

1964

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### Recommended Citation

Goza, William M. (1964) "The Fort King Road, 1963," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 43 : No. 1 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol43/iss1/6>

THE FORT KING ROAD - 1963

by WILLIAM M. GOZA

IN 1825, THE TERRITORY of Florida was sparsely settled and little traveled. Fort Brooke, named for its first commander, Colonel George Mercer Brooke, and located where the Hillsborough River meets Old Tampa Bay, was a scant two years old. In that year, Indian Agent Colonel Gad Humphries established an agency near the present city of Ocala, preceding by some two years the occupation of Fort King on a nearby knoll. Realizing the need to connect its outposts by overland routes, Congress appropriated \$12,000 to build a road from the northern boundary of the territory to Fort Brooke. The road was not constructed, but in 1825 a military road was started with the blazing of a trail north of Fort Brooke. Improvements followed later and what had been known as "The Military Highway" became the Fort King Road.

Since the Fort King Road crosses the Withlacoochee River only a few miles east of my week-end cottage, my interest in the route was strong, but this interest became intensified toward the end of 1962, when I met Frank J. Laumer, a Dade City land developer, who lives only about a mile from the site of the crossing. I met Laumer through our mutual friend, Father Jerome, dean of Florida historians at St. Leo College, and found that he had become interested in establishing the site of Fort Dade on the Withlacoochee River, as a result of his research on the second Seminole War and the life of Zachary Taylor. Records from the War Department and National Archives revealed Fort Dade was located on the south bank of the Withlacoochee River, where it intersected the Fort King Road. An exhaustive and intensive search of the area with a mine detector turned up large iron hinges, which were determined to be supports for the stockade gate, a curry comb, candle snuffer, hand-made nails, a part of a balance scale, and other items.

Although the accuracy of the location of the Fort Dade site was verified by Dr. William H. Sears of the Florida State Museum and other qualified personnel, the usual range of "old wives tales" discredited the effort, with solemn assertions that the spot

Frank Laumer designated was many miles from "where my grandpappy said the fort was!" We also found many references in secondary sources to locations for Fort Dade which are not supported by War Department records. Many highly respected sources claim that Fort Dade was the site of the massacre of Major Francis Langhorne Dade in 1835. Even if Fort Dade had existed on that date, it would have been a somewhat remarkable coincidence if the redoubtable major could have arranged the ambush of his command at a spot already named in his honor!

Perhaps the most interesting thing about having history as a hobby is that it is a never ending pursuit - one thing leads to another in this continuing search for the truth. With the Fort Dade site tucked safely in his map case, Laumer decided to re-search the Dade Massacre, the first step of which would be to re-create the route of the Fort King Road, from Fort Brooke to the battle site. I was delighted when Mr. Laumer asked me if I would be interested in giving a hand to his undertaking.

Maps and field notes of surveys made in the early 1840's, when the Fort King Road was still in existence and still in use, were obtained from the office of Doyle Connor, Florida Commissioner of Agriculture. They showed the section, township, and range through which the "Road to Fort King" passed, and gave some physical characteristics of the land. Appropriate field notes from the United States surveys for the sections gave the distance in chains from the corner of the section to the road, from opposite boundaries of the section. Then, in order to relate this information to present-day development and improvements, geological survey maps from the United States Department of the Interior were secured. Twelve of these maps, each about two feet long, were required to cover the route from Fort Brooke to the massacre site, about two miles southwest of Bushnell.

Professional help was needed to assure the accuracy of the route as transported to the modern maps, and so it was with rare good luck that Elmer Mullins, a surveyor from Dade City who coupled professional qualification with an interest in the historical aspect, volunteered his services. Then came the laborious task of transferring the old to the new - the surveys of 1840's to the modern maps of the 1960's. Of course, the newer maps indicated many changes in the use of the land, showing even the smallest buildings which had been erected when the map was

made, but land contours were unchanged, and the route as laid out on the modern map still coursed around the same ponds-and others which had not been shown on the earlier maps-and followed generally the route which would avoid extreme lows and highs of altitude, so as to give the best available level route to facilitate marching and moving of supplies.

Spot checks were now in order. A 1959 aerial photograph of the Lacooshee area was obtained, and we could see the dark line of a trail in the photograph following the slow spirals of the Fort King Road as it appeared on our tracings on the geological survey map. Short trips to selected areas confirmed the belief that the reconstructed maps were accurate, and at this point began the germination of the idea to march along the route sometime in December, 1963, the same month in which Major Dade had made his fateful march in 1835.

We had expected to find agreement among those who had recounted the details of the so-called "Dade Massacre," but here also we found many conflicting statements. The most reliable authorities seemed to concur that Francis Langhorne Dade and his command, numbering 108 men, set out from Fort Brooke along the Fort King Road on December 23, 1835, outfitted as infantry and equipped with a six pound cannon, intending to relieve the under-manned garrison at Fort King. On the morning of December 28, about sixty-five miles out of Fort Brooke, Seminole Indians under the leadership of Micanopy opened fire upon them from the cover of pine woods and palmettos, killing all but three of the enlisted men. This event, together with the murder of General Wiley Thompson, Lieutenant Constantine Smith, and others at Fort King within a few hours of the Dade attack, signalled the outbreak of the Second Seminole War, which lasted nearly seven years and was the most costly of all Indian wars fought by the United States.

We decided at the outset that our march along the route of the Fort King Road would not be a physical fitness test, nor a survival or endurance contest, but was to be a serious attempt to see if traces of the Fort King Road still existed. We also wanted to travel the route at about the same time of the year Major Dade travelled it. We were hopeful that, if the march attracted any attention at all, it would interest the people of Florida in an important period in the history of our state. I was satisfied with



our decision that we were not trying to prove our physical capacity for endurance, for at forty-six years of age I found myself eight years older than the oldest of Dade's men! A number of individuals of varied interests and occupations expressed their desire to accompany us on at least a part of the march, and all were welcomed. Two of Laumer's children, Christopher, aged twelve, and Valerie, aged fourteen, who had developed an interest in the project from hearing it discussed, intended to make part of the trip. It was also decided that Amos, their ten-year old collie, would be included in the party, and not without some historic precedent, since Major G. W. Gardiner's dog had accompanied his master on the ill-fated march, and the return of that wounded canine to Fort Brooke, according to some accounts, was one of the first signs of disaster which the garrison received.

In order to assure the public of the seriousness of our plans, and to make available to the organization the results of our research and efforts, the Florida Historical Society was solicited for sponsorship of our project at the semi-annual meeting of its board of directors at the University of South Florida, in Tampa, on December 7, 1963. This sponsorship was readily and unanimously given, and we felt that we had clothed our efforts with professional respectability by the endorsement of this venerable organization, but we were cognizant also of our responsibility to maintain our efforts in the field of professional historical research.

It was decided that it would be pointless to begin our march in downtown Tampa at the actual site of Fort Brooke, since the city is now so developed that there would not only be lack of evidence of a semblance of a trail, but it would be impossible to follow the route because of the many buildings. It was therefore decided to begin the march at 1:00 p.m., December 19, at the northwest corner of Franklin Junior High School, Tampa, which our calculations showed that the Fort King Road had crossed, and where we surmised Major Dade might have arrived at about the same hour of the day in his march out of Fort Brooke.

Though the personnel of our 1963 "command" varied from time to time during the trip, the starting group included Frank Laumer; Joe Geiger, a teacher from Dade City High School who also teaches at St. Leo College; and me - and of course, Amos, our mascot. We were surprised to see that WFLA-TV Reporter Emmett Mattes, Miss Mick O'Hearn of the Tampa *Tribune*,

and a photographer were present to cover the departure. The venture had in fact already attracted some press notices earlier. The St. Petersburg *Times* had carried a story with a picture of Laumer and me on the shores of the Withlacoochee examining maps detailing the course, while its Dade City reporter, Mrs. Shirley Chastain, had given a full and accurate account of the mission. Also, E. Reinhold Rogers, Jr., of the Clearwater *Sun* and Chairman of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, had given us advance coverage. We did not realize, however, even from this initial indication of interest by the news media, that our undertaking would attract so much attention. We found as we plodded along that interest increased in geometric proportions.

The starting point was still in a fairly congested area of Tampa, so the route could not follow the almost exact northeasterly direction which was indicated. The site of the Fort King Road lies southeast of the Garden of Memories and the Centro Espanol cemeteries, then cuts across the northeasterly corner of a subdivision to reach tall grass and scattered, gnome-like trees. The general vicinity of the trail was now less densely settled, and for the first time out of Tampa, the party had the feeling of marching cross-country. The land began to assume a gentle rolling appearance, and after crossing Lake Avenue, a citrus grove was encountered, which continued beyond Hillsborough Avenue at a point about three-fourths of a mile east of the Atlantic Coast Line overpass. About a quarter of a mile north of Hillsborough Avenue, the road meets again and coincides almost exactly with Lake Avenue for approximately one mile into the small settlement of Harney, at which point it veers sharply to the west and away from the northeast course of our route.

Our party left the road at about 5:00 p.m., remaining on the trail approaching the Little Hillsborough River, where the elevation of the route dipped. An abundance of large oaks were located at the place where the road crossed over. As darkness began to enshroud us, we realized that it was here that Major Dade and his command had spent their first night out from Fort Brooke. Dade had sent a message to Major Belton, back at Fort Brooke, that the six pounder had been abandoned four miles from the fort due to the failure of the oxen, and asked for assistance in bringing the cannon forward to him. Major Belton had complied with the request, and the six pounder had arrived at about 7:00

p.m. At nearly this same hour, the 1963 command settled down to an evening meal composed of canned tuna and peaches. The present-day group was here augmented by the arrival of Frank Laumer's children, Chris and Val, and Jim Beck, a St. Leo College student who was to prove his worth many times during the trip.

As the 1963 version of the Dade command settled around a cheerful campfire, the temperature began a drop which would take it down to the middle thirties, but spirits were high as Laumer read aloud the article "Florida Aflame" by Dr. Mark F. Boyd (*Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXX, July 1951). Gradually, as the conversation and the camp fire died down, the members of the group huddled in their bedrolls in a futile attempt to keep warm, with only fitful snatches of sleep.

At 6:00 a.m. everyone was awake but it was too cold to think of breakfast, so equipment was assembled, bedrolls packed, and the march was resumed by 7:00 o'clock. The Little Hillsborough River no longer connects with the Hillsborough River, about 300 yards to its west, since the roadway dams it off, but formerly it drained the so-called Harney Flats into the larger waterway. We made the crossing by leaving the trail to go about one hundred feet west to the railroad bridge, then returned on the opposite side to the location of the original roadway. Daylight confirmed our belief that the site of the crossing had been correctly located.

About a half-mile north of Harney the trail crosses the railroad and the highway; then approximately another half-mile north from the highway it turns northeasterly again and parallels the highway on its northwesterly side for about four miles. The countryside here is pleasant and rolling, but with hills of such little consequence that the engineers laying out the old road did not take them into consideration, but merely crossed over them. There are few dwellings in this locality, but there are several small citrus groves, from five to ten acres in size. There was still no evidence of the trail, but the physical characteristics of the land matched the symbols on our maps and assured us that the route was correct.

Breakfast, consisting of such delicacies as canned tuna and dried fruit, proved less an enjoyment than the ease afforded by the lightened pack, for now tightening leg muscles gave evidence

of the departure from flat terrain. The weather, however, was perfect for the undertaking, with a clear, sunny sky and a temperature in the fifties.

The route crosses U. S. 301 and railroad tracks again just north of Fowler Avenue, and then heads northeasterly for the northern tip of Lake Thonotosassa. Larger hills were now in evidence, and the walking was more difficult because it was through orange groves which had recently been cultivated and the sand was deep. One of the stories about the Dade march says the men stopped to rest near the lake and ate some Cuban oranges in their packs, dropping the seeds which then sprouted. One of the trees supposedly is still standing, transplanted, in 1846, to the homestead of William Miley, and some say that many of the groves in that section grew from seeds dropped by military expeditions along the Fort King Road. Where the old road passes the northern edge of Lake Thonotosassa, a beautiful view is seen down the slope to the south and across two miles of lake. The natural growth for the past few miles had been oak and pine, indicating that stands of both had existed in earlier years.

The remaining miles to the Hillsborough River crossing were among the most difficult of the entire trip. We were delighted with the interruption afforded just before undertaking this stretch by the arrival of reporters from the Tampa *Tribune* and the St. Petersburg *Times*. The Florida flatlands which lay ahead were coursed by swamp lands and scattered pines, with range cattle eyeing suspiciously the intrusion of their domain. The course of the old road veered now to the east, and it was evident that the engineers had planned the road in this portion with reference to the course of the Hillsborough River, paralleling it until a proper location for crossing it could be found. The easterly course continued for about two and a half miles, then struck out northerly for about five miles over desolate countryside for its junction with the Hillsborough River. Night had fallen by the time that spot was reached, a few hundred feet east of the present-day intersection of U. S. 301 and the Hillsborough River, and all agreed that Major Dade had covered a lot of territory in his second day out of Fort Brooke. Upon his arrival at the Hillsborough River, Major Dade found the Indians had burned the bridge, so he was delayed the next day in repairing it sufficiently to allow his troops, cannon, and equipment to pass over. We were glad,

however, that no work faced us, but only the prospect of devouring some fried chicken, with all its accompaniments, which had been brought to the Hillsborough River State Park by my wife, Sue. As we enjoyed the warmth of the park office, we took special note of the fact that Frank Laumer's two children had made the day without a murmur of complaint - and that Amos was wagging his tail!

We were welcomed to the Hillsborough River State Park by Park Superintendent Harry E. Sigrist with whom we had corresponded in anticipation of our overnight stop. We decided to spend the second night at the park, rather than at the site of the burned bridge, since we would be only a few hundred yards from the actual place of Dade's camp, which is now located on privately owned property. Park Ranger Roy Gardner aided us in many capacities, including that of press agent, for telephone calls from various newspapers were besieging us for reports of progress. Mr. Gardner, among his many other courtesies, introduced me over his park office telephone to Robert Thomas of Tampa, owner of the burned bridge site, and I had a pleasant and interesting conversation with him. He was well-informed on the history of this locality, and not only discussed Dade's camp site with me but invited us all to make a closer inspection of the property, promising to show us the spot where Fort Foster was located. Gardner told us that Thomas' father had donated the property which now comprises the Hillsborough River State Park to the State of Florida.

We decided to spread our bedrolls just outside the park area to accommodate Amos, since dogs are not permitted in the park overnight. Elmer Mullins, our official surveyor, joined us for a visit and helped build the fire. The Laumer children left us at this point, after a long, grueling day, although they seemed none the worse for the trip. They said they had thoroughly enjoyed the experience. After our chicken supper, my wife drove Chris and Valerie back to their home near Dade City. Then, while Jim Beck stoked the log fire higher and higher, we in our sleeping bags vied with each other to come up with the sharpest jest about his activities as a fireman. Frank Laumer, looking up from his sleeping bag, said he saw a bloom coming out on the magnolia, while I claimed that I had heard my first robin. Attempts at wit, however, grew more strained as the temperature

dropped into the low forties. Conversation lagged and it was replaced by heavy breathing as our second day out of Fort Brooke came to a close.

One of the most pleasant surprises of our trip came the next morning when we awoke at 6:15 a.m. We had expected to partake again of the canned delicacies in our packs, but instead found ourselves invited for a hot breakfast at Ranger Gardner's home in the park, with Mrs. Gardner performing in the highest traditions of the culinary art. Fried eggs, grits, home-made biscuits, jam, and hot coffee gave us the start we needed for the long day which lay ahead. We were met at breakfast by Elmo Collins, a Dade City junior high school teacher, who joined us at this point.

We realized that Major Dade's command had, by authority of most accounts, remained two nights at Hillsborough River, but we saw no point in marking time to follow his schedule exactly since we were not attempting a literal re-enactment of his march. We decided that our purposes would be served if we pushed ahead, facetiously remarking that if we followed the major's example too closely, we might walk into an ambush by Indians up the line.

Major F. S. Belton's account of Dade's march states that the command probably did not make over six miles on the day of their march from the Hillsborough River, then on the next day marched across the Big Withlacoochee River, across the Little Withlacoochee River, and to their camp within four or five miles of the massacre site. We felt that we were now informed sufficiently by experience to know that this was impossible, since a command that had moved only about one mile an hour could not possibly have marched approximately thirty miles between sunup and sundown on December 27, 1835. We were determined to make camp our third night near Dade City, where local legend has it that Dade had encamped near a small body of water now called Lake Hester.

We started our march at a little before 8:00 a.m., crossing to the east side of U. S. Highway 301 and entering the woods on the north side of the Hillsborough River. We quickly found the location of the Fort King Road crossing, since the road was used up into the early 1930's, according to Robert Thomas, by "hunters, fishermen, campers, and poachers." The road now followed

a course slightly to the west of north, crossing Highway 301 only a few hundred feet from the railroad crossing now called Glennell Station. We followed the trail without seeing any evidence of its prior existence. As we passed over the highway, several motorists blew their automobile horns, letting us know that we were recognized. As we continued our travels, it seemed as though we were strangers to no one.

We were now in flat pasture land, with scattered pine trees and evidence of a creek to our west where the growth was heavier and the sweet gum and bay trees grew in profusion. We finally picked up our first sign of the Fort King Road. Evidently it was still being used for light, backwoods traffic to some extent, and it followed exactly the course as shown on our map. We continued on the trail for about three miles, crossing an occasional pasture, with deference shown us by the cattle because of the presence of our collie, Amos. The trail faded, but low ridges indicated the location of the road to be coinciding with our maps. We arrived at State Highway 54, at a crossing about two miles west of Zephyrhills at 12:30 p.m. Joe Geiger left us here, since he had examination papers to grade, but he would rejoin us on our last morning of the hike.

Laumer, Beck, Collins, and I continued on, slightly east of north, with our route as marked on the map following the level route on the ground, avoiding comparative extremes of altitude and depression. We were on higher ground again, and trees appeared in thicker groves. When we stopped for lunch, we checked our map and saw that we had about seven miles of hard, hilly marching ahead before we would reach our camp site that night.

A short road bearing northeasterly brought us into contact with a paved back-route road from Zephyrhills to Dade City, known as the "Fort King Road," but with the exception of three more crossings of the old road before reaching Dade City, there is no coincidence of route. Passing through the rear section of the Cunningham Estates subdivision, we had our picture taken by Mrs. Nell Woodcock for the *Tampa Tribune*. Then we started out through hilly, freshly cultivated grove land. Our route was a little north of east, and leaving the citrus grove we passed through beautiful woodland where the route of the old Fort King Road was clearly visible, threading its way between ancient oaks. This was one of the areas where Laumer and Mullins had made

a spot-check for a section line a few months earlier and had killed a thirty-inch coral snake. We saw no snakes at all on our trip since they are not generally in evidence during the colder weather.

Crossing the western edge of Bird Lake, we moved through a desolate area of dead dog-fennels and sedge-like weeds, noting on the west side of our trail some few hundred feet away a huge dead tree with literally hundreds of large buzzards perched upon it and flying around it. This spot is known locally as "Buzzard's Roost." Frank Laumer and I discussed the eerie sight, recalling the diary of James Duncan, an officer of General Gaines' troops, who came upon Dade's command nearly two months after they had lain unburied at the massacre site:

"The vultures rose in clouds as the approach of the column drove them from their prey, the very breast work was black with them, some soared over us as we looked upon the scene before us whilst others settled upon the adjoining trees awaiting our departure in order again to return to their prey."

Jim Beck is from Dayton, Ohio, and he was not familiar with our "buzzards," thinking they were huge crows. Possessing more energy and curiosity than Laumer, Collins, or I, he charged toward the dead tree, and the sky was black with vultures circling above us.

Ahead now emerged one of our most beautiful scenes, but it also involved some of our most difficult terrain for marching; a broad, grass-lined valley with gnarled and ancient oaks led on to citrus groves situated on hills with an elevation of over 200 feet above sea-level, an uphill climb of about a hundred feet in less than a mile. The old route skirted the summits of the hills, but the walking was difficult through newly-plowed land as we aimed just to the west of the tree-bordered home of Dr. W. H. Walters, Dade City physician and member of the Confederate Round Table. The roadway then turns slightly to the northeast, nearly a quarter of a mile west of the home of State Senator D. D. Covington, beyond which the descent of the hills becomes pronounced.

Our maps showed that we would cross a dirt road, and that the old road would pass directly through a house, which would stand at the southern tip of Lake Pasadena, and surely enough, there it was. The only difficulty was that about four vicious looking dogs began barking at us, and Amos was the only member of our

party who spoke their dialect. As we were debating whether to forsake briefly our historic mission to skirt this portion of the road, an elderly gentleman called to us from the front of the house, welcoming us and ordering the dogs back. He introduced himself as J. F. Hammett, saying that he had been expecting us, since he knew that the Fort King Road passed through his property; his only regret was that his grandson had been waiting with him to welcome us, and had left just a few minutes before. Mr. Hammett gave us some of his delicious tangerines, and we filled our canteens with sparkling, cold tap water. We admired the massive oak trees which lined the route of the old road, and Mr. Hammett told us that two of them had been estimated to be over 300 years old.

We ascended another hill through an orange grove to the northeast for approximately a half-mile on the east shore of Lake Pasadena, then cut the southeasterly corner of Pasadena Shores subdivision to cross the present day Fort King Road again. There, Elmer Mullins met us in his truck and told us that he had tied a few bright streamers on fences ahead at the exact survey point where the road passed. He had also hauled in some "lightard knots" and fire wood to our camp site.

Our route still lay uphill, behind some houses fronting on the new Fort King Road, one of which we knew to be owned by Frank Massey, another member of the Dade City Confederate Round Table. As we passed back of the house owned by Mr. and Mrs. Earl Croley, we were beset by several members of his family and some of their neighbors, all armed with shot guns, rifles, pistols, sabres, baseball bats, and garden tools in a good-natured ambush. Since they were not Seminoles, we decided they must be some sort of home guard or militia, trigger-happy to try out their weapons. Mr. Croley confirmed our belief that the road had passed immediately back of his house, and the level roadway was still plainly visible, for the contours were unchanged by more than a century of use.

We were now only about two miles from our day's destination, as the shadows were beginning to lengthen. Crossing another pasture, we emerged just east of the intersection of the new Fort King Road and Highway 52-S, which connects U. S. 301 with the Handcart Road, the title of which itself invites research. Crossing both roads, we proceeded just west of north back of

some small houses, through more pasture, then uphill again through grove land. We passed through one section where de citrus trees were stark white, with all bark peeled off, lonely sentinels to remind us of the hard freeze of December, 1962. Tall, lean pipes of irrigation sprays called attention to the feeble attempts of man to control nature.

The Pasco County fairground lay on our left to the west, and we passed close to the new Dade City High School, thinking that it would be appropriate to erect a marker there, describing its proximity to the Fort King Road. It was now downhill and darkening to the north of the two Lake Hesters where our campfire would be awaiting the match, so we hitched our packs a bit higher and crossed the last fences to our bivouac. A cheery fire was soon ablaze, as my wife, Sue, arrived with a wonderful dinner for all of us, consisting of beef stew, hot coffee, hot rolls, and other tasty morsels. To top it off, Frank Laumer's wife, Lois, had brought along mince meat and pecan pie which she and their daughter had baked for us. The press, too, was on hand, and flash bulbs exploded brilliantly as we recalled some seventeen or so miles of our day's travel.

We bade our visitors good night at around ten o'clock, but just as we crawled in our bedrolls, Jim Fleming, of the Dade City Banner, came up for a visit. We spent a delightful half-hour with him, then zipped up our sleeping bags and had an excellent night's sleep. Jim Beck, as usual, had stoked the fire to magnificent heights, and just before we dozed off we saw the shadowy outline of the stone marker placed on the site by the local citizenry to commemorate another night, 128 years before.

The following morning, Sunday, we were awakened at 6:15 a.m., by a friendly visit from Mrs. Marge Edenfield of Dade City who was armed with steaming hot coffee. The route through Dade City ran almost due north from our camp site, through the grounds of the new addition to Pasco High School and just west of the hospital along 16th Street extending through "Tommytown."

We saw no point in marching through the limits of Dade City, since it is so developed that an exact following of the route would have been impossible. Laumer's wife transported us to the northern edge of the city to resume our travels, reinforced by the hard boiled eggs and toast she had brought us. The old Fort King

Road continued to follow generally north, with a very slight easterly bearing, along present U. S. Highways 301-98, crossing those highways five times in approximately five miles. Then, about one-half mile from the point where Highway 98 branches off to the west, the road begins an almost exact northeasterly course through Lacoochee to the intersection of the road with the Withlacoochee River. This was the area of Laumer's previous research, where the fort, named as a memorial to Major Dade, was located. We diverted our course a few hundred feet west to cross the river on the Seaboard Air Line bridge, continuing in a northerly direction to meet the intersection of the railroad with the old Fort King Road about a quarter of a mile north of the river. Since Laumer and Mullins had made a spot check for the road, we had no difficulty in picking up the trail. Laumer, Beck, and I, the only three now in our party, agreed that this was one of the most clearly defined traces of the road, and one of the most beautiful areas through which it passed. For about a mile, in a north-northwesterly direction, we passed over level land of an elevation of from seventy to seventy-five feet, through blackjack oak and large pine trees. The clearly visible trail, precisely following the contours on our map, was in the area where recent aerial photographs had revealed its path. This would be a wonderful property for the state to acquire for development as a woods trail, faithfully following the route of the Fort King Road. It would be as beautiful and attractive to tourists as the Appalachian Trail and other trails used for hiking, horseback riding, and sightseeing.

The trail disappeared at a pasture fence line, and we had to interpolate the route for about a mile to a spot near where U. S. Highway 301 is intersected by Florida Highway 50 at Ridge Manor. By now we had grown accustomed to the routing of the roadway around hills and away from low spots, so we felt sure that we could not have missed the road more than a few feet, at most. The route lay west of the club house for the golf course at Ridge Manor. We thought we would have a good chance of quickly picking up the trail again, so we split up to search for some encouraging sign. It was my luck this time to find the trail, and for the next two-and-a-half miles we enjoyed the pleasure of knowing that we were again traveling an unmistakable and clearly evident portion of the Fort King Road. We had one barrier along the way which did not exist in Dade's time, a man-made drainage

ditch about fifteen feet wide, filled with water. There was not enough room for a running start and we were too heavily laden to jump across. As Laumer and I were removing our boots and rolling up our trousers, we were startled by a roar and a splash, and saw that Beck had charged, booted and fully clad, through the water to the opposite side. We laughed again when we saw Beck and our collie, Amos, shaking themselves dry.

The trail crossed Highway 301 about three miles north of Ridge Manor, and we continued on the old road for about a half mile, gradually coming back in a westerly direction to recross the present highway to its west side. We lost the trail at this point, with only about a mile remaining between us and the Little Withlacoochee River. The maps fooled us at this point, for they showed many small lakes. The survey for the maps must have been prepared during a much wetter year than we had just experienced, for we found the area devoid of water, except for an occasional small pond. Because of our miscalculation, we went farther to the west than we should have, futilely searching for some of the ponds shown on the maps. The area became wilder and the grasses were taller than any we had yet encountered. The trees were twisted and drawn, and there were a number of very tall palmettos. After what seemed an interminable and hopeless struggle through the brush we finally emerged on the banks of the Little Withlacoochee. A picturesque turn of the river offered a peninsula for our dining location, so out came can openers and tins, and if I do say so myself, I don't believe I have ever prepared a more delicious Triscuit sandwich.

We knew we were west of where we should be, but steep banks, cypress trees and knees, and extremely dense palmettos made travel along the river a perilous prospect. We finally reached a spot where the river seemed to correspond in contours to the place where our map showed the crossing should be. The river here was only about twenty-five feet wide, and we knew that we could swim it without difficulty; our problem, however, would be to get all our map cases, packs, boots, and clothing across. Laumer swam across first, leaving his equipment with me, and then Beck heaved map cases and some equipment over to the other side. We felled a dead but solid small cypress tree, trimmed the limbs off and decided that I would try to balance my way across, steadied by sticks held out from each side by Frank and Jim. I was carry-

ing not only my own pack, but had Frank's heavy field jacket over me, and I am sure Blondin felt less encumbered when he rode the bicycle on the tight wire across Niagara Falls. After a couple of juggling antics, it looked as if I would make it when suddenly the small end of the cypress snapped - and it was all over for that trip. I believe the icy temperature of the water saved my life, for I would surely have sunk with all my equipment, but the water was so cold that I came right out of it with very little delay. We re-steadied the log, and Jim pursued the more prudent idea of crawling across the log, balancing with a large floating log alongside.

The north bank of the Little Withlacoochee was not as dense in its growth as the opposite bank from which we had just come, but it was more desolate, if possible, in appearance. We went through the whitened cypress swamps, now dry from the lack of rain during 1962, with their moldy marks high on the trunks, and looking strangely like targets. The temperature was fairly cold, but my discomfort consisted more in the squish-squish I felt and heard with each step I took. My companions were worried about me, for I had a sore throat at the outset of the march, but I felt fine now.

A quarter-mile walk put us back on a trail that we hoped was our now-elusive Fort King Road. We saw a jeep with a man and a woman in it driving along the road toward us. We hailed them and inquired for the location of the road. Much to our delight and surprise we learned we were on it. We introduced ourselves to Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Berry of Webster. He is Civil Defense Director for Sumter County, and they had come out looking for us. My luck now changed, for I found Mr. Berry had a complete change of clothes, except for socks and boots, in his vehicle which he offered me. I quickly ducked behind our omnipresent palmettos and effected a quick change.

We continued on the trail, through giant arches of oaks, for about a mile, and then suddenly the trail disappeared into a pasture land. A herd of cows - about twenty - first eyed us suspiciously, then started following us in a walk which increased in pace, and it began to look as if they might stampede towards us. At this point, Amos again proved his worth, and a few loud yelps and a tossing of his Withlacoochee-wet mane started them off in another direction.

We were now within a mile-and-a-half of Dade's Breakfast Pond, the site of that night's bivouac, so-called because Dade and his men ate their last breakfast there. We had been pondering all afternoon a remark made by my wife the night before at Dade City, when she said she heard a rumor that there would "be a surprise for us-but a good one." She said that a Miami newspaper was planning something, since their reporter had inquired if we were armed. It was an odd question, and we guessed that a mock massacre might be in the offing, and the reporter wanted to be sure we would not be startled into shooting someone. We were not armed, of course, and so we did not discount the possibility of an ambush ahead. With this in mind, we veered to the west of our normal course on the trail and slightly beyond the bivouac site, then cut back to the location of the Fort King Road. There we got the surprise of our lives: we came up behind a group of Seminole Indians, in full colorful regalia, their chief wearing the plume in his headband. The leader, Howard Osceola, informed us that they had planned to surprise us on the trail, but we had outflanked him. We shook hands all around and told the chief that turn about was fair play, because the last victory had been won by the Indians. As we went on to our campfire on the shores of Dade's Breakfast Pond, we found that the Seminoles had been brought up from the Everglades by the *Miami Daily News* and its reporter, Don Branning. A full page news story, complete with pictures of the Seminoles was the result, and it appeared in the December 23, 1963, issue of the *Daily News*.

Dade's Breakfast Pond had receded due to the drought, but it was an almost perfectly round pond, apparently spring-fed, to judge by its green color. It lies directly on the trail, and would have been a logical spot for an encampment, for it offered potable water and a terrain suitable for defense. As silence settled around the campfire and we warmed our hands side by side with the Seminoles, we remembered their forebears who had resisted for so long the best our country could offer. We could not linger long in our meditation, however, for we found that Don Branning had a publication deadline, and the Indians had a reservation, so they left us shortly after dark.

On our list of Seminole words "Ista" means "man" and "tootkah" means "fire," so, although we probably broke all the rules of the Seminole language, we christened Jim Beck "Ista Tootkah,"

“Man of Fire,” in honor of his skill with a blaze. That night at Dade’s Breakfast Pond, Jim outdid himself. The photographer from the *Daily News* did not need flash bulbs for his pictures, and in the noon-like glare we discerned many new faces around our campfire, including some who had been with us on the march in its earlier stages. Joe Geiger rejoined us, bringing his wife along to complete the march, and Elmo Collins was back with us, joined by his daughter, Anne, a student at the University of South Florida. Lois Laumer did the honors with food, and we enjoyed the baked ham and potatoes she brought. My wife joined us again, bringing along our miniature dachshund, Giggy, who was dwarfed by Amos. The visitors drifted away as the evening wore on, and the veterans of the march enjoyed repeating the jokes and stories which had been the most successful along the route. As we glanced down the slope occasionally toward the pond, we thought of the 108 men who had looked in the same direction many years ago.

About four o’clock in the morning of Monday, December 23, I was awakened by the noise of rainfall, the first we had encountered on our trip. Frank and I decided to arouse the camp, now numbering ten, to roll packs and bedrolls and seek the shelter of a barn nearby. The owner, Dave Davis, a lawyer from Bushnell, had been among those to welcome us the night before, so we felt sure there would be no objection to our using the shelter, particularly since Frank’s daughter had rejoined us, as had Dr. Charles W. Arnade’s son, Frank. The rain became harder as we reached the shelter, about 200 yards back down the trail, so we were glad we had made the decision to pack up. After a couple of anxious hours when the rain did not subside, Laumer, Beck, and I decided we would finish the last five miles even if we had to swim.

As the eastern skies assumed a lighter shade of gray-blue, we began the final stage of our march. Our travelers now included, in addition to Frank Laumer, Jim Beck, and me, our regulars, Joe Geiger and Elmo Collins, and newcomer Mrs. Lona Geiger. The route lay northeasterly, and in about a half-mile it crossed the Atlantic Coast Line tracks. It continued in the same direction until it crossed the present line of Highway 301 about three-fourths of a mile north of the railroad intersection with the highway at Saint Catherine, and then along the east side of the high-

way for about another mile. The old road then turned almost due north to cross Highway 301 again, proceeding about three-fourths of a mile to the massacre site. We marched into the Dade Battlefield Memorial Park at exactly 9:00 a.m., close to the same hour that the massacre occurred on December 28, 1835. We followed the line of the Fort King Road to the marker with the inscription "Here Major Dade Fell," then we turned to the recreation building in the park area,

A hearty breakfast awaited us, and our wives and friends greeted us again. Park Superintendent John H. Hale had arranged the breakfast, which was prepared by Mrs. Hale and wives of park employees. C. Burton Marsh, clerk of the circuit court and a member of the park advisory board, acted as master of ceremonies, introducing former Senator J. C. Getzen (chairman), Broward Miller, Miss Tille Roesel, and M. H. Sharpe, all members of the advisory board, Mayor Ralph Evans of Bushnell, and Leonard Ballard, president of the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce. Laumer, who was introduced as the "modern Major Dade," made a few remarks, thanking everyone for his interest. Dr. Arnade, professor of history at the University of South Florida and member of the board of directors of the Florida Historical Society, then welcomed our group on behalf of the Society, and lauded the effort as "authentic and worth while." The members of our expedition were then introduced, together with the wives who were present, and after a most enjoyable meal, we retired with the press and cameramen for interviews and pictures. In addition to the newspapers already mentioned, there were representatives from the Wildwood *Herald-Express*, the Ocala *Star-Banner*, and several area newspapers.

We will mark copies of the maps with the Fort King Road route and present them to the Dade Battlefield Memorial Park and to the Florida Historical Society. With the passing years, the trail will disappear entirely unless some concerted effort is made to preserve at least a section of it. The land through which it traverses is privately owned, and the march of the bulldozers is joining forces with other "signs of progress" to obliterate this remaining vestige from a colorful page of Florida's past. Those of us who participated in the march along the Fort King Road will always have a feeling of kinship for the little command which perished in 1835, and we hope that we did them honor in reminding Floridians of their sacrifice.