



ST. PAT'S IN SAVANNAH

We're looking at three different 'green' events on the Georgia coast. Plan o'corrdingly. **Page 2**

Travel

PSST! LOOK! IT'S REESE WITHERSPOON!

Good places to shop, dine and exercise in L.A. – if you want to see celebs. **Page 4**



JEFF MOLLENHAUER

A barred owl stands on high alert at Francis Beidler (pronounced BYE-dler) Forest, southeast of Columbia.



MARK HOYLE

Swamp fling

Nature reigns undisturbed in winter quiet in S.C.'s ancient Beidler Forest swamp.

BY AMBER VEVERKA
Special to the Observer

Water slides between cypress and tupelo trunks at a dreamlike speed. On the coldest mornings, ice – rare to this part of South Carolina – hugs dwarf palmettos. The silence is so complete that the sudden flight of a flock of robins is startling.

In this part of the swamp known as the Francis Beidler Forest, about 70 miles southeast of Columbia, winter is a waiting season: waiting for snakes and turtles to rouse from winter rest, for warblers to wing back from Central America, for downstream alligators to stir.

But it's also an ideal time to visit, to walk the 1.75-mile boardwalk trail snaking through the swamp without the heat of summer.

The swamp is a key tributary to the Edisto River, lacing the South Carolina Lowcountry with black-water sloughs, hardwood forests and stands of towering bald cypress, some of which are 1,000 years old. The National Audubon Society owns 16,000 acres of the swamp, and those acres make up the Francis Beidler (pronounced "BYE-dler") Forest.

The swamp attracts visitors in the spring, many on the trail of its star bird species, the prothonotary warbler. This yellow-orange sprite winters in Central and South America, then returns to the forest around the last week of March or early April. It's drawn by old-growth trees whose roots stand in water. Places that fit that description are shrinking fast, putting the warbler on the Audubon Society's watch list for habitat loss, said Mark Musselman, education director at the swamp.

SEE BEIDLER, PAGE 4

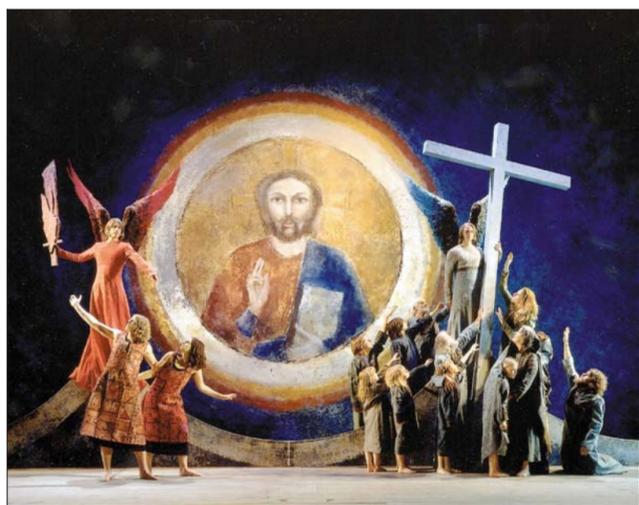
Looking like skinny, grey gnomes, cypress knees poke up from the waters of Four Hole Swamp.



A yellow-crowned night heron looks for lunch in the still swamp waters.

ALL ABOUT BEIDLER
Getting there, events, nearby barbecue. **Page 4**

JEFF MOLLENHAUER



BRIGITTE MARIA MAYER - GEMEINDE OBERAMMAGAU/MCT

"Tragedy of the Passion" has been staged in Oberammergau, Germany, since 1634. This year marks the 41st plague-free production.

2010 is a performance year for the Bavarian town that stages Passion play every 10 years

Oberammergau, Germany, puts on production traced to the 1633 plague. It tells the story of Jesus 'beautifully.'

BY CLAYTON MCCLESKEY
Dallas Morning News

MUNICH — Talk about an expensive medical bill.

In 1633, the Bavarian town of Oberammergau fell ill with the plague, and residents are still paying the costs of being healed.

In the midst of the Thirty Years' War, the Black Death swept across Europe. And as the plague moved into Bavaria, the people of Oberammergau

made a pact with God: Spare us, and we'll put on the Passion play once a decade.

The first performance was in 1634, and this year marks the 41st plague-free production.

"My gosh, it's powerful. It was an enormously moving experience," said the Rev. Wallace Chappell, a retired Methodist minister from Dallas, who has attended the Passion play twice. He called it a "super production" that tells the story of Jesus "classically, skillfully and beautifully."

He also raved about Oberammergau.

"It's a little Bavarian village of farmers and people who give their whole

lives to the play," Chappell said. "The whole town is one big bed-and-breakfast."

Frederik Mayet, head of the Oberammergau Passion Play press office and the actor who plays Jesus, said more than half of the town's 5,300 residents are directly involved in putting on the play.

"This is a theater that is 376 years old, and all the roles are played by locals," Mayet said. To perform, you either have to be a native or have lived in Oberammergau at least 20 years.

The performance hall features an open-air stage set against an alpine backdrop. But don't worry; there's a

SEE PASSION PLAY, PAGE 3

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L.A. celeb hangouts full during Oscars season

These sites offer a good chance to eat, shop, even schmooze with the stars.

By SOLVEJ SCOU
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Look, there's Oscar winner Warren Beatty at the Beverly Hills Hotel, lounging in a restaurant booth. Or Drew Barrymore huffing it up a trail in the Hollywood Hills.

With the 82nd annual Academy Awards on March 7 — next Sunday — Los Angeles becomes even more fertile terrain for celebrity sightings.

Here's a selection of places to eat, shop, sweat (as in exercise!) and schmooze alongside the stars:

Shop

The Grove/Farmers Market, 189 The Grove Drive, Los Angeles: This outdoor retail magnet can be considered an all-in-one stop, where you can catch a celebrity shopping at Nordstrom's, walking the main drag or nosing on gourmet pizza or Mexican food at the historic Farmers Market next door.

Rihanna, Lindsay Lohan, Janet Jackson and Oscar winners Jack Nicholson and Reese Witherspoon have all been spotted there.

Sunset Junction: An east-side stretch of Sunset Boulevard in the trendy area of Silver Lake, Sunset Junction is a favorite hangout strip for celebrity hipsters. Recent Golden Globe winner Chloe Sevigny trolls for dresses at one-room vintage boutique Ragg Mopp. Musician and "Whip It" star Landon Pigg is a regular at coffee and tea shop Intelligentsia. Details: www.sunsetjunction.org.

Eat

Polo Lounge, 9641 Sunset Blvd., Beverly Hills: A-list stars for generations have frequented the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel before, during and after the Oscars — either while staying at the ritzy, pale pink hotel, attending Oscar parties there or just gathering for lunch,

brunch, dinner and even afternoon tea.

Fans of the place include Beatty, Jennifer Aniston, Jack Black and Oscar winner Michael Douglas. Dishes range from classic French onion soup and tuna tartare to chilled Maine lobster salad.

Urth Caffe, 8565 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood: This schmoozy, West Hollywood eatery is the original of a Los Angeles chain that specializes in organic coffee blends with names such as "World Peace" and "Rainforest."

Starlets including Katy Perry, Hayden Panettiere and Jessica Alba are drawn to the cafe's outdoor patio and cozy weekend brunch. Customers and celebrities alike can feast on veggie omelets and healthy egg white and spinach breakfast paninis.

Exercise

Runyon Canyon: By now it's

a cliché to see stars hiking or walking their dogs on trails winding through Hollywood Hills nature park Runyon Canyon, but there they are: Drew Barrymore, Zac Efron, Justin Timberlake, Jessica Biel, Mandy Moore.

Reach the top, and you can see broad views of L.A., plus sweaty stars. Just be sure to sidestep any dog droppings.

Crunch, 8000 W. Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood: Situated next to an art house movie theater, and across the street from mega-celebrity haunt Greenblatt's Deli (Oscar winner Halle Berry gets food delivered from there), this workout haven boasts a juice bar, boxing ring and live DJs.

The long list of celebrities who used to or still sweat it out at the West Hollywood gym include newly engaged Brit comedian Russell Brand, Jeff Goldblum and Eva Longoria Parker.



1991 AP FILE PHOTO

The Polo Lounge has attracted A-list stars for generations in Beverly Hills.



2009 AP FILE PHOTO

You'll find yoga sessions — and see occasional celebs jogging or walking their dogs — in Runyon Park.



JOE KEGLEY

A fawn relaxes — with a watchful eye — in Beidler Forest.

BEIDLER

■ from page 1

The birds are bold and curious, and "will land on the handrail next to you," he said.

But if spring brings warblers and bigger crowds to the forest, winter's nearly-mute mystery is just as appealing. The architecture of the forest, concealed by leaves in spring and summer, is laid bare. Feeding turkeys materialize just yards from the trail. Blue-headed vireos flicker; winter wrens flit among trees. A spattering of white droppings on the boardwalk reveals the perch of barred owls.

And everywhere, the forest is doubled, reflected on the swamp's dark surface.

"There are worlds in the water," said one 5-year-old visitor, peering over the railing on a recent hike.

Cypress knees poke up from the water and look like skinny, grey gnomes. Scientists aren't sure what the knees are for. They may store starches or act as snorkels, delivering oxygen to the tree. Regardless of the original purpose, now they anchor the towering trees, protecting them from high winds. During Hurricane Hugo in 1989, 80 percent of the trees in the dry area of the forest fell, Musselman said, while just 10 percent in the wet area toppled.

The drier upland woods that fringe the swamp ensure the health of the watery areas, Musselman said. Turtles lay eggs in the dry forest, and snakes return there to hibernate. Creeks run through the land to feed the swamp, which doesn't receive water from a major river.

In fact, when it doesn't rain, the water in the swamp drains dry except in deep holes. Otherwise, the shin-deep water is always moving, flowing toward the Edisto. That movement means the water is clear and clean-smelling, and doesn't harbor as many mosquitoes as a still pond might.

The shade of the swamp means visitors aren't likely to encounter alligators on their walk, as the reptiles prefer the warmth of more open, stream-side areas. And in winter, when the temperature gets too cold, alligators don't digest food, Musselman said.

"They sit on the bottom or in shallows and periodically come up for oxygen," he said. "They're as close to dead as you can be."

Landscape, not lumber

The boardwalk winds past some of the most ancient of the tract's trees, giants preserved by a combination of location and love. Chicago lumber baron Francis Beidler Sr. bought the swamp in the late 1800s, but it proved hard to get the giant trees out of their watery hold. Added to that, Beidler journeyed west and visited Yellowstone National Park — and the experience turned him into a conservationist.

"We owe Francis Beidler a



COURTESY OF RON WRIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

The prothonotary warbler has been banded for a scientific study being conducted at Beidler.

Swamp tales

No one is sure which four holes give the Four Holes Swamp its name, but it's been on maps since the Revolutionary War. Within the swamp is the Francis Beidler Forest, named for a Chicago lumber baron whose firm, the Santee River Cypress Lumber Co., also owned what is now the Congaree National Swamp in South Carolina. Inaccessibility and Beidler's conservation ethic preserved some of the most ancient trees, which are more than 1,000 years old.

debt of gratitude," said Norman Brunswig, executive director of Audubon South Carolina. "He was growing up in that era of 'cut out and get out.' He went out West and saw the world in a bigger way, and I think it influenced him profoundly."

Beidler's heirs sold the swamp to the National Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy in the 1960s, and the Audubon Society eventually became the sole owner. The legacy of decisions made more than 100 years ago now tower above the swamp's black water — a treasure of trees.

"It's the largest remaining cypress-tupelo old-growth swamp in the world," Musselman said. "There's nothing like it left."

It's your mucky day!

BASICS

The Audubon Center at the Francis Beidler Forest is at 336 Sanctuary Road, Harleyville, S.C.

The swamp, owned by the National Audubon Society, is open to visitors 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. Admission: \$8; \$7 for Audubon members and anyone 65 and older; \$4 for ages 6-12; 5 and younger, free.

EVENTS

Upcoming events include a "wine and warblers" fundraiser evening at the swamp April 10; guided canoe trips on weekends March-May.

GETTING THERE

From Charlotte, take Interstate 77 South to I-26 East (at Columbia). Take I-26 Exit 177 (Harleyville) and follow the Beidler Forest road signs. From the Harleyville exit, you'll go right on S.C. 453 to Harleyville, then left on U.S. 178; drive about six miles; turn left onto Francis Beidler Forest Road. After four miles, where the road makes a 90-degree turn to the left, veer instead to the right, onto Mims Road. The forest is a mile down, on the right. The drive is about three hours (173 miles), one way.

RESOURCES

843-462-2150; www.beidlerforest.com

HUNGRY?

If visiting on a Friday or Saturday, eat at Dukes Bar BQ in nearby Ridgeville, S.C., about 13 miles southeast of the forest. It has S.C.-style barbecue, Southern sides and "the best fried chicken in the world," according to one Beidler staffer. Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday-Saturday only. Details: 843-871-6507.

We Travel with The Charlotte Observer



COURTESY OF THE GREENS

Greetings from Egypt

Here are Mary and Frank Green of Albemarle, during a trip to Egypt in September. You see them here in front of the famous temple of Abu Simbel, 180 miles southwest of Aswan. The temple was built by Ramses II circa 1250 B.C.

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