



The Florida Gator Tale

Newsletter of the Florida Chapter of the
Motorcycle Sport Touring Association

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In the December 2021 Issue:

- Page 1 – [Feature Article](#)
- Page 5 – [Safety Talk](#)
- Page 6 – [Florida News](#)
- Page 10 – [Florida Rides](#)
- Page 12 – [Future Florida Rides](#)
- Page 13 – [Florida MSTA Apparel](#)
- Page 13 – [Classified Ads](#)

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Feature Article

Babcock Ranch – A Taste of Old Florida

By Van VanSteelant

Après Lunch on our South Ride...

What a wonderful afternoon I spent in a true part of "old Florida"...

What follows is a composite of history, company promotion and photographic evidence that this state we call home was one tough place to hang out in before A/C!!



Fresh-water marsh: Just yards from the Gator Shack, this expansive marsh hides 4-6 inches of slowly moving water under a thick "carpet" of plant life. Medicinal plants, small animals and plenty of insects call this home. And lots of birds call it "groceries"!

Babcock Ranch & Florida Forever

The land we know today as "Babcock Ranch Preserve" was purchased by the State in 2005, as part of the Florida Forever program. The land covers 70,000+ acres of preserved land that has tremendous ecological value.

The Babcock Ranch purchase was one of the most prolific land purchases in the program's history. Since its inception in July of 2001, the state has purchased over 800,000 acres of land with a little over \$3.1 billion through the Florida Forever Program.

When Babcock Ranch was purchased as part of Florida Forever, the state ensured this historic site would be preserved for future generations. The preserve protects the environmental resources, through the Babcock Ranch Preserve Act, which preserves the agricultural, scientific, scenic, geological, watershed, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational values of the area.

In the beginning... The Crescent B Ranch

Prior to that purchase, it was part of the 91,000-acre Crescent B Ranch. The land was originally purchased by the Perry McAdow family in the late 1800s, and the Crescent B Ranch was started. After making his fortune in the Spotted Horse Gold Mines in Fergus County, MT, McAdow sought out the warmer climates of Florida to call home! They set out to make their mark in the region by building businesses and beautifying downtown Punta Gorda.



Employee housing – early 1900’s: Ed Babcock found recruiting workers to tend to his ranch took more than wages of \$1-\$2 a day...like room and board and a full-time doctor/dentist. It was a day’s ride for medical attention back then.

It was then purchased in 1914 by Edward Babcock, a Pittsburgh lumber magnate and politician, who gave it the name, “Babcock Ranch”, we still have today. The ranch served as the base for the family’s business and produced timber, cattle, row crops, and sod, and provided recreation like hunting and ecotourism.

The Babcock Ranch Preserve

Edward Babcock’s son Fred Babcock managed the property for several years. After his death, the heirs attempted to sell the land to the state. This ultimately led to Kitson & Partners to purchase the 91,000 acre ranch. About 80% of the land was then sold to

the State of Florida and Lee County to preserve most of the environmentally valuable areas of the ranch. In fact, this still ranks as the largest single land preservation purchase in the state’s history. With 73,000 acres of environmentally valuable land being preserved, it was a historic purchase.

The preserve protects important water resources, diverse natural habitats, scenic landscapes, and historic and cultural resources. The agricultural integrity of the land is maintained by keeping the fully operating cattle ranch intact. The preserve is also home to a number of endangered species, such as the crested caracara, gopher tortoise, Florida burrowing owl, Florida panther, Florida black bear, and several native and migratory birds. The area spans a diverse number of ecosystems, with pinelands, dry prairie, and cypress swamp. The wetlands contribute to aquifer recharge and help maintain the health of the Western Everglades ecosystem.



Pond behind a weir-axel deep crossing: Water is everywhere! Without the maze of drainage canals that we are habituated to, water flows continuously southward through the property. More evidence to follow...

Babcock Ranch Today

Today, Tarpon Blue Land & Resource Management continues to manage the preserve for the state. It remains an important part of Southwest Florida nature to preserve the natural ecosystems and wildlife, as well as help maintain the health of the western Everglades ecosystem. The preserve is open to public recreation through hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, bicycling, fishing, and camping.



Cypress swamp and “knees”: We’re in 18 inches of moving water!!



Mid-state Everglades: Recent rains made for a dramatic interaction with the southerly flow of water headed to Florida Bay!! Perhaps how the Everglades may have looked before the Army Corp of Engineers "fixed things".

Wildlife at Babcock Ranch

Alligators are one of the most popular animals for guests to see at Babcock Ranch. They are an important part of Florida's ecosystem and while they were once on the brink of extinction due to loss of habitat, conservation efforts have helped preserve their population.



Gators, not logs!! Gators be chillin' in the lake where moments before they were sunning on the Gator Bridge. (l): Literally 25 gators had gathered on the bridge, basking in the direct sunshine caressing the lake. Likely took 5 minutes before all of them moved enough for us to pass! (r): Cold-blooded reptile temperature regulation in action. Yes, alligators "pant" as part of their cooling protocols!

Wild hogs are another favorite animal of Babcock Ranch guests. Wild hogs that are not native to Florida but were brought over by Spanish conquistadors in the 1500s are now found in 67 Florida counties. They can reach weights of 150 pounds and be up to 5 to 6 feet long.

Wild turkeys can often be spotted as you travel through the Ranch. These social animals can typically be found flocking together in groups, and are known to be powerful fliers, reaching speeds of up to 55 mph.

White-tailed deer is a medium-sized deer native to North America that you can see roaming through Babcock Ranch. They are known for their reddish-brown coat in the spring and summer and turn to a grey-brown throughout the fall and winter. They can be identified by the characteristic white underside to its tail.



Whooping cranes: A constant presence on the ranch, these birds mate for life and enjoy the vast area of natural habitats, like real swamp, key to their survival. Cranes in Florida do not migrate.

Birds are abundant at Babcock Ranch. In addition to wild turkeys, there are a number of migratory and native Florida birds that you can spot as you move through the different ecosystems. This includes sparrows, falcons, woodpeckers, burrowing owls, limpkin, and sandhill cranes. It makes us a great spot for birding enthusiasts!



Wild turkeys: These locals know the tour schedule!! It helps that the driver has a supply of corn to "hand out" along the way.

Cracker Cattle are a rare breed of cattle you can find at Babcock Ranch. With the Crescent B Ranch still operating fully, you can spot these cattle that are the official state cattle breed of Florida here.



"Legacy" Cracker Cattle: Direct blood lines to the first animals brought by the Spanish in the 1500's. Here are some friendly locals who know the tour buggy schedule!

Squirrels are another frequently spotted animal. The fox squirrel, a larger member of the squirrel family, is often seen in the pine flatwood ecosystem.

We'll definitely return to Babcock Ranch for another Lunch Ride. And hopefully, a few more of you will climb aboard the Swamp Buggy Tour and roll back the clock of history and enjoy our State's more natural environment.

—Van VanSteelant

Safety Talk

IMPORTANT NOTICES: *Ultimately, the safety of motorcycle riders and their passengers is their own responsibility. Nothing presented in the column supersedes, negates or relieves a motorcyclist and/or passenger from assumption of personal responsibility for their actions and safety. [Ed. Note: This article was previously published in the May 2017 edition of The Florida MSTA Gator Tale.]*

The Howling...Wind *By Doug Westly*



A few years ago, Becky and I took a cross-country motorcycle trip, destination California and the Laguna Sea MotoGP races. I've ridden across the country several times, and rode out west whenever I've lived in that part of the country, and the one thing you can count on out there is the wind. It's almost always blowing, and blowing hard. On this particular trip we were west of Ely, NV on US-50 (known as "The Loneliest Road" and for good reason), when we encountered the fiercest winds I've ever ridden through. West of Ely, US-50 alternates between mountain ridges and valleys, all oriented north-south. The wind was coming from the north that day, and at times so intense we had to lean our bikes at about a 25° angle into the wind just to stay in the lane. We rode next to the north side of the road, as gusts would occasionally lob us into the other side of the lane. We had to be careful, as every time we encountered a wind buffer such as an embankment on the north side of the road, the wind would be blocked and our lean would almost carry us off the road. At one point, we finally stopped in the lee of one embankment, just to rest and shelter.

So how do we deal with wind as riders? The problem for riders is understanding the wind. Headwinds just slow you down and make 30 mph seem like 60 mph. Tailwinds? Just enjoy them. It is the side winds that get us in trouble.

Rule One: Check the weather. Not just wind speed, but direction as well. Our winds in Florida come from all directions, unlike the west where winds are generally from the north.

Know when to say no. That day in NV the wind was probably blowing at 35-40 mph, and we were unfortunately caught out 100 miles from any civilization. We had no choice but to ride when it was safe enough, and shelter when we had to. But that was an extreme situation. For your daily riding, if the winds exceed your comfort level, either don't ride or take the car. It's that simple.

If you're already riding, watch for wind sign. Some of the best indicators are the trees and bushes along the roadside. If they are leaning and blowing in the wind, you will be, too. Birds are another good indicator. If they are flying into the wind and not going anywhere, that's a pretty quick sign that you should watch out.

Your bike makes a difference as well. Heavy bikes counter the wind more effectively than light bikes, to a degree. However, big bikes with fairings and bags offer more surface area for the wind to affect. It's a trade-off. Some of the worst motorcycle characteristics, in terms of wind resistance and affect, are those with solid wheels, as now the wind can actually push against the wheels, impacting the rider's control of the machine.

Bottom Line: Become weather smart. Not only for rain and other conditions, but also for the wind as well. When the wind warnings come out, pay attention and decide if and how you are going to handle it!

Ride safe! – Doug Westly

Florida News



South Director's Report

Ah, a bit of thanks...A bit of joy!!

We have one Statewide event for December! And now's the time to send in your suggestions and recommendations for next year's events. We have a few already. Combined with the several new places this year, next year ought to be another good one!!

We have made the most of our opportunities this year in an effort to make up for last year. Lots of members and friends ventured out to share in the joy of great grub and good gab!! Trust me, your participation in our events warms our hearts! I thank you all, and ESPECIALLY the volunteers who make our Florida Chapter one of the strongest and largest in the MST. From the Co-Directors to the "tail gunners" who enhance the safety of the riding group, there are no small players here! I appreciate you, and hope to enjoy your continued support and participation.

We had 4 (!) rides planned for November. You'll find the Central and North reports below. And, the Black Friday ride was also a big success! Tom's report and pics are included here as well. Seems the "winter" riding weather lured a lot of you out of your houses!!

The South ride led to a new-to-us destination, "out in the middle of nowhere", the Babcock Ranch. Seven riders started out at the 7-11 on a beautiful morning for riding. An hour later, we met up with three others at Love's Travel Stop. One of the three, Manuel Amenta, had inquired online about joining us for the ride. He's out of the north Miami area, and enjoys longer rides on his Star Venture. He fit right in, and the 10 of us motored along familiar roads to the Gator Shack Restaurant. What a setting, amongst natural landscaping and blue sky! The western contingent of Eve, Dennis, Tom and Jeff were already seated and looking for us. The staff was ready for the rest of us, and a long table allowed us to carry on with the tall tales that we are inclined to share! Friendly service, good eats and lots of gab made for a proper good time! Our 50/50 raffle generated \$22 for our winner, Jeff. And brings our total to \$814. Another big thanks to all who participate in our raffle! We'll be settling up our GoDaddy bills in December, so I'll let you all know where we stand by end of the year.



*Great riding to Babcock Ranch. At the Gator Shack Restaurant (l-r): Buck, Nir, Steve, Don, Ellen, Rob & Manuel
Not shown: Eve, Jeff, Tom and Dennis*

If you read the feature article, you know I took the 90-minute Swamp Buggy Tour after lunch. The rest of the gathering made their way home. After the tour, I took the l-o-n-g way home, relishing the gorgeous afternoon and empty back roads. Over 300 miles and most of the day in the Florida sunshine...

It does sadden me to share that Roy Clark has stepped away from the North Co-Directorship. The sheer size of the northern portion of Florida played a big part in his decision. Upon his recommendation, we will be looking for TWO members to step up and organize just a few events. The focus should be regionally east of, and west of, US 221(Perry-Greenville-Asheville), and generally above US 40 (Inglis-Ocala-Ormond Beach). We would welcome any efforts to continue the great start Roy has initiated.

Here's a report from Tom Blake on the Black Friday Lunch Ride:

It was quite pleasing to have nineteen show up at Marsh Landing for this year's **Black Friday Lunch Ride**. No doubt the perfect riding weather factored in. I believe twelve were from South Florida, four from Brevard and Indian River counties, two from (drive across 60) Tampa and one from north Orlando (who rode down from Jacksonville – bless his heart!). Most of us arrived about 11:30 and were too hungry to wait. So we piled inside, were seated in the large meeting room, got our drinks and placed food orders. Besides us, there weren't a lot of folks in the place, so I'm happy that we could pump a little dough their way. It's a good place to ride to and the food is always good.

Several attendees were either new to MSTA or had never been to one of our events before. So that got talked up as I moved around the tables. Even some seasoned members didn't know that our national rally, STAR, stood for Sport Touring Association Rendezvous (I still have to spell check rendezvous – every dang time.) Yes, in addition to monthly rides in Florida for south, central and north areas, we do have a couple extras – the Black Friday ride, of course. And the **New Year's Day ride is to Peck's Old Port Cove near Crystal River**. Holidays dominate December so it is the odd month with just one state-wide event. Other states have their own activities and then at regional and national levels there are weekend or longer rallies in truly great riding areas.

Anyways, it was nice to see and talk to all who rode in – familiar faces and new.

Safe travels, Tom



Great turnout for the Black Friday Lunch Ride at Marsh Landing in Oak Hill

What's Next??

Ok, I intend to support and encourage everybody's decision on whether to ride, eat or be merry. I am leaving the LUNCH rides as scheduled WITH CONDITIONS!!

All restrictions have been lifted for all enterprises across Florida. No new warnings or mandates will be forthcoming. We will continue to contact the restaurants to listen to how they are operating. The latest variant news will likely cause some concern in the near future. I will send out the usual email announcements after our research.

As the weekends in December become one party after another...We have just ONE RTE on deck. The **MSTA Statewide Holiday Lunch Ride** is scheduled for **December 11th**. We are heading to a new location this year. The **Flightline Cafe & Catering**, located in the **Winter Haven Regional Airport!** We have found airport destinations to be a good mix of fun and food. Come out and make our last event of the year one to remember!

Membership News!!

If you are receiving the *Gator Tale*, but not my announcements, **PLEASE** email me ASAP to correct my files. I believe I'm up to date...

My heartfelt THANKS to Don Moe for his efforts EVERY month to bring our Florida membership up to date with all the news about our new and renewing members!!

Here's what we know today...

The Florida MSTA welcomes 3 new members – Gary Gray, Spring Hill, Brad Coston, Saint Johns, and Richard Alleman, Jupiter. Welcome!

These Florida memberships have recently expired or will expire soon:

Carlyson Delgado Stephen Evans Don Mroczenski Bob Shields David Sumner

These Florida memberships have recently renewed their membership in the MSTA:

Brian Dickerson Diana Dickerson Dennis Mitchell Michael Shooks

We urge all our members to renew their memberships and continue supporting their MSTA. If you have a question about when your membership expires, please contact the membership committee at membership@ridemsta.com. Renewing or joining can be done quickly and securely online at PlanetReg.com/MSTArenew or PlanetReg.com/MSTAjoin respectively. If you use a pre-printed form from STARreview or an ITR, be sure to mail it to the new member of our new membership team, **Scott Snedden, 11484 Waterwood Dr., Tyler, TX 75703**, and not to the address of any prior membership director.

If you only want to update your phone, email, bikes, or other details, you can do so quickly via PlanetReg.com/MSTAupdate. **Please include enough unchanging information to assure the correct member is updated in the database.**

When you encounter a rider who would seem to be a good fit as a new MSTA member, please pass along one of our brand-new **Invitation-To-Ride Tri-folds!** For each new member you recruit and who provides your name and/or membership number on the application, you will receive a coupon for a **raffle ticket for the motorcycle drawing at our next STAR event**. Any new or current member who joins or renews as a Sustaining Member will likewise receive a coupon for a raffle ticket for each year of the new membership term.

Random Ramblings!!

With the latest surge of the scourge now in remission, together with an increase in vaccination rates that may minimize the severity of the next resurgence, I do hope to see more riders roll up their sleeves for a shot to keep any positive momentum going!! Most of us qualify for the booster shots, which I received last month.

Enjoy the Holidays and be safe at the same time. We want to see you all riding next year!!

When you can...

Join one of our monthly rides!!

And invite a friend to ride along!!

Ride well! Ride often!! Do it safely!!!

ATGATT Van

MSTA Florida State Co-Director





Carl Swofford

Central Director's Report

November Central Ride – Goodrich Seafood and Oyster House, Oak Hill

Saturday morning, November 6th dawned iffy. The temp was mild, cool, and comfortable, but the rain was iffy. It was raining at 6:00 am. The weatherman said that the rain would end by 8:30. A look at the radar showed that the bad weather was north of Oak Hill – from Ormond Beach north was socked in with heavy rain.

Alan and I departed at 09:45. It was not raining, but the roads were wet. We had a good ride on backroads to Oak Hill and Goodrich Seafood. I knew the weather would block riders from the north – Jacksonville, St Augustine, Lake City and even Ocala. But at 11:30 am, there were six of us who had braved the uncertain weather.

Goodrich always serves delicious food, and we ate on the porch overlooking the Indian River. We enjoyed the food and the great fellowship. The camaraderie with fellow MSTA riders is always outstanding.

The ride home was dry, and the weather beautiful.



We ate great food on the porch overlooking the Indian River at Goodrich.



Roy Clark

North Director's Report

November Northern Ride – Breakfast, Ride, Lunch

It was a great day and turnout. The ten folks in the picture showed up for the breakfast and horse country tour, nine stayed for lunch and one Central rider joined us for lunch bringing the number back to ten.

The breakfast at Florida Cracker Kitchen was a bright way to get ready for the tour for these folks plus myself taking the picture:



Bernie Robert Dave Bob Peter Roger Steve Jim Brad



We mounted up and headed on our 155-mile tour on 214, to 315, to 318, to 346, and Micanopy. All good riding roads to the start of the many horse county roads or the tour.



We used many more roads than listed above as contained on this gpx file print screen. If you want the actual file, email a request to me (rmkc99@gmail.com).

After a lot of fun scenic roads and enjoying their many curves we arrived at THE YEARLING restaurant where Alan Spears out of Central (he skipped our breakfast, rode his bicycle on some good trails we have up here in the hammock), was waiting on us. We all experienced excellent food and service before remembering to get the picture right (Dave is shooting it). You can see some of the unique décor.



At The Yearling restaurant – unique décor

Ride fun. (I believe we did!)

Roy

Florida Rides This Month

Always remember to check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) and/or your email for updates on scheduled rides. Changes in times, dates, and especially locations are often out of our control and with short notice.

MSTA Statewide Holiday Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, **December 11th, 12 Noon – 2:00 PM**

Location: **Flightline Café & Catering**, 2073 US-92 West, Winter Haven, FL ☎ (863) 875-5869 ([map](#))

Description: We close out the year at yet another destination!! We have had great success dining at airport restaurants over the years, and this looks like another great opportunity!! The back door leads to the runways...Again, this is our STATEWIDE HOLIDAY LUNCH, so we hope to see a whole bunch of you!!

Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com or ☎ (561) 386-2594

Future Florida Rides

Note that the future ride events are included to facilitate longer term planning. The destinations and/or dates may be changed just before the ride dates. Please check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) for any updates.

MSTA Statewide New Year's Lunch Ride

When: Saturday, **January 1st, 11:45 AM – 1:45 PM**

Location: **Peck's Old Port Cove**, 139 N. Ozello Trail, Crystal River, FL ☎ (352) 795-2806 ([map](#))

Description: Here we go again!! NEW YEAR, NEW MILES!!! Start 2022 off in a (Bill) Royal sort of way with a lunch ride to one of Florida's best gulf-coast seafood restaurants near the end of one of Florida's twistiest roads. Mealtime is at 11:45AM.

Peck's Old Port Cove is old Florida charm at its very best. They are located out in the gulf's marshes between the towns of Crystal River and Homosassa Springs. Nine miles of twisty Ozello Trail gets you out there from US-98. Everybody raves about Peck's seafood. In addition, the waterside property is clean and comfortable, and the whole staff at Peck's are extremely accommodating. They have ample seating outside, so we will anticipate occupying as much of it as possible. They also have a 50-seat dining room which may come into play. There's plenty of parking.

Long distance riders may wish to get near by December 31st (or earlier). We're not reserving rooms and don't have any activities planned. However, the **Equus Inn** at 3434 SW College Rd,

Ocala is suggested (previously a Quality Inn, they have a 4-star rating with Trip Advisor and others). We've used them in the past during Bike Week. They offer comfortable rooms at reasonable rates with complimentary breakfasts and in-room coffee, microwave & fridge, etc. More importantly, very good restaurants and watering holes are just a short walk away. And in the morning, it's only about an hour's ride through mostly rural Florida to Peck's. You can phone the **hotel directly at (352)-854-3200**. Verify cancellation policy and book early.
 Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or ☎ (561) 386-2594

For additional Florida events and information, [click here](#) to see the Florida MSTa website's Events page. The Florida MSTa chapter also has a presence on Facebook with upcoming events and past photos: [click here](#).

Florida MSTa Apparel



As a reminder, our Florida State Storefront is open online for your MSTa-branded apparel! Go to mstaflorida.qbstores.com. We have made arrangements with the supplier for our National Gearbox to allow our State membership to buy shirts, hats, etc. with our State logos directly from the source!!! No muss, no fuss!! Order yours today!! They offer both embroidery and digital print options. Click onto the Embroidered Apparel or Shop By Logo for each option. Don't hesitate to contact Queensboro directly with any and all questions. They are very customer friendly. They also offer Polo shirts and T-shirts with pockets!! Shopping finds

online... We found some fun motorcycle t-shirts you can order online. Click the image for this particular t-shirt. There are other fun motorcycle t-shirts online at <https://teespring.com/shop/motorcycle-tshirts>.



The MSTa National [website](#) has extensive event information.

National MSTa RideMSTA.com

Florida MSTa FLMSTA.org

We're also on Facebook: facebook.com/FLMSTA/

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Classified Ads

To find a buyer for your motorcycle items, please send your ad and pictures by email to editor@flmsta.org. Don't trash it, recycle it! One man's trash is another man's treasure!