

HardisonInk.com

Clay Landing Days wraps up Saturday; *Local history lessons provided*



Wagon Master Lynn Ditullio, a retired park ranger, prepares to depart on 'The Manatee Express,' a covered wagon used to provide tours of the park. Here she is seen with some visitors to the park who enjoyed the Clay Landing Days experience.

Story, Photos By Jeff M. Hardison, © Nov. 27, 2015 @ 10:47 p.m.

MANATEE SPRINGS STATE PARK – Individuals, couples and families looking for fun on Saturday (Nov. 28) may want to visit Manatee Springs State Park between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Saturday marks the second of two Clay Landing Days. Riding in a covered wagon pulled by a pickup truck with a retired ranger sharing insight about the park is part of the fun.



Leon Bath stands next to a bee

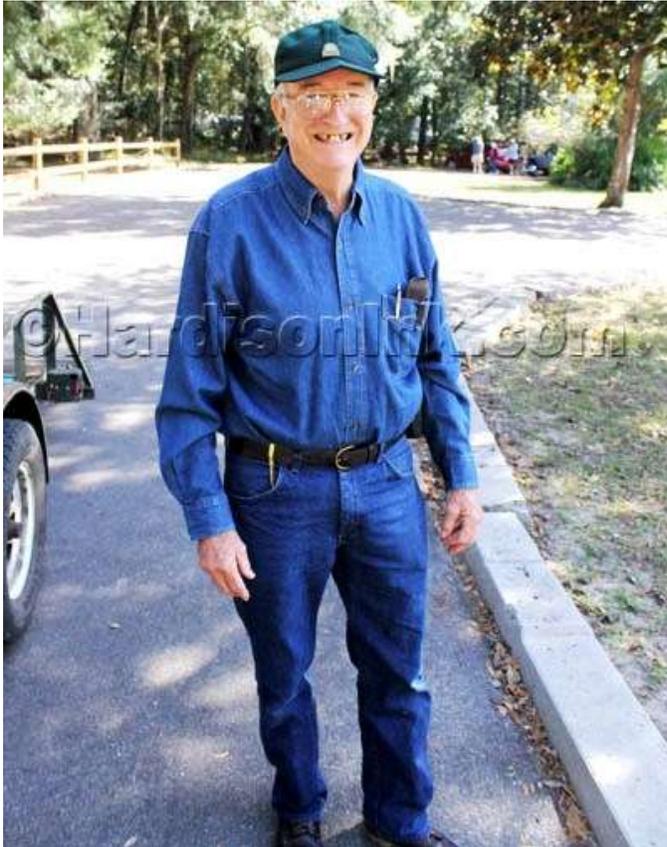
display that shows bees in a cross-section of a hive. He can catch wild bees if need be, and he has honey for sale. Just call him at 352-493-2329.



HardisonInk.com

On Friday (Nov. 27), there was not only the covered wagon, but there was a trailer too. Tours were provided each half hour. The ride is about an hour long and it includes a visit to a Native American hut.

The focus during this event is on the history of Clay Landing and the part of Florida that became Manatee Springs State Park.



Howard 'Matt' Meyer, a retired park ranger, prepares to share insight with visitors to Manatee Springs State Park on Friday.

Howard "Matt" Meyer, a retired park ranger who served in that capacity for 47 years, shared some insight. The first Clay Landing Day was in 1981, which makes this year's event the 34th year since then. Perhaps next year's 35th Clay Landing Days will be an even bigger event.

Meyer said the first one was at night.

Meyer said the covered wagon that is seen today used to have a fiberglass top, but he remembers the efforts to replace that with the cloth top that it sports today.

Park Services Specialist Chris Dixon said the Spring Into The Springs event will include covered wagon rides, too, but the theme will be more about the flora, fauna and springs of today. The Clay Landing Days event keys on the historic foundations that have led to today's Florida.

Dixon said there is an effort under way to enlist more members in the Friends Of

Manatee Springs State Park. There is an application to join. Friends can join as a family for \$30 a year, or for \$15 for an individual. There are Business Friends rates and Sponsor Friends rates too.

Another interpreter beyond Meyer on Friday was Lynn DiTullio, another retired park ranger with plenty of years of service and knowledge about Florida and this park.

The drivers during the morning were Mike Fox, a volunteer, and Park Services Specialist Kirk Marhefka.

The other noteworthy item about using an open trailer as well as the covered wagon is that the trailer made it possible for people in wheelchairs to take the tour. The rides continue on Saturday.

Manatee Springs State Park is located at the end of State Road 320 West. The address is 11650 N.W. 115th St., Chiefland. The park includes a first magnitude spring that feeds into the Suwannee River. Even without Clay Landing Days' activities, which are free with the \$6 per-car entry fee (with up to eight occupants per vehicle) to the park, it is a great place to visit.

Friendly vendors will share information about the crafts, arts, foods, history and other

HardisonInk.com

offerings they have for sale or for discussion. There are participants on the North Trail, who will speak about Native Americans' role in Florida history. There are also "pioneers" who will tell visitors about certain aspects of Florida's past, and how they fit into the history of the state.



Park Services Specialist Chris Dixon stands next to a display he made to announce the Jan. 1 First Day Hike. Like other parks in Florida, Manatee Springs State Park is encouraging people to start walking in parks in 2016 on Jan. 1. He also had a photo display of the first-ever Spring Into The Springs event, which happened last spring at Manatee Springs State Park. That is set to happen again in the spring of 2016.

Clay Landing Days activities start at 10 a.m.

The Friends of Manatee Springs State Park comprise the biggest section of volunteers who bring this all to fruition.

Park Service Specialist Dixon is among the state employees who put this particular event on. Clay Landing Days were happening as an annual event for at least a decade of consecutive years now, even though the first one was decades ago.

Nancy Robinson shows the knife she uses to cut sweet potato disks that are used as weights in a process to make string from alpaca fur. This method is even more primitive than with a spinning wheel.



HardisonInk.com

Nancy Robinson shows the method for twining grass to make common household twine. Here she is using brown corn grass.

Clay Landing Days participants who are showing their wares and telling about the manner in which artifacts came to be include Nancy Robinson.

Robinson, who is the owner of Laughing Woman Trading Company, was joined by Mary Weaver, another person who dressed in period attire.

Robinson and Weaver set up a tent-like structure to represent what a trading area might look like in the 1830s. She is dressed as a travelling peddler. She can explain why things such as a copper pot and glass beads could be seen as very valuable in the early 19th Century at Clay Landing, which is on the Suwannee River near where the spring feeds into the river.



Gene Fourakre stands next to his improved wood chair-recliner.

Robinson showed how alpaca fur can be spun into thread by using a sweet potato and a primitive spindle tool. She also made household twine by twining grass blades together by hand.

Robinson explained that the Native Americans of Northwest Florida would use black-colored Spanish moss to weave highly-developed dresses. They had artistic sensibility, she said, and were not as some people may have depicted them as being savages who simply covered themselves with moss pulled right from a tree.

There are other people present to share stories from the Clay Landing Days.

Another couple who were there to help people learn about crafts and olden ways were Gene Fourakre, who will be 85 on Dec. 13, and his wife of 58 years Rosalee Fourakre, who turned 78 on Sept. 11. They are from Ocala.

Mr. Fourakre tells listeners about grinding corn to make grits. He has ground corn since he was six years old. He was using a hand-powered, cast iron corn grist mill grinder

on Friday. This mill was manufactured by Logan and Strobridge of New Brighton, Penn., in the 1850s to 1870s.

He rebuilt part of the mill with help by other machinists. He spent about \$500 restoring it, he said. Fourakre was a diesel mechanic in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

After returning to civilian life, he later retired after becoming a master electrician.

HardisonInk.com

Rosalee Fourakre has been making rugs and crocheting since she was eight.

Not only is Gene Fourakre well-versed in corn grinding, but he is very adept at woodworking. His portable and comfortable wooden chair now has the reclining option added to it.

He only had one of those available on Friday. They are selling for \$185. He makes each one by hand.

David Marston of Morriston is another man who works with wood and creates items for show and sale. His rustic wood creations include folding tables, birdhouses and toys. His wife Candace "Molly" Marston is cooking and selling "Original Kettle Korn." This is popcorn cooked in a giant kettle. It was both sweet and salty to just the right degree to make it a prime example of Kettle Korn at its finest. Her business is "Miss Molly's Original Kettle Korn."

Leon Bath of Levy County was present Friday. He plans to be there Saturday. He will speak with visitors about beekeeping and he knows a lot about this type of agricultural activity.

He had various sizes and types of honey; as well as peanut and pecan brittle made from honey for purchase too. The brittle is selling for \$2 a bag, and it is amazing.

Bath first starting beekeeping about 10 years ago, when the late Rob Mathis introduced him to the science of keeping bees. Now Bath has 20 hives. He had 45 hives last spring.

Another bigger beekeeper in the area is Scott Barns, Bath said. Barns has 3,000 hives. He lives in Michigan for six months and spends six months in Florida.

A couple of wild bees from a nearby hive smelled the honey Bath brought to the park. They were buzzing around him, but they did not bother anyone.

The Friends of Manatee Springs State Park also manned a booth that included applications for people who want to help the park by volunteering time or donating money or both. This CSO helps maintain the Covered Wagon used to take people through the woods on the ranger-guided tours.