Further Research on the Pine Island Canal And Associated Sites, Lee County, Florida

By George M. Luer

Originally Published in

The Florida Anthropologist

Volume 42 No. 3

September, 1989

CANALS
PINE ISL, CANAL LL34
PINE ISL & BURIAL LL 40
CORBETT MD LL 24
PINE ISL CANAL LINEAR FEAT. LL 784
INDIAN FIELD SITE LL39
AWI. SHELL
AWI CERAMIC

FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE PINE ISLAND CANAL AND ASSOCIATED SITES, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

George M. Luer

Introduction

At the request of archaeologist Robert S. Carr, President of the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy, Inc. (AHC), further research on the Pine Island Canal and some of its associated sites was undertaken in July 1989 by the AHC. This project was done to augment the information presented in "Calusa Canals in Southwestern Florida: Routes of Tribute and Exchange" (see The Florida Anthropologist Vol. 42, No. 2).

The east end of the Pine Island Canal (8LL34), the Pine Island 8 burial mound (8LL40), and the Corbett Mound (8LL24) were each visited by archaeologist George Luer and a field technician, Jorge Zamanillo. Their observations and discoveries are presented below.

East End of the Canal

During a surface reconnaissance along the easternmost stretch of the Pine Island Canal in 1980, the canal was found to be so heavily overgrown with saw palmetto and melaleuca (punk) trees that its east end was not located (see Luer 1989:97). In 1989, however, it was found that much of this area had been cleared by intervening land development. Changes included a private road, groves, and a house.

After gaining permission to inspect this posted and privately-owned area, it was discovered with the aid of aerial photographs that remnants of the Pine Island Canal were now visible. Indeed, the canal's bed and spoil banks still could be discerned running east-west through the house's yard. When this property was cleared, four of the tallest melaleuca trees were left standing. These were growing in the canal bed which now appeared as a long, grassy swale supporting a row of widely-spaced, large melaleuca trees. The construction of the house and adjoining pond had obliterated some of the canal.

However, just east of the house and pond, the canal resumed running eastward through recently cleared but undeveloped land. There, remants of the canal were clearly visible, the muddy bed holding standing water between wide, sandy spoil banks. Further eastward, the canal turned gradually to run slightly south of east (see Figure 1). It entered uncleared land where it still was overgrown: white mangroves grew in a 12-foot wide bed and small melaleuca trees covered the banks. These banks formerly had supported saw palmetto, their decaying trunks and roots visible on the sand.

As the canal continued eastward, it crossed an open sand flat to meet the dense, low-lying mangrove forest that now covers the east shore of Pine Island. On crossing the sand flat, the canal bed gradually widened, and the spoil banks disappeared. At this naturally lower elevation, the spoil banks undoubtedly would have been smaller, as less digging would have been required to make the canal. Since there was less material to erode and to refill the canal bed, the bed has remained close to its original width at this east end. If this interpretation is correct, the greater width here is additional evidence that the Pine Island Canal originally was about 9 meters (30 feet) in width.

An unusual feature was discovered crossing the sand flat just north of the canal's east end. This feature was a long, narrow, linear furrow running northward, almost perpendicular to the canal (see Figure 1). This shallow feature was only about 10-15 centimeters (4-6 inches) in depth, about 3 meters (10 feet) wide, and about 90 meters (300 feet) in length. It was parallelled on the east and west by very low, eroding spoil banks joined together at their north ends.

Visible on these sandy, eroding