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Arch Creek: Prehistory to Public Park

By Emily Perry Dieterich



An Arch Creek outing, circa 1897.

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Meet me at the bridge. The natural limestone bridge. Meet me at the bridge at old Arch Creek... the little natural bridge. The natural bridge where all good friends meet.

*from the song "Meet Me At The Bridge",
by Jessie Freeling*

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Arch Creek -- perhaps no other South Florida landmark evokes more colorful mental images. By definition, Arch Creek is a body of water which historically flowed from the Everglades eastward into Biscayne Bay. Frances Densmore described it as "an avenue to the depths of the Everglades . . . where rare beauty of vegetation may be seen . . ."¹ For Tequesta Indians, Arch Creek was the shady oak tree hammock which provided food and shelter. For early pioneers, Arch Creek was a favorite picnic spot. For passengers on the stage coach route, Arch Creek was the long awaited rest stop. It was also the last stop for boats on sightseeing tours from Miami. Throughout the years, enterprising individuals tried to develop the area, prosper from its uniqueness, incorporate it, re-route it and even destroy it. Artists have painted pictures of it and written songs about it. The concentration and range of activities associated with the Arch Creek area is truly amazing. Even more amazing is the fact that portions of this beautiful place have survived relatively intact.

No description of the Arch Creek area would be complete without reference to the natural limestone bridge which spanned the creek and gave it its name. In a discussion of south Florida geology, archaeologist Irving Eyster noted,

Of all the openings in the limestone ridge, Arch Creek was the most unique. Here the water cuts under the oolite limestone, rather than through it. This left an arch forming a natural bridge . . .²

A variety of interesting theories have been proposed regarding the formation of this geological curiosity. In historian Thelma Peters' *Biscayne County*, she writes the following account:

When the arch was created is not known. One theory of how it was created is this: Arch Creek was an underground stream . . . until one day it lost its cover through erosion or by an earthquake . . . except for forty feet where the solid rock refused to fall. (Lest the earthquake theory be lightly dismissed, there has long been a myth that New River of Fort Lauderdale was the result of an earthquake).³

Bert Mowers, an avocational archaeologist, described the natural bridge as "originating from a partially collapsed cavern roof."⁴ Archaeologist Dan Laxson suggests still another theory:

. . . Arch Creek runs through the only natural bridge forma-