



Deep Lake Interpretive Trail



Unique Beauty *The Deep Lake area of Big Cypress is a unique spot in the South Florida ecology. As one of only five naturally occurring sinkhole lakes in South Florida, it is truly a rare gem. The hike to this tranquil spot not only offers a one-mile round-trip stroll through sub-tropical beauty and diversified habitats, but also history. This area was some of the first property Barron Gift Collier purchased within the vicinity of the county that would soon bear his name. This high, dry parcel of the Preserve rewards any visitor equipped with an old pair of tennis shoes and a walking stick with an exceptional experience.*

Accessing Deep Lake

The entrance to the Deep Lake Trail is located along Highway 29, nine miles south of Interstate 75 and eight miles north of Highway 41. Visitors may park along the road shoulder, but park fully in the grass in a safe manner. Protect your valuables by not leaving them visible and locking your car while you are hiking.

You can access the trail by opening and walking through the chain-link fence and ducking under a yellow bar-gate. The chain-link fence is part of the wildlife underpass system, which supports wildlife safety by providing passage under roadways, minimizing the risk of wildlife being struck by cars. Please do your part and be sure the chain-link gate is closed behind you after each use.



The gate into the Deep Lake area

Deep Lake Fire Station

After entering the Deep Lake area you will notice the Deep Lake Fire Station. This building serves as a functional piece of the fire program of the Big Cypress National Preserve, and is used daily.

Fire is an integral part of the ecosystem in South Florida. Much of the soil found throughout the Preserve is nutrient poor. Most of the nutrients are locked inside vegetation and are only released when burned. Lightning started fires in the spring and summer help provide nutrients for the vegetation in the swamp.

The Big Cypress Fire Division uses prescribed fire to mimic natural fire conditions to help provide nutrients to the soil, while providing safety to people and property. In fact, Big Cypress National Preserve has one of the largest prescribed fire programs in the National Park System. On average, anywhere from 10-20 percent of the national preserve is burned each year. This can be up to 100,000 acres in a single year.

The trail to Deep Lake begins to the north of this building. You will notice an opening in the tree line that indicates the trail.

Hardwood Hammocks

As you walk the trail towards Deep Lake, you will notice thick vegetation. You may also notice that regardless of the time of year, the trail is most likely dry. This is due to the fact that you are walking through an area that is higher and drier than the surrounding landscape.

This type of habitat is found throughout southeast. The dry ground of a hammock is a fantastic location for hardwood trees to thrive. The moist, but not drenched, soils provide a bounty of nutrients for these broad-leaved trees. In addition to hardwoods many mammals like the Florida panther, black bear and white-tailed deer, use these dry lands as a refuge from the surrounding swamp. Keep your eyes peeled for signs of wildlife!



Florida panther track along the trail

Barron Collier

Continuing down the trail you will come to what appears to be a crossroads. To your right you might be able to find the remnants of an old hunting cottage that may have been used by Barron Collier, the namesake of Collier County. Collier used this land as a private retreat and hunting grounds as well as a citrus grove during the early 1900s.

As Barron Collier developed the surrounding area through his Deep Lake Seedless Grapefruit Company, he was able to usher in new development for the rest of Collier County. The grapefruits that were grown here needed a way to be transported around the country.

The Atlantic Coastline Railroad allowed for access from Deep Lake to the nearby town of Everglades City. From there the grapefruits could be taken up the west coast of Florida, and then on to the rest of the country.

The development in this area made the town of Everglades City the seat of power in Collier County. Barron Collier would also use the nearby property of Deep Lake to hold many lavish parties with contemporary socialites; like William Hearst, Henry Ford, and William Wrigley, of the Wrigley Chewing Gum Company. These individuals helped to bring southwest Florida to national prominence. Today, the county government has moved to Naples and the Everglades City region has maintained its “Old Florida” charm.

Cypress Strand

A little farther down the trail you will notice that the environment has changed around you. Did you notice that drop in elevation? Maybe not as the elevation only dropped a few inches. However, this is enough of a drop to create a different habitat than that of the hardwood hammock.

This low-lying area is known as a cypress strand, and is one of the dominant habitats of Big Cypress National Preserve. Cypress trees are flood tolerant by comparison to many other species of plants in the area.



Cypress Strand

Flora and Fauna

Many times when we hear the word scenic we think of vast, open expanses. Here in South Florida we see scenic on a smaller scale. Did you notice the skyflowers along your walk? These small beautiful flowers love the lower, wetter areas near the cypress strand. While you are looking keep an eye out for other wildflowers like the golden dewdrop, tassel flower, and the morning glory.

As you reach the other side of the cypress strand you will find elevation rises again. Once more you are in a hardwood hammock. The heartiness of the hardwood hammock not only lends itself to the growth of grapefruits, but to many of our native wildlife species as well. Especially during the wetter summer months, animals like the water moccasin may be enjoying the trail as well. Make sure you are looking out for these slithering residents.



Water moccasin

Deep Lake

After about one half mile of walking you have arrived at Deep Lake. This 300-foot-wide lake was formed by a sinkhole roughly 6,000 years ago, making it as old as the nearby Everglades. It was formed through a process by which rainwater percolates through the limestone bedrock and dissolves the limestone underneath the surface and creates a series of cavities and voids. When the land surface above collapses, or sinks, into these cavities the lake is formed.

This lake is referred to as Deep Lake because it is over 95-feet-deep, making it the deepest in South Florida, and also an oasis of deep water in this otherwise shallow landscape.

Since water is available here throughout the year it is a perfect home for our most well known inhabitant; the American alligator. Alligators need water not only to help find food, but also to regulate their body temperature. The hot Florida sun provides energy to these cold blooded creatures, but it is possible for them to become too hot. The water helps to regulate their temperature and keep them in equilibrium with the environment. The lake also invites many other species to its waters, making it a great place for alligators to find a meal. You will find numerous alligators near the lake, especially during the dry season, so please exercise caution while exploring the area, and never try to approach one or feed them. How many alligators can you spot?

Many generations of humans and animals have come to Deep Lake for a variety of reasons. The Calusa Indians utilized this lake much in the same way we visit places like a grocery store. They were able to gather the supplies necessary for life here. Barron Collier utilized this lake to provide a serene backdrop for his guests to enjoy. And today you are using the lake as a way to find your own adventure.

After you are done enjoying your time at Deep Lake and you are ready to return home, just follow the trail back to your vehicle. Look for new types of flowers in the cypress area, or new animal tracks through the hardwood hammock. Don't forget to close the chain-link gate behind you, and help keep this wonderful wild place as serene and scenic as you found it.



Deep Lake