

Chapter 25: Special Events

Anniversaries

Anniversaries of the park's 1947 establishment and dedication emerged over time as important park events. The 10th anniversary of the park's establishment was celebrated quietly by park staff and a few invited guests. Superintendent Beard decided against having any public celebrations in 1957 because many of the park's Mission 66 construction projects were not complete. On June 17, 1957, Everglades National Park Commission member August Burghard gave a talk before the assembled park staff, and Superintendent Beard spoke about the park's future. In April 1958, an informal reunion of the Everglades National Park Commission took place at Flamingo. More than half of the members of the 1940s version of the commission attended, including John Pennekamp, Mrs. Mae Mann Jennings, Karl Bickel, and August Burghard. Ray Vinten, who had been instrumental in working out the 1940s deal with the state, and Albert Manucy came down from the Castillo de San Marcos. Other notable participants were Barron Collier Jr., Charles Brookfield of Tropical Audubon, and Will Preston of Florida Power & Light. Dan Beard had already been selected as the new superintendent at Olympic National Park, so it was an occasion for commission members and friends to say good-bye to the Beards.¹¹¹⁰

Celebration of the anniversary of the park's dedication became an annual event with the 20th anniversary in December 1967. Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall was expected to be the keynote speaker but was unable to attend. Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Stanley Cain spoke in his stead. Cain stressed that of all the nation's national parks, Everglades was the only one that faced "an uncertain future." The announcement of the Everglades Park Company's plans for a \$2 million expansion of its operations at Flamingo dominated the proceedings. According to Joe Browder, then a Miami television reporter, so many concession company executives were on stage with Cain and NPS Director Hartzog that Superintendent Hamilton had to sit in the audience. Two flamingos from the flock maintained at Hialeah Race Course were released at this event. This was an odd choice, considering that flamingos had not been seen in the park for many decades. According to the *Miami Herald*, the

1110 "Tenth Anniversary of the Establishment of Everglades National Park Observed Today," NPS press release, June 17, 1957, RDR1 Elbert Cox to Dir., Oct. 25, 1957, Supt. CASA to RDR1, May 2, 1958, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-A-661, box 22; Reunion Attendance List, Pennekamp papers, box 1.

birds seemed “perplexed” as they stumbled out of their cages and scurried into the bush.¹¹¹¹

The park observed most anniversary years by offering free admission and scheduling some special visitor programs, generally on the weekend that fell closest to December 6. In 1972, the park celebrated “25 Years of Everglades and 100 Years of National Parks,” it being the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. The park admission fee was waived for Saturday and Sunday, December 9 and 10, and 87,000 visitors showed up. Park patrol and fire equipment was on display at the main visitor center, where the park ladies club served free coffee and donuts. (See chapter 24 for more on the ladies club.) One visitor noted the poignancy of remembering President’s Truman’s 1947 dedication speech while the former president lay critically ill in a Kansas City Hospital; Truman passed away on December 26, 1972.¹¹¹²

The park’s 40th anniversary coincided with the reopening of operations at Shark Valley, and the major events took place there. Shark Valley had been closed for 18 months while the Shark Valley Loop Road was reconstructed and raised and new facilities were erected, a \$2.7 million project. Senator Bob Graham was the keynote speaker and urged the audience to stay vigilant in protecting the park. NPS Director William Penn Mott Jr. was on hand and gave the park a pen that President Franklin Roosevelt had used to sign an executive order setting aside federal land for the park. The pen is now in the South Florida Collections Management Center. The park cooperating association, the Florida National Parks and Monuments Association, hosted the festivities and partly underwrote their cost.¹¹¹³ In August 1991, the park marked the 75th anniversary of the creation of the National Park Service by waiving the entrance fee for a day.¹¹¹⁴

50th Anniversary

The celebration of the park’s 50th anniversary year kicked off with the dedication of the new Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center in December 1996 (see chapter 6) and culminated in several days of festivities, December 4 through December 7, 1997. Many

1111 “‘Uncertain’ Everglades Future Alarms U.S. Interior Aide,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 7, 1967, “Remarks of Dr. Stanley A. Cain,” DOI press release, Dec. 7, 1967, HFC; Browder interview. Flamingos had not visited the park for decades, so it was unclear why two were released.

1112 “Open House Planned at Everglades Park,” *Key West Citizen*, Dec. 8, 1972; “Timeless Glades Celebrates Birthday,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 10, 1972; SAR, 1972.

1113 “Shark Valley Reopens; Nature Lovers Rededicate National Park,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 7, 1987; Annual Report 1987/1988, Florida National Parks and Monuments Association, FNPMA records.

1114 “Everglades National Park celebrates 75th anniversary of National Park Service,” NPS media release, Aug. 15, 1991, EVER 58222.

local groups held exhibitions, talks, and other events throughout 1997, all keyed to the golden anniversary. Florida International University and the Historical Museum of Miami were among the institutions that hosted photo exhibits and lecture series. Cesar Becerra, head of a Miami historical consulting firm, Echoes of South Florida, produced a special newsletter, *Everglade Magazine*. The fifty weekly issues of the newsletter, edited by Maud Dillingham, contained reprinted pieces and newly commissioned articles on the history of the Everglades and the national park. The state declared November 1997 “Everglades Awareness Month,” and Florida fourth graders focused on the region in science classes. The park sponsored an essay contest for Collier County students in the 7th through 12th grades, asking for 500 words on “Why Everglades National Park is important to my future.” The National Audubon Society partnered with the park to sponsor a photography contest for youngsters less than 18 years of age.¹¹¹⁵ The commemorative year culminated in the first week of December 1997 with a number of public events in the park and nearby communities and a reunion of past and current park employees (figure 25-1, invitation to 50th anniversary).

The public events began with a roundtable discussion Friday morning featuring six former superintendents at the Keys Gate Golf and Tennis Club in Homestead. In order of their service they were Joe Brown, Jack E. Stark, John M. Good, John M. Morehead, Michael V. Finley, and Robert S. Chandler. Incumbent superintendent Richard Ring moderated. Most of the superintendents stressed the complexity of the Everglades ecosystem and its needs and the steep learning curve they faced upon appointment. Jack Stark emphasized that the Everglades remained a test of the country’s commitment to the environment, observing, “as the Everglades goes, so goes the world . . . It’s the canary in the [coal] mine.”¹¹¹⁶

Other Friday events included a children’s stamp design contest, judged by Garnett McGee, creator of the 1947 commemorative stamp and a festival, “One Community . . . One Great Celebration,” all in Florida City. Ending in fireworks, the festival featured food, music and historical displays. That afternoon in Chokoloskee, about 100 people observed a reenactment of the 1910 killing of Edgar Watson, an event known to many through Peter Matthiessen’s 1990 historical novel, *Killing Mr. Watson*. From six to ten p.m., Everglades City blocked off its downtown for a celebration that included country and swing bands, food, and free movie screenings. On Saturday and Sunday, a Taste of the Everglades Festival ran in MacLeod Park in Everglades City,

1115 “Everglades: Fifty Year Anniversary,” *Visitor’s Guide to National Parks and Preserves of South Florida*, Summer 1997; “Photo Exhibit Marks Everglades’ Anniversary,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 5, 1996; “Everglades Evangelist on Eve of Park’s 50th Year,” *Miami Herald*, Oct. 7, 1996; “Here’s a Contest That’s for the Birds,” *Miami Herald*, July 20, 1997; Supt. Ring to Principal, Barron Collier High School, Sep. 16, 1997, EVER-01523.

1116 “Everglades Officials Celebrate 50th, Say ‘As Park Goes, So Goes World,’” *South Florida Free Press*, Dec. 10-16, 1997.



figure 25-1. Invitation to 50th anniversary celebration

featuring live music, food booths, arts and crafts displays, storytelling, and antique cars and swamp buggies.¹¹¹⁷

The highlight of the anniversary was a Saturday afternoon rededication of the park on the same site in Everglades City that hosted the original dedication fifty years early. Vice President Al Gore was the keynote speaker before a crowd estimated at 2,800 (figure 25-2, VP Gore at 50th anniversary). The park and the Florida National Parks and Monuments Association did their best to recreate the ambience of the 1947 event, achieving what the *New York Times* described as “part political rally and part country fair.” Many dignitaries were on hand, including SOI Bruce Babbitt, Governor Lawton Chiles, Senator Bob Graham, and EPA Director Carol Browner. The vice president wished the park a happy birthday and affirmed the administration’s commitment to “preserving this park for all eternity and for all Americans.” Gore was on his way to a global climate conference in Kyoto, Japan, and noted the extreme vulnerability of the Everglades to destruction by human-induced sea level rise. He underscored

¹¹¹⁷ Program, “Everglades National Park 50th Anniversary Celebration,” EVER 58222; “Revisiting History,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 4, 1997.

the administration's commitment to Everglades restoration as he announced a recently concluded deal to acquire 50,000 acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area.¹¹¹⁸ The fate of this "agreement in concept" among the federal and state governments, the South Florida Water Management District, and St. Joe Paper Company is detailed in chapter 28.

Close to 100 former park employees and perhaps 150 current employees participated in a reunion that coincided with the public anniversary events. Park Environmental Education Coordinator Sandy Dayhoff spent weeks tracking down former employees and getting invitations out. The highlight of the reunion was a dinner and social held Thursday evening [where?], December 4. Superintendent Ring introduced the six former superintendents, and attendees paid tribute to Dr. Bill Robertson, who



Figure 25-2. Vice President Gore at 50th anniversary festivities

was about to retire after 46 years on the park staff. The park organized a number of special tours over the next three days as part of the reunion, including a catered lunch at the Pine Island chickee. Former staff also participated in many of the public events.¹¹¹⁹

In 2007, the park scheduled a week-long celebration for its 60th anniversary, in part to let the local community know that it was back in business following the hurricanes of 2005. Compared to previous anniversaries, this one had a stronger focus on the human history of the area. The celebration began at the main visitor center on Saturday, December 1, with an Everglades film festival, a ceremony marking the dedication of the aboriginal Mud Lake Canal as a National Historic Landmark, and a public conversation with Superintendent Dan Kimball and Congressman Mario

1118 "In Celebration of the Everglades," *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1997; "50 Years of Everglades National Park," *St. Petersburg Times*, Dec. 7, 1997; "Gore Announces Purchase of Plantation for Restoration of Imperiled Everglades," *Washington Post*, Dec. 7, 1997; Prepared text of VP Al Gore's remarks, Dec. 6, 1997, EVER-00952.

1119 Program, "Everglades National Park Employee Reunion," EVER-00886.

Diaz-Balart. On Sunday, researchers gave talks on various cultural resource topics in Homestead, and special talks and tours took place at Shark Valley. On December 6, Everglades City hosted a rededication ceremony and a panel of Floridians who had witnessed the original dedication. The festivities concluded on Sunday the 8th with a birthday party at the Royal Palm Visitor Center. Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett participated in this event. The U.S. Senate and House passed resolutions formally recognizing the 60th anniversary.¹¹²⁰

Other Special Events

In 1982, the park celebrated its dual designation as a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve with the public unveiling of two plaques near the main visitor center (figure 27-1).

Southeast Regional Director Bob Baker was the master of ceremonies and NPS Director Russell Dickenson unveiled the plaques. Everglades champion Marjory Stoneman Douglas, UNESCO representative Dr. Francesco di Castri, and Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks G. Ray Arnett delivered remarks. Buffalo Tiger, chair of the Tribal Council of the Miccosukee, also attended.¹¹²¹

Given Marjory Stoneman Douglas's long association with Everglades National Park and her efforts on its behalf, it was only to be expected that the park would celebrate her life when she passed away on May 14, 1998, at the age of 108. A public observance was held on May 23 at the Royal Palm Visitor Center, with Joe Browder delivering a eulogy. The park also created a temporary exhibit on her life in the main visitor center. Following Mrs. Douglas's wishes, Superintendent Richard Ring and Education Program Coordinator Sandy Dayhoff scattered her ashes over her beloved Everglades.¹¹²²

Dr. Bill Robertson was another individual with a long association with the Everglades. Following his death in January 2000, the park gave a program in his memory. Entitled "Remember a Man and Celebrate a Life," the event took place on February 26, 2000. The day featured remembrances and tributes at a luncheon, and the posthumous presentation of meritorious service award.¹¹²³

1120 Schedule of Events to Commemorate 60 Years of Resource Stewardship and Visitor Enjoyment, EVER 22965; "Everglades National Park Celebrates 60 Years," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 6, 2007; House Resolution 845 and Senate Resolution 392, 110th Cong., 2d Sess.; Melissa Memory, personal communication, June 26, 2013.

1121 Dedication Program, Apr. 6, 1982, FNPMA records.

1122 "Memorial Tribute to Marjory Stoneman Douglas," NPS media release, May 22, 1998; Supt. Ring to William T. Muir, May 23, 1998, EVER 58222. The park generally honors requests for ash-scattering, asking only that a permit be applied for.

1123 "William B. Robertson II, Glades Scientist," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 2, 2000; Program for Robertson tribute, Feb. 26, 2000, EVER 58222.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas wrote in her autobiography, *Voice of the River*, that a fitting memorial to Ernest Coe would be a representation in bronze of a Florida panther. As she put it, “I’d love to see a life-sized replica of a catamount The catamount is the same as the Florida panther.” On April 27, 1990, just such a bronze statue was dedicated at the Royal Palm Visitor Center (figure 25-3, panther sculpture). The Institute for Scientific Information commissioned the statue from noted wildlife sculptor Eric Berg, partly to honor Douglas’s 100th birthday. Douglas spoke at the dedication and also wrote the inscription on a plaque for the statue: “Dedicated to the memory of Ernest F. Coe, without whose startling vision, steely endurance and indomitable will there would be no Everglades National Park today.” The statue and plaque were later moved to the grounds of the new Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center.¹¹²⁴

In April 2005, the park conducted a day-long event commemorating 100th anniversary of Guy Bradley’s death.¹¹²⁵



Figure 25-3. Panther sculpture outside Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center

¹¹²⁴ Douglas with Rothchild, 135; SAR, 1990; Colby Stong, “Marjory Stoneman Douglas: A Life-long Passion for Preserving the Environment,” *The Scientist*, May 28, 1990. Douglas mentioned a bronze statue of a catamount in front of the Catamount Tavern in Bennington, Vermont. The tavern was frequented by Americans seeking to break from Britain in the 1770s.

¹¹²⁵ SAR, 2005.