

# WESTERN GATE POST & Choctawhatchee Tracks

Florida Trail Association, Inc.  
Apr - Jun 09



## Hiker Thank You Note! We're Appreciated

Email received: Tuesday, February 24, 2009  
From: Paul Watkins

### MISSION STATEMENT:

To develop, maintain, promote, and protect a continuous public hiking trail the length of the state of Florida, called the Florida National Scenic Trail, and other loop and side trails, together called the Florida Trail System; and to educate the public by teaching appreciation for and conservation of the natural beauty of Florida; and to provide opportunities to hike and camp.

My name is Paul Watkins. My wife Katie and I hiked the portion of the trail that runs along side Eglin Air Force Base a few years ago. We spent five days on the trail and WE LOVED IT. The people associated with the trail assisted us by giving us a map of the sections we would be hiking and safety tips about certain areas of the trail we would be hiking. We are both novice hikers. This trail was great for the two of us to start our trail hiking experience. Most of the terrain was flat and fast. The scenery was wonderful. We only saw one person during those five days. I would recommend this trail to anyone. Thanks again for all of the superb help you gave us when we were planning the trip and assisting us with transportation to the start of our hike. Thank you for maintaining the trail so well and making the markings clear and easy to spot. Thank you for making our first hike together one we will never forget. THANKS!!

Paul Watkins / St. Louis, MO

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## Choctawhatchee Chapter is MOVING!!!!

New meeting site is at Bayou Blue Restaurant, 314 Bayshore Drive Niceville, FL. The restaurant is on the north side of Bayshore Drive next to the Front Porch restaurant.

See pg 5 for map and further info



## Western Gate 'Chair Chat'

The new year is off to a good start. I was particularly impressed at our Activity Planning Meeting in early February when so many came forward with ideas of things to do in the coming months. The big event for April is the annual Panhandle Trace Hike led by Peggy Grantham, a eight day, 100 mile event starting at the Alabama line an ending on the Gulf at Fort Pickens. This is not a backpacking trip. One may hike one or more days as one sees fit. Be sure to check out the web site for additional information. Another event, which is a first for Western Gate, occurs on Saturday May 23, when Ed Williamson will lead the first ever hike on the new Yellow River Ravines Trail. Vernon Compton and Ed have lead a number of trail building hikes this past quarter and all their work is bearing fruit. I attended one of these myself. It took us all morning to clear a

path of less than 100 yards long through one of the thickest stands of Yopon I have ever seen. May and June activities include many canoe and kayak trips, so many, that I am tempted to rename our club the Western Gate Hiking, Canoe, and Kayak Club. Don't miss the chance to cool off.

Florida Trail's problems with its budget continue to be a concern. As you may remember late last year FTA cut Chapter rebates in half. Granted that the total reduction is fairly small, only \$300 to \$400 for Western Gate, but this is half of our income. I have appointed Randy Creel to the position of Financial Chair. His objective will be to determine the Chapter's financial needs and take the lead in generating new Chapter income. Thanks for volunteering Randy. Of greater import than our income is the fact that FTA may become strapped to pro-

vide the tools, gazebos, signs, SCA crews and other assistance that we need to build and maintain trails. Hopefully we will receive some clarification on this matter in the coming months.

Finally, on a sad note, I recently received word that one of our long term and loyal members, Sara Williamson, has been stricken with an incurable cancer. In addition, Peggy Grantham's close friend Gerald O'Flynn died in his sleep on March 25th. Please keep Sara, her husband Bob and Peggy in your thoughts and prayers.

George Brinkman  
Western Gate Chair

## Choctawhatchee 'Note from the Chair'

Valentines Day was no ordinary day for twelve Florida Trail volunteers. A forecast calling for rain, and lots of it, only made the planned bridge project a little more challenging. A juniper log was to be placed over a slough in the Soggy Bottom area of the Cimarron section. This project had been planned for several months, and the name Valentine Bridge was chosen since it would be installed on Valentines Day.

The volunteers showed up to work, and the rain came down...something like 2 ¾ inches of it! Everyone was transported down Yellow River to the bridge site by boat in the downpour. What a colorful sight we were in our rain gear. We looked much like a box of crayons.

Upon arrival and after a safety briefing, we set about the task of moving the log over the slough and into position. A sky line

had been set up to assist in moving the log into its place. The volunteers were divided into two teams with one team on each side of the slough. By using the sky line, come-alongs, chains and various hand tools we were able to winch the log from one side

Just before lunch someone noticed the rain had finally stopped. This seemed like the time to take a break. Everyone ate, and then we were treated to a surprise dessert...Strawberry Sweetheart Cake in the shape of a heart. It survived the boat

ride down the river earlier that morning in the rain and wind. The cake was appropriate on Valentines Day as Marsha and Larry celebrated their wedding anniversary in the rain working on the bridge project.

After lunch it was back to work. The log had to be placed on sills, anchored down, and some trail rerouted. By mid afternoon the work was completed. Valentines Day 2009 will be remembered as a special day to all

those who shared in the Valentine Bridge project.

Wallis Mayo  
Choctawhatchee Chair



## Trail Reports

### NOTICE TO EGLIN HIKERS

Florida National Scenic Trail Closure Notice  
Eglin / Alaqua Section

#### Description / Closure Area:

The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) on the Eglin Air Force Base Reservation between US Hwy 331 and Range Road 208 is currently subject to frequent closure due to increased military training exercises. This closure applies to the ten mile FNST segment immediately west of US 331 and north of Freeport. FTA Map No. 04 Eglin East (Eglin AFB Reservation only). All other FNST segments on Eglin (between Range Road 208 and State Road 85 and along State Road 87) remain open to hikers.

Those planning a hike in this trail segment should consult the Monthly Closure Schedule posted on the Choctawhatchee web site under Late Breaking News. This notice is also posted on the US 331 and Alaqua (Bob Sikes Road) Trailhead kiosks.

**Alternative Route:** Eglin Range Roads 208 and 205 (SR 282).

**Effective Date:** 9/1/07

**Ending Date:** Until further notice

#### Contact Information:

FTA / Section Leader Tom Daniel, Ph. (850) 341-1389  
Eglin Natural Resource Branch / Jackson

Guard, Ph. (850) 882-4165

### Eglin Trail Report

Trail Condition: All Eglin FNST segments are open to hikers except as noted in Alaqua/Blount Route (below). The trail maintenance cycle has been limited until opening of the Alaqua/Blount reroute. As of this writing 22 miles of 67 trail miles on Eglin have been completed. The trail is passable, but a few blowdowns may be encountered.

Alaqua/Blount Route: The eastern most ten miles between US 331 and Range Road 208 are subject to frequent military mission closures. Those wishing to hike this segment should consult the Closure Schedule posted on the Chapter web site and trailhead kiosks.

Alaqua/Blount Route Development: The reroute corridor has been approved and route construction completed in February. The new route required moving 3-4 miles of the FNST into a 500 foot corridor south of the boundary line in the Alaqua / Blount Creek Basin. The Eglin Portal Campsite was also re-located. The remaining trail route between Bob Sikes Road and US 331 will not be changed. Anticipated opening of the reroute is the Spring of 2009. We are currently awaiting Eglin's use approval of the new route.

Yellow River / Valentine Day Bridge Project: If you missed it you missed a good one! See Chapter Chair's description of the project.

Blaze Post - When the FNST was originally routed on Eglin there were several segments

crossing newly planted Longleaf Pine clear cuts. These Longleaf trees are now large enough for blazing. In February, volunteers removed 20-25 post from the Catface Section and blazed as needed. Most of these posts have already found a new home on the Nokuse Section.

Information: Eglin Natural Resources Center (850) 882-4164 or Tom Daniel, Section Leader (850) 492-8258

### Nokuse Section News

Bob Deckert / Section Leader

Since our last newsletter, our Chapter's volunteers have been primarily focusing their energies on our Eglin Section but we have managed a couple of trail maintenance days on Nokuse. We spent one day in the Water Management section clearing stumps from nearly a mile of trail in an area that had been clear-cut early on in the development of the route. It was a tedious task but the trail is much better off as a result. We also got started in another area affected by clear cutting on Nokuse Plantation. We positioned several blaze posts over another mile of trail and began the process of clearing wood debris from the treadway. This effort eliminated what had become a confusing segment.

We will have to get out and do some mowing in the coming months to knock back the spring growth but all things considered, the trail is in pretty good condition. If you have the opportunity, get out there and check it out before the summer heat sets in.

National Trails Day® is a celebration of trails that evolved from the report of President Ronald Reagan's President's Commission on Americans Outdoors. In 1987, the report recommended that all Americans be able to go out their front doors and within fifteen minutes, be on trails that wind through their cities or towns and bring them back without retracing steps. The recommendation, dubbed Trails for All Americans, became the impetus behind several public and private parties joining American Hiking Society in launching National Trails Day® in 1993.



Trails do not just appear for our enjoyment, it takes many hours of planning, labor, and negotiating to develop them. National Trails Day®, the only nationwide celebration of trails, brings awareness to trails and thanks many people and partners for their support and hard work, including volunteers, land agencies, and outdoor minded businesses. It is also a day to introduce people to the many joys and benefits of trails.

[www.americanhiking.org/NTDGeneralInfoFaq.aspx](http://www.americanhiking.org/NTDGeneralInfoFaq.aspx)

## Trail Hog Field Day at Two Penny



For photos and a youtube on the Econfina / Two Penny Bridge building go to:

For the video visit :  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Hs75dtkZG8>

For the photos visit:  
<http://jeremyquant.smugmug.com/>

The Panhandle Chapter, FTA, and the Student Conservation Association replaced the Two Penny Bridge on Econfina Creek with a new engineered suspension bridge. The team was lead by lead by Ian Barlow

On March 10th, ten Trail Hog volunteers assisted with driving bridge anchors and "flying" auguring equipment across the creek on a skyline.

The new Two Penny Bridge will be a featured attraction for the upcoming Econfina Creek Wildflower Hike on April 18th (part of the Pine Log Gathering, April 17th - 19th).

Flying "Bobcat" across the Econfina



Andy Dula and John Stefanovich cross temporary suspension bridge

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## Hike the Yellow Ravine Trail

our newest section of trail

Saturday  
May 23

contact: Ed Williamson 850-474-5359

[http://westgate.floridatrail.org/Activity/2009/FTA\\_Activity0509.html](http://westgate.floridatrail.org/Activity/2009/FTA_Activity0509.html)

## Panhandle Trace Hike - April 2009

The sixth annual Panhandle Trace hike was a great success, at least according to the four hikers that traveled from afar and hiked the whole 100 miles from the Alabama line to Fort Pickens. As usual this was a very diverse hike, the hikers, (male and female, young and old, from the South and from the North), the weather, ( warm and humid, stormy and rainy, and cold and windy) The terrain, (woody and piney, old brick roady, and sandy and beachy) and the dinning, (from Gator's in Baker to Reggies in Milton to Peg Leg Pete's on Pensacola Beach and several other yummy places in between including two home



cooked meals at the camp ground. The four hikers were joined several days by members of the Western gate and we all formed a close friendship during the 10 days and nights we camped and hiked together. I plan on doing it again next year, for those who missed this neat experience, the week before Easter.

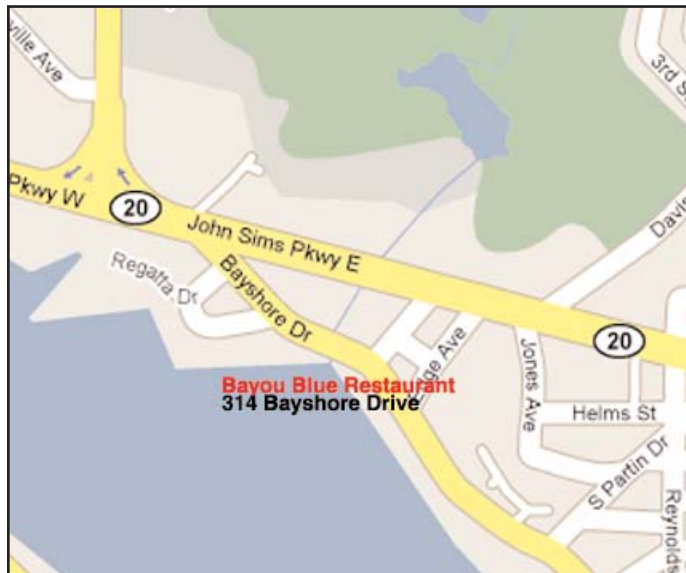
Peggy Grantham

## Meeting locations and schedules

The Western Gate Chapter of the **Florida Trail Association, Inc.** meets at the First Christian Church the third Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM. Refreshments are served at 6:30 PM.



The Choctawhatchee Chapter of the **Florida Trail Association, Inc.** meets on the 4th Tuesday at Bayou Blue Restaurant in Niceville, FL., 314 Bayshore Drive. The meeting begins at 6:30 PM, with a half hour social beginning at 6 PM.





For more information, membership and change of address please contact the FTA office:

**Florida Trail Association Inc.**

5415 SW 13 St  
Gainesville, Fl.  
32608

Call: 1-877-HIKE-FLA  
floridatrail.org

Email: fta@floridatrail.org

**At a Glance**

**Mark your calendar!**

**North Florida FTA Regional Conference**  
Fri-Sun  
Oct 23-25

**Kids Hike**  
Take a child on a hike. Big kids invited too! 2.9 miles Little Silver Road to SR 85.  
Saturday  
May 9

**National Trails Day local events**  
Saturday June 6

**Choctawhatchee Chapter:**  
hike on the Alaqua section of Eglin AFB

**Western Gate Chapter:**  
Moonlight hike on Pensacola Beach

**Check for further details**



**Florida Trail Association**

**Western Gate and Choctawhatchee Chapters**

200 Willard Rd NW  
Fort Walton Bch, Fl.  
32548



Stamp

Label