

Useppa Island Fieldwork Reaches Successful Conclusion

Possible shell tool workshop revealed

by John Dietler

Just beneath the surface of a grassy hillside on Useppa Island lies a dense layer of shell that may hold a key to understanding the beginnings of Calusa political dominance. Over 50 Randell Research Center, UCLA, and Useppa Island Historical Society volunteers donated more than 2,000 hours of their time this spring to exposing what appears to be a prehistoric shell axe workshop.

In sharp contrast to the mixture of food remains and pottery found in most shell middens in the area, this layer consists almost entirely of large lightning whelk shells, the species from which shell axes were made. They may have been left behind by craftspeople who lived there just prior to A.D. 800, when the Calusa were beginning to adopt a more complex political system. The shell tools could have been used to manufacture canoes and other wooden items that were essential to the Calusa, a powerful maritime society that dominated south Florida by the 1500s.

At some point, Calusa leadership became centralized, and social status became inherited, not just earned. But how did such a social structure first develop? Part of the answer may have to do with the ability of enterprising leaders to control certain resources, and to distribute them in return for political or economic advantages. In a fishing society like the Calusa, canoes and the tools used to make them might have been resources worth controlling. The person or persons who did so would become politically powerful.

Tipped off by the unfinished shell tools first noted during construction in 1998, we designed the current project to determine whether a shell tool workshop was present. Working a stone's throw from the historic Collier Inn, volunteers excavated thousands of whole and broken lightning whelks, along with shell hammers and sandstone fragments



(Above) Volunteers Marsha Perlman and Denege Patterson excavate whelk-shell fragments, Useppa Island. (Photo by J. Dietler)



(Left) Lightning whelk fragments. (Photo by J. Dietler.)

that might have been used to manufacture tools. The precise location of each tool and large shell was recorded, and all of the excavated lightning whelk fragments were collected for further study. Several unfinished shell tools were also recovered, providing even stronger evidence for on-site tool production.

Fully answering the question of whether this deposit represents a shell tool workshop will rely on laboratory analysis at UCLA's Cotsen Institute of Archaeology. Distinguishing among shell breakage caused by meat removal, tool making, and damage caused by modern construction activities is challenging, to say the least. For that reason, our analysis will attempt to demonstrate that the shells found on Useppa Island were broken in a manner that is both uniform and consistent with the manufacture of shell woodworking tools.

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Shell tool workshop revealed continued

In all, we excavated ten square meters of the hillside and recovered artifacts from three distinct time periods. The potential shell tool workshop deposit appears to date to A.D. 600-800, based on associated pottery. Beneath it was an earlier black sand midden that rests upon sterile dune sand, approximately one meter below the modern ground surface. Above it was a thin scatter of Cuban-period artifacts, an unexpected bonus. These included three glass beads, several olive jar fragments, and a piece of iron grape shot. These items are most likely associated with the early nineteenth-century fishing camp operated by José Caldéz.

The value of this project goes beyond the fascinating archaeological results. It was also a wonderful opportunity for a diverse group of scholars to work together, and for hundreds of people to experience archaeology first-hand. Thanks to the Randell Research Center, Garfield Beckstead and the Useppa Island Club, the Useppa Island Historical Society, the UCLA Friends of Archaeology, the National Science Foundation, and the many volunteers who gave of their time, we may discover an important key to the emergence of the powerful Calusa.



Useppa Island Archaeological Project volunteers. (Photo by J. Dietler.)

Details Emerge on “Spanish Indians” of Useppa Island

by John Worth

It has long been known that the Cuban fishermen of Useppa Island’s well-known fishing rancho lived with and in some cases intermarried with a little-known group of Native Americans known as “Spanish Indians” during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of these Indians not only spoke Spanish, but were also transported back to Cuba for baptisms and perhaps other Catholic sacraments. In recent years my own archival research into the Cuban fishing period of Southwest Florida has provided voluminous new information regarding not only the origin and ethnic identity of these “Spanish Indians” (predominantly of Creek/Muskogee extraction), but also their routine interactions with Cuban fishermen, both here along the Gulf coast and during regular visits to Havana on board Cuban sailing vessels. The amount of information alone is a daunting task, increasing in volume from the American Revolution era through the transfer of Florida to United States control in 1821.

What has only recently come to light are remarkable personal details contained in parish registries for the church of Nuestra Señora de Regla in the harborside community of Regla, Cuba, the base for the South Florida fishing fleet in Cuba at that time. Thanks to recent digitization of many of these records through a project entitled “Ecclesiastical Sources and Historical Research on the African Diaspora in Brazil and Cuba” administered by Dr. Jane Landers of Vanderbilt University, I have been able to review records of non-white baptisms in the Regla church, revealing a number of these “Spanish Indian” baptisms during the early 19th century.

Details and patterns are only beginning to emerge, but among the finds are several infants and toddlers born on Useppa Island right here in Pine Island Sound, including the three-year-old Fernando Gonzalez, son of Asturias (Spain) native Fernando Gonzalez and an Indian woman named Manuela, also a Useppa native, and an infant girl named Ana Masearreño, born May 7, 1820 on Useppa Island, daughter of Canary Island (Spain) native José Masearreño and another Indian woman native to Useppa named Fabla. Both of these half-Spanish, half-Indian children were transported to Cuba by Captain José María Caldéz among a total of 133 Indians who arrived on his ship *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* on January 13, 1821. Their baptisms were performed a week later.

Ironically, as teenagers these two multi-ethnic children would ultimately witness the destruction of the Cuban fishing ranchos and the forced removal of the “Spanish Indians” to the American west after 1836. Now, almost two centuries later, their stories are finally coming to light.



Excerpt of 1859 map showing Useppa Island. Note “Old Wharf” indicated where the landing spot for the Spanish fisheries would have been. (Source: “Map of Charlotte Harbor Approaches” by A. D. Bache, scanned from document in the possession of Vernon Peebles.)

RRC Takes First Steps as Regional Public Archaeology Center

RRC is one of three charter centers

by John Worth, RRC Assistant Director

As reported in the March issue of the *Friends* newsletter, the RRC was recently selected as one of three charter regional centers within the new Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN), alongside the new charter centers at Flagler College in St. Augustine and the University of South Florida in Tampa, as well as an expanded program at the state coordinating center at the University of West Florida in Pensacola. Working in consultation with FPAN Director Bill Lees and State Archaeologist Ryan Wheeler, the RRC has begun planning for its new and expanded outreach program to a five-county area, including not only conducting a search and interview process for a new full-time Public Archaeologist (still ongoing at press time), but also hiring a half-time Program Assistant and a half-time Fiscal Assistant, and reclassifying the local coordinator's position to Assistant Director to reflect his role in the RRC's new range of functions associated with FPAN. Once staff and office infrastructure are in place, the RRC team will build on its successful existing model for public archaeology in and around Lee County, expanding its mission to include all four surrounding counties, extending eastward all the way to Lake Okeechobee. Not only will the RRC serve the public of this five-county area as a resource for information on archaeology and the importance of our dwindling archaeological resources, but it will also form part of a broad-based statewide network of scholar-educators with similar goals, and will be able to share with and also learn from other regions. The RRC's new five-county region roughly corresponds to the sixteenth-century domain of the Calusa Indians, which ran from Charlotte Harbor inland to Lake Okeechobee and south to the Ten Thousand Islands district of the western Everglades. If we can achieve even a small measure of success in comparison to the Calusa within this same region, we will consider ourselves very fortunate indeed.

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A Report from the Calusa Heritage Trail

by Craig Timbes, RRC Operations Manager

It's been a while since my last report, as we have been very busy here at the Randell Research Center following two years of active hurricane seasons. We are happy to announce the near-completion of the teaching pavilion, and also the installation of our new tool shed (see photo) located along the back fence line of the Pineland site, where we keep our tools, tractor, and mowing equipment, including our brand new 72-inch zero-radius mower. I would like to thank Doug Jones, Director of the Florida Museum of Natural History, for helping us to acquire our new mower. The site is a monumental task for one person to mow, and the new machine allows me to cut the nature trail, headquarters, and post office properties in one day, leaving about two



Craig Timbes has moved his maintenance equipment and supplies into a new storage building. (Photo by W. Marquardt.)

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RRC Welcomes Dave Hurst

by John Worth, RRC Assistant Director

We are pleased to welcome the newest member of the RRC staff, Dave Hurst, who has recently come on board as fiscal assistant with our new Florida Public Archaeology Network program. Dave was born and raised in the Cleveland, Ohio area, and developed an interest in archaeology and history early on in life. He graduated with a B.A. in History from Cleveland State University in 1977, and then moved to Utah, working in coal mines and factories, living on a ranch, and working as an orthopedic technician in a hospital. As Dave reminisces, "What's the coolest thing about working in a coal mine? Looking up at the roof and seeing the bottoms of dinosaur footprints that were imprinted towards the end of the Carboniferous Period and later covered with sandstone."

Dave moved to southwest Florida in 1994. He began volunteering with the RRC in December, 2002 as a docent. He participated in digs and lab work at Surf Clam Ridge at the Pineland site and twice on Useppa Island. He also began to study accounting in 2002, and received his A.S. in Accounting and A.S. in Business Management and Marketing in June, 2004, both from Southwest Florida College. This year he also received his B.S. in Accounting from International College. He has worked in the accounting field since March, 2004 in a number of area busi-



Dave Hurst works at his temporary desk in the Gill House. Renovations are now underway to create new work spaces for the Florida Public Archaeology Network program. (Photo by J. Worth.)

nesses, and joined the RRC staff this April. Dave enjoys gardening, stained glass craft, reading, golf, and bicycling, and plans to take up kayaking "when I have the time."

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hours left for trimming and weed-eating the following day. This task used to take an entire week with our earlier equipment. Thank you, Dr. Jones!

Thanks to our grant from the Florida Division of Forestry, the extensive growths of exotic Brazilian Pepper trees have been eliminated on more than thirteen acres throughout the site and headquarters properties. We will also soon be purchasing more than 900 native trees and shrubs, which will allow us to reforest and enhance portions of both the cleared areas and the existing open areas along the trail. This will provide shade and restore some elements of the indigenous Calusa landscape.

Do I dare ask where the rain is? Some of you may have noticed some rather dry conditions around the trail this spring. It has been extremely dry here for a while, and a little rain would at this point be appreciated instead of dreaded.

I would like to thank all of you for contributing and taking an earnest interest in what we do here at the RRC. Because of you, we have been able to achieve amazing things. If you haven't been here in a while, please drop by and see us and the ever-changing Pineland site and Calusa Heritage Trail. It's never the same twice.



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William Marquardt

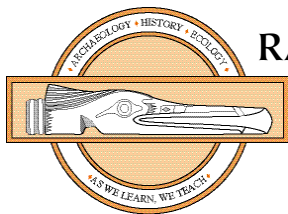
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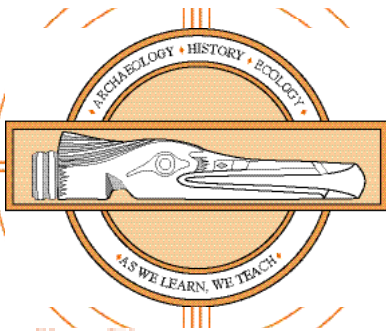
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Sincerely,

John E. Worth, Ph.D.
Assistant Director
Randell Research Center

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