



# FROGG



## *Friends of the River of Grass Greenway*

Volume VI Issue 3

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## **SPECIAL EDITION**

### ***Highlighting Runners & Cyclists Enjoying the Everglades***

The photos and stories included in this issue feature just a few of the many individuals and groups who are now enjoying recreational opportunities in the Everglades. We have seen a substantial increase in the number of people coming to our Florida State Trail Town to take advantage of the amenities and beauty of our area. Read about Kevin Borgia's bike trip on Page 2 and more about the Pier 2 Pier on Page 3.



### **Overview by Tuan Nyugen**

The Pier 2 Pier 200K is an ultramarathon that takes place every January, crossing south Florida starting in Miami Beach's South Pointe Pier and finishing at the Naples Pier. Participants run along pedestrian pathways, the Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area levees, through Big Cypress National Preserves' Loop Road Scenic drive and road shoulders along US 41. Because of the extremity of the feat, a support crew is required for runners to participate. The original route was created in 2018 when I was curious if it was possible to safely run across the state. On January 20, 2019, I made the first crossing of the original route in 2.5 days. I shared my accomplishment with my peers, and many said that they felt inspired to attempt the run and that's how Pier 2 Pier was born. During the 2021 event the majority of runners dropped out at around mile 70. The 2021 overall winner is two-time finisher Caryn Lubetsky who resides in Miami finishing the 2021 event in 27:03:03 beating her time from the previous year by over 30 minutes and setting a new female course record! The overall course record and fastest time was by Grant Maughan from Australia who finished the run in 26:34:00 during the 2020 event. Jamie DePaola was the 3rd and final finisher out of the 10 starting runners. She completed the course in 40:46:00.

***FROGG is committed to establishing the safe use by the general public of US41 across the Everglades between Naples and Miami, focusing on safety and environmental education and stewardship for those hiking, walking, and cycling through south Florida and the Everglades.***

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## Avoiding the Cold and COVID on the River of Grass

by Kevin Borgia

Vacations in COVID times mean isolation, and what better place to Social Distance than the Everglades. For a friend and I, that meant biking US-41 from Fort Myers to Miami, largely following the path envisioned as the River of Grass Greenway. I live on US-41. But my home is 1200 miles northwest, where the great American road snakes through Chicago, forming the city's iconic Lake Shore Drive and a host of neighborhood throughways. While the pandemic raged and snow blanketed the city, I road-tripped south, paralleling US-41 all the way to Ft Myers, where my parents retired. My lifelong friend Chris flew down a few days later.



**Day I: 73 miles** - Our plan was to leave Bonita Beach early Tuesday. A light rain fell as we rode down Vanderbilt, took a left on 111<sup>th</sup>/Immokalee Rd, and pedaled for miles until it curves north to meet Oil Well Road. These urban/suburban sections were the most treacherous of the entire trip. The bike lanes were too dangerous, but our route purposefully included miles of separated bike paths. Slick roads did cause one mild wipeout and a bent derailleur, but thankfully we were near Cycle Shack in Naples. They fixed it on the fly, seeing a kindred spirit in a drenched dude with scraped knees biking across the state in the rain. The sun came out as the sidewalk ended, halfway across Oil Well Road. Patty Huff warned me this section has no shoulder and fast traffic but the tailwinds helped, and we reached some of our fastest speeds of the whole trip. After a water stop at the only gas station for miles, we made a right and headed south on SR-29. Out there, the traffic gets progressively lighter as the terrain gets wilder, and we clipped into our pedals for a 30-mile straightaway to Everglades City. The road passes through the Florida Panther National Refuge, but like most visitors we didn't see the elusive predators.



Crossing I-75, I recalled waiting in traffic on that interstate over 20 years ago to attend a concert by the band Phish, who played to over 100,000 people at Big Cypress Reservation at the turn of the Millennium. Approaching the Fakahatchee Strand evoked scenes from the brilliant film *Adaptation* that bring Meryl Streep and Nicholas Cage to that forest to search for rare orchids. It was here that I got my first flat tire of the trip, but Chris and I changed that tube like a NASCAR pit crew, racing to finish as the daylight waned and the mosquitos emerged. The night

won in the end, and we glided into Everglades City in the dark.

**Day II: 78 miles** - Rising early at our AirBnB, we grabbed our frozen camelbacks and departed for what we knew would be a long, hot day. Those first 20 miles on US-41 are intense. There is a 4ft shoulder, but it's often deficient when a semi blazes past you at 70mph. Most drivers were courteous though. The Loop Road was a welcome reprieve and a dazzling look into the wilds of the Everglades. I'd driven this road once, but the experience is much more visceral on two wheels. More than once we were startled as a gator sunning itself on the roadside darted back into the water. The surface of this section is mostly packed clay, making it rideable for road bikes with skinny tires, though some sections of gravel make for tougher biking (Flat #2). After 20+ miles of secluded swamp, the Loop Road emerges back onto 41 near the Miccosukee Reservation (closed to outsiders) and the only gas station since Everglades City. Sandwiches on a gas station curb is far from gourmet, but it felt like 5-Star dining after 50 miles in the heat. After refilling our water, we launched again, attempting to avoid the road by riding the levee path after the Flight 592 memorial, which remembers the 110 people killed when the ValuJet flight crashed near there in 1996. Unfortunately, the gravel quickly proved too severe for my skinnies (Flat #3), and I began to question my own tire-changing abilities. After backtracking a bit, we headed east on 41 again for the final leg of the day. Here the shoulder becomes wider, at least 10 feet, making for much safer and enjoyable riding. It also rises above the land, facilitating natural water flow and providing stunning views of the surrounding terrain. Again, we found ourselves racing sunlight as the Miami Burbs approached, and thanks to the well-developed bike paths along Krome Avenue, we reached our AirBnB in Kendall before dusk. Here we departed US-41 and the intended path of the Greenway. Our route would then take us through Homestead and down to Key West over the next three days, but that's a story for another day. Our trip took significant planning and hours scoping paths on Google Maps, but it highlights what The ROGG could become with the right support from the State of Florida or Corporate backers: a destination for adventure travelers seeking a unique and beautiful endurance ride through some of the most amazing landscapes in North America. Hopefully someday we'll see this dream realized.



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## *Pier 2 Pier 200K across the Tamiami Trail*

by Jamie DePaola

Boy, I can't say enough amazing things about my life-changing experience completing the Pier 2 Pier 200k. From the incredibly attentive and dedicated race director, volunteers, and crew members to the beautifully challenging course, it was certainly, and every bit, my honor to run. The adventure started in Miami, navigating through side streets, downtown areas, and small cities. We continued down the M path, then through some trails and levees, and then eventually ended up bouncing back and forth from the Tamiami Trail (US41) to Loop Road, then back on US41.



There's definitely a different mentality between running long distance on a main road/highway shoulder and running long distance on trails, paved paths, or even sidewalks. Although the loneliness of the trails requires a mental threshold during the later miles, running on a main road shoulder calls for grit and defense in more ways than just protecting your knees from the asphalt. The consistency of the traffic adds an element that requires you to not only be focused on your running but on people's driving.

Running Pier 2 Pier gave me the opportunity to run across the state under official race direction. My dream has always been to run for miles and miles on a highway, just like a vehicle. It would be great to have the option, as a pedestrian, to hop on a sidewalk, though, because sometimes you just can't fight the cars anymore. After all, we are human. Pier 2 Pier 200k fulfilled my ultra-running dreams.

The crew and volunteers showed up out there, leap frogging their runner for miles to provide aid, love, support, and fuel. Pulling over on side streets, road shoulder, and questionable rest stop areas to pop up a camp stove and heat up some coffee and chili. I think my favorite part of this race is that we were accessible to crew basically the whole race, and we all made it forward as a team. Together. My crew was able to drive next to me for a lot of the night and that's a memory I'll have forever. In the later miles, they were able to pull over and stagger the cars down US41 all the way home. Going only a mile in distance at a time so I had something to keep in my vision and keep pushing for. I was relieved when we reached the sidewalk in Naples, and I could just enjoy my trip home now ♡ What a beautiful journey! (Jamie pictured in the middle)



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## Along the Tamiami Trail

The Bicycle Adventure Club is a non-profit bicycle touring club based in San Diego and sponsors member trips throughout the world. In early February they began their Florida trip in Ft. Myers, cycled through Naples and Marco before arriving in Everglades City where they enjoyed live music and overnight lodging at the Rod &



Gun Club. After a hearty breakfast at Island Café the next day, the group headed off across the Tamiami Trail, then south to Key West. Visit [www.bicycleadventureclub.org](http://www.bicycleadventureclub.org).

Just a few weeks later a group of four cycled from Ave Maria to Chokoloskee for breakfast before heading back along SR29 and Oil Well Road. It was a beautiful cool morning and they seemed to relish the 88 round-trip bike ride.



“Cycologist”

Cyclists are traveling here from far and near! Two separate groups (one from New Jersey and the other from Sanibel) began their biking adventure in Miami, cycled to Key West, took the ferry boat to Marco, then biked east to Everglades City along the Tamiami Trail and stayed the night before returning by bike to Miami. Pictured below are several of the cyclists enjoying lunch at Havana Café in Chokoloskee.



Every March for the past 10 years the *Ends of the Earth Cycling Tour* has been coming to Everglades City, a welcome stop during their 5-day event to Key West. Their trip begins in Ft. Myers and they ride 300 miles, traversing through the Everglades along the Tamiami Trail. This year proceeds from the registration fees and donations benefit the youth of Romania (each year a different country is designated).



This is a photo of the group (61) at the starting line in Ft. Myers. For more information, visit [www.endscycling.com](http://www.endscycling.com).

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