

## Three Hidden Coast Scenic Drives

*Take a Holiday drive on the wild side*

Looking for a less active way to get outdoors after too much Holiday eating? Take a scenic drive! No matter where you live on the Hidden Coast, one of the three drives described below

of water grass dotted with clumps of palms runs to the horizon. At the end of this second road there is an unpaved boat ramp into the creek where kayaks and canoes can be launched, plus a small parking area.

Nature Drive is an excellent choice if

Starting with managed pine forests with a low understory often full of flowers and butterflies, the road narrows into crowding trees and thick bottomland hardwood swamps, only to open up suddenly again with sweeping marsh vistas dotted with palms and cut with inviting tidal creeks.

Go slow and expect to see all manner of wildlife: water birds such as yellow-crowned night herons, white ibis and great egrets, bald eagles and even barred owl; alligators, snakes, and more.

An interpretive Dixie Mainline Trail Guide with a map is available at kiosks on either end of the trail and can also be downloaded at [www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee](http://www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee) (click on Publications). Directions:

from south CR349, turn north at the Dixie Mainline sign; from CR357, turn south at the sign. Portions open for hunting access; observe state and Refuge regulations.

### TIDE SWAMP DRIVING TOUR

*Thirteen miles one-way; allow 2+ hours*

This trail wends through a portion of the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area (WMA), state-managed lands clinging to a swath of coast in Dixie and Taylor counties. The south end of the trail starts north of Steinhatchee at the WMA hunter check station and ends at the Hagen's Cove entrance. Two branches of the main trail are also worthwhile. Dallas Creek Landing at the south end offers a scenic vista over tidal Dallas Creek with a boat ramp, parking, a picnic area, information kiosks and a 30-minute trail along the creek. Hagen's Cove at the north end has a boat ramp, parking, information kiosks, a beach (ideal for shore scalloping in summer), and an elevated observation deck. Gated roads are open to hikers and bicyclists.

Evidence of early 20th century logging is visible almost everywhere along the drive. Pine plantations for pulpwood production followed clear cutting and the area was also used as rangeland for hogs and cattle.



The bat house as seen from Indian Island Road, part of the Tide Swamp Driving Tour.

The Nature Conservancy purchased the land from Buckeye Cellulose in 1986 and in 1987 the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission) purchased the land from The Nature Conservancy.

Large areas along the roadside are either open grassland or covered with immature pine flatlands, the original longleaf pine replaced with fast growing slash, loblolly, and sand pine. (Efforts are now underway by the state to replace long-leaf communities.) In the swamps the occasional huge cypress stump, with visible hand crosscut saw marks, bears witness to the giants that once dominated the landscape. The road itself follows the past as it twists and turns along disused logging tram roads with historic names such as Turkey Track

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### HIDDEN COAST NATURAL COMMUNITIES

**Pine Flatwoods:** low, flat expanses with poorly drained sandy soils. Dominated by longleaf, slash and pond pine. These open canopy forests have an understory of saw palmetto, mixed with other naturally occurring shrubs and grasses.

**Hardwood Swamps:** found bordering rivers and in low-lying areas; submerged or saturated part of the year with very poorly drained soils. Overstory species include red, loblolly and sweet bay, water tupelo, black tupelo (a.k.a. black gum), Carolina ash (a.k.a. water ash), red maple, and cabbage palm.

**Cypress Swamp:** dominated by bald cypress or pond cypress, on nearly level ground or in depressions with water at or above ground level for much of the year. Cypress seeds cannot germinate in water and these swamps often form characteristic domes or heads, sometimes appearing as a clump amidst sawgrass marshes.

**Wetland Hardwood Hammocks:** occur on poorly drained soils subject to constant seepage or high water tables; can flood but do not remain flooded for as long as hardwood swamps. Support luxurious vegetation with a diversity of plants and animals. Main tree species are live oak, laurel oak, water oak, cabbage palm, southern magnolia, sweet and red bay, red maple, and sweet gum. The understory includes hawthorn, wax myrtle, witch hazel, saw palmetto, and yaupon holly.

**Coastal Salt Marsh:** typically dominated by grasses, sedges, and rushes cut by tidal creeks. Common salt marsh plants include black needlerush, giant cordgrass, seashore saltgrass, glasswort, and sea purslane.

*Note: Overstory is the layer of foliage in a forest canopy. Understory is the layer of low vegetation on a forest floor.*



McCormick Creek Road vista, part of the Refuge Nature Drive.

is close at hand. All three drives are also included in the West Florida section of The Great Florida Birding Trail.

### REFUGE NATURE DRIVE

*Nine miles one-way; allow 1-2 hours*

Just 16 miles south of Chiefland on CR347, start this nine-mile loop at the sign south of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge headquarters driveway. The loop rejoins the highway about six miles north of the Shell Mound turnoff (can also be started from this end). From the main loop there are three side trips: Pond 4 Road (approx. 1 mile), Barnett Creek Road (approx. 1 mile), McCormick Creek Road (a short distance), and Cabin Road (approx. 1.5 miles). There are also gated roads open to foot and bicycle traffic.

Follow the hard dirt road through bottomland hardwood swamps, pine flatlands, cypress domes, natural creeks and sloughs, and past several ponds. In the drier upland areas, look for flowers such as cheerful yellow black-eyed Susan blooming summer through fall, and delicate purple skullcap in spring through fall. Ponds and roadside ditches are filled with summer-blooming water lilies. In many swampy areas tree trunks are festooned with air plants; some trunks are covered nearly top-to-bottom. In late summer and on fall days when the temperature is above 65 degrees F, look for butterflies, such as the queen, clinging to waving heads of goldenrod. Songbirds, wading birds, alligators, otters, turkey, deer and other wildlife can also be seen along this route. Take your time. Drive slowly!

The most visually interesting side roads are Barnett Creek Road which opens into a water meadow where the creek snakes through thick golden-green grasses and McCormick Creek Road where a wide vista

you are interested in fauna and flora. It doesn't have the knock-your-socks-off impact of the second Refuge scenic drive described below, but it is a peaceful, and perhaps more comfortable drive with a wider and often smoother road. Open for hunting access in accordance with state and Refuge regulations. A colored Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge map, which includes a trail map, can be downloaded at [www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee](http://www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee) (click on Publications).

Directions: approximately 16 miles from Chiefland. Take US19 to CR345; right on CR330 which leads to State Road 347 south. Follow the Nature Drive signs.

### DIXIE MAINLINE

*Nine miles one-way; allow 1-2 hours*

This historic trail at the north end of the Lower Suwannee Wildlife Refuge was constructed in the 1920s as a tram road (narrow gauge railroad) to transport timber out of the forests during the heyday of cypress logging. After logging ended in the 1940s, the bridges on the road eventually deteriorated making the road impassable. In 1979, the land was purchased by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, but the bridges were not restored nor the road opened until 1998. The trail had been virtually free of human activity for 50 years, allowing fauna and flora to flourish.

From the community of Suwannee in the south to CR347 in the north, this narrow and sometimes rough lime rock road is open to two-way traffic although passing is tight at times, with few pull outs. During bad weather the road is subject to flooding and may be gated.

This aside, it is a gorgeous scenic drive.

## Christmas Heritage Recipes

by Beverly Hilliard, Fanning Springs

For years my mother has made it a Christmas tradition to bake two family favorites: the Bacardi rum cake (she bakes a couple) and a double batch of fruit cake cookies. From experience, I recommend following her example and baking at least two cakes; even then you may not get a second piece. The fruit cake cookies are much better than fruit cake; you can't eat just one.

My mother, Mina Piece, was originally from Alton, Illinois. She came to the Chiefland area in 1948 at the age of fifteen with her mother and stepfather. A short time later she herself married. She never left the state or the area. Today she has four children, and is blessed with eight grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren, with another on the way.

Mom told me that her first experience



Mina Piece (then Brock) with her husband, Junior Brock, and their first child. Circa 1950.

opening their Christmas presents. My favorite part is eating her delicious cake and cookies!

### BACARDI RUM CAKE

Pre-heat oven to 325 degrees F.

#### Cake

1 c. pecan or walnuts, chopped  
1 yellow cake mix (I use Duncan Hines yellow cake mix)  
4 eggs (I use 3 eggs or ¾ egg beater)  
½ c. cold water  
½ c. oil (I use 1/3 c.)  
½ c. Bacardi dark rum 80 proof

Grease and flour 10 in. tube or 12 in. Bundt pan. Sprinkle nuts over bottom of pan. Mix all cake ingredients together. Pour batter over nuts. Bake one hour, cool and invert on serving plate.

Prick top of cake, drizzle glaze and smooth over tops and side of cake with spoon. Allow cake to absorb glaze, then repeat until glaze is used all up.

#### Glaze

¼ lb. of butter  
¼ c. water  
1c. sugar  
½ c. Bacardi dark rum, 80 proof

Melt butter in a sauce pan, and then stir in water and sugar. Boil 5 minute stirring constantly, then remove from heat (important) and stir in the rum.

### FRUIT CAKE COOKIES

½ c. butter  
½ c. brown sugar  
1 ½ c. flour  
2 eggs (I use Egg Beaters)  
1 ½ baking soda  
2 t. cinnamon  
½ t. ground cloves  
½ t. nutmeg  
1 t. vanilla  
1 lb. of pecan halves (I chop 1lb. of pecan)  
1 lb. candied cherry  
½ lb. candied pineapples  
1 package of white raisin plumped in a ½ cup of bourbon or juice for 1/2-1 hour.

Cream butter, sugar, and flour with two eggs, cover nuts and fruit with dough and mix (you will need to use your hands). Bake at 325 degree on greased cookie sheets for approximately 15 minutes. Best if allowed to ripen like fruit cake. (Note: The alcohol cooks out of both recipes.)



Beverly Hilliard with mother, Mina Piece. Hilliard has lived in Chiefland area for her entire life.

My mother is the most giving person; she is the foundation of the love that has held the family together. With Christmas coming, I asked about her childhood Holidays. "Children today receive more presents than I ever did," she told me. "I would get a doll, tea set, books, and maybe a card game." Without electricity, there were no lights on the cedar or pine tree Christmas tree; instead, they hung silver 'ice-suckles' and some Christmas balls.

These days, the best part of Christmas for my mother is watching the children

## -- BOOK REVIEW --

### Spinning Forward by Terri DuLong

Review by Maureen Landress

By the time you turn the last page in author Terri DuLong's new novel, *Spinning Forward*, your emotions will have run the gamut from anger to joy, from sorrow to laughter. Like a good wine, the story offers up a full bodied richness that lingers on the tongue.

Anyone who has ever lost at love, or felt alone in the world and at their wit's end, will easily relate to the main character,



Sydney Webster. Widowed at fifty, an age when life should have begun to be fun again, Sydney discovers that the man she married was not the knight in shining armor she had always imagined him

to be. Her late husband's propensity for gambling has left her homeless and bitter. Accepting the kind offer of a friend, she takes refuge on the small island of Cedar Key. Soon the island's magic is working its spell. New friends are made, old mysteries are solved and the possibility of romance blossoms while she begins to turn her talent for spinning wool and knitting into a retail venture. Sydney's new existence isn't all sunshine and rainbows, though, and she soon finds herself facing some of the hardest decisions of her life.

The author has expertly woven real life drama into this work of fiction, touching on subjects often relegated to the shadows – sexuality after age fifty, the dignity of choice when facing eminent demise, and the special bond between a mother and her child. She speaks about the deep friendships of women, how they can sustain a woman in her darkest hour, give her hope and help her heal from tragedy. Maybe that's what makes DuLong's readers connect so easily with her writing – it's like being with an old friend – comfortable and easy.

The book is also filled with snippets of island lore and history, making the unique flavor of Cedar Key a charming backdrop to this fast-paced tale. DuLong's love of Cedar Key is evident in the rich details and underlying sense of joy that permeate the story. Readers who have visited (or live on) the island will easily recognize places and people. Those who have never been to the island will begin dreaming of visiting and some may even be so bold as to actually

venture down for a stay in paradise.

If you haven't yet read one of Ms. DuLong's novels, take the time to pick this one up – you won't be disappointed.

DuLong is a resident of Cedar Key. She has been seriously pursuing a career in writing for over ten years. *Spinning Forward* is her first book to be published by a major publishing house. She will also be co-authoring a short story collection with Fern Michaels, for release next fall. For more information, go to her website at [www.terridulong.com](http://www.terridulong.com).

All DuLong's books are available online from the major book sellers. *Spinning Forward*, can also be found at any of the larger brick and mortar stores such as Barnes & Noble or Border's Books. It is also available in electronic format for the Kindle reader at Amazon.com.

M. E. Landress is the author of two mysteries, *Sour Grapes* (2008) and *One Bad Apple* (2009), winner of the Royal Palm Literary Award, and a member of the Florida Writers Association.

**Happy Holidays!**  
This two-month Holiday issue covers December and January. Our normal monthly issues resume February 2010.

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Tram and Tide City Mainline.

Before you start on the tour, be sure to check in at the hunter check station information kiosk for a tour guide booklet. Watch for the helpful car symbols along the road marking the driving tour. Observe and obey all "closed" signs and gated roads. Use of ATVs is prohibited. Some portions of the roadbed are very rough, or sandy. Proceed with caution. For regulations and more information go online to [myfwc.com](http://myfwc.com) and click on Recreation and Wildlife Management Areas.

Directions: from Steinhatchee, travel north on CR 361; turn in at the Dallas Creek Entrance.

