

References for Prehistoric Florida peoples use of oysters 11/20/14

Carrabelle History Museum staff recently had an opportunity to research the earliest documented use of oysters in the Apalachicola River Valley area.

Here are a few references related to the prehistoric people's use of oysters for food, jewelry and building materials especially prevalent in the Archaic Period, 8000 BC–2000 BC. There are extensive shell mounds in Apalachicola that were studied by the Smithsonian Institute who removed many of the artifacts and took them to the museum in Washington, DC. These mounds are privately owned at this point in time but have been studied by Dr. Nancy White and others. Freshwater mussels were also part of the upriver cultures.

We inserted several comments marked "Note to Reader:" in italics.

1. Trail of Florida's Indian Heritage

<http://www.trailoffloridasindianheritage.org/index.html>

[Note to Reader : The website of this organization has several museums that address the prehistoric peoples along the Apalachicola River. The Pensacola, the Apalachicola, the Apalachee are the primary groups along the river. Number 4 is the site for Fort Walton Indian Temple Mound Museum where Dr. Nancy White, Professor of Archaeology, University of South Florida conducted significant research there. On the website she gives a brief informative talk. Dr. Jim Miller who was the head of archaeology of the State for 20 years also has an informative talk under the topic of archaeology. He is currently living in Tallahassee and working as a consultant. The Carrabelle History Museum is also on that website as number 12. There is an excellent brochure produced by the Trail organization and the Florida Department of State, Division of Historic Resources.]

2. Brown, Robin C. Florida's First People: 12,000 Years of Human History, March 1, 1994

This book brings to life the first humans who entered Florida about 12,000 years ago. It combines contemporary archaeology, the writings of early European explorers, and replication experiments to paint a vivid picture of the state's original inhabitants. Photos of replications of many of the technologies used by early people in their day-to-day lives are throughout the book. The author made a tool kit of stone, wood, bone, and **shell**, then used implements to carve wood, twist palm fiber into twine and rope, make and decorate pottery, and weave fabric. Includes a comprehensive photographic atlas of Florida projectile points, pottery types, and typical plant and animal remains that are uncovered at Florida archaeological sites.

http://www.amazon.com/Floridas-First-People-Robin-Brown/dp/1561646288/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1416533088&sr=1-1&keywords=1.%09Brown%2C+Robin+C.++Florida%27s+First+People

[NOTE to Reader: An excellent reference about the lives and culture of paleo Indians in Florida. The first 40 pages describe life, foods and culture. Not only were oysters thought to be one of their favorite food, many of their mounds were built with oyster shells. The areas where the rivers meet the salt waters were the most popular for villages of all sizes. The rivers were used for transportation and trade from the Florida Gulf coast north to other native cultures in Georgia, Tennessee and northern states.]

3. Florida's Museum of Natural History Educators' Guide

Northwest Florida: Waterways and Wildlife at the Florida Museum of Natural History
Part One: Northwest Florida: Waterways and Wildlife Exhibition
Section Four: Rivers, page 26.

Vocabulary Words

Fort Walton: A term used to refer to an ancient culture that built mounds in the southeastern region of the United States

Mississippian: A term used to refer to an archaeological culture of the Southeast region of the United States

Guiding Questions and Answers 1) How have people in Northwest Florida utilized rivers?

The area we now call Northwest Florida was once a major political and cultural crossroads. People flourished along the numerous Panhandle rivers because they sustained important animal foods such as turtles, fish, and mussels. Riverine forests were full of deer, turkey, and squirrel, as well as wild plant foods such as hickory nuts, grapes, acorns, and persimmons. Fertile floodplain soils supported corn and other agriculture. In addition, the rivers served as highways for communication, travel, and trade.

Before European influence, the native people of Northwest Florida shared cultural traits with most societies east of the Mississippi River. Archaeologists refer to these societies as **Mississippian**. Powerful leaders ruled large, agricultural populations. Extensive trade networks located along rivers and over land, connected Mississippian societies. Archaeologists call the Mississippian societies in Northwest Florida, Southeast Alabama, and Southwest Georgia the **Fort Walton** culture. Florida's Fort Walton people lived between the Aucilla River and the Chipola River uplands. Fort Walton leaders expressed their power by building large earthen mounds and by displaying rare and valuable wares obtained in ceremonial exchange with other Mississippian leaders. Items made of copper, **marine shell**, and greenstone served as symbols of high status throughout the Southeast.

As far back as 5,000 years ago, trade networks extended throughout eastern North America. Native people in what is now Florida imported copper from the Appalachian Piedmont and Great Lakes, galena from Missouri, mica from Georgia, steatite and mica from the Appalachians, greenstone from the Piedmont, and elaborate ornamental objects from other areas. In exchange, Florida native people exported marine shells, shell beads and ornaments, **marine pearls**, shark tooth ornaments and whelk shell dippers.

Northwest Florida: Waterways & Wildlife

“Follow the path of water — Florida's most precious resource — as it flows through northwest Florida habitats, from limestone caves and springs to the Gulf of Mexico...

As far back as 5,000 years ago, Florida native people traded over huge distances, both importing (copper from the Great Lakes region, stone from the Appalachian Piedmont) and exporting (**marine shells**, pearls, shark teeth).”

<https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/exhibits/always-on-display/northwest-florida/>

4. Scenic & Historic A1A Coastal Byway

Prehistory: The Archaic Period

Several thousand years ago, Archaic Period hunters and gatherers began to expand out of the central highlands of Florida ... and move into areas along the ... rivers where they found an abundance of fish, game, and freshwater shellfish (mainly snail and mussel).

By 4,000 B.C., prehistoric peoples were well established in villages along the rivers, living there year-round rather than seasonally. For the first time, people became more sedentary in lifestyle, settling in one area. A stable supply of food found in the river environs attracted and supported more people. Eventually large villages and ceremonial centers began to emerge. ...While much larger in number, prehistoric populations of this period practiced the same pattern of living developed by Archaic peoples centuries before, including **shellfish harvesting**, hunting, fishing, and plant collecting. It was also during this period that domesticated plants, mainly corn and squash, were used for the first time.

... Abundant resources ... allowed prehistoric populations to grow and expand throughout these regions of the county, establishing permanent villages as well as ceremonial and political centers at locations where food was most plentiful. Some archaeologists believe that both the river and coastal regions are marked by enormous shell mounds and the remains of prehistoric foods: snail and mussel in the freshwater environs and oyster and clam on the coasts, all of which served for centuries as the staple for the diet. ... The late archaic period peoples in ...[northwest Florida, the Pensacola, the Apalachicola and the Apalachee Indians were still living throughout the area when the Spanish and French explorers came to Florida in the 1500's]... The works of the French artist Jacques le Moyne in 1564 and other early descriptions provide

archaeologists and historians with invaluable information about the lifestyles of the Timucua [Apalachee, Calusa, etc.] and their prehistoric ancestors. These early documentations, coupled with archaeological information, give us a relatively accurate picture of native life.

We know from this information that in addition to collecting **shellfish** from local waters for food, native Floridians hunted deer and any other animals -- even alligators -- with bows, arrows, and spears. They also fished and trapped turtles and birds. Plants, roots, nuts (mainly acorns and hickory nuts), and berries were also gathered for food. A popular method of cooking foods involved the stewing and boiling of meats and plants in various combinations in a large pottery kettle. Fish and animals were barbecued whole and preserved on smoke racks made of wood. Crop harvests were often stored in structures similar to corncribs.

While the [people] wore little, sometimes clothing consisting only of strands of Spanish Moss, their elaborate practice of body ornamentation and use of jewelry made for some colorfully decorated natives. Chiefs and other important members of the community were often tattooed from head to foot as a symbol of authority. Men wore their hair up in a "topknot" adorned with feathers or stuffed animals. Dyed fish-bladder ear plugs and long shell and bone pins were worn by both men and women. Finely crafted jewelry was made of **shell**, **pearls**, bone, wood, stone, and metal.

References for Historical Text

Ste. Claire, Dana. True Natives: The Prehistory of Volusia County.

Florida: The Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1992.

Conte, Christian. "Back to the Beginning". A History of Flagler County Fall 2002: Pg. 4

<http://www.scenica1a.org/history-3.html>

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