

## The Cutting Place

Guy Labre, the barefoot artist, who has spent his life depicting Seminole culture through his paintings once told me that the Seminoles believe that when you walk into abandoned Indian camps in the hammocks, you'll get cut from the sawgrass and the thorns, "It is the knives of Indian ghosts", he said, "They don't want you there."

His words surfaced in my mind after I pushed my hands against a saw palmetto stalk opening a deep wound on my finger that began to bleed profusely. I was following Mike Adams who was leading us to Polly Parker's last camp. It was here that she died at the age of 110 although some say she was even older. Polly was a Seminole, Florida's First Lady, who had survived the Seminole Wars and had escaped captivity to live her final days in the hammocks northeast of Lake Okeechobee. Today her last camp is situated in what is now the Adam's Ranch west of Fort Pierce.

Atto "Bud" Adams, Mike's father, told me that in 1937 when his father bought the property she was living in this hammock. "She lived in a chickee by herself", said Bud. "Her people left her there alone for some reason. My, but she was a really old Indian!". She had to have been old. In 1838, she and her husband Chi were captured by Colonel Sheldon Harney and the Second Dragoons. They were forced to become guides for Harney to scout through the Everglades to find other Seminoles. Polly thought that Chi was too cooperative with the soldiers, as the story goes, and she shot him leaving her as the solo guide. She effectively stayed lost and found no Seminole camps for the soldiers. Eventually she was taken to Fort Brooke in Tampa for emigration to reservation lands west of the Mississippi River. Once on board ship, she managed to convince soldiers to allow her to disembark at St. Marks to find herbal medicine for a sick Seminole on the ship-she never returned. Instead she walked through the swamps and forests until she reached her beloved south Florida.

As the blood freely flowed down my hand-I saw a rusted coffee grinder half hidden in the sand and pieces of animal bone and pottery from the people that had used the island before Polly. It seemed impossible to stop the bleeding-I hurried back to the truck to find a first aid kit. A thunder storm began to threaten and we left. Polly had won again-avoiding the scrutiny of any archaeologist who dared to rustle the thick jungle understory to steal her story and disturb her Florida home.