

Friends of the Randell Research Center

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Surf Clam Ridge Excavations in Full Swing *Details of Early Pineland Occupation Being Uncovered*

by John Worth

Excavations and labwork for the 2003-2004 field season moved into high gear in November, and have continued through the winter season, with considerable volunteer help. As of mid-February, some 25 square meters have been opened in a block excavation that originally started a year ago (see *Friends* newsletter, March 2002). Although the dig is still in progress, and some of the most important information still remains to be examined both in the field and the lab, the project has already shed new light on the early inhabitants of the Pineland site.

The focus of the current work is to explore the ancient human occupation along the landform known as Surf Clam Ridge. This ridge runs north-northwest to south-southeast, and parallels Citrus Ridge just inland to the east. Excavations have revealed a blanket of shell and other debris across the summit of Surf Clam Ridge, and pottery

and radiocarbon dates indicate that this material accumulated along the ridge during the 6th century A.D. Amid the abundant and diverse quantities of whelk, conch, clam, scallop, and

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RRC volunteers Rosemary Squires, Diane Maher (above), and Carolina Kislack screen excavated sediments.



Excavations at Surf Clam Ridge (left), showing exposed shell midden, black sand midden, grey sand, and excavated shell-filled pits (photos by John Worth).

RRC Education Pavilion In Progress

by John Worth

Crews have been hard at work at the new Randell Center education pavilion over the winter months. As seen in the accompanying photo, much of the structure was nearing completion in early February, including the public restrooms and water fountain, the big, open activity deck, and a covered bench area. An inclined walkway leads to the pavilion from the new graveled parking area adjacent to Waterfront Drive, which includes two bus parking areas and ample car parking. In addition, perimeters are being cleared and fencing is being installed around the entire RRC parcel open to the public.

Meanwhile, Synergy Design Group of Tallahassee is working to complete a series of new interpretive trail signs that will be installed this summer along the improved walking trail system at the RRC,

which will itself include an improved footbridge and boardwalk sections, as well as expanded observation platforms on top of Brown's Mound. By the end of the summer, the RRC will look very different than it did only a year ago, but it should be remembered that we are still about \$140,000 short of our total project cost, and until those funds are raised, the classroom, gift shop, and storage rooms cannot be finished. Those wishing to support this effort should please call the RRC office at (239) 283-2062 for more information.



Work on the first phase of the RRC's education pavilion was nearly completed in February when this photo was taken (photo by John Worth).



Intact deer jawbone emerging from upper shell midden deposit.

Surf Clam Ridge continued from page 1

oyster shells, one distinct activity “floor” was identified, including an oblong firepit or hearth with many charred animal bones, as well as a scattering of large fragments of pottery bowls and shell anvils and other tools. Several bone beads, a charred chert spearpoint base, a quartzite abrading stone, and a soapstone pipe bowl fragment were also recovered. Shell-filled pits and trenches exposed at the base of this layer

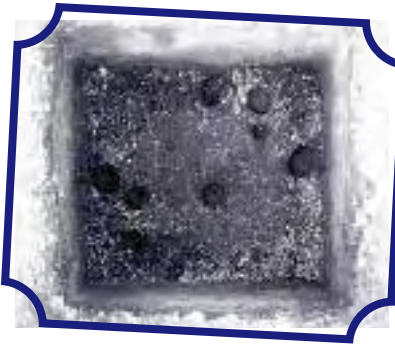


FLMNH soil scientist Sylvia Scudder takes samples from deep excavation in Surf Clam Ridge (photo by John Worth).

may also represent architectural features. The hearth was radiocarbon dated to between A.D. 420 and 580, probably falling in the latter part of that range.

The 6th-century shell midden lies directly on top of an earlier black sand midden, which seems to represent an occupational floor dating to roughly A.D. 450-500. This layer is devoid of shells, but contains many larger scattered pottery sherds. In addition, the rich sand deposit contains charred plant remains and traces of bone and shell that are being systematically sampled for analysis by zooarchaeologist Irv Quitmyer at the Florida Museum of Natural History and archaeobotanist Lee Newsom at Penn State University.

One test pit has recently been excavated well below this black sand midden, revealing that it lies upon a thick and relatively artifact-free coarse gray sand deposit that contains many small articulated marsh-clam shells typical of the estuarine grass flats just offshore and west of Pineland. Although many postholes both large and small penetrate this sand from the 5th-century floor above (and these may ultimately provide firm evidence for early Calusa residential architecture), evidence is rapidly accumulating to confirm the earlier hypothesis by Karen Walker and her colleagues that this sand



Excavated post-holes from Calusa structures in deep surf clam midden (photos by John Worth).

deposit was laid down by a storm surge. In fact, topographic data now suggest that virtually the entire elevation of Surf Clam Ridge is comprised of this storm deposit and subsequent human habitation on its summit. Soil scientist Sylvia Scudder at the Florida Museum of Natural History is conducting studies of these sediments to explore their origins.



RRC volunteers Dave Hurst and Marty Kendall excavate upper shell midden (photo by John Worth).

The base of the ridge comprises a heavily concreted 3rd- or 4th-century shell midden dominated by surf clams, with a thin black sand midden just above it, and a thick, and bone-filled black sand midden underneath it. A shell from the top of this midden has been radiocarbon dated to A.D. 220-360. Below these deposits lies a mottled gray sand deposit that gradually grades into an orange-yellow sand, although there is an ephemeral oyster-midden roughly 20 cm (8 inches) above modern mean sea level at Pineland. Work is continuing even as we go to press, and future issues will update our progress. Visitors are always welcome at the dig site. Call 239-283-2062 for information.

RRC Welcomes New Operations Manager

by John Worth

We are pleased to welcome John Paeno, who is our new operations manager. John takes over from Sydney Cosselman, who is now focusing her work exclusively in the RRC laboratory.

John was most recently second in command of Fort Ontario New York State Historic Site located on the Oswego River in Central New York, where he worked for 8 years. He also worked for the State University of Oswego for 10 years as a tradesman and project supervisor. John was active in his community as President of the Fulton Historical Society, and while president he was able to get the society's house on the National Register. He was Vice President of the Oswego County Labor Council and President of Civil Service Employees Association. John also did research and restoration on a cemetery site reported to be part of the Underground Railroad. He has over twenty-five years' experience as a builder and holds a certificate from a nationally



John Paeno in his office at the RRC headquarters.

approved carpenter apprentice program. John also has an Associate Degree in Science and has had special training in drafting, wood restoration, and building design. While in Oswego, John was one of the original founders of a local event called Harborfest. This festival is ranked as one of the top ten festivals in the nation.

John moved to Bokeelia this past October after several years of seasonal visits. His wife Lynne runs Four Points Editing with clients around the world. John's oldest son Nick will be attending FGCU in the summer, and his youngest son Tony attends Cape Coral High.

RRC Operations Report

by John Paeno, RRC Operations Manager

RRC operations have been keeping busy this winter. In December, 40 visitors signed our guest book, and we had 100 participants in our outreach programs. In January, we had 42 visitors and 233 participants. Volunteers have been very active, particularly in the ongoing dig and lab work. We logged 498 volunteer hours in December and 573 in January.

We currently need volunteers for the following upcoming projects:

1. Construction of substantial improvements to the footbridge over the canal.
2. Construction of a board walk as part of the interpretive trail system at Pineland.
3. Demolition and removal of small old building on top of Brown's Mound.
4. We will also be working on site clean up and junk removal, and also invasive and exotic vegetation control.

Anyone interested in helping with these projects can call the office (239-283-2062) for details.

HELP NEEDED! We will have to rent or buy equipment for these projects unless they are donated. Equipment we are looking for are: Bobcat or skid steer, golf cart, or utility vehicle such as a John Deere "Gator," or medium-sized trailer that could be pulled behind our tractor. Please contact us if you wish to make a donation to the project.

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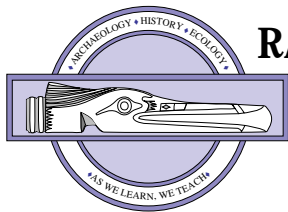
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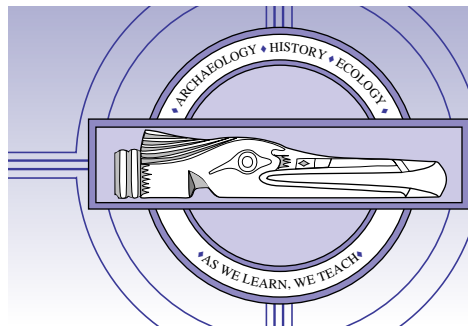
Send questions or comments to:
John Worth
Randell Research Center
PO Box 608
Pineland FL 33945-0608
Telephone (239) 283-2062
Fax (239) 283-2080
Email: randellcenter@comcast.net



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Sincerely,

John E. Worth, Ph.D.
Coordinator of Research Programs and Services
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