



# Adventures in paddling

Doug Alderson maps Florida's waterways in new book, 4



# Writer Doug Alderson mines Florida's watery wonders

By Dana Edwards  
Special to the Democrat

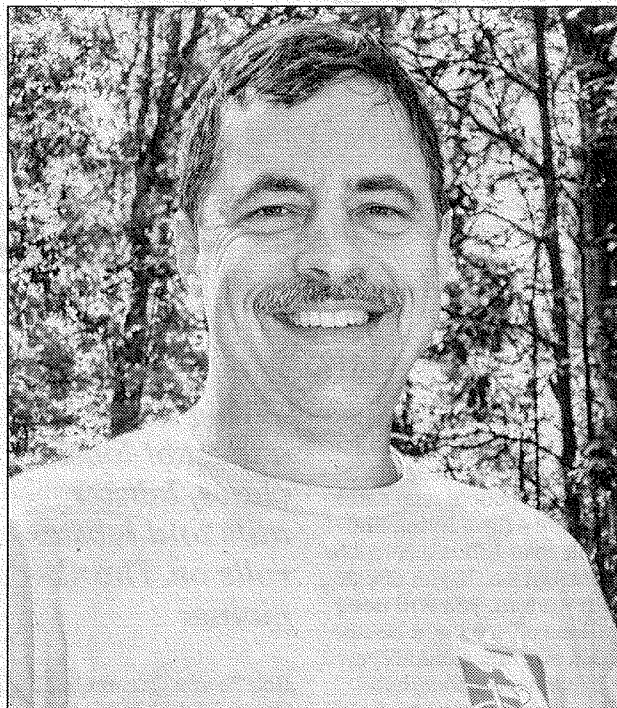
"Two alligator eyes peer beneath dark waters."

"The roar of Big Shoals whitewater rapids fills the ears of rafters."

"An inflamed shoulder joint experiences the healing powers of the Suwannee Springs."

Through journal entries like these, nature writer and photographer Doug Alderson takes readers into the world of Florida's frontier to capture its adventure, history and folklore through a naturalist's eyes.

Originally from Chicago but a Tallahasseean since age 11, Alderson, 54, always wanted to write about outdoor biology and ecology. The summer after he graduated from Rickards High School, he hiked the entire Appalachian Trail, an experience he says allowed him to encounter people from all walks of life and get a broader education than he thought possible. (Later in



JAN CORCORAN/SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT  
Doug Alderson has a new book about Florida waterways.

life he backpacked across Europe from Stonehenge to Delphi.)

By 19 he was a professional "young suit-and-tie

lobbyist" for environmental groups, and beginning to move people to action with his writing. He continued to lobby about envi-



ronmental issues for the next 13 years, and worked as a naturalist for the Tallahassee Museum. Now he is Florida Paddling Trails Coordinator for Florida's Office of Greenways and Trails. He recently finished a three-year project scouting the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail, a 1,500-plus-mile sea kayaking trail around the entire state.

Since he published his first freelance magazine article at 18, Alderson's articles and photographs have been featured in *Florida Wildlife*, *Tallahassee Magazine*, the *Florida Naturalist*, *Wildlife Conservation*, *American Forests* and many other publications. He has won two national writing awards for his magazine features.

In his first book, "The

*Alderson will be at the Visit Tallahassee gift shop from noon to 1 p.m. Dec. 2, and in Sopchoppy at The Frog & the Hummingbird from 5 to 10 p.m. Dec. 9. Learn more about Alderson at his website, www.dougalderson.net, or read his "Outdoor and Nature Expert" blog at www.visittallahassee.com.*

Waters Less Traveled," Alderson created what he calls "the first comprehensive armchair guide to this region," introducing readers to Florida's natural resources, interweaving history, folkways and observations from life in the great outdoors. The book was selected runner-up for Best Travel Book of 2006 by the North American Travel Journalists Association.

He since has written eight other books, ranging in subject from Florida's endangered wildlife and the state's coastlines to the Seminole Indians and ghost tales of St. Augustine. His writing is done almost entirely in the evenings and on weekends. Alderson says a typical book project takes roughly eight to nine months from research to a finished product. He is also an accomplished nature photographer.

"I like to take pictures by myself, so I can sit quietly while the animals become accustomed to me," he explains. "It's less intrusive to their natural routine that way."

Alderson records his day-to-day hiking, camping and paddling experiences in his journal, and tries to include anecdotal memories and humorous encounters with wildlife in his books, such as the time he went whitewater rafting with a friend who

spent the entire trip scoffing at the rapids in Big Shoals State Parks (the largest whitewater rapids in Florida), only to find out firsthand that their reputation for attracting thrill-seeking canoe and kayak enthusiasts was well-deserved.

"I think in my writing and with my photography, I try to celebrate life and the beauty around us, and I just let my observations tell the story," says Alderson. "Really, I don't write for best-sellers. I do it because I love it."

Alderson's new book, "Wild Florida Waters: Exploring the Sunshine State by Kayak and Canoe," places Florida's unsurpassed beauty and abundant wildlife in the forefront, but includes a hefty dose of paddling adventures, stories of tipping over in the Suwannee River's Big Shoals rapids and surfing wind-generated waves while paddling the remote Apalachee Bay.

Alderson frequently gives author presentations and does book-signings. He will be at the Visit Tallahassee gift shop from noon to 1 p.m. Dec. 2, and in Sopchoppy at The Frog & the Hummingbird from 5 to 10 p.m. Dec. 9. Learn more about Alderson at his website, www.dougalderson.net, or read his "Outdoor and Nature Expert" blog at www.visittallahassee.com.

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