In 1932 the marriage of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Charles Rawlings was coming to an end. For Marjorie, life at her home at Cross Creek, southeast of Gainesville was (to quote her words) becoming a nightmare. Thus came the idea for the journey. Marjorie was 36 years old. She and her 26 year old friend, Dessie Smith Vinson planned to drive two hundred miles south to the head waters of the St. Johns River and return by its waters, home to Cross Creek.

“The two women planned to take an eighteen-foot rowboat and two outboard motors several hundred miles down the St. Johns River. From this sojourn Marjorie wrote the short story, “Hyacinth Drift.” Their way lay for at least one hundred miles through forsaken marsh country. They were warned many times over of the dangers of getting lost in false channels.” Marjorie was to handle the navigating and cooking and Dessie the steering and hunting.

This afternoon, The St. Johns Riverkeeper, Neal Armingeon, and I are going to take you on that journey and chart the passage of that long ago time.

“The St. Johns River flows from south to north from its source. It rises in a chain of small lakes near the Florida east coast, south of Melbourne. The lakes are linked together by stretches of marsh through which, in times of high water the indecisive course of the young river is discernible. Two years of drought in 1932 had shrunk the stream and dried the marshes. The southern most sources were overgrown with marsh grass and water hyacinth filled the channels.”

The navigable head of the river proved to be where the highway crosses miles of wet prairie and cypress swamp between Orlando and Indian River City.
It was at this point the two women put their 18-foot rowboat into the water at a spot just north of Lake Hellenblazes where the river “was no more than a path through high grass.”

As they entered the river a fisherman warned them of the lack of reliability of their charts, advising them, “Keep to your left. The next mark you get is a good ways down river. You go left by a partickler tall piece o’ grass.”

He then added, “I’d be mighty well obliged if you’d send me a postcard when you get where you’re goin’. That-a-way I won’t have to keep on worryin’ about you.”

At 5 o’clock that first afternoon, the river dissolved without warning into a two mile spread of flat confusion. A fluid maze. Hundreds of directions. They tried four. There was no channel.

Dess said to Marjorie, “That map and compass don’t amount to much. Later they were to find half the channels charted no longer existed after the drought.

Not knowing which way to follow, they found a dry spot and camped.

In the morning they had the answer. As they watched the flow of the water, they realized that the hyacinth were drifting faintly faster in a northeast direction. From that instant they were never truly lost. They knew how to find the channel. They had only to followed the drift of the hyacinths.

Still there was disorientation.

At one point they believed they already had made it through Puzzle Lake and even through Lake Harney only to find from a fisherman that they hadn’t even come as far as Puzzle Lake.
Realizing their location, they safely came through Puzzle Lake and then crossed the four broad miles of Lake Harney. They camped that night on a high bank above the river. In the morning they watched the hyacinth drift closely, to be sure of taking the cut instead of wandering into Lake Jessup.

“They cut across the **south end of Lake Monroe** and entered the city of Sanford on Sunday morning.

When they left Sanford, **still on Lake Monroe**, they felt they had a “right clare river now.”

They “pushed” the motor that day and traveled beyond Deland Landing, asking advise on crossing **Lake George** from a man in a houseboat tethered to the bank. They were advised to hug the west shore and cross in the early morning before the wind rose.

They were hailed by three fishermen who asked if they were the women who had put in at Fort Christmas nearly a week before. Word had been sent down river to watch for them and report their safety.

The course for the main channel in crossing **Lake George** was simply **north by east**. There was fog at daylight. Boats twice their size had encountered trouble on the lake because of its squalls. They could not see the shore through the haze but in two and a half hours were across Lake George.

At Welaka they left the hyacinths and turned up their home river, the **Ocklawaha** and began the end of the journey, home to a place called **Cross Creek**.

I would like to close with the words that Marjorie Kinnan Rawling wrote of her home:

**Cross Creek** is a bend in a country road by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove and nine miles east of a turpentine still.”