

## IMMOKALEE-EVERGLADES HIGHWAY CONNECTS COUNTY SEAT

### WITH CENTRAL FLORIDA

#### New Road Shortens Distance Between Everglades and Jacksonville

With the newspapers throughout the state and the magazines throughout the nation carrying articles lauding the building and opening of the Tamiami Trail across south Florida, a highway almost if not equally as important to Collier county has been relegated to a secondary position in the pages of the press. Reference of course is made to the Immokalee-Everglades highway which connects Immokalee near the northern boundary of Collier county with the seat of government at Everglades through Carnestown.

The construction of this highway presented many problems as difficult to solve as those encountered in the construction of the Tamiami Trail. Beside providing ingress and egress to and from the central portion of the state, this road splits wide open the great agricultural and pine timber regions of Collier county.

According to those in position to know the difficulties encountered in crossing the Big Cypress were as great as those overcome in the sloughs and marshes in the eastern part of the county by the intrepid builders of the famous Tamiami Trail.

The work was taken over on February 1, 1927 by G. C. Wilson at a point three miles south of Immokalee and by C. G. Washbon at a point about six miles south of Deep Lake. With Mr. Wilson's forces based at Immokalee and Mr. Washbon's forces based at Deep Lake construction work began in earnest and continued without interruption until March 10, 1928 on which date the press announced that the dredges had met and that the waters of the Ocaloway-Ocootchee slough flowed unimpeded to the Gulf of Mexico through the magnificent drainage canal constructed by the forces of these two eminent engineers.

Mr. Wilson's division constructed approximately sixteen miles in twelve months and Mr. Washbon's force constructed about thirteen miles. The two construction crews averaging slightly more than two miles per month. This is a record of which the entire Collier organization is proud and for which the employees of both the Immokalee division and the so-called division of the port here entitled to the highest praise.

There is really a triple transportation system from Immokalee to Everglades and the Gulf; the hard surfaced highway

### Immokalee-Everglades Highway (Cont.)

with a canal on one side and the Deep Lake railroad on the other--highway, rail and water. But of the greatest importance to the residents of Collier county at the present time is the highway..this allows immediate access to all parts of the country and an outlet for the entire central section of the state via connection with the Tamiami Trail.

#### Tough Going

The railroad grade, the highway and the canal are work of Alexander, Ramsay and Kerr and these contractors will tell you that their engineers, Wilson and Wasbon and their crews of clearing men, drillers and dynamiters encountered plenty of "tough going" when they penetrated the Big Cypress section between Deep Lake and Immokalee.

The two miles through Big Cypress is considered by highway construction authorities, one of the most difficult pieces of road ever built. Working in water up to their waists the men pushed slowly through this great natural obstacle followed by monster machines which at times in handling the dislodged boulders experienced the greatest hardship. Lips were wrenched from the buckets, buckets were torn from the booms, and the dredges themselves when lifting the massive fragments of stone would slowly sink into the mud and ooze causing disastrous delays and added work for the straining men.

It was absolutely impossible to travel through the muck of Big Cypress with oxen during the rainy season; the animals would sink in the muck and have to be hoisted to solid ground with the aid of the dredge booms. Men attempting to tarry the necessary power to the front would likewise bog down. Something had to be done and done quick. The best engineering minds in the organization were put to work on the problem of transportation and finally Mr. Wilson, the engineer in charge, found that special wheels could be located in St. Louis with flanges large enough to ride rails constructed from cypress logs. These wheels were ordered by telegraph and by the time of arrival a log railroad had been built through the two swampy miles of ooze and with negroes walking the rails and pulling the car the materials necessary were hauled to the scene of activity. This was the first "pull man" through the Everglades country. As every one knows the butts of cypress trees no matter how small are much larger than the trunks and it was necessary to place the trees butt to butt and end to end, making as Mr. Willson so aptly put it, a railroad with rather a "roller coaster effect". However, it was successful and speeded up work which until the advent of the pullmobile" was almost at a standstill.

### Immokalee-Everglades Highway (Cont.)

These are just a few of the many peculiar difficulties encountered by the men on the "highway north."

This road now shortens the distance from Everglades to Jacksonville and points north by 125 miles and brings Sebring and that interesting section 110 miles nearer. The highway just completed joins the new road into LaBelle, the county seat of Hendry county and the motorist can now reach the hitherto unfamiliar show places of central Florida. It forms a vital part of the state wide system of highways and is of secondary importance only to the Tamiami Trail in South Florida.

One of the largest dredges ever used in the state was worked on the Immokalee highway and was obtained at a cost of over \$100,000. This was a Marion floating dredge with bucket capacity of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  yards. A train composed of 20 flat cars was necessary to bring the dredge parts from St. Louis where it was purchased by Alexander, Ramsay and Kerr. A special boom 89 feet in length was constructed to enable the dredge to reach across the highway to erect the railroad fill which ran parallel to it. It took six weeks and an expenditure of over \$10,000 to manufacture and fit this boom.

Tenders to transport fuel to the dredges and several draglines brought the cost of equipment on this job to the \$225,000.00 mark.

The work of this giant Marion is especially interesting and not one of the least items to be mentioned was the fueling of the mammoth digger. Mr. Willson decided that wood would make not only a more efficient fuel but since it could be obtained in the county it would save \$100 per day. To haul this fuel it was necessary to utilize the canal and a small Mississippi river type steamboat, a wood turner, was put on this run. This little steamer carried gasoline, oil and supplies to the crew living on the dredge, as well as wood to feed the huge "dipper."

The width of the canal varies from 36 to 60 feet, with an average depth of 10 feet; in some places a depth of 25 feet was necessary to obtain sufficient material to build both the railroad fill and the highway grade. Twenty-five cubic yards of excavation was necessary for every lineal foot for the entire 41 miles connecting Everglades and Immokalee.

Above Deep Lake in a special basin dug by the dredge itself to one side of the canal, the giant Marion is resting today from its arduous labors.

### Immokalee-Everglades Highway (Cont.)

The new road brings the little town of Immokalee which has been hovering for several years on the outskirts of civilization in direct contact with the outside world and its advantages and opportunities. Immokalee is an interesting settlement, one of Arcadian simplicity and boasting superior soil conditions. Telephone and telegraph systems connect this once isolated community with the metropolis centers and the new highways are bringing motorists by the hundreds to inspect the splendid citrus groves and truck gardens from which each year are shipped many carloads of produce. The Atlantic Coast line railroad serves Immokalee and is rewarded by large shipments of fruit and cattle from the surrounding sections.