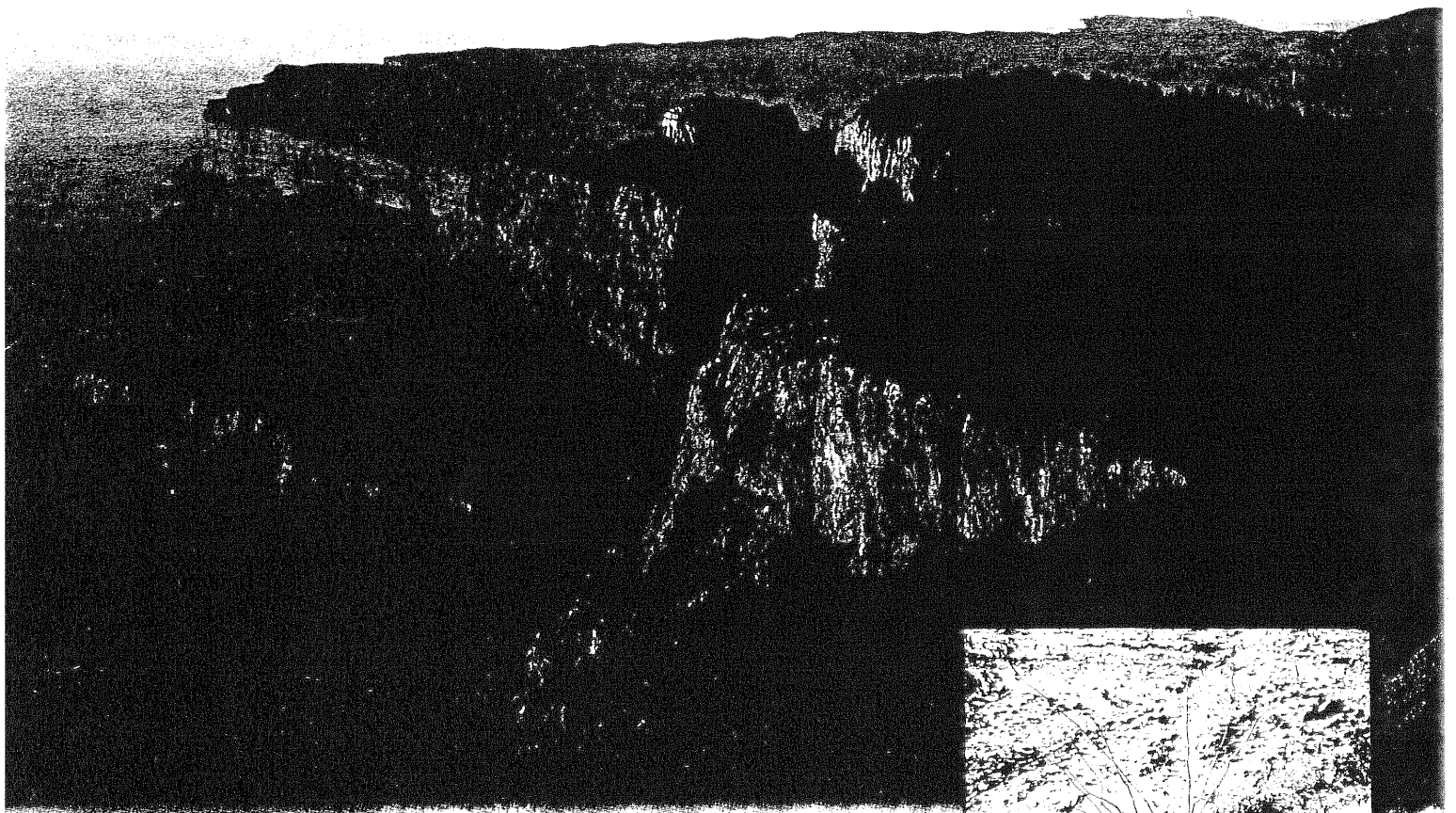


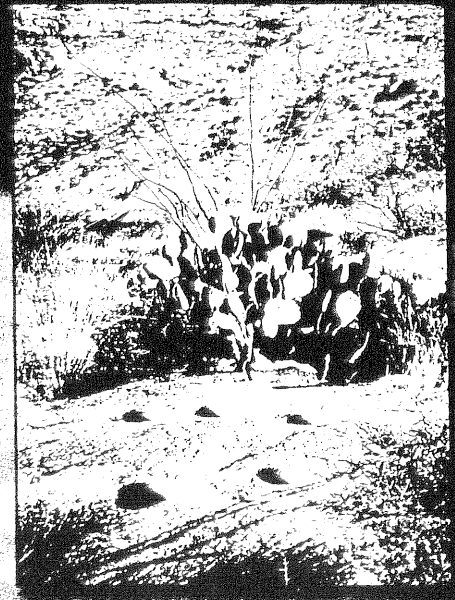
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FRONT COVER The magnificent El Carmen escarpment, one of the the "sky islands" of Coahuilo, Mexico. Photo by Patricia Rables Gil/Sierra Madre.

INSET Ancient grain grinding site, Maderas del Carmen, Coahuilo, Mexico. Photo by Vance G. Martin.

Florida Wilderness

Working with Traditional Tools after a Hurricane

BY SUSAN JENKINS

Clearing up after one hurricane is an immense task. Clearing up after three hurricanes—hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne—can seem insurmountable. In November of 2004, the national forests in Florida requested assistance from wilderness and traditional tools experts throughout the Forest Service. An assessment team was assembled to determine the best and most sensitive approach to reopening the Florida National Scenic Trail and Juniper Run through some of the most unique and protected habitats in Florida. Despite the dangerous conditions posed by hundreds of downed trees along the trail and in the waters of the run, the team was tasked with devising a safe plan that would not require the use of any motorized or mechanized equipment in accordance with the values detailed in the Wilderness Act of 1964. The team was highly successful. Not only were the Florida National Scenic Trail and Juniper Run safely reopened, but traditional tool skills that were instrumental in the settlement of Florida long ago were rejuvenated and found to be just as useful and relevant today as they were in our past. The following article is a firsthand account and interpretation of the effort as written by recovery team member Susan Jenkins, a wilderness ranger from Idaho who came to Florida to participate in the work.

—Michelle Mitchell, *USDA Forest Service, National Forests in Florida*

January comes in cold and damp on the Florida National Scenic Trail and the Juniper Springs Canoe Run. Both are found in the Juniper Prairie Wilderness on the Ocala National Forest. It is a different world here. The mornings are freezing but the day quickly warms. Walking along the tall grasses, we are soaked with sweat. The 75-degree weather feels stifling, and the humidity soaks us as though we are breathing under tepid water. It is not even hot or really humid yet.

Days later we are jumping out of canoes into swamp muck to our chests. We are too cold to rest during the day. Methane gases bubble up and the stench is ... interesting. Our frustration mounts when saws bind repeatedly as embedded sand in both oak and bay trees dull the cutting teeth. In the middle of the run the tension and binds within the trees change as the current pulls the limbs back and forth as we saw beneath the surface. We can't even saw into the palms as the pith repeatedly pinches the steel. Our sharpened axes chip and ring as they strike the downed oaks covering the trail and waterways. At the end of the

day, we have traveled less than a hundred yards. But this is a unique chance to see the amazingly different country.

There is no doubt that this is a beautiful and unique place. As we travel from one end of the wilderness to the other, we encounter a landscape shifting from small ponds and lakes to swamps, runs, and prairies. Vegetation varies as this complex countryside changes from hardwood to longleaf islands historically shaped by fire. The Juniper Canoe Run is canopied by live oaks with Spanish moss hanging from its branches. As we work to clear the waterway, alligators and water moccasins become a daily happening that takes a while to get used to. There are tick checks at night, and the chiggers and mosquitoes are biting every warm evening.

Different and incredibly beautiful. Many of us work between two large wildernesses encompassing 3 million acres (1.2 million ha) with one gravel road between them. But this country becomes more valuable as there is so little left. In a single afternoon we drive around the entire perimeter of the Juniper Prairie Wilderness. You have so

many visitors, and there is not much wildland remaining. ... How do you plan and deal with the management decisions needed to preserve something so unique? It is easy for any of us to see why people come from as far away as Venezuela and Germany to be a part of the Florida Trail Association's efforts to work in this wilderness.

Outdoor enthusiasts and winter hikers are aware of the destruction hurricanes Charley, Frances, Jean, and Ivan inflicted on nearly all segments of the Florida National Scenic Trail (Florida Trail). In October, after the last of the storms had passed, it was estimated that 80% of the 1,400-mile trail (2,258 kilometers) was either closed or under assessment for damages. But the volunteers and land managers that care for this trail are innovative and dedicated. Despite having to deal with repairs to their own homes and property as a result of the storms, people came out in force to rebuild sections of the trail and remove blowdown that blocked trail access. In four months, volunteers from the many different chapters of the Florida Trail Association (FTA) had cleared most of the trail. Bridges, boardwalks, and campsites were cleaned and repaired.

The nine-mile (14.5 km) section of the Florida Trail within the Juniper Wilderness called for some creative thinking and problem solving. This is the only section of the Florida Trail passing through designated wilderness that was affected by the hurricanes. Trail users, volunteers, and land managers realize that the Juniper Prairie is a rare setting in Florida's national forests. And, like the wilderness areas in the western states, a different type of management approach is called for. The use of traditional (non motorized) tools has been a keystone for managing wilderness since 1964, when the Wilderness Act was enacted. One of the

most positive outcomes of its passage is that certain skills that may otherwise have vanished have been kept alive. This is one of the benefits of wilderness.

Some individuals believed that using traditional tools would not be a viable alternative when reopening the impacted trails and canoe runs. Others saw the recovery efforts in a different light. This was an opportunity to reopen the trails and canoe runs and to revitalize skills that had not been a part of the maintenance of the Florida Trail for many years. Florida's forest-related culture is filled with examples of traditional tool use. Crosscut saws, axes, and rigging equipment such as hoists and winches figured strongly into logging operations, road and trail construction, and the building of structures. The Wilderness Act requires the use of nonmotorized means in designated wilderness except in fire-related emergencies, law enforcement, and medical emergency situations. We tried to develop an educational context and recovery plan that allowed for the work to be accomplished safely and efficiently while fully meeting the directives of the act.

In other places, we sometimes encounter resistance to the use of hand tools as a means of performing trail maintenance for accomplishing trail and restoration work. Many people believe that chain saws and motorized rock drills are the only effective means for opening and reconstructing mountain pathways. Our work in Florida has been viewed in a different light. And the feedback we received from managers and wilderness visitors will increase our resolve when we return to our jobs out west.

As we visited with hikers from Florida and all over the world while cutting the hiking trails, we were overwhelmed with the positive responses. People told us how important it was to know that traditional hand-tool

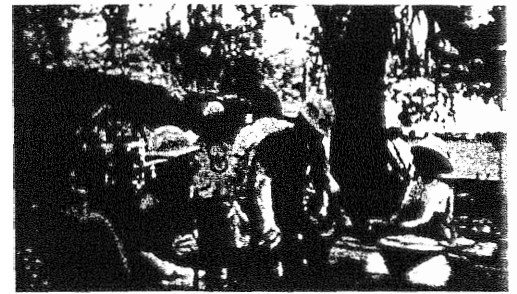


Figure 1—Florida Trail Association members Megan Griffin and Sara Griffin of Tallahassee demonstrate one way to use the crosscut saw with the help of Dr. Don Jastad. Photo courtesy of Florida Trail Association.

skills are still alive, and many quickly developed an emotional involvement in just knowing that these means are being used to accomplish the jobs at hand. As often happens, when complex recovery projects are initially laid out, individuals look at the sheer amount of work to be done. Many compare tool options for the job rather than comparing the tools within the context of the work to be done.

A chain saw is definitely faster and easier to use than a crosscut saw. However, in the heavy blowdown that we have encountered from high winds, we have seen that only a small percentage of the work involves sawing. Most of the job lies in moving the materials after the sawing has been finished. In addition to working within Juniper Prairie Wilderness, our crews were asked to clear downed trees from the nonwilderness portions of Alexander Canoe Run where chain saws are a viable method for accomplishing work. We brought power saws along, but we were unable to use them effectively, as most of the sawing had to be done under water in order to clear the run to a depth allowing for outboard motors. We quickly returned to hand tools and cleared the run in a few days.

Initial examination of the Florida Trail and Juniper Canoe Run showed impacts from the hurricanes that seemed horrendous, with trees piled into huge jackstraws. With a seemingly



Figure 2—Juniper Springs run in the Juniper Prairie Wilderness located in Florida (USDA Forest Service). Photo by Deborah Caffin.

overwhelming task ahead, a recovery program was put in motion. Land managers from the national forests in Florida and the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests in Idaho designed a plan to promote stronger partnerships among local forests, historical societies, and the FTA in order to complete the work in an economic fashion. Long-term plans were developed to promote these partnerships and cooperation into the future.

Upon arrival in Florida, tool trainers from the western regions of the U.S. Forest Service met with local land

management employees and volunteers to embark on a four-day training program with classroom and practical sessions. Learning about traditional tools is more than just learning how to swing an ax or run a saw in the woods. Good tool usage is part skill and physical ability, but efficient work takes place when planning and layout are present in the working process.

The practical sessions were designed to let everyone involved learn how to use the hand tools and rigging equipment to their full advantage. Participants quickly understood that

traditional crosscut saw and ax skills along with skyline logging techniques will continue to play an important part in trail and bridge maintenance and restoration in backcountry areas. With a never-ending need to continue trail maintenance, there will be plenty of time to perfect technique.

The training was geared toward teaching and reviving skills; however, it was also about learning how these tools coupled with unlimited imagination can be used to solve all sorts of trail construction and reconstruction problems in the backcountry. As trainers, the best feedback we can receive is seeing ideas and thoughts taking root in participants. By the end of the training, what began as a four-day session stretched into five, and FTA volunteers from around the state began to reevaluate methods of construction for future Florida National Scenic Trail projects using the traditional tool skills they had learned. **IJW**

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