a break and a snack.

The tide was with us from there and it was an easy paddle to Chokoloskee Bay, then we had the wind to deal with crossing the bay.

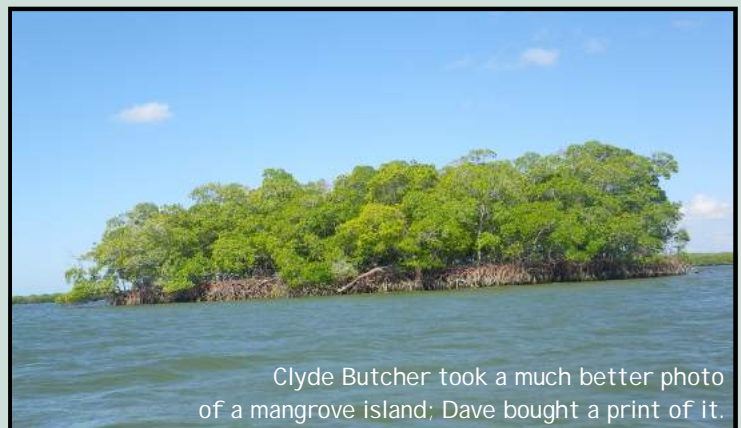
The current was strong under the Chokoloskee Bridge and we shot right through. Wind was calm on the other side. It was a short paddle to the kayak rental shop.

MILEAGE: 8.3 miles.



Lunch on the last day, before the tough paddle across Chokoloskee Bay

Dave, Marsha and Sue stopped on the way back to look at Clyde Butcher's photographs; he's famous for black and white Ansel Adams-style pictures of the Everglades.



Clyde Butcher took a much better photo of a mangrove island; Dave bought a print of it.

In Miami, they checked into the Ramada Springs hotel near the airport, where everyone was happy to take a shower, and have dinner at the sports bar.

The next day Richard caught a bus to a walking tour of some area murals and the rest of the group took the morning shuttle to the airport for their flight home.



Mangrove roots



Mangrove roots at low tide when you can see they are covered with oysters

ADDENDUM AND COMMENTS

CAMP PESTS: Dave said he'd made the mistake of leaving a bag of garbage behind the seat in his kayak. "All night long there were growls and squeals as the raccoons fought over the spoils." (That was the second time that they'd found our garbage. Eventually we did have a quiet night when we finally remembered to put every single thing away.)

WHY WE TRAVEL TOGETHER: Teamwork solved a lot of memory problems on this trip. When poles were forgotten at home a tent was rigged up with cording and borrowed sand stakes. Pants were lent when another participant's paddle clothing was left behind, and a mesh bag was located in the wrong trunk before a third case of CRS caused a meltdown. Yea for us! With the group's help, we did just fine, except maybe for keeping garbage away from the raccoons.



A tent cleverly rigged up without its poles

FROM CLARK: On this trip I learned that I need to continue to push myself to sign up for and attend these wonderful Club paddles. I have a limited number of paddle seasons left in my old bones and the chance to paddle in the Everglades with competent companions might not come again.

Also, I saw that, once again, collective input (observations, questions, reservations, suggestions) from engaged members of the paddle group provided the trip leader with several points of view and insights. The strong leader then made the decision for the group and off we went. We got to our destinations through the mazes of mangrove islands each and every time.

Finally, the logistics planning was complex enough that the trip leaders assigned several individuals to undertake aspects of the arrangements. Due to excellent and disciplined communications, the parts fit together beautifully.

BUG BITES: A part of the group was terribly bothered by the insects. Here's a sad picture of a patch of bites, and a brand of insect repellent recommended by the people on the edge of the swamp at Clyde Butcher's.

The active ingredient in the Swamp Gator bug spray which they promise repels the biting flies is Gerinol. (King Soopers has had the Cutter brand with Gerinol on closeout sale for \$2.49) Read more about repelling insects: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/insect-repellents.html>



Some people had masses of bites



FROM TIM: It was a wonderful trip. Even the mosquitoes and no-see-ums don't seem so bad looking back. I'd definitely do it again. I was really enchanted by the mangrove islands and white sand beaches. Nature was at its best, except for the bugs. I've never seen so many different kinds of birds in one place. Also saw dolphins, a manatee, and sting rays. The weather was great and the paddling was relaxed and really enjoyable. Happy hour was, as usual, a great time.

SUE SAID: I was not bothered by the mosquitoes but even with my head net on the no-see-ums got in my hair and bit my scalp until I wanted to scream. Regardless, I'd go back tomorrow. I'd think more about timing our travel with the tides, but I'm so thankful to be able to travel with people who are better than I am about navigation, and who quietly get out a tow belt before the situation goes south.



Sea Oats stabilize dunes in places where mangrove trees don't grow



Gray Nickerbean seedpods on the Gulf Coast's famous white sand

SUE, CONTINUED: I grew up not far from the Gulf Coast and was thrilled to return to the land of sugar-white sand. Sea Oats grew all over the barrier island we vacationed on, but I'd never seen the Nickerbean vines. They have beautiful shiny gray seeds that are tough enough to float in salt water to sprout in distant places.

RICHARD'S THOUGHTS: All in all, a good trip. I was the new guy in the group, and one of the younger members. I hope to paddle with them again in the future. We learned that we need to plan around tidal currents. We all got warm for a week or so, having missed some snow in Colorado.

FROM JUD: The editor gave us an assignment to write about our most enjoyable parts of the trip, but we had to say more than it was a great trip with great people, even though it was. So, here goes:

Believe it or not, I really enjoy planning these trips. The logistics can be challenging but all that is just following a logical line of thought from walking out the front door until I walk back in the front door. But the best part is the participation of everybody in the planning and preparation. We did about a jillion iterations of our planning document because everybody kept coming up with good questions and things I hadn't thought of or clarified. Other members also took on some tasks such as kayak reservation, finding a hotel, rental cars, etc. This makes the trip their trip and not just Jud's trip they are going along on. Thank you to a wonderful team effort, both in planning and executing the trip.

The next thing I enjoy is the paddling. It was really neat to paddle new water and navigate our way out and back through the mangrove islands. Let me tell you, at water level one mangrove island looks just like another and it is all just one huge green mass. Fortunately, we had seven and a half great navigators on this trip which kept me from making a wrong turn. I have paddled ocean tides and island currents in Glacier Bay, Annette Island and the San Juan Islands, but nothing compares to what we had. This was a great learning experience as we ran into some pretty strong currents between islands. It really drives home the point of planning your paddling with the tide.

Finally, I really enjoyed the camping on the white sands beach. Well, except for the mosquitoes and no-see-ums. Once again, the fellowship amongst the group is what truly makes a trip great. You just couldn't have asked for a more beautiful setting and a wonderful group of people with which to enjoy it. It was another wonderful and blessed trip. Thanks to all for making it that.

FROM EVERYONE: Amen, Jud, and thank you!

WILDLIFE IN FLORIDA: We were excited to see so many animals and birds we don't have in Colorado, although we know we'd have identified lots more if Gregg and Anna had been with us. Here's a list of what we remembered:

- Double-crested Cormorant
- Roseate Spoonbill
- Black-crowned Night Heron
- Great Blue Heron
- Tricolored Heron
- Green Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Anhinga (viewed from overhead swimming in a canal...very cool)
- Little Blue Heron
- White Ibis
- Dowitcher (maybe)
- Cattle Egret
- Gulls, types undetermined
- Killdeer
- Turkey Vulture
- Crow
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Osprey (lots of nests)
- Bottlenose Dolphin
- Manatee
- Loggerhead Turtle
- Sting Ray, type unknown



RESOURCES

CHARTS:

- Waterproof Charts' *Everglades and Ten Thousand Islands #41*
- National Geographic's *Everglades National Park Trails Illustrated Topographic Map* (not as good for 10,000 I lands; better for the Wilderness Waterway Trail)

BOOKS:

- *A Paddler's Guide to the Everglades National Park*, by Johnny Malloy (2009, but still valuable)
- *Exploring Everglades National Park and the Surrounding Area*, by Roger Hammer (2016)
- *Sea Kayaking in Southern Florida*, by Nigel Foster (1999, but very good paddling advice)
- *Day Paddling Florida's 10,000 I lands and Big Cypress Swamp*, by Jeff Ripple
- *An Ecotourist's Guide to the Everglades and the Florida Keys*, by Robert Silk
- *Florida Gulf Coast* by Moon Handbooks (good background information about how rural this area is)

WEBSITES:

- Everglades National Park for up-to-date details regarding permits and rules:
<http://www.nps.gov/ever/index.htm>
- The website that first piqued our interest:
<http://www.yackman.com/yackmans-trip-reports/paddling-floridas-10000/>
- Another website with good information: <http://www.paradisecoastblueway.com/>