

Portland charms

City is welcoming, weird and wacky | F3

Coming next Sunday

OHIO STATE PARKS

Much is new for summer

Online

THE CAPE FEAR COAST

Dispatch.com/multimedia



Wary of an approaching airboat, an anhinga prepares to fly off.

FLORIDA'S

WILDSIDE

Seminoles introduce visitors to land of many alligators



STEVE STEPHENS | DISPATCH PHOTOS

Alligators and razorback hogs live in (relative) harmony at the Billie Swamp Safari Park on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation.

Big Cypress Seminole Reservation



TOM BAKER | DISPATCH

Though not native to Florida, a bison calls the reservation home.



By Steve Stephens
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

BIG CYPRESS SEMINOLE RESERVATION, Fla. — The old Florida — at least one version of it — still exists, a world away from the hip crowds at Miami's South Beach or the posh condos of Naples.

Billie Swamp Safari is a private nature park of about 2,000 acres in the Seminole Indian tribe's Big Cypress Reservation. The reservation is just north of Alligator Alley, the long, straight stretch of I-75 linking Fort Lauderdale to Naples.

The safari, a Seminole Nation enterprise, is a mix of old-time reptile show, American Indian storytelling and a natural-history lesson unlike anything else, all starring lots and lots of alligators.

Seminoles, an offshoot of the Creek people, began moving from the north into the inhospitable marshes of Florida in the



Tortoises are among animals at the park.

18th century, fleeing the British settlers and other, hostile Indians. (Many of the original Florida tribes had been largely wiped out by the Spanish.)

In the 1830s, most Indians were forcibly removed from Florida.

But under the leadership of Chief Osceola, the Seminoles fought back. Many were

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