

False Cape Fun and Work Trip

November 2nd - 6th, 2014

By Bruce Julian

Our Fall Trip to False Cape State Park has come and gone. I put all the information out about four months ago and thought the trip would never get here, but boy, how time flies. My June, July, and August went by so fast. With all I had on my calendar, it's a good thing I'd written it down so I would be able to remember what I've done. September and October only slowed down about 5 miles an hour, and before I knew it, November was here and our trip was on.

This time we had 15 volunteers for our 5 day trip. It looked like we would have good weather. Chuck Butler, Chief Ranger, always says we bring rain when we come to the park, but he still invites us back twice a year. I guess we do something right for him, or he needs rain twice a year for his grass.

Attendees included Jane & John Oakes, Sandy Baylor, Diana Ramsey, Nancy Pruden, Juliet Stephenson, Margaret & Bruce Julian, John Gilliken, Mike McCarthy, Milton Beale, Lee Gregory, and two new people, Gayle Owens and Tom Rump. Our chef, Dennis Ferguson, agreed to cook for us again. I think he loves to cook and he sure can. Just ask anyone who was on this trip.

We agreed to meet at 3:00 P.M. at Little Island City Park. We put all our gear on the bus by 3:05 and then drove toward Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. On the drive we saw 2 swans and a few ducks. It was too early for most of the migrating birds to be there. For the last 3 weeks, I had seen cormorant flocks flying overhead, but most do not stop at Back Bay.

After the 9 mile trip through the park we arrived at Wash Woods and the EEC. We unloaded all our gear, then I gave out the sleeping arrangements for everyone. We helped Dennis get his gear upstairs to the kitchen, where he would prepare all 12 meals which we would enjoy for the week. On this trip he was also going to prepare a meal for 16 park employees on Tuesday for lunch. He had arranged this with Danette Poole last month when we had a dinner for the VAFP Meeting. While Dennis and Diana stayed back to prepare our evening meal, the rest of us met outside for a short GPS course. I divided the group into 2 teams (A Team & B Team). I had placed 6 bottles on each 1.5 mile long course during the previous week. We had a short class on the how to work a GPS there in the yard at the center, then I gave each team a GPS, and they were on their way. There were 6 people on each team. Each person took turns holding the GPS and followed the arrow on the screen to the next bottle. We all stayed on the same road until each team found their first bottle and then each team went their separate way. I was hiding at the end of the course and left a note in the bottle which read "Find the grape vine and you will find me, within 100 feet of the bottle." B Team was the winner when Margaret found me. The prize was "a box of chocolate." B-Team shared it with the A Team, and I had some too.

MONDAY: Time to go to work! After breakfast, we headed to the work site. We met Chuck there and talked over what he wanted us to do. After rebuilding four Boat Docks in the past three years we knew what to do. We jumped right in with both feet and started taking down the old walkway. We had people pulling up old boards, taking out all the old nails, and loading the old lumber on the trailer to be carried to the burn pile. We worked like a smooth running machine. Within an hour we had it down and started putting up the new lumber. At noon we drove to the Visitor Center for lunch. Diana, Gayle, Jane and Margaret had been working there moving office furniture. Dennis had our lunch of sandwiches and hot potato soup waiting for us. After lunch, we headed back to the site and worked until 4:00. Most of the walkway was finished. Back at the EEC, we cleaned up and waited for the evening meal, which Dennis was preparing for us. We ate, cleaned the kitchen, and went for a hike. Eight of us went for a 3 mile hike. Some decided to rest up for the next day.

TUESDAY: After a delicious breakfast, we headed north about 3.5 miles to the entrance of the park where a platform is located. We started removing all the old lumber from the 12 foot x 14 foot observation tower. Everyone helped. Three people were on top of the platform taking it apart. The wood was handed down to others on the ground. It took about an hour to load the trailer. Two of our group headed back to Wash Woods to begin cutting the poles for the railing with the chop saw in the Pole Barn. We decided to drive back to the EEC for lunch. Dennis needed to be there for the 16 park personnel coming from Richmond to tour the park and have their lunch in the EEC Building. We were able to finish our lunch before they arrived. We met the guests on our way back to the work site. Dennis was in his glory getting to feed 16 new people. They complimented him on a good meal and thanked him over and over for all his hard work. We stopped work at 4:00 P.M. and I drove everyone back to the EEC for another great meal. We always eat well when we go to False Cape.

We took another hike out to the ocean and discovered that the almost full moon had pulled the tide out farther than I had ever seen in my 22 years of volunteering at the park. That night only four people hiked with me as the others decided to rest up for the next day.

WEDNESDAY: Once breakfast was over, all but four of us got on the bus and headed back to the work site. The four remaining stayed at Wash Woods to work on the poles for the railing. They met up with us later at the site. Four of us decided to also repair one of the kiosks which had been damaged a few months earlier. We thought we could finish everything on the walkway, the stairs, and the observation tower, but we came up 13 boards short. After working till 5:00 P.M. we cleaned up everything, since rain was forecast for Thursday. We then went back to the EEC, for you guessed it, another great meal. I wanted to put my two game cameras out somewhere in the park, so four of us went out and hiked about 4 miles and were back by 9:30. After talking until 10:00, we turned in hoping that the weatherman would be wrong so we could finish those last 13 boards.

THURSDAY: We ate our last breakfast, and discovered the rain had held off. We put all our packed gear on the Yellow Bus and left four people behind to help Dennis clean the EEC and get all his cooking gear loaded on the truck. The rest of the group jumped in the White Bus and I drove to the work site. Watching the western skies for any dark clouds heading our way, we started measuring, cutting and nailing those last 13 boards. With just a few raindrops falling, we finished around 10:00 A.M. The platform is finished except for the pickets, which Chuck will purchase next week. Some of us may go back to attach the pickets later. When we returned to the EEC, Cameron was there to tell us good-bye, and to let us know how much the park appreciated all our hard work. We headed out to our homes, all satisfied with a job well done once again.
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