



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

David and Anita traveled to Cedar Keys, a little fishing village near the Florida coast, for the holidays. Though they enjoyed being able to walk around in T-shirts, Christmas didn't feel quite right in the warm sunshine.

Florida's nice, but it's no Virginia

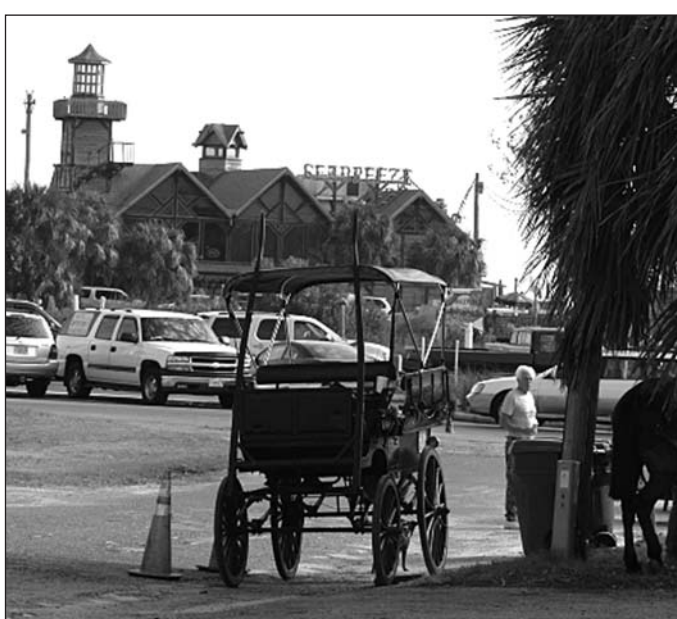
“Way down upon the Suwannee River,” as the old song goes, is where we have spent this last week over the holiday period. Believe it or not, that old song by Stephen Foster is the state anthem for Florida, which, considering he composed it way back in 1851, is no mean feat in this modern age.

It isn't a song you would think would remain popular these days, but from personal experience I can see why it has lasted thus far — once you start singing it to yourself, you can't get it out of your head!

Ironically, Foster himself never actually visited Florida, but the river to which his lyrics are devoted is one of the main waterways in the state, flowing south from the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Florida, effectively separating the panhandle from the rest of the state.

Our eldest son Thomas had recently moved down to Gainesville (just under an hour from where we were staying in Old Town), and Anita wanted to “check his place out” just to be sure he was doing OK without her! So it seemed a pretty good idea to leave the horses and new puppy, Ginny, with Rob and Donna for a week and go down for a visit. Plus, as we had Anita's parents here from the U.K., it would give them a bit of a tour too.

For all those of you enduring the chilly days and nights of the Virginian climate, let me tell you it's not all sunshine and roses down here! Well, actually it is for the most part, but there is something not quite right about spending Christmas in



Though they left their horses with their friends in Culpeper, David and Anita were reminded of them in Florida.



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

80-degree sunshine.

Much as we enjoyed being able to walk around in T-shirts, there was a distinct lack of Christmas joviality about the place. True, as is the case with many an American home, houses were festooned with enough lights to drain the national grid of all power, and there were the usual “Happy Holidays (come and spend your dollars here)” signs plastered all over any of the shopping malls we passed. But at the end of the day, it did seem pretty quiet around the

place, and we didn't see a great many people as we travelled around the area.

Ironically, one of the few people we did talk to visiting Cedar Keys, a little fishing village near the coast, were on holiday from Virginia! But to be fair, we were not in the main vacation area of the state or even the equestrian equivalent of Ocala, so it was going to be quiet anyway.

This was an area tuned in to the summer watersports and camping people, with rivers, coastline, forests and even swamp to play in.

As is our wont wherever we go, we did explore the local area around where we stayed and we soon began to appreciate the rolling hills and scenic vistas of Virginia. Florida is definitely what you'd call flat! We saw mile after mile of flat, sandy fields, and acres of pine forest dotted with these amazing “ghostly” oak trees covered in a hanging vine that from a distance looked like cobwebs.

It would be extremely easy to get lost in these forests, and again we were surprised to see small clusters of houses suddenly appear in the middle of nowhere, almost hidden by the trees around them — real backwoods stuff! Once off of the main blacktop, the roads were all made of white sand and, although I don't know the geology of the area, it gave me the distinct impression that this land was all once underwater and was probably a beach many moons ago.

There is beauty in nature wherever you look, and this part of Florida certainly had some beautiful coastline, clear starry skies and some wonderful wooded parks to explore. Despite the very numerous signs of relatively inexpensive lots/acreage, or gated communities with pools for sale, coupled with the undeniably warmer climate and the slightly more “laid back” lifestyle, both Anita and I felt that Virginia offered us that little something extra. Exactly what that something was that made up for the higher prices and the colder weather you couldn't really put your finger on, except perhaps to say that Virginia (and Culpeper in particular) was fast becoming a little more like the English home we had come from.

We have our friends, our familiar places, our clear, starry skies and one day maybe, even our new home here — well, it isn't known as the (British) “Commonwealth” of Virginia for nothing, now is it?!!

Until next week

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Dealing with the drought

Water is likely to be the top concern for farmers thinking back on the 2007 growing season. The year's drought conditions actually began to take shape in the fall and winter of 2006, when below-average precipitation set the stage for a drier-than-normal spring.

We missed an important chance to build soil moisture reserves when we usually could make progress. Most plants are dormant then and evaporation rates are lower, which, when combined with rainfall, usually makes some mud.

Dave Starner, Superintendent of the Northern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Orange, studies the weather as part of his work and looks at daily measurements throughout the year.

He pointed out that evaporation rates depend on wind speed, sunlight, temperature and, most important, humidity.

We all understand from firsthand experience these forces of nature, but can be surprised by his findings. Evaporation rates actually peak during relatively cool, low-humidity, windy, clear spring days, as compared with the hot, humid summer days we might expect to be the peak for evaporation.

Our failed progress in soil moisture last winter increased the potential for a summer drought, made certain by a rainfall shortage that continued into spring, the summer, then the fall and again, it seems to be repeating itself so far this winter — look at the lakes.

It was dry enough early in the 2007 growing season to file a report with local government by July, but the summer annual row crops, including corn and soybeans, had yet to set their yields for the year, although prospects were doubtful.

The row crops have now been harvested and are estimated to be 50 percent below normal; hay and pasture yields from the last half of the season also continue to be a disappointment. When combined with the early season estimates submitted, our total losses to agriculture from the 2007 drought could exceed \$10 million.

We are quickly feeding up a short hay supply and will likely come into spring with few reserves. Livestock forages in the coming growing season will depend on soil fertility and rainfall to produce enough volume and quality to put us back close to normal.



CARL STAFFORD

Plan to put plant nutrients in place in 2008, as they are one input you can control in your effort to make up for this needed tonnage.

Some forage tonnage was found when we baled up corn stover/fodder in the fall, but there are fertilizer and organic matter values that need to be realized.

While corn stover has feed value to livestock, it probably has a higher fertilizer and organic matter value to the next crop.

No-Till Farmer magazine quotes University of Kentucky scientists who have set some interesting values for corn fodder. They figure that 150 bushel corn “creates about 8,000 pounds per acre of corn stover.”

On a per-acre basis, they find that four tons of fodder would account for 55 pounds of nitrogen, 27 pounds of phosphorus and 115 pounds of potassium. On a per-bale basis, each “1200-pound bale of corn stover contains eight pounds of phosphorus and 17 pounds of potassium.”

With fertilizer values reported by Farm Management Agent Peter Callan, in his crop budgets talk at Syria, he found nitrogen at 55 cents per pound, phosphorus at 75 cents per pound and potassium at 37 cents per pound.

This makes the 1,200-pound bale of fodder worth \$13.70 for fertilizer, not counting its soil building and water holding improvements coming from its organic matter.

Earlier, I advocated grazing corn stalk land with cattle, which might be a compromise between exporting those pounds of fertilizer and organic matter removed with each bale of fodder contrasted with the risk of compaction and land damage possible from the hooves of cattle grazing stalks on wet soil.

If our winter was wet enough to offer this risk from grazing the stalk land, we would be better off overall.

Carl Stafford is Culpeper County Extension Agent, Animal Science. He can be reached at cstaffo@vt.edu.

Women playing greater role in running farms

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MILWAUKEE — Diane Grezenski grew up a city girl, but now she and her husband run a dairy farm where she has taken on more and more of the work over the years.

“I do almost all the milking, feed the animals, and handle the book work and much of nearly everything else that needs to be done,” she said.

The public face of women in agriculture in Wisconsin

for 60 years has been Alice in Dairyland, a young woman selected annually to promote the state's farm products. But because of old barriers coming down, men doing other jobs, and mechanical advances, women like Grezenski are more actively involved.

Grezenski's husband does the field work and pitches in on milking when he can, while working full time at a nearby paper mill. The two

are increasing the size of their operation from 47 cows to about twice that number, Grezenski said.

“But somebody has to work elsewhere to get health insurance, and often it is the man because they usually can find better paying jobs,” she said.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service's most recent agricultural census, done in 2002, showed women were the principal operators

of 7,353 Wisconsin farms, up about 27 percent from 1997. There was about a 13 percent increase nationally during the same period.

The percentage of Wisconsin's female principal farm operators increased from 6.7 percent in 1997 to 9.5 percent in 2002.

Wisconsin had the ninth-highest number of women who were the principal operators of farms, a category led by Texas and California.

ASK THE JEWELER
at Petersen Jewelers

Q: Garnet is the birthstone of January. Does it just come in red?

A: No. Although known for its warm red hue, garnet is also popular in many shades of green and other earth tones such as yellow and brown. Blue seems to be the only color in which no garnet can be found.

January is Garnet Month at Petersen Jewelers (540) 825-6033
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