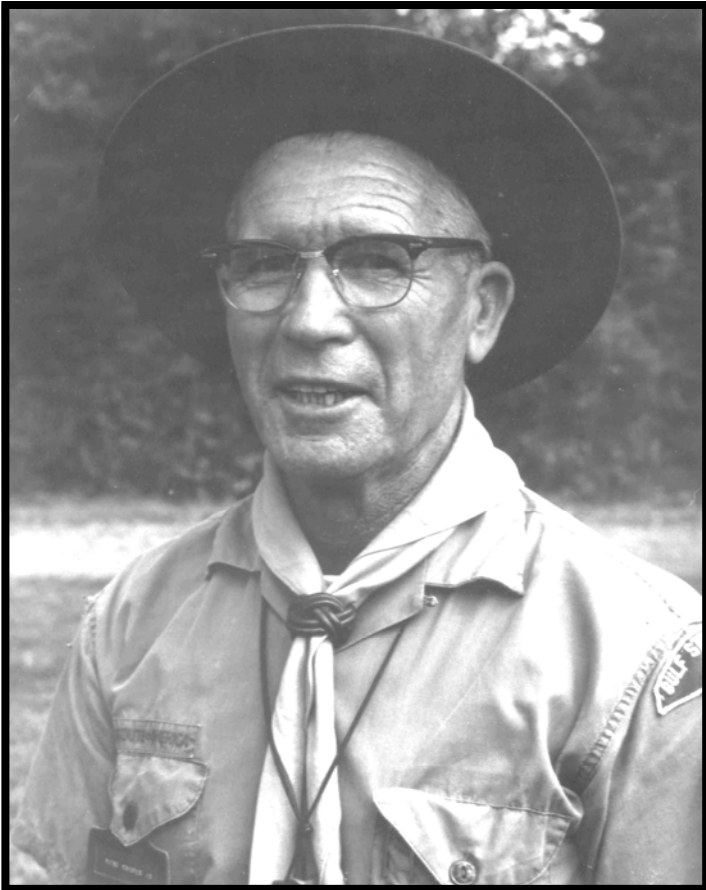


# THE MIKE MACHEK TRAIL



Tanah Keeta, Tanah Keeta,  
On your trails we have found,  
Beauty all should see  
You must surely be,  
God's own camping ground

Refrain from the Tanah Keeta Hymn



“Always do your best” - *Mike Machek*

Mike Machek was a Scouter in the Gulf Stream Council from 1948, when he started Troop 302 in Delray Beach, until his death in late 1991. As Council Camping Chairman, Mr. Machek was very involved in building the camp at Tanah Keeta during the middle 1950's helping to get it ready for TK's first Order of the Arrow Area Meet and Summer Camp in 1957.

(Continued inside back cover)

# THE MIKE MACHEK TRAIL

Welcome to the Mike Machek Trail — a 5.2 mile self-guided hike into the heart of the Tanah Keeta Scout Reservation. Tanah Keeta is a unique piece of land. Within its one square mile (640 acres) can be found a sampling of nearly every kind of topographical feature common to South Florida. We have cypress heads, sawgrass, the Loxahatchee River with its mangroves, cabbage palm hammocks, high sandy ridges, pine flatwoods, lakes, ponds, gator holes and mysterious dark swamps.

This land is home and refuge for many wild animals, birds, numerous wildflowers and rare orchids. It and the adjacent Jonathan Dickinson State Park and Girl Scout Camp Welaka are fast becoming the last remaining wildlife preserves in the area — an island refuge surrounded by development.

We want you to see it and get to know it; but it is a fragile ecosystem, easily damaged and must be used carefully. We have designed the trail in such a way as to be an inner as well as an outer experience as it leads you throughout the property. We hope you will walk this trail many times and come to know and love this treasure we call Tanah Keeta — The Gathering Place.



For your safety, comfort, enjoyment and for the protection of our environment, please observe the following guidelines:

- **Patrol size groups of 8 or 10 people** with two adults per group per National standards. Space your groups 30 minutes apart (see campmaster for available starting times)
- One first aid kit per group. One canteen per person (2 qt. is best).
- We suggest your group leader read the above introduction to the group as you begin and then group members should take turns reading the numbered paragraphs out loud to the others as you come to the numbered trail markers.
- Please don't pick flowers or take samples of leaves, bark, pine cones, etc. or go off the trail into surrounding areas. Over a thousand people will walk this trail each year. Leave it as you find it for others to enjoy.

- Canned, bottled or packaged drinks are not allowed. Canteens only. If you do see any trash, please carry it out with you — always leave the trail better than you found it.
  - Adults — we prefer to have no smoking on the trail. However, if you must smoke, please do **not** do so in front of the youth and remember to carry out your matches, ashes and butts.
  - If you are having lunch or a snack on the trail, take extra precautions not to leave any litter. A good place to rest and eat is Osceola's Hideout, up in the northwest corner of camp (see map), past the three mile marker.
  - Try to maintain an attitude of quiet, respectful observation. The trail has much to give you if you are able to receive it.
  - Read your questionnaire before you begin. Use it to keep track of your observations along the way. Return it to the ranger after you complete the trail so you can purchase your patch.
  - Group Leader — Please discuss with all your hikers as many of these guidelines as are appropriate for your group. The milepost markers are based on starting from the Welcome Pavilion at the main parking lot of Tanah-Keeta.
- 

Thank you very much. We hope you enjoy the hike.

The Mike Machek Trail is a project of the Council Conservation Committee. It is maintained under the guidance of a special Machek Trail oversight committee, with the help of the Trail Maintenance Crew of Aal-Pa-Tah Lodge, Order of the Arrow, and other volunteer groups doing conservation service projects.

1. We have two species of pine on our land: the Slash Pine and the Sand Pine. Here, in this area, they are intermixed. The quickest way to tell them apart is by the length of the needles. The Sand Pine has the short needles. Slash Pine has longer needles. As you become more familiar with them you'll notice they have distinctive shapes. Notice also the differences in the bark and cones.

The undergrowth around the base of these trees is made up of Sand Live Oak, one of three scrub oak species you will be seeing. Look for this as you continue.

**2.** The bush you see here on the south side of the trail with the short needle-like leaves is Rosemary. It is not the same as the cooking herb of the same name, but Indians say when it is rubbed on the skin, it acts as an insect repellent. Just ahead, on the north-east side, is a dead tree that is one of the many “lighter pine snags” you will see during the hike. These trees have a distinctive solid, heavy sound when hit. These Slash Pines have died quickly, often by fire, while their sap was high. The bark decomposes and falls off and the tree slowly dehydrates, crystallizing the pitch. The wood is very hard and burns easily. Lighter chips are excellent fire starting materials and experienced Florida campers often carry a bag of them in their packs.

**3.** This tree is a Turkey Oak. It is the most common of the four large oaks found on our property. Turkey Oaks like dry sandy soil. Of the other three large oaks, the Live Oak can be seen next to the covered bridge over the pond by the dining hall. The Laurel Oak can be found next to the footbridge at the north end of that pond. The Water Oak can be found on the lost Creek Nature Trail which begins near that footbridge. The leaf of the Turkey Oak resembles a wild turkey foot.

**4.** As we loop around the top of Grass Lake, the elevation has dropped a few inches. Over the last 100 feet, the plant community has changed due to the increasingly damp soil. Looking south, you will see a Red Bay tree. It is of the same family as the tree producing the “bay leaf” that is dried and sold commercially as seasoning for spaghetti sauce. These Red Bay leaves are very similar and are used by many people for the same purpose.

**5.** This white sand ridge is man made — a spoil bank left over from dredging Clear Lake. Many of these pines were planted by Scouts years ago. What kind are they?

All the lakes and ponds within the Tanah Keeta Reservation are refuges for animals which come to drink in the early morning hours. The white sand here makes this an especially good area to observe animal tracks. Commonly seen here are the tracks of deer, hog, raccoon, rabbit, armadillo, and on occasion, Florida bobcat.

A Jaguarundi has also been sighted on our property. This tropical cat, native to Central America, has been seen in several places in Florida and other Gulf coast states. They have either migrated

around the coast or are offspring from released pets. If it is still in the area you may find its tracks, so be alert and take pictures if you have a camera.

### **The Boardwalk**

On the right just ahead is a boardwalk overlooking Grass Lake. At the end of the overview, looking South, you will see North Passage homes and their maintenance building. This area was once overrun with the invasive *Melaleuca* tree. Their aggressive expansion can destroy native aquatic ecosystems. As an additional hazard, the trees' papery bark and growth pattern allows wildfires to spread quickly and burn hotter, killing the adjacent native trees. Our *Melaleuca* eradication program is evident in this area.

Taking this side trip will add 1/4 mile to your hike

**6.** Years ago this large area just to the east was dug for fill, resulting in this "pit". Because of the sometimes wet - sometimes dry conditions, Wax Myrtle bushes have become common here. It currently has a *Melaleuca* infestation which is being treated.

Directly behind the #6 marker are all three of the scrub oaks found on our property. On the right is the Sand Live Oak which you first saw at Marker #1. Just to the left is the Myrtle Oak with the small oval leaves. Further to the left is the Chapman Oak (the most rare of the three) with the larger spade-shaped leaves.

**7.** You are about to enter an area called Garden Grove. Once a mature Sand Pine forest with a beautiful shade canopy and a thick carpet of lichen (commonly called Deer Moss), it was one of the most special and beautiful areas in Tanah Keeta, a rare and prime example of the type of scrub which used to dominate the area.

Most of the old trees are now dead (due to the hurricanes of 2004) and the Deer Moss is less abundant. A new ecosystem is emerging and we have an opportunity to watch it evolve during the coming years. The twisted remains of the old trees give the area a unique atmosphere.

While the area has radically changed, the Deer Moss is recovering and many young Sand Pines are growing in. It remains a healthy and vibrant forest and some of the old special feeling is still present. Enter now, and walk quietly and attentively through our Garden Grove. Watch for the endangered Scrub Jay. It makes its home in this area.

**8.** At this southern-most point of the trail, civilization has encroached upon Tanah Keeta with condominiums in clear view. The remains of the once largest and oldest Sand Pines at Tanah Keeta can be seen here.

**9.** This is the border of the Moccasin Print Pond area. It is off-limits because of an ongoing conservation effort to remove Sand Spurs and exotic (non-native plant species) such as Australian Pine, Brazilian Pepper and Melaleuca.

**10.** Notice all the Slash Pines to the right. Slash Pines propagate by opening their cones to allow the seeds to be carried by the wind, sometimes great distances.

**11.** If you look back to where you have just walked you will see that the dominant plant community is Slash Pine and Palmetto. Now the trail turns right and makes an abrupt transition into The Highlands, a plateau of higher elevation that is dominated by Sand Pine and Scrub Oak. Notice how rapidly the elevation and plant community changes and how the soil changes to white sand. You will be entering one of the most arid zones on the Tanah-Keeta reservation, one in which these plants thrive. If you are quiet and sharp-eyed you may see some Wild Turkeys.

**12.** Sand Pines need intense heat to open their cones, usually in the form of a "crown fire". A crown fire is a brush or ground fire that gets up high and travels through the crowns of the trees. Many of the trees are killed, but many hundreds of seedlings sprout later. The fire also creates open, brightly lit areas, which are necessary for germination and healthy growth of seedlings and for releasing needed nutrients into the soil.

There is lots of variation within the species and some trees will open their cones in the intense heat of the summer. However, this rarely results in adequate reproduction due to missing the other benefits of fire mentioned above. Sand Pine forests need fire periodically to maintain good growth and a healthy environment.

**13.** We are standing in the central area of The Highlands. In the 1970s a large number of mature Sand Pines were killed in this area in a very intense crown fire. The fire crowned because the undergrowth was high and there was a strong wind.

Since then, many young trees have sprouted and grown shoulder high and are regenerating the area. Notice that the scrub oaks are also getting tall again. This is a very healthy scrub environment.





**14.** Look ahead and notice how the elevation drops. Over the next hundred feet the Sand Pines will diminish, leaving only the Slash Pines which can tolerate wet conditions. Later when you go up on Sandhill Ridge on the Trail of Silence you will again see a transition from Slash to Sand Pines.

**15.** Looking east from here you can sometimes see the canvas tops of Camp Welaka. Outpost Lake separates the Boy Scout Camp Tanah Keeta from Girl Scout Camp Welaka. The small square cement post is an old survey marker which designates a specific section of the property.

**16.** Little Mud Lake is to the north. Due to the Snake (or Marsh) Grass which partially obscures the lake it resembles flourishing grasslands, but is actually home to a variety of aquatic wildlife including frogs, alligators, fish, turtles and many birds.

**17.** You are now entering the *Trail of Silence*. Space yourselves 50 feet apart and walk slowly in silence, making sure to keep your spacing. Don't catch up to the person in front of you - if they stop, you stop.

Listen to the sound of the wind, the forest, God speaking through Nature, some say. At the crest of the ridge you will find the Chapel of Silence. Rest there and regroup. Look about you and spend a few minutes contemplating the creator of the beauty you see. Remember the first part of the Scout Promise and the twelfth point of the Scout Law. Now, enter and walk the Trail of Silence.

**18.** Here on the ground are two species of Deer Moss (lichens) and the low Haircap Moss all growing together. This is very unusual and not often seen.

The Sand Pines are leaning because they have a lateral root system and no tap root. The prevailing easterly winds force them to grow at a slant.

## 2 Mile Marker

# Gator Lake Trail Observation Points

Add 1/4 mile, round trip

**19.** Beginning at the 2 mile marker, Gator Lake Trail leads to two observation points, one at Gator Lake and another at Heron Pond. The Gator Lake point affords a view of a dawn/dusk bird flyway over the Tanah Keeta lake system as well as daytime feeding activity. Heron Pond can have a lot of daytime feeding activity.

Some of the birds that you might expect to see here are various Herons and Egrets, Ibis, Wood Stork, Sandhill Crane, Osprey, Killdeer and other seasonal waterfowl. Bald Eagles and Wild Turkey have also been sighted in this area. One of the more remote spots in the Tanah Keeta Scout Reservation, the Gator Lake Trail observation points are ideal for Environmental Science Merit Badge work. We hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to visit this special place.

Approach these points slowly and quietly so that any birds already there will not be disturbed.

**The Eagle Tree, guardian of Gator Lake Trail** - Just to the right of the trail entrance is the Eagle Tree, a thin lighter pine snag with a formation at the top which looks like an eagle with spread wings.

**20.** Around the edge of most swampy areas is a thick ring of Palmetto. You have been traversing an old firebreak along the fringe of one of these rings. It is a transition zone between the high piney ridge and the swamp. You will soon turn and go through the ring emerging at the lower end of Hog Wallow Swamp. As you skirt the edge of the swamp, stay as close to the palmetto as you can. You will be in a wetland. During the rainy times, parts of the trail will be wet.

Palmetto berries are used in a number of medicines as well as providing a valuable food source for animals. The hearts of the palm are edible. With Palmetto, you can eat the hearts without destroying the plant, unlike Cabbage Palms.

**21.** The tree behind this marker with the broad dark green leaves and white bark is a Dahoon Holly. It is a very popular ornamental shrub used in native species landscaping and is propagated in nurseries. Preferring moist soils, they can be found in several areas on our property. It produces bright red berries in the Fall.

(continued next page)

We are on the southern edge of Hog Wallow Swamp, a sometimes wet, sometimes dry transition zone containing numerous species of trees, including Slash Pine, Pond Cypress, Wax Myrtle and the Dahoon Holly. Deeper into the swamp where it is always wet it contains mostly Cypress. This area contains some of the oldest and largest Pond Cypress on our property, which can be seen at various places along this section of trail.

**22.** You are in a typical Florida pine flatwoods. Notice the turkey oak, the only one in this area. To the northeast is some Silver Saw Palmetto, a sub variety of the more common Green Saw Palmetto. The silver has a waxy cuticle over the leaflet to retard evaporation. You may see an orange vine called Dodder Vine. It is a parasite which preys on the host plant's vascular system, decreasing the photosynthetic surface area. However, it usually doesn't succeed in killing its host because it is one of the first things that burns whenever a fire goes through. Dodder Vine propagates by producing a flower and a seed which is widely spread by birds.

**23.** You are walking along the margin of two different ecosystems: the Cypress Dome or Head, and the Pine flatwoods. This particular margin is very abrupt, with plants of both habitats growing very closely together – almost no transition zone. Notice the Cinnamon Ferns growing right alongside the Gallberry bushes. In the Cypress trees is a very bad infestation of Lygodium (Japanese Climbing fern) which needs to be treated.

**24.** This swamp on the left is mostly Sawgrass (look closely at the edges of the blades) with thick Florida Willows behind. Old time Florida residents would call this a “willow bog,” although this technically is not a bog.

**25.** Lygodium is an invasive species and is a major environmental problem in Florida. If left untreated it will eventually kill everything it covers. This infestation extends into the State Park property and a treatment program is being planned.

This area is often torn up by wild hogs. Along with grubs and mushrooms, hogs eat the roots under the clumps of grass. These wild animals can be dangerous. If you see any, don't chase them—especially the babies. You might be confronted by an angry mamma hog with big teeth!

**26.** This low and open pine grassland area is home to many different wildflowers, depending on the season. One of the most notable is the Grass Pink, a small native orchid which thrives in this sunny, sometimes wet environment. It blooms from late winter to early spring. These flowers are listed as endangered due to habitat loss. Please do not pick them.

### **Osceola's Hideout Rest Stop**

This area of the trail is named for the Seminole Indian Chief Osceola who led his people in the second Seminole Indian War against the United States in the 1830s. Osceola evaded the US Army by hiding in pine flatwoods such as these and in the harsh swamps of the Florida Everglades.

As you look out over this area of the trail, you might wonder how life might have been for Osceola and the people of South Florida nearly 200 years ago.

**27.** You are in the extreme northwest corner of camp, bordering on Jonathan Dickenson State Park. The slough up ahead feeds from the park into Buzzard Roost Bog and the cypress head, forming the headwaters of the entire Lost Creek water system. This water eventually enters the pond by the dining hall, the swamp behind the OA Lodge and finally flows into the Loxahatchee River.

**28.** You are entering Lost Creek Hammock. This huge Slash pine is one of the largest on the property, and it is estimated to be one of the oldest pines on the entire reservation. Some estimate that this stately tree has been here for close to a century.

The dense growth in this hammock, which contains Sabal Palm (Cabbage Palm), Red Bay and Yellow Cattley Guava, among others, is caused by the lower elevation and wetter soil. Parts of this trail can be wet during rainy times.

**29.** This is the northeast edge of Lost Creek Marsh, the wetland home to many forms of wildlife. It is a good place to enjoy a peaceful moment and to reflect on what you have seen today as you near the end of the Machek Trail. Soon, the trail will take you away from the undeveloped portions of Tanah Keeta and back into the more heavily used areas.

**30.** Just ahead is Half Mile Road. Turn right and head west on this road. Due south are the rifle and archery ranges. For your own safety, please stay on the road and do not wander into this area. It is marked for your protection.

**31.** Turn left here onto Lakota Way and head south. As you walk back into the main part of camp, you will pass Gillwell Field and the COPE course on the west side. The archery range is on the east side.

**32. 5 Mile Marker**

You have nearly completed walking the Mike Machek Trail. Turn left here and go east. After crossing Lost Creek, turn right and follow the camp road back to the parking lot shelter where you began. This will complete the 5.2 miles.

We hope you have found it challenging, educational and lots of fun, and we hope you will come back and do it again.

There is one more thing you must do to earn your patch. When you get back to the parking lot shelter, take a few minutes to finish filling out your questionnaire and give it to the ranger. This information will be very helpful to us. Thank you.

Congratulations and please come again.

**Group Leader:** It is very helpful to the ranger if you will collect the questionnaires from your entire group and turn them in all together, along with the money for the patches. The patches are limited to one per hiker. Money from the patches helps cover the printing cost for this booklet and other trail maintenance expenses.

Thank you

*Special Note: If you are interested in doing a conservation service project at Tanah Keeta, please contact the Camp Ranger*

(Continued from inside front cover)

In addition to serving in many other positions in the Council, including Aal-Pa-Tah Lodge Advisor, Mr. Machek's far-reaching service was in Wood Badge. As Gulf Stream Council's first Wood Badge trained Scouter, he was responsible for bringing the Wood Badge program here and conducting our first training sessions.

As Regional Wood Badge Director, having taught many of our Section's trainers through the program, he took four trips to South and Central America between 1962 and 1968 (to Panama, Mexico, Bolivia and Venezuela) to conduct the "Train the Trainer" course in Wood Badge for their Scouting programs.

Mr. Machek received the Silver Beaver and the Silver Antelope awards in recognition for his Council and Regional service and was also recognized nationally for his service on the National Activities Committee.

During these years, while maintaining the family business, Delray Farms, and being a father to a daughter and two Eagle Scout sons, he always maintained his position as Scoutmaster of his troop, feeling that this was one of the most important jobs in Scouting. We are pleased to name this the Mike Machek Trail in honor of the man who helped build our camp and who has walked its trails countless times.



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### **Acknowledgements**

The founder of the Mike Machek Trail, Clayton Jones, served for many years as the first Conservation Chairman for the Gulf Stream Council. Beginning in the Spring of 1984, he spent three and a half years planning the trail, the guidebook and drawing the map, plus another year of construction with help from the Trail Crew of Aal-Pa-Tah Lodge. The trail opened for general use in the Fall of 1988. It was through his experiences at Tanah Keeta and the influence of Pete Knoll (as his Explorer advisor while a youth and later as Camping Chairman), that this trail became a reality, fulfilling the dream of sharing this bit of wilderness treasure with others.

Special thanks to Jeff Vorpapel, Kelsey Cupples, Carl Fox, Steve Whalen, Tom Chewning, Jay Hamm and Keith Miner for their help with the Machek Trail program.

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