

## Florida Museum of Natural History and Harn Museum of Art Gainesville, Florida

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Gainesville, Florida was a wonderful revelation for Diane and I on our spring migration back to Canada this past April. Every year we try to choose a different destination where we can stop for a day to break up the drive and expand our knowledge of areas beyond Florida's borders. Savannah and Charleston have been enjoyable stopovers in past years. Gainesville had not previously occurred to us as a candidate as it is only 3.5 hours up the road from BSM. Why stop when we had just got rolling? A glowing recommendation from both a local friend and also the folks at the Randell Research Center on Pine Island (a division of The Florida Museum of Natural History) encouraged us to visit Gainesville and its museum complex this year. This also gave us an opportunity to stay with and reconnect with some old friends who live there.

What a wonderful surprise we had. Gainesville does not resemble any other Florida city we have visited. It is blanketed with huge towering trees which provide a cooling canopy. Ravines provide lots of variation in elevation. High rises are few and far between. The University of Florida, Santa Fe College and spin off enterprises dominate the local economy providing a palpable college town vibe.

For Florida history buffs, the Florida Museum of Natural History is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the State. From archaeology and fossils to fish species and wildlife, there are exhibits for everyone. What particularly intrigued me was the "South Florida People & Environments" gallery. The story is told with displays of artifacts found throughout the area, dioramas and a carefully reconstructed cross section of a Calusa mound. The famous carved bird's head artifact recovered from a Pineland mound in 1995 is on display. I was surprised to see that it is only 1.5 inches long having previously only seen the large images on the Randell Research Center logo and signs. The pin fragment is carved from a deer bone and is approximately 1,000 years old.



If history is not your passion, there are several other attractions in the museum complex, all located within the precincts of the University of Florida on the west (I-75) side of town. The immersive Butterfly Rainforest and associated research facilities are among the most comprehensive in the world. Next door is the Harn Museum of Art which Diane particularly enjoyed. It has an excellent permanent collection and regular visiting exhibits.

Parking and admission to the museum and art gallery is only \$4.00 but there is an additional charge for the Butterfly Rainforest and special exhibits, such as the current *First Colony: Our Spanish Origins* interactive exhibition which tells the story of the origins of St. Augustine in 1565 and its time under Spanish control.