

HardisonInk.com

Clay Landing Days succeeds; *Living history draws people to park*



Dave and Candace 'Miss Molly' Marston of Morriston stand near the kettle where they create kettle korn. Dave also creates rustic wood creations such as folding tables, bird houses and wooden toys. They are in their 23rd year as kettle korn cookers and sellers.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 25, 2017 at 3:17 p.m.

MANATEE SPRINGS STATE PARK -- Volunteers and staff at Manatee Springs State Park provided another fun and educational event on Friday (Nov. 24) and Saturday (Nov. 25).

Clay Landing Days a living history event that is a time-honored tradition. This festive occasion gives history buffs and reenactors a chance to share some of the cultural heritage of the early to mid-1800s in Levy County.

HardisonInk.com



One set of riders departs from the parking lot to go to the area where reenactors help them learn about Native American traditions from the days of old at Clay Landing.



Athena Hurtubise of Taylor County, a member of the Big Bend Florida Native Plant Society, mans a table for the group at the park. This group is

HardisonInk.com

led by President Jaya Milam and Vice President Bill Milam. It meets the fourth Monday of the month, from 6 to 8 p.m., in the Steinhatchee Community Center, 1013 S. Riverside, Steinhatchee. The Mission of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.



Posters show what the Friends can do as volunteers, and some of the items

HardisonInk.com

the group has purchased for the parks.



One group with a table at the event on Friday was the Friends of Manatee Springs State Park Inc.

This Citizen Service Organization helps maintain the Covered Wagon used to take people through the woods on the ranger-guided tours.

HardisonInk.com

According to the handbook provided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Park Service (FPS), "The Department of Environmental Protection (Department) manages more than 6.1 million acres of public conservation lands throughout Florida. The Department's Division of Recreation and Parks (Division) Florida Park Service (FPS) manages approximately 800,000 acres of state parks and state trails. The FPS strives to protect the natural environment and enhance the resource-based recreational potential of such lands."

Citizen Support Organizations (CSOs) are some of the Division's most treasured resources helping to support Florida's state parks, provide visitor services, and protect the amazing natural and cultural resources unique to our exceptional state through volunteerism.

"For more than 25 years, the FPS has enjoyed a special partnership with an ever-growing family of 86 CSOs. These volunteer involvements, also known as Friends groups, consist of local community members, business people, retirees, and families, the handbook notes.

"Through years of collective efforts, CSOs have contributed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and raised tens of millions of dollars to ensure the state park system's incredible natural and cultural resources are preserved and cherished," the handbook continues.

Richard Denier was manning the Friends of Manatee Springs State Park booth on Friday. He said the Friends also help Fanning Spring State Park and the Nature Coast State Trail.

This group of Friends helps the parks in many ways, such as purchasing equipment, repairing structures and volunteering at events like Clay Landing Days. His wife is Marguerite Denier and she is often found in the check-in station at Fanning Springs State Park.

This group of Friends meets on the first Thursday of each month starting at 10 a.m. in the Fanning Springs State Park Community Room.

Among the recent big purchase by this Friends group is a \$6,000 lawn mower in October, he said.

Many park visitors who went to the Clay Landing Days event rode in a covered wagon pulled by a pickup truck with a person sharing insight about the park is part of the fun. There also was a flatbed trailer used to take people from the main area – about two miles into the woods at a location where there is a part of a Seminole or Creek Indian village reenactment established.

The hour-long tours were enjoyed by scores of people. This tour included a visit to an area set up similar to how Native Americans of the 1800s would have lived in this part of Florida. Another aspect this year was people learning about "Cracker Horses."

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

The first Clay Landing Day was in 1981, which makes this year's event the 36th year since then. The very first of these events was at night.

Park Services Specialist Christopher Dixon was among the park staff who assured that a good time was had by all.

Both day provided weather to make it a perfect day to be in the park. The weather was delightful and everyone was friendly and happy.

There was no extra fee to enjoy the ride or to visit with the historians at Clay Landing

HardisonInk.com

Days. Most of the people helping make this event a success and assisting so that visitors had fun while they were learning history are volunteers.

The ride and tour was covered by the fee to enter Manatee State Park, which is \$6 per vehicle with a maximum limit of eight people per vehicle. It is only \$4 for a single-occupant vehicle to enter the park. The fee is \$2 for pedestrians, bicyclists, extra passengers, and for passengers in a vehicle with the holder of an annual individual entrance pass.

THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Seminole Indians and Creek Indians were both simultaneously represented by portrayals and narrators who dressed in period attire of the 1830s. Florida became a state 1845.

At the campsite, the audience learned about several different types of cooking and how to build a hut from the plants in the area.

As they took the tour, guides also stopped at a couple of locations so people could see remnants of large cables used from the timber industry in the 1800s there.

The Spring Into the Springs event is slated for March.

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.

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.

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. The park is a great place to visit.

The participants on the North Trail spoke about Native Americans' role in Florida history. There were also "pioneers" who told visitors about certain aspects of Florida's past, and how they fit into the history of the state.

The Friends of Manatee Springs State Park comprises 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.

There are about 8.5 miles of trails in the park, and all but 1.5 miles of the trails are open for hikers to enjoy. The little bit of trail that is closed is for service vehicles that are used by park staff.

A map is available at the ranger station entrance to the park that shows the trails. There are signs along the trails to draw attention to different plants and artifacts along the way.

Below are links to stories from 2016 and 2015 Clay Landing Days events.

Click [HERE](#) for a link to the **2016** Clay Landing Days coverage.

Click [HERE](#) for a link to the **2015** Clay Landing Days coverage.