

Historic Ethel Trail opens at Rock Springs Run State Reserve

The trail goes through what would have been the heart of the sprawling but long forgotten township

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The Historic Ethel Trail, which winds through what was once a thriving post-Civil War township, is now open at Rock Springs Run State Reserve in Sorrento.

Visitors can walk the 1.5-mile, wheelchair-accessible loop and view twelve interpretive panels along the way that describe the history of Ethel and what life was like back then. The trail goes through what would have been the heart of the sprawling township which had a station, store, post office, cemetery, and one-room school.



Cabin built at Ethel around 1888

“

Bringing this long-forgotten township back to life has been an exciting and worthwhile project but I am sure there is still lots to discover about Ethel.”

Don Philpott

“Almost nothing was known about Ethel until two headstones were found by accident in a remote pasture,” said Philpott, who is President of the Wekiva Wilderness Trust, the volunteer nonprofit group that supports the work of the Wekiva River Basin State Parks which includes Rock Springs.

“The discovery of the headstones led to a 10-year research project that has unearthed a treasure trove of information about Ethel which flourished between 1870 and 1920, and

the 3,000-acre pre-Civil War Delk Plantation, the largest in central Florida, around present-day Kelly Park,” he said.

Guided tours are conducted twice a month, but visitors can now do the walk themselves with a self-guided brochure available at the trailhead. School groups are also being encouraged to visit

to learn more about their local history.

A pavilion is being erected at the trailhead and there are plans to reconstruct two homestead cabins, based on a photograph of a one-room cabin built at Ethel in 1888. One will be a small museum and the other will be furnished – sparsely – as it would have been around that time.

In addition to opening the trail, a book about Ethel's history has been published. An e-book version can be downloaded free at www.wwt-cso.com. Hard copies have also been offered to every school and library in Lake, Orange, and Seminole counties.

“Bringing this long-forgotten township back to life has been an exciting and worthwhile project but I am sure there is still lots to discover about Ethel. It is incredible when relatives contact us with memories and photographs about their family members who used to live in Ethel three or more generations ago,” said Philpott.

“I would love to hear from anyone who had relatives that lived in Ethel or may have old photographs or documents about Ethel. We know that there are still many relatives living in the Apopka, Leesburg, Longwood, Orlando, Mount Dora, Sanford, and Sorrento areas. I am especially interested in hearing from any descendants of William Delk and Anthony Frazier,” said Philpott.

“Frazier was a slave on the Delk Plantation who fought in the Union Army during the Civil War. Afterward, he returned to the area and bought various parcels of land over the next 50 years, becoming a prominent member of the community. In 1880 he was appointed an Orange County Special Commissioner for Roads, a remarkable achievement. His wife Mary was the local midwife and delivered many of the babies born in Ethel.

Although we have photos of Mary and her children, no photograph of Anthony is known to exist. No one knew who Anthony Frazier was when we started this project, now everyone should,” he said.

If you have any information, please contact Don at info@wwt-cso.com.

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