

## Friends of the Randell Research Center

June 2013 • Vol. 12, No. 2

# A Tour of the Islands of Pine Island Sound: A Geological, Archaeological, and Historical Perspective

## Part 5: Cabbage Key

by Denége Patterson

**Cabbage Key lies one mile east** of Cayo Costa's southern end. Mangroves and cabbage palms cover its 111 acres. Shell middens blanket the sandy elevations, which peak at 38 feet. No formal archaeological work has confirmed occupation dates, but from surface collections donated by Taylor Stults, archaeologists believe the period 500 B.C. to A.D. 500 is represented. This was an era of rapid accumulation of shell middens on Useppa, Burgess, Josslyn, Pine Island, and Big Mound Key. The Stults collection also shows that the island was home to Spanish Cuban fisherfolk during the late 1700s and early 1800s.

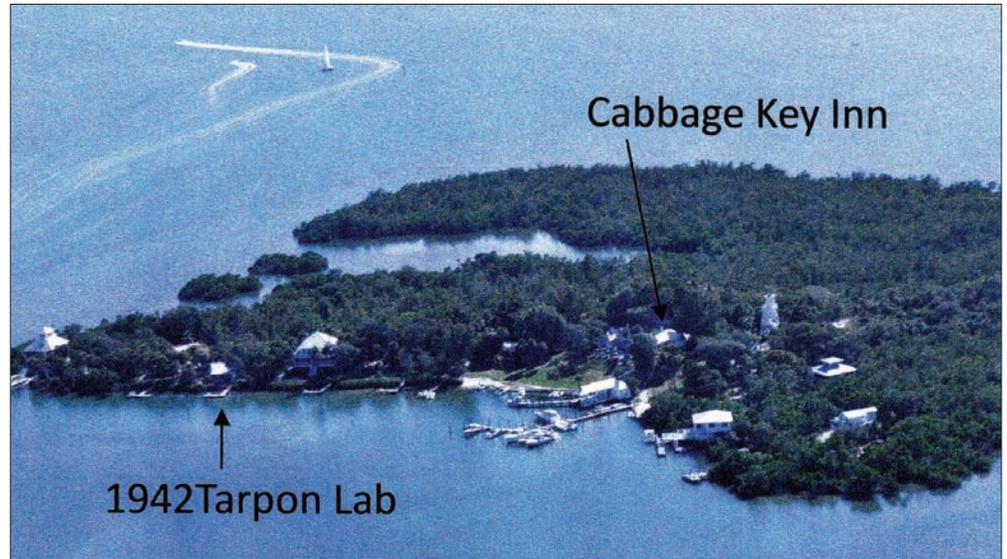
Cabbage Key appeared on charts in 1859 and 1899 as Guanal Key and Palmetto Island. The first owner was Otto Stellrich from 1899 to 1905. The island reverted to state ownership after he failed to pay the two-dollar annual tax. After 1905, various persons tended groves, raised hogs, and brewed moonshine there.

In 1936 Alan Rinehart, a producer for Paramount Pictures, purchased the island, building a seasonal residence that is

today the Cabbage Key Inn and Restaurant. His wife Gratia, the great-granddaughter of Emory Houghton who founded Corning Glassworks in



**Charles M. Breder, Director of Fishes and Aquatic Biology, American Museum of Natural History, who conducted tarpon research on Cabbage Key.** (Photo courtesy Arthur Vining Davis Library, Mote Marine Laboratory.)



Cabbage Key showing today's Inn & Restaurant, and the location of the 1938-1942 Tarpon Laboratory, now called Tarpon Cottage. (Photo courtesy Arthur Vining Davis Library, Mote Marine Laboratory.)

1851, hosted her cousin Katherine Hepburn. The Houghton family members were publishers of school textbooks and testing supplies, as well as senators, ambassadors, woman suffragettes, family planning advocates, philanthropists, writers, and sculptors.

Alan's mother, author Mary Roberts Rinehart, occupied her own cottage near the main house. She wrote her first successful novel in 1908 entitled *The Circular Staircase*, combining a murder mystery, horror, and humor. A Broadway play based on one of her novels inspired the character Batman. She was credited with the phrase, "The Butler Did It," a Broadway lyric referring to her work. She was the first female war correspondent, the first female best-selling mystery writer, and the first journalist to interview the Queen of England.

Beginning in 1938, the Rineharts provided a facility on Cabbage Key for a series of tarpon studies led by Charles Breder, Curator and Director of Fishes and Aquatic Biology at the American Museum of Natural History. The work was of interest to taxonomists, embryologists, ecologists, and comparative invertebrate morphologists. In 1967, Dr. Breder became the Director of Mote Marine Laboratory.

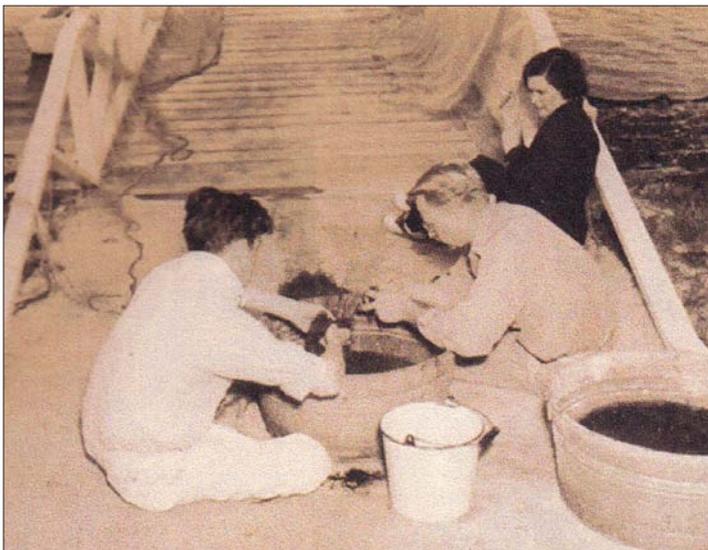
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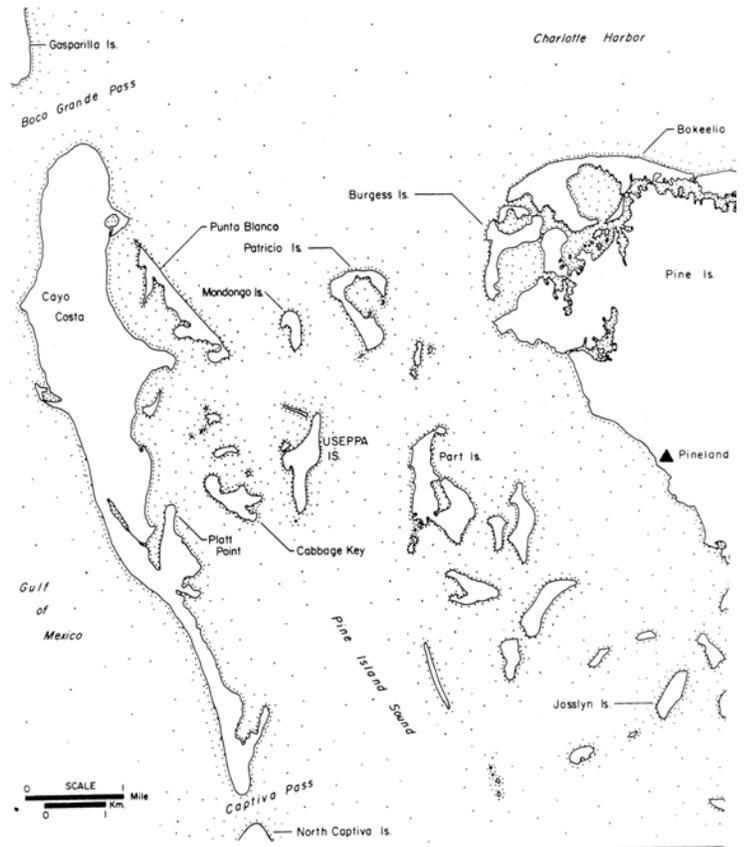
In 1944 Jan and Larry Stults purchased and re-named the island and operated "The Inn and Studio at Cabbage Key" until 1969. Taylor Stults, one of three children, recalls riding on the school boat to a one-room schoolhouse on Punta Blanco from 1944 to 1951. The Stults family renovated the former tarpon lab, naming it Studio Cottage. In 1969 the Beck family bought the island and established the Dollar Bill Bar, where visitors signed and attached their dollars to the walls. Robert and Phyllis Wells purchased the island in 1976. Today they still live on the island and operate the restaurant and inn. Patrons still sign and tack dollar bills on the walls of the restaurant and bar. Periodically the Wells peel them all off and donate the money to charities.

Rob quit his job as Dean of Admissions at High Point College in North Carolina to live on the island with Phyllis and their children. Son Ken confirms, "It was a wonderful place to grow up, taking a Boston Whaler to school every day." Ken obtained his degree in hospitality and restaurant management, and with his parents now oversees the Cabbage Key Inn & Restaurant. His brother Robert III has a degree in finance, and manages the Tarpon Lodge at Pineland. The Wells have been wonderful neighbors, supporting the Randell Research Center in numerous ways. Their assistance with this article is greatly appreciated.

Today, Cabbage Key is still charming and alive with history. Some visitors are well known: Tony Bennett, Walter Cronkite, Ed McMahon, Ted Koppel, John F. Kennedy Jr., Hulk Hogan (who ran aground in his boat), Rob Lowe, Julia Roberts, Kevin Kostner, and Jimmy Buffet, about whom the manager said, "He'd sit here all day and pick at his guitar." Owner Phyllis Wells observes, "Cabbage Key is sort of an attitude." Her husband Rob Wells, Jr., remarks, "Some people will come to Cabbage Key and say how much they love it, then make suggestions to improve it. But we have no intention of changing it." 🐢



Sorting catch at the end of the laboratory dock. Dr. Marshall Bishop of Yale University, who worked with Dr. Breder, may be the person seated at the right. (Photo courtesy Arthur Vining Davis Library, Mote Marine Laboratory.)



Map drawn by W. Marquardt

## IN BRIEF *by Bill Marquardt*

### New Project on Mound Key

In cooperation with Victor Thompson (University of Georgia), Bill Marquardt and Karen Walker are participating in new research on Mound Key, located in Estero Bay near Fort Myers Beach. Mound Key is thought to be the location of Calos, capital town of the Calusa kingdom at the time Spaniards arrived in the 1500s. It was also the location of the mission of San Antonio de Carlos, the first Jesuit mission in the New World. Funded by grants from the National Geographic Society and the University of Georgia, the work is focused on remote sensing, using ground-penetrating radar and resistivity to try to locate structural remains of the Calusa and Spanish settlements.

### Boardwalk Restoration & Classroom Exhibits Enhancement

Funded by a grant from the Southwest Florida Community Foundation's Arts and Attractions program, we are enhancing exhibits and teaching materials in the RRC classroom and restoring the boardwalk leading to the Smith Mound on the Calusa Heritage Trail. The boardwalk project is underway, and the exhibit enhancements are in the planning stage. The project will be completed by October this year.

*Continued on back page*



## GOOD QUESTIONS

by Bill Marquardt

A teacher and mother of three who identified herself only as “Mom of Kearra” posted the following query to our web site: “Why did the Calusa build these shell mounds?” Here is my answer:

The great mounds at Pineland, Big Mound Key, Mound Key, and other sites in southwest Florida are made up of shells, bones, ashes, charcoal, broken shell and bone tools, broken pottery, and dirt. In some cases, there are layers made up mostly of small whelks or conchs or oyster shells, with very little sand. These often contrast with dark-colored activity-surfaces or house floors with which they are inter-layered.

Some people think the layers of mostly shell mean that lots of shells were purposely brought in to the site to build the mounds up. But in every case in which we have done a detailed study of these so-called “fill” layers, we have found a mixture of shell, bone, charcoal, and quartz sand, that is, a midden. A “midden” is a garbage dump, basically. The fact that some of these layers are composed predominantly of a single species of shellfish (oyster, or lightning whelk, or crown conch, for example) is simply a matter of which particular shellfish were available at the time people were living there. In addition to fish—their main dietary staple—and a large variety of plant foods, they also ate shellfish such as oysters and conchs. In every case, there are good ecological reasons to expect an abundance of those species at particular times, and there is no reason to believe that the mollusk meats were not

used for food. People used midden materials to build up their living sites higher, and sometimes they even heaped older midden materials up on top of mounds to make them higher. But what they used for such mound construction was simply food debris and other discarded materials, which is why we call these “midden-mounds.”

Now, to answer your question, we think they lived on top of these midden mounds, particularly after A.D. 1000.

There are many advantages to being up high: catching a cool breeze on a hot day, escaping mosquitos and biting gnats, being safe from storm surges, and being able to see long distances so as not to be surprised by enemies approaching. Their villages were situated near food resources and fresh water. They accumulated massive midden-mounds—some more than 30 feet high—and they lived on top of them.



View showing structure of Mound 1 at the Randell Complex, Pineland. Measuring rod on left is slightly more than 2 meters long (about 6½ feet). (Photo by W. Marquardt.)

## New and Renewing Friends of the RRC

February 1, 2013 through May 15, 2013

(Please let us know of any errors or omissions. Thank you for your support.)

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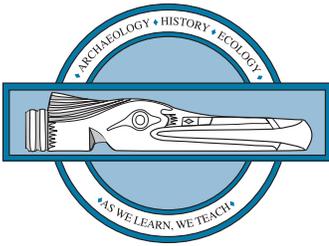
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## IN BRIEF *continued from page 5*

### Calusa Heritage Day (March 9, 2013)

Splendid weather and an interesting program brought over 600 people to Pineland for Calusa Heritage Day this year. The featured speaker was Jerald T. Milanich, who spoke on the Calusa Indians and Juan Ponce de León's 1513 voyage to Florida. Classroom exhibits, outdoor events, children's programs, speakers, and free tastings of Calusa foods were much enjoyed.



A reproduction of Ottomanno Freducci's map, created in 1514-1515, is used by Dr. Jerald Milanich during his Calusa Heritage Day presentation about Juan Ponce de León's contact with the Calusa in 1513. (Photo by C. O'Connor.)

### Cindy Bear teaches Florida Master Naturalist Program's Coastal Course

Cindy Bear again taught the Florida Master Naturalist Program's coastal systems course in April. This mini-course provides instruction on the general ecology, habitats, vegetation types, wildlife, and conservation issues of coastal Florida, specifically coastal upland, estuarine, and nearshore marine environments. Cindy also teaches naturalist interpretive skills, environmental ethics, and the role of people in shaping



Cindy Bear teaches a hands-on lesson in estuarine ecology at the Randell Research Center's shoreline. (Photo by W. Marquardt.)

our past and determining our future. Classroom learning with hands-on activities is enhanced by field trips to the Pine Island Sound estuary, a salt marsh, a local commercial fishing operation, and the seashore at Ft. Myers Beach.

### The Pineland Prize Package!

During Pineland's 110th anniversary year, everyone who became a new member or renewed at the Family level (\$50) or higher from September 1, 2012 to April 30, 2013 was eligible to win the *Pineland Prize Package*, a generous variety of gifts from the Pineland business community. The winner was Virginia Amsler. Congratulations, Ginny!

### Useppa Island: 2012 Excavations

With the support of the Useppa Inn and Dock Company and the Useppa Island Historical Society, archaeologists Karen Walker and Bill Marquardt, assisted by numerous Randell Research Center volunteers, excavated at Useppa Island's Southern Ridge in March and again in November and December of 2012. Joining the team in March was a small crew led by archaeologist Victor Thompson (now at the University of Georgia). For the later episode, archaeobotanist Donna Ruhl of the Florida Museum joined the field team. Within Useppa's high Southern Ridge, we discovered a series of layer-cake, ancient middens (refuse) comprised of shells, animal bones, artifacts, and charred plant materials. Each midden was separated by a layer of wind-blown sand. Both midden and

sand layers thickened from east to west. Our goal is to understand the sequence and characteristics of human habitation and abandonment represented by the layers. With help again from RRC volunteers in January, 2013, artifacts, specimens, and samples were assigned catalog numbers and then cleaned and labeled as appropriate. This work took place at Pineland in the RRC's Ruby Gill House labs. The collection then was transported to the Florida Museum in Gainesville. The process of organizing and analyzing all the results continues. Examination of records such as excavation forms, drawn profiles ("walls" of the excavations), and photographs combined with analyses of artifacts, animal bones, charred wood and seeds, along with bulk samples of shells and bones, continues at the Museum. UF graduate student Melissa Ayvaz has completed identifications of animal



Melissa Ayvaz at work on the Useppa sample. (Photo by K. Walker.)

bones and shells from one bulk sample collected from the earliest midden layer, radiocarbon-dating to 1180 to 1040 B.C., roughly 3,100 years ago. 

## RRC News

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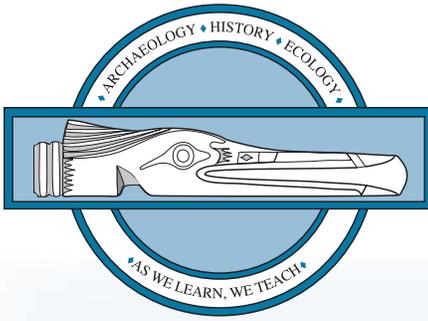


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# Friends of the Randell Research Center

Pineland, Florida • June 2013  
Phone 239/283-2062  
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Sincerely,

William H. Marquardt  
Director  
Randell Research Center



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- Sponsor (\$500-\$999):** The above + invitation to annual Director's tour and reception
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Photo by A. Bell

