

MIAMIANS FIRST IN PROMOTING TAMAMI TRAIL

By Capt. Jack De Lysle

For years the writer has had an intimate knowledge of the Tamiami trail. Nearly 10 years ago, while living in Fort Myers, he had occasion to go down into the Everglades, making the hazardous trip by automobile, horseback and boat, and he is familiar with the hardships encountered by contractors who have built the last span connecting the east and west coast, America's last frontier. He knows too well the difficulties encountered by those who have made this wonderful trail possible, the obstacles they have had to overcome.

On March 15, the writer made the trip from Miami to Tampa, and was amazed to see that practically every one of these obstacles had been overcome by man and machinery.

A short history of the Tamiami trail may prove of interest. It starts in the latter part of 1915, when Capt. J. Jaudon and Judge William F. Hill, two of Florida's greatest boosters, residing at Miami, proposed that Lee county and Dade county jointly undertake the construction of a cross-state road that would join the east and west coasts. These two men visualized the possibility of the opening of this section of the state that held vast, untold commercial and other possibilities. They realized that the building of such a road through the Everglades would result in an influx of permanent rural and urban population that would develop this rich section.

Perhaps at that time they did visualize what a great engineering problem was involved, a problem that would require the brains of the best engineers and contractors and equipment that could possibly be secured. They perhaps did not realize the problems as to drainage, irrigation and the hundreds of seemingly insurmountable obstacles that would have to be overcome, or the millions of pounds of dynamite and the millions of dollars that would make this road possible.

Securing the backing and publicity of a number of newspapers and backed by the tireless energy and influence of Capt. Jaudon, a survey was started and eventually a tract of land was purchased by the Chevelier Corporation, of which Captain Jaudon was made president.

Eventually the first bond issue was floated in Dade county, when the county officials issued \$275,000. This was in July 1, 1916, and was followed by other appropriations totaling well over \$200,000. In 1924 a further bond issue of \$125,000 was floated, which was later turned over to the state when it took over and agreed to complete the

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the road, after Lee county had floated a bond issue of \$325,000 for the western end.

Work on the east coast started first and a road was ultimately constructed from Miami west to the Monroe county line, a little over 22 miles, a rough, narrow road, impracticable for motor traffic.

In 1918 the Tamiami Trail association was organized at Fort Myers, with the multi-millionaire, Barron G. Collier, as its president, Ora E. Chapin, executive vice president, and the late Charles H. Brown, then mayor of Tampa, as treasurer. The writer is informed that the name Tamiami trail, which is a combination of the words Tampa and Miami, was first suggested by L. P. Dickie of the Tampa Board of Trade. Newspapers of both coasts gave the proposition instant publicity, which aided materially in influencing public opinion and making possible through the legislature the help of the state road department.

Previous to 1923 we have no record of anyone ever crossing the Everglades, with the exception of a few Seminole Indians. On April 4, 1923 the Tamiami trail blazers of the Tamiami Trail association, made a trip lasting 23 days, building temporary roads. Of the 10 cars that started, seven reached Miami.

Actual construction work on the trail did not begin until 1925, the J. B. McCreary Engineering Co. of Atlanta, Ga., being given the first contract in Dade county. The Morgan-Hill Paving Co. then built 14 miles beginning at a point eight miles west of Miami, the border of the Everglades, but due to wartime conditions the Morgan-Hill Paving Co. did not complete this contract, which they had sublet from the J. B. McCreary Engineering Co. the McCreary Co. started the work on the 14-mile section, having literally to dynamite their way through the limestone formation. Thousands of pounds of dynamite was used in the first part of this work.

The first 22 miles of road from Miami on the trail was done by means of excavating dredges which followed over the canals formed by the removal of the limestone. From then hard rock was encountered, and we understand that here the J. B. McCreary Engineering Co. even used TNT one of the most powerful explosives known, obtaining it from the government and making their own cartridges. The J. B. McCreary Engineering Co. did not finish this work until 1923 and nothing more was done on the trail by Dade county, excepting a little work on the first eight and one-half miles, which was completed by the county and which

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was turned over to the state road department in 1926.

In 1926, 10 miles was rebuilt by J. C. Winterburn Construction Co. of Jacksonville, this being the first contract the state road department made after taking charge of the trail. The state road department then awarded a contract to R. C. Huffman Construction Co. of Miami, letting a 30-foot job of 12 miles which was completed by this company to the first strip.

The writer recently left Miami at 9 a. m. and set his speedometer from the entrance at Coral Gables. His speedometer starting at naught, he passed this magnificent development and proceeded on S. W. Eighth st. towards the Trail.

Ten miles from Coral Gables we had a short detour of about 50 feet where Nuttie & Bierce, contractors, were completing a 30-foot bridge.

When our speedometer read 15 miles we came to the temporary gates, where we were stopped by a watchman who asked for our pass from the R. C. Huffman Construction Co., whose work begins at that point. The road is barred to all except those who have permission from Mr. Huffman or the engineer. For the first few miles the road is a boulevard, complete except for the oiling.

When the speedometer read 20 miles we were passing through Alida Belle, a small town consisting of one house, one shed, four boats, one white family, three Seminole Indians and 72 dogs. Half mile further we came across a huge pile of broken machinery, drills, buckets, etc., showing that the contractors had had their troubles when these canals and roads were built. This road is as smooth as a billiard table and the half of the road that was oiled was as level and as hard as the top of a marble table, and was wide enough for three or four cars to pass abreast.

At 26 miles we came to a huge dredge, drill barge, and a couple of lighters of R. C. Huffman Construction Co. The dredge had an upper deck with a regular bungalow at the top in which lived the workmen and their families.

At 29 miles we left the oiled road and at 30 miles, a little further, we met another large crew of the R. C. Huffman Construction Co., where a huge "northwest shovel" was loading the trucks with gravel and small rock taken from the banks of the canal and from the canal itself.

At 32 miles we struck our first piece of rough road, about two miles that they are now grading and compacting. It

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is the busiest place I have seen in a long time; with rollers scarifiers, graders, etc., finishing this road.

At 35 miles we passed a crew of surveyors and engineers who were checking up on the work, one of the engineers assuring me that this part of the Trail would be done long before the opening on April 25. As we continued we saw a number of Seminole Indian boys with some home-made canoes, who were probably after the wild ducks that seemed as tame as kittens and refused to fly even when the boys got within three or four feet of them. On the left bank of the canal we saw row after row of fine cabbage and other garden truck, and at 38 miles we came to the fork in the road, the right-hand road, or Tamiami trail proper, continuing to the Collier county line, while the left road continued to Pine Crest and is being built by the county to connect up with the Trail approximately 25 miles further on.

The road from now on gives one an idea of what the Everglades really is. Picture for yourself a hard-packed natural rock road with a swamp on each side, with tracts of flowers and riotous, colorful shrubbery against a background of hanging moss and with thousands of air-plants in the stubby pine, reddish orange flowers glowing like bells of fire as the hot sun reflects their vivid color.

Within the shade of the Everglades the bobcat spits atop the tall pine and cabbage palm; among the cypress swamps and mangroves may be seen the eagle, the buzzard and the hawk, and in the lagoons are every variety of birds, were you to leave the trail and penetrate into the denseness of the jungle.

Jungle, we say; but all of the Everglades is not jungle. There are thousands upon thousands of acres of high land, Land that needs little or no draining; thousands of acres of land that a few canals can drain and make into a rich producing area the like of which cannot be conceived. For a stretch the trail continues through this jungle, boiling sun shaded by huge trees and vegetation on each side. Then for several miles we pass through hundreds of acres of well drained, rich land upon which there is not a sign of tree or shrubbery.

At 42 miles we reached the Collier county arch, our actual driving time from Coral Gables to the arch being one hour and 17 minutes. This road is all complete except the oiling, and we struck a number of grader and roller crews from the state road camp which was in front of us. The

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state road department is going over this road now, getting it ready for oiling, which should take only a few weeks.

Twelve miles farther on when our speedometer reads 54 miles, we pass a Seminole Indian hunter. The upper half of his body is garbed in the colorful native dress, while a pair of modern laced boots encase his feet and topping off this non-descript garb is a huge cowboy sombrero, his long straggly coarse hair protruding at least six inches below his hat.

At 59 miles we meet the junction of the road from Pine Crest to the Tamiami Trail. We are now approximately 22 miles from Everglades where we strike the second watchman who inspects our passes and allows us to continue and slowly pass the roller and grader camp, which is unique, being a series of houses on wheels with several rooms in each house, nicely appointed with cooking wagon, etc., the entire camp being shifted from point to point by huge trucks. We pass here a broken down car driven by a dirty Seminole Indian boy with several bucks in the tonneau, garbed in their native costumes, plus huge sombreros. A historian wrote not long ago that there were 90 Seminole Indians in the Everglades. We would advise him to consult his multiplication table, for we have passed more than that number already.

At 66 miles we come to a small bridge and on the side of a canal on top of an empty Hercules powder box is a huge water moccasin, which lazily slid into the water as the writer attempted to approach near enough to take a snapshot.

Half a mile farther we came to a short detour around a bridge which is nearing completion. On the telephone poles in this section are placards stating that this is the state breeding grounds and hunters are not permitted. We pass two blackbirds quarreling over a dead fish, and a small alligator slid off a log as we slowed up to view them.

At 68 miles we came to another bridge. The superintendent of construction told us that this was the last bridge that was not completed, there being a total of three uncompleted bridges which he estimated would be finished by April 15. The road from there on is not so good, and from what we could learn the joint crews of H. C. Huffman Construction Co. and Alexander, Ramsey and Kerr, augmented by a considerable force of the state road department, were rushing this work, a stretch of only a few miles that they say will be done in 30 days. From here it is approximately eight miles to Carnestown and three miles further on to Everglades City. The road at this point was blocked, with the

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exception of just room enough for a car to pass, by a 20-foot pile of rock and gravel. Here we met W. P. Hix, superintendent for H. E. Wolfe Construction Co. The writer had his doubts that the Tamiami Trail could open on April 25 when he saw this short stretch piled high with rock and gravel. Mr. Hix assured him that with these joint crews working, within two weeks the road would be like a boulevard. At the canal at the side of the road drill barges were drilling holes for the dynamite. One of the most interesting sights the writer has ever seen were the huge boulders strung up on the side and the huge shovels carrying them across the road and dumping them in the piles. From 50 to 150 holes were drilled and made ready for the dynamite and late in the evening the charges were fired and the shovels and draglines were ready for the next days work.

From this point nearly to Carnestown it is a scene of great activity with the work well in hand in anticipation of the opening of the trail. It is a monumental achievement, a mute testimony to the intelligence and capability of the contractors and engineers.

Three miles from Carnestown we stopped at the camp of E. H. McClendon, who has just completed project 669W from Carnestown to Royal Palm hammock, about 16 miles, where we had some bacon and homemade biscuits. Our speedometer said 72 miles as we left this point. We continued about a half-mile to the commissary of H. E. Wolfe Construction Co., where we bought cold drinks and cigars. We had traveled 72 miles in three hours and in another month can make this same 72 miles in less than two hours. We had hardly left the commissary camp when we encountered a terrific shower. To our surprise the road was not slippery, natural rock making a practically non-skid road. On the right, as we neared Carnestown, was a huge dredge apparently cutting a new drainage canal. Our speedometer ticked off 77 as we reached Carnestown. The trail continues here to Fort Myers, a sharp turn to the left three miles to Everglades City.

Everglades City is not on the trail, but is one of the most interesting little cities the writer has ever visited. It is owned by Barron G. Collier and his associates, who own practically all of Collier county, with the holdings of more than 1,300,000 acres. It is a strictly modern little city where Mr. Collier has built schools, banks, hospitals, churches and splendid business houses. Into this section Collier, the builder, has poured unlimited resources of men, money and material. Through the wilderness before which hearts less stout and unflinching would have quailed, Collier has built highways, railroads, and

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canals. It is his intention as well as his dream to open up Collier county and make of it the happy home of thousands of satisfied and successful farmers.

Here on the banks of the beautiful Barron river is the Garden of Eden. A river lined with gigantic coconut palms; a river teeming with every variety of edible fish, as well as the gamesters of the deep, for in the river there is an abundance of tarpon, kingfish, etc. Florida alligators, left by man to their own devices, are harmless and enliven the scenery as they slide into the water of the lagoons, canals, etc., in the Everglades and show for the fraction of a moment their big heads and stare back at you until you advance towards them.

Here, if you please, is the only street car line on the gulf coast south of Tampa, a trolley running from Everglades City up to the machine shops, etc. Street cars run between Everglades City and Fort DuPont and at Fort DuPont connects with the Deep Lake railroad to Deep Lake.

Returning from Everglades City we again take the trail, crossing a large bridge. A half mile off the trail we note a new railroad that is being built parallel with the canal from Deep Lake to Carnestown. Several huge canals are crossed as we continue. On each side is a deep canal parallel with the road. Huge mullet and trout were jumping as the rain ceased to a slow drizzle. Here and there a large alligator with only his head showing eyed us as we drove slowly by. The writer can remember this same stretch of road some two years ago when it was, without a question of doubt, the most terrible sandy road he has ever driven over. Convict labor built practically all this road and the writer remembers passing the convicts time and time again on his previous trips to the Everglades. Our speedometer reads 85 miles as we pass the old convict camp, which is now housing a few workmen and their families. This is a most excellent road, and has been completed for some time, is slag treated and if there is a finer boulevard in the United States the writer wants to know where it is.

We continued 18 miles farther to Belle Meade, our speedometer reading 103 miles at that place. We came to the construction camp of H. E. Wolfe Construction Co., which is 11 miles from Naples. The Atlantic Coast Line railroad crosses here from Marco to Naples. At 111 miles from Coral Gables we leave the Tamiami trail and take the old road for perhaps a quarter of a mile and thence to the bridge. A very large bridge is being built at this point and this stretch of the old road will be put in perfect shape for

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the opening of the trail. The bridge, in the writer's opinion, will be several months in the building. From there on we continue to the Seaboard Air Line station at Naples, which is 112 miles from Coral Gables. The road from here on is very rough, but we were assured that the crew would have this road in perfect shape well before April 25.

The road leads from Naples to Bonita Springs through Lee county, one of the richest and most fertile areas possible to imagine, with beautiful truck farms and huge orange groves on each side of the road. The air was heavy with the odor of orange blossoms. From the Lee county line into Fort Myers the road is excellently paved by the Morgan-Hill Paving Co. and we made fine time, our speedometer reading 147 miles as we reached Fort Myers, the home of Thomas A. Edison, Henry Ford, and many other celebrities.

Continuing from Fort Myers over the Caloosahatchee river we find the state road department is building a magnificent \$1,000,000 bridge. We take a wonderful paved road into Punta Gorda, where our speedometer registers 175½ miles. From thence we proceeded to Venice by the Myakka river. The short cut of the Tamiami trail, which has just been finished by E. F. Powers Construction Co., comes in about a half mile from the Myakka river bridge. Travelers do not need to go through Englewood, but may take the short cut to the right, which is the new Tamiami trail, coming in at Venice, where your speedometer should read 214½ miles. Two miles farther on, or at 216½ miles, you reach Venice-Nokomis over a beautiful highway. We go 19½ miles farther and at 236 you are in Sarasota, where John Ringling, the famous circus man, has his winter quarters. Your speedometer should read 249 miles as you come to Bradenton, where you cross the Manatee river over the famous \$1,500,000 bridge to Palmetto, where you will register a total of 251 miles. Two miles farther, or 253 miles from Coral Gables, you come to Parrish, a small town in the heart of the famous trucking valley near Manatee farms, noted from the thousands of acres of tomatoes, cabbage and other garden truck.

You are now headed for Tampa, and 31 miles from Parrish your speedometer should read 294 miles as you come in at Six Mile creek, and an even 300 miles when you come to the post office in Tampa.

It is a wonderful trip, one of the most interesting trips that you could possibly make. It is a short cut from Tampa to Miami. In a few months time a trip can be made from

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Miami in seven hours, against from 12 to 16 hours at the present time.

It is a beautiful drive, taking you through the vast wilderness of America's last frontier. It is a trip that must be taken once at least by every person with a motor in the United States. This trip should be taken in the next few months, in order that the traveler may see the virgin land that will soon be transformed into a veritable farmer's paradise. It is a wilderness, a gigantic, mysterious weird and awesome jungle. It is predicted that well over 10,000 cars will be in the motorcade on April 25, and while there is still months and months of work to be done on the Tamiami trail, there will be nothing to hinder the tourist from making a speedy and interesting rrip from Tampa to Miami after the opening of the trail on April 25.