

REFERENCE

MOUNDS OF THE VANISHED
CALUSA INDIANS
OF FLORIDA

by M. W. Stirling

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was replaced by another which connected with a new intake, farther up stream. Such substitutions were necessitated by altered conditions in prehistoric times no less than today.

Modern irrigation canals and the industry they symbolize have done most to erase from central Arizona former vestiges of that native civilization which once prospered there. The sad ruins of aboriginal homes have been leveled with their neighboring fields; the ditches which once watered those fields have been filled or scraped away. Where Indian farmers eight or ten hundred years ago cultivated gardens of beans, maize and squashes, vast acres of cotton, lettuce and melons are now harvested. Neat orchards of dates and grapefruit flourish where catclaw and mesquite stretched their spiny branches only a generation ago. The diabolical Apache has been tamed if not conquered. Bow-legged cowboys, garbed according to the latest fashion notes from Hollywood, ride herd on eastern "dudes." Attractive dwellings and sumptuous winter resorts, with green lawns and flower-bordered walks have replaced the mud-walled habitations of the ancient folk.

As one looks down from the air upon this Paradise that is Salt River valley today, one is impressed first of all by the orderly habits of mankind. At least there is a semblance of order, from a height of 2,000 feet or more. Long, straight roads on which autos slither away like headless roaches; brown and yellow fields all nicely squared; orange trees that seem as tiny pellets of dark green, patiently arranged, row upon row; little cubed houses, fringed with flat green things.

Reaching across these fields and under these houses, light or dark streaks mark former prehistoric Indian canals which only the aviator may readily detect. Silt deposited in those old ditches shows dark brown against the drab desert soil; pale yellow lines remain where embankments have been smoothed away. Slight differences in vegetation, imperceptible when close at hand, take on color variations that enable one at a considerable height to retrace works which otherwise have been wholly effaced.

The blue Army plane glides down from the clouds and back to port with numbed crew and empty cameras. Camel Back Mountain squats complacently at one side and looks out across the valley where such momentous changes have taken place within memory of men still living. Squaw Peak lifts her unkempt bulk to frown upon this new civilization, as she did upon the old. A setting sun momentarily gilds the giant saluaro whose long, fingered shadows point eastwardly to rugged mountain ranges whence flow the life-giving waters of the Gila and the Rio Salado.

MOUNDS OF THE VANISHED CALUSA INDIANS OF FLORIDA

By M. W. STIRLING,
Chief, Bureau of American Ethnology

When the Spaniards first visited the west coast of Florida early in the sixteenth century, the region from Tampa Bay southward to the Keys was occupied by the Calusa Indians. At this time they were an important tribe, but in common with the other aboriginal Indians of Florida they disappeared rapidly upon contact with the whites. Unfortunately no early traveler has left an adequate description of this interesting group. As a result we must depend almost entirely upon the results of archeological investigations in reconstructing their mode of living.

It was for the purpose of continuing such researches that the writer visited Florida during February, March, and April of 1930. Through the kindness of Mr. Lee Parish, the writer was enabled to accompany him on his yacht *Esperanza* through the intricate channels of the Ten Thousand Islands, where a number of old village sites were located and excavations conducted on a typical southern Calusa mound on Horr's Island. Numerous trade objects of European manufacture discovered in course of the excavations helped to confirm the writer's previous view that the mounds of the Ten Thousand Island district are probably the most recent in Florida. It was in this hidden and comparatively inaccessible region that the Calusa Indians finally retired as a result of pressure from the north and here made their last stand against encroaching civilization. Here and there among the maze of keys comprising the Ten Thousand Islands is one which has caught the wind-blown sand in such a manner as to build it up, forming "high ground" above the level of the surrounding mangrove swamps. Such localities were invariably utilized by the Indians as places of abode, the height of the ground in most instances being considerably augmented by the accumulation of shells and village debris.

On the east end of Horr's Island is a rather extensive shell deposit now overgrown with a dense underbrush. Three hundred yards to the eastward of the village site is a sand burial mound 35 feet in diameter and 7 feet in height. Working among dense clouds of mosquitoes and sand flies, we excavated a sector of the mound comprising about one-third of its volume. Seven burials were encountered,