

DEAR READER,

3-17-19

HEY! I HOPE YOU ARE DOING WELL.

I WAS SHARING MY EXPERIENCE IN WILDERNESS CAMP WITH YOU.

2<sup>ND</sup> STOP. THIS ONE WAS DOWN TO FLORIDA TO CANOE THE SUWANNEE RIVER. I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY MILES WE CANOED BUT WE STARTED FROM SUWANNEE STATE PARK & TOOK THE RIVER ALL THE WAY TO THE AWESOME MANATEE SPRINGS. THAT'S WHERE THE WATER BECOMES BRACKISH. (SALT OCEAN WATER MIXES WITH THE FRESH RIVER WATER)

NOW, UP UNTIL THIS STOP MY KNOWLEDGE OF ALLIGATORS BEGAN AND ENDED WITH THE MOVIE "ALLIGATOR" IN WHICH MICHAEL DOUGLAS' CHARACTER WAS HUNTING A KILLER GATOR IN THE NEW YORK SEWER SYSTEM. YES... I'M SAYING THAT AT THE AGE OF 14 I STILL BELIEVED GATORS LIVED IN THE SEWER SYSTEM. THIS TRIP WAS A CRASH COURSE ON HOW WRONG I WAS.

WE CANOED BY DAY & MADE CAMP BY NIGHT. WE EVEN HAD TO SWIM IN MOST OF THE SPRINGS WE PASSED. SWIMMING THROUGH THE DARK, TIGHT CORAL TUNNELS WAS A FEAR I DON'T KNOW I HAD & WAS NOT EXCITED TO CONQUER. BUT I DID. AND THEN I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF THEM. THE LONGER THEY WERE, THE MORE EXCITING IT WAS. I'D WATCH THE OTHER 1250S DIVE DOWN & DISAPPEAR IN THE

CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER LIKE SOME MAGIC TRICKS. AND THEN A WAYS OVER I'D SEE A SQUIGGLY LINE OF THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN AND SWIMMING SHOWS MAKE ITS WAY TO THE SURFACE.

IN THIS STOP I ENDED UP SEEING MAYBE ABOUT 200 GATORS. THOUGH MOST OF THEM CAME FROM A STOP DOWN A SIDE RIVER/CREEK THAT, AS WE PADDLED DOWN, THE GATORS WOULD SWIM OUT TOWARD THE BANKS. OF COURSE, I BEING THE "SMART" ONE DECIDED TO GET US BACK TO THE LARGER BODY OF WATER BEFORE THEY STARTED TO SEE US AS LUNCH... OR TOOTHPIECES... A COUPLE OF US WERE REALLY SHENNY! HA! BUT IN RETROSPECT, IF THEY WANTED TO EAT US, BEING IN THE LARGER BODY OF WATER WOULD HAVE BEEN BAD. THE WATER IS THEIR TERRITORY. LAND IS OURS....

WE ARE TRAVELING DOWN THE RIVER AND THE OTHER 2 GUYS IN MY CANOE POINDED OUT A HUGE TURTLE SITTING ON THE END OF A FALLEN TREE THAT'S FLOATING IN THE WATER SINCE I'M IN STEER (STEER IS THE REAR SEAT AND THE ONE WHO STEERS THE CANOE) I ANGLED US TOWARD THE LARGE FALLEN TREE. IT HAD NO BRANCHES ON IT SO IT WAS EASY TO GET CLOSE. I EASED US UP TO IT. FOCUS, INTENTLY, ON NOT BUMPING THE TREE & SCARING THE TURTLE INTO THE WATER. THE OTHER 2 ARE ACTING FUNNY. LIKE THE TURTLE CAN HURT THEM. BUT THEY WERE EXCITED. REALLY EXCITED & AFRAID. THAT'S WHEN THEY REALIZED I'M STILL FOCUSED ON THE TURTLE... THEY POINDED FOR ME TO LOOK

TO THE OTHERSIDE OF THE TREE... THAT'S WHEN I SAW IT! ~~A~~  
~~IT WAS FASTER THAN THE TREE!~~ HEK, IT WAS FASTER  
 THAN OUR 4 MAN, 16 FOOT, CANOE. IT WAS HUGE! ALMOST  
 AS LONG AS IT IS. A GATOR AT LEAST 12 FEET LONG. ITS  
 HEAD AS BIG AS MY TORSO. YOU SEEN THE MOVIE LAKE PLACED  
 RIGHT? YOU'VE SEEN HOW GEGANOC THAT CROCODILE WAS?  
 O.K., O.K.. IT WASN'T "THAT" BIG. I MEAN THAT CROC  
 WAS THE T-RED OF CROC'S & GATOR'S. BUT AT THE SAME,  
 I FELT LIKE THAT GATOR WAS A T-RED. MY EYES  
 GOT BIG & I STARTED TO SIDE PADDLE US AWAY FROM  
 THE TREE. I WAS DOING SO ALONE SO THE FRONT OF  
 THE CANOE ISNOLTED THE TREE. AT THAT MOMENT THE  
 TURBLE HAD THE WATER & THE 737 TURBINE JET  
 ENGINE OF A TAIL ON THAT GATOR SWOOSHED SIDE-TO-  
 SIDE SUBMERGING THE PREHISTORIC RELATIVE UNDER  
 THE DARK GREEN MURKY WATER... I JUMPED UP!  
 ROCKED SIDE TO SIDE. LOOKED AT THE WATER, WAITING  
 FOR IT TO COME FLYING UP OUT OF THE WATER, JAWS  
 OPEN WIDE, PREPARED TO SEND ITS SHARP, BEAK **TEETH**  
 INTO MY FLESH & PULL ME UNDER & INTO A DEATH ROLL.  
 BEFORE SUFFANG ME UNDER A ROCK OR LOG AT THE  
 BOTTOM OF THE RIVER TO LEAVE ME THERE TO DECOMPOSE...  
 THEN, I LOOKED AT THE TREE, THE BANKS, HOW FAR I  
 COULD DIVE TOWARD THE BANKS, COULD I BEAT IT THERE?  
 NO! HE'D DECOMPOSE ME FOR SURE. THEN, SLOWLY FINDING  
 ITS WAY INTO MY CONSCIOUS REALITY WERE THE WORDS:  
 YOUR, TUMP, DOWN? YOUR, TOUTUMP, SIT DOWN??

"YOUR GOING TO JUMP THE CANOE! SET DOWN"  
OOOH! THE CHEF WAS YELLING TO ME. I SAID... SO  
WAS A GOOD, NO, GREAT IDEA. AFTER ALL THE CANOES  
CAME TOGETHER (4 CANOES) WE, IN MY CANOE, JETTLED  
DOWN OUR ESCALATION. WEARDLY ALL 3 OF US JUST  
WANTED ONE THING... TO SEE SO AGAIN! HA! TEENAGERS!

SO WAS AN AWESOME TRIP! I HAVE ONE MORE  
BLOG ON THIS TRIP BEFORE I'M DONE SHARING THIS  
MOMENT OF MY PAST. SO'S MORE ON THE FUNNY SIDE...  
AT LEAST 2 OF US IN MY CANOE THOUGHT SO.

UNTIL NEXT TIME.

YOURS TRULY,  
DOUG