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A Visit to the Springs

by
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Well, for those of you who participated in the Guinness World Record Golf Cart Parade this past Sunday I know you were as excited as I was. In actuality, the deadline for this column was two days before the parade so I don't know the final count but it was near or above 3,000 strong. It will take some heavy action for any other community to best this record for sometime. For those of you who were unable to participate, for whatever reason, I'm sure the event organizers of The Villages will be putting together some extravaganza in which you will be able to be part of in the near future.

Being a fairly new resident of this great state I'm still learning a lot about all the opportunities it offers to its residents and tourists for recreation and relaxation. There is, of course, one of the largest theme parks in the world just a hop skip and jump from The Villages, and that would be Disney World. Together with Universal Studios and Sea World adjacent to Disney any traveler has many fantastic adventures available within a two hour drive. Needless to say the children in all of us revels at the rides, exhibitions and restaurants the Orlando area offers and it's safe to say they will continue to draw millions of pleasure seekers for years to come.

For those of you who have been "themed out" I would like to share with you a great day trip opportunity that you and your friends/relatives could partake of with a drive of less than one hour. There are actually several of these facilities nearby but I will whet your appetite by giving you a blow by blow description of one recent trip a group from our Village took. It took all of 45 minutes to get there and a fantastic time was had by one and all.

What started as a planned excursion for 4 expanded into an odyssey for 12 which left at 9 am on a beautiful Wednesday morning. After a 45 minute drive East on 42, North on 19, and right on 445A our three vehicle convoy arrived at Alexander Springs, one of four major natural springs located in Ocala National Forest. Our first order of business was to rent six canoes at a great price of \$12.50 per canoe and, leaving our picnic lunches in the cars, we set out on our two hour paddle down Alexander Creek, hoping to see nature at its wildest and best. I might add, of the 12 who went, there were only 5 us who had ever been in a canoe, much less motivate one down a curving, gently flowing body of water full of fish, fronds and water lilies. The creek is formed and powered by the 76 Million gallons of pure spring water that erupts daily from a fissure in the bottom of a 28 foot hole.

We made it down and back in the allotted two hours, hungry, hot, and eager to devour our lunches and then snorkel in the fenced off portion of the Springs that allows one to swim down to the source of the water. It's an awesome site and to float or swim in the volumes of water visually coming from under the earth with such force it pushes at you in a friendly way. This area is large

enough, also, to allow local Scuba clubs to certify new divers as needed. It's interesting to watch as these Navy Seal wannabes go through the paces of learning to handle underwater emergencies and becoming one with the water.

There are hiking trails available as well, but we chose to hang loose in the water for this foray and to possibly schedule a hiking trip in the future. Let me prepare you for something that might take you by surprise. The water coming out of the earth is a constant 72 degrees all year round, which means it will feel mighty cold as you first venture in. The secret to acclimating to it, you already know... wade in a few feet then hit it all at once. Your body will adjust quicker than you can imagine. Be sure and take a mask and snorkel tube even if you don't have fins. It's absolutely beautiful to watch the fish swimming around your feet and swim over the source of so much pure water coming out just like the good Lord planned.

Oh, by the way... while canoeing we got up close and personal with 3 or 4 alligators sunning themselves. Great picture opportunities!

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