

HUMAN PRE-HISTORY OF CHARLOTTE HARBOR

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Until recently, the original inhabitants of Florida—from the earliest human presence until the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century—have been very little known. The contact between the New and Old world which began 500 years ago marked the beginning of the end for Florida's first people. During the two centuries that followed initial contact, huge numbers of native North Americans died from disease and harsh treatment at the hands of the European invaders. But nowhere was the decimation more terrible than in Florida. In 1500 AD there may have been as many as 100,000 people living in what is today Florida. By 1800 AD all aboriginal Floridians were gone. The loss of their wisdom and knowledge stopped 12,000 years of tradition in its tracks, causing an informational implosion, a thunderous silence that continues to echo through the archaeological and native American world today. There is simply no one left to ask for first-hand answers to the questions of who our predecessors in this corner of the planet really were, or how they lived, or what they believed.

Accounts written by early European explorers give us only glimpses of aboriginal Florida people—occasional descriptions of ceremonies and battles, brief references to food and clothing, and the name Calusa for the people of Charlotte Harbor at the time of contact. But none of this tells much about what went before.

Our real knowledge of the past 10,000 years of continuous human occupation comes from the archaeological record. Archaeological studies in Charlotte Harbor conducted over the past 10 years by Dr. William Marguardt and his team from the Florida Natural History

Museum, provide fascinating information about these people who lived here prior to the arrival of Europeans. And solutions devised by these people to problems of food procurement, tool making, transportation, insects, heat, and a rising sea level, are pertinent to the Floridians that replaced them. Ten thousand years ago—8,000 BC—at the close of the Pleistocene Epoch, the sea lay 200 feet below the current sea level. What is today Charlotte Harbor was dry land; the waters of the Gulf lapped 40 miles west of today's coastline. Sea level rose during the Holocene, but the rise was not uniform over this 10,000-year period. Archaeological evidence from Flor's Island just south of Marco reveals that in 2,000 BC the sea level had risen to near present day level.

Evidence from around the world indicates a period of global warming from 400 BC to 900 AD. Archaeologic studies of prehistoric living sites in Charlotte Harbor by Karen Jo Walker and geologic studies of barrier island beach ridges by Frank Stapor, coincide nicely, revealing a sea level rise to levels higher than today's level 200 to 400 AD. Several indicators suggest a rise of 120 cm above today's stand. Archaeological evidence shows that during this time on large bodies of land such as Pine Island, human settlement retreated to higher ground and on low islands such as Jocelyn, living sites were totally abandoned.

Precontact Florida had no cattle, sheep, pigs or goats, and there were no fences. There were no house cats or Norway rats. Horses evolved in North America, but disappeared about 8,000 BC at the end of the Pleistocene, and dogs did not appear until about 4,000 BC. There were no honeybees

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