



Karys Mawyer, Beth Gray, Linda and Steve Christian, and Katie Betz strike up a friendly conversation before heading off for a ride on the trails of the Carlton Reserve.

Russ Johnson, a volunteer with the Friends of the Carlton Reserve, and a ranger on duty at the park's Turpentine Cabin — so named for the industry whose trees provided the logs for the cabin — helped to build a 12-horse stable, bunkhouse, and cookhouse about seven miles into the park. The structures replicate the camp used by cowboys moving their cattle in the 1920s and '30s. There is also a windmill on the site that helps to provide water.

"We built the camp the old-fashioned way, by hand," Johnson said. "We have groups who come in and have events there."

Aside from horses, wildlife can also be seen on the various park trails. "About half the time you come into the park, you will see a deer as you drive in or out," Johnson said.

Deer are the most prevalent of all animals that inhabit the park, but they are not the only wildlife seen by visitors or by the motion-sensor cameras installed on the trails. "We have a black bear that I've seen," Johnson said, "and we're seeing more coyotes and turkeys, but less bobcats. We trap the wild hogs because there

are too many of them. Of course, there's an alligator in every body of water in the park."

Birding is also a popular activity, and the park is part of the Great Florida Birding Trail and home to 150 species of birds.

In addition to the numerous land trails at the park, kayakers can put in just east of the Border

Road Bridge and paddle downstream to Snook Haven or upstream to a park near Laurel Road.

To take advantage of all the Carlton Reserve has to offer, visit the Friends of the Carlton Reserve website at CarltonReserve.org or the park at 1800 Mabry Carlton Parkway, in Venice.