

Bartram Lives Again!

by Kathy Sample

Bartram Wildflower Study Club, a member of the Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., is following Bartram's Trail through Florida, studying the wildflowers and indigenous plants. The club members record native flora found along the "Trail" today. Many of the plants Bartram recorded in his **Travels** in 1774 are growing happily on his "Trail" today, and the most unusual sites recorded by him have become either a State Park, a State Preserve, or a National Wildlife Refuge.

Everywhere he traveled in Florida, Bartram was impressed by the astonishing magnitude of the great, ancient live oaks which are still evident, although some show the ravages of storms and hurricanes. The live oaks on the large shell mound at Hontoon Island State Park appear to have suffered in the great hurricane which Bartram survived on the shores of the "beauteous long lake" (Lake Beresford near Deland).

Bartram was enchanted with the

large floating plant communities in the St. John's River. The dominant amphibious plants in these islands were floating lettuce, pond lilies, ragwort. Today, these floating islets are found in small creeks and rivers and contain the same plants Bartram recorded as well as floating heart, floating ferns, frog's bit, and many others.

Deep Creek on County Road 310 west of Palatka, and the River Styx on County Road 346 east of Micanopy, are a sight to behold in the fall, when the golden glow of *Biden laevis* and *Biden mitis* cover the floating islets with their blooms. Try to visit Deep Creek right after a rain. The Florida gallinules are out on the lily pads talking to each other across the marsh, like a bunch of hens, as they did in Bartram's time. It was at Deep Creek where one of our members discovered frog's-bit, which flowers under water, and also *Habenaria*, growing in the pond lilies.

Deep Creek was one of the crossings Bartram made on his way to the "Great Alachua Savanna" (Paynes Prairie) near today's Cross Creek. Bartram crossed the River Styx which was on his route to visit the Indian village (Tuscawilla-Micanopy). Even today at

any time of year the traveler would feel impelled to stop a few minutes at this crossing. Bald cypress still grow in the creek. Due to the large islets of floating plants, it's almost impossible for a boat to get through. White ibis, egrets, and the Florida limpkin may be seen feeding on these floating isles with the *Bidens* coloring the islands golden.

Bartram's wild oranges are usually found in the swamps along the St. John's River, as well as the Cardinal flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*. It is in this same habitat that *Clematis crispa*, with its roots in the shade, climbs to the top of a large shrub to reach the sun and display its showy blue flowers all summer.

William Bartram still lives along the trails he documented through early Florida!

DID YOU KNOW?

The oak in Highlands Hammock State Park is 36 feet in circumference, or more than 11 ft. in diameter and is estimated at 1,000 years old (according to sign on Big Oak Trail).

Harold J. Nett