

Turpentine History Loop on the Plantation Bikepath and Suzie Court West Beach Access (1.5 miles)

Prepared by Jim Mott



This short walk along the bikepath trail will point to examples of the former turpentine resin harvest. The round trip back to the clubhouse via Suzie Court West is about 1.5 miles. A longer loop can be made through Pelican Way.

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 poured off to harden. The rosin can be reheated to make it soft for use.

Turpentine was used medicinally since ancient times, mostly as topical and sometimes internal home remedies. Topically it was been 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. 19th and early 20th century chest rubs, contained turpentine in their formulations. Taken internally it was used as treatment for intestinal parasites because of its alleged antiseptic and diuretic properties. Sugar, molasses or honey were sometimes used to mask the taste. Internal consumption of the toxic product is no longer advised.

Turpentine and Rosin were important naval stores through the 18th to middle 20th 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 and boil the resin. The work was commonly carried out only by the most impoverished of workers: commonly blacks of the day, those indentured persons with unpaid debts and prison convicts.



Evidence of turpentine harvesting is widespread in the Plantation here on most of the larger (older) trees usually – those now more than 1 foot in diameter. Smaller trees have grown up since Turpentine collection ceased. Originally workers would cut a box notch at the base of the tree to try to collect the sap and scrape the resin from the tree as it oozed out. Concern began to mount that many trees were being destroyed by the process, particularly as demand for naval stores soared. At the turn of the 19th century, Charles Holmes Herty Sr, a chemist from University of Georgia, designed a modified ceramic cup and gutter system that was originally used in France. The early Herty system utilized two v-shaped galvanized iron gutters to collect the resin. The simplicity of the method allowed it to be taught to the existing workforce in the turpentine industry. Herty's method yielded more resin that was also higher in quality; however, the most important success of this new method was that it lengthened the useful lifetime of the pine trees from only a few years to decades. This extended use not only saved the trees but the naval store industry as well. The cup is held on the tree by a large nail; two metal plates

driven into the tree direct the secreting resin into the herty cup. V shaped grooves, called cat-faces, are further cut to direct the resin to the center of the tree scar and down towards the cup. As the tree heals, resin secretion diminishes; but more grooves can be cut higher up the tree to renew the flow of new pine resin.

In the Plantation here, some trees still show the tell-tale cat-face scars, and some still have partial (rusted) metal plates attached to the openings. In many cases a large bark burl has grown over the metal plates. Other trees have mostly been able to partly or fully heal, with their bark now growing over all or most of the wound. That turpentine activity on healed trees is revealed by a long vertical slit or line scar. Most of the Plantation trees that were harvested for resin were cut on two (opposite) sides.



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.



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.

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.

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 2/3rd 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 Creek/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 storms that occurred sometime before 1942. In Johnson Creek 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 twisted pine trees also reveal the turpentine collection 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 the stops 10 and 11 don't show clear turpentine scars; however some others further west show the tell-tale scars and cat-face groves beneath where the trees were broken.

