# V. THE GLADESMEN CULTURE

This chapter begins with a discussion of Florida Cracker Culture and describes the subsequent development of Gladesmen Culture; both share historical roots related to cattle ranching in the state. Over time, there was a regional divergence that occurred in the wetlands environment of southern Florida wherein some Crackers developed their own distinctive (Gladesmen) subsistence practices during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1920s-1940s, many Gladesmen made ends meet by living off the land and through opportunities for employment. The post World War II period was a time of cultural transition, producing a new wave of Gladesmen, searching for recreation, propelled through the Glades on high-powered airboats. Following a discussion of these developments, a summary of what characterizes the Gladesmen tradition follows, including the activities practiced by the group and the ways in which those evolved as modern Gladesmen have developed and incorporated new technologies over the last several decades. The chapter closes with a description of the characteristics that define what it means to be a Gladesmen today.

## FLORIDA CRACKER CULTURE

Between 1821, when the Spanish left Florida, and the eve of the Civil War in 1861, the region evolved from a sparsely populated frontier to an American agricultural society. This period saw a tremendous influx of immigrants moving to Florida, with the population soaring to 160,000. Settlers came from all areas of the East Coast, with the majority arriving from the neighboring states of Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The most important factors in drawing people to Florida were the promises of fertile soils for farming and an abundance of land suited to raising livestock (Denham 1994:454).

One of the interesting facets of this nineteenth-century migration concerned the Anglo and Celtic cultural beliefs and values that many of the new arrivals brought with them. By the eve of the American Revolution, the dominant immigrants in the South were people from the Celtic regions of the British Isles: Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, and Wales. This emerging southern Cracker culture closely resembled Celtic culture, characterized by expert herdsmenship and close kinship ties. The Cracker economy was one of open-range herding; their rural values have been said to include "wasteful hospitality…reckless indulgence in food and drink, a touchy and romantic sense of honor, and a strong tendency toward lawlessness…." (Ste. Claire 2006:61-62). Highly individualistic and mobile, fiercely dedicated to popular democracy, generally possessing antipathy toward Indians and African Americans, and quick to anger, the crackers came to represent the majority of the population in the farming regions of the state (Denham 1994:453-462).

The word "Cracker" has its roots in sixteenth-century England, where it denoted a braggart; in the United States, the term came to mean a class of rogue settlers. While Florida Crackers are associated largely with cattle ranching in northern and central Florida, many of them did extend into southern Florida. Some Crackers in Florida use the term to describe themselves with a sense of pride, while in other regions of the southeast it is considered a pejorative term.

There are several conflicting American definitions of the term "cracker," with one explanation being that before the advent of a hand-mill, people of this culture pounded their corn. By placing the corn on a flat rock, it was beaten and cracked with another rock (Hill and McCall 1950:224; Ste. Claire 2006:235). A more popular explanation pertains to the sound of whips cracking over cattle or teams of oxen. A similar but separate definition refers to Florida-born people who drove their brush cattle into the palmettos and flat lands. On the end of their whips was a small strip of buckskin known as a "cracker." Observers of these cattle drives would remark: "here come more of those Florida 'crackers'" (Ste. Claire 2006:66). Whatever the origin of the term, Cracker signifies a culture, not an economic condition (Ste. Claire 2006:28-30, 66). Gladesmen Ronnie Bergeron (2008) agreed with this interpretation and stresses an association with cattle:

> The cracker culture really developed when the families moved in to Florida to round up all the cattle that had multiplied that was turned loose by the Spaniards back in the 1500s. They turned loose cattle, they turned loose horses, and the cattle adapted to the environment and multiplied…so people migrated into Florida and they were cow hunters. And they would go out and round up all these wild cattle. And as they would come into the different little ports and through the little towns, they all had whips that cracked so they developed the name of Cracker.

Ste. Claire (2006:41) stated that by the mid 1700s, the term "Cracker" had begun to be used by Florida gentry as an ethnic slur for Scotch-Irish frontiersmen in the South who were typed as rootless, unruly, and corrupt renegades. Others identified Crackers as criminals organized as gangs of horse thieves, counterfeiters, and slave-nappers. This characterization is seen to have changed, however, by the turn of the century. During the mid eighteenth century, the term cracker "respecialized," and was used to characterize poor or rogue settlers of the rural south and, later, to describe a proud Florida backcountry culture. Throughout Florida's history, the meaning has vacillated considerably, alternately taking on derogatory or desirable tones (Ste. Claire 2006:34-35).

Some of the best descriptions of early Cracker Culture are found in the accounts of soldiers stationed in the Florida territory between the 1830s and the 1860s. Many Florida Crackers served as volunteer soldiers during the Seminole Indian Wars and these units were referred to as the "Cracker Calvary." Most Crackers resented the Army and in turn, the commissioned officers held no fondness for the Cracker volunteers, who they claimed drank and gambled, and were not very good soldiers (Ste. Claire 2006:50).

By the eve of the Civil War, the term had become a general designation for a lower class, non-slave holding white who resided in the Deep South. But defining Crackers as poor, lower class, or white settlers ignores the cultural characteristics of this group that distinguished them from other cultures in Florida. Proud, independent, tenacious, and self-sufficient would be better descriptions of the Florida Cracker, as it was these characteristics that allowed some Crackers to adapt to and survive in the diverse environment of southern Florida, which some considered uninhabitable (Ste. Claire 2006:51, 67-68).

The defining features of Cracker culture are marked by three major occupations that sustained life in Florida before the advent of tourism – ranching, farming, and fishing (Bucuvalas et al. 1994:39). By the time, Florida became a state in 1845, the Seminole Indians of the Everglades already

possessed extensive cattle herds, and white settlers soon followed their example. These new Florida Crackers were mostly an impoverished and poorly educated people who were driven out of their homelands by the adversities of war and were lured to the wilds of Florida by rumored opportunity. Continuing into the twentieth century they came with little, not knowing their destination, entering the state in carts and wagons to settle themselves in rural areas (Ste. Claire 2006:53). Marjory Stoneman Douglas (1967) wrote this description of Florida Crackers:

> Keen-eyed Yankee visitors had already written about the people who made up the almost unseen background of the state, calling them "natives" or "Crackers," lank whiskered men, tobacco stained, with the marks of malaria on them; thin bony wives, and sallow, white-headed children. They had retreated after the war into deeper wilderness, in the immemorial rugged frontier life of log cabin and clearing, hunting, and fishing. They were seen driving rickety oxcarts along pine woods roads, or coming in barefooted to boat landing stores to trade skins or deer meat for chewing tobacco, snuff, bacon, calico, powder. Sometimes they worked at logging or sawmilling. They had taken the place of the almost vanished Indian in the remote country where they kept alive the legends, the ballads, the tunes, the customs of their Georgian, Carolinian, Scotch-Irish, Irish, English, or even German ancestry. They were, as they had been, proud, secretive, unlettered, suspicious, enduring as time. They had taken the land for their own and had held it, making it American. It would be a long time before anyone noticed them more closely.

Crackers have perhaps best been described as self-sufficient, Southern "plain folk" who scratched their living from the soil or by raising livestock or fishing; the culture is said to have included a middle class, illustrating that Crackers were more than just poor whites (Denham 1994). In the early twentieth century, Cracker was considered an affectionate term by many, but by the 1950s, it again took on a pejorative tone, referring to a bigoted, country Southern white. Today, it is still considered a racial slur by many in the South (St. Claire 2006:34-35). On the other hand, many Gladesmen interviewees proudly proclaimed themselves to be Florida Crackers, so it appears that the term is subjective in meaning.

In southern Florida, Gladesmen Culture grew out of the Cracker culture and, in early times, logging, in addition to cattle raising, was one of the economic endeavors that initially drew these people to the region:

> …a lot of the large landowners in Florida ended up owning large pieces of property by virtue of coming down and cutting the virgin timber. And that started in probably the 1830s (and continued) right through the 1800s up to the turn of the century. So after the timber was cut, all these families were here, and they more or less developed what I would call the Gladesmen's culture. All of these families, some of them made a living off of commercial hunting and furs and alligator hides and frog hunting…So you actually went from the cattle originally that brought people down here to the timber. And with all these families here into commercial fishing and trapping and frog hunting and gator hides, that was the beginning of the Gladesmen's culture, which still exists today – not as much commercial but as a

> way of life – a traditional culture of a way of life probably more into the recreational enjoyment of their past and their history of being a part of the environment (Bergeron 2008).

By the time of the first survey of the Everglades and South Florida in 1921, many pioneer families had carved out a living as Florida Crackers in the sawgrass and peat. Some came to be Gladesmen hunters of plumes and pelts, while others established vast open range ranches, produce or citrus farms, or fishing businesses. South Florida Crackers tamed the tropical environment and brought their unique culture into what would become a truly multicultural region (Bucuvalas et al. 1994:37). It has been said that Crackers are not only a part of Florida history – to a great extent they are Florida history (Tonyan 2006).

Material possessions meant little to these self-reliant settlers. To Crackers everywhere in the state, personal independence and a restraint-free life were far more important than material prosperity or work – a behavior often viewed as lazy and shiftless by outsiders who did not understand the Cracker way of life. What few goods Crackers owned were usually homemade and rarely store bought, for they seldom had money to buy things. Typically, Cracker materials like cloth, tools, and cooking pots were used everyday until they wore out, which explains why little early Cracker material culture has survived for study today (Ste. Claire 2006:73-74).

While Crackers were bound by similar traits, the different environmental regions they occupied offered natural resources unique to those areas, and these environs required specialized means of settlement and forms of technology to ensure survival. Regionally, subcultures emerged throughout Florida from the northern part of the state to the Keys. Clearly, subsistence adaptation was a major determinant of regional cultural variability among the Crackers (Ste. Claire 2006:68).

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE GLADESMEN FOLK CULTURE

The Gladesmen Swamp/Folk Culture (Ogden 2005) represents a regional variant and localized outgrowth of the Cracker Culture in Florida (Bucuvalas et al. 1994; Ste. Claire 2006; Ste. Claire, personal communication 2009). As Crackers settled along both coasts and in interior portions of southern Florida, some adapted their lifestyles and subsistence patterns to the diverse wetland environment of the vast Everglades ecosystem. The rich natural resources of the southern Florida marshes, sloughs, and sawgrass prairies have always provided a steady supply of fish and game, and the people whose adaptations focused on the utilization of these resources have recently been given the name Gladesmen (Ogden 2005). Early Gladesmen sold hides and pelts as a cash crop while hunting game animals to provide food for their families, who lived on the edge of the Everglades or in frontier outposts such as Flamingo (Simmons and Ogden 1998:xvii):

> The landscape of the Everglades must be understood as more than a mere backdrop to the culture of the Gladesman. On the one hand, they were keen observers of this wilderness spending weeks at a time walking across endless sawgrass marshes, setting camp…and poling flat-bottomed skiffs through labyrinths of mangrove forests…their livelihoods depended upon the rich bounty of the Everglades wildlife…

The Gladesmen Culture has always had an interdependent relationship with the wetlands environment of southern Florida; it is this feature that best represents its regional variation from Florida Cracker Culture. The Gladesmen Culture is inextricably related to the wetland environment and is embedded in multiple shared aspects of it: language (terminology), practices, and worldview. A Gladesmen can be seen as the ultimate southern Florida naturalist in that he/she has extensive knowledge of numerous facets of the ecosystem, and in that Gladesmen practices require an awareness of and adaptation to the nuances of the seasons, weather, and human alteration of the landscape.

Glen Simmons, a Gladesmen, and Laura Ogden, an anthropologist, provided the first description of Gladesmen, a regional Cracker variant, in 1998. According to these authors, the term "Gladesmen" was not used historically by members of this culture to describe themselves (Simmons and Ogden 1998:xv-xvi). Instead, members of the culture referred to themselves as "swamp rats," "glade hunters," and "crackers." Ogden in her later work (2005:1) referred to "gladesmen" as "the people, mainly Anglo-American, who began settling along the edge of Florida's Everglades during the mid-1800s." She recalled first seeing the term in a letter written in the mid-1970s by John S. Lamb, Sr., to the manager of the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Mr. Lamb used the term to describe the lifestyle of those who hunted and camped in the northern reaches of the Everglades. He further explained that these men lived off the land, harvesting whatever grew there, even producing moonshine whiskey. In defining Gladesmen Culture, Ogden (2005:1) stressed the existence of a very strong relationship between the local culture and the environment of the Everglades (Figure 13).

While many settlers to southern Florida were attracted by open land and opportunities for livestock herding, by the 1920s, the land boom also beckoned people to the region. The promise of high paying jobs to drain and pave the swamps resulted in an influx of people from throughout the country. The land boom led to the construction of roads and subdivisions staked out through the pinewoods of southern Florida (Simmons and Ogden 1998:20-21). Clearing trees, timbering, and producing lumber were associated occupations during this era of new development that provided additional wage labor opportunities during those years. Many people took advantage of new employment in harvesting timber or working at sawmills while, if they chose to, still extracting the resources of the wetlands environment. In addition to those with the ancestral history mentioned earlier, much of the workforce involved in logging and building roads during the early twentieth century was provided by Miccosukee and black labor (Fred Dayhoff, personal communication with Grady Caulk 2009).

If settlers were not involved in timbering or livestock herding, they could harvest shellfish and bird plumes, hunt alligators, and fish coastal areas and nearby rivers – such people were the Gladesmen. The earliest Gladesmen depended heavily on the game of the region to supply food for their families. Deer and wild birds provided the main meat staple to their diets. Other meat staples included wild turkeys, raccoon, opossums, rabbits, and squirrels. Since refrigeration did not exist at this time, the meat was smoked, stored in salt brine, or packed in lard to preserve it for later consumption. People also tended small gardens and citrus groves to round out their diets (Ogden 2005:2). These Gladesmen shared the Cracker cultural traits of self-sufficiency, independence, and an ability to adapt to diverse environments. "Swamp rat," "skiffer," "glader," regardless of the term, the Gladesmen Culture has always been deeply linked to the environment of

Figure 13.
Historic Views of the Everglades Region

A. Lettuce Lake, Corkscrew Swamp

B. Early Camp

C. “Entering Everglades”, 1923

Source: Historical Museum of South Florida

southern Florida. The early Gladesmen lived a rural life where survival depended on the resources of the Everglades to feed themselves and their families. Adoption of this lifestyle was a transition from timbering activities in the region and can be seen in an increased emphasis on Gladesmen subsistence practices in providing for oneself and family. Through time, the importance of resource extraction would shift more toward recreation.

During the 1920s-1940s, steady employment as part of an expanding workforce allowed Gladesmen to work at wage-paying jobs or engage in truck farming and still live off the land by hunting, fishing, and trapping in the afternoon or on weekends. This represented a period of change from the lifestyle of the earliest Gladesmen, as there were increased opportunities to earn money in support of families while still engaging in traditional pursuits in the outdoors.

James Wile was one of the early twentieth-century land boom settlers. Wile and his family moved to Florida in the 1920s from Nova Scotia, Canada. Mr. Wile heard from a Canadian neighbor about the land boom in Florida so, along with his sons, he went to work for the Chevalier Corporation on the construction of the Tamiami Trail road (Kirkland 2001:2). The men stayed in the community of Pinecrest, on the Loop Road, in what is now Big Cypress National Preserve.

In 1926, Wile sent for his family to join him in Pinecrest. The Wile family moved into a three-room house made of rough-cut lumber. Mr. Wile's daughter, Mabel Kirkland, described the community as:

> ...several small homes, a commissary was built to buy groceries and a mess hall where everyone ate for free. They had a big sawmill too. They also had slot machines to play...They had a small school where all the children attended...There was a hotel where everyone gathered to dance and have parties...(Kirkland 2001:2).

Kirkland characterized life in Pinecrest as "fun" and included mention of "hoppies," a form of backwoods transportation using a "cut down Ford with hard rubber tires." This description suggests that she may have been referring to an early version of the swamp buggy (Kirkland 2001:3).

Wile's story is typical of many families who migrated to southern Florida during the 1920s and 1930s. They were looking for a better life and Florida offered this in the form of decent paying jobs and plentiful land. Gladesmen Don Barton, a long-time resident of Everglades City, was born in Ohio, where his father had temporarily relocated on a construction job. Mr. Barton's father, also an Ohio native, spent winters working as a commercial fisherman in Everglades City during the early 1930s. In 1943, the family joined the elder Barton in Clewiston, where he had secured employment on a government construction project. When the Clewiston project was completed, the Barton family moved to Everglades City, where Don's father returned to commercial fishing (Barton 2008). This lifestyle was typical of many people in rural southern Florida during this time period. They worked in wage paying jobs and supplemented their income through commercial fishing, frogging, and alligator hunting.

Early Gladesmen of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made their living entirely from the resources of the Everglades region, subsisting on game, fish, and plants. They provided for themselves and their families by hunting and trapping animals and selling the plumage of exotic

birds (Owens 2002:86). For later Gladesmen who utilized the area that became Everglades National Park, their way of life changed dramatically after the establishment of the park in 1947. The lifestyle of roaming the land at will, building camps, hunting, fishing, and riding swamp buggies was no longer permitted. "Gladesmen could no longer keep permanent camps within the park's boundaries or set fires on the Everglades prairies – a practice traditionally carried out during the wet season to increase game density" (Simmons and Ogden 1998: xxi).

In response to access regulations in the 1940s, many people modified their resource use to accommodate the Everglades National Park restrictions, while other Gladesmen moved to different areas of the state. It should be emphasized, however, that the Gladesmen Culture has always existed far outside the present park boundaries. Gladesmen have recounted how they or their ancestors covered a vast territory, and at one time could travel by canoe from Lake Okeechobee all the way to Miami. It is a culture that has always been at home throughout the extensive southern Florida wetlands, although cultural, subsistence, and recreational practices may vary according to geographic subregion.

Florida is home to thousands of transplants from all over the country and the world. But it is also home to those whose families have been in the state for several generations. Gladesmen Byron Maharrey's family has been in southern Florida for five generations. At the turn of the twentieth century, his paternal great-grandfather moved from central Florida to Fort Myers, where the family opened a dry goods store. His grandmother later married Joe P. Maharrey, who worked for the Atlantic Coastline Railroad. At some point, Joe quit the railroad and took up vegetable farming on Whiskey Creek, north of Fort Myers. Byron stated that Joe hunted the Everglades areas near the Big Cypress Swamp. He apparently used his Model A Ford to traverse the sloughs. In order to get through high water areas without flooding the engine, the hunting party would take their rain slickers and secure them to the front of the radiator. This would push the water ahead of the vehicle and create a pocket of air where the engine was located (Maharrey 2008a).

Arthurine Wilson, born in 1927 in Okeechobee, is a sixth or seventh generation Floridian. Though Mrs. Wilson does not recall the date, her grandparents and their family moved from the Pensacola area by covered wagon to Fountain, Florida; they later moved to the Okeechobee area some time before Arthurine was born. After her mother married, she lived on the lake in Canal Point, where Arthurine's father took a job as a night watchman at the Old Sherman, a sawmill on Lake Okeechobee. Her father also participated in a common regional activity, making and selling moonshine. Like most people living near the lake, Arthurine's father fished and hunted alligators, while her grandfather hunted and trapped raccoons near Moore Haven (A. Wilson 2008).

The land boom and the abundance of employment opportunities lured many families to Florida in the 1930s and 1940s. A few of the histories from that period are summarized here. Charles Nesbitt was born in Clewiston in 1947 but his family moved to Florida from Indiana in 1942, when Charles's grandfather settled in the Kissimmee area to commercial fish. Grandfather Nesbitt later moved to Clewiston, where he took a job at U.S. Sugar and commercial fished Lake Okeechobee (Nesbitt 2008).

Frank Denninger's family, attracted by the economy and warm Florida weather, relocated from Connecticut to Hialeah in 1948, when Frank was six months old. During Frank's childhood in the 1950s, he and his friends rode their bicycles out to the Everglades to fish. This was his first exposure to the backwoods and, over the years, he developed a strong connection to it and began

to devote all his free time to hunting, fishing, and enjoying the outdoors. These activities continue today for Mr. Denninger, as he still spends most of his free time in the Big Cypress Swamp (Denninger 2008a).

Tom Shirley, born in 1930 in Texas, has lived in Dade County since about 1932. His father moved the family to the Miami area after a cousin told him there "was a mint to be made in tropical fish." The business did well until the late 1930s when a cold front killed the entire stock. The elder Mr. Shirley then went into the construction business (Shirley 2008). Tom Shirley's first exposure to the Everglades occurred as a boy when he accompanied his father and a family friend on a Sunday afternoon automobile excursion to the Loop Road. He fell in love with the area and remembers that some of his best moments in life were spent fishing with his father off Highway 27. He later bought property in the Big Cypress and recalled:

> …[it] puts a great value in life when a family can go to the woods. Like I have property out in the Big Cypress, and our greatest times are when family and friends, we all go to [the] woods. And not [for just] hunting…we all enjoy hunting…our best time is to go out in the Everglades and camp…sit around the campfire at night. That's a great value (Shirley 2008).

After World War II and the establishment of Everglades National Park, there was a decrease in the degree to which Gladesmen activities were intended for primary subsistence. Instead, Gladesmen practices today are more of a recreational nature, and include the use of modern conveyances including airboats and off road vehicles. As stated in later interview excerpts, many modern Gladesmen yearn for the earlier times. According to Franklin Adams (2008), "back then, there was almost no regulation -- we had a wonderful freedom. You could just go anywhere you wanted, day or night." Today's Gladesmen continue to derive mush satisfaction from practices that were once rooted in day-to-day survival.

## THE LIFE OF A GLADESMEN

Glen Simmons was born in 1916, grew up on Long Glade, between Homestead and Florida City (Simmons and Ogden 1998:1), and passed away on July 21, 2009. He was well known in the southern Florida Gladesmen community and his experiences in the Everglades provide a glimpse into the life of someone who used the area for subsistence as well as enjoyment. Sometime after Glen was born, his father James Simmons built a house of rough lumber that stood off the ground on wooden blocks on two acres in Long Glade. The house was located on land that Glen's mother, Maude, had purchased using money she had saved from her husband's earnings. The 1926 hurricane moved the Simmons house into the glade though they did not rebuild it; instead, the family "leveled it up a bit" and continued on with life (Simmons and Ogden 1998:10-12).

For a boy growing up in the woods, life tended to be an adventure for Glen:

> Any boy fortunate enough to have grown up along these inland glades before too much settlement can remember romping barefoot, swinging from one willow tree to another, fishing, hunting, and working, toting logs on our shoulders…and rambling the trails and wagon roads (Simmons and Ogden 1998:12-13).

Glen Simmons' father was killed at the beginning of the Great Depression but his mother, Maude, was a resourceful woman who kept the family fed and took in sewing as income. Long Glade provided plenty of food for the Simmons family, with an abundance of fish, crawfish, rabbits, and herons. Mr. Simmons never left the Everglades, and for many years, continued the Gladesmen lifestyle of alligator hunting, camping, and fishing, as well as serving as a guide and expert skiff builder. In his later years, he never lost his wonderment for the Everglades but lamented the loss of so much of the Everglades environment and culture (Simmons and Odgen 1998).

One did not have to live in an isolated rural community to be exposed to the Everglades way of life (Figure 14). Many people who grew up in the Miami-Dade County area and surrounding environs during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s still had the pinewoods and swamps of the Everglades as their backyard. Since the urban explosion of the past several decades, these areas have been drained, paved over, or built upon, but to these Gladesmen the childhood memories of the swamps, prairies, and pinewoods are still vivid. Frank Denninger grew up in Hialeah in the 1950s and remembers outfitting his bicycle with wire baskets to hold his tackle box and fishing rod, and peddling with his friends to fish in a canal a few miles from his home:

> …we started going out on the edge of Hialeah where there was the edge of the Everglades, used to come within five, six miles of here and it was within easy range of a bicycle. Well, we only went so far and we caught little dinky fish and we knew there was bigger ones out there, but we were a little worried about going out there (Denninger 2008a:5).

Owens (2002:86) aptly described today's Gladesmen:

> Like the Cajuns of Louisiana's bayous, the Everglades boasts its very own one-of-a-kind culture and heritage, a peaceful way of life largely independent of its outer-lying densely populated areas...Today's Gladesmen's relationship to the environment is more in a ritualistic sense: traditional and lingo, intimate knowledge of the geography and natural processes of the land. They are regular people with regular jobs and homes in the suburbs.

Most contemporary Gladesmen also have a deep respect for the environment and understand the need for its management. When discussing how heavy hunting decreased the deer population in the Loop Road area before the establishment of the Big Cypress National Preserve in 1974, Franklin Adams (1992) recounted that, "You know, we were crackers but we were raised to obey the law and if there was no law out there, you disciplined yourself. You were ethical…"

Figure 14.
Early Gladesmen Life

A. Backcountry Camp, from left: George Espenlaub, Henry Espenlaub, Unknown

Source:
Christine Espenlaub Howell

B. Hunting Trip in Glade Skiff

Source: Historical Museum of South Florida

Most of the Gladesmen interviewed have roamed the Everglades since childhood. A great many were introduced to this lifestyle by their parents, who introduced them to the backcountry and the traditional ways for drawing from and enjoying it. Others were "recruited" by friends or siblings, or they discovered the Everglades on their own and roamed at will with others or even by themselves. They did what kids do – they went to the woods – which in the 1940s and 1950s in southern Florida were relatively unspoiled and unpaved. Franklin Adams (1992:1) remembered:

> I started coming out [into the backcountry] when I was just a child, I started coming to the woods with my father when I was about five…And would just sort of tag along with [him] and his friends…and they'd go hunting…in Everglades National Park prior to the park being dedicated in 1947, I would go…to West Lake and go duck hunting…and we'd go to the fish houses down in Flamingo…and get fresh fish…so I started being involved in the Big Cypress, as going out there, by about 1943.

Activities in the backcountry included hunting deer and turkey during hunting season, while during the rest of the year, people would just go out to be in nature, to explore, picnic, take photographs, and bird watch (Figure 15). Both resource consumptive and non-consumptive activities continue to be an integral part of the modern Gladesmen Culture. Families travel to the Everglades to camp, hike, observe wildlife, and enjoy fellowship with fellow Gladesmen.

## HISTORIC GLADESMEN ACTIVITIES

Historically, early Gladesmen activities and methods reflect the fact that many, if not most, of their resource procurement practices were shared with the native inhabitants of Florida: hunting, fishing, and living off the land's natural resources for survival. The close relationship to the land as a cultural and natural landscape is an important trait shared with Florida's Native American cultures. Early Native American access to hunting and fishing areas in the Everglades was by foot or canoe, transportation modes adopted by early Gladesmen. Activities that define the earliest Gladesmen of southern Florida, and the types of game they pursued, are discussed below.

### ALLIGATOR HUNTING

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the alligator hide trade has traditionally been a lucrative cash crop for hunters in southern Florida. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Florida alligator hide trade was well established, and the state represented the chief supplier of hides to tanneries throughout the East Coast (Simmons and Ogden 1998:81). Early hunting methods varied depending on the season and terrain. During dry season, access into the backcountry was on foot, with hunters walking from camp to camp, hunting the alligators in their dens. After harvesting an alligator, they cleaned and salted the hide and left it hidden in camp until it was time to return to their cars, parked on rudimentary roads along the edge of the Everglades. During the wet season, access was more difficult and the hunters used various means of adapting their Model A's to the wet and muddy conditions (Ogden 2005:4). To many early Gladesmen, the revenue from alligator hides provided their primary means of support. Hides rose in price from 60 cents per skin (in 1896), to 90 cents to $2.00 (in 1902), and reached $2.50 to $3.00 for seven foot hides during the 1930s (Simmons and Ogden 1988:83).

Figure 15.
Backcountry Camping

A. Frank Espenlaub's Jungle Hammock

B. Meal Time in Camp. From left: Unknown, George Espenlaub

Source: Christine Espenlaub Howell

Gladesmen hide dealers had their own means of preparing hides. One method was to build a house about 10 feet wide and 20 feet long. Inside was a bench with notches cut every foot or so to measure the hide. The house was filled with salt; the more salting done, the more the salt piled up (Simmons and Ogden 1998:103-104). When a hunter brought an alligator in, the dealer measured it and examined it for holes and defects (Charles Nesbitt 2008:11). Frank Denninger (2008a:22) recalls alligator hunting at Lake Okeechobee in the late 1980s. There were hide buyers at the lake that would meet hunters at the docks and pay them in cash for the hide. According to Denninger, by that time prices varied from $35.00 to $55.00 per foot, depending on the size of the alligator. Today, alligators are hunted during a designated season and hunters are required by the State of Florida to buy a permit. The most common means of contemporary hunting is by airboat. At present, alligator hides sell for $12.00 to $30.00 per foot, depending on the size, width, and age of the alligator, as well as the region of the state in which it is sold (Byron Maharrey, personal communication, 2008b; Bishop Wright, Jr., personal communication, 2008a).

## SMALL AND BIG GAME HUNTING

Subsistence hunting was a very important activity to the early Gladesmen. The abundant natural resources of the Everglades region provided a plethora of available game for the hunter to put on the family dinner table (Figure 16). In addition to fish, frogs, and turtles, the list of available terrestrial game is long but the animals that Gladesmen hunted most often included deer, otter, turkey, various birds and ducks, rabbits, wild pigs, and raccoons. Hunting is still central to contemporary Gladesmen Culture with many of the same traditional practices employed, particularly the use of a hunting camp as a base of operations. But instead of walking or skiffing to a hunting area, the modern-day Gladesmen have adapted the earlier hunting techniques to employ swamp buggies, all terrain vehicles (ATVs), and airboats to access remote camps and hunting areas.

## BIRD PLUME COLLECTING

During the nineteenth century, many hunters in southern Florida earned high profits from selling exotic bird plumes; this represents a short-term use of Everglades resources to make money. During this time period, plumes had become the fashion in the millinery industry and the hunting of these birds nearly led to their extinction. After 1901, the practice decreased when the Florida Legislature passed a law forbidding the killing of wild birds at nesting time for their plumage (Paige 1986:98-99). The demand for plumage stayed high, however, and the trafficking of feathers was hard to stop (Tebeau 1957:240-241). Eventually women's hat fashions changed and the plumes were no longer in such demand.

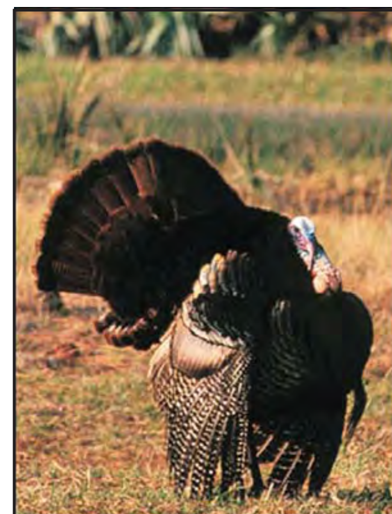
## COMMERCIAL FISHING

The waters of the Everglades have been the focus of resource extraction for centuries. As previously discussed, many early Gladesmen participated in commercial fishing, either fulltime or part-time as a means of supplementing income from a fulltime job. By the 1880s, commercial fishing was well established, with Key West fisherman selling a variety of fish in Havana and lower Florida (Paige 1986:85).

Figure 16.
Game Animals

A. Alligator, Turner River Road

B. White Tail Deer, Kissimmee Chain of Lakes



C. Florida Wild Turkey
Source:
National Wildlife Federation Website;
www.nwf.org

Two fish processing plants opened in Chokoloskee in the 1890s that were operated by the West Coast Fishing Company out of Punta Gorda and the South Fish Company out of Fort Myers. By the turn of the twentieth century, commercial fish houses had opened in the Ten Thousand Islands, with the Hamilton brothers operating a profitable operation on Wood Key, selling salted mullet to Cuba. Fish processing plants sprang up during the 1920s in Everglades City after the Barron River was dredged, which allowed deep-water vessels to dock locally. Small commercial fishing operations continued to grow during this time along with the associated ice hauling business that delivered ice to the fish houses. In 1936, there were over 100 fish houses, with a lesser number of ice plants, situated from Chokoloskee to Cape Sable (Paige 1986:86-87). Much of the commercial fishing in the Everglades City area focused on mullet, though in the winter fisherman also harvested trout. One of the smaller scale fishing methods involved taking a small boat out and catching minnows with a net. The fisherman then went out to the edge of the Gulf and caught trout with cane poles using minnows for bait (Barton 2008).

Everglades City still relies on fishing and crabbing for its economy, but a ban on gill-net mullet fishing has hurt the local fishing industry, resulting in a difficult transition from fishing to tourism. Some former commercial fisherman now run airboat concessions and guide services, though according to Ogden (2005:6), anti-government sentiment resulting from the ban runs high in the community. The fishing restrictions have also brought to light conflicts over natural resource protection. "The sentiments of these former fisherman reflect the conflict over and complexity of natural resource protection – the preservation of an important species causing the loss of a traditional way of life" (Ogden 2005:6).

One of the larger, although more isolated, fishing villages that developed as a result of commercial fishing was Flamingo, established around 1900. Located in Monroe County, on the eastern edge of the Cape Sable Prairies, this small settlement originally consisted of several small stilt houses (Simmons and Ogden 1998:128-130). Due to its geographic isolation, intense heat, humidity, and mosquito infestation, only a small core of fisherman lived in the village. Flamingo remained unreachable except by boat until the completion of the Ingraham Highway in the early 1920s. Although that new highway connected the community to Homestead, the road was often impassable. The hurricane of 1935 destroyed all the permanent structures in Flamingo and by 1939, the already small population had dwindled to only 21 residents. In addition, as new technology developed in the fishing and processing industry, the fish plants and icehouses closed, further sealing Flamingo's fate (Paige 1894:87; Simmons and Ogden 1998:122-126). Flamingo is now part of Everglades National Park and the location of a National Park Service visitor center and campground.

By the early twentieth century, Lake Okeechobee had a vibrant commercial fishing industry with catfish harvesting the most important operation on the lake (Will 1977:114). Many fishermen worked at U.S. Sugar Corporation and ran their traps in the afternoons and on weekends. Early commercial fishermen used plank boats, and later boats made out of marine plywood, to fish the lake (Nesbitt 2008). During the early 1900s, several fish camps appeared on the lake and in 1904, Fernando Miller started the OK Fish Company. Though Miller also purchased fish from other fisherman on the lake, his enterprise established several fish camps, employed about 25 workers, and owned and operated 18 boats (Will 1977). More commercial fishing operations followed and for over 40 years, commercial catfish fishing boomed on Lake Okeechobee. Ronnie Bergeron (2008) recalled how his mother's family moved to Lake Okeechobee to take advantage of the commercial fishing opportunities:

> They lived on the rim of the lake prior to any levees or any restriction of any…natural flow. They made their own boats, they made their own traps, they made their own bait, and they fished for catfish in the lake. And they basically would catch the fish and bring them up Taylor Creek to the Ice Plant where the railroad came in and those fish would be shipped all over America.

Commercial operations at Lake Okeechobee eventually declined due to over fishing of the catfish population, the lowering of the lake, drainage of the spawning grounds, and the 1925 passage of a law prohibiting seining in fresh water (Will 1977:115,125). Today, sport fishermen fish for bass, crappie, and bluegill on the lake, and there are several sport fishing camps and guide services located in the area.

## RECREATIONAL FISHING

Recreational fishing is one of the most popular activities among contemporary Gladesmen. The type of fish and method of fishing can vary depending on geographic location and the preferences of the fisherman. Throughout southern Florida, people fish from airboats, canoes, off bridges, and from the shores of lakes and canal banks. Southern Florida is known for its backwater fishing (associated with tidal creeks, mangrove islands, and bays) where there is an abundance of saltwater fish. Freshwater fishing is just as popular, with species including bass, bream, snook, snapper, and grouper. Exotic fish species have been introduced to Florida, both intentionally and unintentionally, during the past several decades that include the oscar, armored catfish, walking catfish, tilapia, and jewelfish (Florida Wildlife Commission 2003).

## FROGGING (FROG GIGGING)

Frog gigging is a practice of hunting frogs with a three or four-pronged spear called a gig. The spear is attached to a long pole that is thrust at the frog. Before airboats, froggers used wooden poled skiffs and canoes to hunt. They attached the gig to one end of the cane pole they used to push their boats through the shallow water. By the 1940s, froggers began to use airboats and no longer had to push their boats and gig the frog with the same pole. Frog gigging is done largely at night using flashlights to spotlight the eyes of the frogs; boats are sometimes outfitted with a long, cylindrical tube where they store the frog after it has been gigged. Gigging is also still done on foot and out of a canoe. Frog gigging is currently practiced both commercially and for personal use. The meaty hind legs are a popular delicacy in this country and abroad (Stuempfle 1998:28).

## TURTLING

Turtles have historically been a favorite staple of people living in and around the Everglades region, with fisherman supplementing their income by hunting for both the animal and the eggs. When the turtles come ashore at night, the hunter captures the turtles and collects the eggs. Cape Sable and some of the small keys in Florida Bay became main hunting grounds in southern Florida until the establishment of Everglades National Park (Paige 1986:89-90). Though turtle hunting is illegal within the park, this did not bring an end to the turtle industry, as the practice still continues commercially throughout southern Florida.

Today the Florida Soft-Shell Turtle is the most favored species and is hunted through trot lining. This method involves hand feeding a baited multi-hook line across a waterway. The fisherman pulls the line in and removes the turtles, depositing them in a sack. Dealers then sell most of the turtles for consumption in Japan, although turtle is still eaten locally (Ogden 2005:3). Turtles are caught in the lakes, streams, and creeks of the region using a canoe or airboat.

## ACCESSING THE EVERGLADES

Access to and within the Everglades environment of southern Florida has always been a very important concern of Gladesmen. It has strongly influenced their hunting methods through time and, during the last several decades has been shaped by changing technologies. Contemporary Gladesmen access the Everglades to hunt, fish, and enjoy nature in a much different manner than their ancestors. Frank Denninger (2006) stated:

> This culture today includes those of us who fish, hunt, frog, etc., and utilize specialized motorized or non-motorized transportation systems to engage in traditional cultural activities and access traditional cultural properties throughout the CERP regions. Today's modern community members have evolved from predecessors…who arrived at this Traditional Cultural Property…by ox-cart prior to any highways about a century ago.

While most of the contemporary Gladesmen utilize motorized transportation such as airboats, swamp buggies, and manufactured off highway vehicles, these inventions have origins dating back to the 1930s and indicate continuity over several decades in traditional practice. The evolution from canoes and pole-driven skiffs to powerful airboats driven by aircraft engines reflects the technological changes, environmental adaptations, and improvements in equipment that have taken place in this culture over time.

### TRADITIONAL MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

Before the advent of motorized boats, Gladesmen accessed the backcountry using glade skiffs, which are traditional flat-bottomed boats necessary for very shallow water. Poles were used to propel the skiffs, as oars are virtually useless in shallow waters of the swamps, mangroves, and sawgrass marshes. The pole also provides balance when the one is standing, and poling is less tiring than paddling. Master skiff builder Glen Simmons' boats were 16-18 feet in length and just over two feet wide. The bow was held together with copper wire and the gunwale and transom were made of cypress or redwood planks. He finished the boat with a layer of fiberglass resin (Simmons and Ogden 1998:27; Simmons 1985:7). Before motorized boats, these skiffs transported early Gladesmen into the backcountry to their fishing and hunting camps. Early skiffs were constructed of cypress boards and, later, marine plywood. Because farmers and settlers in the Everglades depended on the game and fish to provide income and food, glade skiffs and canoes were key to survival in the swamps. Non-motorized boats did not die out with the appearance of airboats and motorized jon boats; some are still in use today, as there seems to be no better way to traverse the shallow, narrow confines of the swamps than with a pole-driven skiff or canoe (Figures 9b, 14b, and 17).

Figure 17.
Everglades Water Craft

A. Jon Boat on Fisheating Creek; Butch Wilson and William "Nubbin" Lanier

B. Canoe on Fisheating Creek

## CONTEMPORARY MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

In order to support traditional activities, contemporary Gladesmen use a variety of off-road vehicles (ORV's) in southern Florida where the water is too shallow for conventional watercraft or the land is too soft for automobiles or motorcycles. ORV's have enhanced the Gladesmen's ability to traverse remote areas, though Gladesmen of the pre-motorized era did not let difficult access deter them from traveling the backcountry by skiff or canoe. Many of the activities that are currently central to the culture are dependent upon the use of both motorized and non-motorized vehicles, although it should not be assumed that the use of ORVs throughout the Everglades ecosystem is not of particular environmental concern (Ramos 2009:3). The fluctuating water levels and diverse Florida terrain dictate the type of vehicle used in the Everglades region and, according to Denninger (2006), the success of many Gladesmen activities is dependent upon this wide range of vehicles.

As the use of ORVs increased, clubs and organizations developed based on the use and enjoyment of not just the ORV but to promote its use in the Everglades. Gladesmen indicate that membership in these clubs strengthens ties to the physical environment of the Everglades ecosystem and further reinforces the continuation of the Gladesmen Culture. In addition to sharing a specialized knowledge of airboats, swamp buggies, tracked vehicles, and all-terrain vehicles, the camaraderie of belonging to an organization whose members share similar interests provides cohesion and structure to the Gladesmen Culture.

### Airboating

Airboats are one of the defining characteristics of modern Gladesmen Culture. These are flat-bottomed crafts propelled in a forward direction by an aircraft-styled propeller and powered by either an airplane or automotive engine (Figure 18). A metal cage encloses the engine and propeller to prevent foreign objects coming in contact with both. The flat bottom of the boat and the lack of a propeller under the water allow airboats to operate through very shallow areas and even on dry ground. As development and drainage of the Everglades increased, the need to travel deeper into the difficult terrain of the backcountry also increased; use of the airboat has allowed access to a much larger area than is possible using other methods.

The first airboat, called the *Ugly Duckling*, was built in 1905 in Nova Scotia, Canada, by a team led by Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. This prototype was used to test various engines and prop configurations. An associate of Dr. Bell, Glenn Curtiss, also a Florida developer and aircraft builder, is reported to have registered the first airboat in Florida, in 1920. It was called the Curtis Scooter and consisted of an airplane propeller and engine bolted to a small fishing boat with a closed cockpit design. By the 1930s, homemade airboats began appearing in the swamps and marshes of Florida and Louisiana (McIver 1994:chapter 28). Denninger (2008a) has said that the first ones he knew of used Model A or T engines and were not very powerful; improvements made them much more effective after World War II.

Ogden (2005:4-5) documented how the "backyard mechanic" hunters, fishermen, and froggers in southern Florida adapted the airboat for use in the shallow conditions of the swamps, ponds, and sloughs. Constructed using marine plywood, the first airboats were gradually replaced by aluminum bodies (Azzarello et al. 2006:45). After World War II, airboat use increased dramatically, incorporating aircraft-styled propellers, airplane (or automobile) engines, and riveted

Figure 18.
Airboats

A. Airboat in Water Conservation Area 3; Paul Bailey and Susan Perlman

B. Two Seater Airboat

C. Commercially Produced Airboat

sections of aircraft aluminum. Airboat design varies according to local conditions. Airboats used in northern Florida employ manufactured fiberglass or welded aluminum hulls outfitted with a tough sheet of polymer on the bottom; this allows for ease of navigation through the deeper waters of the area. In the shallow, rocky terrain of extreme southern Florida, shallow draft hulls that use riveted aircraft aluminum sections are more effective.

Although there are still many airboat owners that continue to build their own boats, commercially produced airboats are extremely popular. These craft vary from the functional to highly customized boats with intricate and colorful paint schemes, high performance engines, and quality workmanship. High technology hulls are now constructed of welded or riveted aluminum and can be painted in a camouflage scheme for hunting. Airboats can be further customized with bimini tops, windshields, composite propellers, and wraparound decks.

In addition to providing access into the Everglades for recreational activities, airboats are used commercially and for search and rescue operations. There are several businesses along the Tamiami Trail that use airboats to take tourists into the Everglades. Some have been in business for decades, including several in Dade County such as the Coopertown Restaurant and Airboat Rides, Frog City, and Gator Park (Azzarello et al. 2006:43). Other commercial uses of airboats include surveying, pipeline inspection and maintenance, and law enforcement.

Southern Florida airboaters often refer to themselves as the "eyes and ears" of the Everglades. Their knowledge of the backcountry and skill at operating airboats enables them to assist in search and rescue efforts in the swamps and saw grass country. Almost every region of southern Florida has an airboat club and, in addition to wildlife preservation and conservation, search and rescue is one of the most important functions of these organizations. On December 29, 1972, Eastern Airlines Flight 401 crashed in the Everglades in Water Management Area 3. Bud Marquis, a member of the Airboat Association of Florida, and his partner, Ray Dickinson, were frog gigging nearby and witnessed the crash. Mr. Marquis navigated his airboat through the saw grass and was the first person on the scene, where he rendered aid to victims (American Airboat SAR 2007). Other club members have participated in rescue operations, often working long hours under dangerous conditions.

### Half-Tracks and Full-Tracks

A half-track is a civilian or military vehicle with regular wheels on the front for steering, and caterpillar tracks on the back to propel the vehicle and carry most of the load. The purpose of this combination is to produce a vehicle with the cross-country capabilities of a tank and the handling of a wheeled vehicle. It is not difficult for someone who can drive a car to drive a half-track, which is a great advantage over full track vehicles. A full track vehicle has tank like tracks on both the front and rear and is steered by a system similar to a bulldozer, whereby movement is accomplished by controlling power input to the left or right track system individually using two vehicle steering sticks in front of the driver. In both types of vehicles, the driver and passenger sit on a raised platform above the tracks (Denninger 2008c). Loggers reportedly used half-tracks in southern Florida during the 1930s and 1940s. Tracked vehicles occur in photographs from WWII, and their adaptation and use in the Florida swamps appears to have coincided with other post-war technology (as noted for the airboat) and may have involved the use of government surplus.

The main advantage of half-tracks over wheeled vehicles is that the tracks reduce the vehicle's overall ground pressure and give it greater mobility over soft terrain, while they do not require the complex steering mechanisms of fully tracked vehicles, relying instead on their front wheels to direct the vehicle, augmented in some cases by track braking controlled by the steering wheel. The weight of the tracked vehicles is more evenly distributed than that of a swamp buggy, allowing them to be used on soft ground where a swamp buggy would sink. Freddy Fisikelli (2009:6-7) gave an account of using his half-track many years ago in taking a medical team out to an airplane crash site in the middle of the night. He also related that he and others formed a club in the 1960s that was called the Halftrack Club of Dade County; today it is known as the Full Track Club (Fisikelli 2009:8).

Many track vehicle users built their own systems using junk parts. Frank Denninger (2008a) recalled that he, along with Stan Jensen and Buck Madison, built his first half-track in the 1960s at his employer's machine shop. This half-track greatly expanding his hunting opportunities, allowing him to progress from hunting on foot to using what he called "the most sophisticated type vehicle of the era for hunting the Glades." Denninger used the vehicle for deer hunting in areas north of Alligator Alley, utilizing access points off Route 27 and the L-5 Levee on the Broward and Palm Beach county line. He stated that the use of tracked vehicles is still popular, as seen by the number of track clubs in southern Florida. Most of the vehicles currently used are full tracks that, due to regulatory changes, are smaller in size than earlier vehicles.

### Swamp Buggies

Swamp buggies are all-terrain vehicles built of necessity by hunters and others in the Everglades to traverse the region's swampy areas. They are tall, awkward looking, gas-powered vehicles with huge, balloon-like tires (Figures 19 and 20). The swamp buggies of the 1930s and 1940s incorporated Model T engines and parts and used aircraft tires. Freddy Fisikilli (2009:4) recounted that in the late 1950s he cut up old Model As and built his first swamp buggy; this had three tires on each side of the rear end and single tires on the front. A later version was built that used 12 airplane tires (Fisikilli 2009:5). Some modern buggies are still homemade and consist of various automobile body and engine components, though many are now manufactured commercially.

Ed Frank, from the Naples area, is considered by folks in southwestern Florida to be the inventor of the swamp buggy. In order to better access hunting areas in the Big Cypress Swamp, he utilized parts from a Model T Ford and a seat from a World War I airplane (Ogden 2005:5). According to Ed Frank's niece, Christine Howell (2008), Ed and Christine's father built these buggies for their own use and not commercially. Ed so enjoyed being in the woods, however, that he gave up his gas station business and began a guide service, using the buggies as transport. Howell (2008) said, "And he enjoyed going out. And so he took daily, guided swamp buggy tours into the Everglades. My mom fixed a lunch, and he could only carry [around] four people…but it [the swamp buggy] had rails back there—for daily trips into the Everglades."

Other innovations incorporated into buggy construction include the use of two transmissions to provide lower gear ratios, extra cutout tires over the existing tires for added traction, and Jeep components (Ogden 2005:5).

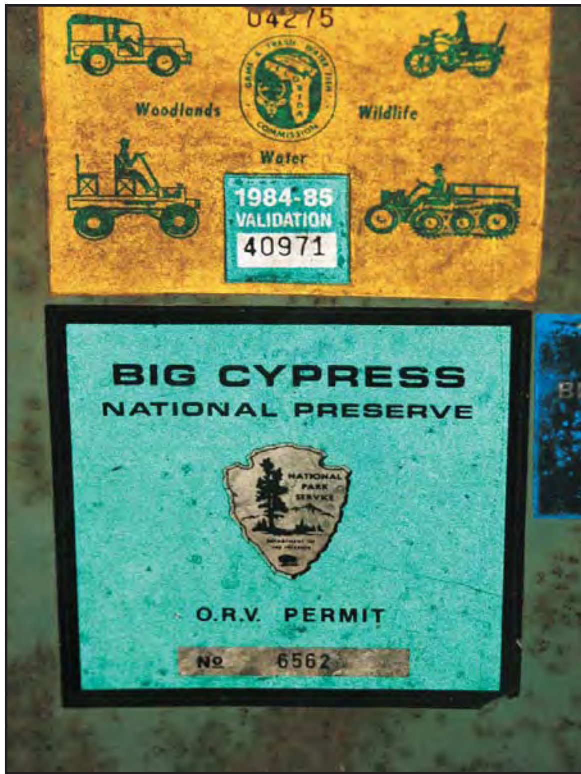
Figure 19.
Swamp Buggies

A. Byron Maharrey's Swamp Buggy with 1929 Ford Model A Engine

B. Early Swamp Buggy: Everglades Guide Services "South Under"
Source: Christine Espenlaud Howell

C. Impromptu Gladesmen Swamp Buggy Meet-Up in the Woods Source: Barbra Jean Powell

Figure 20.
Swamp Buggy Culture




A. Big Cypress National Preserve
O. R. V. Permits

B. (from left) Harold Hampton, Chuck Hampton, and Costas Cavas on the Hampton Swamp Buggy, Arcadia, Florida

### All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)

An ATV serves the same purpose as a swamp buggy but is smaller and lighter and generally commercially produced. Whereas a swamp buggy may be large enough to carry several passengers, the ATV will only seat one to two people. Though this vehicle will cover the same terrain as a buggy, its smaller size allows for passage into tighter areas than a swamp buggy would be able to access (Denninger personal communication 2008c).

## WHAT IS A GLADESMEN?

Outside of Florida, the Gladesmen Culture is little known. Within Florida, it has been little studied and is largely misunderstood. This chapter began with a discussion of how the culture evolved from historical beginnings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout the twentieth century, while Gladesmen traditions have been adapted and modernized up to the present day, these traditions have nonetheless continued. Whether passed on through generations of families or introduced to newcomers by friends, a modern Gladesmen Culture is still active today.

History indicates the Gladesmen Culture developed in the region of southern Florida out of the Florida Cracker Culture. During the early twentieth century, Gladesmen like Glen Simmons symbolized this early development, which appears to have had two forms: the fully immersed "swamp rat" and others who made their livings as farmers, loggers, and ranchers, yet also used the ecosystem regularly to extract resources. After World War II, there was a transition that occurred within the culture. This coincided with an increase in the availability of steady employment, expanded development, the establishment of the Everglades National Park, and increased use of mechanized equipment, and can be seen in a marked shift from traditional behaviors related to subsistence to similar practices that are largely associated with recreation.

Here, we discuss what has been learned about the traditions and social institutions that define a Gladesmen, as drawn from literature searches, personal accounts, and ethnographic participant observation. What are the traits that make Gladesmen different from anyone else that hunts, fishes, or uses a swamp buggy or airboat in southern Florida? How do people come to consider themselves Gladesmen, and recognize others as part of the same group?

A Gladesmen is a member of a rural folk culture that has a shared identity characterized by a strong sense of community based on unique cultural, behavioral, and ideological ties to the Everglades (southern Florida) environment. As described by Simmons and Ogden (2005:xviii-xix), the quote below serves to define the Gladesmen of the pre-1950s in relation to their chosen surroundings:

> The landscape of the Everglades must be understood as more than a mere backdrop to the culture of the Gladesmen. On the one hand, they were keen observers of this wilderness—spending weeks at a time walking across endless sawgrass marshes, setting camp on slightly higher hammock-covered islands, and poling flat bottomed skiffs through labyrinths of mangrove forests. As their livelihood depended upon the rich bounty of the Everglades wildlife, gladesmen

> necessarily monitored the seasonal fluctuations in the region's game. They were also able to interpret subtle signs in this landscape (such as slight depressions in the mud, the presence of certain birds, or specific odors) to track their prey.
>
> Their reading of these signs and their complete immersion within this environment often granted gladesmen a unique insight into the workings of this complex ecosystem. The landscape was central to their daily experience, as their self-imposed isolation in the Everglades back-country provided them with scant other diversions. At the end of the day, gladesmen often gathered around campfires and smoking smudge pots, some sipping moonshine, to rehash their observations, to speculate, and to tell tall tales. Although most of these men received little formal education, they well understood the complexities and variations of this environment.

Today's Gladesmen have inherited and share many characteristics of the first Gladesmen, although their practices are not intended to provide primary subsistence. Most importantly, as stated by Ogden above, the landscape of southern Florida is not a backdrop to their culture – it is its primary focus. Gladesmen do not merely fish out of the trunk of their car on occasion, they consciously and purposively invest a large part of their lives, their free time, and themselves in the practice of being modern-day Gladesmen.

Over subsequent decades, the traditions and knowledge of the earliest Gladesmen have been maintained, passed on to, and adapted by their successors. Based on interviews and other written accounts, many people say that their families have been Gladesmen for several generations and can recount numerous experiences and stories passed down over the years. Others recall being exposed to the Gladesmen way of life by their fathers or grandfathers, and cited that those early influences have stayed with them all their lives. They, in turn, continue to experience the backcountry with their own offspring. Still others, many now grown, were "recruited" into the Gladesmen way of life through friends either during childhood or later in their lifetime. Whatever the form of initiation may have been, many people identify themselves, and others, as Gladesmen today. They do not appear in a census, as they represent a subset of American society, but they know who they are.

Through time, there have been changes in the technology used to access and make use of the Everglades, but the Gladesmen traditions and shared culture have remained constant. The latter would include the use of hunting camps as a base of operation for storing gear and supplies, processing the daily catch, and housing watercraft. Modern Gladesmen, who are the focus of this study, use a variety of vehicles (e.g., airboats, half tracks and full tracks, swamp buggies) that have increased access to remote regions and, in many cases, promoted their membership. Throughout southern Florida there are airboat, swamp buggy, sportsmen, and conservation clubs that are organized on a regional basis. These clubs not only provide advocacy and camaraderie, they also play important roles in search and rescue operations and environmental conservation efforts. These organizations and regional clusters of Gladesmen reflect a common desire to maintain their traditions, practices, and the Everglades ecosystem itself. For Gladesmen, the environment of southern Florida is central to their lives – it is part of who they are, it is the focus of what they do with most of their time, and it establishes a strong relationship with the world around them that is shared by others. As one Gladesmen (Wright 2008) said: "you just can't live without it."

Today's Gladesmen come from many walks of life, and reflect a broad range of background and ethnic heritage, especially Hispanic, Anglo, and African American. As one informant (Dombroski 2008) stated, there is no "stereotypical Gladesmen anymore." While many Gladesmen are now retired, their employment reflects a wide range of both blue- and white-collar fields. Some of these include the military, construction/fabrication, and a variety of trades, while other Gladesmen are doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineering and electrical contractors, schoolteachers, cooks, public officials, commissioners with the Florida Fish and Wildlife and the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish commissions, firemen, insurance salesmen, and certified public accounts, to name a few. [In response to a written comment, it should be noted here that not all these professions were represented in interviews.]

There are Native Americans in southern Florida that share Gladesmen practices and have similar interests in resource access and preservation. Some of the interviewees mention "hanging out" with Native Americans and going to school with them as children; others shared encounters on islands when stopping off by boat. There are also stories of early Gladesmen trading with Native Americans. Today, Native American traditional cultural practices are protected, wherein the same access limitations that Gladesmen are subject to would not be in force. [In response to a written comment, it should be noted here that no Native Americans came forward at CERP recreation planning meetings who identified themselves as Gladesmen with property access concerns or volunteered to be interviewed.]

This excerpt from Bergeron (2008) provides his recollections of seeing Indians in the backcountry during earlier times:

> And he would pack so many groceries…and we'd go to an island. And these islands were built by the Glades Indians ten thousand years ago….West of Fort Lauderdale…And back in those days, in the late forties, I was very young, but all of the cultures that were there from the turn of the century were still there…And there were Indians still living on various Indian Mounds. And there were certain hunting camps that the Indians would come to every year and kill their wildlife, smoke it, and then go back to the Tamiami Trail, the Miccosukee, or to the Seminole Indian Reservation. So I got to see the native Indians on these islands with dugout canoes. I remember one particular island where there were about 40 dugout canoes around the island that we pulled up on. And this was a hunting camp. And it was called Willie Jim's Island. I still go to that island today. And they had tikis built. And that was one of their hunting islands, where the Indians would leave the reservations and they would go to certain islands and hunt and then go back to the reservation. And that was prior to Alligator Alley, prior to the Indian Snake Road, prior to any levees and pump stations….I was [part of] the last generation to see the Everglades and the Indians living the way they lived for hundreds of years exactly the way it was before the turn of the century.

One interviewee likened today's tribal and independent Indians who share a love of the region to members of a subgroup, or "tribe" of Gladesmen, citing a parallel in the past when Gladesmen with different interests and access concerns (use of airboats vs. swamp buggies, for example) competed among themselves. Today, however, Gladesmen feel that such differences have largely faded, with all parties now working together for the common good in promoting preservation and seeking backcountry access, and by assisting agencies in seeing to it that their traditional use of the

region is maintained (Frank Denninger, personal communication 2009). One interviewee (Schramm 2008) stated that "if you want a good opinion on how to save the land, talk to the Indians…They will tell you the true way to help save the Everglades."

Contemporary Gladesmen share the characteristics and attitudes of the early Gladesmen. They are independent, self-sufficient outdoorsmen who are very proficient in surviving in the wilderness that is southern Florida. Gladesmen men, women, and children of today may no longer depend solely on the natural resources of the Everglades ecosystem for subsistence, but they continue to depend on it in other ways to fulfill a variety of needs. These include hunting, fishing, recreation, contemplation, family time, camaraderie, search and rescue, and serenity, in addition to supplementing their diet, as desired. Some of the philanthropic work they do includes building common use emergency shelters, firefighting, replanting native vegetation, helping to control exotic plant intrusion (i.e., cattails and melaleuca), and advocacy. Activities within the glades provide Gladesmen with a strong sense of self, a connection with the world around them, and a unique self-reliance within their chosen environment. As one interviewee (Shirley 2008) said of the reverence that Gladesmen share for southern Florida:

> …they love it, they'd give their life for it, they fight for it, spend money on it, just enjoy it (as a) great part of their life, and they'd be lost without it.

Gladesmen have developed a common identity based upon activities that depend upon access to southern Florida for cultural and spiritual nourishment. Many Gladesmen say that they see themselves as conservationists who want to preserve nature, not "environmentalists" who, as it has been stated, they see as "wanting to put up fences and keep people out." In keeping with this sentiment, many interviews indicate a certain distrust of governmental agencies, whose actions have restricted Gladesmen access to certain areas. Many feel they have been "run out" by the loss of access to large acreages they have a history with; while interest in pursuing traditional activities is high, today's Gladesmen see increased limitations on their opportunities to do so. On the other hand, many Gladesmen acknowledge the need for cooperation, see some good in environmental protection efforts by governmental agencies, and are willing to share concerns in creating a Master Recreation Plan that will ensure long term public access and make things better for people and the environment in the future.

What is a modern Gladesmen? Based on the information and interviews collected for this study, members of the Gladesmen Culture have strong personal connections with and a highly developed knowledge of southern Florida as a natural resource, a cultural resource, and a place they feel at home. When they are away from the backcountry, they yearn to return there; it is a priority in their lives. They acknowledge direct ancestry and/or the inheritance of traditions from earlier Gladesmen and feel it is important to maintain those links by passing the culture on to future generations. They want their traditional practices to continue because for them, the Gladesmen Culture is a way of life. Gladesmen want to share their knowledge and time with others who are like-minded; they establish groups such as the Airboat Association of Florida, and other clubs and associations, that promote solidarity, education, and outreach programs in an attempt to reach a larger community. Gladesmen want to have the ability to hunt, fish, and recreate in areas they have visited for decades and are passionate about maintaining their culture through these traditional practices. A Gladesmen's sense of place and a large part of their collective identity derive from the Everglades region of southern Florida.