

# Carrabelle, Pearl of the Forgotten Coast

by Kathleen Walls

A tiny lighthouse stands guard over a stretch of Florida's most pristine beach. Crooked River Lighthouse is a small unproposing structure as lighthouse go. Built in 1892, the light is supported by steel beams rather than the more common round masonry tower. Once it was flanked by the keeper's house and the assistant keeper's house. Plans are afoot to replace the keeper's house and turn it into a museum of seafaring history. In fact lots of renovation is going



on in Carrabelle. Long considered part of Florida's Forgotten Coast, things are changing. This stretch of pristine beach hugging the inner curve of the panhandle is being discovered. It's still one of the few places where you find uncrowned Florida beaches but visitors are beginning to realize what a treasure it is.

A great place to stay is the [Old Carrabelle Hotel](#). Just reopened, it's all

spruced up after a fire devastated the historic structure. The new owners, Kathy and Skip Frink have worked hard to preserve the 1880 era home's original Key West style.

Its new library is a study in determination. For years, local readers longed for a library that didn't have a leaky roof. They craved a decent place to sit and read. But money was not available from any public source. One friend of the library, Jackie Gay, decided it was time to do something about the sad state of affairs. She began perfection her favorite gumbo recipe. After trying countless versions on her husband, finally she was satisfied. She entered it in the 1998 Newman's Own and Good Housekeeping Recipe Contest. Jackie was ecstatic when her Franklin County Florida's Own Frankly Fantastic Gumbo won. Paul Newman presented her with a check for \$50,000 for the Friends of the Franklin County Library and the building fund began.

They raised the rest of the money through a matched \$250,000 grant. by holding everything from a medieval fair to car washes. On Jan 12, 2002, they dedicated the new library.

Carrabelle has a lot going for it. Pristine beaches, a temperate location and a low crime rate should tempt many of the snowbirds that flock to Florida to escape winter snow up north. Historical attractions like the World's Smallest Police



Station, which has been featured on "Real People". "Ripley's Believe It or Not" and the "Today Show", and Camp Gordon Johnson Museum which relives the little known event of the amphibious assault forces in World War II.

A unique attraction is the Florida State University Marine Lab. It is located there because the purity of the environment creates a hospitable place for research but be sure to visit if there is an open house when you are in the area.

Carrabelle's waterfront combines the authenticity of a working waterfront with the fun of recreational fishing and boating. The town is quite proud of its new riverwalk. Captains like Ron Treutel and Bob McDarris will take you fishing, or cruising. Lest you think all the captains are male, think again. [Captain Robyn Morgan](#) will be happy to prove different. She or any of the other charter boat captains will be happy to take you to Dog Island also. There is just one lodging there, The Pelican Inn and no roads, bridges or traffic there.

For lazier water fun, try wading or just tanning at Carrabelle Beach. When all the water sports bring on a raging appetite, you have plenty of choices. Carrabelle Junction is great for breakfast or light lunch. Harry's Restaurant will also fill the bill. For a seafood dinner cracker style, it's got to be the Tiki Hut on Timber Island. The catch is so fresh it doesn't know it's not still in the water when it reaches your plate. The Tiki Hut owners, Marlene and John Denig, acquire their seafood directly from their next door neighbor, Pirate Landing Seafood. The Saunders family, who operate Pirate Landing Seafood have their own shrimping fleet. This relationship enables the Tiki Hut to offer you a unique treat, a small lobster called a bulldozer. Fried or steamed this is something you won't soon forget.



For the night owls, there are two lounges. Wicked Willie's goes into the wee hours. It has a lively upbeat atmosphere. Harry's Bar is another Key West style

nightspot. Be sure to try the Watermelon Juice. If you are there on a Friday and spot a group of ladies clustered in one area and you happen to be male, don't join them. This is the weekly meeting of the N. P. A. (no penises allowed) Club. Skip from Old Carrabelle Hotel made the mistake of trying to sit with them. They ran him away quick. He recalls, "And I though those women were my friends!"

It's all in good fun however. The club raises money for worthwhile causes and gives local women an excuse for a night out.

More adventurous souls may want to go hiking or canoeing in Tate's Hell. Beware! The pristine nature preserve between Carrabelle and the Apalachicola National Forest is 144,508 acres of untamed woodland and swamp inhabited by wildlife including bears, deer, wild turkey, snakes, unlimited bird life, and lots of insects. You might be fortunate enough to spot a bald eagle or red cockaded woodpecker. Be cautious there or you could end up like Cebe Tate, the man for whom the place is named. The legend recounts that a farmer named Cebe Tate journeyed into the great swamp in the late 1800s. He was searching for a panther that was killing his cattle. He followed his dogs into the heart of the wetlands. Gradually, the panther killed all the dogs. Tate lost his shotgun and was bitten by a water moccasin. He wondered for days delirious and feverish. When he finally emerged near Carrabelle. The only explanation of his whereabouts was "My name's Tate and I've just been through Hell."

Nothing about Carrabelle is reminiscent of Hell however. In fact you may think you accidentally wandered into Heaven when you arrive there.