

Learning to exhale in Dixie County Florida

I first landed in Dixie county FL in the spring of 2018. There was a sweetness to the place that seemed to take me back in time. I felt I could taste the river on the breeze and the smell of Live Oaks permeated everything. Lodgepole and Long Leaf pines grew in patches here and there and just added to the rural calmness alongside a sense of “aliveness”. My first morning waking up in the RV park there was a mist floating off the Suwannee and providing a beautiful canvas on which to view the ancient Live Oaks and Spanish moss.

Dixie County lies on the Southside of the “Big Bend” area of North Central FL. Bounded on the East by the Suwannee river and on the West by the Gulf of Mexico. Northeast of the county lay the Santa Fe and Itchetucknee rivers. The entire area is dotted with natural springs that flow into and supply the area with water and is a paradise for outdoor folks and scuba divers. Dixie county has very low population density with just under seventeen thousand people in 864 square miles. The county seat is Cross City with 1700 people, but most of the residents live in a large vaguely defined area called Old Town in the South and Eastern portions of the county.

Whether you’re a visitor or thinking of living the rural lifestyle Dixie county has a lot to offer. Just on the Southside of the Suwannee river is Fanning Springs State Park with camping, hiking, boating, fishing and much more. The Fort Fanning historical site is

located across Hwy 19 from the State Park and is a beautiful and interesting place to picnic or just spend a couple hours. All along the Dixie county Gulf coast there are opportunities for fishing and Gulf water sports in the towns of Steinhatchee, Horseshoe Beach and Suwannee. I am a motorcycle enthusiast and the area enjoys a mild climate that ensures nearly perfect roads providing almost endless miles of entertainment. Another favorite pastime of mine is bicycle riding, for exercise as well as exploring off the beaten path. The Nature Coast Trail is a thirty-one mile paved bicycle and walking path that is paralleled by an equestrian trail. The trail winds its way from the town of Chiefland, to Fanning Springs, has a branch that wanders to Trenton while the main trail continues to Old Town and Cross City. Much of the trail is covered by a treed canopy and at one point crosses the Suwannee River using an old steel girder bridge. If you pause on the bridge and gaze down the river it is very easy to imagine the river and its traffic as they might have been in the early twentieth or late nineteenth centuries; wild and moving incredible quantities of water.

All in all Dixie county is a gem, a treasure waiting to take the inquisitive visitor places both magical and relaxing. If the hustle of the city grabs your attention this is not the place for you, but if the easy pace of country life and the chance to experience life the way it might have been in some bygone time ignites a spark, this place is worth your time.

Dixie County begins in the South where US 19 crosses the Suwannee River. There are numerous motels on either side of the river and as previously mentioned camping is available in the State Park. If you are RV'ing you'll have numerous choices in the area. My favorite is a Park just on the North side of the Suwanee on Hwy 19. The Park was purchased a couple years back by two young couples who have done an almost unimaginable amount of work to bring the park up to a wonderful standard. The park sits on a small piece of land that forms an oxbow in the river and provides that perfect setting for the mist in the morning floating between the Live Oaks and the Spanish Moss.

No matter where you choose to hang your hat while you stay you'll find plenty to do and an amazing dose of relaxation.

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