



Southwest Florida Archaeological Society Newsletter



Vol. 22 No. 1

February 2006

FEBRUARY SWFAS MEETING

The next monthly meeting of the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society will be held on Wednesday, February 15th at 7 pm. Our speaker is Bill Keegan. We will meet, as usual, at the Bonita Springs Community Center at Old 41 and Reynolds Street. The public is invited to attend.

Dr. William Keegan is Chairman and Curator of Anthropology, Department of Natural History, Florida Museum of Natural History. He also serves as Associate Director for Research and Collections.

He holds affiliate appointments as Professor of Anthropology and Curator of Latin American Studies at the University of Florida.

He is also affiliate faculty in the College of Natural Resources and the Environment. He received his Ph.D. in 1985 from the University of California, Los Angeles. Following the completion of his Ph.D. he was the Visiting Scholar in North American Prehistory at Southern Illinois University where he published the edited volume, *Emergent Horticultural Economies of the Eastern Woodlands*. He was Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina before moving to the Florida Museum of Natural History in 1987 to develop a research-based program in Caribbean Archaeology. He was appointed Department Chair in 1994.

Keegan began investigating Caribbean prehistory in 1978 in the Turks and Caicos Islands. In 1982 he initiated a systematic survey of the islands in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas during which more than 1500 kilometers of Bahamian coastline were surveyed and more than 150 prehistoric sites discovered. The most recent discoveries are sites in the Turks Islands; islands previously



viewed as uninhabitable. He has participated in and directed archaeological excavations in Haiti (1995-present), the Turks and Caicos Islands (1978-present), Bahamas (1982-present), Grenada (1989, 1990), Grand Cayman (1993) and the Dominican Republic (1999). His research has been supported by grants from the American Philosophical Society, National Geographic Society, H. John Heinz III Charitable Trust, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the United Nations Development Program, and through the participation of EARTHWATCH volunteers. He is Curator of the Bullen Research Library of Caribbean Archaeology and is involved with the use of stable isotope analysis to investigate prehistoric diets.

His interests range from the very specific investigation of Columbus' first landfall to broad questions of cultural development and change. One goal has been to demonstrate how understanding and explaining Caribbean prehistory is important for investigators working in other island archipelagos. As a result, his work has attracted international attention. He has published more than 40 scientific articles detailing his research. He was awarded (with co-author Morgan Maclachlan) the Morton H. Fried Prize in 1989 for the best article in general anthropology published in the *American Anthropologist*. He has published two single-author books, *Bahamian Archaeology: Life in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Before Columbus* (Media Publishing, 1997) and *The People Who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas* (Uni-

versity Press of Florida, 1992); and the edited book, *Earliest Hispanic/Native American Interactions in the Caribbean: A Sourcebook* (Garland Press, 1991). He is the Contributing Editor for the Caribbean Area to the Library of Congress' *Handbook of Latin American Studies* and the *Journal of Archaeological Research*. He serves on the Advisory Board of the HRAF Collection of Archaeology.

JANUARY MEETING

Ann Cordell Pastes Together a New Look at Prehistoric Indian Pottery



Our January meeting at the Mound House was an exciting exploration of prehistoric ceramics in southwest Florida by Ann Cordell from the Florida Museum of Natural History. We thank Ann for making the long drive down from Gainesville and providing us with an excellent presentation. She began her talk by explaining how ceramic studies in archaeology contribute to our understanding of time/space relationships such as defining culture areas, regional trade

relationships, and the antiquity of sites. She followed with an introduction to ceramic technology outlining how clays were collected, prepared, shaped, and fired. We learned how prehistoric peoples of Florida decorated their pots and how many of them used. In closing, we learned how ceramic specialists conduct their research.



Effigy bird head with slipped/painted and burnished surface finish ceramic. From the McKeithen Site, 8CO17.

An important part of the preparation process involves adding temper to the clay to improve the clay strength, reduce shrinkage during firing, and improving the pot's resistance to thermal shock. The clay and temper combined constitute what is called "paste." In Florida many different types of temper including Spanish moss, sand, shell, limestone, and

even charcoal and broken bits of old pots were added to clay as temper.

As many of you know, most pots, or potsherds found at Calusa sites are undecorated, but hidden in the clay-pastes are clues to the pot's source of origin and period of manufacture. For example, the first pots made in southwest Florida between about 2000 and 500 B.C. were tempered with Spanish moss. From 500 B.C. to the time of European arrival, Calusa folks preferred the use of sand. Researchers have also noticed the presence of fresh water sponge spicules in many clay-pastes. The number of clay spicules in clay-pastes helps distinguish plain pots made locally from those that originated in the Okeechobee and St. Johns regions. Because the spicules can only be seen under a microscope, Ann stressed the importance of this piece of equipment in identifying ceramic sherds, along with a petrographic microscope to observe thin cross sections of ceramic sherds. Her high tech methods were captured in magnificent photographs that might have looked more like colorful abstract art than pottery paste to the general observer. Of course, Ann detailed and explained the colorful images, and a world of pottery pastes unfolded before us.

Most researchers believe that the sponge spicules occurring in the pottery pastes is natural, and several clay samples analyzed by Ann confirm this belief. However, it has been proposed that some of the sponge spicules might be intentionally added to the clay, as is done by some Indians in the Amazon. While this might be the case in the St Johns where clay-pastes have an abundance of

sponge spicules, Ann doubts it was practiced elsewhere based on the samples of raw clay she has observed. If you know of a clay source, get a sample and send it to Ann. The more we learn about the location and characteristics of naturally occurring clays, the more we will learn about the manufacturing process.

Ann recommended several books for those of us interested in learning more or expanding our libraries. Ceramic analysis has come a long way in the last 50 years, thanks largely to Ann's careful and meticulous work. As Ann points out, some of the variations she has discovered still awaits archaeological explanation as to why these subtle variations exist and what they might tell us about the people who manufactured and owned them.

ABOUT SWFAS

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To Join: Address your check to:

The Southwest Florida Archaeological Society,

PO Box 9965,

Naples FL 34101.

Dues are:

Individual - \$20. Sustaining - \$50.

Family - \$35. Student - \$15.

Board meetings: 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7 PM, Hampton Inn, Bonita Springs
All welcome

NEWSLETTER NEEDS EDITOR

As of January 2006, the SWFAS Newsletter is without an editor. Volunteers interested in this ever-fascinating job should contact any of the Directorate.

In the meantime, the newsletter will be assembled from publishable articles received by the 20th of each month. Publishable means:

- Original material under your byline and not duplicated from a copyrighted publication.
- Readable sentence text. Abbreviated notes, hints or ideas to be expanded by the editor will *not* be used.
- Of general interest to SWFAS members.

Submitted articles will be corrected for spelling and grammar by software, and proofread by Craighead Lab volunteers.

Articles may be shortened to fit available space.

Articles received after the 20th of the month may be carried over to a later issue if not date sensitive.

Jack Harvey – typesetter
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Dues are Due for 2006!

If you joined on or after September 1, 2005, you are good until January 2007.

Please see **ABOUT SWFAS** for dues and mailing address.