



Friends of the Randell Research Center

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A Tour of the Islands of Pine Island Sound: A Geological, Archaeological, and Historical Perspective

Part 15: Gasparilla Island Geology, Archaeology, and History

by Denége Patterson



Gasparilla Island rises north of Cayo Costa at Boca Grande Pass. It is part of the west-central barrier-island chain in the greater Charlotte Harbor region, and is accessible by bridge from Placida. Gasparilla Island is essential for enclosing the estuary that includes Pine Island Sound. The name “Friar Gaspar” appears on ancient maps drawn long before the mythical pirate was supposed to have lived. The pirate theme first appeared on a railroad brochure in 1904.

Gasparilla Island Geology

The geological evidence suggests that Gasparilla Island is one of the oldest barrier islands in the West-Central portion of the Gulf Coast. Beach rock with shell inclusions indicate that the Gulf of Mexico touched this Florida shoreline as far back as 7,600 years ago.

Gasparilla Island Archaeology

Although archeological exploration of Southwest Florida began in the late 1800s, few archaeologists made it to Gasparilla Island. Only beach-ridges provided clues to possible locations where indigenous people fished. A dozen or more archaeological sites

Gasparilla Island looking north from Boca Grande Pass. (Photo by Ron Mayhew.)

with aboriginal shell middens have been identified among the mangroves on the bay side of the island.

In 1905, antiquarian Clarence Moore explored the remains of one of José Caldéz’s fishing ranchos located on Cayo Pelau, adjacent east of Gasparilla Island. In 1953 archaeologist John M. Goggin and students recorded two sites. In the 1980s anthropologist Robert F. Edic recorded nine indigenous shell middens on shoals and shallow areas on the east side of the now-developed area of Grande Bayou, the widest part of Gasparilla Island, just before bulldozers obliterated them.

Gasparilla Island History

During the Victorian Era, the top three activities on Gasparilla Island were fishing, phosphate loading, and arriving in style. In the 1870s, the ichthyologist George Goode conducted a survey of Gasparilla Island’s lucrative fishery. Located on the northern end of the island, it was run by “Captain Beacon” or Peacon (located in Peacon’s Cove) and thirty “Conchs” from either the Bahamas or

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Key West. In one year, the fishery produced 550,000 pounds of mullet and 44,000 pounds of roe (fish eggs). Products were salted, processed, and shipped to Cuba where prices were higher.

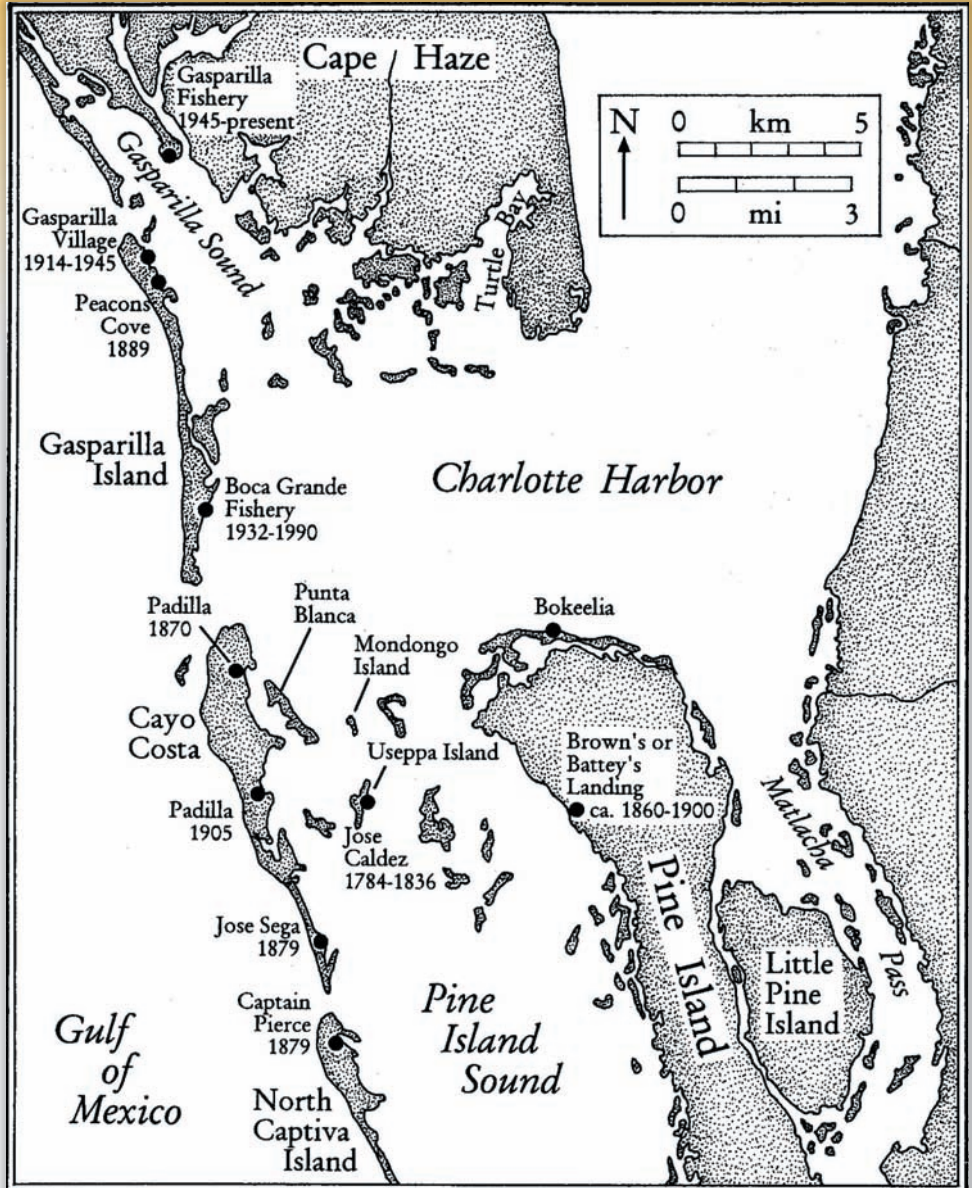
According to Robert F. Edic in *Fisherfolk of Pine Island Sound*, local fish products were superior to those produced by Spanish (Cuban) fisheries, which were seasonal, temporary, and sometimes focused on hook-and-line fishing for grouper in deep water. The Peacon's Cove fishery was permanent, consistent, and focused on net-fishing schools of mullet in the estuary.

In 1897 Albert W. Gilchrist (eventually governor of Florida) filed a plat for a city named Boca Grande on the south end of the island. In 1907 representatives of a railroad company proposed to buy all the land on Gasparilla Island north of a two-mile long military reservation then held by Gilchrist and his partner. The deal was launched through money furnished by the Peace River Phosphate Mining Company. A new plat for Boca Grande was given to the American Agricultural Chemical Company, a phosphate company.

By 1920, three million tons of phosphate, a key component of fertilizer, was being mined in "Bone Valley," an area within Polk, DeSoto, Manatee, and Hardy Counties, producing 90 percent of the world's fertilizer. A phosphate port facility was built on the east side of Boca Grande Pass for ocean-going vessels. Phosphate arrived via the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railway (CHN), or "Cold, Hungry, and Naked" according to workers who joked about the low pay.

The railroad also shipped iced fish in insulated boxcars from Gasparilla fisheries.

Around 1916, ice houses on stilts over water

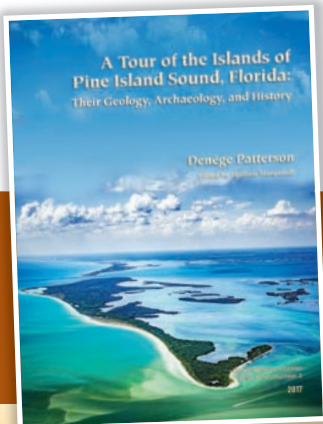


Map of Historic Fishing Operations of Pine Island Sound. (Drawing by Merald Clark.)

were built for storage on the northeast side of the island as ice replaced the salt method of preserving fish.

In 1913, the two-year old "Hotel Boca Grande" (not to be confused with a later hotel) was renamed Gasparilla Inn. Beachfront cottages attracted prominent industrialists of the day, some of whom arrived in huge sailing yachts. Gasparilla Inn continues to host modern dignitaries.

Bone Valley today still produces about 75 percent of the nation's supply of phosphate, and about 25 percent of the world's fertilizer, but not through Port Boca Grande since 1979. The railroad line through the center of Boca Grande is now a bike and golf cart path. Visitors can bask at Gasparilla State Park and find an interesting museum inside the newly refurbished Port Boca Grande Lighthouse.



This article was adapted from *A Tour of the Islands of Pine Island Sound, Florida*, by Denége Patterson, RRC Popular Series No. 2. The map is reprinted from the book. It is for sale at the RRC bookstore and other local venues or by mail, see insert for details. Proceeds from sales benefit the RRC endowment.



Update: Calusa Island North Beach Monitoring

by Rachael Kangas, Florida Public Archaeology Network, SW Region and
Cindy Bear, RRC Coordinator



North Beach Calusa Island midden on August 18, 2017 before Hurricane Irma. (Photo by Rachael Kangas.)

Around the world archaeologists are documenting sea level rise impacts on archaeological sites and creating projects to protect them or to gather as much information as possible before they wash away. One such project, the Calusa Island North Beach Archaeological Monitoring Project, was first reported in our June 2016 issue. The Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) joined the project in August 2017, just before Hurricane Irma made landfall on September 10, 2017 at Marco Island, approximately 60 miles south of Calusa Island.

Calusa Island is located on the northern end of Pine Island, much of it is owned by the Calusa Land Trust which has provided support for this work. Historic photographs and resident reports showed a loss of 30 to 40 feet of North Beach midden from the 1970s to the time the project began. This shell midden dates from the Late Archaic (1200-500 BC), a poorly understood time period in our region.

The project uses rebar rods installed as fixed points from which we measure the distance to the midden edge. With erosion, measurements from the rods to the edge will decrease and the rate of change determined. The rods also divide the roughly 300 feet of beach into 8 sections. To refine methods, we began using a compass and a plumb bob and pin flagging

all artifacts to be photographed, mapped, and cataloged. To provide information on erosion processes, we adapted methods to record undercuts created when the top surface of the midden extends further than the bottom. All data is recorded in the field and to a Google Docs catalog by team members consisting of FPAN staff and trained RRC volunteers.

The team has made 15 visits and documented an average of 19.7 cm (7.75 inches) of erosion, with some sections seeing a loss of 64 cm (25 inches). Hurricane Irma caused significant impact as surf tore away as much as 39 cm (15.35 inches) in one area while depositing 16 cm (6.3 inches) of sand in another. Intense winds felled a Gumbo Limbo tree exposing artifacts once safe under its roots. Our most recent visit in September 2018 showed a significant amount of shell re-deposited creating a sand berm beginning to sustain mangrove propagules. Mangroves protect sites from wave energy and are a welcome addition, future monitoring will tell if they continue to thrive or are swept away by rising or turbulent water.



North Beach Calusa Island midden on October 6, 2018, after Hurricane Irma and coinciding with a King Tide. Note the fallen Gumbo Limbo tree. (Photo by Rachael Kangas.)

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August 1, 2018 to November 9, 2018

Please let us know of any errors or omissions. Thank you for your support.

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Upcoming Events



*Jonathan Bloch, Ph.D.,
Curator of Vertebrate
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ONE WORLD LECTURE

Saturday, Dec. 8, 2018

“Extinction of the Dinosaurs,
Global Warming and the Origin
of Primates”

**with Dr. Jonathan Bloch,
Curator of Vertebrate**

Paleontology, Florida Museum

Jonathan I. Bloch studies fossil vertebrates from the Cenozoic with an

emphasis on addressing questions surrounding the first appearance and early evolution of the modern orders of mammals, including Primates. His field-based research in Panama and Florida emphasizes the Miocene, in Wyoming, Montana, and Colombia, the Paleocene and Eocene. He is an author of over 90 peer-reviewed articles, is on the Editorial Board for the Journal of Mammalian Evolution and also teaches and advises students in the biology, geology, and anthropology departments.



The Santiva, our boat for the Harbor History Tours. Photo provided by Captiva Cruises.

of Pine Island Sound: Their Geology, Archaeology, and History. You will learn about the surprises encountered when Wilson's Cut was dredged at Pineland, discover why the stories of Useppa Island are a metaphor for all the islands, learn how mysterious islands might have received their names, and explore how geologic processes worked to create the rich Pine Island estuary.

Your reservations and \$35 per adult payment are made with Captiva Cruises by calling (239) 472-5300. Car parking, check-in and pre-trip orientation will be at noon on the day of your reservation in the Classroom at Calusa Heritage Trail, 13810 Waterfront Drive, Pineland, FL. These tours are fascinating and popular and no additional dates will be added this year. If you have questions, please call Captiva Cruises, (239) 472-5300.

Harbor History Boat Tours 2019

Tuesdays, January 8 and 22,

February 5 and 19, March 5 and 19

\$35 per adult / \$25 per child

The Randell Research Center is again partnering with Captiva Cruises to offer six exciting Harbor History Boat Tours of Northern Pine Island Sound each departing on a Tuesday from Pineland at 12:30 p.m. The 2019 dates are January 8 and 22, February 5 and 19, March 5 and 19.

The 90-minute, round-trip will be aboard the Santiva, a very stable pontoon boat with shade over most of the seats. Our narrator will be Denége Patterson, author of *A Tour of the Islands*

RRC News

Editor: Cindy Bear

Writers: Cindy Bear

Rachael Kangas
Denége Patterson

Production: GBS Productions



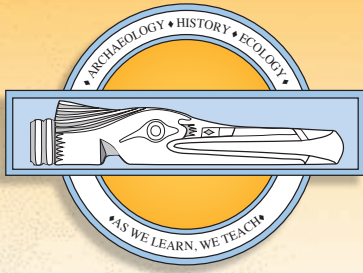
Gift Shop & Tour Information:
(239) 283-2157

Send questions or comments to:
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Pineland, FL 33945-0608

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Friends of the Randell Research Center

Pineland, Florida • December 2018
Phone 239-283-2062
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Dear Friend,

You are cordially invited to join, or renew your membership in, the RRC's support society, *Friends of the Randell Research Center*. All Friends of the RRC receive a quarterly newsletter and free admission to the Calusa Heritage Trail at Pineland. Supporters at higher levels are entitled to discounts on our books and merchandise, advance notice of programs, and special recognition. Your continuing support is vital to our mission. It means more research, more education, and continued site improvements at the Randell Research Center. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cindy Bear

Cindy Bear
Coordinator
Randell Research Center



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- Individual (\$30) and Student (\$15):** quarterly Newsletter and free admission to Calusa Heritage Trail
- Family (\$50):** The above + advance notice on special events and programs
- Contributor (\$100-\$499):** The above + annual honor roll listing in newsletter + 10% discount on RRC publications and merchandise
- Sponsor (\$500-\$999):** The above + invitation to annual Director's tour and reception
- Supporter (\$1,000-\$4,999):** The above + listing on annual donor plaque at Pineland site
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Photo by A. Bell.

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The Randell Research Center is a program of the Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida.

Thank you for your support.

