



Section 9: Lofton Island and Centennial Park

Nick flies over the bridges, which are the north and south lanes of U.S. Highway Business 41. They were built high above the river, so even tall boats can pass under. Nick lands in the water beside an island.

Two men sit in the shade of Australian pines. When the breeze blows the branches, the sound is like waves washing the shore. The first man asks, "Did you know this island was named for a fellow named Lofton?"

The second man pours coffee from a thermos into a cup. "Who's he?"

The first man says, "He dredged the river back in 1910. He made it wider and deeper from here to LaBelle. This island is sand he dug from near the south shore where the Fort Myers Yacht Basin is now."

Nick watches dragonflies zip over the water.

The second man sips his coffee. "This is a huge pile of sand. The river must have been very shallow."

Standing very still, Nick sees a mud crab.

The first man says, "It was different then. Docks with packing houses jugged out into deep water. Two piers even had tracks for trains!"

"So what happened?" the second man asks.

"The docks were taken out because most businesses had failed. It was the Great Depression. Sand dredged from the yacht basin filled in the waterfront to make Centennial Park."

A fish crow lands on the branches above Nick.

The first man looks at it. "Are you an American crow?"

The crow tilts its head, ruffles its feathers and says, "Uhn-uhn."

"I knew it!" the first man slaps his leg. "That's a fish crow. I see them over at the park. They're always at the fishing pier and near the boat ramp."

The second man points at Nick. "I see herons like that one when I'm at the park."

As the men walk away, Nick grabs the crab. The fish crow dives at Nick. It wants to steal the crab, but Nick eats it. The fish crow flies away.

DREDGING

by Dr. Charles O'Connor, Environmental Education Program, Lee County Schools

A dredge is a machine that scoops dirt and mud from a waterway and places it somewhere else. Dredges are used to deepen or straighten a waterway. This can speed boat traffic and water movement, but many problems can occur. Pollution in the mud can be spread to other areas. Fish, plants and birds can be harmed by quick changes. The plants and fish may die and then

the birds have a problem finding food. The water can become muddy and not as friendly to life. Also, less of the fast-flowing water is in contact with plants that help clean the water. Usually, nature changes waterways more slowly so that life can adjust and survive. Some waterways that were dredged are now being restored and repaired.

