

Marking 150 Years, Sierra Club Celebrates Founder John Muir's Thousand-Mile Walk to an Ever-Rising Gulf

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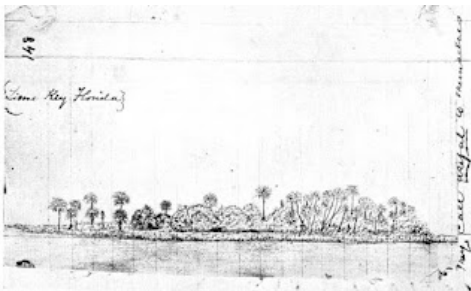
Marking 150 Years, Sierra Club Celebrates Founder John Muir's Thousand-Mile Walk to an Ever-Rising Gulf

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by Jon Ullman



Sierra Club Florida commemorated the 150th anniversary of John Muir's historic Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf on Cedar Key last month. The two-day conference focused on the Sierra Club founder's travels in Florida, his illness and months-long recovery on Cedar Key. It also delved into the present and future of the at-risk Gulf island in the age of climate change and sea level rise.



John Muir's drawing of Lime Key.

On the first day, University of Florida scientists and architects based on Cedar Key presented the most recent effects of sea level rise and projections to a standing room only audience of 75 people. Cedar Key Mayor Heath Davis and Councilwoman Sue Colson discussed plans for the island and how it is prioritizing its spending to manage the effects in this working oyster and clam harvesting community. The most revealing presentation was by Marty Hylton of University of Florida's Historic Preservation program of a 3D flood simulation of Cedar Key. John McPherson of the Cedar Key Water and Sewer District gave an unfiltered discussion of climate change impacts on water supply, sewage and drainage. Later, UF professors led a tour of G Street, a low-lying street experiencing flooding and erosion and an example of a living shoreline. The day concluded with a presentation by

Sierra Club staffer Jon Ullman of the most recent Al Gore Climate Change slide show. Guests were treated to a Clam Bake and entertainment by local singer/songwriter Anna White Hodges.



Visitors to John Muir's place of recovery on Cedar Key.



Historic marker for John Muir.

Day two focused on the Florida portion of John Muir's walk to the Gulf that originated in Indiana. After taking a ferry from Savannah to Fernandina Beach, Muir walked along rail road tracks through Gainesville and on to Cedar Key, where he had planned to board a ship to the Amazon. However, a malaria-carrying mosquito that bit him while sleeping in the Savannah Cemetery had incubated causing him to collapse. He was nursed to health by the wife of a sawmill owner for several months, spending much of his time under a giant oak tree observing the neighboring islands.



The giant oak tree under which John Muir recovered from Malaria and formed his views on nature and man.



John Muir's drawing of the giant oak.

While he went through near death experience, he began to rethink. What is the difference between man and other creatures to the universe? It was here that his ideas about the sanctity of all living beings formed and, when he was well enough, he boarded a ship to Cuba before embarking on a boat from New York City to San Francisco and heading to his beloved Yosemite in the Sierra Nevadas.



A model of downtown Cedar Key before filled with water.

The audience of 100 was treated to a series of experts including Merald Clark, a Gainesville authority on John Muir's Florida travels, Amy Gernhardt, the executive director of the Cedar Key Historical Society, and Andrea Dennison, who recounted her own detective story tracking and identifying the giant oak where John Muir's health was restored by Sarah Hodgson. Later, Paul Thibault presented an expert's synopsis of the malaria that almost killed Muir and the controversial toxic treatment that also nearly took his life.



Participants at the conference.

Later the Sierra Club rededicated the John Muir Historical Marker, heard from experts at the local historical museum and visited the famous John Muir oak tree.

The talk was organized by Paul Thibault, on behalf of Sierra Club Florida, with the support of the Suwannee-St. Johns group of the Sierra Club and the program was moderated by Sierra Club Florida Director Frank Jackalone.



John Muir's walk through Florida timeline:

- Oct. 1 - Arrive by steamboat from Fernandina, FL (from Savannah, GA)
- Oct. 18 - Arrives in Gainesville, FL.
- Oct. 23 - Arrives in Cedar Key.
- Jan. 10 - Leaves on boat for Cuba, then New York City where he boards a ship to San Francisco and journeys to the Sierra Nevada.

Source:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/blog/2017/12/marking-150-years-sierra-club-celebrates-founder-john-muir's-thousand-mile-walk>

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