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Hampton Dunn

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WALKING DREDGE HAD ROLE IN BUILDING TAMIAKI TRAIL

By: HAMPTON DUNN

COLLIER SEMINOLE STATE PARK --- Probably no rougher terrain ever challenged man's engineering ingenuity in roadbuilding more than did the swampy Florida Everglades in the construction of the Tamiami Trail.

Overcoming obstacle after obstacle, disappointment after disappointment, discouragement after discouragement, the hardy and heroic pioneers conquered the swamplands and rugged rock deposits and laid down a ribbon of concrete to link Miami with the Florida West Coast. Gov. John W. Martin, a roads-building governor, dedicated the Trail on April 28, 1928, 13 years after the idea was first seriously considered. Its cost has been variously reported from seven million to 13 million dollars.

One of the persevering contractors on the job explained it took three "m's" to build the road---"men, money and machinery." And another observer facetiously paraphrased the three m's to mean "muck, misery and moccasins." A writer cited the Trail project as a classic example of "hell and highwater."

A sentimental memento of the tools used to build the Trail is preserved in a prominent spot at the entrance to Collier Seminole State Park, which is about 20 miles south of Naples on the Trail (U.S. 41). It is called a "walking dredge" which crawled its way through the Everglades and contributed so much toward the construction of the project.

The plaque on the primitive 20-ton monster explains its role: "THIS BAY CITY WALKING DREDGE IN CHARGE OF EARL W. IVEY AND MEECE ELLIS WORKING 18 HOURS DAILY, CONSTRUCTED THAT PORTION OF THE TAMIAKI TRAIL BEGINNING AT BLACK WATER RIVER AND EXTENDING NORTHWESTERLY 10 MILES TO BELLE MEADE CROSSING, AND ADJOINING THIS PARK IN 1927-28."