

Finding Florida: The Guide to the Southernmost State, Revised.

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Finding Florida : The Guide to the Southernmost State, Revised

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Abstract

In the 1930s the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project hired unemployed writers to create driving tours of each state. Florida's Zora Neale Hurston and Stetson Kennedy. They crisscrossed the state separately, but not allow black Zora to travel with white Stetson – carving out the Guide to the Southernmost State. Over seventy years later I did it too. I broke out my shiny, red Florida Gazetteer and tried to recreate the tours, studying towns and researching old route numbers. Often I retraced the Depression-era routes by jumping from city to city, sort of hop-on-the-dots. Roads are living things, and for one to assume that a road where someone else put it down almost 80 years ago, well, sir, don't think that road would stay where you left it. Especially in Florida, roads are young through constant change. The roads, it seem, breathe and pulse with Florida's fervor in much the same way her people are malleable. Florida doesn't have much that won't bend and break. Just as often, though, it yields, bending until it simply cannot stretch and bends back and we are the ones who must yield. I recently climbed into a camper van with my better half, Barry, and my daughter. We spent the month recreating those original tours, guided by a spined, 1950s-era version of the Guide, a now-tattered, Florida Gazetteer (Barry's part) and endless patience. We logged almost 5,000 miles in the van, I hoped to see the state through Stetson and Zora's eyes. I looked for scraps of Florida abandoned along her backroads. I retraced these tours: the ultimate Florida road trip. These tours share a lot, but they differ, too. I followed Stetson and Zora, yes, seeking their original routes every spring and searching for visions of them in every blazing sunset, but I also recreated, one more time, Florida's story – a best thing I have ever done.

Comments

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Liberal Arts, College of Arts and Sciences, University of South Florida.

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