

## Trapper's Gold

My shovel digs deep into the sand. I hear the crushing sound of rusty cans. Beer cans – hundreds of them. In fact, mounds of beer cans litter the palmetto thicket. Beer apparently was the daily subsistence of Trapper Nelson. His cans are evidence of years of a solitary life on the bank of the Loxahatchee River. His cabin and abandoned tourist petting zoo, now a historical site in Johnathan Dickinson Park, was the subject of our archaeological investigation, necessary before any improvements could be made by the park.

The park ranger pointed to the chickee where they had found Trapper's body, face down in the sand, a shotgun blast to his chest. John DuBois had found the body several days after his death, badly decomposed. One witness, Joe Farrue, testified at the inquest that he thought it couldn't be suicide. The sheriff could find no tracks in the soft white sand for one hundred yards around the body and near the boat landing – but he added, Trapper's chickens had pecked and scratched their way around the chickee obliterating any evidence of visitors. Powder burns were on his shirt but the judge pondered how had Trapper held and fired a shotgun at his own chest?

The ranger stayed close to our crew each day keeping a wary eye on our digging. After all who knows what we might find. Trapper was a rich man when he died. He had sold a portion of his property for over \$328,000 just before his death and it was rumored that he had buried money on the property. It was no surprise that shortly after his death his cabin was looted – his furnishings torn apart and papers strewn across the floor and grounds. Some came for souvenirs, some came to grab things that they thought others would steal, and others were drawn by the smell of treasure. Holes began to mysteriously appear across the property, and one ranger actually found a cache of silver coins inside the cabin chimney – the change Trapper had accumulated from years of selling nickel cokes and ten cent post cards to visitors and tourists.

All we find are Trapper's beer cans and trash. Every time we try to expand our search northward away from the cabin the ranger intervenes and tells us to stop – despite a cleared path that obviously leads somewhere. "There's nothing there to see," he says. Near the end of the work week we have our chance while the ranger is elsewhere. We follow the path a short distance to a small footbridge that crosses an oxbow creek festooned with no trespassing signs apparently painted by Trapper.

As we cross the bridge a large sand mound looms above us rising at least eight feet above the creek. Someone – presumably Trapper had – dug a trench across the center of the mound bisecting it. Digging for what we wonder? The trench, deep enough to walk through, gives a perfect view of the mound's white sandy interior void of any artifacts or bones. Something round and melon like catches my eye just on the top of the trench. Growing across the top of the mound are golden brown pineapples lushly matting the sandy surface. Small and plump, I cut a piece. It melts in my mouth like August rain on

the porous sand. These pineapples are descendants from the pioneer stock that once thrived across south Florida and the Bahamas. Trapper had planted them far away from the prying eyes of any visitor. Perhaps the ranger thought it best to maintain the secret of Trapper's golden stash, particularly from any archaeologists who would pluck his pineapples for a tasty pause on a hot summer day.

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