

## A PRELIMINARY REVIEW AND BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS CURATED BY THE PALM BEACH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

PETER FERDINANDO

*Department of Anthropology, The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History, 2805 E. Oakland Park Blvd #402, Ft Lauderdale,  
Florida 33306*  
*Email: pferdinando@pbmnh.org*

### Introduction

The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History (PBMNH) is a private non-profit organization that curates a wide variety of paleontological, anthropological, and archaeological resources, including approximately 900 boxes in the South Florida Archaeological Collection (SFAC). Of considerable note, this is one of the largest archaeological collections housed in southeast Florida. One prominent component of the SFAC is a sizeable selection of human skeletal remains. Originating from 21 different archaeological sites and representing the full or partial remains of a minimum of 139 individuals, this material demands study. To date, some investigation has been completed and is referenced herein. However, no collection-wide, in-depth osteological examination has yet been undertaken. This article represents a preliminary step towards this endeavor.

### The State of Physical Anthropology in Southeast Florida

In short, based on this brief analysis and our own review of other research on Florida prehistoric populations, it is our opinion that physical anthropology of the native Floridians is poorly known and that few attempts to remedy this problem have occurred beyond superficial consultation [Iscan and Miller-Shavitz 1983:114].

Since the above quote first appeared in *The Florida Anthropologist*, there have been some notable improvements to our physical anthropological knowledge of specific archaeological sites in southeast Florida (Table 1). Ister et al. (1985), Iscan and Kennedy (1987), Iscan and Kessel (1988), and Iscan et al. (1993, 1995) published information about the Highland Beach Mound (8PB11), Nebot (8PB219), Boynton Mound (8PB100), Brickell Bluff (8DA1082), and Flaganini South (8DA1053), data about Santa Maria (8DA2132) was reported by Carr et al. (1984), and osteological analysis of the Pine Island site (8BD1113) by Felmley (1990). In addition, Miller-Shavitz and Iscan (1991) discussed the "physical and health characteristics" of the people of Fort Center. Moreover, several comparative works have appeared. These include Iscan's (1989) evaluation of the dentition from the Highland Beach Mound in contrast to populations from the American Midwest, Winland's (2002) comparison of several

East Okeechobee Area skeletal populations to others located around Florida, and Elgart-Berry's (2003) odontological investigation involving eight southeast Florida sites. Finally, brief notes concerning skeletal populations are available in Bullen (1957) for the Boca Raon Sand Mound (also known as Barnhill Mound) (8PB13), Newman (1993) for the Cheetum site (8DA1058), and Ritchie et al. (1981) for the Patrician Mound (8PB99), along with additional information about the Boynton Mound site in Jaffee (1976). Despite this excellent beginning, the comprehensive physical anthropological study of native southeast Floridians is still lacking. For example, in her landmark review, *Prehistoric Mortuary Practices in the Everglades Cultural Area, Florida*, Felmley (1991:93) states "available data on prehistoric mortuary practices in the Everglades cultural area is limited and seriously hampered by a lack of osteological analysis." Indeed, the most inclusive study of burials in Florida found only one archaeological site from the southeast region of the state where available data (age, sex, health, burial layout and type, associated artifacts, etc.) was complete enough to be utilized (Kingle 2006). This deficiency must be addressed, and the remains curated in the SFAC represent an excellent opportunity for collecting such baseline data.

An additional article of note, Kessel (2001) described the human skeletal material curated at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). This excellent commentary demonstrated a framework for a simple, concise, and clear method to disseminate information into the academic community. Consequently, it was employed as a model for the writing of this article.

The SFAC is the cumulative result of almost 50 years of excavations by the now defunct Broward County Archaeological Society (BCAS). It is the legacy of hard work by many archaeologists, both professional and avocational. They excavated numerous archaeological sites in southeast Florida and reported many in *The Florida Anthropologist*. During preparations for ongoing analysis of the SFAC, an extensive literature review revealed both the depth of previously completed archaeological research and the wide selection of skeletal material awaiting intensive physical anthropological investigation (Ferdinando 2006). The majority of human remains in this collection originated from sites in the Everglades and East Okeechobee areas, with a single individual from the Lake Okeechobee Area (Carr and Bernait 1984) (Figure 1). These materials date from the Late Archaic through the Glades archaeological periods, a sequence of 4,000 years. This wide swath of geographic and temporal data