

Rocky Creek



View of the creek and dam (USF)



View of the creek in October 2003 (USF)



View of the bridge over Rocky Creek (USF)

The following narrative comes from an interview with Rocky Creek resident Bill Allen in his home on October 8, 2003. In it Bill shares with us his family's experiences with the creek and how it has changed over the years.

Personal History

Bill Allen moved to Rocky Creek on August the first in 1963. He grew up in a local fishing village and was looking for a home near the water that could offer fishing, seclusion, and beautiful natural surroundings. He found what he was looking for on Rocky Creek. Bill helped raise two children while living on the creek and he believes the creek helped keep his kids out of trouble:

"Ours and all the neighborhood's [kids]. If we were here they could fish, but they had to let us know they were here. And when it became warm for swimming they could swim, but they had to mind. And I told them, 'the first one that's in the creek that hollers "help" that doesn't need it, they're gonna need it when I get through with them.' About the second year we moved here the Christmas present for the whole family was a small fiberglass boat. And we had a little five horsepower motor and my daughter and my son both learned how to use it, but they had to take turns. Cathy could go up the creek, but Billy could go to the bay because he was older. And a gator hole used to be up there somewhere because the girls used to have picnics and they never saw any gators, but they could see where they had walked around and dragged their tails. The creek was a big help to us because there was always something for them to do. They stayed out of trouble."

The creek has also been a gathering place for social events with the Allen family. They have shared card games in the yard, as well as numerous picnics. The Allens also carried on a local tradition in their section of the creek. Bill remembers:

"Before we got here, the third house down from here, the Fountains, used to have baptisms in the creek from Rocky Creek Baptist Church. When we moved in, and the Fountains had moved away, we would have baptisms right here in our backyard. That's when the water was pretty."



The shoreline near Rocky Creek (USF)



View of the creek taken from the bridge (USF)



View of creek and vegetation from Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)

Bill has also enjoyed the excitement of local wildlife including regular visits from manatees, birds, armadillos, and gators:

“Gators would come by here once in a while. That dock that’s out there... The center post, the salt-water worms ate the center post down and it sagged in the middle. And for a while, an 8 or 9-foot gator used to come up on our old dock and sun, but we’ve never had one in the yard.”

History/Information

Rocky Creek is located in the Rocky/Brushy Creek watershed. Its headwaters are at Lake Carlton, and it has a length of 89,373 feet, and the mouth of Rocky Creek is in Old Tampa Bay. Bill believes the name of Rocky Creek came from the number of rocks and rocky formations found throughout the creek.

According to Bill, the creek has undergone many changes from the addition of bridges to flood control measures:

“You have to be careful about the position of the tide because they’ve got four bridges. The first bridge is an island out here. Between me and the next house there’s land that goes back there and there’s a bridge back there. The original creek came right down here, made a sharp turn, and went a couple of hundred yards back, and then came back right down there, [to the] neck right out there. [As for] flood control, I think it was Hurricane Donna, that’s when they started straightening it out, you know. Let’s see, they straightened out a bunch of the creek down below Hillsborough Avenue, they straightened that out, in fact there’s only two curves in it now, but it used to be a winding stream.”

According to Bill, another addition that has affected the health of the creek has been a canal that goes up “across Webb Road and Hanley Road.” Bill states, “They messed up the creek when they put in that canal... at one time we could go all the way to Waters Avenue without trouble.”

Fishing was a big activity for the Allen family. Bill explains:

“We caught all variety of fish here. The largest snook I ever caught was standing in my yard, 14 pounds and 35 inches long. But we have caught black bass, blue gills, sea trout, redfish, and at one time I caught snappers out here... And at one time we had small tarpon swimming up the creek. My son used to use a fly rod to catch tarpon with. But I haven’t seen any of them for a long time. Of course they faded out all over the state for a while.”

Rocky Creek is also home to a variety of wildlife, especially a variety of birds. Bill explains:



View of creek in 2003 (USF)

“Down at the mouth of the creek you can see all kinds of wading birds down there. The roseate spoonbill, wading birds are all over the place out there... In the dead tree back there, there’s an osprey that makes his roost. He has to go away to catch fish, though... There used to be eagles down the creek. There were three of them nesting down there... We used to have lots of rabbits, and we used to have quail. And people used to come and dump their spare cats in the yard. There’s armadillos; I know that’s what’s digging in the yard.”



One of the fishing boats on Rocky Creek (USF)

According to Bill, Rocky Creek has seen a steady decline in quality as more people have moved into the area, and more of the natural creek has been altered. Bill believes this has also affected the fish:

“It’s been awful dry the last two years. The other thing, you might say is the commercial fishermen, cast netters. For a long time they stayed up here 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But this past, all last winter, they don’t come up here anymore. What they were after is mullet. But there’s been no fish hardly at all since last summer... we used to get fresh oysters out of the creek when we first moved in, but then it became so polluted; all of Tampa Bay is. The oysters are still there, but you don’t want to eat them.”



View of the creek from the bridge (USF)

Development

The area surrounding Rocky Creek has seen an increase in development in the last three or four years, according to Bill. However, the area has continued to change ever since the Allens moved to the area. Bill remembers:

“This subdivision was here before Town N Country was here. My first job when I came to Tampa... was laying storm sewer and sanitation sewer right down Town N Country Boulevard south of Hillsborough. I mean there were no houses. So, it was ’59 when that started. Our closest grocery store was Waters and Armenia. Our closest bank was Financial State Bank at Dale Mabry and Henderson Blvd. But it’s been a continuous growth ever since then. And this street at one time went straight to Hillsborough Ave.”

As the number of people living in the area has grown, so has the amount of pollution in the creek. Bill believes that it is a combination of new canals and yard chemicals that has attributed to the declining health of the creek:



View of Rocky Creek and the Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)

“They dug a lot of canals and they’re getting all the junk from those in there [the creek]... A few years back I thought it would be nice to take water out of the creek to water my lawn. Would you believe that I had one of these oscillating sprinklers, I had two of them, and it knocked all of the leaves off of the Hickory tree out there. We feel that it was probably the weed killer stuff that they put on the lawns up there that drains in here, I think that’s what it was.”

Also a result of development in the area, a dam was built on the creek. Bill believes it was put in ten or more years ago, and that it has severely limited the amount of water running in the creek. Bill says about the water, “the tide still rises and falls, but it don’t run like it used to.” The Allens think that before the creek was altered, the flushing action helped keep it clean. Now, it just doesn’t have the ability to flush itself through.

Despite the changes that have been brought to the creek, the Allens still love its natural beauty and the unique lifestyle that comes only with living on the water:

“It’s nice to look out and see kayaks. People, you might say, paddle the creek often, and people do a lot of fishing up and down the creek, but they don’t catch much up here anymore.”

The Future

Rocky Creek has undergone many changes as the area around it has continued to develop. Undoubtedly it will continue to transform with the times. Bill comments, “There’s such tremendous growth in the area- there used to be nothing out here.” When asked what they would change about the creek if they could, Bill replied with a desire to see the creek returned to its original state. However, they realize that this dream is impossible:

“The natural creek that was here first has been messed up because they dredged south of Hillsborough and they dug the canal up here and as far as I’m concerned they messed the whole thing up. When it winds it kind of has time to purify itself, and this way- straight through- you get junk from both directions.”

The Allens continue to admire and enjoy the beauty they get to view everyday, but remain nostalgic for the creek as it used to be.

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