



## Chekika

### Lake Chekika in 1972

*This area is named after Chief Chekika, a powerful American Indian leader during the Seminole War era.*



Historic photos courtesy of The Historical Museum of Southern Florida, Miami Herald, Florida State Parks and the State of Florida Photo Archives. Aerial photograph used for map, courtesy of USGS.

Walking through Chekika, it is hard to imagine that people have lived in and shaped this environment for at least 6,000 years. From the time American Indians made this hammock their home until it was acquired by the National Park Service in 1991, its history is an intertwined story of humans and the Everglades. Use this guide to explore this land rich in history and nature.

### Boardwalk Access



Begin exploring Chekika as you enter through the boardwalk; walking gradually from sawgrass prairie into a higher elevation area with hardwood trees surrounded by lower seasonally flooded areas. In the Everglades, these “tree islands” are called hammocks and stand out from a distance over the sawgrass.

As the Everglades environment evolved, various American Indian tribes lived on these hammocks and helped shape the unique environments that exist today. The tree islands provided higher ground on which houses and gardens could be constructed and defended. Evidence from these occupations can be found in the form of dense deposits of pottery, shell and other animal and plant remains.

### Lake Chekika



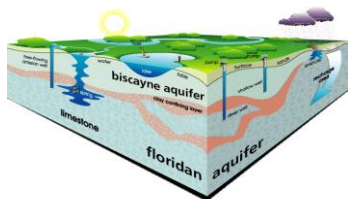
Anglo- American pioneer Sam Grossman bought several square miles of land including this hammock in 1917. He farmed some of the land without much success due to the difficulty of getting his produce to market.

In the late 1940's, the Grossman family ventured into oil exploration and a sample well was drilled. Instead of finding oil, the well produced a supply of sulfuric brackish 74° water which spurted up 6 feet into the air and produced 3 million gallons of water per day. This water flow came mainly from the Floridan aquifer.

At a time when antibiotics were not highly effective and bubbling mineral spring baths were considered to have healing powers, this area was developed into a park that offered therapeutic recreation. Despite the sulfuric smell, it was highly visited and became a popular swimming beach for the eastern Everglades, known as Grossman's Mineral Springs and Lake Chekika Park.

The Grossman family owned the hammock until 1970 when it was sold to the state of Florida. Through the years the name of the hammock changed to Grossman Hammock State Park, to Chekika State Recreational Area, and to the current, Chekika Day Use Area of Everglades National Park.

The original well was sealed off when it was discovered that the sulfuric brackish water was polluting the Everglades and the freshwater Biscayne aquifer located above the Floridan aquifer. New wells were drilled into the Biscayne aquifer to pump cleaner water to artificially flow through Lake Chekika and out into the River of Grass.



### Alligator Hole

This “borrow” pit was dug to artificially reinforce the banks of Lake Chekika. The small fishing pond was about 20 feet deep and it provided another recreational opportunity for visitors. Alligators were present and at times would cross under the bridge and venture into the lake. Visitors who saw this occurrence recalled that the alligators stayed in their own area of Lake Chekika and did not bother people in the swimming area.

### Chekika Picnic Area

Chief Chekika was an influential Seminole Indian leader during the Seminole Wars. He was a man of large stature who was said to be over six feet tall. Some historical accounts describe him as a “Spanish Indian”, a descendent of the Calusa, archaic people of the Everglades that returned from Cuba and became part of the Seminole resistance against displacement.

In 1842, Chief Chekika gathered some tribesmen on a hammock and planned a raid on Indian Key, south of Everglades National Park, which was an important settlement during the 1840's. This raid resulted in the death of Dr. Henry Perrine, who had plans to develop the Everglades into tropical fruit plantations.

United States Army troops led by Colonel Harney set out to find Chief Chekika. Discovered on a hammock about ten miles north of present day Chekika, Chief Chekika was killed and then hung as a warning to others. The Seminoles would go on to fight the U.S Army until the war ended in 1858.

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## Nature Trail



Nature trails were cleared when the Grossman family owned the park. Hurricanes played a key role in changes to this hammock, causing irreparable damage to the site's infrastructure. With the pumps devastated, Lake Chekika was gone and the park was closed. The site reverted back to a dense hammock.

Take the reopened trail here and enjoy the experience of walking through this densely vegetated atmosphere. Can you see the lush flora of this hammock that includes hackberry, wild fruit, octopus live oak, pigeon plum, mastic, coconut, fiddleleaf fig and gumbo limbo trees as well as May ferns and air plants?

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## Fountain



Grossman's original Artesian Well and Lake Chekika, June 1970

The artesian fountain in the picture surged at a rate of 3 million gallons a day. It required no electric pumps to make it flow. The original well's rate was constant throughout the day, with two exceptions. The first being the Alaskan earthquake in 1964. It was felt in Florida about 60 to 90 minutes after the first shock was recorded in Alaska, causing the well to produce 6 million gallons of water per day. The Grossman family reported that the waters overflowed and washed out the sandy beaches. The family had to enlarge the lake and replace the sand with material from the alligator hole. The second exception occurred in 1970 after an earthquake in California. This time the well produced 4 million gallons of water a day.

Lake Chekika will probably never be a swimming lake again. Even though the roar of the waterfall, the sounds of children laughing and splashing, and the smell of sulfur are gone, Chekika can still offer tranquility, a glimpse of history and an opportunity to observe wildlife that is unique to Everglades National Park.

Thank you for visiting and we hope you come back. Prepare a picnic, bring a comfortable chair, a book and a pair of binoculars. Let yourself be surrounded by history and the Everglades.

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