

birds

93
Not many birds of water birds seemed to frequent the river, though once I encountered a flock of coots I estimated at ~~at least~~ at least 1000 birds. There were usually a few scaup and pie-billed grebs about, and one time I spied the only pinktail (a pair) I saw the whole time I was in Florida.

others

base. A particularly memorable little incident happened one afternoon during a short walk. Just after crossing the little bridge that carries the road south over a creek, right near the end of east runway, I spotted something moving on the far bank where the creek swings back about parallel to the road. Through the binoculars I could see that it was two animals that appeared to be fighting, but upon creeping close I saw that it was two otters. The first wild one I had ever seen, nearly playing with each other. They were literally tumbling all over the place and one another and obviously having as much fun as two animals possibly could. After a while they got tired and stopped, still apparently quite unaware of me, who was by this time less than 100 feet away. One of them casually slipped into the water and returned with a fish. Eventually, as if now a little suspicious of something, they left

The first unester and both slid into the weed, swimming slowly upstream and away from me. Half the time they were wholly under water, the rest of the time showing their almost seal-like heads above the surface.

bicycle
(bad English!)
Trips

After buying a bicycle from one of the other instructors, trips on it became the rule on days off. The bicycle was near the main station but instead of bringing it straight back to Lee Field I planned a series of trips with the bike to be left at one of several "strategic" places along the way. On the first day I took the bus to the main N.A.S. and then rode the bike through the city and out to Atlantic Beach, leaving my trusty "steed" at the Reids for a week or so. On the next day off I rode south to Ponte Vedra and then headed south-west across country, eventually finding the road along the east bank of the St. Johns and then the bridge just below Lee Field. It was

CROSS
COUNTRY

around a 50 mile ride, really too long for my still rather untoughened legs and especially the bicycle, one of those heavy-framed, thick-tired jobs - very comfortable except against the wind, but it did give me a good look at the country until it got dark. I remember passing a forest fire that was sweeping through the grass at an alarming rate, but not doing much harm to the trees. Rather scrubby pines with little beneath them but grass or palmetto completely dominated the scenery, but in one of the scattered swamps I saw an aged and decayed cypress a good seven feet through, the first large one encountered in over a year in Florida, where there are indeed few such survivors of the axe.

With the return to Lee Field, however, my series of trips was just beginning. The next leg took me to St. Augustine through more pure pine land and little else.

FOREST FIRE

giant cypress

St

AUGUSTINE

BIRDS

but occasional hardwood and cypress swamps, one of the latter dominated by several giant cypresses. I remember seeing a winter wren in one creek-bordering swamp and my first Florida red-cockaded woodpecker in some pine trees. Once at the end of the day's trip I left the bicycle in the baggage room of the station and took the bus back to Green Cove Springs.

MORE
BICYCLE
TRIPS

A week later a very straight and nondescript side roll along the scrub-bordered shore road, behind the sand dunes, got me back to Atlantic Beach ready for a more interesting trip the following day off. This involved a short ride to Mayport, a ferrying across the St. Johns just above its mouth and a very pleasant down wind ride from Fort George Island, which was thoroughly explored first, to Jacksonville.

"FERRY"

A fisherman with his put-put, which he had a lot of trouble starting, got me across the river for a reasonable fee, and a short ride in the opposite direction