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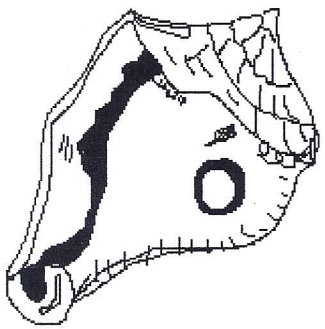
Inside this Newsletter

BIG CHANGES FOR A SMALL NEWSLETTER

The recent unexpected loss of our valued and esteemed newsletter editor, Gail Strader, has forced some "new talent(?)" into the breach in an effort to temporarily fill the very big "holes" that have resulted from her departure. We have had a succession of ever more sterling editors such as Travis Doering, Art Lee, and of course, Gail. They are all hard acts to follow. Our newsletter is vital to the cohesion and even the continuance of our group. It's more than something to look forward to each month, it's the way by which we learn of what events will be planned, and where they are held. Without some sort of timely vehicle of information, our organization would soon fall apart. Acting editor, John Beriault has agreed to put out the next issue or so, aware that he barely knows how to work the template for the newsletter, as offered up on his newly acquired computer.

SWFAS



"Some of this is a little beyond me, says Beriault, as he fights with his machine for mastery of formatting, "But , I believe in this group, I helped found it, and don't want it to fail on my watch." Beriault asks that those with information for the next issue of the newletter Email ready-prepared copy pasted into the body of the Email message to: JGBeriault@aol.com.

Membership Secretary Desperately Needed

In order to get the newsletter to the 160 plus members of the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society, it will be necessary to find someone who would be willing, at least for a while to become membership Secretary. This position would involve keeping track of the membership and helping put labels on the envelopes to mail the monthly newsletter. "This position is vital for the continuance of our Society. Many of us would be willing to help whoever would take this on, " says Jack Thompson, treasurer. "A member who has been living out of town recently renewed and indicated that she did so because of the friendly contact the Newsletter provides."

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FGCU STUDENTS VISIT
CRAIGHEAD LABORATORY

A score of students -- members of a Florida Gulf Coast University archaeology class -- and their teacher, SWFAS member Mike McDonald, visited the Craighead lab Sept. 30.

Since it was not a normal work day, the lab tables were less cluttered with bone and shell than usual, but Ella May Ablahat and Art Lee tried to give their guests an idea of what the lab was set up to do, and

why. Implicit was the need for conservation of the area's archaeological resources and the great care needed in their preservation.

Despite the lab's lack of creature comforts, such as chairs, for such a group, the students were attentive and receptive. Facilities of the lab were offered for any future needs of the University class.

ARCHAEOLOGY AS I SEE IT

Ambiance of Shell Mounds - John G. Beriault Part 3: Site Location

The last (or would it be the first?) two installments of this ongoing series of information concerning shell mounds have dealt with the plants found growing on them. A further discussion is warranted, but maybe a diversion is called for. Plants are best learned about in the field, and not everyone is anxious to know all the kinds. So, I thought I would begin talking about the *placement* of sites, why we find them where they exist today.

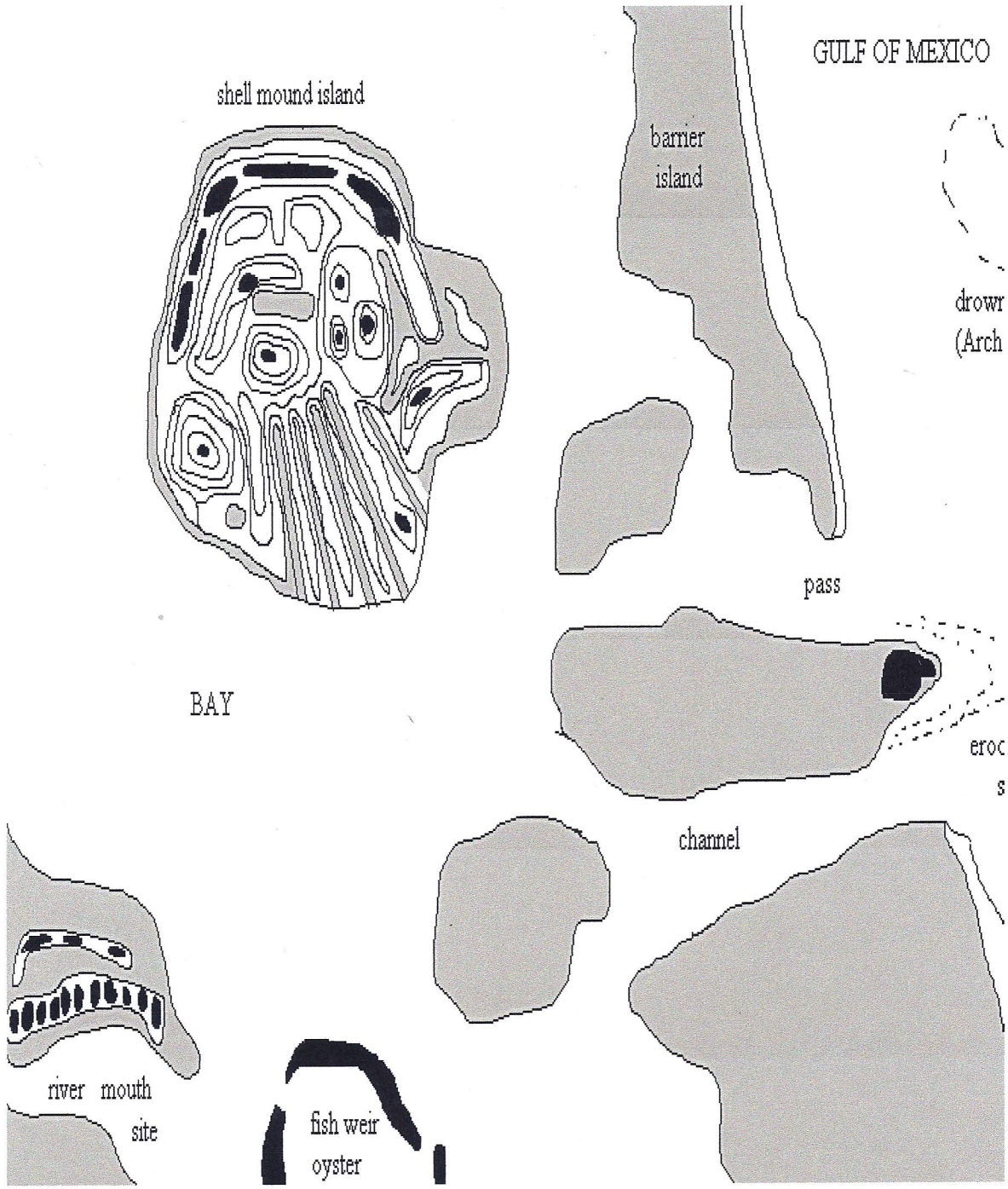
Shell mound sites, simply said, exist where the prehistoric Indians found the marine food resources. Our area supports an amazingly diverse and rich coastal marine environment. It is a "drowned" coastline, which means that a worldwide and gradual sea level rise has been underway for the last several thousand years and has affected our area by slowly submerging the coastal portions. There are two competing theories: that this sea level rise is a smooth and steady process, or, that it has taken place in fits and starts, with perhaps and occasional *drop.* It is likely the later theory is the correct version. At any rate our low-lying coastline, particularly south of the Naples/Marco Island area is a fragmented series of mangrove islands, most of which are awash at high tide. The extensive mangrove forests covering these islands (and which created them from shell bars and sand flats) drop their leaves which provide tremendous biomass (a fancy word for compost) to sustain small organisms, which in turn feed bigger organisms, all the way up the "chain of life" to where Man, modern and prehistoric, stands at the apex.

Prehistoric man soon learned of the "carrying capacity" of this marine environment. Work by the University of Florida at Horr's Island and Useppa Island has uncovered very early evidence that by at least the

end of the mid-Archaic people were settling near the coast and harvesting marine resources. At Horr's Island, a huge shell midden site, these people that were once free-roaming hunter-gatherers were now living year-round harvesting fish and shellfish. Corbett Torrence recently gave us some interesting information about the possibility "our" Indians at Useppa Island were exporting reduced whelk columellas (central univalve columns) for production by other Indian groups to the far north into shell beads. At Horr's Island these same people were probably doing this and living off the sea in a variety of ways. The vast quantities of shell remain at the western end of Horr's Island as shaped piles of material. There has been some question as to *how much* the Indians relied on shellfish (versus fish) for their principal food. Recent work (particularly on formative period shell mound sites) suggest the main food source were millions of small anchovy-sized fish, whose less prominent remains are expressed as thin lenses of yellow-orange bone. Shellfish leave much bulkier remains, and these are what create 99% of the visible shell mound material at any given site.

There is the intriguing theory that Indians may have been using shellfish as an easily gathered "starvation" food in times when the fishing was poor. Work is being done to determine the season shellfish were primarily harvested. Shell samples from the mounds are thin-sectioned by grinding and examined under a microscope to view laminations or "growth rings". The samples are compared with recently harvested samples that were taken throughout the year in carefully noted times. A good data base is being compiled by researchers as to *when* the majority of shellfish was being harvested. The winter season would indicate the possibility that storms and cold weather were preventing the customary fishing activities from taking place. The presence or absence of quantities of seasonally-harvested food remains may also indicate the shifting of populations between coastal sites or coastal/interior sites. Even large, "permanent" sites may have seen seasonal population fluctuations has gathering opportunities for certain food resources came and went. These "windows of opportunity" were obviously understood and seized upon by South Florida's prehistoric people. Years ago the rangers at Everglades National Park were demucking a silted up pond on the Anhinga Trail boardwalk and overlook. To their amazement, they began finding dozens of projectile points made from stingray barbs. This pond site was in the middle of the Everglades miles from the coast, but the Indians were traveling inland seasonally to exploit the seasonal migration of wading birds, ducks and other waterfowl.

The large coastal shell mound sites may have routinely had populations of up to several hundred people which may have shifted and fluctuated in response to windows of opportunity presented by the fluctuating food resources. The fact that this area was so well endowed in marine resources and provided such a broad and steady resource base enabled the local Indians to develop and establish a complex and rich culture far surpassing most non-agriculturally based societies. Only areas such as the Pacific northwest would similar cultures develop in North America. Next we will continue to pursue the idea of Location in the placement of the



shell mounds.