

FOOTING IT ACROSS THE EVERGLADES

(By Capt. G. W. Storter)

It was in the summer of 1921 that Captain J. F. Jaudon a well known Miamian suggested to the writer a trip on foot across the unknown route. (now the Tamiami Trail) across the Everglades to Miami. Few white men had ever attempted it and some of them got lost and searching parties had to be sent out to find them.

But we did not anticipate anything like this so we engaged a Seminole by the name of Abraham Lincoln, not as a guide but as a packman.

We expected to make this trip in three days and outfitted ourselves with the following articles, twenty-seven lbs. of food which consisted of biscuits, bacon, coffee, some canned milk, and sugar, a mosquito bar each and a rubber rain poncho weighing two and one half pounds. We traveled as the real Florida Cracker called it "light." In our equipment we should have carried a extra pair of shoes as we found out on our second day across the saw grass swamp.

On leaving Everglades City we got a lurch to carry us up to Flag Landing on Turner's river where we tied up about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Then we began our long journey. We traveled until sundown and made our first camp on the Rockwell Prairie.

After arising before day to get an early start the next morning and taking a sunrise course, (as we carried no compass) it was necessary to watch your course closely during the middle of the day. But after three o'clock all that we had to do was to keep the sun on our backs and go straight ahead.

We only accomplished about twenty-five miles the first day, as we had entered that area of scrub cypress that lies miles next to the Everglades and camping grounds were scarce. You will observe this as you ride through it in your limousine on what is known now as the Tamiami Trail. So as the sun began to get low in the West we decided to hunt a camping place, and after shooting off several moccasins and alligators from a little knoll in a dense swamp, we took possession and went to work cutting palmetto cabbage fans to build up our beds out of the water and, after eating our supper we retired for the night.

We had a splendid night's rest and arose about four o'clock in the morning. After partaking of a very frugal and unsatisfactory breakfast we resumed our long and tiresome

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journey. I forgot to mention that our Indian packman had no shoes and he had begun to complain that his feet hurt him ojus, (plenty) of course we could only sympathize with him. As our own feet had begun to warn us that we had a similar experience before us.

As we approached nearer the Everglades the timber line began to dwarf and we could look off on the great expanse of grass and water dotted here and there with hammock islands. Some of which were occupied by the Seminole Indians. We soon found foot prints leading to one of the hammocks which we followed and finally we came to a fine field of sugar cane, pumpkins, bananas, several Indian squaws and papooses, also some pigs and chickens which offered us the opportunity to replenish our already scant supply of "grub." We purchased some venison and eggs of unknown vintage which our Indian partook and enjoyed of very freely. The Indian was getting weaker each day as he did not thrive well on the white man's condensed food. The quantity is the main thing with him, it does not matter much as to what kind of food it is but the main thing is that he has to have his stomach filled.

After leaving the Indian Village, we laid out a course that we thought would take us to a dredge that was building the grade on the Miami end of the Trail.

Some 20 miles west of Miami, a survey had been made across the Glades, and we hoped to find some of the stakes to guide us, but the prairie fires had destroyed all such markings, so we wandered on eastward for two days more. Not finding anything in the way of a habitation, we held a council and decided, after checking up, that we were too far south; so on the morning of the third day we traveled north until noon, and found what we were looking for--the stakes that would lead us to the dredge. We reached this dredge about four O'clock that afternoon, but found no one there but the caretaker, as the dredge was shut down on account of the lack of funds to carry on the work. The man in charge expressed his regrets that he did not have sufficient food to divide with us, but directed us to an Indian, whom we employed to take us six miles down the canal to a place where a lone trapper lived.

My Miami friend had known this trapper in former days, and we were received very hospitably. He set out a Poland water bottle, and said: "Gents, there is a little shine in that bottle, and I want you to help yourselves, as I know you need it." He had just returned from Miami, and brought with him an abundance of nice fresh groceries.

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From this supply he cooked us a splendid supper.

After finishing supper, he cordially invited us to spend the night with him, and said that the next morning he would take us 12 miles further in his motor boat. We decided to accept his hospitality, and the next morning he was up before daylight preparing breakfast. As I was also an early riser, I turned out about the same time he did. We engaged in conversation, and I noticed that sometime during the night he had refilled the bottle of shine, and invited me to help myself. I asked him what he was doing in the Everglades in the summer time, and was informed that he was farming.

I noticed this gentleman had a brand new hoe and rake up in the top of his camp, with the price tag still on them; and said to him, "These Indians make very good shine." He couldn't stand this any longer, and stated very emphatically: "Hell, no; no Indian didn't make that shine." By past experience, I knew then that I was being entertained by a moonshiner; but being his guest, I did not think it would be courteous to inquire any further.

After a sumptuous breakfast of bacon, grits, bread, syrup and coffee, he took us into his motor boat and carried us down stream as far as a dam in the canal, where we paid him and bade him good-bye. He told us we would not have to wait very long, as many people came out on the canal to fish, and that we could send a message in to Miami to come out and take us in. We had been waiting only a few minutes when a Ford roadster drove up, having a truck body behind covered over with canvas, and some fishing poles tied on the side. We asked the driver if he would take a message in for us, to which he agreed, but after looking us over carefully, he said: "Men, I might carry you in, if you can hang on back there." We gladly accepted his invitation, and got up on his Ford.

It was not very comfortable riding sitting on stone jugs and demijohns, but it beat walking and waiting. He took us to the first telephone, and said: "Gentlemen, this is as far as I can go, on account of these fishing poles on my car, but you can phone for a taxi that will come and get you."

We reached Miami after about four and a half days of travel. The writer had sprained his ankle from falling in a crevice in the rock, and it had swollen to the size of a picnic ham. Poor Abraham Lincoln (not related to our martyred president), had almost lost the soles of his feet on sharp rocks and roots; and after resting a day or two, he came to me and said, "We want to go back to Big Cypress.

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Miami too big." So I gave him a letter to my folks at Everglades, thinking he would get back there in two or three days; but when I next saw him about three weeks later, and asked him what he did with the letter, his explanation was: "Got drunk ojus on way back; lose 'em."

Sunday, the first day of April, 1928, I left Everglades at 7:20 in the morning, and traveled over practically the same route we followed in 1921, now the course of the Tamiami Trail. We saw many interesting things--indians, birds, turtles, alligators, wild turkeys, and snakes of different kinds, and reached the city of Miami Beach in two hours and forty-five minutes. There I saw as many as two thousand bathing beauties; drove over the many wonderful roads and beaches around Miami; and was back home in Everglades by 6:30 the same evening.

"Surely the world do Move."