

New Life Found on Old Forgotten Road

By Kelly Reetz,
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Although it was never a heavily traveled road, County Road 2 was always well known by the locals and visitors of Gulf Shores.

It meandered through swamps and old dunes making its way from Gulf Shores to the quaint town of Orange Beach. Large, luscious trees and shrubs bordered the road providing excellent habitat for birds, bobcats, wild hogs and more. Quite often along its path, where there were breaks in the canopy, large gators could be seen warming themselves in the sun. However, as the sun set and the mosquitoes came out, County Road 2 became a dark, eerie place.

Catman Road

Eventually, locals began to talk about a mysterious creature that was said to be part cat and part man. As word got around, the legend took hold in the early 1950s and people began to refer to County Road 2 as “Catman Road.” With the growth of Gulf Shores and the development of Highway 182, the Department of Transportation and Gulf State Park decided to reroute County Road 2 and connect it with Highway 182. In the early 1970s, the Department of Transportation dropped the designation of County Road from the unused part of the old road, and Gulf State Park developed it into the existing campground. Catman Road became a thing of the past.

Once the campground was established, Park Superintendent Hugh Branyon began working on plans to turn the remainder of Catman Road into hiking and bike trails. Money was made available through federal grants and plans were being drawn to make the most of Catman Road and the surrounding trails.

Unfortunately, in 1979, Hurricane Fredric hit the Gulf Coast and destroyed the majority of Gulf State Park. As a result, everyone’s attention and all available funds were used to repair the park. Again, Catman Road was forgotten. The trees continued to grow. The grass crept towards the center of the road. It was slowly being reclaimed by nature.

Rediscovered Potential

Every once in a while, someone wandered along the road and thought: “This would make a great bike trail!” That is exactly what happened in 2002 when

Phillip West, the Environmental Planner for the City of Orange Beach, rediscovered the potential of Catman Road. With permission from Gulf State Park, West immediately began to secure funding from Federal Transportation Enhancement and Recreational Trail funds. The first grant, totaling \$50,000, was used to clean off the old road and pave it. This small two-mile stretch of “trail” was an instant success with locals and visitors.

West applied for additional funds and received \$348,000. These funds were used to develop a trail system branching off Catman Road, a parking lot, bathroom, and a beautiful picnic pavilion on the trail. Two additional grants for \$412,594 and \$219,200 will allow the city to continue to develop the trail, connecting it south to the Beach Highway and northwest through the heart of Gulf State Park’s Maritime Forest along the Gulf Oak Ridge Trail. At a cost of more than \$1 million of federal funds, Gulf State Park and the City of Orange Beach plan to develop this trail into a 9 ½-mile trail system that is yet unmatched in coastal Alabama.


On March 9, 2007, the City of Orange Beach and Gulf State Park hosted the official opening of this beautiful backcountry trail. With approximately 150 people in attendance, the City of Orange Beach held a special called business meeting of the city council members. The city officials unanimously voted to name the trail the “Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail” in honor of Gulf State Park’s long time superintendent Hugh S. Branyon, recognizing over 30 years of service and dedication to Gulf State Park. Branyon was surprised and honored. He took a few minutes to share his dream and



From left, Conservation Commissioner Barnett Lawley, Gulf State Park Superintendent Hugh Branyon and State Parks Director Mark Easterwood unveil the sign for the new Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail.

life’s dedication to preserving the beauty of Gulf State Park and encouraged people to get out and enjoy being a part of nature.

The City of Orange Beach has done an excellent job at providing the public with a trail that offers a safe place to hike and bike through various habitats in Gulf State Park. Along the trail, visitors will get a glimpse of mature live oaks in the maritime forest, wet and dry pine savannas, old dune shrubs, and a pitcher plant bog.

“These diverse communities harbor a wealth of plant and animal species, especially birds that have become the focus of a major tourism industry in our area,” West said. As the trail continues to grow in popularity, Gulf State Park is making plans with the City of Gulf Shores to continue this trail through the west side of the park and connect into several of the existing trails in Gulf Shores. This plan will eventually connect the Island’s two cities and open up many possibilities for bird watching, bicycling, and guided tours. 

For More Information

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