



The Carr Family Cabin — Celebrating a Forgotten Place in the Florida Scrub

a short film for
the Umatilla Historical Society
and Friends of the Carr Cabin

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THE CARR FAMILY CABIN — CELEBRATING A FORGOTTEN PLACE IN THE FLORIDA SCRUB

Newcomers and tourists to Florida don't always realize the full richness of its heritage and how it has been woven into our state's unique natural systems. Three out of every four Floridians come from someplace else, and the sensibilities they bring with them seldom acknowledge the more subtle realities of our state.



Carr Cabin, May 2008

If there is any single family who helped communicate these values and signaled the need for their protection, it is the Carr family. Modern Florida naturalists are indebted to scientist and author Archie F. Carr, Jr. for his inspired work in introducing so many to the joys of Florida's singular nature through his compelling books and his science. But other members of the Carr family played vital roles in this respect as well.

In fact, three generations of this family can trace their Florida outdoor learning to a cabin on the edge of Nicotoon Lake and the Big Scrub in the Ocala National Forest. The cabin was built in 1938 by Dr. Archibald Carr and his wife, Louise, from local and scavenged materials. The family had just moved down from Savannah, Ga. to Umatilla where Dr. Carr had accepted leadership of the First Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Carr was an avid waterfowl hunter and fisherman. He passed this love of the outdoors down to his sons Archie and Tom, and they, down to their children. Many have witnessed and benefited from the results of

this intergenerational transmission of love, appreciation and curiosity for the natural world.

This little cabin played a key role in the development of their conservation ethic. It wasn't a Walden or a Cross Creek where single intellectuals isolated themselves from society. The Carr cabin was more in the vein of Aldo

Leopold's "Shack" — it was a family affair from beginning to end. Observations were made and ideas were exchanged and passed down through three generations of Carrs as they escaped from the pressures of the university, work or the church to interact with a natural, unspoiled Florida.

Archie's seminal experiences with Florida's natural systems began here in the "Big Scrub" of the Ocala Forest. His early years spent hunting in the Scrub are truly a lost chapter in the story of his development as a world-renowned naturalist. Archie developed keen observational skills while hidden "on-stand," silent and motionless, waiting for a white-tailed deer to appear. At night, after the hunt was over, he listened to the frog songs from nearby Nicotoon Lake — and he learned.

Other members of the Carr family honed their sensibilities to unspoiled Florida here as well, including Marjorie Harris Carr, Tom Carr, Parson Carr, Louise Carr, Chuck Carr, Steve Carr, Mimi Carr, Susan Carr, Tommy Carr and David Carr.

In April 2007, the Ocala National Forest received a gift of inestimable value from Dr. Tom Carr, a physicist and radio astronomer, and the younger brother of Archie. It was the Carr family cabin and 46 acres on the northeast shore of Lake Nicotoon.

While the cabin itself is iconic in what it represents, the years have not been kind to it or to the surrounding landscape. Like many smaller lakes in the forest, Nicotoon almost dried up in the 1970s. All that is left now are a few wet holes amidst marsh grasses. New development dots the once unspoiled shore and ATVs run through the nearby woods. As the lake dried up and people moved in, the Carrs' motivation to escape to the cabin declined over the years and it fell into disuse.

Today the cabin is in disrepair, yet it is restorable. Although the environment has changed from then to now as it has throughout Florida, the cabin remains a potent symbol. Indisputably, it was the launching ground that helped the Carrs fashion a conservation ethic that has touched every Floridian, and every nature traveler who's ever since visited an ocean's shore and witnessed a sea turtle's successful return to it's ancestral nesting grounds.

After extensive discussion with the Carr family, the vision has emerged of restoring the cabin and its environs as a place for a broad based appreciation of nature, contemplation and continuation of Archie's conservation legacy. The cabin will serve as a catalyst for thought and to pass Archie Carr's conservation ethic to future generations. The cabin is envisioned as a place for education and inspiration, where kids and adults alike can wander the paths that Archie trod, observe the natural world and appreciate the simple yet compelling passion for nature that Archie's writing evoked.



Dr. Archibald Fairly Carr, Sr. and wife Louise at the cabin, ca 1938-39



2007 L-R: H. Popenoe, M. Carr, T. Carr, D. Carr, G. Wagner & Dr. Tom Carr

The Friends of Carr Cabin was formed with the help of the Umatilla Historical Society to assist and guide the USFS in the preservation and interpretation of this unique resource. There is strength in numbers — that is where the Friends of Carr Cabin need your help in exploring all possibilities that might bring life to this unique resource. Already, these Friends reflect a wide spectrum

of donated support: artists, craftsmen, architects, engineers, fire fighters, loggers, environmentalists, hunters, teachers and more. Please consider joining the Friends of Carr Cabin to show your support.

LETTER FROM DR. PERRAN ROSS

Below is an excerpt from a letter to the USFS sent by Dr. Perran Ross when he heard of Dr. Tom Carr's donation of this cabin and land. It helps put the gift of the cabin into context and helps us all understand that this is far more than simply a structure of wood and metal; it is a time capsule that carries with it the inspiration of Florida nature over decades. Please remember that for this project to be meaningful and to succeed, we need your help.

Perran Ross writes:

I am excited by the recent news that Archie Carr's old cabin in the Ocala Forest still exists and has been donated to the Forest Service. I was a student of Dr. Carr's in the 70s, his research assistant, and subsequently a friend and colleague of both Archie and Marjorie until the end of their lives, and their several sons and daughter currently.

Archie and Marjorie told affectionate stories of their Ocala Forest hideaway and it was obviously a location they both loved. Their daughter Mimi relayed to me one such story about their ancient dachshund Zep:

'The dog's name was Zep, and he was really quite young.

Zep came into my mother's life in 1939 when his prior owner joined the Canadian army to go to England to be a flier in the early days of WW II. Zep (short for zeppelin) came from Boston to north Florida and after a short period of adjustment never looked back. He became an avid hunter. He hunted so much and so hard that the hair along the sides of ears was whipped off by brush as he rushed along on a trail.

He accompanied Mother and Daddy to the Scrub for hunts and the other hunters were amused at the ridiculous looking dog who was "a whole dog long and a half dog high." One hunting day the other hounds lost the scent of a deer, wind I suppose, and the trail was lost. Then, amazingly, the deer appeared out of nowhere and ran past the waiting guns where met its demise. No dog appeared to be after him.

Well, my mother saw Zep (long, low Zep) hard on the trail right behind that deer. He was nose down, trailing him, baying.

She mentioned to the hunters that her little dachshund had pushed that deer in front of their guns. They didn't believe her.

Later that evening, though, there was a knock on the door at Parson and Louise's home in Umatilla. Daddy went to the door and there on the step was a carefully wrapped package containing a quarter cut of the deer. Apparently someone verified Mother's claim. I guess Zep was so low that he could really stick to the trail and not have to use air scenting and be confused by crosswinds.'

Archie has become North Florida's most respected ecologist, conservationist and a natural history author of note. His wife Marjorie's lifetime of conservation contributions are reflected in the Marjorie Harris Carr Greenway.

I do hope that as the Forest Service considers its best action concerning this perhaps rather run down acquisition, that the value of this location as a symbol of two lifetimes's of conservation service to Florida can influence your thoughts. I am sure that he would not want a sanctimonious plaque and would shun a statue, but the idea that his favorite old place was preserved as a place where naturalist could wander and ponder on the complexities of frog calls, and the nature of egrets would please him. It would certainly please his legions of affectionate acolytes, friends and admirers.

— Dr. James Perran Ross, University of Florida, 2007