

## TRAIL BLAZING IN MOTOR CARS WAS ADVENTURE

Crossing of Everglades by Tamiami Trail Blazers in 1923  
Was Feat Equal to That of Lindbergh in the Eyes of Southern Fla.

EIGHTEEN DAYS WERE USED  
IN MAKING HAZARDOUS TRIP

Vivid Portrayal of Trials and Hardships of the Journey  
Given in the Diary of Frank S. Lewis.

As a motorist travels over the Tamiami Trail in the future, he probably will not pause to consider the trials and hardship which were contingent upon the building of this wonderful road, although it is doubtful if the daring and courage of the men in the party of the Tamiami Trail Blazers who crossed from Fort Myers to Miami in April, 1923 will every be forgotten. A few of the facts concerning this undertaking are reproduced here, having been found in the diary of Frank S. Lewis of Everglades. Mr. Lewis kept a diary of the entire trip, but lack of space prevents it being reproduced in its entirety.

The party consisted, at the start of twenty-three men and ten automobiles, and left Fort Myers on Wednesday, April fourth, 1923, at 7:30 A. M. Late that afternoon it reached the end of the grade, just a few miles east of Royal Palm Hammock, and Florida Grower car was sent on ahead to ascertain the condition of the prairie, but bogged down about two hundred yards from the end of the grade and was left there for the night.

### Scouts Plot Route

On the following day scouts were sent out to plot a route, but no progress was made during that day, and seventy-eight miles remained before the party reached Miami. One car was finally abandoned--that belonging to George Dunham of Fort Myers--and nine cars, all Fords except an Elcar and an Overland remained with the party.

On Saturday the scouts who had been sent out could be seen in the distance, and at 10:40 A. M. the party commenced to move forward, but all soon bogged down in the soft ground. At 4:45 P. M. a caterpillar tractor from one of Barron G. Collier's nearby camps came up and pulled the cars through the marshy ground.

### Trail Blazing in Motor Cars (Cont.)

By this time the party had traversed three miles across the prairie, and were, as Mr. Lewis expressed it in his diary, "somewhere in Florida". The Elcar became bogged again, and was left until daylight. Most of the party slept in their cars that night, and at 5:30 Sunday morning the men were all up, and forty-five minutes later were moving eastward again. They all became mired, and worked in water up to their hips to get their cars under way again. Finally, with their Indian guides leading the way, they reached an Indian camp, where instructions had been left by the Indians there as to what was to be done on the next leg of the journey. In the afternoon a train of the Deep Lake Railroad, drawn by an automobile converted into a locomotive, came up and took the members of the party from this point to Port DuPont, thence they went by motor boat to the Rod and Gun Club at Everglades. They were the guest of Mr. Scott, then in charge at Everglades, for the night, but left Everglades Monday morning at seven o'clock. The tractor was taken along with the expedition, and proved it worth many times during the remainder of the journey.

#### Party Reaches Indian Camp

The party had not progressed very far when it came to the camp of one of its Indian guides. Mr. Lewis describes the camp thus: "The pigs, chickens, and dogs ran freely under the beds and in and out the houses, as they were all open on the four sides. In windy weather the family cannot shut the windows, as there are none. There native tools and cooking utensils were scattered about, and I should imagine that at Indian standards the family would be considered well-to-do."

Shortly after getting under way again at 2:30 in the afternoon, the trail blazers ran into a cypress strand, where they proceeded slowly over a blazed trail for a condians and a party of men ahead clearing the way with axes. The party camped for the night at 6:30 in the evening.

By 9:30 Tuesday morning the party had reached an almost impenetrable forest, and it was necessary to stop and build a road ahead to the head of Turner's River. About twenty miles of prairie lay ahead of the men when the party started out again, shortly after noon. During the course of the day the party made 12.6 miles, and the men camped that evening tired and hungry.

## Trail Blazing in Motor Cars (Cont.)

### End of Trail Reached

At 7:45 that morning the end of the blazed trail was reached, and the work of the Tamiami Trail commenced in earnest. Mr. Lewis walked eight miles over the hardest portions of the day's journey to avoid putting too much of a burden on the car in which he was riding, and two of the Indians were sent ahead to scout for a route. They signalled some time later, and the party moved on to join them. They were now passing through virgin country, and were probably about the first white men to get through this section. Finally the party worked through the cypress, and found themselves once more upon the prairie, ninety-nine miles from Fort Myers.

At 11:25 A. M. on Wednesday an aeroplane was sighted overhead and the men who had been out from Fort Myers just a week were glad to see this sign of civilization. The party continued to struggle on but the progress was slow, and by three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, the thirteenth, six of the cars had reached Billy Roberts' camp on Pine Island.

### Party Waits for Supplies

The party waited until 9 A. M. on Saturday for an aeroplane to arrive with gasoline and supplies but when it did not arrive started out again. The aeroplane landed at the camp an hour later, and as little progress had been made one of the cars was unloaded and sent back to pick up the supplies. Only four miles were traversed during the day, which was one of the most trying days since the start of the journey. Only fourteen members of the party remained, the rest having hiked on into Miami. The party remained camped until Thursday, when the trail blazers managed to get underway once more. But the going was hard, and slow progress was made. The cars became stuck frequently, and the tractor was in almost constant use. The water supply was getting low, and it was necessary to dig frequently for water. Many moccasins were seen, and Mr. Lewis saw a diamond back rattler, which he reports was very large, although he did not stop to make an exact measurement of it. The saw grass in many places was above the heads of the men, and civilization seemed a thing of the future.

Ultimately, however, the Freeman camp was reached, and the men received an excellent supper of roast beef,



### Trail Blazing in Motor Cars (Cont.)

ham, sweet potatoes, biscuit, coffee, with cream and sugar, and pumpkin pie "with all the Trimmin's." The men slept in cots that night for the first time since leaving the Rod and Gun Club at Everglades, and it was, according to Mr. Lewis a real treat. Mr. Lewis wrote in his diary at this time: "To Mr. H. Freeman and his gang and to George Smith with his "Cletract" tractor is due the credit of getting us out of the Everglades. But for them we would have had to abandon our cars five miles from the grade and hoofed it on into Miami."

#### Freeman's Camp Described

Mr. Lewis continued with a description of Mr. Freeman's camp, and wrote: "Mr. Freeman's usual crew of twenty-five to thirty men camp consists of about fifteen tents where the men sleep and eat and a small collapsible house for supplies. It has rocks laid in the roof to keep the top from blowing down in a high wind and letting the sides collapse like a house of cards. Out mess table is out in the open, will seat twelve men, and is under a slanting thatch sun and wind shield." He adds, "When it was found a few days ago that the Tamiami Trail blazers were stuck good and proper, all the men but the drivers were called off and sent on into Miami to avoid "toting" supplies so far to such a large party. The only exception was myself, and on unanimous request I remained to look after the food supplies for the few men left."

The party, diminished in numbers but with never-flagging courage, set out again, and struggled on. Finally, on Saturday, April Twenty first, Miami was reached, and the first successful motorcade, known as the Tamiami Trail Blazer's motorcade, had traversed the Everglades, and blazed much of what is now the Tamiami Trail.