

## Camp Cozy



**The Apopka Sportsmen's Club: Setting out for the Hunt.**  
(Courtesy of the Apopka Historical Society)

In the flats at the middle of Rocks Springs Run the concentrations of wildlife are astounding because the swamps and the river are squeezed to fit across a shallow isthmus or land bridge. Here especially are the nesting sites for many species of the waterbird kingdom, but also the widest diversity of insects, dragonflies, and damselflies. When the winter chill wears off each year, a crowd of swallowtails can be seen to butter-flutter here in greater numbers than I have seen anywhere else. Here too we have to imagine that for thousands of years bears, deer, panthers, bobcats, foxes, grey wolves, saber-toothed tigers, and even mastodons once moved across the uplands between Rock Springs and the flats to enter the several thousand acres of upland to the east.

Following them came the hunters of old, presumably the Timucuan natives, who had major settlements at both Rock and Wekiwa Springs (the remains now gone). From Rock Springs on foot they would make their way east across Delk Island and turning slightly south to the bend in the run, cross at the ford, and then heading slightly north could make their way across to the Twin Mounds on the west bank of the Wekiva River, just below the confluence of the Little Wekiva. From Wekiwa Springs they would walk across Mill Creek and up the length of Mill Creek Island to the same ford, and thence to Twin Mounds, a day's hike of about fifteen miles.

Archaeologists have found five mounds associated with Witherington Springs and running down Mill Creek and another six up along the wide flats. This is the highest concentration of mounds by far in all the Wekiva basin. Unless our waterlevels are substantially lower now than they were before the Spanish arrived, many of these mounds were not accessible by canoe from the Wekiva and St. Johns rivers, suggesting a considerable amount of travel on foot along the contours of upland access, most likely in pursuit of game.

Following in their pathways were Seminole Indians who occupied this region during the 1800's and hid here from the American territorial warriors. When peace was achieved, early settlers of Apopka and the springs area most certainly hunted along these routes. Eventually in the 1920's they began to have hunting parties that gradually became more and more organized. Then in the '30's they leased the land between the great springs from the Wilson Cypress Company and called themselves The Mill Creek Preserve, using the high ground for their hunting stations and Camp Cozy, a cabin just west of the first big island in the flats as their headquarters.



**A female Tiger Swallowtail  
on the trail to Camp Cozy  
from Rock Springs**

They would begin their hunting season with a party to draw lots for the almost fifty hunting stations indicated in the hand-drawn map provided to me by John Land, the long-time mayor of Apopka. As we shall see in my interview with him in the next chapter, this group of men are a pivotal factor in the movement from the opening of Kelly Park to the establishment of the Wekiwa Springs State Park. They are in effect the first activist group to organize an effort to preserve the wildlife and habitats of the basin.

Here is a hand-drawn map of the hunting stations in The Mill Creek Preserve (courtesy of Mayor John Land).

