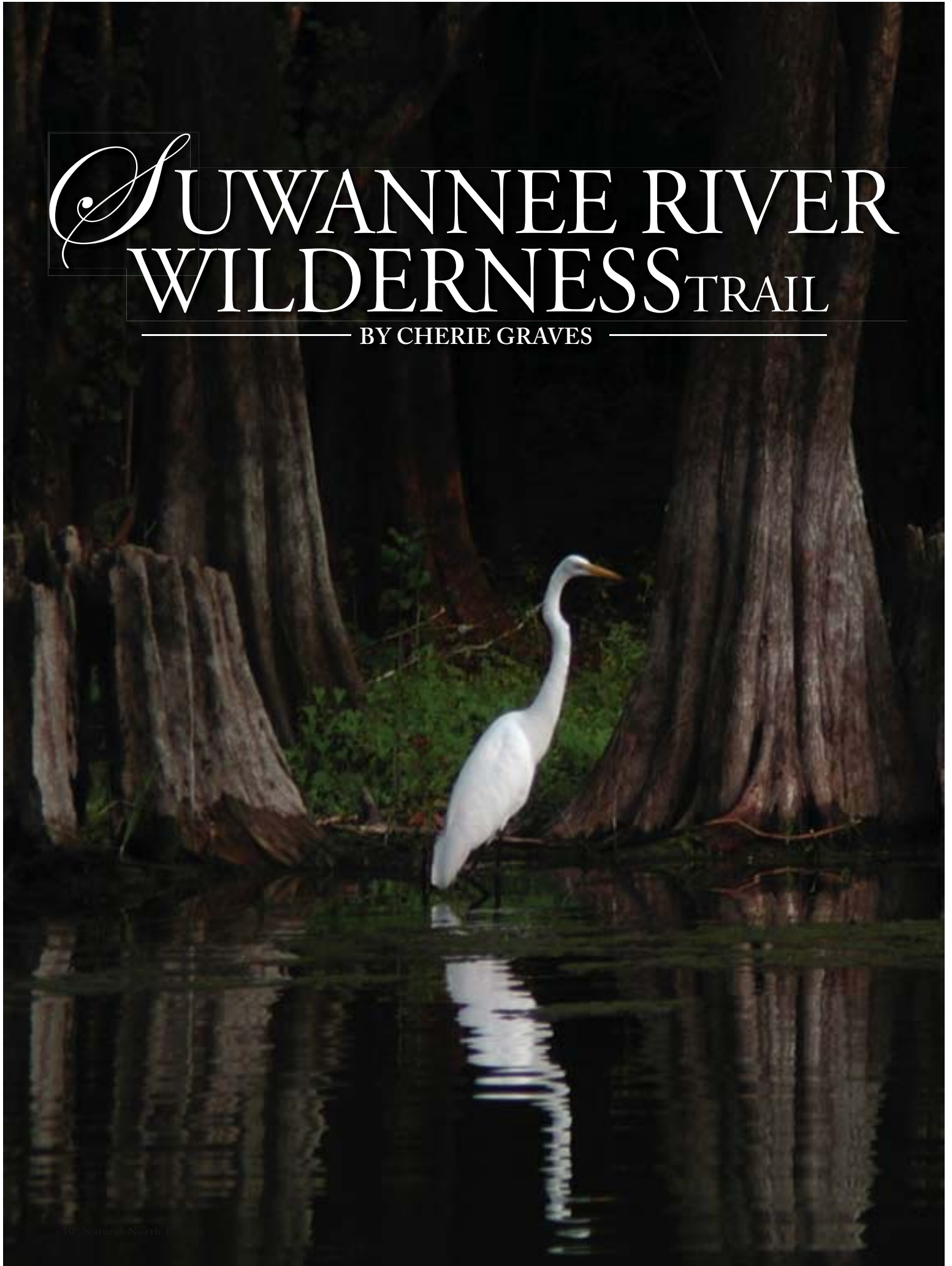


SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL

BY CHERIE GRAVES





“WAY DOWN UPON THE SUWANNEE RIVER” DOESN’T MEAN WAY AWAY FROM MODERN CONVENIENCES.

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail – a regional system of parks, forests, wildlife management areas and conservation areas that extends from the Florida/Georgia border in rural north Florida to the Gulf of Mexico – provides as much (or as little) wilderness as you want.

Throughout the Suwannee River Basin, visitors can enjoy paddling, hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, boating, and wildlife viewing. Towns along the river offer enchanting inns, excellent dining and shopping experiences. The Suwannee provides a route through miles of scenic natural Florida. While some visitors want a primitive experience and paddle the length of the Suwannee, others prefer to take it a few river miles at a time.

PLACES TO GO AND THINGS TO SEE: UPPER SUWANNEE

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail begins in White Springs, located along the upper Suwannee River, one of the last undisturbed areas of Florida. Here, the river is narrow and flows through towering pines and stately cypress that line steep riverbanks and high bluffs. Limestone cliffs and outcroppings, and white sandbars make the upper Suwannee an ideal setting for picnics and leisurely canoe or kayak outings.

Make your first stop the Nature and Heritage Tourism Center to collect information about the many natural, cultural, and historical sites in Florida. Exhibits, kiosks, videos and brochures provide resources and ideas for planning an adventure, which may include hiking, bicycling, birding tours, museum visiting in addition to paddling. Online computers are available to locate destinations and book reservations. Or, let staff arrange a tour with an outfitter.

Antique and art shops, B&Bs, restaurants and cherry pie at the historic Telford Inn entice visitors to stay awhile in White Springs. Stop by American Canoe Adventures to customize a paddling trip – this outfitter can arrange a half-day paddling trip or an overnight adventure.

Cabins, a campground and cafe make Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park in White Springs an excellent place to set up camp while you explore the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. The park celebrates North Florida’s natural beauty, regional craftsmanship, and a legendary American composer. Visitors can tour the Stephen Foster Museum and Carillon Tower. In Craft Square, working artisans share their skills in classes and workshops. Special events throughout the year include an Antique Tractor Show, Quilt Show, Rural Folklife Days, and the Florida Folk Festival.

Less than an hour away from White Springs at OluStee Battlefield State Park is the site of a Civil War battle. Each Febru-

Hidden *Treasures*



SUWANNEE HOUSEBOATING

Cruising the Suwannee River aboard a 44 ft. Suwannee houseboat may well prove to be one of the most memorable experiences of your life. You can cruise for over 70 miles north on the Suwannee River. Visit not only magnificent East Pass but many of the world's largest and most beautiful springs. Miller's, PO Box 280, Suwannee, FL 32692, (352) 542-7349 or (800) 458-BOAT



SUWANNEE VALLEY QUILT SHOP

The Suwannee Valley Quilt Shoppe, located in a restored 1925 Coca Cola Bottling Company building just north of the historic railway depot, at 517 North Main Street is home to over 3,000 bolts of fabric, quilting supplies, books and classes. This wonderful structure also houses Cross Stitch and More, one of the six largest cross-stitch shops in the United States, and the Cypress Swamp Café, serving delicious pastries and luncheon specialties to visitors from over 140 cities in Florida and 20 states. www.suwanneeshops.com

CAMP WEED AND THE CERVENY CONFERENCE CENTER

The conference center facility is purposefully distanced from the hustle and bustle of urban centers. Offering space and freedom in an exclusive natural setting. The relaxed setting and casual dress, place participants on equal ground, thus encouraging communication across all levels. Five hundred acres, a beautiful lake, and meals that are the hallmark of our service. Camp Weed and the Cervený Conference Center, 1057 Camp Weed Place, Live Oak, Florida 32060, 386-364-5250. <http://campweed.org>

ary, Confederate forces turn back Union troops marching on Tallahassee as the battlefield comes alive during re-enactment. A museum and an interpretive trail along battle lines make Olustee popular with history buffs.

If you're on the river, Woods Ferry River Camp, about ten miles downriver from White Springs, provides primitive campsites and five screened camping platforms with water and electricity. Several river camps along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail are planned to support multi-day river tours, allowing paddlers to camp near the river in areas where other accommodations are unavailable.

Music, campgrounds and cabins, a restaurant, gift shop, general store, and lots of trails make Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park another excellent base camp for exploring the SRWT. Spirit of the Suwannee hosts concerts throughout the year. The park's Suwannee Canoe Outpost can provide canoes, gear, camping equipment, meals, and shuttle. Visitors can take advantage of weekly trips that leave Friday evening and return Sunday midday. Guided trips include camping on sandy beaches and the Big Shoals area, Florida's only whitewater. Boarding stables, horse camping, and guided trail rides are available for those who want to explore the area on horseback.

The scenic Withlacoochee River joins the legendary Suwannee River within the Suwannee River State Park. An overlook provides a panoramic view of both rivers and the surrounding wooded uplands. When water level is low, visitors can see springs bubbling from the banks of both rivers. Numerous trails provide great views of both rivers and access to remote springs. The park also has a boat ramp, picnic shelters, and full facility campground and cabins.

Next door, Twin Rivers State Forest provides another 14,000 acres for recreation along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail.

Falmouth Springs, a short drive from Suwannee River State Park, claims to be the world's shortest river. Falmouth is a first magnitude spring and a window to an underground river.

MIDDLE SUWANNEE

From Suwannee River State Park to Branford is spring country. The river widens, with numerous springs and small shoals adding to its character. The Suwannee River boasts over 70 crystal clear springs, many of which are found in the middle region. The springs range in size from small fissures to first magnitude springs with an average water flow of over 65 million gallons per day. On hot summer days, spring hopping is a popular pastime for paddlers and boaters who stop to enjoy a cooling dip in the clear spring waters. Average temperature of the spring water is 72 degrees year round.

Another base camp for exploring the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is Advent Christian Village in Dowling Park. The



Village Square Shopping Center has banking, postal services, a grocery store, specialty shops, motel and a café. The Village Lodge, a campground, and group cabins provide excellent accommodations. A playground, grills, picnic areas, pontoon boating, and a conference center are other amenities visitors can enjoy. A library and computer station with internet access make this a prime base camp for those who prefer to take some of the “wild” out of wilderness.

Further downriver, divers will enjoy Peacock Springs State Park, known for its extensive underwater cave system, and Troy Spring State Park, a haven for open-water diving teams. A riverfront dock provides a mooring platform for access to facilities within the park.

LOWER SUWANNEE

The river widens along the lower Suwannee near Branford. Sandy banks become lower and slope gently toward the river. Located in the heart of Florida’s spring and river country,

visitors can travel in the shadow of these early trains along the 32-mile long Nature Coast State Trail.

Cabins and a campground make Fanning Springs State Park another excellent base camp for exploring the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. A Christmas boat parade, Red Belly Days, and other special events add to the fun of open water diving, swimming paddling, fishing, and hiking.

A few minutes away, at Manatee Springs State Park, Suwannee River Tours offers food, drinks, gifts, camp supplies and canoe rentals. The local outfitter can put you on the river for hours or for days. If you forget your snorkeling gear, the outfitter can provide it. You won’t want to miss the great dive sites along this portion of the Suwannee. Some river tours include a dive stop at the City of Hawkinsville, a 141’ paddle wheeler resting on the riverbed.

B&Bs, motor lodges, campgrounds and marinas that provide quick access to both salt and freshwater fishing make the town of Suwannee an excellent base camp for anglers and sea-

AN OVERLOOK PROVIDES A PANORAMIC VIEW OF BOTH RIVERS ... WHEN WATER LEVEL IS LOW, VISITORS CAN SEE SPRINGS BUBBLING FROM THE BANKS

Branford is 20 minutes from High Springs, Live Oak, and Mayo – towns along the “Antique Trail.” Visitors may want to stay at the Smoakhouse Ranch B&B Inn, built on the site of a 19th century tobacco farm. Surrounded by miles of farm and timberlands, the inn’s down covered beds or sleeping lofts make a comfortable end to a busy day.

Railroad heritage provides opportunities to experience history and nature along the Suwannee River Greenway at Branford. A rail-trail through the greenway provides views of old Florida. The Suwannee River at Little River Springs marks the trail’s western terminus while the Ichetucknee River is located at the east end. From river to river, the trail is approximately 12 miles long. Little River and Branford Springs are nearby for those interested in a cool swim. At Ichetucknee Springs State Park, visitors can enjoy an outing along one of Florida’s most popular tubing routes.

More railroad legacy can be found along a paved rail-trail connecting three counties and five communities in the Suwannee Valley. In the early 1900s, trains hauled crops and timber throughout the region, picking up passengers in small towns such as Chiefland, Cross City and Trenton. Today visi-

tor food lovers. Anglers can cast for large-mouth bass in the river or in freshwater creeks, for redbird and speckled trout in grass beds at the mouth of the river. Grouper, Spanish mackerel and other saltwater catches are a short boat ride to the Gulf of Mexico. Local restaurants serve fresh seafood – both salt and freshwater – a double delight. The Lower Suwannee runs deep and wide. Houseboats make a fine vehicle for cruising the lower 70 miles of the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail and visitors can rent one from Miller Marina (training included) for several days.

Stars. Those who look up into the night may be surprised to find the sky aglow with stars enough to reawaken childhood wonder. Under the Suwannee sky, stargazers will understand why ancient poets referred to the Milky Way as the “road of the gods.”

Day or night, from whichever point along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail you enter the river’s presence, you will remember the sound of the river, echoing ancient stories, carrying the tune of cultures past and present for as long as the river flows.

Call 800-868-9914 or visit SuwanneeRiver.com for more information about the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. ■