



Rare Earth

TEXT NINA KORMAN

NATURE HELPED SAVE photographer Clyde Butcher's life. It was only right he return the favor. When a drunk driver killed his only son 20 years ago, a despondent Butcher took refuge in the wilderness, specifically the Big Cypress National Preserve (where he poses at left), 35 miles west of Miami. He had already spent years as a professional photographer shooting landscapes and architectural models in color, but then and there, squishing around the swamp, large-format camera in tow, Butcher got back in touch with himself and the world. He learned to truly appreciate nature and wanted to impart its importance to others. Ever since, Butcher's dramatic

and detailed black-and-white images have documented the beauty of the Florida wetlands, rivers, and beaches, and encouraged their conservation.

A few years ago, Butcher—who downplays his role as an artist, referring to himself instead as an “educator about the earth”—began focusing on new terrain: the Cuban countryside. He had been invited to photograph the island in 2002 by a United Nations official and a Naples, Florida, businessman who coordinated a conference in conjunction with the UN's International Year of the Mountains. One trip soon turned into three, leading Butcher to explore some of Cuba's most treacherous and remote areas, including the Sierra Maestra Mountains, a famous hiding place for Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries, and the waterfalls of Sierra de San Juan in the east. □

See Butcher's work at Big Cypress Gallery, 52388 Tamiami Trail, Ochopee, Florida; 239 695.2428 or Venice Gallery & Studio, 237 Warfield Avenue, Venice, Florida: 941 486.0811.