

# **The Men's Journal - Forbidden Places**

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**Travel**

**Wauchula, Florida**

Remember those rambunctious chimpanzees from the “trunk monkey” car ads? Or the Careerbuilder.com chimps, one of whom photocopied its ass in a celebrated Super Bowl commercial? Chances are you’ve forgotten about these and other great simian thespians. Which is why the Center for Great Apes near Wauchula, Florida, had to be built.

“Apes are used by the entertainment industry only as infants and juveniles,” says director Patti Ragan, who founded the center in 1997. “By the time they reach adolescence they’re too strong to manage, so they get outsourced. But few accredited zoos will take animals from the entertainment industry because their social skills have been so stunted.”

Dropped in the middle of orange groves between highways 17 and 27 near small Wauchula, the center occupies 120 acres of well-hidden forest to provide what Ragan calls a “retirement home” for apes. Only 25 acres are used as habitat; the rest serve as a buffer from the outside world. The 42 resident chimps and orangutans — including all those mentioned above — live in large geodesic enclosures, connected by three-quarters of a mile of elevated passageways through tropical growth.

As the only celebrity chimp and orangutan sanctuary in the U.S., the inconspicuous center might help meet expenses by following the amusement park–crazy blueprint of central Florida economics. Instead it relies on private donations. “We’re not here to be an attraction,” says Ragan. “We want to give these animals some peace and a life of dignity.”

The highly restricted facility opens its doors just once a year, in the spring, and only to member donors.

**How to Get There:** To become a member with a \$40 donation, contact the Center for Great Apes; 863-767-8903, [centerforgreatapes.org](http://centerforgreatapes.org).