

ANCIENT CANALS ON THE
SOUTH-WEST COAST OF
FLORIDA

by
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canals in use today. It might be expected that canals of such size, involving substantial and probably protracted labor in their construction, would have been used for more than the century or so suggested by the ceramic evidence. On the other hand, many causes may have been responsible for their abandonment after a relatively brief span of service—excessive silting, water-logging of the fields they served, or changes in the river.

It is too early in the current study of prehistoric land and water-use in the Southwest to attempt answers to the many questions posed by Hohokam irrigation. Its origins, its extent, and the reasons for its decline need much further study, and the social and economic implications of this extensive system of large canals are not yet understood. As this study progresses it is hoped that all of these aspects of Hohokam irrigation will become better known. A more detailed report on the canals at the Park of Four Waters, and reports on the other investigations now in progress will be presented in the future.

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While exploring the South-west coast of Florida, I was much interested in two ancient canals which I examined, and whose object seemed quite inexplicable. The first occurs about three miles north of Gordon's Pass, an inlet thirty-three miles south of Punta Rasa, and twenty miles north of Cape Roman.

I entered Gordon's Pass, and for some days was occupied in examining the evidences of Indian occupation in the shell and earth mounds to be found there, and while awaiting a fair wind for Punta Rasa, devoted a day to the examination of the Canal. With two of my men I walked northward along the beach, which was a perfectly straight line to the next Pass. For the first half mile this beach was skirted by a beautiful grove of cabbage palmetto, under whose shade was the ranch of Mr. Madison Weeks, an intelligent settler, who was cultivating the surface of an extensive shell mound, just north of the Inlet,

and who courteously gave me much information about the country. The Palm Grove was on a plateau about eight feet above the sea level, but beyond the grove the land sank into a low marsh not more than half that elevation. The storms of many years had created a levee of sand, which defended this morass from the sea, and was at least one hundred feet in breadth. It was apparent, however, that erosion of the coast had here occurred to a great extent, for stumps of dead palms could be seen a hundred yards or so to sea, and suggested the probability of great change in the contour of the land during not remote years. One of our party followed the line of embankment or sand-dune while the other two kept along the beach. At a distance of three and a-half miles from the Inlet the former announced the Canal, and we soon joined him and saw the object of our search before us. Where we stood it was buried in the sand embankment, but from that it was plainly visible straight as an arrow, crossing the low intervening morass and penetrating the sandy pine ridge, half a mile, or nearly so, away. The bottom was moist and full of tall grass; the sides and summit of the embankment covered with a dense chaparral of oak scrub and scrub palmetto. Its direction from our stand-point was about one point South of East. We could see in the distance, pines growing upon the inner and outer sides of its banks. With infinite labor we worked our way through the dense scrub for a hundred yards or so, and took our measurements. The width from the summit ridge upon each bank was 55 feet, and the depth from that summit level to centre of the excavation 12 feet. At the bottom the width was 12 feet, the banks being almost perpendicular for some 5 feet, and then receding on an easier angle at the summit. This summit was about eight feet above the level of the meadow, through which for nearly half a mile it was excavated till it reached the higher level of the sandy pine land beyond. Owing to considerable indisposition on my part, this was the end of our exploration for that day, but on the day following we rowed up the Interior Lagoon with a view of examining its eastern terminus. Mr. Weeks, the resident settler, kindly accompanied us and gave us all the information he possessed as to its structure and peculiarities. He had often hunted through the pines, and had crossed it at various points not at present acces-