

# Naval Stores

GPS Coordinates:  
84° 9.869' W ~ 30° 5.282' N



Before Europeans settled the southeastern U.S., an estimated 90 million acres of longleaf pine forests blanketed the Coastal Plain from southern Virginia into east Texas and down Florida's peninsula. Longleaf pines were so dominant that people believed the forest would never disappear, but it almost did.

*(Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)*

## St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail

1	Wakulla Beach: site of Wakulla Beach Hotel and West Goose Creek Seheyard	84° 15.703' W	30° 6.316' N	4	Mounds Station: site of Shell Mounds and Naval Stores	84° 9.869' W	30° 5.282' N
2	Plum Orchard: site of Port Leon	84° 8.892' W	30° 9.099' N	5	St. Marks Lighthouse: site of Lighthouse, Ft. Williams, and Spanish Hole/Shipwreck	84° 10.955' W	30° 4.658' N
3	East River: site of CCC and Salt Works	84° 8.710' W	30° 7.797' N	6	Mandalay: site of Aucilla River	83° 58.769' W	30° 6.985' N



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*During spring and summer, workers dipped the gum and ladled it into barrels that were hauled to the turpentine still. The raw material was heated over open fires in copper kettles to produce the spirits. (Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida)*

Pitch, produced by distilling gum from pines, is used to caulk holes in wooden boats. Longleaf pines produce more gum than other southern pines. Collectively, everything that is needed to outfit and keep a wooden ship afloat – pitch, masts, turpentine, rope, sails, and so on – is called Naval Stores. Turpentine

was also used in medicines, cleaning products, paint, varnish, and a multitude of other products.

When the bark is scraped from the trunk, gum begins oozing to protect the wound. The scrape is called a face or cat-face. A metal box or clay pot attached to the bottom of the wound collected the gum. The face was not allowed to heal and periodically the gum was collected

*Clay Herty cup attached to a cat-faced pine  
(Courtesy State Archives of Florida)*



and taken to the still. The stiller, who monitored the temperature of the kettle, and the cooper, who fashioned barrels, were two of the most important jobs.

A stand of pines was called a crop. These magnificent trees were highly productive for only a few years and when production dropped off the timber was logged or abandoned. The camp and still were moved to another virgin forest, and the cycle began again.

North Carolina was the top turpentine producer for many years. As the pines gave out the turpentiners moved south but did not begin heavy exploitation of Florida's pinelands until the late 1800s.

When the first convention of the Turpentine Operators' Association met in September 1902, they were welcomed by the Mayor of Jacksonville and Florida's Governor, W. S. Jennings. Both men cautioned that the current practices were "a reckless destruction of the trees . . . At the present rate your industry will not last fifteen years."

Little heed was paid to those words.

Most of the land that makes up the St. Marks Unit of the refuge was purchased from the Phillips Turpentine Company in the early 1930s. The company retained turpentine and timber rights until the



*Cooper's shed (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)*



*Collecting and distilling pine gum was hot and dirty work. The threat of fire was constant and many stills went up in flames. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)*

mid-1940s. A few cat-faced stumps and clay pots can still be found.

By the mid-1900s, managed rows of pine had replaced natural forests. The advent of steel ships and synthetic chemicals brought an end to commercial turpentine production, once the South's largest and most profitable industry.

The once seemingly endless longleaf forests along with many of the plants and animals that depended on the ecosystem have almost disappeared from the southern landscape. Fewer than 3 million acres of old growth longleaf pine forest have survived. Luckily modern land managers are working hard to restore the ecosystem. The best examples of longleaf pines on the refuge are on the Panacea Unit near the town of Panacea.

The St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., with a matching grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, produced the signs and brochures for the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail. The association is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports educational, environmental, and biological programs of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Visit [www.stmarksrefuge.org](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org) for more information. 9/2010