

Florida Horsemen's Club

January's Trip to Princess Place

Princess Place is a nature preserve four hours North of Jupiter and East of I-95 . Suitable paddocks ,water and showers are available for horse campers.

Florida Horsemen's Club formally Gaited Trail Riders had trailered their horses to the equestrian campsite for a weekend of riding and camping and, as always, lots of fun.

Sunday morning we separated into three groups; those intending to ride a little faster in their own group would ride to the Florida Agricultural Museum west of I-95 over the equestrian bridge. The bridge ,according to the National Bridge Register, is almost 200 feet across and was built in 2002. Unique as it is a dirt tree lined trail across an interstate.

Four riders passed along the dark blue water of Pellicer Creek under a canopy of giant pines and oaks covering the five miles quickly over easy ground. Our group arrived at the museum and the tour guide greeted us at the gate. Our guide was between tours and was happy to give us a load of information about Florida horses, cattle and old time cowboys. We said goodbye and rode back down the trail toward camp for a mile or so, and then detoured to another trail, which, according to the map, would return us to camp on an inland route rather than along the creek.

It was fine for a mile or so, but we then encountered an obstacle: A creek ten yards wide, but which appeared to be deep with soft mud on the sides. Would the bottom be too soft, perhaps trapping the horses in the muck? We should have turned around. The water was cold, and not wanting boots-full of water, I raised my feet (while wishing Ziggy was a hand or two taller) and got through it with swamp water soaking the edge of my saddle pad.

The three other trailblazers came through just fine. This would turn out to be the least threatening of the obstacles we would encounter on our way back to camp. The trail was OK for a short distance, but then we found what seemed to be all the dead, fallen trees in Florida.

The horses against their natural instinct bravely pushed themselves through the branches of hurricane fallen trees... the cracking sound reminding riders of the pointed hazard created by the lead horse .A few yards of clear ground was a brief respite from what seemed like endless challenges. Our GPS satellite maps showed where we were, but the trails were not readable. When my cell battery dropped to ten percent, I called back to camp and said we were in a jam, but OK.

The sky became overcast and we could no longer use the sun as a compass, and soon we would lose our phone compass. It was getting late, and in the back of my mind, I was aware of the very real possibility we would be in the swamp overnight. We had only another hour or so and we would have to build some kind of shelter.

We all agreed we should make a 90-degree turn toward I-95, as there was a dirt road running parallel and we could use the distant sound of traffic to stay on course. We hadn't covered much ground, and as you might expect, we soon encountered another obstacle. We had to get through it, as attempts to avoid problems had been putting us in circles all day. Our horses obediently squeezed through a pair of standing trees that had created a bit of high ground and made a sharp right turn. Any solid ground was welcome mitigation of the uncertainty. We then only needed to break through the branches of a dead tree while crossing five yards of silt of very suspicious depth. . I could see what might be higher ground on the other side, but we had been fooled in this swamp many times, but maybe this was a way out at last.

Against what was the better judgement of all, we attempted a crossing ...the horses barely able to extract their hooves from the muck as they sunk down with each step.Tense minutes but everyone was still with their horse between them and the ground, and otherwise OK. The footing on the other side was dry firm and easily passable! We escaped from the swamp island and then, after 100 yards or so, I heard a ROAD!

We turned on it, and headed towards camp, and I heardP Jayne say, "Wow! That was fun!

John Kavaliauskas account of the Sunday ride

