

Shell Mound Trail

Before Written History

Before pottery, before the great pyramids of Egypt, there was Shell Mound – the base, or midden, with mound construction spanning over 1500 years. Shell Mound can reveal changes in lifeways of the people who fished, hunted and raised their families here. Prospects to discover more about Shell Mound and its builders disappear daily as erosion and looting degrade the site. **Staying on the trail will help protect this chapter of our shared human heritage.**

What Is a Midden?

All the shells you see beneath your feet were placed here thousands of years ago. Early native cultures reused and recycled their debris (mollusk shells, bones, broken tools) in order to fortify the mud flats and make them more stable. Archeologists agree that most of the Gulf Coast was manipulated in this way by early peoples as long ago as 7,000 years.

Stabilizing the mudflats allowed ancient fishermen to throw their cast nets and push their dugouts off the shoreline without sinking into the muck. The muck is created after millennia of silt flowing into the area from the many tidal creeks and the historic Suwannee River.

This timeworn monument was at one time considered for a residential building. Mid-20th century, prior to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, some of the crescent-

shaped mound was used to make a road around the mound as is evident by the scarred area fifty-yards in from the trailhead.

From the Collection of Timothy & Cecile Mistovich



Painting by Theodore Morris, Florida Lost Tribes

Who Were the People?

Such a resource-rich coastline afforded clans (extended family groups) living here to be larger than inland clans. They lived prior to European invasion, so no one knows the names of the peoples of the Middle Archaic period and into the Woodland Period (1,000-3,200 years ago) who built the mound. More than likely it was “the people” in their language. Their sturdy nets manufactured from their hand-crafted cordage, would have been used to gather shrimp, fish, crabs, manatee, birds, and more.

Cordage

“First peoples possessed vast knowledge of cordage; basic methods of this ancient technology have remained relatively

unchanged. Cordage is made from two or more hanks of pulverized plant fibers, like palm fibers, that are twisted together – a perfect product for constructing nets. Not only was this hand-made rope and string perfectly made, the tensile strength of many indigenous plant fibers was great enough to catch sturgeon.” –Tara Prindle

Walk the Past

As you take the 0.3 mile loop across this ancient site, notice the plants that flourish in the calcium-rich mound: wild coffee, snow berries, Christmas berries, coontie and the sacred cedars. Relish the same bird’s-eye view of the salt marsh that the ancients did so long ago. A spectacular panorama of sparkling Gulf waters can be enjoyed from a bench atop the mound.

Enjoy the Present

For a longer hike, take the adjacent Dennis Creek Trail, an easy 1-mile loop crossing a salt barren and winding through a coastal island. Its covered observation deck is ideal for photography and wildlife observation. Experience the salt marsh firsthand by paddling from the convenient launch area where you’ll also find a fishing pier accessible year-round. Watch for the white ibis, herons, egrets and shorebirds as you enjoy the past and present at the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

For Range- led programs call 352/493-0238
or e-mail: lowersuwannee@fws.gov

Updated 10/2014

The University of Florida is finishing the fifth year of an archaeological survey of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. Much more is being learned about this area as Dr. Kenneth Sassaman and his colleagues proceed.



Found in Oklahoma, this ceremonial engraving on a lightning whelk, the sacred shell of southeastern cultures, depicts what appears to be a paddler with animal hide banners attached to the dug-out. It is said that his mouth hang open “in awe of the universe”

Traders from the Mississippian-culture mounds at the top of Florida’s Big Bend would have paddled here for trade around 1,000 years ago. Trade was not only commerce, but time for interaction with other peoples: sharing news, intermarriage, games, and ceremony. They would have traded goods for pieces of steatite from Georgia that were prized locally as cooking stones. Foods, plants, and cultural objects would also have been traded.

A magnificent collection of pottery taken from gravesites in the immediate area during the 1930’s by hobbyist Montague Tallent, is on exhibit in Bradenton, Florida at the *South Florida Museum*. They are among the finest pieces of Florida Weeden Island Period pottery to be seen on display.

Refuges are places where the people of today can renew the ties to their cultural heritage by viewing ancient & historic sites. These ties, delivered through the Refuge’s public use program, strengthen the connection between wildlife and people.”

Fulfilling the Promise



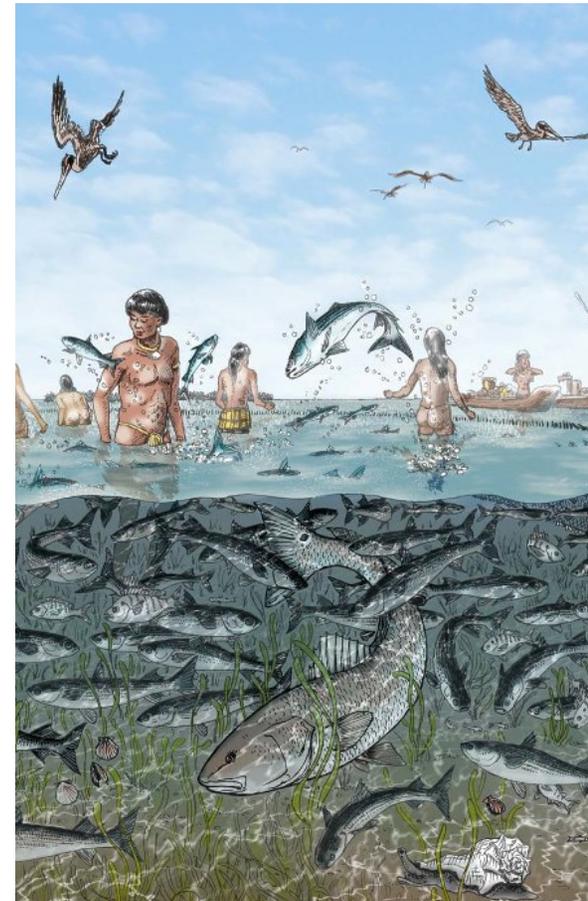
**For reservations and information:
Lower Suwannee NWR**

Call: 352/493-0238, ext 223

Office: off of Hwy 347, just south of Fowler’s Bluff; 16 miles north of Cedar Key (helpful signs posted)

Email: lowersuwannee@fws.gov

Website: fws.gov/lowersuwannee



Courtesy of Florida Museum of Natural History

Shell Mound Trail

Part of the Lower Suwannee
National Wildlife Refuge

Celebrate Florida
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2015