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On Lake Okeechobee—An Everglade Garden Farm

The Florida Everglades

BY

E. B. Sanders

WHAT is "The Everglades?" A vast basin, roughly fifty by one hundred miles, lying between Lake Okeechobee on the north, and the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf on the south, bounded on the east by a rock rim, 5 to 15 miles wide, overlaid with sand, lying between the Everglades and the Atlantic Coast, and on the west by a similar rim, which separates the Everglades from the Big Cypress and other swamps.

This basin is formed by a soft, porous, golithic and coral limestone, covered by a deposit of sand or marl, or both, on top

of which lies a blanket of more or less decomposed vegetable matter, almost as black as coal, and varying in thickness from a few inches at the edge of the Everglades, to fourteen or more feet in the interior.

The surface gently inclines downward from Lake Okeechobee to the coast waters, with a total fall of about 21 feet, and this fall has made all the difference between the true swamp, such as those west of the western rim, and the living marsh, which the Everglades has always been; in other words, the difference between

stagnant water and moving water. During the rainy season, and for a little while after, water covered most of the Everglades from a few inches to several feet deep, but with the discontinuance of the heavy rains, found its way gradually to the sea. However, there was usually more or less water on the Everglades throughout the year. The appearance of this vast body was much that of an immense rice field.

Soil

As stated, the greater part of the Everglades is composed of muck soil which is sweet and fresh, owing to the neutralizing quality of the underlying lime rock and the fact that the water is always in motion. Therefore, it has not been necessary to apply neutralizing substances to the soil in order to correct any acidity.

With drainage, and the lowering of the water table, air obtains access to the soil, and aided by cultivation, soon thoroughly decomposes it and makes it more compact.

It is worthy of emphasis that the presence of this lime rock foundation is of vast value to the great natural fertility of the muck soil, since it not only neutralizes the acids which form with the deposit and decomposition of vegetable life, but it is from this lime rock that the Dade County citrus and other fruits obtain the beautiful coloring and inimitable flavor which have made them famous wherever shipped.

Climate

The Everglades are not in the tropics, nor yet in the temperate zone, but on the line between, which science and experience have shown to be better than either zone for the propagation and growing of many of the finest products.

Since there is no point on the mainland of the United States that is absolutely free from frost, it may be presumed that

there will be frosts in the Everglades at long intervals, but frosts heavy enough to injure the most tender vegetation are exceedingly rare. The more hardy vegetables and the feed and forage crops are practically uninjured by such frosts as have occurred.

Surrounded by large bodies of water and with the great, warm Gulf Stream almost touching the coast, the heat and cold of the further north districts of the country are here tempered. The heat of northern summers is not experienced in the Everglades—the highest temperature ever recorded having been 96 degrees at Miami; and when one of the notorious heat waves of the north, with a temperature of 100 to 107 degrees has suffocated all the territory from the Pacific to the Atlantic, an inspection of the weather map will usually show the temperature of Miami, about even with the Middle Everglades, to be in the 80's and not over 90 or 92 degrees, with a cool wind blowing. The prevailing wind in the summer is from the east and southeast, therefore, from the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf Stream.

The rainfall averages in the neighborhood of 60 inches a year, the greater portion of it falling between May and October. Light and heavy showers make up the manner of precipitation; drizzling rains are a rarity, as are also fogs.

Plant Life and Commercial Crops

In this part of Florida, below Lake Okeechobee, are growing an infinite variety of tropical trees and shrubs, and the entire appearance of the country is tropical. This also pertains to the hardwood hammocks of the Everglades, and will with development and cultivation apply to the entire Everglades.

Here, on the rock rim between the Everglades and the Coast, are growing the world's finest grapefruit; here are oranges and other citrus fruits, which

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could hardly be duplicated elsewhere in color, flavor and juice; here is the only place in the continental United States where the mango, the avocado, and many other fruits less known, can be grown commercially. Here, also, is practically the only place in the United States which is shipping vegetables in the dead of winter, when most other parts of the country are snow and ice bound. There are still other vegetables of a tropical nature which in time will become known and in heavy demand in the north, and which in this country can be grown only in South Florida.

The Everglades composes the greater part of South Florida, and what is said of the rock rim, lying between the Everglades and the Coast, will apply in still greater degree to the Everglades itself when it shall have been developed, and it is to this Everglades section that the country will have to look for its winter supplies of fruits and vegetables.

Some portions of the Everglades which have been farmed for some time have shown very clearly the distinctive characteristics of that soil and the extraordinarily large crops it is capable of growing.

Live Stock and Staple Crops

Because crops can be grown every month in the year in the Everglades, the farming tendency is toward the raising of live-stock and poultry, and the necessary feed for it, and the growing of staple crops, such as sugar cane, rice, corn, Irish and sweet potatoes and many others, and later on, tobacco, since the Everglades seems to have shown under experiment its natural adaptability for this crop.

The raising of live stock carries with it the growing of feed and forage crops, hay and pasture.

Such crops, with stock, bring in a continuous income throughout the entire year.

With its reclamation and development the Everglades is destined to become one of the great feed and live-stock sections of this country—we believe we may safely say in the world.

On account of the high value of the land this will, to a certain extent, be done intensively, on comparatively small farms, and this would carry with it the necessity of devoting particular attention to raising only the highest class of stock, since none could well afford to raise any other. Despite the fact that green feed can be grown the year around, silos will nevertheless



Corn Grown in the Everglades

probably be found on all well-conducted farms.

Transportation

As transportation facilities stand at present, the Florida East Coast Railway is the only railway serving the east coast, it having also a branch line reaching the town of Okeechobee, at the north end of the lake of that name. The main line of this road reaches Key West, and thence by the largest ferry in the world carries entire freight trains to Havana, Cuba.

It seems probable that finally the branch

Surveys for railroads have been made from Tampa to Miami, and from Ft. Myers to Miami, via Marco Bay, each with a possible branch line projected to Ft. Lauderdale, and the latter road, from Ft. Myers to Miami, seems to have a fair probability of construction in the near future.

The Atlantic Coast Line is building south from the central part of the state to reach Big Cypress Swamp, west of the Everglades, with the possibility of extension to the Cape Sable country. A branch line has been projected from this



One of the Lateral Drainage Canals

line, now terminating at the north end of the lake, will be carried around the lake, and into the interior of the Everglades.

Anticipating the early development of the Everglades several railroad projects are being worked out. The Palm Beach and Everglades Railroad, from Palm Beach to a terminal on Lake Okeechobee, west of the Miami Canal, is promised for the near future. A commodious hotel has been erected and other improvements made at the site of the proposed terminal by the company back of the project.

survey to the West Coast of Lake Okeechobee, to the town of Moorehaven. Sooner or later we may look for the completion of this line.

Several of the canals are navigable by launches and barges and regular schedules are maintained connecting the East Coast with the West Coast by way of Lake Okeechobee. The rates are very reasonable.

From Miami to Jacksonville the inside channel is navigable for boats up to about 5 foot draft. Between the same points by the ocean route a line of boats is run

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at very reasonable freight rates—some of them very cheap. This line connects with boat lines from Jacksonville to New York and intermediate ports, and also with several railroads out of Jacksonville. Both the boat line and these railroads have recently made a considerable reduction in freight rates, which directly affects the products shipped from south Florida points through Miami.

Directly and radically affecting the transportation facilities and arrangements for the Everglades and South Florida in general, will be the following:

(a) A deep water harbor for Miami. Dredges are now at work and arrangements are complete for a 20 foot channel and adequate municipal docks. Deeper water and greater dockage facilities will undoubtedly come immediately there is a demand for them. Such a harbor will be one of the best development agencies for the Everglades, and will mean very cheap water rates.

(b) The taking over of the Inter-Coastal Canal, commonly known as the "Inside Channel," and its deepening and enlarging will infinitely improve water traffic and rates.

(c) The completion of the Canals from the Lake to the coast, which are now only partially finished; and the building of additional canals between the lake and the coast, and other canals from the coast up to points not far from the lake; the building of many miles of secondary canals by private owners, which will be navigable for launches and barges, will all add several hundred miles to the present water navigation in the Everglades, and will open up for settlement

and cultivation immense tracts of exceptionally fertile land.

General Drainage Matters.

Among the first canals opened by the State were the Hillsborough, the North New River, the South New River—connecting with the Miami Canal—and the Miami Canal, all of which originated in



Delicious Bananas Grown in the Everglades

Lake Okeechobee, and followed the fall of the Everglades to the Atlantic Coast. The State has let contracts for the completion of both the Hillsborough and the North New River Canals, as well as for the digging of the control canal, sometimes known as the St. Lucie Canal, from Lake Okeechobee to St. Lucie Inlet; no doubt succeeding contracts will provide

for the completion of the Miami and South New River Canals, as well as such sub-canals as were started and are not yet complete.

The control canal will perform the duties of controlling the lake level, draining some contiguous territory, serving as a transportation line, and incidentally will be the means of creating several thousand horsepower, which may be utilized for various purposes incidental to the Everglades.

The Palm Beach Canal between the Atlantic and Lake Okeechobee, has been partially completed.

Some years ago canals known as Three Mile and Nine Mile Canals were dug to connect Lake Okeechobee with Lake Hicpochee, and the Caloosahatchee Canal was dug, connecting the latter lake with Lake Flirt. These canals were incidental to across-the-peninsular navigation, and allowed boats entrance from Lake Okeechobee into the Caloosahatchee River on their way to the Gulf.

Several stub canals, tapping the Everglades and bringing that water into the Atlantic were excavated, but not entirely completed; these canals being the Cypress Creek Canal, near Pompano, the Snake Creek Canal, at Fulford, and Snapper Creek Canal, at Larkin. In addition to this a private canal reaches from Florida City to Biscayne Bay.

The aggregate length of the various canals mentioned is approximately 250 miles. Under the tentative plans of the Everglades Engineering Commission many hundreds of miles of other main canals to be excavated by the State are contemplated in the general reclamation scheme.

On one block of reclaimed land about sixty families have settled, and have for some time been conducting farming and

trucking operations, and setting out tropical groves with gratifying results.

There are other portions of the Everglades which are dry the greater part of the year, and some limited areas which are dry practically the entire year, being higher than the ordinary high lake level. On these, people have, to a limited extent, settled and are conducting farming and trucking operations with more or less success. Others have settled along the various canals, and a number at various points east of Lake Okeechobee.

There are upwards of 20,000 individual purchasers of Everglades lands, about 5,000 of which purchases lie near Lake Okeechobee, to the east and southeast of the lake, the remaining 15,000 being congregated principally in an area containing, roughly, about 200,000 acres, reaching from the Miami Canal northward, and including both the South and North New River Canals, in the territory nearest the Atlantic Coast. The greater number of these purchasers seem anxious to settle upon their lands at the very earliest date possible.

The Outlook.

Fifteen or twenty years hence, when people can get a backward perspective of the present conditions, many matters now hazy to them will become clear, and the doubts some now entertain in regard to different features pertaining to the Everglades and its development and possibilities will have then been dissipated. Things appearing to them now impossible will long ere that have become accomplished facts, and the Everglades will then have demonstrated to the world her right to take front rank in matters of fertility of soil, climate and commercial standing.