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The 1622 Tierra Firme Flota Salvage and the Florida Keys Natives



The Marquesas in the 1960's from the southwest. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

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I first saw the Marquesas in 1970. We left Key West and passed through the Lakes—the inside route—I believe Don Kincaid was running the boat. On both sides we passed the green blobs of man-

grove islands, called chiquimulas—the brothers—by the Indians, because they looked so much alike. At last we came up on our left to the island of Boca Grande.

Ahead to the west lay a broad channel, across which we could see a low rim of green—the Marquesas Keys. Boca Grande channel was quite rough that day and our boat pounded into the swells. As we approached, the green line separated into the islets of the Marquesas atoll. Passing at low tide through a narrow channel, we

came into a wide shallow lagoon which smelled strongly of mudflats and sun-on-mangrove. I had never seen such a lonely, isolated place.

Imagine how isolated it was before the fleet disaster of September and October of 1622. In the lower keys, named Cuchiaga, Uchiaga, or Aceaga, there lived a sparse Indian population. They traveled by canoe, and likely lived in some degree upon fish and shellfish. They had trade

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