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Bruce D. Epperson. *Roads through the Everglades: The Building of the Ingraham Highway, the Tamiami Trail and Conners Highway, 1914-1931.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2016. 276 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4766-6479-8.

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One hundred years ago, Florida was a very different place than it is today. According to 1910 census figures, it had a total population of 752,619, ranking it 33rd out of the then 46 states in the Union, just behind Connecticut and Colorado and just ahead of Maine and Oregon. Dade County (home of present-day Miami) had only 11,000 inhabitants, Palm Beach County only 5,500, and Broward County (the location of todayâs Fort Lauderdale) had not yet even been formed. Of the top 100 American cities ranked by population size at that time, not one was located in the Sunshine State. The interior of the state, especially south of Lake Okeechobee, was virtually unmapped and certainly untamed as the Everglades remained Americaâs last great frontier. The building of transportation infrastructure across South Florida was crucial in the development of the state throughout the twentieth century. While Henry Flaglerâs railroad snaked down the east coast of Florida, reaching the newly incorporated city of Miami in 1896, and Henry Plantâs rail line extended to Tampa by the late 1880s, interior South Florida remained almost completely untouched by development until a series of roads were constructed in the first third of the twentieth century. Bruce Epperson tells the story of those amazing construction projects in his breezy but detailed *Roads Through the Everglades*, which chronicles the building of three major road projects through the Everglades ecosystems–the Ingraham Highway, the Conners Highway, and the iconic Tamiami Trail. Epperson posits that âby 1915 the landowners examined in these three stories elected to undertake large-scale ventures to open up large tracts of their holdingsâ (p. 8).

Author Bruce Epperson is a transportation planner and attorney who has written extensively on the design, development, and funding of highways and the automobiles and bicycles that use them. In this book, he tackles the story of how these three roads were built and concludes that the construction took place for one reason–the need to access land for development and sale. In early twentieth-century Florida, land was readily available but difficult to get to because of the lack of transportation infrastructure and the fact that so much of it was wetlands. You cannot discuss the building of Everglades roads without discussing Everglades drainage as well. Roadbuilders seemed anxious to not only establish roads but also to drain wetlands and then sell them to Northerners excited about the possibility of cheap available land. Though the roads were eventually completed (although very slowly and at a much higher coast than was originally estimated), Epperson posits that âall three of these roads failed as land speculation toolsâ (p. 10). They did succeed, however, in helping to radically reshape the Everglades environment and provide the basis for future South Florida development later in the twentieth century. While today we view the Ingraham Highway, the Conners Highway, and the Tamiami Trail as quaint anachronisms and throwbacks to an earlier, simpler time, in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, the building of these roads was a massive engineering and technological undertaking.

In March of 1892, James Ingraham, then president of Henry Plantâs South Florida Railway, led an expedition across the Everglades from Fort Myers to Miami. This seminal trek was the first recorded trip across the

vastness of the âGlades, taking almost three arduous weeks to complete. Plant organized the voyage with two goals in mind: to determine an appropriate route for a cross-Everglades transportation network, and more importantly, to establish the efficacy of draining the region and turning it into profitable and productive land for sale. These two objectives would provide the rationale not only for the Ingraham expedition but also for the building of the three roads Epperson discusses. Within six months of the expeditionâs completion, Ingraham had been lured to work for Plantâs leading competitor, Henry Flagler. Ingraham would work for Flaglerâs companies until his death in 1924, rising to become president of the Model Land Company, the most important company in the Flagler galaxy. The Ingraham Highway, built from 1914 to 1922, was built under the auspices of the Model Land Company and was financed first by private funding and then by a series of bonds issued by Dade and Monroe Counties. It stretched forty-five miles from Homestead in south Dade County to Flamingo on the tip of Cape Sable and was designed to open up this part of Florida to development. The construction method used, dredges and barges cutting a parallel canal to remove the water, provided the methodology for the building of all three of the Everglades roads discussed by Epperson. Epperson asks two legitimate questions about the construction of the road. First, âwhy would anyone take so much trouble to build a road simply go to such a far-off Godforsaken place as Cape Sable?â (p. 28). A November 1917 article in the *St. Augustine Evening Record* explains the rationale for the road building: âThe highway to Cape Sable has not yet been completed so the party was therefore forced to go by rail to one of the lower Florida keys crossing Florida Bay to Cape Sable. Mr. Ingraham reports that thousands of settlers are pouring into the East Coast county and that all the towns are enjoying wonderful prosperity, and remarkable growth and development.â[1] Epperson then asks, âwhy did it [the Ingraham highway] follow just about the worst possible rout to get there?â (p. 28). He answers that question by explaining that the road was needed to connect the newly developed Royal Palm State Park to existing development in Dade County. By the 1940s, the road had become part of the newly established Everglades National Park and the reason for building it, to open Everglades lands for development and sale, had become moot. Today, âsome parts of the Ingraham Highway do continue to exist in largely original condition ... [and are] used as a recreational hiking and biking trailâ (p. 79).

The bulk of the book discusses the building of the historic Tamiami Trail. The road extended 284 miles from Tampa to Miami, with 154 miles stretching across the Everglades themselves It took fifteen years to complete (1915 to 1930) and became known as one of the engineering marvels of its time. Financed by large bond issues by county and state governments, as well as by loans and funding from private entrepreneurs like Barron Collier, the Trail reshaped South Florida and drastically changed the hydrology of the Everglades. Epperson spends much time on the both the actual construction of the trail and the politics of road development associated with it. For him, a key factor in the building of the Trail was the passage of the 1916 State Highway Act, which shifted control of road construction to the state road department. Epperson concludes that âFlorida did not approach roadway development from its usual traditional, conservative Deep South perspective. Instead, it far more resembled the progressive state governments of the Midwest and Westâ (p. 130). While the state government provided significant funding and support for the Trail, Epperson sees archtypical Florida land tyoons Barron Collier and James Jaudon as crucial to the completion of the project. Jaudon, known as âFather of the Tamiami Trail,â exemplified the relationship between developers and government in building the road. Jaudin simultaneously served as Dade County tax assessor and president of the Chevelier Company, a South Florida land development corporation. Collier, a northern advertising tycoon, invested heavily in southwest Florida real estate and was instrumental in providing funding for the Trail and succeeded in shifting its course to lands that he owned. In 1923, Florida created Collier County in his honor. That same year, the Tamiami Trailblazers, an intrepid group of twenty-three men in ten cars, crossed the state from Fort Myers to Miami in a trek that resembled the Ingraham expedition thirty-one years before. The trip, heavily financed by Collier, ârevitalize[d] interest in the Tamiami Trail at a time when many thought the project was dead and most had forgotten about itâ (p. 153). With the publicity of the trip, âthe trail became the most discussed highway in Americaâ and construction continued at a renewed pace.[2] Though not completely finished, the Trail officially opened in April 1928, the last major event of the 1920s Florida land boom. Within less than two years, the Palm Beach-Lake Okeechobee hurricane and the stock market crash marked the end (at least until after World War II) of the dream of developers like Jaudon and Collier.

The final part of the book deals with the development of the Conners Highway, a privately financed and built

fifty-two-mile road stretching from just west of West Palm Beach to Canal Point on Lake Okeechobee and then north along the lakeshore to the town of Okeechobee. William (Fingy) Conners, the larger-than-life Buffalo waterfront boss straight out of Dennis Lehaneâs *Live By Night* (2012), provided the idea and the money for the construction. In 1917, Conners moved to Florida from Buffalo and immediately understood the relationship between highway infrastructure and land development. By 1923, the Florida legislature passed a bill granting Conners a franchise to build a toll road joining his commercial farmland on Lake Okeechobee with Palm Beach and railroad connections north. Within a year, Conners and his brilliant engineer, R. Y. Patterson, had finished the hard surface highway, thus completing the first paved road connection between the Florida coasts south of Orlando. The road proved a commercial success for Conners, providing him with close to $2,000 per day in toll revenue during the busy winter season. But it never succeeded in opening up the areas on the shoreline of the lake to large-scale development. Conners hoped his highway would make the town of Okeechobee a boom town, as he tied his road to his real estate acquisitions in the town. He died in 1929, never seeing a significant return on his Okeechobee hopes. As Epperson drily points out, âFar from becoming a major inland city, a rival to Orlando or Lakeland, Okeechobee reverted to becoming a sleepy town whose main businesses are sport fishing, catfish farming, and solid waste disposalâ (p. 10). Within a year of Connersâs death, the state had acquired the road and quickly removed the toll gate.

Epperson provides a extraordinary detailed account of the funding and actual construction of these three roadways. His research is voluminous and thorough, as he tells the often complicated tale of road building. There are times, however, when he gets mired (an appropriate verb for this subject) in the details of construction engineering and bond funding and loses sight of the larger issues of development in a fragile ecosystem. The book could really use a comprehensive concluding chapter–as it now stands, it simply ends in 1930. The reader is left with a desire for more information–particularly on how these roads (especially the Tamiami Trail) affected the Everglades ecosystem. A conclusion would have brought the story up to contemporary times and allowed the book to speak to broader environmental concerns. As it now stands, it provides a great resource for anyone interested in the remarkable engineering (and fiscal!) achievements of these three roads which profoundly reshaped Floridaâs River of Grass.

Notes

[1]. âReturned from Interesting Trip,â *St. Augustine Evening Record*, November 28, 1917.

[2]. *The WPA Guide to Florida,* reprint (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 406.

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