

Northeast Florida

# Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

*The Great Alachua Savannah*

## Real Fun in the Real Florida

Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park is a 22,000-acre wilderness that represents the finest of ...*the Real Florida*. Paynes Prairie became the first state preserve in 1971 and was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1974, one of only 600 designations nationwide. Its distinctive geologic features, rich and productive wildlife habitat, and value to people past, present and future make it an extraordinary place.

A good place to start explorations of the Preserve is the **visitor center** near the historic town of Micanopy. Exhibits, stunning photography and an audio-visual program explain the area's natural significance and cultural history. A 50-foot-high **observation tower** provides panoramic views and a chance to see the **bison** or **wild horses**.

Reconnect to nature at Paynes Prairie on more than 30 miles of trails for **equestrians, hikers**

and **bicyclists** through a variety of ecosystems. Spend a night camped under the stars at the full-facility campground. Participate in a **ranger-led activity** on weekends, November to April. A public **boat ramp** for canoes, kayaks and small boats with electric motors is located on the east side of nearly 300-acre Lake Wauberg. For **anglers**, the day's catch may include bass, bream or speckled perch. Florida fresh water fishing license required.

## History & Nature

A natural resource of national importance, Paynes Prairie is comprised of twenty-five distinct natural communities which include more than 800 kinds of plants. This diversity provides an impressive array of habitat for wildlife. Visitors can observe alligators, bison, wild horses and 271 species of birds, including sandhill cranes, bald eagles, hawks and migrating waterfowl. Seasonally, dazzling displays of marsh marigolds, American lotus, and pickerelweed paint the Great Alachua Savannah just as described by William Bartram in 1774 in his book *Travels*.

The prairie basin was formed when a number of sinkholes close together eventually merged. The lush grasses, sedges, and flowering plants that

cover the basin act as a filter purifying water in the vast wetland. Alachua Sink works like a drain in the floor of the basin providing an essential "recharge" of the Floridan Aquifer - our drinking water. During its recorded history, the basin's character has changed little, except for periods when the area has flooded enough to be considered a lake.

Waves of diverse people settled the area for over 12,000 years, each wave eager to utilize the lush land to fill their needs. A rich prehistory of Paleo, Cades Pond, and Alachua people were followed by the historic Potano Indians, Spanish adventurers, Seminole Indians and finally Americans pushing down from the north. The wilderness, now called Paynes Prairie, has always proved an irresistible lure to the explorer and the adventurer.

Hunter/gatherers were followed by hunter/farmers both Native American and European. They were followed by cotton farmers, citrus farmers and then the cattlemen. The land has seen them all come and go yet still abounds with the diversity of plants and wildlife that has always been its fame.

## **Directions**

Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park is located 10 miles south of Gainesville, in Micanopy, on the east side of U.S. 441.

## **Park Guidelines**

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected. Do not approach alligators, bison or wild horses.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets are not permitted on some trails. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and well behaved at all times.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverage consumption is allowed in designated areas only.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.

- For camping information, contact Reserve America at (800) 326-3521 or (866) I CAMP FL or TDD (888) 433-0287 or visit [ReserveAmerica.com](http://ReserveAmerica.com).
- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the ranger station.

## **Contact Information**

Florida State Parks  
Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks  
**Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park**  
100 Savannah Blvd.  
Micanopy, Florida 32667  
Ranger Station (352) 466-3397  
[FloridaStateParks.org](http://FloridaStateParks.org)