

Newsletter

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Arthur R. Lee, Editor

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The May 21 monthly meeting

CEREMONIAL ART IN SOUTHERN FLORIDA

Relationship of prehistoric ceremonial art of Southern Florida to that of other areas will be explored Thursday, May 21 at the monthly meeting of SWFAS, which will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the First Federal Savings and Loan of Fort Myers' Community Room, 3201 Tamiami Trail North, Naples.

There is evidence of the influence of the Southeast Ceremonial Complex in some South Florida artifacts; its extent, and its change over time, are among the subjects SWFAS President John Beriault, who will be our speaker, will discuss.

He sees greater understanding of the art form in future as more wet sites are uncovered, since much was carried out in perishable media like wood, which has survived only in areas where water has kept oxygen from destroying the organic material.

datebook----

BONITA BAY EXPLORATION PROMISES EXCITING WEEKEND

SWFAS diggers have been invited to resume excavation of sites in the Bonita Bay area, where a crew from the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy has been carrying out an intensive exploration program the past few weeks.

The dig is scheduled for the Memorial Day weekend, May 23, 24 and 25. Since all arrangements have not been completed, this date is not firm, so those interested should check with John Beriault, Phone 261-0082, later. As usual, participants will meet at B&B Builders at 8 a.m. each day.

The Conservancy work follows exploration by SWFAS, which located a number of areas of interest in the development, and made a plane-table survey of a major site, the one which is to be explored more thoroughly. The upcoming dig promises to be one of the most exciting the Society has done.

Consevaney team members are Marilyn Masson, Don Mattucci, and Mark Duda.

MAY 30-JUNE 8 DATES SET FOR PUERTO RICAN JUNKET

The long-anticipated archaeological field trip to Puerto Rico has been set for May 30 to June 8, according to SWFAS President John Beriault. Bob Carr, Dade county archaeologist, and Jose Munoz, who is studying for his master's degree in Miami, are making arrangements.

The group will leave from, and return to, Miami. Plan is to make a circle-tour of the 100-mile long island visiting, among other places, the karstic region near Arecibo, where limestone caves house parietal drawings, and a ball court inland, near Utuado. The tour probably will include a visit to the foundations of a house used by Ponce de Leon, and the church of San Jose, where his remains are kept. Air and ground travel and most accomodations will cost \$790; meals will be extra.

Puerto Rico was a frontier zone between the Tainos, who then occupied the Greater Antilles, and the Caribs, who held the nearby island of Vieques and the Virgin Islands, at the time of the Spanish conquest. Columbus discovered Puerto Rico Nov. 19, 1493.

DIVERSITY OF TREES CHARACTERIZES

PUERTO RICO'S EL YUNQUE FOREST

No forest in mainland United States approaches the diversity of trees found in El Yunque Rain Forest of Puerto Rico, which will be seen by Southwest Florida Archaeological Society members in their forthcoming visit to that island.

Botanists have counted some 168 varieties of trees in the forest, with 33 different kinds present in any given acre.

Officially called the Caribbean National Forest, the area is popularly named for the mountain peak El Yunque, part of the Luquillo mountains. It is the only typically tropical rain forest in the national system.

It rises from 330 feet near the coast to 3,281 feet. Ascending its slopes is like moving 100 miles north with each 350 feet. From the hot plains to the 2,000-foot level is the rain forest proper, dominated by the tabanuco tree, a relative of Florida's gumbo limbo. From there to 2,500 feet a montane thicket prospers in the cool cloud cover. On the highest ridges is an elfin forest with gnarled trees less than 12 feet high.

Information can be had from the Forest Supervisor, Caribbean National Forest, Box AQ, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico 00928. An article about it appeared in the February, 1987, Natural History Magazine, which is subscribed to by the county library on Central avenue, Naples.

VALIANT FROG-FATHER IS PUERTO RICAN SYMBOL



He's named for his call: a quick low note, followed by the first part of the wolf whistle. It's used to attract females. And when the eggs are laid, it's he who protects them from dehydration and other frogs who live in Puerto Rico's rain forest and who find their unhatched relatives tasty.

His cocky call and jaunty appearance have made him the unofficial symbol of Puerto Rico: You'll find his portrait advertising all manner of things. Unless you unfold the right rolled leaf, you may not actually see one, since they are nocturnal, but you'll hear his call and you'll smile. He is el Coqui.

SWAFASERS USE DECAPAGE

AT PELICAN BAY SITE

Decapage is the archeological technique of exposing broad areas of a site, leaving artifacts in place until they have been recorded and plotted. It was used May 2 and 3 at a single-occupation site in the Pelican Bay area by a SWFAS crew of 10 or so, with nine one-square-meter areas being excavated to sterile soil, a depth of about 10 centimeters. Only shell was encountered and President John Beriault believes it may have been a lunch stop by a foraging band. More work on the site is scheduled for June 20-21. Workers will meet at B&B Builders Specialties, 3800 N. Tamiami Trail at 1 p.m. Saturday, the 20th, and at 8 a.m. the following day.

THE FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN THE SPRING...

A group of SWFASers who like flora as well as old, used, fauna, strolled and drove through a number of sites in the Golden Gate area Sunday, April 26, admiring the spring blooms and hoping to spot a mound or two. Included in the group were Joe and Frieda Long, Leland and Isabelle Felsberg, Guy Fisher, Keith and Anne Waterhouse, and John Beriault. John remarked the presence of Spring Violets, usually associated with regions farther north, and one small sand mound that might merit further investigation.

UNDERSTAHL DEFINES AREAS

IN CHOKOLOSKEE SITE

Analysis of earth and artifacts from two areas of the Collier area on Chokoloskee island gave evidence of their having been put to widely differing use, Gina Understahl told members of SWFAS at the April meeting.

Using slides to illustrate her points, Ms. Understahl told of contrasting depositions in the two areas which supported a theory that one -- a horseshoe-shaped depression with surrounding arena-like boundaries -- might have been used for social or ceremonial occasions while the other, on a ridge, apparently was a residential area used by prominent people.

In the depressed "plaza" area there were more crushed shell, fewer sherds, tools and ornaments, while the contrasting area she studied -- the lower occupation horizon of Test Pit 4 -- was rich in midden earth and bones, as well as shell and artifacts.

A clayey marl mixed with crushed shell in the Plaza area gives rise to surmise that a prepared surface may have been in place at one time.

Datebook --

The Bonita Springs Historical Society has invited SWFAS to join in a picnic to be held in the Bay Hammock Park of the Bonita Bay Development June 14. A volunteer will be sought at the May 21 meeting to coordinate our offerings.

Datebook --

Central American archaeology will be the subject of the June 18 monthly meeting. Speaker will be Marilyn Masson, a member of the Conservancy crew which has been following up on SWFAS exploration of the Bonita Bay development, and who is recently returned from a major dig in Central America.

Datebook --

A site form meeting will be held at the Strader residence at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 7.

PENSACOLA'S FIRST SETTLEMENT?

Pensacola -- Army Corps of Engineers archaeologists from Mobile, Ala., and volunteers from the Pensacola Archaeological Society believe they may have found the location of Pensacola's first settlement. Norm Simons, curator of the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board, says there is a good chance the oldest Spanish artifacts may go back to 1698. Finds include handforged nails, musket balls, brass buttons and buckles. Site is on a Naval base in the south part of the city. (Naples Daily News)

A GHASTLY AFFAIR

Oxford, England -- Archaeological excavations at Magdalen, an Oxford University college, may have unleashed ghosts. The Oxford Archaeological Unit was given permission to dig among the ruins of a hospital built in 1231 for "poore scholars and other miserable persons" before construction of a new kitchen next month. Since it started work ghostly presences have been felt and footsteps and singing have been heard. "There is some fear that the excavations may have unleashed spirits which are returning to haunt us," said the Rev. Jeffrey John, Anglican Dean of Divinity at Magdalen, who blessed the rooms of a student, saying prayers for the peace of lost souls. (Miami Herald)

UNDER THE MASTHEAD

Under the masthead of any publication is the name of the editor. But if it weren't for others, there would be only one copy of each issue, and that would be in the hands of the editor. So, as a new editor assumes responsibility for your Newsletter, he pays tribute to those who have got it out over the past years. Joyce Doering has typed every letter of the past three years' issues, and Gail Strader has seen to their being properly addressed; Gail actually has gone the extra mile and, after a session with Treasurer Jack Thompson, has turned over to the new corresponding secretary, Lynn Lee, a sparkling, new, guaranteed up-dated membership list. So, for their many hours contributed to SWFAS, my thanks and congratulations, which go also to Travis Doering for his adding a new dimension to the Newsletter, and doing an extra issue so Lynn and I could muck around some more (pre-Neanderthal) French garbage.

Art Lee

HEYERDAHL'S WORLD: MYSTERY
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN



The Maldive Mystery

Thor Heyerdahl
Adler & Adler, Bethesda, Md., 1986

The government of the Maldive Islands, which are scattered in a north-south line just north of the Equator and southwest of India, called on Thor Heyerdahl to investigate carved rock that had been recently uncovered. That he did do, and his report is pure Heyerdahl, the findings be-decked with themes of popular appeal such as mosques not facing toward Mecca, and struggles to thwart repression of evidences of pre-Islamic civilization.

The author does find possible sources of Maldivian roots in Sri Lanka and India and in the artifacts left by vanished civilizations of Sumer, Mesopotamia, Bahrian and the Indus Valley.

And in so doing he doesn't let slip the opportunity to strum some favorite strings: suggestions of pre-historic voyages by primitive peoples to bring 26-chromosome cotton to the Americas and thence to the Pacific islands; use of papyrus boats on long adventures; and coincidence of long (pierced and stretched) earlobes in sculpture from the Indian and Pacific oceans.

He does make a good case for the Maldives being a consistent crossroads for early travel across the Indian Ocean, both east-west and north-south.

An interesting theme, but the book's not likely to keep one from getting a full night's sleep.

HOARD OF MAYAN KING
MAY CONTAIN HIS BLOOD

An unusually well-preserved cache of artifacts, including jade carvings and a shell that may contain the blood of a Mayan king has been uncovered in the ancient city of Copan, it was announced by William L. Fash of Northern Illinois University, head of the team that made the find.

The 1,200-year-old hoard was found beneath an altar at the foot of a temple pyramid of the old city, in western Honduras. It included two large jade anthropomorphic carvings, three flint lance heads with Mayan faces worked in profile, stingray spines and a spiny oyster shell which held a reddish-brown substance which researchers thought might be the dried blood of the king who was the pyramid's final owner.

When you have a good thing going . . .

Curator David Webb of the Florida State Museum at Gainesville says a fossil pit in Marion county has produced the first complete prehistoric alligator skeleton ever found in Florida. "These alligators were about 10 feet long and appear identical to the (current) form", Webb said.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Mail to: SWFAS, P.O.Box 9965, Naples, FL 33941

_____ Individual--\$10.00 _____ Family--\$15.00 _____ Student--\$7.50 _____ Contributing--\$25.00

Yes! I want to support the SWFAS in their work of preserving and interpreting the prehistoric heritage of Southwest Florida.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

INTERESTS & HOBBIES _____

I hereby agree to abide by the rules and bylaws of the Southwest Florida Archeological Society. I further release from any and all liability due to accident and injury to myself, dependents, and property, the SWFAS, its officers, members, and any property owners cooperating with the Society.

NOTE: All dues and contributions are tax deductible.