

Everglades



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The Everglades is the largest subtropical wilderness left in the continental United States. It was established as a national park in 1934 when the National Park Service set aside approximately 2,354 of the estimated 5,000 square miles comprising the original Everglades. Today, the national park is a World Heritage Site, an International Biosphere Reserve, and a Wetland of International Importance. The park even includes a Nike Missile Site that is on the U.S. Registry of Historic Places. More than one million people visit the park annually, but vast changes have drastically altered the natural landscape they see. Few visitors realize that, for more than a century, the state and federal governments have constructed drainage canals and ditches to redirect some 1.7 billion gallons of water per day toward the Atlantic and Gulf coasts in order to support agricultural pursuits and large-scale urban and suburban development. The ensuing conflicts over water and the "best" use of land-between preservation, restoration, and desecration--have led to a curious blending of natural and human landscapes that are both around and inside Everglades National Park. After reading "The Orchid Thief" by Susan Orlean, and with a Guggenheim Fellowship in hand, Marion Belanger headed south to the Everglades to discover for herself what the writer had seen and so vividly captured in prose. Belanger went to find wilderness, because that is what a traditional national park is supposed to promote. Instead she found a

puzzling dichotomy: visually, it is often hard to know whether one is outside or within this "natural" sanctuary, thus blurring the lines between what is natural and what is not. Although Belanger remains the curious observer, it becomes apparent that, in hindsight, the Everglades is an environment not meant for human touch. In her photographic sequence we see the pull between commerce and human enterprise and the need for boundless wilderness. Ultimately nature and culture are inseparably intertwined, as seen in the Everglades both from outside and within.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Everglades 下载链接1](#)

标签

评论

[Everglades 下载链接1](#)

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[Everglades 下载链接1](#)