

CROSSING THE EVERGLADES IN A  
POWER BOAT



## CHAPTER XVI

### CROSSING THE EVERGLADES IN A POWER BOAT

THREE days, me think so," said Tommy Osceola, when asked how quickly he could cross the Glades to Miami in his canoe; but he only shook his head negatively when I inquired how long it would take a white man. The Camera-man and I had decided on the trip, and I asked Tommy if he would go with us, when the trader chipped in:

"What do you want of a guide? Don't you know where the sun rises?"

We fell in at once with the enchanting suggestion of our Florida friend, and invited him to join us in crossing the Everglades, with no other guide than a compass, to which he nodded instant acceptance. We arranged to take the two boys from our cruising-boat, and with launch, skiff, and little Canadian canoe go down to Osceola's camp in the Ten Thousand Islands. There we would borrow an Indian canoe for the trip, leaving the launch and skiff with the Indians until our return. As we were about to start, the sand of our sailor-boy ran out, and, in the language of the hunter-boy, he "skipped his job"; but his place was quickly taken by an older

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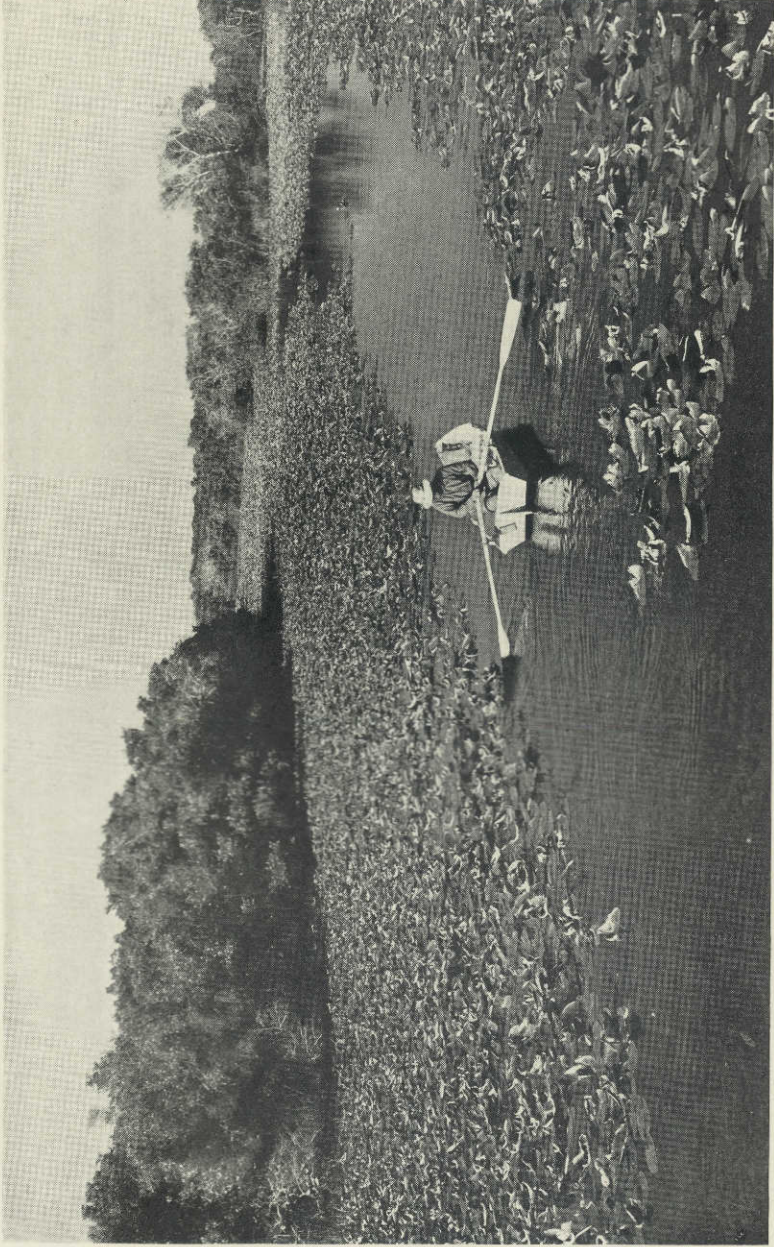
*Florida Enchantments*

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sailor, who had cruised and hunted with us in former years. As our purpose was really to cross the Everglades, we dispensed with such conventional obstacles as tent equipments, prepared foods, medical and surgical outfits, and big armaments, and told our hunter-boy, who bossed the galley, to put up a spoon, cup, fork, and plate for each of us; to take a coffee-pot and frying pan, and pack enough bacon, corn-meal and coffee to feed us for a week. An old single-barreled shotgun, which we took along on the chance that we might get bird-hungry, was found convenient to blow off the heads of venomous snakes, but was not used otherwise. Each of us had a blanket, mosquito-bar, and rubber sheet, and, generally speaking, a change of underclothing.

As getting some real pictures was part of the project, we were liberal with the Camera-man, and he filled what space was left in the canoe with two big cameras, plate holders, and heavy boxes of  $6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$  glass plates. The population of Everglade, consisting of our friend's family, turned out to witness the departure of the flotilla in tow of the power boat, in which the captain held the tiller ropes, while the Camera-man acted as engineer. The skiff, which was next in line, contained the Florida man, the writer, poles, provisions, and our personal bundles, while stretched out at full length on top of the loaded canoe our hunter-boy enjoyed his *otium cum dignitate*.

Our course lay among the Ten Thousand Islands, through Chokoloskee Bay, Turner's River, and Bays Sunday, Huston, and Chevalier. We camped on a



Harney's River. The heads of the rivers are choked with "bonnets," a sort of water lily.



plantation which bore the name of the last, but had been recently abandoned by its late owner, who had gone to a country where the titles to property are clearer than in the unsurveyed Ten Thousand Islands. We respected the padlock on the door of the house and lay on the ground in front of it, where my slumbers were undisturbed until dawn, when a sociable possum sought to share my bar. We here added to our stores by gathering a few avocado pears, a bunch of bananas, some stalks of sugar cane, a few sweet potatoes, and a lot of guavas.

Some plantations in the Ten Thousand Islands have their private graveyards, but all have histories, and as we continued our placid voyage my companion told me of the one we had left, which was known by the name of its founder. He was a harmless individual who once weakly consented to join two of his associates, whose names have been too numerous to mention, in arresting his nearest neighbor, one Wilson, upon a bogus warrant. Arresting Wilson upon a genuine warrant had long been recognized as a form of suicide, and it is believed that nervousness arising from his acquaintance with the man induced the leader of the trio to begin the service of the warrant at long range. The return shot neatly shaved off one side of his mustache, and he fled, followed by his fellow conspirators. Mr. Wilson chased them as far as Cape Sable in his boat and is believed to be still on the lookout for their return. He is said to wax indignant at the suggestion that his course was justified by the bogus character of the warrant, and

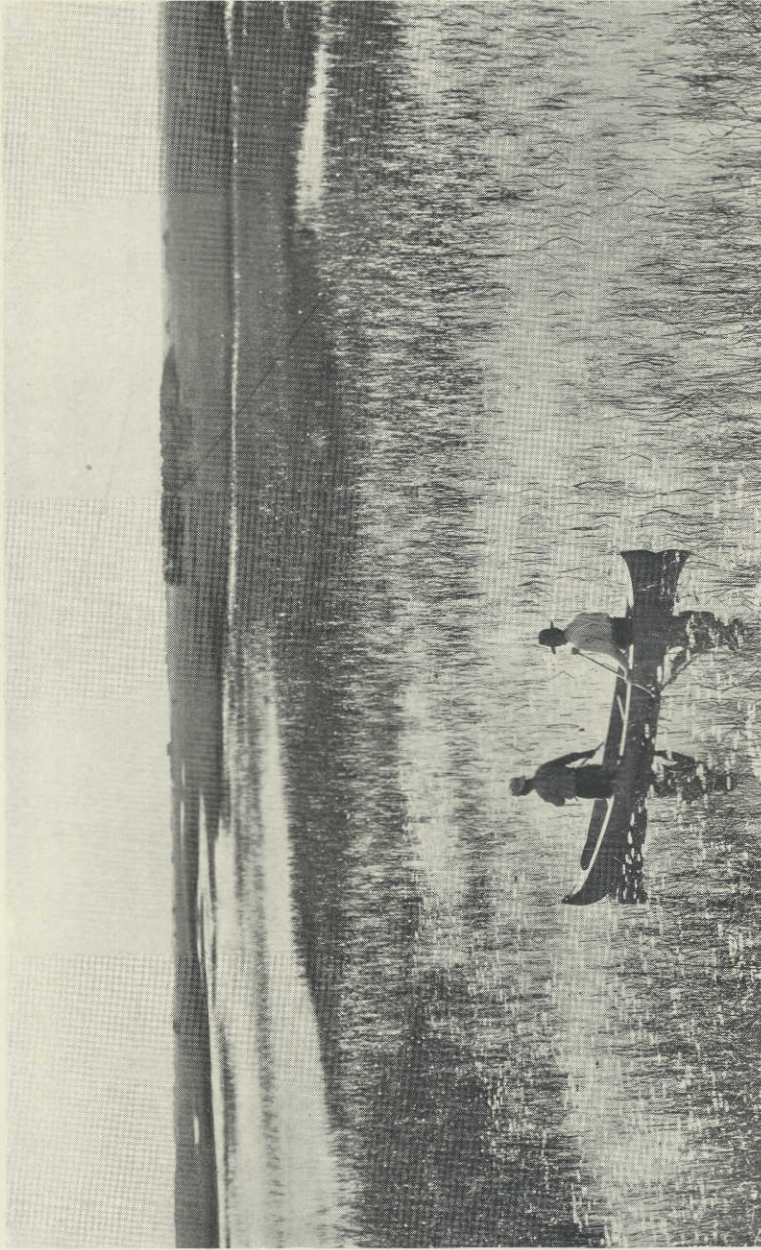
insists that his action was quite uninfluenced by that feature of the case. The ringleader must have experienced a change of heart, since Lieutenant Willoughby, who employed him as a guide despite his reputation as a bad man, writes of him in his "Across the Everglades," that he often sat up an hour beyond his usual time that he might tuck the lieutenant in bed before retiring.

Early in the day we entered a narrow creek completely covered by branches of trees that interlaced overhead, and so crooked that the power boat at the head and the canoe at the foot of our procession were usually traveling in different directions. During two miles of snakelike progress to Alligator Bay, dragging over roots, pulling under branches, smashing an occasional wasps' nest and striking at impertinent moccasins, we saw more varieties of orchids than I have found in a single locality elsewhere, including specimens colorless and full of color, scentless and filled with odor that made the surrounding air heavy with their fragrance; some garbed somberly as a Quakeress, and others costumed to rival a Queen of Sheba.

On one of the keys of Alligator Bay is the principal plume-bird rookery left in Florida. It had been shot a few days before our visit and twelve hundred dollars' worth of plumes taken. The mother birds had been shot, the young birds had starved.

Of important rookeries, this is one of the least accessible, and birds nest here when driven from others. If a trustworthy warden could be found and





A view of the Glades from a tree top—water, grass and trees everywhere.



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*Crossing the Everglades in a Power Boat*

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kept alive here for six months in each year, a long step would be taken toward perpetuating two or three species of the most beautiful of birds, now far along on the road to extinction. Probably two wardens would be better than one for the sake of preserving their species also from extinction in this land, where the Court of Appeals is a shotgun. In continuing our cruise eastward we cut our way through two miles of an even crooked creek, across which many trees had been felled by plume-hunters from north of the rookery, who sought thus to block the road of their rivals from south of the bay, or of a possible wandering game warden.

A few more miles of navigation through creeks, lakes, rivers, and among keys brought us to Possum Key, with the area of a good-sized room, where for many months an escaped convict lived with his family, while officers of the law sought far and wide for him with varying degrees of diligence. At Onion Key—a Lossmans River landmark—we gathered and ate wild grapes and figs while coffee was being made for our luncheon. The afternoon was spent exploring in the Glades the many trails leading from what we thought was Rocky Creek, vainly looking for signs of the Indian camp of which we were in search. When night came we were miles from the nearest camping-ground we knew, and our choice seemed to lie between sleeping in our boats or searching through the blackness of the night for a bit of dry land that might not exist. At this crisis the captain remembered having seen near the river some

banana plants, indicating the presence of land above the water. We waded to the place, and by beating down high grass and weeds made room to spread our blankets and stretch our bars. In carrying the baggage to camp we groped our way fifty yards through a thicket and waded in the mud half leg-deep.

I was glad that the moccasin I stepped on turned out to be a bullfrog, and that the crawling things that got under my bar didn't prove venomous. A family of rats running around and under us disturbed our slumbers during the night, and when one woke me up by prolonged squeaking near my ear I hoped a snake had got him and that I would get the snake in the morning. We held a council of war beneath our bars, definitely abandoned search for the Indian camp, and decided to tote the power boat all the way to Miami.

In the morning, by channels which our manatee hunt had made familiar, we found the head of Rodger's River, and descending to its mouth, sailed three miles down the coast to the mouth of Harney River. Miami now lay sixty-five miles east-northeast of us. Twelve miles of this were made easy by the river and an intermediate bay, for of them we knew every fork, bight, bunch of grass, and island; and as the sun set and a few acres of bonnet stopped the motor, we were within a quarter of a mile of the Glades and half that distance of a beautiful Indian camping-ground surrounded by lime and lemon trees.

The approach to this site was overgrown, and when my Florida friend and I reached it, after wading



Now and then we poled through strands of sawgrass.



Where we camped for the night.



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*Crossing the Everglades in a Power Boat*

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through knee-deep water among weeds that grew far above our heads, we found it occupied by a big rattlesnake which was much alive and very musical. While keeping the reptile at bay with oars, waiting for the shotgun which the Camera-man was bringing us, we estimated his length, in the hope that he would prove worthy of being captured alive for the Zoo in New York. Big as he was, he failed to qualify for that honor, and we blew his head to pieces. His mate could be heard rattling in the near-by thicket, but this was so dense and so filled with the thorny branches of the untrimmed lime-trees that we didn't trouble her. I was sorry afterward, when the darkness of the night brought to my memory grewsome tales of venomous serpents following the trail of the bodies of their mates, dragged with murderous purpose across the beds of innocent victims, and reflected that one of my hips was resting in the hole in the earth which the shot from my gun had made as it slew one of the pair. In the morning we gathered from the ground a bushel of limes, to correct, if necessary, the lime water of the Glades, and as we added them to our stores I thought with disrespect of the widow's cruse, which only maintained its original supply, while under our system each day doubled it.

Here our real journey began. We looked out upon the Everglades, and innocent enough they appeared. Miami was fifty-three miles east-northeast of us as the crow flies. But we were not crows. The only record of crossing the Glades at this point which

I had seen was by Lieutenant Willoughby, and he had treated the subject with much seriousness. But the lieutenant was burdened with official responsibility, a cargo of scientific machinery, a heavy armament, and a weight of ammunition that suggested provision for another Seminole war.

In 1883 the *Times Democrat* sent an expedition through to Okeechobee from Harney River, but I had not seen its report.

In 1892 one of the chief officials of the East Coast Railway, with an engineer and twenty men, conducted a *de luxe* surveying expedition from Fort Myers to Miami. Unfortunately the surveying portion of the work had to be suspended because of unexpected obstacles and privations, even the leaders of the expedition having been compelled, it was stated, to sleep in wet clothing.

We endeavored to feel impressed as we plunged into this mysterious region. But the motor boat towed us gaily along in bright sunlight through channels of clear-flowing water, among beautiful keys, over meadows covered with the big white-petaled, pink-tinged pond lily of my New England memory. Sometimes strands of heavy saw-grass drove us north, or shoaling water forced us to the east, but we kept a running account of our digressions, and compensated for them as we found opportunity. We lunched on a key of cocoa-plums, myrtle, and sweet bay, where we found about a square foot of earth for a campfire. I sat on a log, with my feet in the water, exchanging glances with a





A young Evergladite.



Our camp on an Indian farm.



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*Crossing the Everglades in a Power Boat*

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water-moccasin coiled on a root within six feet of me, as I ate my lunch.

It became more and more difficult to keep the propeller free from grass, and we finally gave up its use almost entirely and worked steadily, pushing with oars and poles. The best of these poles, which had been obtained from an Indian, had a wooden foot formed like a lady's shoe with a French or cowboy heel. The heel held on the coral rock, which is never far from the surface in the Glades, and the foot sunk but little in the soft ground and heavy grass.

That night we found no key with land enough for a campfire, but the boy managed to heat some coffee on a pile of brush, and we slept in our boats. It was not convenient to rig our mosquito bars, and we dispensed with them, as we found the pests so scarce in the Glades as to be hardly worth considering. The captain curled up in the motor boat; the Camera-man slept on oars laid across its gun-wales; our Florida friend and I were comfortable in the bottom of our skiff, where the croaking of frogs had just soothed me to sleep when a tropical thunderstorm burst upon us and half drowned us before we could get up. The hunter-boy had shown woodcraft by stretching his bar among the trees and piling up branches enough to keep him out of the water beneath him, while the canvas top of his mosquito bar measurably protected him from the torrent from above, and if the disturbance awakened him, he gave no evidence of it. When the storm had

gone by, my companion said he wanted to be dry once more, and put on his extra undergarments. Before he was fairly in them the black clouds came back and it rained worse than before.

The next day we were in the water a good deal. The motor boat had to be pushed and hauled. The open water, which we followed when possible, often led so far from our course that we had to drag our boats over water that was shoal and through grass that tugged against us. During this day our work was hard as that of pleasure seekers in the North Woods or campers among the Canadian lakes and rivers. A bit of dry land was secured for a mid-day camp by blowing the head off of a cotton-mouth moccasin which had pre-empted it. We discovered in the afternoon a beautiful camping-ground of Indian antecedents, half an acre in extent, dry, level as a floor, covered with pawpaws and fringed with wild grapes and cocoa plums. Piles of shells of turtle and snail, bones of deer, and remnants of fish told how life might be maintained in the Glades. That afternoon our course was guided by the dead top of a tall mastic tree at the foot of which was an Indian camp with the fire still burning.

We camped beside it among pumpkin vines, and ate roasted taniers and pumpkins which we gathered from the little field, where grew oranges, bananas, corn and sugar cane. The song of birds awakened me in the morning, and I recognized cardinal, king, and mocking birds, and saw one horned owl, several black hawks, and many crows. There was a greater

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*Crossing the Everglades in a Power Boat*

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variety of trees and higher land than we had seen since leaving the west coast. From the top of the mastic tree a fringe of pines could be seen to the east, and I fancied once that I heard the whistle of a locomotive.

Soon after starting we saw the smoke of Miami factories and an occasional Indian in the distance. The water grew shoal as we worked toward the coast, and the iron shoe of our launch continually pounded the upthrusting pillars of coral. We turned back often for little distances, and pushed and pulled the power boat for hours, stumbling along the uneven, rock-based, grass-covered formation. We tried to lunch on a promising bit of ground on a small key, but finally yielded possession to a few million big ants who seemed to possess some squatter interest in the property. In the afternoon we met an Indian, who was spearing turtle and fish with much skill. He told us that his village was "three miles," and although it was off our course we invited ourselves to visit it; and as the water and grass permitted, towed the whole outfit, including the Indian and his canoe, with the motor boat.

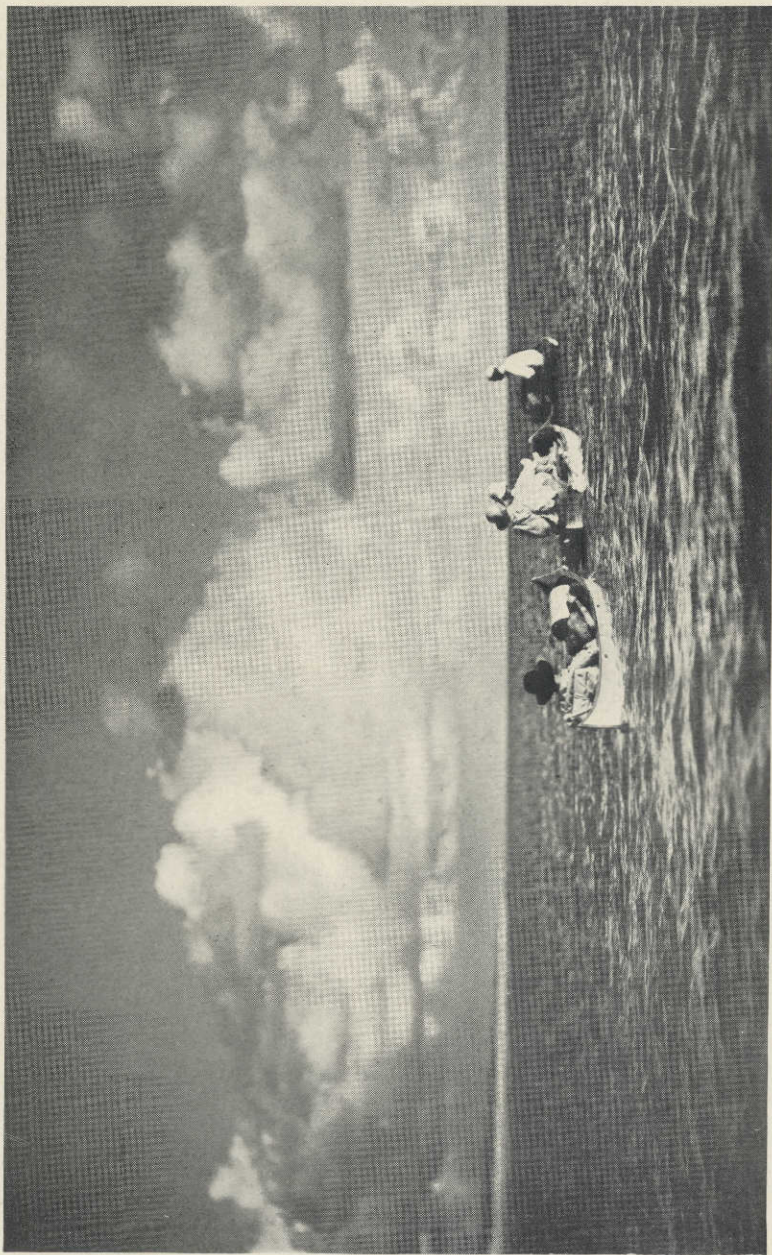
The village was attractive of its kind, consisting of three or four large buildings, neatly thatched, with large tables three feet above the ground, which served as floors. There were clocks (not running) on the walls and sewing-machines on the tables or floors, while accounts hanging on a hook showed frequent dealings with a Miami tradesman. The little colony consists of four or five families and less

than thirty members. The men wear shirtwaists and bare legs, the women beads above, skirts below, and a middle zone which seems to have been forgotten.

At night we camped near the village, and I made my bed in the lower end of an Indian canoe that was twenty-five feet long and lay upon the sloping bank of a little canal. My companion slept just above me, and must have dammed the rain, when the usual deluge came suddenly in the night, with his bar blanket and himself, for when he got up, the rush of water nearly swept me away; but I was getting used to this, and only feared that I might get dry some day and take cold from the exposure.

We cooked breakfast by the Indians' fire, and then, after a short run with the motor boat, poled leisurely for the last few miles, during which the current of the water on which we floated changed from the southwest course it had maintained since we left the west coast, to about the opposite direction. This would suggest that the maximum elevation of the southern Everglades may be measured by the fall in its course of the Miami River, and that the current stories of eighteen feet of elevation above sea level may be looked upon as fairy tales.

It was late when we found the south fork of the Miami River, and dark when we sat down to a square meal at a hotel. The return trip around Cape Sable, although under power, was more trying than the one through the Glades. Shoal water, and sticky mud that was blue and bottomless, bothered us at times,



Rounding Cape Sable on the return trip.





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*Crossing the Everglades in a Power Boat*

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and the closing of a creek by the railway added many miles to our course, mosquitoes and sand-flies afflicted us, and our supply of fresh water ran out, producing in all of us, when we discovered it, a sudden and intense thirst.

Around East, Middle and Northwest Capes we encountered waves so high that their tops gently lapped over the coamings of the power boat, while we in the skiff bailed continually, and only the little canoe kept its contents dry. During an all-night run up the coast, a rain squall flooded us and stopped the motor, while the whole flotilla tossed about in the darkness and rain and drifted seaward for an anxious quarter of an hour, even the imperturbable hunter-boy remarking: "Looks like we've got to swim."

But we had crossed the Everglades in four days with no other guide than a compass, traveling seventy miles to make fifty-three, which seems to us like an air line under the circumstances.

I estimated that from Everglade to Miami across the glades we traveled one hundred and forty-six miles in six and a half days, and from Miami to Everglade around the cape, one hundred and forty-eight miles, in three days and one night.

We saw no game during the trip and the track of but one deer. Two alligators and a good many turtle appeared. Birds were scarce, but there were enough to keep one from being hungry if other food gave out. Fish abounded from coast to coast. In most of the deeper channels tarpon could be seen. Big-mouthed bass, called trout in Florida, were

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*Florida Enchantments*

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plentiful, as were gar, bream, and several other varieties, and a few mullet were seen.

Our experience was that one meets delay in the Everglades, but not danger. The water is pure and sweet and food plentiful enough. Limpkins taste like young turkeys; all members of the heron family likely to be found in the Glades and most other birds are fair food. Snails, which abound, are delicacies when called periwinkles; you will pay a dollar a portion in New York for the frogs that are yours for the catching in the Glades. There are plenty of turtle, which possess all the good qualities, except cost, of the green turtle or the terrapin. A few fruits can be had for dessert—cocoa-plums, custard-apples, and pawpaws—while the leaves of the sweet bay make a fragrant beverage.

Crossing the Everglades of Florida in a boat is not an adventure, it is a picnic.