
The Head Spring

Friends of Blue Spring State Park Newsletter

December 2023

Meet a CSO member – Paul Forestell

Paul was born in New Brunswick, Canada, and grew up on the Bay of Fundy, site of the highest tides in the world. After completing a master's degree at the University of New Brunswick, he moved to Honolulu, where he attended the University of Hawai'i and obtained a Ph.D. in Animal Learning and Behavior, with a focus on learning and memory capabilities of bottlenose dolphins. He then spent 40 years studying humpback whales and dolphins throughout the Pacific, and as a faculty member at Long Island University, New York. He also gained international recognition for developing environmentally-responsible naturalist/interpretation programs for Whale Watch organizations.



After retiring in 2018, Paul and his wife Nancy moved to Deland, Florida. Paul soon made his way to Blue Spring State Park to see the manatees, and quickly fell in love with the spring and its intriguing seasonal "residents". Since March of 2023 he has volunteered as a Manatee Observer, roaming the boardwalk and talking to visitors during the winter, and kayaking the spring run during the summer swim season, to make sure that humans do not interfere with the manatees that come into the spring. In addition to being a Florida Park Service volunteer, Paul enthusiastically supports and promotes the work that the Friends of Blue Spring carry out to support the ongoing protection of the manatees and the spring environment. He and Nancy purchased a brick to honor a deceased friend who dedicated his life to the protection of marine mammals, Paul has volunteered for a number of Friends of Blue Spring State Park events, and continues to be impressed with the dedication and hard work of the CSO members and the ranger staff. He is proud to be a small part of all the important efforts to protect the spring and the manatees, while at the same time creating a welcoming environment for the many visitors who come to the park each year.

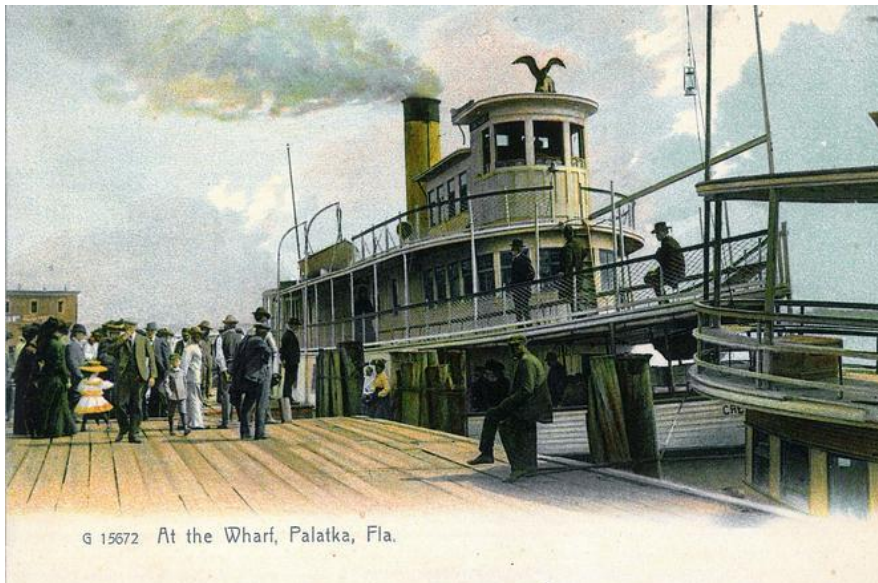
Are you interested in volunteering with the Friends?
[click here!](#)

In this edition of the Head Spring we are introducing a new history series. We hope to answer many questions and generate a few more!

Transportation on the St. Johns River

by Rich Hatton

The Welaka (river of lakes) was the lifeblood of early indigenous people; a source of food, transportation, and culture. It has since gone through quite a few name changes before eventually becoming today's St. Johns River. The French established Fort Caroline at the river's mouth near present day St. Augustine in 1564 and named the river Rio de Corrientes (river of currents). After defeating the French, Spanish soldiers renamed the river San Mateo in 1565 in honor of the apostle Matthew, whose feast day was being celebrated. In the late 1600s, the river was renamed Rio de San Juan after a Franciscan mission near the mouth of the river. Finally, by the mid-1700s, Florida came under the control of the British, and the river's name changed one last time to the St. Johns.



G 15672 At the Wharf, Palatka, Fla.



(vintage postcards of people boarding a steamboat "At the Wharf, in Palatka" in 1906, and "The Clyde Line St. Johns River steamer 'The City of Jacksonville,' by night. Jacksonville, Fla.")

With the introduction of steamboats on the St. Johns in the 1830s, the river became very popular with northern visitors in the winter time. Steamboats were the only practical way to get around, and hotels soon sprang up along the river banks to accommodate travelers. Commercial products (especially lumber, livestock and cotton) were sent by way of the river, and at one time, there were six steamboat companies working out of Palatka, Florida, where products would be transferred from the sea-going vessels to smaller more maneuverable boats. A round trip on a steamboat would take up to a week depending on the number of stops that were made.

In our next issue, we will take look at the indigenous people who lived in and around Blue Spring State Park.

Our Annual Meeting was a wonderful success!

We had a great time at our Annual Meeting at the Stetson Aquatic Center on Lake Beresford. We met a lot of new people interested in volunteering at the park, talked about opportunities, ate some good food, and elected our new officers: President - Karen Kellerman, Vice President - Katherine Hallum, Secretary - Gina McClain, and Treasurer - Sally Andrews.



Board members L-R: Rich Hatton, Gina McClain, Jackie Cheers, Sally Andrews, Missy Gibbs, Ranger Blu, Cora Berchem, Karen Kellerman, Donna Rousseau, and Susan Hardester.



Ranger Blu works the crowd at the Aquatic Center

Blue Spring State Park Junior Ranger Friends

Springrunner, the Florida Black Bear, loves to climb trees. As a native to Florida, he knows how to climb, keep his balance, and enjoy the view from up above, but he wants to remind our visitors and kids to not climb trees in the park and risk injuring themselves. If you happen to see a Black Bear while at the park, make sure to observe it from a distance. Black Bears are occasionally seen on the Pine Island hiking trail or even on the main park drive or by the campgrounds. Remember to "stash your trash" and do not leave it out for bears to paw through!



Critter Corner

Article and photos by Missy Gibbs

Loggerhead Musk Turtle - *Sternotherus minor* a.k.a. stinkpot

The Loggerhead Musk Turtle is one of the more common turtles you will see underwater in the spring run; they don't bask on logs like cooters and redbellies, but instead spend their time walking on the bottom of the spring run. Interestingly, they are able to absorb oxygen through the membranes of their mouth, which allows them to stay underwater longer (and safer from predators). They look like miniature snappers and are fierce (you may see them gaping when they feel threatened). These little turtles are under 5" in carapace (top shell) length, have a large grey head (loggerhead) with tiny black spots, and a relatively short tail. Their closest relative is the Common Musk Turtle, which has a smaller head, and stripes instead of spots. Why are they called musk turtles? They have musk glands near the base of their tails that release a foul odor when they are disturbed. A nasty aroma can cause some predators to drop their prey long enough for the prey item to escape!



Musk turtles eat aquatic invertebrates (especially snails), carrion, and plants. They are not picky eaters! Unlike sea turtles, they nest in the cooler months (October - June), and because the temperatures are cooler, it takes the eggs about 3 months to hatch.

Even though these are very cute animals, never pick up an animal you find in the spring run (fish, turtle, baby alligator, etc.), it's incredibly stressful for the animal and could even result in its death.

Upcoming Events

Orange City Christmas Parade - Saturday, December 9th

Come walk with Hope, the giant inflatable manatee, from Save the Manatee Club. We will be decorating the truck and trailer at the park on Friday, December 8th from 2-5 p.m., and walk in the parade starting at 5 p.m. on Saturday. We are looking for volunteers to help out on either (or both) days. If interested, please email Gina.



Junior Rangers Manatee Program Dec 6th, 3:00-4:00 p.m. Meet in the Lower Use Area - Learn how multiple agencies work together to help the manatees and assist with a manatee count. RSVP today (4th) to Ranger Connor for details.

Jay Walk - Dec 23rd 9:30-10:30 a.m.: Meet at the Ranger Station. Walk a quarter of a mile into the scrub to see and learn more about our cheeky native Scrub Jays.

Quilt Raffle - We are raffling off a beautiful manatee-themed quilt between now and the Manatee Festival (January 28th). The quilt was hand-made and donated by CSO member Kellie Muddiman. The winning ticket will be drawn at 3 p.m. on the last day of the festival (January 28th).

Orange City Manatee Festival - January 27th and 28th - stay tuned to Facebook for more information! We will need plenty of volunteer help on both days!

Weekly Wednesday Bingo - Wednesday nights at 6:30 p.m. at the Riverwalk Pizzeria and Brew Pub in Orange City. Come join the fun and maybe you will win a stuffed manatee or another fun prize!

Would you like to help out at Bingo? We are always looking for volunteers to sell bingo cards and call numbers. Please click [here](#) to sign up to help.



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