



Alderman's Ford Park

General Description

Size: 596 acres. Named after the river crossing established by John Alderman, the first pioneer settler to homestead in the area south of the Alafia River in 1848, this park has been a gathering place for local residents since the late 1800's. It became a Hillsborough County park in 1950, and was expanded to its current size in the late 1970's. An extensive development project completed in 1982 provided the excellent recreational facilities found here today, including paved trails with wooden bridges, picnic areas with restrooms and shelters, a canoe launch and a small visitor center. The park is bordered on the east and west by extensive preservation areas acquired over the past fifteen years by the County, Southwest Florida Water Management District, and State of Florida.

Location and Access

The park is located on Highway 39 at the Alafia River, about nine miles south of the City of Plant City. Access is available at two points, with the main picnic area on the north side of the river and east of HWY 39, and the canoe launch area south of the river on Thompson Road, on the west side of HWY 39.

Environmental Significance

The significance of this site, along with the additional preserve lands found along the Alafia River corridor, is based on the remarkable diversity of habitat types that occur as a result of the elevational changes characteristic of the region. The park contains the confluence of the North and South Prongs of the Alafia River. The river floodplain consists of a dense hardwood swamp forest. At the edge of the floodplain, the ground slopes upward and the heavily vegetated hillsides contain small springs or seeps that feed numerous tributary streams. The variety of native plant life found in these conditions is considered to be remarkable for the region. At the highest elevations, the moist and shady forests give way to dry, open forests of longleaf pine and scrub oak. In this habitat plants and animals are adapted to fire and drought. Gopher tortoises, six-lined race runners, and wiregrass are a few of the species that not only survive in, but depend on such conditions.

Recreational Opportunities

This park offers an exceptional range of access options for outdoor recreation in a natural setting. Ample parking and picnicking facilities give easy access to a paved pedestrian/bicycle trail that loops for over two miles through the park, crossing the river on wooden bridges and connecting to a boardwalk and several hiking trails of varying length. In addition to a relatively short hiking trail that climbs the hillside on the south side of the park and features primitive overnight camping sites, two trails leading into the larger preserve areas found to the east and west offer longer treks of up to nine miles. A canoe launch provides river access at the beginning of a State designated canoe trail that runs downstream for 15 miles. See other sections of this guide for more information about the areas accessed by these trails.

Volunteer Opportunities

The park is managed by a staff of park rangers who maintain the facilities and conduct management activities including interpretive walks and programs, exotic plant control, trail maintenance, etc. Volunteer opportunities include assisting with routine maintenance activities, environmental education, park patrol, reporting wildlife observations, and interacting with park visitors in a supportive role.

Contact Information

Alderman's Ford Park, 9625 Canoe Launch Loop, Lithia, FL 33547. (813) 757-3801.
Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation & Conservation Department, 1101 E. Rivercove Drive, Tampa, FL 33604. (813) 975-2160.