

A bit of Camp History by Martin Schnipper

Camp Oklawaha is a 60 acre site in Sebastian, Indian River County, on the banks of the Sebastian River. Donated by Anna Vern Smith in memory of her husband Claude in 1953, Oklawaha is a scrub oak flatland which includes a swimming area, canoe launch into the river, amphitheater, large meeting/dining hall pavilion, archery/BB range and chapel.

The campsites did not always have the names by which you currently know them. Until about thirty years ago, each of the campsites was named for the Indian River District troop that maintained it. Most troops only camped in "their" campsite, and they claimed first rights to it on any weekend they wished to camp at Oklawaha. If a Scoutmaster wanted his troop to camp in another troop's campsite, he would usually check with the Scoutmaster of that troop before doing so.

The Gulf Stream camping committee (on which I served) wanted to bring Camp Oklawaha more in line with the procedures used at Tanah Keeta for registering to use a campsite and for maintaining the campsites. We decided that part of this process was changing the names of the campsites so that they no longer were associated with specific Indian River District troops. I owned a map of Indian tribes' locations in the United States at some earlier part of our history. I think it was around the mid-1800's. I suggested that we name the campsites so that they corresponded as closely as possible geographically to that map. Since I was an orienteering merit badge counselor (as well as being Scoutmaster of Troop 510), I organized a group of Scouts (including my son Lanny) to use compasses and pacing to map out the camp as accurately as possible and to put in the appropriate campsite names. It appears that I don't have rights on this FB site to post pictures, or I would have included a photo of one of the original maps.

As a teacher at Vero Beach High School, I was able to persuade the carpentry class to route campsite names into wooden posts that I provided for that purpose. Some other Scouters and I (as well as some of the Scouts) then dug post holes and put a post with the appropriate Indian tribe name in each campsite. That carpentry class was also very helpful when those of us on the camping committee wanted to build a real Camp Oklawaha ranger's house to replace the dilapidated old house trailer parked next to the pavilion that was what the ranger was using. The VBHS carpentry class traveled on many school days from Vero Beach to Camp Oklawaha to frame out the ranger's house. John Schlitt did the architectural work. Sebastian Mayor (and Cubmaster) Richard Votapka helped get required government approvals. Many local Scouters and craftsmen donated time and materials. There were no costs associated with the ranger's house that were borne by Gulfstream Council, which was a condition placed on the Camp Oklawaha committee by Scout Executive Ben Edwards. This was a purely local effort.

Scouts in the Indian River District are very privileged to have such a nice camp so close to home. It is part of the council camping program, so there does need to be appropriate coordination with Gulf Stream Council. That being said, there is a special obligation on the part of Indian River District Scouts and Scouters to maintain the camp so that future generations of Scouts may continue to enjoy it. Kudos to those of you who are obviously continuing the tradition!