

TRAVEL

TALLAHASSEE:

*Florida with a different accent*By BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG
Special to the Exponent

The "real" Florida — that's how some Tallahassee locals like to think about their city, and with good reason. Tallahassee is *not* at all like Miami or Palm Beach or Orlando, or the charming, if somewhat less fabled, resorts on the west coast, like Longboat Key or Marco Island.

Actually, both east coast and west coast "name" destinations (or the Disney-generated locations in the middle of the state, to some extent) have developed a certain image of Florida: beaches, palm trees and "early bird specials" at the more or less glitzy restaurants there.

Tallahassee is different — it is still the Deep South in many ways, albeit modified by time.

Even its terrain is different from the rest of Florida. It has hills. Lush rolling hills, quite unlike the tabletop-flat terrain of the southern part of the state. And plantations. Not *Gone With the Wind* kind of plantations exactly (although Tallahassee is closer to Atlanta than it is to Miami). But plantations, nevertheless. Plantations that once grew cotton and corn, but now, in the main, serve as "gentlemen's hunting preserves."

The Tallahassee area has plantations in abundance. Both in and out of town. Seventy-one of them, to be exact — and all located in the corridor between Tallahassee and Thomasville, just inside the Georgia border. That's only about 28 miles and less than one hour from the center of one city to the other.

The grand and glorious Pebble Hill Plantation, in fact, is located in Thomas County, Ga., and is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. (closed in September from the day after Labor Day, to Oct. 4, Thanksgiving, Dec. 24 and 25). Otherwise, visitors are free to roam the exquisitely manicured grounds and outbuildings unattended, but only six at a time may enter the beautifully

decorated and furnished house.

Other of the plantations include Foxfire Hunting Preserve, where people go to hunt the aristocratic bobwhite quail. Foxfire also mounts pheasant and chukar (a type of partridge) with energetic Brittany Spaniels leading the way.

But, if hunting animals or birds is not your kind of sport, but watching them in their native habitat is, then Tallahassee offers other, more attractive locations and activities.

In fact, Tallahassee is a paradise for nature lovers. One of its most intriguing attractions is Wakulla Springs, located just 11 miles south of the city. Wakulla Springs is a site with 4,000 acres of virgin hardwood and pine forest, magnolias, maples

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and moss-draped cyprus. To the Seminole Indians who inhabited this part of Florida, this was the forest primeval; to the modern traveler, it still offers a haven of peace and beauty.

The spring, itself, is considered the largest and deepest on earth. It pours forth 600,000 gallons of water per minute, water so clear that it is possible to watch a penny dropped from one of the glass-bottom boats at the site sink all the way to the bottom.

Many complete mastodon skeletons have been removed from the spring. Two of them were raised just after the Civil War and were en route to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, but encountered a storm and now lay buried deep in the sand off Cape Hatteras.

A boat ride around the area provides a close-up look at many species of wild birds — and alligators of varying sizes and ages. The boatmen who guide the voyage are on intimate terms, it seems, with all the wildlife and are quick to point out species that people might not otherwise notice.

For people who wish to extend the experience of living with unspoiled nature, there's a lodge on the premises with modest rooms at reasonably modest prices. And an on-premises dining room that prepares some of the local fish for guests of the lodge — or people just passing through.

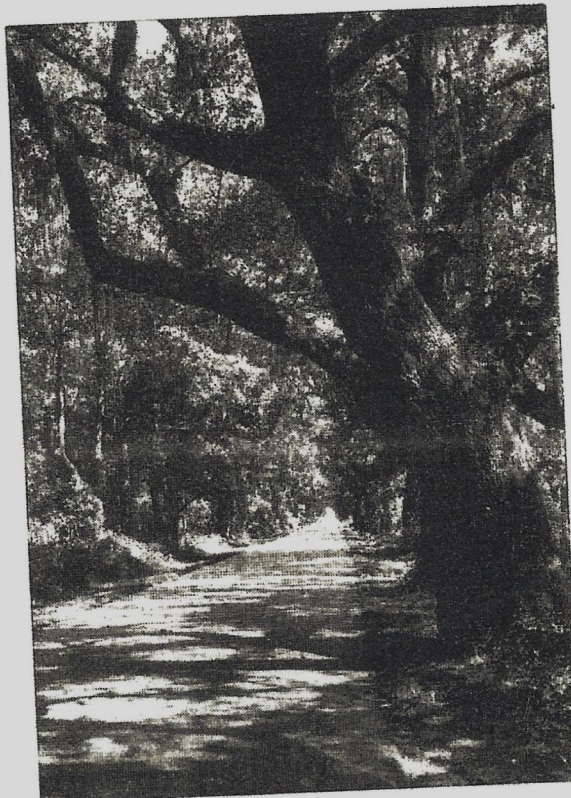
Another attractive in-town destination for nature lovers of all ages is the Tallahassee Museum, sometimes called the Junior Museum. Both names are somewhat misleading, however, unless one can consider various man-made outdoor habitats for such species as Florida panthers, black bears, otters, bobcats and red wolves as a sort of outdoor museum. But never mind. It's a rare experience, not to be missed.

Then there are other amusing attractions, such as the Knott House Museum, one of Tallahassee's oldest structures. Its eccentric owner wrote poems about many of the pieces of Victorian furniture on display there.

Tallahassee offers a variety of accommodations for overnight visitors to the area — as charming and beautifully appointed as Governor's Inn located in the downtown historical district and surrounded by restaurants and lively music bars, to every chain and corporate hotel imaginable.

Visitors to the area will find serenity and a view of Florida life as part of the "old South" in a meander down streets lined with trees draped in Spanish moss. These several streets close to the center of this capital city have been preserved and are referred to as "canopy roads."

For people driving to (or returning from) the "other" Florida, Tallahassee offers a glimpse of life as it used to be in this corner of Florida, located between the panhandle and the Gulf (only 14 miles to the south).



Tallahassee streets known as "canopy roads" are lined with trees draped in Spanish moss.