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November 2006

Special November & December SWFAS outings

The November and December SWFAS meetings will NOT be held at the Bonita Springs Community Center. In November, the building will not be available and the December meeting has traditionally been a field trip.

November 5 - Tour of Mound House Pool Excavation

The roof will be going in over the Mound House pool excavation on November 8, so a November SWFAS tour has been scheduled for Sunday, Nov. 5 at 11 a.m. Bring a bag lunch and enjoy a post-tour bayview picnic on the grounds!

Mound House Director Theresa Schober will lead a tour of the site, where archaeological work is ongoing. Earlier work on the site revealed that continuous habitation of the mound ended at around 800 AD; levels they are working on now appear to be from about 300 AD, and they are coming up with some exciting finds.

A map to the Mound House is on Page 2.

The Mound House is a cultural and environmental learning center on Fort Myers Beach whose mission is to inform and educate residents and visitors about Florida prehistory, the



See MOUND HOUSE, page 2

December 3 - SWFAS Annual Picnic and Work Party

This year's annual picnic will be a BBQ and potluck get together at Charlie Strader's house in Bonita Springs, located on the upper Imperial River.

While enjoying good food and good company, we also plan to sort through material analyzed from a previous SWFAS excavation to determine its accession fate.

So, this will be a good time to see some local archaeological artifacts (the shells and pottery, not us old members) and learn from the professionals. The material to be sorted derives from an excavation conducted in 1986 by SWFAS at the 8LL709 Strader Site. The test pit into the midden located along the lower Imperial River went

down to a depth of 12 feet and yielded a large quantity of cultural material.

SWFAS will provide/cook ribs and chicken and have cold drinks, plates, etc., available for all who RSVP. We also ask that you bring a dish to be shared. Please call Charlie at 239/992-9660 to reserve and coordinate your delicious entry to the potluck. Map and directions to Charlie's will be provided in the December newsletter (which will be sent out just before Thanksgiving).

We hope all can attend the Sunday, December 3rd party, starting at 10:30 a.m.

Mound House from page 1



Coming from the north end of the island, the Mound House is not too far past the Fire station, which has a flashing yellow traffic light. Turn left at Connecticut (right, coming from the south); there is a brown Mound House sign, and a large white Baptist church on the corner. Follow Connecticut to the end and the Mound House is on the left.



Mound House, from page 1

Calusa Indians, early pioneer settlement and life on Estero Island, and the sensitive marine/estuarine environment upon which past cultures and present inhabitants of south Florida have always depended. The learning center is situated on Estero Bay and includes a 2.77-acre Calusa Indian shell mound (The Estero Island Site) and the oldest remaining historic structure on Estero Island, with portions dating to ca. 1906. The property was purchased by the Town of Fort Myers Beach for preservation and interpretive purposes with funds from the Florida Communities Trust Preservation 2000 Program.

In 1958, a 20x40 foot swimming pool was excavated into the Calusa Indian mound immediately south of the original 1906 structure. With grant funds from the state of Florida, the past year has seen the combination of construction activities with public archaeology to transform the non-functioning swimming pool into an underground exhibit room that will ultimately showcase approximately eight feet of actual shell mound stratigraphy over a 40-foot distance.

As the archaeological work is nearing completion, join SWFAS on a tour of the shell mound and the exhibit room construction by Director Theresa Schober. Picnic lunch to follow on the grounds.



Geology Rules: Grand Central Lake

By Jack Harvey

Lewis and Clarke had it tough. They paddled up the Missouri River as far as they could and abandoning their boats, trekked across the continental divide many mountainous miles for about two months to find the headwaters of the Columbia River. There they cut trees and built new boats to complete their epic journey to the Pacific.

If Lewis and Clarke had been trying to cross Florida, they would have had a water route the entire way. At the center of South Florida is a huge lake with many convenient rivers providing access to it from all around Florida. The lake perhaps served as a Grand Central Station, an interchange for canoe traffic to various points of the compass.

Lake Okeechobee is above sea level on high ground at mid South Florida but the land to the northwest is still higher. The Kissimmee River flows from this higher ground into the lake. Fisheating Creek is another tributary draining into the lake. Both of these were at times busy transport routes.

The Caloosahatchee is one of the rivers emptying Lake Okeechobee to the sea, as are the St. Lucie and Miami Rivers, all potential canoe routes. However, the Miami River may not have had reliable waterways contiguous from the sea to the lake during Calusa times. It seems likely that most canoe traffic crossing South Florida would have traveled via Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie.

The map with this column shows

the modern outline of the lake and routes of the various waterways connecting with it. Reliable information on their Calusa-era configurations is scant to non-existent. Certainly the rivers were far more meandering than the straightened versions we have today.

The boundaries of the lake itself were always a problem, changing drastically with rainfall rates and storms. Various projects culminating with the Herbert Hoover Dike have stabilized it so that permanent towns and marinas can exist on its shore. But in Calusa times, some of its shores probably shifted miles between the end of the dry season in spring and the end of the rainy season in fall.

This continually shifting shoreline may have precluded many permanent aboriginal fishing villages near the water, although there might have been adaptations to the shift, such as dwellings on stilts. Also there are some limestone formations at points that might have provided stable dry ground for people to settle.

The lake is a giant saucer rather than a big teacup. It is extremely shallow for its size, with a modern average depth of nine feet and a maximum of 17. In Calusa times, large areas of it were probably hardly more than marshes. We know that when Hamilton Disston dredged a barge canal through it in the 1880s, the Caloosahatchee was considered to start at Lake Flirt, the western-most of a series of small lakes near the western shore of Lake Okeechobee. Just how far canoes had to be portaged across this



Lake Okeechobee: Grand Central stretch isn't known, but it probably depended very much on the season.

Since we know that aborigines built canals just a few miles away at Ortona, it seems likely that they may have improved routes through marshes to facilitate canoe traffic. Certainly hauling a dugout canoe any distance might be impossible for a single canoe traveling alone with only, say, four people aboard.

On the other hand, all the people in a fleet of five or ten canoes could easily haul them, one at a time. Or a single canoe might have been able to get help from local people. It's also possible that in some cases, the travelers might have left their dugouts and walked a few miles to Lake Okeechobee where they bought or borrowed (or stole) canoes from lake dwellers. So there are various ways that the difficult parts of the passage could be han-

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Upcoming events in the area:

Practicing anthropology in a globalizing world: Studies of youth gangs in marginal sociocultural contexts - part of Florida Gulf Coast University's Anthropology Club and the Department of Marine and Ecological Sciences Fall 2006 lecture series. Speaker: Louis Marcelin, Ph.D. - University of Miami. Research both in Brazil and Haiti on family, kinship, and politics as well as on uses and memories of political violence in Haiti and Brazil. **November 2 at 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.**, Student union 213

The History of Mound Key - Sierra Club Meeting. Speaker: Nancy Kilmartin, Lee County Parks and

Recreation Ranger and formerly a ranger at Koreshan State Park will present a program on the history of Mound Key. There will be old pictures and documents that will be kept in the archives. Mound key, the capital of the Calusa Civilization for over 1,000 years, has marvelous man-made mounds and spectacular plants. **November 2 - 6:30 p.m.** at the Unitarian Universalist Church located at 13411 Shire Lane, just off of Daniels Pkwy. in Fort Myers. For info call Connie of the Sierra Club Calusa Group at 239/694-5513 or e-mail gaeakayaks@aol.com; web site: <http://florida.sierra-club.org/calusa/>

GEOLOGY, from page 3

dled. In any case, they didn't need to resort to building new boats as Lewis and Clark did.

And of course the exact means used to navigate difficult spots no doubt depended on the season (high or low water) as well as the millennium. So geology suggests that special skills and experience were needed to efficiently navigate into, through and out of our Grand Central Lake – aboriginal river pilots, if you will. But is such specialization possible in hunter-gatherer cultures? Pottery rimsherds counted and weighed at Craighead Laboratory argue that trade with distant parts of Florida was common, so there must have been great demand for experienced pilots.

Geology rules that Calusa traders (or warriors) planning an expedition would gather a fleet of canoes under a leader and employ a river pilot to guide them through the complex passages leading to the lake. They may have then turned north up the Kissimmee to visit northern tribes. If their destination was the Ais or Jeaga tribes

just east of the lake, the pilot no doubt lead them through the marshy entrance to the St. Lucie river and down it to the Atlantic. From there, they could go north or south, either in the ocean, or through passages behind the barrier islands. If their goal was Tequesta during the rainy season, they may have been able to leave the lake southward through marshes and short canals (as yet undiscovered) to the headwaters of the Miami.

A lake with waterways flowing east, west and south to the sea must be elevated above ocean level. As we have seen, all land in South Florida is formed by the precipitation of calcite from seawater, so that the land around the lake must have formed during globally warm times when icecaps and glaciers melt, raising sea level higher than the lake. But geologists tell us the limestone ridges that form Lake Okeechobee precipitated out of seawater only about 6,000 years ago.

WHOA! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Weren't aboriginals living here 6,000 to 10,000 years ago? Under water? We'll look at possible resolutions

About SWFAS

SWFAS web site: www.explorationsinc.com/swfl-archaeology

The Directorate:

President - Corbett Torrence

1st VP - Theresa Schober

2nd VP - Tom Franchino

Recording Secretary - Jo Ann Grey

Treasurer - Charlie Strader

Membership - Charlie Strader

SWFAS Committees:

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Lab - Jack Thompson

Hospitality - Jeanne Sanders

Education - Dr. John Worth

Publicity - Victoria Rans

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

Board meetings are the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Hampton Inn in Bonita Springs. All welcome. Member meetings are the third Wednesday at 7:30 (coffee served at 7) at the Bonita Springs Community Hall on Old 41 (by the banyan tree).

The Southwest Florida Archaeological Society

P.O. Box 9965

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