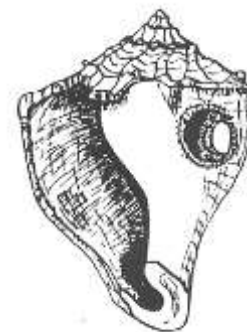


SWFAS

# NEWSLETTER

THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



JOHN G. BERIAULT, ACTING EDITOR VOLUME 19, NUMBER 5

MAY, 2003



a highly successful pottery manufacturing workshop on April 5<sup>th</sup> followed by a varied and spectacular pottery firing and native American craft event on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Both these events were held at the serene and scenic Brown family retreat on Hickey's Creek in East Fort Myers. It would be my estimation that at

least sixty different individuals participated in one or both events, and I'm sure that each person came away with

pleasant memories of gorgeous spring days spent in an oak hammock setting along a lazy creek making (and largely succeeding at) pottery, basketry, and, yes, even archery (thanks to Dick Workman and his impromptu bows and arrows of cabbage palm fronds). I can't thank Dr. Robin Brown, his wife Jan, sons Stuart and Cotten, and

granddaughter Sarah Brown enough for their hospitality, general gracious good nature in the face of so many visitors, and their efforts to provide such a pleasant and instructive event for SWFAS and other like-minded enthusiasts of the area. All we can hope is that the Brown family too enjoyed the event and might consider having us back out to do another of these events in the not-so-distant future...

Somebody made a pot at Dr. Robin Brown's Ceramic Firing and craft event at his Hickey's Creek retreat April 5<sup>th</sup>. I think this event was one of the most enjoyable recent activities SWFAS has participated in. Hope we can do this again next year... photograph courtesy of Dr. Robin Brown

## POTTERY FIRING AT HICKEY'S CREEK WAS GREAT...

Members of SWFAS, other interested individuals, and members of Dr. Robin Brown's family participated in what most would regard as

## Inside this Newsletter

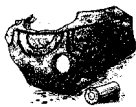
- 1 We have Moved! Florida Gulf Coast University is the new site of our General Meetings
- 2 Can You Canoe? Read Robert Gore, Part Seven...

**DR. JOHN GIFFORD TO SPEAK ON LITTLE SALT SPRING AT MAY 21<sup>st</sup> MEETING-SEE NOTICE**

**THE DATEBOOK**

**May 14th** SWFAS Board Meeting, Hampton Inn, Bonita Springs, 7:00 PM

**May 21st** General Meeting at Florida Gulf Coast University, Ben Hill Griffin Bldg., Room 109 at 7:30 P.M.



**POTSHERDS AND POTSHOTS... AN ONGOING SERIES BY ROBERT GORE**

THE ORTONA ENIGMAS: CANOES, CANALS, COMMERCE, AND CONVEYANCE: VII.

VII. ORTONA TODAY

The town of Ortona was founded and named by Jerome G. Attanasio, a businessman from nearby LaBelle, around 1920. He purchased 360 acres of land, planted six of these in grapes, and began to sell five and ten acre tracts, naming his development after his birthplace in Italy. The 32 acre town cemetery was laid out and received its first "inhabitants" in 1921. The remains of Billie Bowlegs III, the 103-year-old patriarch of the Seminole Nation are perhaps its most famous resident.

The Coffee Mill Hammock, which lies directly on the Caloosahatchee River, but south of the mound-canal

area, was supposedly named for such a device that had been nailed to a tree so that settlers and riverboat people could grind their beans. Another, perhaps apocryphal story, is that some robbers who were fleeing from law enforcement purportedly buried some \$60,000 in jewelry in the Hammock. They apparently never returned and the "Jewels" have never resurfaced. The Ortona Locks were begun in 1936 as part of the Okeechobee Waterway, but major development passed by the little town and concentrated instead on the shores of Lake Okeechobee. Meanwhile, cattle, hogs, vegetables, sand mining, pineland turpentineing, and a little sugar cane formed the earliest modern industries on the Ortona prairies. The sand mines, and pasture clearing have destroyed most of the so-called Ortona Canals. By 1979 a 1,000-acre citrus grove had been planted, and today cattle, citrus, settlement and some tourism form the balance of the economy. The Ortona site, lying about a mile north of a bend in the Caloosahatchee River, has had both a bright and a sad history. And therein lies the completion of our tale. The original Ortonan people, seemingly never the pop stars of the indigenes, probably disappeared sometime in the

**About SWFAS**

**The directorate:** President Tom Franchino, first vice president Corbett Torrence second vice president Theresa Schoeber, membership secretary Charlie Strader, treasurer Charlie Strader, recording secretary Jo Ann Grey, directors Bud House, Sue Long, Liz Clement, Jo Ann Grey, Don Taggart, Jack Thompson, John Beriault, Charlie Strader, John Worth, and Dr Susan Stans.

The committees: Field: Beriault, 434-0624; Hospitality: position open; Membership: Charlie Strader, 941-992-6133; Publicity: Dottie Thompson, 597-2269; Sales: position open; Finances, Jack Thompson 597-2269, 774-8517; Lab: (774-8517), Art Lee, 261-4939, Walt Buschelman, 775-9734, Jack Thompson, 597-2269.

To Join: Address your check to the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society, P.O. Box 9965, Naples, FL 34101. Dues are: Individual \$20, Individual Sustaining \$50.00, Family \$35, Student \$15.

Any questions, comments, contributions to the Newsletter: John G. Beriault, acting editor, P.O. Box 9074, Naples, FL 34101-9074 or Email to: [JGBeriault@aol.com](mailto:JGBeriault@aol.com).

1700s. Thereafter their original village site suffered from 19th and 20th century insults, being at one time a garbage dump and, as noted above, a source for sand mining and cow pastures. Although the mounds and their associated settlement, believed to have covered some two square miles in area, had long been recognized as aboriginal in design and age, and accurate engineering and survey maps had been drawn in the 1870s and 1880s, the accompanying two-pronged canal system, which radiated southeast and southwest from the mound complex was only critically and scientifically investigated by professional archaeologists beginning some 12 years ago. By then, much of the area, including the canals, had been so severely altered that most anthropological conclusions must remain either tentative or uncertain.

From an ethnographic level even less has been determined. Were the Ortonan peoples one and the same with Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda's Maya'imi? Or were they merely another offshoot of the history-hogging Calusas? These questions, no less pertinent, are also poignant but remain unanswered. Sadly, and like many of the mound-like

structures within the Greater Lake Okeechobee Watershed, the extermination of the occupying aboriginals, begun by the Spanish, then followed by the Americans, caused the canal-mound complex at Ortona to quickly fall into disrepair--but not out of memory. Pre-Civil War politicians had already begun beating the development drum, and soon Cracker cowboys, fortune-seeking Yankee explorers, and hardscrabble settlers ranged across and into the area. After the Civil War the Okeechobee watershed was rediscovered and quickly blossomed. Settlers from nearly all the eastern states began swarming into the region.

Then Hamilton Disston bought a million acres for pennies on the dollar and began to develop the region. He dynamited the rapids on the Caloosahatchee River so stern- and side-wheeler steamboats could navigate across old Lake Flirt and Lake Hicpochee into Lake Okeechobee, and thence northward to his home-base city of Kissimmee. Opening the Lake also gave a River route from other dredged lakes southward down the Kissimmee and then westward down the Caloosahatchee. Ancient mound "cities" became curiosities, places to bring a shovel and to dig for "treasure" or bones, or both.

Sand being a commodity needed for wagon roads, cattle pen bases, truck gardens, and housing foundations, the remnant mounds at Ortona quickly provided an abundant supply. That many of the mounds were a combination of aboriginal house sites and burial grounds became immediately apparent as human skeletal remains and associated artifacts were discovered during the excavations. But that did not prevent their destruction. After all, they were just "Injun mounds."

Haphazard excavations continued into the early twentieth century when the site was essentially abandoned for more prolific borrow pits nearby. Now, nearly another century later, on the cusp of a new millennium, a paved two-lane highway swings past the ancient village site, and the surrounding land has been "protected" under the aegis of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Professional archaeologists have gathered again. But the mounds are mostly gone now; parking lots and a picnic pavilion cover . . . what? Grave sites? Artifact treasuries? Canoeyards? What can the Ortona and other now-lost aboriginal tribespeople in that area tell us? What is left for them to say? Anything at all?

Over the past months we have focused on aspects concerning

the Ortona canals, and at the same time raised questions about the validity of some "conclusions" that have

peoples who constructed them. Ironically, these were a people whose bestowed "tribal" name has been

"Ortonans" are the only other aboriginals with "international" (nomenclatural) connections in Florida.

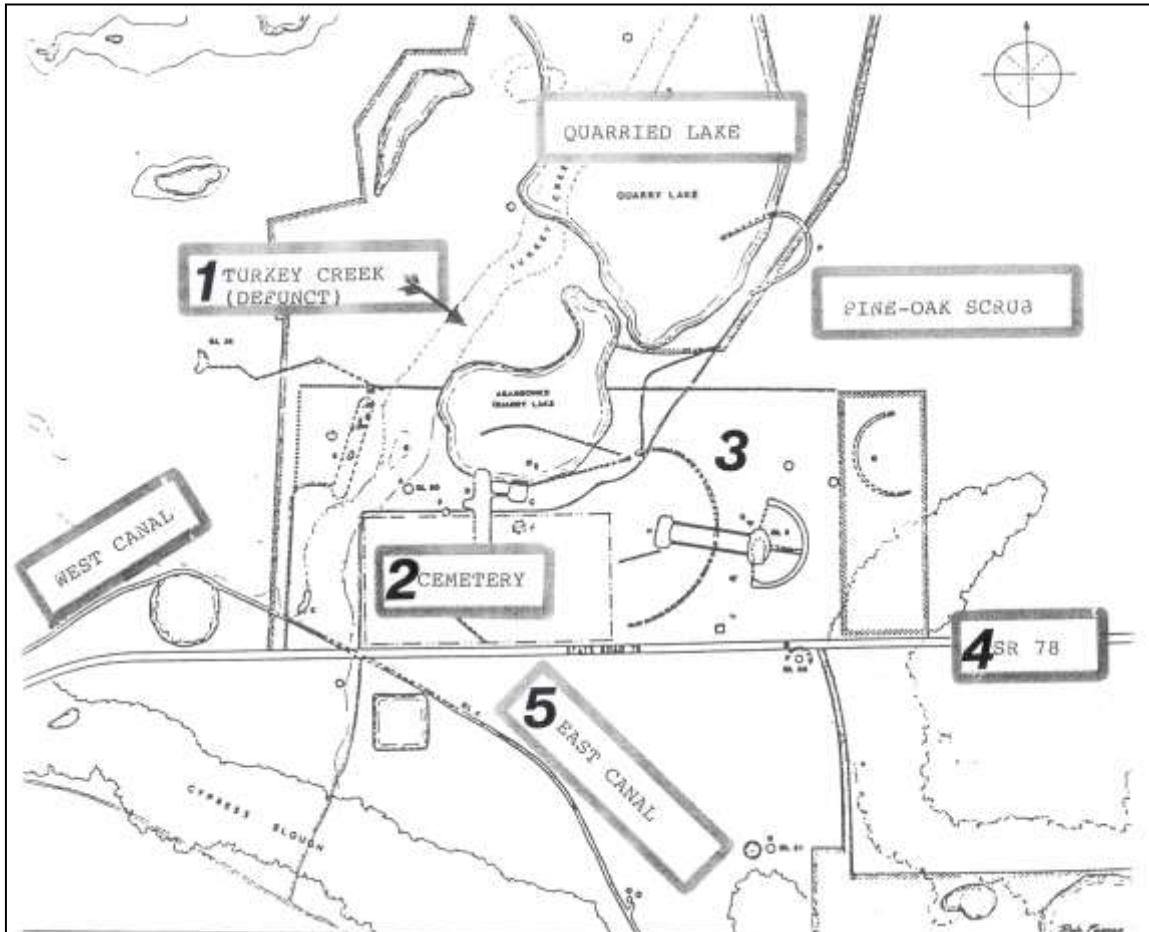
What is clear, however, is that coming to anything but tentative and tenuous conclusions is unwarranted.

And imputing relationships to other, more geographically distant cultures seems to me (at least) to be archaeological folly. And, who knows, it might eventually prove to be an historical insult as well.

For example: Why must the "Ortonans" be

beholding to anyone in the Ohio River Valley for their engineering skills? Why not be beholden to the Mayans just over the Gulf of Mexico horizon, who were already noted seafarers 1,200 years ago? Or even beholden to themselves? One also

wonders whether the Ortonans actually spread their canal-building knowledge throughout the peninsula, especially southwestward to the Calusa-Muspa bailiwicks.



**FIGURE 13: Magnified schematic overview of the Ortona Site, 1) Turkey Creek stream bed (defunct); 2) Ortona town cemetery; 3) Area of existing or destroyed earthworks and mounds; 4) SR 78; 5) Remnant canals. Modified from cover illustration by Rich Farrar, *The Florida Anthropologist*, vol. 48 no. 4.**

appeared in the "scientific forums" of at least two newspaper articles. Thanks to the recent investigations by Luer, Wheeler and Carr et al., the general engineering complex of the Ortona Canals has become much better known. But other much to be desired data are sparse, and precious little is known about the reasons behind the canals (or ditches), and even less about the aboriginal

derived from an early twentieth-century Floridan town, itself named after a developer's place of birth in Italy! Except for the Timucuans (senso lato) the

Were the Ortonans "canal contractors" of sorts, hired by other tribespeople on the peninsula?

Regardless, the Ortonan canals, built through a waterland and nearly broken-arrow straight, are a marvelous fact, and that, for now, is enough. Why they were placed where they were, how they were built, and who built them, presently consists of a series of hypotheses, or even "Just So Stories." And that includes much of the Kiplingesque "data" used in these columns as well. But as noted earlier, that sort of speculation is fun, as long as it is not elevated into belief without proof.

Yet Dame History is a perverse and tricky old crone, and a jokester to boot. Who knows what information she will provide in the future? Or from where or from whom she will let it come. What kind of information might be revealed by satellite imagery, or ground-penetrating radar? From the Spanish Archives of the Indies in Seville? From further excavations on as yet undestroyed sites?

Until such time, let us merely acknowledge that the people tentatively designated as "Ortonan," whoever they might have been, whatever they may have done, and however they may have done it, did accomplish a

spectacularly ingenious, and perhaps even awesome, engineering feat, one unsurpassed by any of the other tribespeople (including the much-vaunted Calusa) anywhere in the Floridan peninsula. And the Ortonans accomplished it in the distant, waterlogged recesses of the howling wilderness that was once the Greater Lake Okeechobee Watershed. And, they did (apparently) by hand what Hamilton Disston could NOT do except by dynamite and steam-dredge. Who today would try and imitate the Ortonans' feat, exactly as they accomplished it?

Today, the Ortona Lock Recreational Area, a pleasant if blandly unassuming camping and recreational area in a broad, grassy, parklike setting, occupies little more than a narrow spot just off the highway. It lies just before the bend on two-lane SR 78, which parallels a portion of the Okeechobee Waterway west of Lake Okeechobee, and is also very near what used to be Lake Flirt. The facility, approximately 15 miles west of Moore Haven, is operated by the Corps of Engineers and boasts ten camping sites, a covered picnic pavilion, and restrooms with showers. When I was there two years ago a young mother with children was the on-site manager.

The site itself is unimposing. Nearly all of the Ortona

"mounds" have been almost completely destroyed by sand-mining operations and other development over the last century, although slight ground elevations (reminding one of an ill-kempt golf course) can still be seen within the park proper. A tiny "natural habitat" area, consisting of scrub-shrub understory and oak and pine trees, has a short wooden boardwalk through it. Signs scattered here and there provide standard minimal information concerning the site. Looking carefully on the ground in the dirt and gravel parking lot the diligent searcher may find small pieces of clay potsherds. The local cemetery, somewhat weedy, still lies adjacent. But the ghosts that whisper among the oaks at night do not speak any modern language. Go see it.

## APRIL MEETING

By Jack Thompson

Stuart Brown showed us how he learned to make an aboriginal canoe. It turned out to be both an educational and hilarious talk. It seemed to be a simple process but over a long time he learned what worked and didn't work. We all have a new understanding and appreciation for our pre-historic friends.

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Dr. John Gifford will be the speaker at the Southwest Florida Archeological Society's meeting on May 21st at 7:30 P.M. The meeting will be at FGCU in Room 109, Ben Hill Griffin Building. His subject will be Paleoenvironments at Little Salt Spring, Florida. Florida's first people had to live near sinkholes because there was no water on the surface 7,000 to 10,000 years ago. He will explain how they subsisted.

Dr. Gifford is an Associate Professor in the University of Miami's Division of Marine Affairs and Policy and is in charge of archeological studies at Little Salt Spring

The public is invited; a social hour will begin at 7:00 PM. Call 239-597-2269 for information.

## **LAB NOTES**

By Jack Thompson

The Craighead lab has been a very busy place. Since October 31 we have processed, identified and labeled over 1,600 artifacts from the Olde Marco Inn project. We are doing this for the Archaeological and

Historical Conservancy. It still seems possible that the final total will be over 10,000. Both historical and pre-historical items are found and we frequently are pleasantly surprised when we open a bag.

We need help. Several of our valued analysts will be heading north for the summer. We are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 8:00 A.M to about noon. There may be some Saturday "washins" as some of the material is quite dirty. If you want excellent training and a fun place to work, just come.

THE NEXT TWO PAGES  
ARE MONTAGES OF

THE HICKEY'S CREEK  
EVENTS

COURTESY: DR. ROBIN  
BROWN





Pottery Replication  
Hickey's Creek  
April 5, 2003

