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Clay Landing Days succeeds



Ranger Kelly Hite poses on the covered wagon that is used to transport guests to the primitive campsite during Clay Landing Days at Manatee Springs State Park. She told guests the name Clay Landing Days was based on clay in soil used by Native Floridians as a base for the chickee huts. She spoke about the use of Wax Myrtle by early settlers to produce wax for candle-making, and Yaupon Holly berries and leaves that were steeped to produce a native ceremonial drink -- Black Tea. The area was later used for logging operations, in which giant trees were dragged to the river for further transport. Remnants of steel cables are scattered throughout trail areas, and are left in place for preservation of the park's history.

Story and Photos

By C.L. Watson © Nov. 28, 2018 at 1:18 p.m.

MANATEE SPRINGS STATE PARK -- Volunteers and staff at Manatee Springs State Park provided another fun and educational event on Friday (Nov. 23) and Saturday (Nov. 24).

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This primitive vendor campsite for Laughing Woman Trading Co. is guarded by a canine pal. Nancy Robinson is a registered member of the Rose Creek Tribal Village of Muskogee Descendants. She offered beaded jewelry for sale and prepared food for volunteers cooked in a cast iron skillet over a small fire.



This Gypsy Wagon is made from a recycled military trailer. It has a dual purpose of serving as a unique vendor display as well as a sleeping space with bedding inside. Butch and Melissa Mauer offered items handcrafted from grapevine and furniture made with two-tone cedar.

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The demonstration of egg preservation used by early settlers in Florida is seen here. Eggs were very valuable and used for a variety of foods. Applications included salt, wheat, varnish, oils, wood ash and slacked lime to preserve. Eggs being porous caused the taste to diminish with some of the practices. Slacked lime was the most successful method and allowed eggs to be stored up to eight months.



This is a replica of a Native Floridian fishing basket made with woven grapevine. The basket, which includes a smaller version inside, was baited at the smaller end, a fish would swim in for the food – then becoming trapped.

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The knotted end of a pine knocker with a resemblance of a face is seen here. Native Floridians used pine branches with a knotted end for combat. The stick is a couple of feet long with the heavier knot at the end. The tool was very effective in battle.



A pumpkin shell is used to cook a cake over an open fire.

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A cross fire was the method used by Native Floridians to have a continuous fire without the waste of wood. The wood is set up in a cross fashion with only a small section of the end burning. During the Indian Wars of the early 1800s, women and children remained at campsites until soldiers approached. If they had to flee the camp a stick would be thrown by the fire indicating

the direction they ran. Soldiers did not know of the practice and only saw an abandoned campsite.



Seminole Indian style attire made with fabric that was introduced after trade with Spaniards sometime in the 1800s is seen here. Prior to fabric, the Seminole women made clothing out of animal hides. It was a lengthy process to tan the furs into usable materials. The Seminole women were happy to trade a tanned fur for reams of fabric, allowing a more manageable textile to produce clothing.

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Seminole chickee huts were made from wooden posts buried in the ground for support and a slanted support system on the upper part to hold the palm roof. Palm fronds were woven together to provide a waterproof shelter. A raised area was used for bedding as well as an elevated workspace.



Sable Palm, sometimes referred as Cabbage Palm, is Florida's State Tree. It was used as a food source by Native Floridians. The interior of the palm provides an edible food that can be cooked or eaten raw.

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Horses and cows were introduced by the Spaniards and later released – where the herds became feral colonies. Early settlers captured the wild horses and cows to use for a livelihood. The horses were ridden through the thick palm to drive out the cows using whips and inherited the name Cracker Horse, from the cracking sound of the whip.

Clay Landing Days is 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.

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 as part of their 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 tours were enjoyed by scores of people during the two days. 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.

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 37th year since then. The very first of these events was at night.

There was no extra fee beyond the normal park entry fee to enjoy the ride or to visit with the historians at Clay Landing Days. Most of the people helping make this event a success are volunteers.

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

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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.

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.

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.