

Southeast Florida
Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park
125,000 Years of History

Real Fun in the Real Florida

Formed of Key Largo limestone (fossilized coral), this land was sold to the Florida East Coast Railroad and was used to help build Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad in the early 1900s. After the railroad was built, the quarry was used until the 1960s to produce exquisite pieces of decorative stone called Keystone.

At Windley Key, visitors can walk within the eight-foot-high **quarry walls** to see cross sections of the **ancient coral reef** formed nearly 125,000 years ago. One can also learn about the quarry and its operation—an important part of Florida's 20th century history. Samples of the quarry machinery have been preserved at the park. **Ranger-guided tours** of the old quarries and the West Indian tropical hardwood hammock are available Friday through Sunday at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Visitors may also explore 1.5 miles of **self-guided trails** that wind through a tropical hardwood hammock. Along the trails, visitors are able to observe more than 40 species of trees and plants that are native to the Florida Keys including Florida thatch palm, white ironwood and gumbo limbo. With the aid of a **guidebook**, numbered trail stops and interpretive markers, visitors learn about the natural and cultural resources of Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park.

The **Alison Fahrer Environmental Education Center**, open Friday through Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., features educational exhibits about the history of Flagler's railroad, tropical hardwood hammocks and the geology of the Florida Keys.

Picnic tables are available in several locations; however, shady tables are limited.

History & Nature

After Key West was settled, 'Conch' families moved up the Keys to establish small farming and fishing communities. In the mid-1800s, the Russell family homesteaded Umbrella Key, Windley Key's earlier name. The Russell family lived on the land until it was sold to the Florida East Coast Railway in 1908 for \$852.80. From that time, until completion of the Overseas Railroad, the quarries along the tract were used to supply thousands of tons of fill for the railroad bed and the bridge approaches.

The railroad was completed in 1912. The quarries and Windley Key Station continued to operate with local trains stopping daily to deliver fresh water from the mainland and pick up mail and passengers. On return trips, shipments of

polished 'keystone' were railed back to the mainland. This keystone, a decorative building stone, may be seen on several buildings throughout the U.S., including the St. Louis Post Office. Local examples include the Alison Fahrer Environmental Education Center at Windley Key and Hurricane Monument in Islamorada. The quarry was active into the 1960s and today stands as a preserved geological treasure. The clean cuts of the quarry machinery reveal the preserved fossilized specimens of a variety of ancient coral animals. The park offers a rare opportunity to geologists and visitors to compare the living corals of today with their fossilized ancestors. The limestone cuts also reveal the thin layer of soil that supports the abundant variety of botanical life that thrives in the subtropical environment of the Florida Keys.

Directions

Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park is located on Windley Key at 84900 Overseas Highway (Mile Marker 85.5) near Islamorada.

Park Guidelines

- The Visitor Center is open Friday through Sunday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with guided tours at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- A fee is required for guided tours and to access the nature trails.
- The collection, destruction or disturbance of plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- A conference room may be reserved for school groups and meetings.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet and well behaved at all times.
- Alcohol, fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- To join the Friends of the Islamorada Area State Parks or become a volunteer, inquire at the Visitor Center.
- 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 Visitor Center.

Contact Information

Florida State Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park
P.O. Box 1052
Islamorada, Florida 33036
(305) 664-2540
FloridaStateParks.org