

ROUTE 5

The Tamiami Trail

MIAMI TO CHOKOLOSKEE

Route 5

From Miami, take U.S. Highway 41, the Tamiami Trail, west to the Shark Valley Loop Road, turn south (left) and enter Everglades National Park. Return to U.S. Highway 41 and continue west. Beyond Ochopee, turn north (right) on the unpaved Birdon Road and continue along Birdon to Wagon Wheel. There turn east (right) and go to Turner River Road. From there, turn south (right) and return to U.S. Highway 41. Turn west (right) and continue past Ochopee to State Route 29 and turn south (left) to Everglades City. Continue south on Route 29 to Chokoloskee.

It may look like just another pretty two-lane Florida byway, but it took hundreds of laborers, three million sticks of dynamite, and thirteen years of backbreaking effort to build the first road to span the Everglades. Begun in 1915, the effort to link Tampa and Miami with a road through the then-impenetrable wetlands of Florida's interior required developing unique construction techniques specifically for the Everglades. The challenge was complex; after all, how do you build a road across a ten-inch-deep sheet of water flowing over a solid layer of limestone?

First crews with machetes cleared the underbrush; then they laid a primitive set of rails so that a massive drilling machine could move forward. The drilling machine bored large holes in the limestone, and dynamite was packed in the holes. When it was detonated, custom-built steam shovels scooped the broken bedrock up, creating a ditch, and then the rock was placed next to the ditch to form the roadbed.

In its early days, driving the Tamiami Trail was a novelty in itself, and it wasn't long before colorful and tacky tourist traps sprang up all along its length. Alligator wrestling, airboat rides, and reptile zoos were all popular. The zoos and the wrestlers are mostly gone today, but the airboat rides continue to be popular and are a great way to experience the 'glades close up.



It took thirteen years of effort to construct the Tamiami Trail. The road was a triumph of technology, but its existence blocked the slow-moving flow of water through the Everglades, threatening the fragile environment. FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES



Located about fifteen miles west of Krome Avenue, the Everglades Safari Park offers traditional airboat rides. Driven by airplane propellers (and very loud engines), airboats glide almost frictionless along the water's surface, reaching speeds of up to forty-five miles an hour. A typical ride lasts about an hour, during which you will almost certainly see alligators and numerous birds in their natural habitat. After the ride, the park presents an excellent twenty-minute educational program on alligators and other crocodilians, featuring a trainer working with live (and large) gators. After the show, you are welcome to stroll around the wetland enclosures where one or more of almost every type of crocodilian on Earth dwells. If you are lucky, Monster, an aptly named sixteen-foot alligator, will make an appearance, lumbering out of the airboat canal to sunbathe nonchalantly on the bank a few yards from a park walkway.

A few miles farther along the Tamiami Trail, a well-marked turn leads into the Everglades National Park Shark Valley Visitor's Center. This center is the starting point for a fourteen-mile round-trip tram tour of the Everglades. Narrated by a knowledgeable guide, the tram tour travels at a stately seven miles per hour down a narrow

Traveling at exhilarating speeds, airboats are a great way for first-time visitors to experience the bird- and wildlife-filled world of the Everglades.