2014 UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LOWER SUWANNEE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL, LEVY COUNTY, FLORIDA

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This summer marked the inaugural field season of the Lower Suwannee Archaeological Field School. For the last 12 years the University of Florida's Laboratory of Southeastern Archaeology (LSA) has been conducting archaeological field schools along the St. John's River of northeast Florida. The switch to the Gulf Coast was enabled by the ongoing Lower Suwannee Archaeological Survey (LSAS), much of which is shaped by the research interests of LSA graduate students. A contributing factor to the switch is the erosion of coastal sites, many of which are vulnerable to complete destruction in coming years.

Known widely as the "Nature Coast," Florida's Big Bend consists of miles of crenulated coastline comprised of private, state, and federal landholdings including the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges. While home to underdeveloped scenic views of North Florida's iconic marshes, the region also houses evidence of thousands of years of human occupation. Launched in 2009, the LSAS is a joint effort between the LSA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to document and understand human responses to environmental, social, and cultural change in the region. Our research this summer focused on several locations in Levy County, Florida including sites on Seahorse Key, North Key, Way Key, Hog Island, and a big little-known site called Shell Mound (8LV42). Although investigations at each site were guided by particular research questions, the basic goals were to establish site chronology and document intact stratigraphic sequences.

Considerable work this summer focused on Shell Mound, a large, virtually intact, arcuate shell ridge over 8 meters high. Investigations by LSA starting in 2012 have begun to reveal the sequence of occupation at this complex site. Dating to the Woodland period but with Late Archaic foundations, the site was occupied intensively between about A.D. 400–550 by communities of Swift Creek or early Weeden Island affiliation who established a nearby cemetery on Hog Island (see below). Over the ensuing century or two, large quantities of mostly oyster shell were deposited in a semi-circular ridge over a thick midden. This season we investigated the interior and exterior edges of the shell ridge, as well as the apex of the northern aspect of the arcuate structure. These excavations showed that topographic relief in this portion of the site was enhanced by an underlying relict dune. Dug into the sands of this dune along the interior edge were large pits with abundant vertebrate fauna, including white-tailed deer and large fish, as well as appreciable amounts of lithic artifacts and some unusual items, such as a whole quartz crystal. Postholes in this location provided evidence for structures whose size and shape will require additional testing. A unit at the apex of the north ridge likewise revealed the buried dune sand, on

which a meter of organic midden accumulated, which was then capped by an additional two meters of bedded marine shell (predominately oyster). The outer edge, as we have seen elsewhere, revealed a stratified deposit of presumably secondary refuse. Pottery throughout all the deposits is dominated by plain limestone- and sand-tempered sherds. Seven radiocarbon assays securely date these assemblages to the fifth through seventh centuries A.D.

Across a narrow channel to the west of Shell Mound lies Hog Island, the location of a Woodland-period mortuary facility known as Palmetto Mound. As a part of his dissertation research on Swift Creek and Weeden Island rituality, Ph.D. student Mark Donop (UF) approached the burial mound this summer to produce a map and establish the mound's chronology. The impetus for such sensitive work comes from Donop's attempt to situate a massive collection of ceramic vessels collected from the island in the late 1900s. This work is being conducted under supervision by Dr. Neill Wallis, of the Florida Museum of Natural History. This summer Donop confirmed the mound was sited away from residential space through excavation of systematic shovel tests. Additionally, a small remnant of intact mound stratigraphy was located and samples collected for radiometric dating.

Excavations were also conducted on private land on Way Key, the landform on which the town of Cedar Key is located. Maps from the late 1800s depict a large mound in the present day downtown area and our investigations were designed to determine if any portion of it remained intact. Local informants indicated that shell from the mound was used to fill lower portions of the island. Unfortunately, our excavations showed this to be the case. However, a neighbor has given permission to examine next season what may be a small remnant of the mound located under his house.

Lastly, two distal islands across the harbor from Cedar Key were investigated by the field school students to establish the archaeological and ecological potential of these open-water landforms. Testing of a site on North Key revealed a well-stratified shell midden with at least three components spanning 1200 years (ca. 700 B.C.–A.D. 400). A submidden component of this sequence that has yet to be dated may help to fill a major gap in the occupational sequence in the region known as the Transitional Period (1500–700 B.C.). Limited shovel testing on nearby Seahorse Key helped to expand earlier work on the island by a former UF student, but additional work is needed to establish the context of two actively eroding shoreline middens. Survey and testing at North Key, Seahorse Key, and other open-water islands of the area is part of the ongoing dissertation research of Ginessa Mahar. Focusing on alternative fishing technologies and their impacts on society, Mahar's research this summer also included experimenting with mass-capture fishing technologies—techniques that enable the simultaneous capture of multiple fish. This summer two types of fish weirs were tested by field school students under permit with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The purpose of the experiments is to model the potential yield of different weirs and variation between technologies. Each weir type was tested independently and all fish captured were counted, a subsample measured for length, and released. Preliminary results indicate the two weirs catch a different selection of fish species.