



ALLIGATORS are our largest reptiles and are reminders of the large animals of the past.

PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

American Alligators Remind Us Of Giant Reptiles From Past

BY BILL FAVER

Lizards, snakes, turtles and alligators make up the group of animals we call reptiles. They are all similar in that the typical reptile has a protective covering of plates or scales, has five claw-like toes on each foot and uses lungs rather than gills for breathing.

Most reptiles eat animals and lay eggs, though most poisonous snakes bear live young. The alligators and crocodiles are the largest reptiles today, though much larger species were alive in the past, as the very successful exhibit at the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington will attest.

The American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) ranges along the Atlantic coast from the Carolinas southward and along the Gulf Coast. Our alligators have a broad, rounded snout and are usually from 6 to 15 feet long. Old adults are dark grayish-black, but young are black with yellow bands.

Alligators live in fresh water, brackish marshes, swamps, rivers, canals and bayous. They can be seen basking in the sunshine in spring and summer, or drifting like logs in the water.

During the spring mating season males can be heard bellowing as they seek a mate and ward off any competitor. After mating,

the female is busy with building a nest mound near water in which she will lay 29 to 60 eggs. She covers the eggs with vegetation and guards them for about 19 weeks until they hatch. The young stay with her for about a year and feed on frogs, aquatic insects and crustaceans. Adults eat fish, turtles, birds and small mammals.

With a four-chambered heart, alligators are unique among reptiles. They have the most highly developed brain of any reptiles, but are not as able to detect tastes and odors as are most of the other reptiles.

Alligators do raise their head and upper jaw, not just drop their lower jaw, as some observers have claimed. Their teeth are used for catching and holding prey and not for chewing. The gizzard part of their stomach does the chewing of food with the grinding aided by rocks and other hard objects they eat. The rear legs of alligators are usually longer than the front legs, leading scientists to speculate they once walked upright, like man.

Like most wild things, alligators are safe if not disturbed or chased from their preferred habitats. We get in trouble when they are teased, or become dependent upon us for food or are confined in too small a space by development, fire or other change in their habitats.

Alligators are a good reminder of the giant reptiles of the past and of the diverse and valuable life forms sharing life with us on planet Earth.

Tough Equation: Gains And Losses Possible With MM Quarry Proposal

Balancing the equation is a challenging dilemma when it comes to our potential new Brunswick County resident, Martin Marietta Aggregates.

Yaupon Beach Commissioners are circulating a resolution throughout the Southeastern Brunswick County municipalities and other public bodies in the area it believes would be most affected by MM's location of a quarry between the CP&L, Bethel Church Road and Sunny Point properties off N.C. 133 north of Southport.

Opposition to the company's plans appears to be mounting. The site would be buffered from a nearby residential area and the company has offered to replace affected shallow drinking water wells. But noise, visual appearance, lowered property values and damage to wells aren't the only concerns.

Some of the resolution sponsors' greatest worries relate to traffic, not just on N.C. 87 at the Sunny Point intersection and into Boiling Spring

Lakes, but N.C. 87 south to Doshier Cut-Off and N.C. 211, the roads that will handle an estimated two-thirds of the plant's truck traffic. These already-busy, two-lane roads serve, Supply, Southport and Oak Island.

The resolution also questions impact of the discharge line on endangered species and their habitat.

Opponents aren't convinced that Brunswick County will gain more economically by Martin Marietta Aggregate's presence than it would lose in terms of quality of life. They haven't been persuaded that the increased county and Smithville Township tax base, lower haul rates for crushed rock, and the 20 or so local jobs that the plant will ultimately create are worth it.

They plan to forward the joint resolution to state level officials and state agencies that will be involved in application review or issuance of the permits MM will require to do business here: mining and water discharge permits from the state, build-

Susan Usher



ing permit, for example. More approvals may be required since CP&L has rejected the company's request to discharge water pumped from its limestone pit into CP&L's discharge canal that leads to an ocean outfall on Caswell Beach. MM will have to pipe the water to an outfall of its own, since local creeks are too fragile to accept the volume of water anticipated.

Two performance groups from the Brunswick County Schools and President Clinton were where I would rather have been last Tuesday—joining in my alma mater's

200th birthday gala at Chapel Hill.

That's right. West Brunswick High School's chorus and the North Brunswick High School Band were chosen to represent Brunswick County in the festivities at Kenan Stadium.

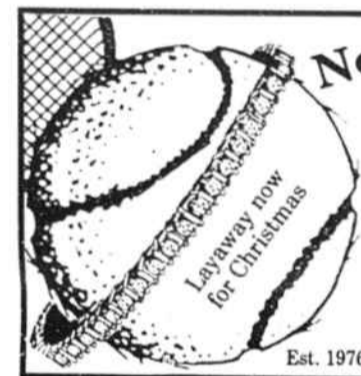
Sybil Clemmons called to tell us that Brian Benton and his 80-member NBHS band and 11-girl flag corps were going. They had a busy weekend, holding a fundraiser that Saturday to help offset the expense of the trip. The band was to join 70 others from across the state in playing Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man," John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" and J. Howell's "Bicentennial Fanfare," written for the celebration.

Patti Jordan and her 35 to 40 chorus members left Charlotte last Tuesday morning, bound for Chapel Hill as well. Assistant Principal Jerry Small confirmed. The group was

one of 60 high school choruses gathered to sing "Onward Ye Peoples" by Sibelius and "Hark the Sound," the UNC fight song. (Hark the sound of Tar Heel voices...)

Nothing could be finer than to be at Carolina...! I'm confident both groups represented Brunswick County well.

Friends and acquaintances of Master Bullshooter and retired Brunswick County veterans service officer Jess Parker may want to drop him a note. Jess recently underwent triple bypass surgery and would also appreciate your prayers. He can be contacted at University of Washington Medical Center, 1959 NE Pacific St., Seattle, Wash. 98185.



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