

The Riviera Complex: An East Okeechobee Archaeological Area Settlement

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THE RIVIERA COMPLEX: AN EAST OKEECHOBEE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA SETTLEMENT

Ryan J. Wheeler

Examination of artifacts collected by the Palm Beach County Archaeological Society (PBCAS), unpublished maps held by the Smithsonian Institution, and ethnohistoric documents provides new information on the East Okeechobee Archaeological Area in southeastern Florida. The Riviera site (8PB30), excavated by PBCAS from 1978 to 1980, is a large Glades III Period village that is part of a settlement complex similar to the one described by Furey (1972) for a group of sites in Boca Raton, also in Palm Beach County. A review of ethnohistorical literature reveals that Riviera and its associated sites may have been the location of the historic period village *Jeaga* first mentioned in the 1500s by the Spaniard Fontaneda (1973).

Introduction

John Goggin (n.d.:383-384) summarized his 1950 and 1957 observations of Riviera by describing a large dirt and shell midden located in a hammock on the west side of Lake Worth. A small stream flowing out of the Everglades bisected the site. Goggin also mentioned a sand earthwork and elevated sand causeway to the west of the midden. Figure 1 illustrates a map prepared by Charles Newcomb (1914) that is helpful in visualizing the size and configuration of this site. The elliptical area labeled "Big Mound" is probably the earthwork mentioned by Goggin; though most of the site now is covered by pavement or residences, this sand mound is still partially visible. Riviera is likely only one site in the Riviera Beach Complex; the Palm Beach Inlet Midden (8PB28) and the Palm Beach Inlet Burial Mound (8PB29), located about one kilometer south of Riviera (see Figure 2), also comprise part of this settlement. 8PB28 is a 200 m long midden of black dirt and shell located in a hammock on the east side of Lake Worth, portions still remain today. 8PB29 is a circular mound of black sand adjoining the Palm Beach Inlet Midden.

Materials and Methods

The PBCAS excavated a small portion of Riviera at the intersection of Orange Avenue and Oak Street, Lots 1 and 2, visible on Figure 1. All 33 units were 1.5 m square test pits dug in 15 cm arbitrary levels, except test pit 21 which was 0.5 m square. Figure 3 illustrates the exact location and distribution of the test pits. Areas bearing cultural material were located with post holes and then investigated by test pit.

Artifactual items recovered from screened soil were stored in labeled bags or vials. Accession number 79 was assigned to the excavated materials received by the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) archaeology laboratory. A small collection of artifacts donated by Miss Edith Newcomb also formed part of the collection.

Results

Stratigraphy

The following description of the stratification in the excavated portion of the site is based on hand-written field notes and several crude sketches made by the excavators. The first level, 0 to 15 cm, is thoroughly mixed with modern rubbish. An undisturbed cultural layer begins around 15 to 20 cm and continues to approximately 85 cm; this area is composed of black dirt, typical of middens in southern Florida. From 85 to 100 cm a layer of generally sterile sand was present in most of the excavated units. From 100 to 120 cm another cultural level occurred; this layer is typically composed of larger, coarser sandy material.

Features

Many of the PBCAS notebook entries mention 'a great deal of charcoal,' while these may be features or components of features, it is impossible to determine what was actually encountered. Only when more detailed descriptions are present is it possible to comment on the nature of the deposits. Features identified include hearths (12), post molds (4), pits (2), living floors (1), burials (2), and lenses (3), a total of 24 (See Table 1).

Hearths, despite being the most numerous type of feature excavated, were not well described. They are characterized by large amounts of charcoal and food debris, fire cracked rock and clay, and are roughly circular in outline. In one case (Feature 6, Pit 5, 60-75 cm), large portions of a turtle were found in a cooking area, where it may have been roasted.

The three lenses reported are all primarily composed of coquina shell (*Donax* sp.); the notes indicate that quite a bit of charcoal occurred within these areas and that many of the shells were burned. I have observed similar features at the Singer Island Midden 2 (8PB214), located nearby on the beach strand, and feel that these may be the product of large

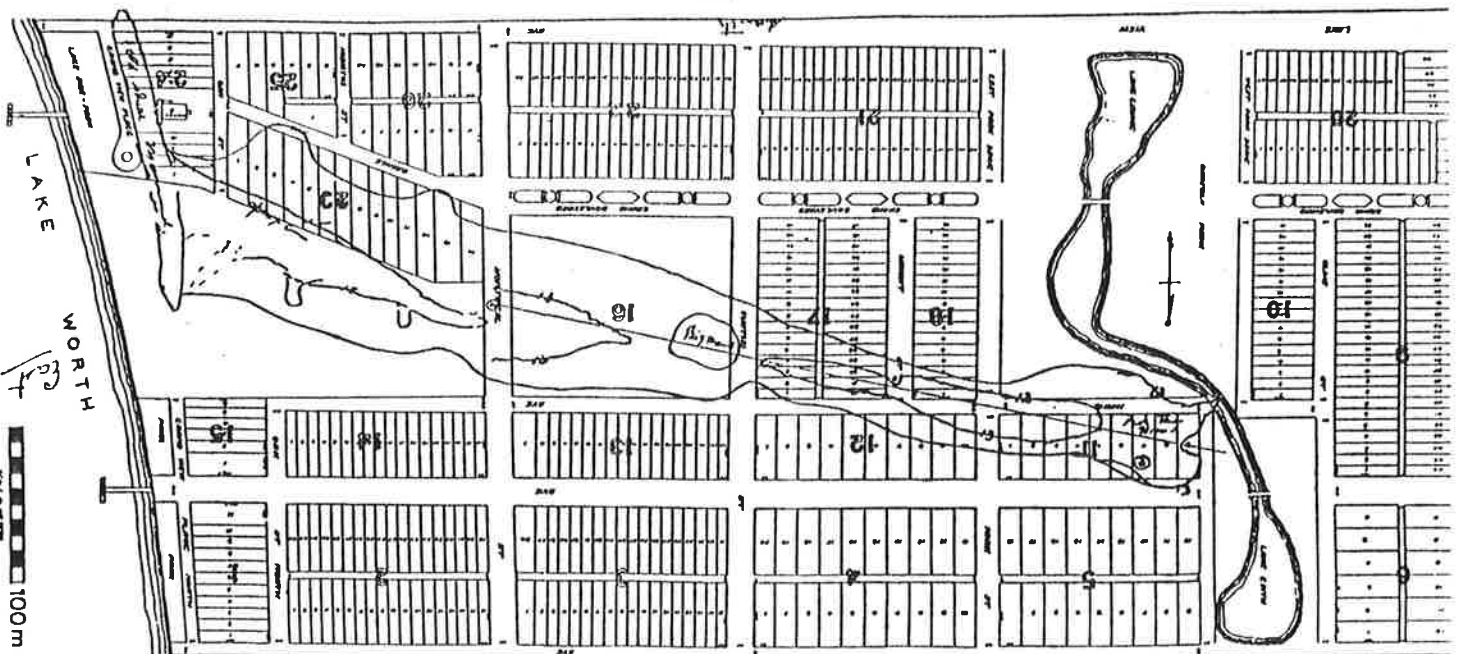


Figure 1. Map of Riviera Site (Newcomb 1914). Areas labeled by Newcomb include "Big Mound" near the center of the site, "Old Shell Mound" at the eastern portion of the site, and occasional midden. Newcomb's hotel adjoins the shell

collection episodes.

The excavation of Pit 30 revealed a greasy black soil that may be a portion of aboriginal floor; large portions of St. Johns Check Stamped bowl were recovered from this area (Feature 22, Pit 30, 90-105 cm).

Perhaps the most interesting features are the two burials. Feature 13 (Pit 20, 60-75 cm) consists of a dog (*Canis familiaris*) that was interred in the general village midden. Portions of the skull and long bones were recovered, and are surrounded by a dense sandy concretion. Feature 15 (Pit 2, 45-60 cm), while not really a burial, represents the carcass of a large shark discarded with other food debris; 20 articulate vertebrae were excavated.

Ceramic Analysis

Sixteen-hundred and forty-one sherds were recovered from the excavation units; Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of the 18 identified types. The ceramic found at Riviera are typical of the East Okechobee Area and seem to be from large open bowls, reflecting participation in the "Florida Open Bowl Tradition" discussed by Sears (1982).

St. Johns Series. St. Johns Check Stamped is a distinctive paddle-marked type with a chalky, temperless feel (Figure 4a). All levels at Riviera have large quantities of it. This type is known throughout southern Florida from Glades III Period sites and is considered a marker for Glades III occupation (Goggin 1947). Some authors (Milanich and Fairbank 1980:233) suggest that it was produced locally, while others argue that it entered this area via late Formative Period trade networks with the areas to the north (Carr and Berial 1984:2; Sears 1982:31). In either case its presence seems to give some continuity to the groups of the east coast and southern Florida during the protohistoric period.

St. Johns Plain was also present in large amounts at Riviera. It has the same chalky paste as does St. Johns Check Stamped.

St. Johns Punctate, St. Johns Simple Stamped, and St. Johns Incised (probably not the same as the defined type) are represented at the site by a few sherds along with mal-marked and fabric-marked patterns on sherds of St. Johns temper.

Belle Glade Series. Willey (1949:25-26) first described Belle Glade Plain from an inland site in Palm Beach County, Okechobee Area sites, like Ft. Center (Sears 1982:22), have the highest frequencies for this type. Belle Glade Plain sherds range from sandy to temperless but are easily distinguished by pits and drag marks on their exterior surface produced by a smoothing tool. This type is moderately common at the Riviera site.

Belle Glade Incised has been described from sherds at the Belle Glade (Willey 1949:26) and Ft. Center sites (Sears

1982:26).
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