

# Turpentine History Loop:

Clubhouse along the bikepath to Suzie Court and Return



Turpentine was a major industry for collection of Naval Stores through to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. A gentle walking loop (1.5 miles) enables one to see its history on SGI and within the Plantation

**Turpentine** is a natural liquid obtained by the distillation of pine resin obtained from live pine trees. The resin is harvested by cutting the tree bark (so injuring the tree) and collecting the sticky resin that the tree secretes in order to try to heal and protect itself. At the base of the boiling turpentine still, the separated residual liquid (rosin) is then poured off to harden. The rosin can be reheated to make it soft for use (as caulking for example).

Turpentine was used medicinally since ancient times, mostly topical but sometimes as internal medicine. It was widely used for abrasions and wounds, and when mixed with animal fat it has been used as a chest rub, or inhaler for nasal and throat ailments. 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century chest rubs, contained turpentine in their formulations. Taken internally (sugar, molasses or honey used to mask the taste) turpentine was injected as treatment for intestinal parasites owing to its alleged antiseptic and diuretic properties.

Brush was carefully kept clear from around each tree, owing to fire risk and to watch out for poisonous snakes. The sloped grooves (cat-faces) then cut into the pine bark gave two products, pine resin that slowly dripped into a 'Herty' cup and a hardened resin 'scrape' that solidified on face; both products were scooped into pails, then barrels, and transported away to a large still for boiling and refining. When the resin production slowed from old cat-faces, new grooves would be cut immediately above the old wound.



Turpentine and Rosin were important naval stores through the 18<sup>th</sup> to middle 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The distilled materials and derivative substances made were used for caulking, waterproofing and preservation of wood and cordage. With the abundant pine forests in Florida, it was a major industry. This was a hot, messy and dirty job to manually collect the resin. The work was commonly taken by and carried out by the most impoverished of workers: commonly (and tragically) many black people, but also those indentured persons with unpaid debts and often prisoners convicted to hard labor. Camp conditions were hard, sometimes atrocious. A single laborer could be responsible for as many as 5000 trees over a season.

### **STOP 1:**

From the Plantation Clubhouse walk north on Magnolia to the Bikepath; turn left (west). Stop 1 is located only a few steps in on the bikepath just west of Magnolia. A large tree on the edge of the brush shows a long scar from Turpentine harvest. The tree has partly healed covering a lot of the scar. However, there is a large rusted nail (the hook for the herty cup) and two sets of rusted metal plates are still present on the tree and faint cat-face grooves. Also notice the carbonized wood - this tree has also survived an evident forest fire.



Tree-ring dating shows that forest fires were common on Saint George Island – occurring every 5 years or so

## **STOP 2:**

Continue west on the bikepath. Virtually all of the larger trees you pass have some evidence of turpentine activity – but we will only stop to examine the most obvious ones. Smaller trees have grown up since harvest stopped; these have no scars. On some trees scars will be present on two (opposite) sides. STOP 2 is about 2/3rds the way to Denise Street from Magnolia. This is an example of a mostly healed tree- look for the long vertical slit in the bark – this is where the injury existed



It is a little walk between Denise to Suzie Street to Stop 3; trees along the bikepath here mostly show little evidence of turpentine resin collection - they may have grown up later and are younger than the turpentine harvest.



At least two periods of turpentine extraction have been documented (from tree-ring dating) on Cape St George; 1918-1921 (with most trees first cut in 1917) and 1948-1956 (with most trees first cut in 1949). The resin harvesting was not unique to The Planation – it occurred all over Saint George Island from LSGI through to the State Park. The collected resin barrels were barged to the CC Land turpentine still in Eastpoint (near HWY 65 where Gramercy Plantation now sits).

### STOP 3:

On the bikepath, immediately east of Suzie Street, look beyond the large electrical switchbox. There on private land (please do not trespass) - another large tree sits there with a large turpentine scar.

***Many slash pines on SGI and The plantation reveal two or even three sets of cat-faces. In the day, this was actually considered poor harvest practice, because it made the tree's survival more risky***



### STOP 4:

On the bikepath, now immediately west of Suzie Street. A large tree on the edge of the cleared private lot area (please do not trespass) shows a big turpentine scar. It is partially healed with the bark trying to close the scar. Rusty metal plates are still evident in the tree.



### Stop 5:

Continue west on the Bikepath to about 2/3<sup>rd</sup> the way to the Johnson Creek Boardwalk: A large tree on the north side of the bikepath shows very obvious cat-face grooves visible rusted metal plates and carbonized wood (firescale ) -this tree too survived a forest fire.



### STOP 6:

Continue west on the bikepath: Stop 6 is just before the boardwalk at Johnson Slough. On the south side at the edge of the forest is another scarred tree with rusted metal plates evident



**STOP 7:**

We'll now backtrack east to Suzie Street; turn and walk south on Suzie Street and then turn right onto Susie Court West. As you turn onto Susie Court west, look to the right/north - another obvious scarred tree stands by the side of the road; cat-face grooves are evident



**STOP 8:**

Continue to the end of Suzie Court West. At the last driveway on the left /south (Twin Palms) sits another large pine with a big turpentine scar- now mostly healed. The burl in the middle of the scar conceals the metal plates. Cat face scars are visible below the burl. The scar is also carbonized owing to forest fire (Please do not trespass)

## **STOP 9:**

Continue along the now dirt trail (beach access) from Suzie Court West – from where the trail bends south, as you walk south towards the beach, you will pass at least five large trees with very large scars made from turpentine collection (mostly healed and some on both side of the trees). Two trees are on the right; three on the left. The last tree sits only about 100' or so from the T-road bikepath. The forest of large pines remaining here that was used for turpentine extended right up to behind the beach dunes on the island. Most of this forest was badly broken and splintered by one (or more) very large windstorms that occurred presumably sometime after 1956 (notice how many of the trees are commonly broken immediately above the cat-faces). But along Johnson Slough and along the Suzie Court Beach access, a few of these trees have survived more or less unbroken .

### **The trip back to the clubhouse:**

On some first tier lots – there are large areas showing broken, now twisted old pine trees; some of these broken pine trees also reveal their tell-tale turpentine scars. For the trip back to the Clubhouse go left /east and follow along the T-road bikepath about ½ mile. Look at all the old broken trees damaged by storms. The twisted pines at stops 10 and 11 don't show clear turpentine scars; however some others further west do show the tell-tale cat-face groves sitting beneath where the trees were broken (thus windstorms presumably post-date end of turpentine harvest after 1956.





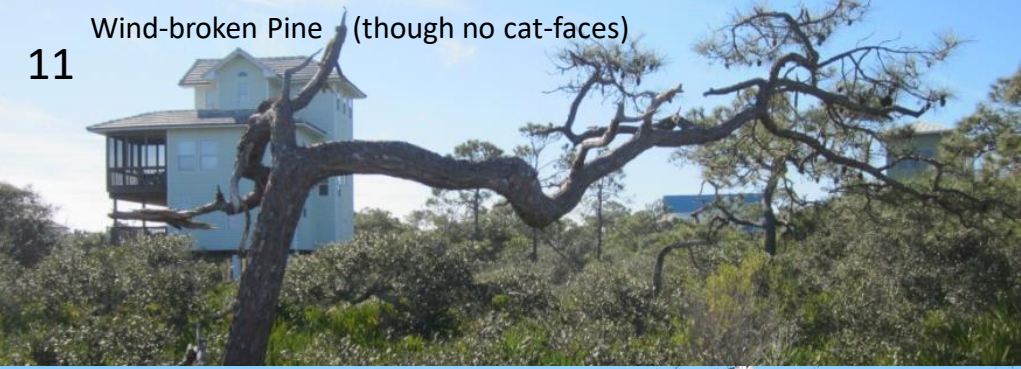
Wind-broken Pine  
(no cat-faces)

10



Wind-broken Pine (though no cat-faces)

11



Wind-broken above the part-healed cat-face  
(not on the route)



A second turpentine history trail can be followed from the parking at Pelican Tennis Courts along the bikepath to Resort Village Way and around Dogwood