

REFERENCE

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TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA

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## PREHISTORIC MOUNDS IN THE VICINITY OF TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA

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In prehistoric times the region around Tampa Bay, Florida, was the site of many villages, the inhabitants of which subsisted principally upon the fish and mollusks which abounded in the shallow waters of the bay. The kitchenmiddens which arose as a result of the accumulation of refuse from these villages constitute the largest shell mounds on the American continent. The writer spent the months of March and April, 1929, in making a survey of the mounds in this neighborhood.

Because of the conspicuous nature of these towering heaps of shells, it is a comparatively simple matter to locate the ancient sites, despite the fact that during the last 75 years countless tons of this material have been hauled away to be used in the construction of roads. In numerous instances mounds more than 30 feet in height and covering many acres of ground have been almost completely obliterated within the past few years. In many cases the houses of the village were constructed upon these refuse heaps, so that their destruction entails also destruction of all traces of the habitations.

During the writer's survey, more than 40 sites were located upon Tampa Bay alone. At the present time but a single example of one of the large shell mounds remains undisturbed. The huge refuse heap on Cockroach Point, rising to an elevation of 50 feet, has escaped the depredations of the road builder because of its comparative inaccessibility. The mound rises in a succession of terraces, each of which was formerly occupied by houses. The flat summit of the mound was undoubtedly crowned by a temple, from which point it is not unlikely that dark-skinned observers watched in fear and wonder the progress of De Soto's ships as they followed the winding channel into Tampa Bay.

In early historical times it is known that this region was occupied by the now extinct Calusa Indians, while immediately to the north dwelt their neighbors, the Timucua. History gives us scant information concerning the language and customs of these tribes. The problem of the archeologist is to find more of their arts and customs from the unintentional record they have left behind in their



FIG. 165.—Ancient village site at Safety Harbor, Florida, now overgrown with dense tangle of vegetation.

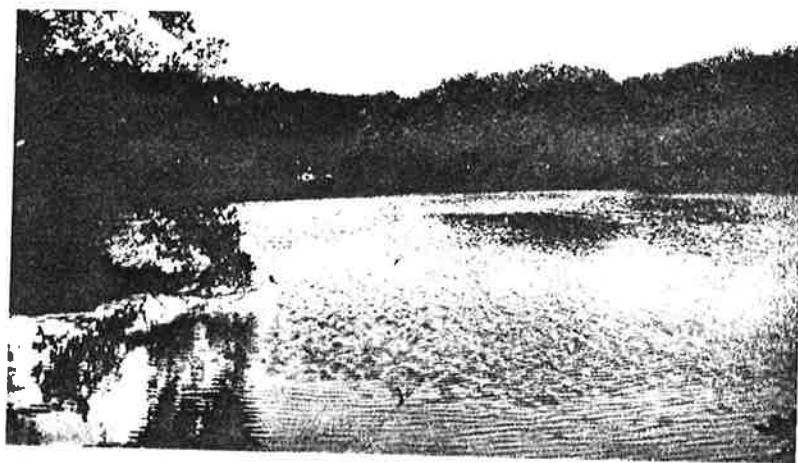


FIG. 166.—Mangrove at Cockroach Point, Florida. The elevation at the right corner of the picture is the large mound.



FIG. 167.—The Weeden Island mound showing two burials in place.

burials and refuse heaps, and to discover if possible what people preceded them into this region.

Excavations continued at Weeden Island have finally cast some definite light upon the problem of culture sequence, when a mound containing secondary burials and pottery of an advanced Muskogean type was found erected over a cemetery which contained primary flexed burials in graves lined with oyster shell and containing only a few fragments of a crude, undecorated pottery.

Preliminary tests were made at the large mounds near Safety Harbor, which reveal a site similar to that on Weeden Island, further excavation of which should add considerably to our knowledge of this culture.

The largest sand mound which the writer has yet seen was located near Palma Sola, and it is hoped this coming winter to conduct excavations at this place. The village to which the mound belonged was situated near the entrance to Tampa Bay, and was probably the largest of all the Tampa Bay sites. Unfortunately the refuse heap, described by old inhabitants as having been the largest of the Florida West Coast, has been almost entirely carried away.

A good beginning has now been made in an area in which very little systematic archeological work has been done. It is hoped that this data, added to that which it is hoped will be accumulated during the next few years, will definitely establish the line between the Calusa and the Timucua, their possible relation to tribes in the north or the West Indies, and to the peoples who preceded them—probably the first discoverers of Florida.