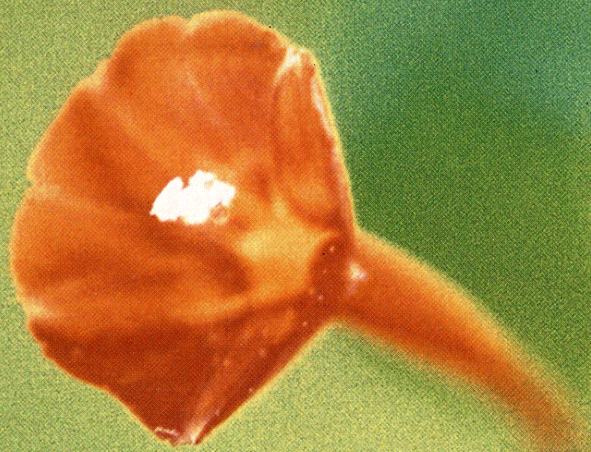


# TROPICAL TRAILS



*Your Nature Guide to South Florida*

Vol. 24 No. 2 & 3



## Tropical Trails

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## On the cover

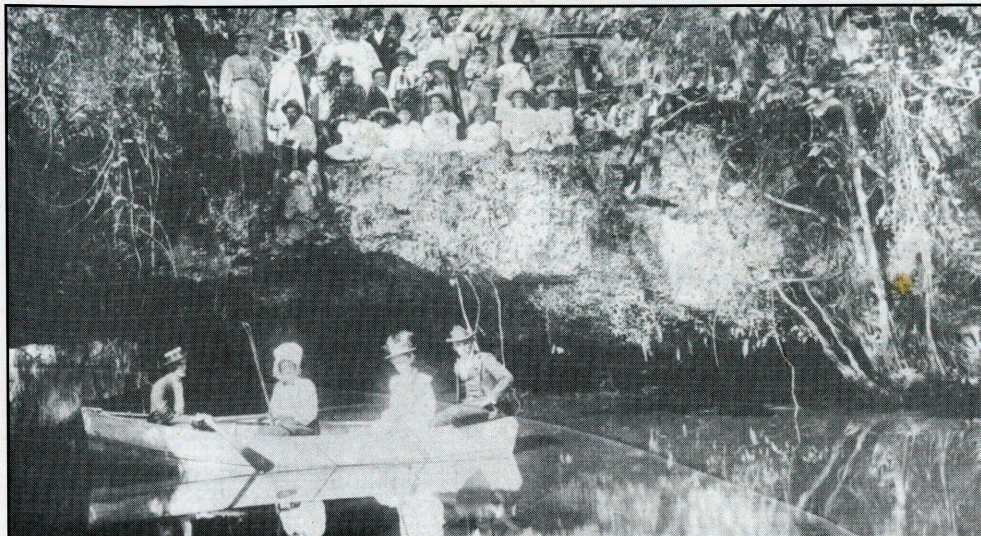
Man-in-the-ground, *Ipomoea microdactyla*, is an endangered species of morning glory found only in Miami-Dade County in Florida. It is most noticeable following fires in its pine rockland habitat, when it can be seen scrambling across the ground or climbing shrubs. See "Meet a Native" on page 29.

*Photograph by Ernest Lynk*

## Correction

In last issue's story "It's turtle time in South Florida!" the weight range should have read 35 - 2,000 lbs. The illustrated turtle shell should have been captioned a leatherback.

# A history of Arch Creek Park



HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTH FLORIDA

**Arch Creek's unique natural bridge was a favorite gathering place and photo spot for many of the area's residents in the early 1900's.**

## By Carol Helene

**500 BC-AD 1800** - A native American group we call the Tequestas probably used this site for over 2000 years. Excavated artifacts suggest the Tequestas had a nomadic lifestyle of hunting and gathering. Numerous marine animal remnants have been excavated suggesting that the Tequestas were proficient users of the creek and ocean.

The most intense occupation was between 500 BC and AD 100. The site may have been used as a seasonal or temporary home from AD 1300-1800 by Tequestas and Seminoles. Records in Seville, Spain report that the few remaining Tequestas fled to Cuba in 1763.

**1855-1858** - During the Third Seminole War, U.S. Troops built the Military Trail between Ft. Lauderdale and Ft. Dallas at the Miami River. The trail passed over the

natural bridge at Arch Creek. The road was designed by Abner Doubleday of baseball fame. Lt. I.C. Ives described the trail's route: "It followed through its whole extend a dry belt of country grown up with pine, palmetto, koontie and crosses three streams: the Boca Raton, Arch Creek—which is spanned by a natural bridge—and Little River." After the war the trail was abandoned and, in many places, obliterated.

**1860's** - A coontie mill was established at Arch Creek. The Arch Creek coontie mill is the only known coontie mill to have used a sluice and the only excavated mill site in South Florida.

Coontie, a relative of the cycad family, produces a stem resembling a sweet potato which is composed of a tough fibrous material with a high proportion of starch.

"Processing coontie involves straining

*continued on the next page*

*continued from the preceding page*

and washing the pulp until a soluble toxin in the pulp is removed. After allowing the pulp to dry, an arrowroot starch with a sweet vanilla-like flavor is produced. Pioneers turned processing coontie into successful businesses until the early 1900's when the slow growth of coontie and the destruction of its pineland habitat finally caught up with the pioneering entrepreneurs. The lack of abundant coontie closed down most mills, including the one at Arch Creek, which probably lasted about a year. Another problem caused by the destruction of the coontie plants, was the devastating effect on the atala butterfly. Coontie is the only larva plant for this species. At one time the butterfly was considered to be extinct.

**1887-** A crocodile named Gladiator lived at Arch Creek during this period. As Dr. John B. Dupuis tells it, Gladiator was "blown by a very severe hurricane when he was a baby into Arch Creek River and was adopted by a mother manatee who protected him. As his name suggests, Gladiator was a vicious and terrific fighter and if a shark or animals invaded his home, he executed them without fear or favor. However, in all the time he resided at Arch Creek, he never fought or annoyed any of the manatee family."

**1892-** The first county road built at taxpayer's expense was completed. The road spanned 60 miles from Lantana to Lemon City, and was built at the cost of \$25 per mile. Several ferries (across Little River, Snake Creek and New River) were built but no ferry was necessary at Arch Creek. The road just used the natural bridge. A stage coach "consisting of a springless wagon drawn by mules with boards to sit on, and a canvas for shade" began operating in 1893. Guy Metcalf, editor of the *Tropical Sun* newspaper, described the stage's stop at Arch Creek: "At noon (of the second day) we reached Arch Creek

where is to be found a natural rock bridge under which runs clear deep waters of the creek, full of the finest fish, which can be seen gliding hither or thither."

**Early 1900's-** A group of people from Elmira, New York established a winter colony at Arch Creek where they grew grapefruit and tomatoes. The Elmirans are credited with establishing the first organized settlement at Arch Creek. The Florida East Coast Railway came through and established the Arch Creek Depot in 1903. A post office opened also in 1903. Classes at Arch Creek began in 1905.

**1916-** Charles Simpson writes of Arch Creek in a letter to a Dr. Small of the New York Botanical Garden, "Arch Creek used to be such a delightful spot and was a fine place for a botanist, the conchologist, the insect man or the geologist. But now most of the hammock has been destroyed to raise vegetables. I saw two men there yesterday who had cut out a lot of it and had the crop which I felt thankful to see was burning up for the want of rain. Two of the meanest looking hounds I ever saw were there and I thought that an acre of the wild hammock was worth the lives of a billion such heathen."

"Lovely weather. Was down to Mr. Charles Deering's place at Cutler the other day to give him some suggestions about some ground he bought and is going to make into a lovely hammock. Long live uncle Charles. With best wishes, your fellow voyager among the rattlesnakes."

**Late 1800's to early 1900's-** Arch Creek was a popular site for picnics for family groups that lived in the communities that now make up north Dade County. Drawn to this site because of the beauty of the hammock and natural bridge, folks would spend their day boating in the creek, fishing or relaxing in the coolness of the shady oaks.

**1920's-** The community of Arch Creek boasted a population of 307 residents. A

refreshment stand whose outer walls were covered with conch shells overhung the creek. Dr. Thelma Peters states, in Biscayne Country: "During prohibition when tearooms were in vogue, this building was known as the Arch Creek Tearoom. The tearoom almost overhung the stream near the arch and was itself the subject for many postcards."

**1950's-** Portions of the Oak Hammock were cleared to make room for the Seabreeze Trailer Park. Trailer owners destroyed much native vegetation and

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*Within hours of signing  
the official document  
one month later, the  
bridge collapsed*

---

introduced some exotics which are still in the park today.

**1957-** The Army Corps of Engineers proposed blowing up the bridge or rerouting the creek for better drainage of the area. Protests from the Audubon Society, the Historical Society of Southern Florida and local residents prevented any tampering with the bridge and the creek. And preserving the area was surely a good thing. The bridge got its fifteen minutes of fame in a Ripley's Believe It Or Not column in 1958.

**1972-** The Chrysler Corporation proposed building a used car lot on the oak hammock surrounding Arch Creek. Led by Alice Cohen, activists Harvey Ruvin, Jessie Freeling, Maureen Harwitz, Laymond Hardy, Rev. Charles Eastman, and Wesley Wilson joined the efforts of the Tropical Audubon Society and the Miami-West India Archeological Society. They launched a heartfelt campaign to save the

hammock. Nevertheless, Chrysler gave the Broward County Archeological Society 60 days to do salvage excavations to determine the property's archeological worth.

**1973-** After intense activism by local citizens and the Northeast Women's Club, the State of Florida voted unanimously to preserve the property and develop it into a state park. Within hours of signing the official document one month later, the bridge collapsed. Sabotage was suspected but subsequent examination could not substantiate the charges. Numerous theories abound about why the bridge collapsed: the most likely explanation is that the years of use finally caught up with the bridge.

**1978 - 1982** In 1978, construction of the museum nature center had begun, and in 1981 the Youth Conservation Corps had established a nature trail and planted more than 500 trees. The park was ready for the public. In 1982 the park was officially dedicated. Members of an organization, Arch Creek Trust, Inc., raised money to build a replica of the natural bridge. Artist Lewis Van Dercar was hired for \$20,000 to do the work. He used buttermilk on the stone surface to give it an aged appearance.

**1992-** After years of negotiation by Elmore Kerkela with property owners, lobbying by Maureen Harwitz and support from Brenda Marshall of the Trust for Public Lands, the one and a half acres north of the park was added through funds provided by the Environmentally Endangered Land Program.

**Today-** A butterfly garden has been built in the north end of the park. It will soon be accessible to persons with disabilities. During the school year, busloads of students come to the park to learn its history, walk the trails, and participate in an archeological dig. There is a free trail walk every Saturday morning at 9:30 am.

*Carol Helene is President of the Arch Creek Trust Inc.*