



Vol. 25 No. 7

Summer 2009

## July 11 Field Trip: Sanibel's Wightman Site at the Shell Museum

Learn about the pre-Columbian Indians who lived on Sanibel at a talk by Dr. Arlene Fradkin of Florida Atlantic University on Saturday, July 11 at 2 p.m. at the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum on Sanibel. The talk is presented by the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum and the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society (SWFAS). Reservations are not required but there will be a Shell Museum admission fee of \$7.

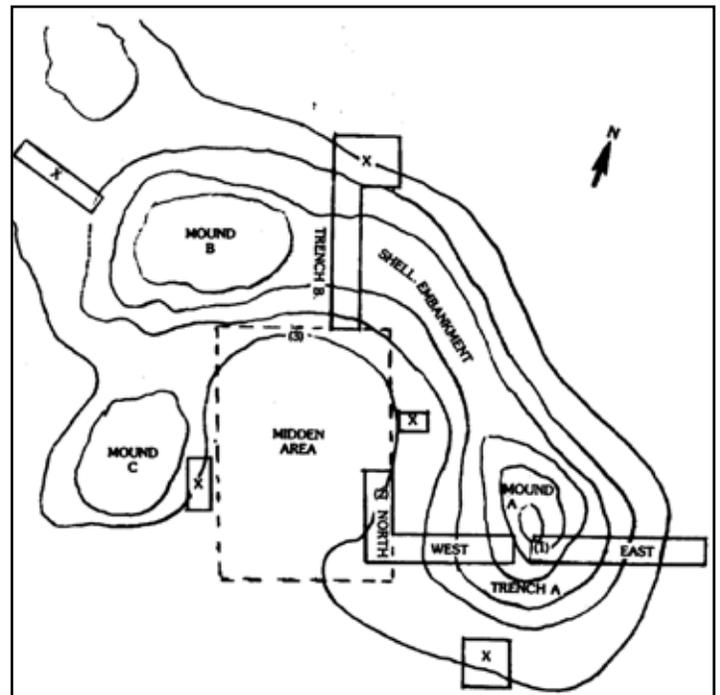
First occupied around 500 B.C., the Wightman site had become a year-round settlement by about 500 A.D., which is when construction of the large mounds began. Like almost all the smaller mound sites ringing Pine Island Sound, it was abandoned around 700 A.D.

The Wightman site was studied in the 1970s (and again, briefly, in the mid-1990s). The work in the 1970s was one of the first uses of fine-mesh screens, revealing that fish, rather than shellfish, was the primary food source.

Fradkin, a graduate student at the University of Florida in Gainesville in the '70s, worked with UF's Dr. Jerald Milanich, and she used her work on the site as the subject of her Master's thesis.

Dr. Arlene Fradkin is Associate Professor of Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology at Florida Atlantic University. She received her B.A. in anthropology from the State University of New York at Albany and her M.A. and Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Florida. Her major area of expertise is zooarchaeology, the study of animal bones recovered from archaeological sites. She has worked on numerous archaeological sites both in the U.S. and abroad. Her research projects focus on both pre-Columbian and historic sites.

Cushing and Goggins visited the site. Cushing noted that "Such portions of the work as were left -- for some part of it



*Wightman site topographic map from "The Indian Presence" by Charles J. Wilson. Located near the exit from "Ding" Darling, the Wightman site probably connected to the mounds of the Shell Mound Trail at the Refuge, before the construction of Wildlife Drive separated them.*

had been destroyed and washed away by successive storms -- formed... an enclosure of mangrove swamp... It had been considerably widened and built up, at its middle, and again towards its western end. Well-defined canals led in from among shell-bank enclosures with the mangrove swamp to both of these built-up points, the westernmost terminating in

*NOTE: There will be no SWFAS meetings in Bonita Springs in July and August. The next Bonita Springs meeting will be on Wednesday, September 16, when Jeff Moates will talk about Florida shipwrecks. The July 11 field trip to the Shell Museum will be the July SWFAS meeting.*

## FGCU Field School: Searching for Fort Shackelford

On Sunday, June 7, a small troop of SWFAS members journeyed to the Fort Shackelford site (a Third Seminole War fort) hosted by Dr. Paul Backhouse and Dr. Annette Snapp. Backhouse began the tour at the 1940s concrete monument with a brass plate set by D. G. Copeland to mark what he believed was the location of Fort Shackelford. He said that when representatives of the Seminole tribe had visited the field school site, they mentioned that there had been four markers that indicated the four corners of the fort. Backhouse pointed out broken pieces of concrete scattered near the large monument that could have been those markers. Ultimately, the field school sought to locate archaeological evidence of the early fort to determine whether or not the Copeland monument is accurately placed.

Ground-penetrating radar had been used to try to get the general contours of the site, moving from the cypress dome at the west end of the site to past the marker going east. Backhouse noted that he had been hoping for an indication of a palisade but there wasn't.

Backhouse said that a 1940s aerial of the site had shown a trail leading from the cypress dome in the direction of Big Cypress. The area was an important trading route and historical accounts report that the site was at the conjunction of the swamp and the pine forest. A few pines could be seen at the edge of the cypress dome.

Work at the site was focused on two-meter-square units which were dug at six locations and each unit provided a different slice of the site's history. Several units yielded a variety of metal artifacts, from buckshot (also found in a metal-detecting survey) to square nails (a period indicator) and pieces that might have been gun parts.

Backhouse explained that the acidic soil hindered the preservation of iron (the presence of some metal artifacts could be inferred merely from the stained soil). As a result, the metal artifacts recovered have nearly all been heavily corroded which makes artifact



*Above: Dr. Paul Backhouse (left) and students examining metal artifacts in situ. Below: The concrete marker, looking west toward the cypress dome. Inset: Metal sign that tops the marker.*



identification more difficult.

Other units appeared to reflect a watermelon farming operation from sometime in the '40s-'50s which was evident in the dark parallel lines that appeared to connect one eastern unit to a western unit. These dark parallel lines appear to represent agricultural rows. Additionally, one unit contained plastic "baskets" believed to have been used for the watermelon farming operation. One of the units located nearer the

cypress dome hit limestone bedrock just below the ground's surface which may also suggest earthmoving activities related to agriculture.

Shovel tests in one of the nearby "push-up" piles revealed historic ceramics, glass and metal artifacts that probably postdate the fort and represent Seminole camps that were known to have been located in the Fort

*Continued right*

## Otter Mound Maintenance in July

Melissa Hennig of the Collier County Facilities Management Department has invited SWFAS members to participate in another dig at Otter Mound Preserve on Thursday, July 30 and possibly Friday, July 31.

For those of you who may have forgotten, Otter Mound Preserve is a small public park located on Addison Court in the Caxambas area at the south end of Marco Island.

Previously, we participated in the park replanting work in June and July of 2006, with a follow-up sifting and examination of surface material from the construction of sidewalks and the small parking area in 2007. SWFAS volunteers then performed much of the heavy work of sifting the soil through screens to isolate artifacts and shell. This

year Melissa Hennig plans to have the screen shaking done by her workers and the SWFAS volunteers will be asked only to sort and classify the remaining material.

Since classifying archaeological material is best done at Craighead Laboratory after washing and drying, it appears at this time that our function during the July 2009 dig will be to properly bag and identify each screen-load of artifacts and shell and keep records so that subsequent lab analysis will have proper provenience for all material.

If you are available and would like to help, please let us know at Craighead Lab (paleologer@naples.net). As more details about the schedule and work plan are developed, they will be sent as follow-up messages.

## Coming Up Next Fall

There will be no August SWFAS meeting but the Fall schedule is shaping up:

- September 16 -- Jeff Moates on Florida shipwrecks
- November 18 -- Greg Mount, Florida Atlantic University
- December -- Possible Field Trip to the Pillsbury Mound in Bradenton
- January 20, 2010 -- Ann Cordell, Florida Museum of Natural History

## At SWFAS in May

At the May SWFAS meeting, FPAN Archaeologist Michele Williams, Ph.D., gave a highly entertaining talk about the various plants utilized by early Floridians as well as some of the 'meatier' issues of early diet in South Florida.

Michele Williams is the Director and Terrestrial Archaeologist for the Southeastern Region of Florida Public Archaeology Network. She has participated in digs throughout the southeastern United States for the past 20 years. Her specialty within archaeology is the use of plants by prehistoric Native Americans.

## FGCU Field School: Student Notes

*By Lance Anderson*

On May 18, 12 Florida Gulf Coast University students began a 20-day archaeological field school on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation. The class was aimed at instructing students on how to properly excavate a site both scientifically and methodologically over the course of the two 10-day sessions in the field.

The field school is excavating to locate the remains of U.S. Army fort Fort Shackelford, which was used during the third Seminole War as the last military stop before the expanse of the Everglades. The fort was reportedly abandoned during the rainy season and burned down by the Seminoles. All that remains today of the fort is a single stone monument with a

### Shackelford -- from left

Shackelford area. These results were a reminder to all that the site is likely a multi-component one with artifacts ranging through various time periods and occupations.

The work, which is being done in a cow pasture, presented some challenges. After several days of rain, they returned last week to find a lake covering one unit, and the group spent a couple of days bailing out the units with dustpan and bucket. It was again preparing to "robot" (as they superstitiously termed the R-word) as we departed.

Based on preliminary results, Backhouse felt pretty comfortable in saying that the original marker probably was correctly placed.

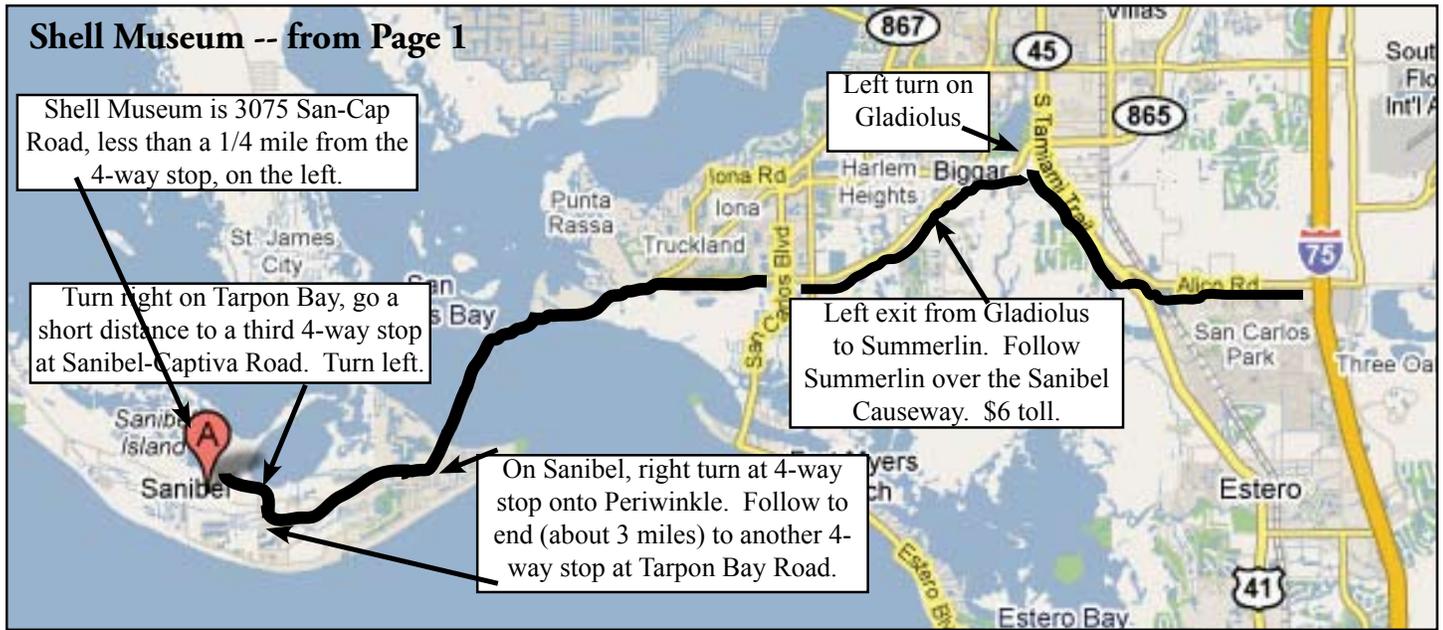
brass plaque which was placed in the 1940s.

Students read Barbara Purdy's "How To Do Archaeology The Right Way" before entering the field and, once work began, they quickly took on the roles of archaeologists — theorizing, arguing ideas, meticulously looking over maps of the site and asking questions in an effort to gain greater perspective on the work they were doing. As each unit descended, centimeter-by-centimeter, new questions arose about the history of the site, which only added to the increasing excitement of the excavation.

The field school was lead by Dr. Paul Backhouse, Deputy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer at the Tribal Historic Preservation Office in Big Cypress and adjunct professor of archaeology at FGCU, as well as Dr. Annette Snapp, visiting professor. Together they have kept the excitement level high and the focus precise.

Dr. Backhouse has also provided students with the opportunity to participate in all aspects of an archaeological dig, including historic architectural surveys; lab work; field surveys that use state-of-the-art surveying equipment; and photography.

It is very rare that the Seminole Tribe of Florida allows for excavations of this sort to be conducted on its reservations. This was well understood by the students, who were both respectful and grateful for the opportunity. It is also very rare that FGCU has a field school, and it is the hope of many students that it continues to have one in the future. .



a diminutive inner court.”

All that remains of the Wightman site today is a low hill; the mounds were demolished for a housing development. The low mounds of the “Ding” Darling Shell Mound Trail were probably part of the same mound complex.

Following the lecture, there will be an optional behind-the-scenes tour of the museum’s collections.

The Shell Museum’s “Calusa: The Original Shell People” exhibit incorporates some of the artifacts found at the Wightman site. The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum is located at 3075 Sanibel-Captiva Road on Sanibel. For information about the Museum, please call 239/395-2233. For more information on the Wightman site lecture, please call Karen Nelson at 239/292-7858.

## About SWFAS

### The Directorate:

President - Theresa Schober  
 1st VP - Tom Franchino  
 2nd VP - James Oswald  
 Recording Secretary - vacant  
 Treasurer - Charlie Strader  
 Membership Secretary - Charlie Strader

### Trustees:

Rebecca Austin, Jean Belknap, John Beriault, Liz Clement, Alison Elgart, Betsy Perdichizzi, Annette Snapp, Jack Thompson

### SWFAS Committees:

Field - John Beriault  
 Lab - Jack Thompson  
 Hospitality - volunteer welcome!  
 Newsletter - Karen Nelson

If you would like to join SWFAS, please address your check to: The Southwest Florida Archaeological Society; P.O. Box 9965; Naples, FL 34101  
 Dues are: Individual - \$20; Sustaining - \$50; Family - \$35; Student \$15

### Learn more about SWFAS at:

<http://www.explorationsinc.com/swfl-archaeology/index.html>

Board meetings are usually held prior to the regular meeting on the third Wednesday of the month at the Bonita Springs Community Hall at 27381 Old U.S. 41 (by the banyan tree). All are welcome. Board meetings begin at 6 p.m. Regular meetings begin at 7:30 (with coffee served at 7).

## Summer 2009 Newsletter

The Southwest Florida Archaeological Society  
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