

## Crandon Park

Crandon Park is one of seven heritage parks acquired by Miami-Dade County. The park sits on a barrier island, with two miles of beach to the east, and Biscayne Bay to the west. Possessing a rich coastal environment the Park is home to a fossilized mangrove reef (unique in the world), a barrier island shoreline, sea grasses, protected wetlands, coastal hammocks and bird estuaries. Amenities include Crandon Gardens, a Nature Center, Marina, Golf Course, Tennis Center, picnic areas, bicycle/running paths, a pristine sandy beach, swimming, birdwatching and tot lot, to include a historic carousel all of which offer unparalleled recreational opportunities. Crandon Beach and the Bear Cut preserve are listed birding sites in the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Viewing Trail guide <sup>[1]</sup>. Two and one half miles of road, located in the Park, were designated as a State historic highway by the State of Florida <sup>[2]</sup>.

The north side of Key Biscayne, what's known today, as Crandon Park, was purchased by Commodore William John Matheson, a wealthy aniline dye businessman, in 1908. He purchased 1,700 acres of land and created a coconut plantation at least twice as large as any other in the United States employing 42 workers by 1915. Thirty-six thousand coconut trees and a variety of other tropical fruits were planted and in 1921 he introduced the Malay Dwarf coconut to the United States. This is now the most common variety of coconut found in Florida. By 1933, the world price for coconut products had dropped to about two-fifths of its 1925 level, and the plantation stopped shipping. <sup>[3]</sup>

Crandon Park was a donation, made to the County, in 1940 by heirs of Commodore William John Matheson, with the condition that the land be used as a public park. In exchange for the land donation Chairman Charles H. Crandon of the County Commission, for whom the park is named, offered to have the County build a causeway that would connect Key Biscayne to the mainland. On Sunday, November 9, 1947, the Rickenbacker Causeway and Crandon Park were officially opened to the public. <sup>[6]</sup>

Zoo Miami had its origins in Crandon Park's botanical garden or Crandon Gardens. In 1948 the County purchased three monkeys, one goat and two black bears for \$270 from a small traveling show which caravan had broken down and was stranded near Miami. With that the County started Crandon Zoo on 53½ acres in the south end of Crandon Park and named it "Zoological Gardens". There was extensive use of open air animal exhibits and lush vegetation developing the theme for the Nation's southernmost Zoo. A Children's Zoo was eventually added. <sup>3</sup>The popularity of the zoo and aid from the South Florida Zoological Society resulted in many additions to zoo exhibits and improvements to others. By 1965 the Crandon Zoo had grown into one of the major zoos in the country, housing over 1,000 animals of approximately 380 species.

In September, 1967, Crandon Zoo received worldwide recognition for the first successful birth and rearing of an Aardvark. This Aardvark matured and soon became a mother. There were a total of 17 Aardvarks born at the Crandon Park Zoo. A pair of Indian elephants also matured at the Zoo and produced two offspring - still a rare accomplishment in zoological collections.

In 1973, two southern bald eagles were hatched - the first successful captive hatching in over 50 years. <sup>[5]</sup>

The first known indigenous inhabitants of Key Biscayne were the Tequesta Indians. Between 1,500 and 2,000 years ago Key Biscayne appeared to have once been inhabited by a large community of the Tequesta. Evidence of their existence was discovered in 1992 in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, where three distinct areas of archaeological materials were uncovered in Crandon Park. A very significant site was uncovered adjacent to the once Crandon Zoo and south of the Crandon Tennis Center entrance. Test excavations have uncovered well preserved post hole molds that may indicate the exact size and format of Tequesta thatch houses - information not previously found anywhere in southeast Florida. Hundreds of prehistoric artifacts have already been uncovered from this site. A relic dune that extends from the Bear Cut preserve southwestward towards Crandon Boulevard for about 1000 feet is one of the longest Tequesta sites in Miami-Dade County. A bicycle path located on the crest of the dune follows much of the site. These sites have been included in the designated Key Biscayne Archaeological Zone. <sup>[4]</sup>

Juan Ponce de León charted Key Biscayne on his first mission to the New World in 1513. He christened the island Santa Marta and claimed it for the Spanish Crown. He reported that he found a fresh water spring on the island and named it Biscayne Bay or Chequescha, a variant form of Tequesta. Fifty-four years later Pedro Menéndez de Avilés a Spanish admiral and explorer from the region of Asturias, Spain, and first governor of colonial Florida, took refuge in Biscayne Bay from a storm. Relations were established with the Tequesta and a mission was established on the mainland although it was abandoned three years later in 1570. <sup>[3]</sup>

Today, Crandon Park is frequented by locals and tourists from around the world, who enjoy the many recreational opportunities afforded.

#### References

- [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Great Florida Birding Trail](#) <sup>[1]</sup>
- [Listing of Designated Roads in Florida, Page 41, Updated August 5, 2014 \(FDOT\); Chapter 88-418, Laws of Florida \(1988\). See Appendix M-2](#) <sup>[2]</sup>
- [Wikipedia - The History of Key Biscayne](#) <sup>[3]</sup>
- [Crandon Master Plan; History by Howard Gregg, Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept.](#) <sup>[4]</sup>
- [History of the Dade County Park System The First Forty Years by A.D. Barnes, Miami-Dade Parks Recreation](#) <sup>[5]</sup>
- [The Miami Daily News, Sunday, Nov 9, 1947 - Google News Archive](#) <sup>[6]</sup>



PICNIC TABLES AT CRANDON PARK - DADE COUNTY PARKS, FLORIDA

Crandon Park Cabanas and Picnic Area  
Courtesy Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept.  
Crandon Master Plan



Crandon Zoo Barn Petting Zoo  
Courtesy Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept.  
Crandon Master Plan



Miniature Train at Crandon Zoo  
Courtesy Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept.



Crandon Park Zoo  
Courtesy Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept. Master Plan



Crandon Park Coconut Plantation 1940's  
Courtesy Miami-Dade Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Dept.



Crandon Beach Sunrise  
Courtesy PROS Staff

