

9.0 CORRIDOR STORY

A. Introduction



The Beach

Scenic and Historic A1A is a 52.14-mile segment of highway that runs along the eastern edge of St. Johns County – from Ponte Vedra at the northern county line, to Marineland at the southern border. It is replete with natural, archeological, historic, recreational, cultural, and scenic resources, and tells a 5,000 year-old story about human beings and their continually changing relationship with the unique barrier island environment in which they live.

B. Natural Aspects of the Parallel Habitats

For most of its length, the highway is flanked on the east by the dunes and beaches adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by extensive estuarine waters and marshes. These two habitats – the beach and the estuary – are closely apposed; but they differ markedly in their geological and biological characteristics:

THE BEACH - Due to the actions of currents, waves, shifting sands, and the persistent salty aerosol, the beach is a harsh environment. Its flora and fauna are relatively sparse, and it is biologically unproductive, like a desert.

A phenomenon that illustrates this harshness is the salt pruning of trees and bushes that are growing within about 1000 feet of the beach and are exposed to the

wind, and the salty aerosol that it carries. The plants are stunted in shape and form. Nice examples of salt

pruning are to be seen along the west side of the highway north of Vilano, the north end of St. Augustine Beach, and south of Owens Avenue, where Anastasia Island begins to narrow precipitously as one approaches Crescent Beach.

THE ESTUARY - The high dunes behind the beach protect the long lagoon that runs through the marshes. Freshwater runoff from the east coast of Florida (the Florida east coast drainage) flows into this area and constitutes part of the Intracoastal Waterway. The lagoon and its surrounding marshes constitute the estuary, which is, unlike the beach, enormously productive and, therefore, a source of food for animals and human beings.

Productivity here refers to the conversion of sunlight into organic material. Estuarine marshes are among the most productive habitats on earth, exceeding wheat, equivalent to rice paddies, and exceeded (among terrestrial crops) only by sugar cane. They provide nutriment for an enormous diversity of finfish and shellfish, which they feed and shelter juvenile stages of fish that live in the ocean. A nice view is the Guana River State Park from the top of the northernmost high dune lookout is apparent at the northern part of the park.



The Estuary



Barrier Island and Natural Habitat

THE INLETS - The inlets are also important. This is where the salt water of the ocean mixes with the brackish lagoon, balancing the influx of freshwater, and thus ensuring a beneficial salinity.

THE BARRIER ISLAND HABITAT - Comprised of the beach, the protected estuary, and the inlets, the barrier island habitat found along the corridor is typical of the southeastern Atlantic and Gulf coasts between Cape Hatteras and the Yucatan Peninsula. But the segment of Florida coastline in St. Johns County is unique: it is located just below the northern limit of the easterly trade winds, which blow over the ocean, warming the winters, cooling the summers, and thus extending the ranges of both northern and southern species into this region. Black mangroves, for example, are lush in the south of St. Johns County, but are virtually absent 40 miles to the north.

C. Human Activities Associated with the Estuary

PREHISTORIC

Two inherent natural characteristics of the barrier island habitat have, for eons, encouraged human settlement in St. Johns County. First, the biological productivity of the estuary enables fishing and hunting, thus providing food. Since many oceanic fish return periodically to spawn in the estuary and inlets, they are especially good places, in the appropriate season, for fishing. Second, in an area of dense vegetation, passable only with difficulty, the estuary also provides the most feasible mode of transportation.

The prehistoric settlements along the estuary were abandoned long ago, but the cultural remnants left by

the inhabitants remains in no fewer than 50 archeological sites along the A1A corridor dating back to the Middle Archaic Period (5,000 BC). Many of these sites are easily accessible from the highway. A complete archeological and historical list can be found in the **Appendix**.

EUROPEAN COLONIZATION SETTLEMENT

In the age of exploration, inlets provided sailing ships with access to fresh water and provisions. Inlets were particularly attractive if they opened into a large bay and provided a protected anchorage, for such sites had special potential for fortification, settlement, and therefore commerce. A prime example is the inlet leading to Matanzas Bay and present day St. Augustine.

The St. Augustine site had two other attributes as well. The easterly trade winds and the course of the Gulf Stream forced Spanish ships - homeward bound and laden with gold - to sail close to the coast until about the latitude of present-day Jacksonville. At that point they would catch the westerly trades and head northeast across the Atlantic. This course induced the French to threaten that shipping, which in turn compelled the Spanish to found, fortify, and settle St. Augustine in 1565.

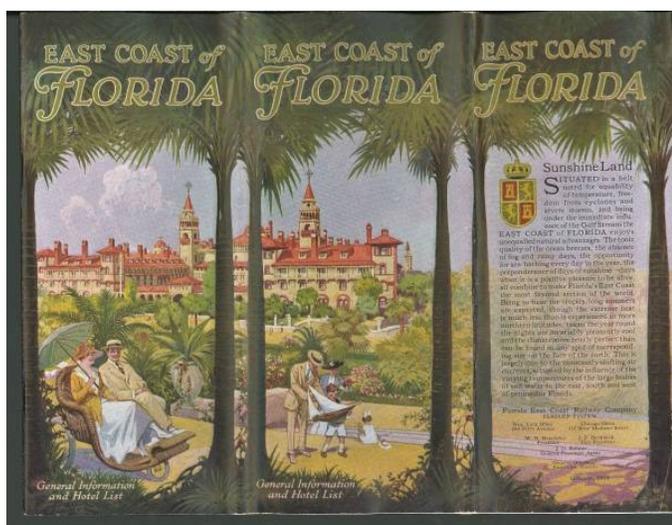
From the 16th century to the early 19th - under the successive governments of Spain, Great Britain, Spain again, and finally the United States - St. Augustine, with its fortifications and harbor, offered a measure of security and economic opportunity to people of diverse cultures. The City of St. Augustine and its environs are filled with structures, artifacts, and customs from these earlier periods.

Remarkable scenic and historic views of the Ancient City and its strategic location can be seen from the Vilano fishing pier, the top of the Usina Bridge, the upper deck of the Castillo de San Marcos, the Bridge of Lions, and the top of the St. Augustine lighthouse, and of course from the streets of the City - all within or close to the A1A corridor.



Statue of Ponce de Leon, City of St. Augustine

D. Seaside Resorts: Folks on the Beach



Alcazar Hotel circa 1888

The healthful effects of sea air and sea bathing were already becoming popular in the middle of the 19th century, but seasonal mass migrations to the seashore were dependent upon peaceful and secure coastlines and upon railroads. In southeastern states, like Florida, these conditions could not be met until after the Civil War.

The Development of a Southern Resort

Once the Civil War was over, northeasterners – especially consumptives and other invalids – were encouraged to escape the winter by taking the healthful waters in St. Augustine. But it wasn't until the late 19th century until seaside tourism in St. Augustine really exploded. Henry Flagler, an oilman on his second visit to the city at age 53, decided to stay and develop the small town of St. Augustine into the American Riviera. His impact on the town was profound, and the results are still clearly visible today.

Flagler provided three hotels, the Ponce de Leon, the Alcazar and the Cordova, unique architectural designs with extravagant dining and entertainment for wealthy guests. He also repaired and later extended the Florida East Coast Railroad (FEC), so visitors were able to travel to his hotels without changing trains. Additionally, Mr.

Flagler provided Anastasia Island and the North River communities, with seaside bathhouses, a dance pavilion, churches, and amusements for guests.

The quaint Lighthouse Park community on Anastasia Island began to develop in 1886, as the Ponce de Leon Hotel was being constructed. Attractions were available to amuse the visitors – a trend that has never ceased. One of the oldest and most respected of these entertainment locales is the Alligator Farm. The Alligator Farm, now in its second century, is aging well, gaining stature as a conservator of crocodilians.

The Hotel Ponce de Leon was the first of the grand hotels that Henry Flagler constructed in St. Augustine in an effort to refashion the city as a southern resort for wealthy northerners. It constituted the centerpiece of the opulent architecture of the Flagler Era (1887-1913). Flagler commissioned a pair of young architects, Thomas Hastings and John M. Carrere, to draw the plans for the building, whose Spanish Renaissance style influenced architectural design throughout Florida for the next half-century. Another young architect, Bernard Maybeck, who later won national prominence in



Flagler Hotels circa 1910

California, designed the interior spaces, which evoke the Victorian splendor of America's Gilded Age. Louis Comfort Tiffany contributed to the interior. The building served as a hotel for well over half a century before it was converted to educational use and transferred to Flagler College in 1968. It presently contains classrooms, administrative offices, and student residences for the college.

The Cordova, originally named the Santa Monica, served as the county seat until it was recently renovated and reopened as the Santa Monica Hotel. The Alcazar currently houses two shopping arcades, a small café, the City Hall of St. Augustine, the Lightner Museum and a newly decorated ballroom. Many of the churches build during this era still stand, but the bathhouses and dance pavilions are gone. Remnants of the old bridges and tramlines remain as does the neighborhood of Lighthouse Park. Many of the old houses are being renovated and this neighborhood is increasingly elegant and desirable.

Boom-time in St. Augustine

In the 1920s, developers came to Florida to buy cheap land, develop it, sell it, and leave with tons of money. The boom came late to St. Augustine (in 1925) in the person of D.P. "Doc" Davis. Through his efforts the marsh on north Anastasia Island was bulkheaded and filled with dredged bay bottom. While a handful of model homes were built on the fill, Davis' plans for a large subdivision never materialized during his lifetime. He left town in 1926 never to return. Today Davis Shores is a pleasant neighborhood community.



Guesthouse circa 1936



The Bridge of Lions - circa 1927

St. Augustine was left with a great boom-time consolation prize: The Bridge of Lions, which is one of the most prominent, designs features of Scenic and Historic A1A. The Bridge of Lions was completed in 1927. The bridge was designed to reflect the city's Mediterranean heritage, one of the few engineering structures that can be defined by its architectural style. The bridge spans Matanzas Bay (the Intracoastal Waterway) in downtown St. Augustine, linking the mainland portion of the city with its eastern neighborhoods on Anastasia Island. Because of its graceful appearance, the bridge has become a well-known local landmark and earned listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

A GLIMPSE INTO UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

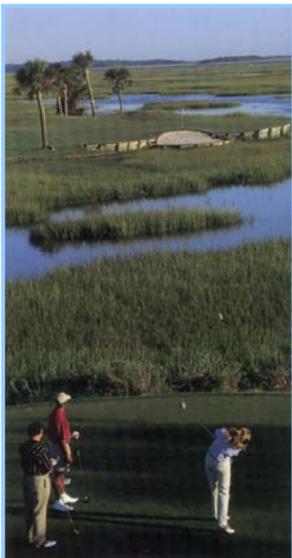
Scenic and Historic A1A evolved to serve the unique communities located along the corridor. A trip along Scenic and Historic A1A introduces travelers to the distinct attributes of these communities. After World War II, the construction boom of bridges linking Florida's Atlantic coast barrier islands prompted the redesignation of the A1A route through St. Johns County. Yet, Scenic and Historic A1A is still referred to by a variety of names. Starting at the Duval/St. Johns County boundary line the highway is known as S.R. A1A; through Ponte Vedra the highway is referred to as Ponte Vedra Blvd. and South Ponte Vedra Blvd.; through the general Vilano Area it is known as the Coastal Highway until the traveler reaches the Vilano Bridge then the name changes to Usina Bridge. As the traveler approaches the City of St. Augustine the name changes to May Street and through the City of St. Augustine the highway is known as San Marco/ Avenida Menendez until you reach the Bridge of Lions; where the highway is known as Anastasia Blvd.

Through the City of St. Augustine Beach on the ocean side the road is known as CR A1A/ Beach Blvd. Past the City of St. Augustine Beach the highway is known as SR A1A South. Finally in the City of Marineland, A1A is known as Ocean Shore Blvd. These names reflect the distinct heritage and history of each community the corridor serves.

Ponte Vedra

Ponte Vedra Beach is fundamentally different from any other community along the A1A corridor in St. Johns County. First, it is located well north of where the Guana and Tolomato Rivers terminate. Therefore, because the Intracoastal Waterway was not extended northward by dredging until 1927, this region, through most of its prehistoric and colonial times, was constrained on its western boundary. A more important, contemporary distinction, is the closeness of Ponte Vedra to Jacksonville; indeed, the recent growth of this huge metropolitan area has had a major influence on development to the south.

Ponte Vedra was developed during World War I. The National Lead Company bought out the original owners for the rights to the valuable minerals discovered in the local sands, and the area was named Mineral City. In 1922 the National Lead Company built the first nine-hole golf course for the use of its workers.



When the demand for minerals gave out, a resort community was planned, and in 1928, Mineral City was judiciously renamed Ponte Vedra Beach. Golf, tennis, and beach activities are celebrated in this expanding community; and recreation is the primary resource within this portion of the A1A corridor. This is the home of the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, the Association of Tennis Professionals, the PGA tour, and that quintessential golf community, Sawgrass.



Aerial photo of Vilano Beach

Vilano Beach

Colonial maps identify this southern tip, Punta Quartel, as the location where the Spanish built a small watchtower. This watchtower was used to alert troops at the Castillo de San Marcos of incoming vessels. During 1830 to 1880, the United States Army used Vilano Beach as a burial site for Native Americans who had died while imprisoned at the Castillo de San Marcos.

In the 1920s, Nobel prize winner, author Sinclair Lewis, rented a shingled bungalow in Vilano Beach where he generated ideas for his novels, including *Main Street* (1920), *Babbit* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925) and his best known novel *Elmer Gantry* (1927). Lewis returned to St. Augustine in 1939 and again in 1941.

In 1926, Florida developer, August Heckscher, built the Grand Vilano Casino, a Mediterranean Revival-style building, on Vilano Beach. Once called a “garden spot of happiness and relaxation for all those who visit it”, the Grand Vilano Casino was a favorite spot for fine dining, swimming and dancing. On August 28, 1937, 50-mile per hour winds lashed across the coast and high tides sparked the casino’s demise. Despite Heckscher’s desperate attempts to save the casino by erecting a steel bulkhead, he could not prevent the shoreline from crumbling beneath. Finally, he ordered the casino razed. But before it was destroyed its ornate columns were donated to the Florida Memorial College and the Usina family received some of the doors and fixtures. The rest was hauled away by the salvage company.

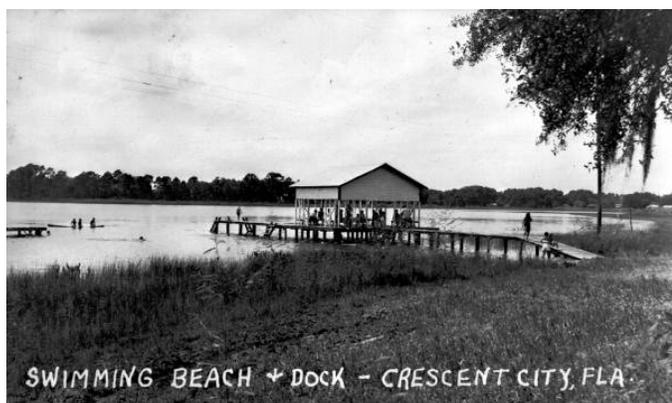
Vilano Beach recovered slowly as sand, retained by jetties, accreted providing more land for construction. Present day Vilano Beach, another product of the boom, is a beach community that boasts about its unique architecture that encapsulates the rich story of coastal development, from vernacular cottages of the 1920s, Art Deco designs of the 1930s and 1940s to post-World War II.

St. Augustine Beach

In 1911, Anastasia Island was selected as the site of the summer Chautauqua for the Methodist Church. Flagler's Model Land Company donated 200 acres of oceanfront, and Chautauqua Beach was platted. It was incorporated into the City of St. Augustine Beach in 1959. Today, a drive through the various sections of town reveals pleasant tree-shaded street scenes. Down at the shore, the City is working with the County to renovate the Old City Hall, the WPA building, into a cultural resource center. Within St. Augustine Beach is the St. Johns County Pier and Park, and the Anastasia State Park is adjacent the City; these are important recreational facilities.

Crescent Beach

Crescent Beach is a community where old Florida resort homes built in the 1920s can still be seen. One of the town most distinguished residents was Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. In 1940, with the proceeds from *The Yearling* (for which she received a Pulitzer Prize), Rawlings bought a cottage on the dunes in Crescent Beach. She expanded the house with income from the movie of the same name and lived and worked there for 14 years. She died there in 1953.



Swimming Beach / Dock at Crescent City, Florida

Butler's Beach

Frank A. Butler, an African American educator, established Butler's Beach, post-boom, on a strip of property that ran from the beach to the river. Butler meant this beach to be for African-Americans, for there was no other site along the coast available to people of color. And indeed, Butler's Beach was very popular and crowded through the '60s. Today, only a few of the original homes remain.

Summer Haven

Summer Haven, named on July 4, 1885, numbers among the oldest beach communities on the east coast of Florida. It began as a seasonal resort during the late nineteenth century, populated by northerners during winter months and some St. Johns County residents during the summer. There were 40 cottages, a store, a boarding house, a clubhouse with a bowling alley, and a post office. Among the more prominent winter residents were the Mellons from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, whose fortune was derived from steel and finance. Summer Haven, with its waterfront location and proximity to boating and fishing, remained a popular destination for winter residents and tourists through the 1920s. Its rustic, seaside cottages embody a formative period in the development of St. Johns County.

Summer Haven (and later Crescent Beach) was difficult to get to at the turn of the century. As in prehistoric times, the river was the only feasible highway, and the trip up to St. Augustine could take 12 hours by sailing vessel. Even when the first boat with an engine began delivering the mail and provisions, the trip took at least 3 hours.



Frank Butler circa 1920s

Development at these communities was stimulated by the construction of a rough, one-lane, coquina road down Anastasia Island in 1903, and by the bridging of the Matanzas River and the Matanzas Inlet in 1927.

The number of residences between Crescent Beach and Summer Haven has increased markedly in the last 20 years, but in the end, the availability of buildable, sustainable land on this narrow end of Anastasia Island limits the growth of these small communities. South of Summer Haven, A1A used to run along the beach, but a hurricane damaged it irrevocably in the '60s, and the ocean has since taken most of what remained. Therefore, the highway was rerouted further to the west.

Scenic and historic views are abundant in Summer Haven, particularly from the bridges over the Matanzas River, where the ocean, the marsh, and the Intracoastal Waterway; are visible. The Matanzas Inlet, site of a historic massacre and the last unjettied inlet on the east coast of Florida; and at Fort Matanzas, which still guards the inlet -and the back door to St. Augustine, are historic and natural sites that should be preserved and shared.

Marineland

The world's first "oceanarium," Marineland opened in 1938 as an underwater motion picture studio. Developed by Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, Jr., of the prominent American family, Marineland was designed to permit moviemakers to create films of sea life in as controlled an environment as possible. Public interest soon made it one of the state's leading tourist attractions. Here, for the first time people could view life as it exists below the water's surface.

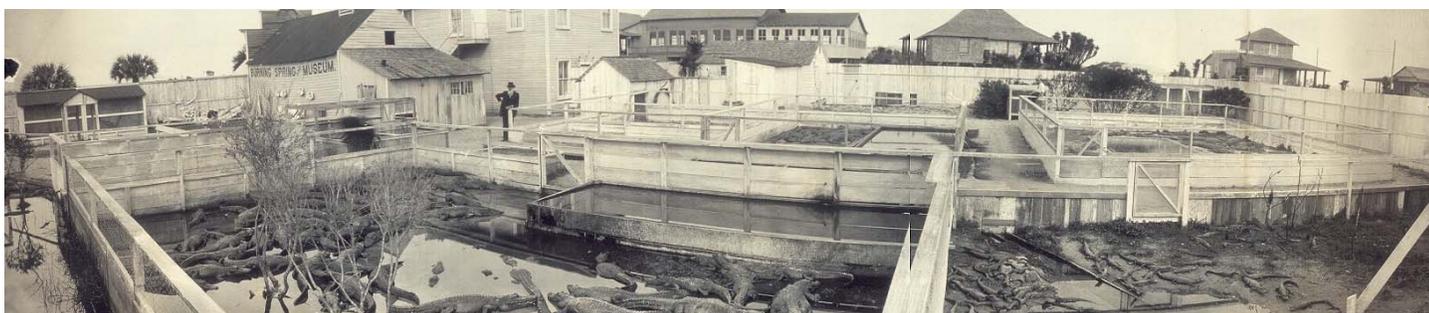
As an oceanarium, Marineland, unlike aquariums where species were segregated, replicated an ocean habitat where various marine species lived together. Marineland was the first place where marine animals with entertaining skills (taught by humans) were exhibited. Also the location of a major oceanic research



Marineland

effort, Marineland has served as a prototype for numerous oceanarium and marine museums throughout the world. Marineland continues to function as an attraction and research facility. Marineland's location was selected because it is near the Matanzas Inlet, and because the thread of land between the estuary and ocean is very narrow there. Thus, animals could be readily transported (with minimal stress) from the ocean to the river and thence back to the viewing tanks. Although the site is rather small for a town, Marineland is, nevertheless, a town - with less than 20 voters. Marineland is undergoing a remarkable renaissance as a historic site devoted to ecotourism.

The Scenic and Historic A1A corridor provides views and access to some of Florida's greatest natural amenities. The Atlantic Ocean, portions of the Guana, Tolomato and Matanzas River are visible along portions of the Scenic and Historic A1A corridor. These amenities are central to the culture of north Florida, supporting the economy and traditional recreational activities. Traveling along Scenic and Historic A1A provides an introduction to the beautiful coastal environment, which supports a diverse and fragile ecosystem. For those travelers interested in exploring these natural resources,



The Historic Alligator Farm and Bird Rookery



Scenic and Historic A1A provides access to the Guana River State Park and the Anastasia State Recreation Area. The Guana River State Park, near Ponte Vedra, is a 2,200-acre sanctuary for wildlife and birds. The Anastasia State Recreation Area has five miles of beaches, where a 1,700 acre protected bird sanctuary containing 170 species of birds can be found at this recreation area.

Just a short drive down SR 206, then south on to U.S. 1 to the St. Johns/ Flagler County boundary line, Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve defines the County's southern boundary line. Located within the County, adjacent to Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve, a 752-acre park Faver-Dykes State Park can be found. Two nature trails meander through pine hammocks, swamps, and beheads where bald eagles, wood storks, alligators and waterfowl can be found. There are also a number of public beaches and local parks that allow travelers to take advantage of the natural beauty of North Florida. These natural amenities provide recreational and educational opportunities to visitors and residents.

The Scenic and Historic A1A Corridor Story will be reproduced on brochures, audio and CD ROMs and distributed at Visitors Information Centers.