

# Public Archaeology as Public Outreach

by

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## Abstract

Public archaeology engages local people about their past and provides a broad avenue for public outreach. Most people are naturally interested in archaeology. Many confess to having wanted to be an archaeologist at some point in their lives and quickly jump at the opportunity to “do archaeology.” The Florida Public Archaeology Network uses this interest to inform local stakeholders about the archaeological and historic preservation issues in their communities. Outreach efforts at the West Central Regional Center have included local schools, archaeological societies, and civic groups. Educating the public about archaeological preservation in the present is our best hope for protecting the past.

Everyone loves archaeology. When asked, many people respond that at some point in their lives (typically when they were younger or “in school”) they really wanted to be an archaeologist. Well, what’s not to like - permanent jobs are scarce, the pay is low, field projects are often in remote locations, and the work is never-ending... And WHY do people want to do this?!

This paper explores the various perspectives from which public archaeology makes effective public outreach. It seems at first to be obvious – PUBLIC archaeology, PUBLIC outreach; the ties appear simple and straight-forward. However, under the surface, the situation becomes complex and multidirectional. I explore the use of the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN; pronounced “F-PAN”) as a new vehicle for delivering public archaeology to a variety of local stakeholders. Composed of eight (8) regional centers, the Florida Public Archaeology Network is decentralizing archaeological public outreach and community involvement in archaeology as part of larger heritage preservation concerns.

I’d like to explore what is meant by public archaeology, public outreach as it relates to archaeology (both past and present), discuss some of the alternative ways that archaeology is presented to the public, and discuss two examples of how the FPAN Centers can encourage stakeholder involvement in the identification, interpretation, and preservation of Florida’s prehistoric, historic, and submerged archaeological heritage. It should come as no shock to anyone that archaeological sites in Florida are being destroyed at an alarming rate. With every new road, strip mall, and subdivision, a small piece of this puzzle is gone. Year after year, house after house, site after site, this development has effectively left some highly urbanized counties within the state with few

parcels outside of those in public ownership, that have not in some way been impacted by some sort of development.

For most of its history, the term applied archaeology was synonymous with cultural resource management (Shackel 2004:12), and cultural resource management with public archaeology. In recent years, the distinction between cultural resource management and public archaeology has grown wider, although they both still can be considered applied archaeology. In Chamber's (2004:195) view, applied anthropology, and consequently applied archaeology, is about making decisions. Archaeologists involved with the cultural resource management industry make decisions every day about the archeological record – which sites are important (significant), which sites are not, and which sites need further evaluation, typically more archaeological research, to make this determination. These decisions are discussed with their clients, state, and sometimes federal and even local officials until some consensus is reached about the ultimate fate of these archaeological sites. The public, including the community in which the site is situated, rarely, if ever, gets a voice in this decision.

Archaeologists concerned with public archaeology make decisions too. However, these decisions typically center on the preservation, public interpretation, and management of the state's archaeological heritage. Public archaeology as good applied anthropology must involve the application of knowledge or skills from the applied archaeologist's toolkit to the management and preservation of heritage resources. Community involvement and increased public participation in archaeological investigations means that archaeologists can no longer act as culture brokers. Public archaeologists have accepted the concept that many histories can exist in the same place

and these views of the past are continually being reconstructed and shaped by the experiences of the community (Shackel 2004:2).

### Public Outreach

Public outreach means many things to archaeologists. Outreach efforts lie along a continuum of efforts from complete misinformation (or at least disinformation) to interactive public excavation and interpretation. Public outreach involving misinformation or disinformation typically occurs when the archaeologist misinforms the public about their efforts. This might be done to “protect” a site that has just been found that might be in danger of looting or other impacts should any information about the site be released. But more typically it’s the standard response – “We haven’t found anything” that is given by contract archaeology field crews to any and all inquiries about what they are doing.

A bit further along the continuum are the more classic or typically definition of archaeological public outreach - a lecture or “talk” to a school group, club, or civic organization. In the past, this involved dusty slides and hot, darkened rooms, but today computers and flashy presentation software are the norm. Another example of the classic archaeological outreach are site tours or site viewing areas where the interested public is either lead around the site or they are allowed within a specific area within the site to observe and watch the archaeologists as they work.

More recent attempts at outreach include popular works that explain the excavation and its interpretation in terms that can be understood by the general public. These works are meant to be distributed and consumed by non-archaeologists. This differs from what is often termed the “grey” literature in that it is non-compliance related.

## Who Gets to Interpret What for Whom?

Since most of Florida's prehistoric and historic sites were first discovered by archaeologists, both professional and/or avocational, they have assumed the role as the primary interpreters of the past. With time, heritage tourism operators, artifact collectors, ecotourism entrepreneurs, and various historic (and prehistoric) re-enactors have expanded this role and in large part have taken over from archaeologists as the primary spokespersons for Florida's past. Florida's native peoples have been long silenced from this dialogue, but they are now increasingly demanding a role in how the story is told. Other groups sympathetic to Native American beliefs, some intertribal groups, others Indian "wantabees", vie with native groups to provide the residents of the state with the Native American side of the story.

There are many ways to engage the past and many theoretical perspectives from which to view it. The past, however, is not a static entity; it is largely an artifact of the present (Lowenthal 1985:xvi); the past is a constructed, modern phenomenon. During most of history, people did not typically make the distinction between the past and the present. All events, remote or recent, were all seen as concurrent. Lowenthal (1985:187) defines three sources of knowledge the past: memory, history and relics. Each allows us to connect to the past in distinct ways. Memory goes beyond our knowledge of the past, so only a portion of what we refer to as memory is devoted to storing this information. The remembered past is both individual and collective. Even a person with a good memory, sometimes referred to as a photographic memory, can not remember all events or all experiences. Even when people collectively share the same public events, we often process our individual experiences of that same event differently. The personal nature of

memory condemns it to ultimate extinction at death, but also flaws its communication of the past (Lowenthal 1985:194-196).

According to Lowenthal (1985:210-211) history extends and elaborates memory by interpreting relics and combining stories and reports from accounts of past events. Three things limit what can be known the past: immensity of the past itself, the distinction between past events and the individual and collective accounts of those events, and bias of various types. Historical knowledge is subjective and influenced by biases by both the narrator and by the audience. No account can recall the totality of past events because they are just too complex.

Artifacts, or relics as Lowenthal (1985:238) refers to them, are the primary building blocks of the archaeologist's trade. Artifacts and relics are the surviving natural features and human cast-offs left behind by people. They include altered or manufactured items, structural remains, and landscape features. Lowenthal (1985:238) states that the awareness of these relics enhances the knowledge gained through memory and history. Artifacts, however, leave behind an imperfect record; they are often effaced, decayed, or are destroyed. They typically suffer greater attrition than do memories or histories. Artifacts and relics provide tangible evidence of past events and often provide physical proof that these events actually occurred or took place.

Heritage links us to our past, to our fore-bearers, and to our former selves (Lowenthal 1996:3). Since the later portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, history and heritage have become national, if not world-wide obsessions. It returns back to a simpler time, to a former glory, to a sense of place and community that somehow we had "then" but do not have now. Displacement of large numbers of people, massive migrations, and the

growing longevity of individuals are attributed with enhancing the remoteness of the past. Displacement increases the nostalgia for roots, for a sense of belonging somewhere (Lowenthal 1996:11). Preserving heritage is a question of ownership and control. If it is not your heritage, it is easy to sell the artifacts or relics, build over the sites and heritage properties, and silence the history. This has been the primary argument against first world and neo-colonial control of non-western heritages.

Archaeologists focus on material culture, artifacts, and the physical residues left behind by human activities and events. They are, in Trouillot's view, positivists. They make a clear distinction between what they consider the historical process and the narrative about that process. Collectors and heritage tourism operations are also part of the collective history, and their contribution is often negated or underestimated (Trouillot 1995:20).

Trouillot (1995:6) employs a memory-history storage model. Individual memory is not an effective way of recalling the past; it becomes only one person's story. When taken collectively, the inherent problems with individual histories are compounded into the collective history. Added to this is the problem of what to include and exclude from this collective endeavor. Scholars have also underestimated the size, relevance, and complexity of the overlapping sites where history is produced, especially those outside of academia. Amateur history, television, and the movies also provide a historical narrative that often has a very strong influence on what people believe is truthful and authentic.

According to Trouillot (1995), that by examining the two intertwined sides of historicity (history/memory) we can discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others. Prepackaged narratives indicate that

historians alone do not set the narrative framework within which their stories fit. Silences can enter the process at any of four critical moments: the moment of fact creation (making of sources), the moment of fact assumable (making of archives), the moment of fact retrieval (making of narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance (making of history). These concepts are abstractions or second-level tools that help us understand why all silences are not equal and why they can all not be addressed or redressed in the same manner (Trouillot 1995:26-27).

Power is constitutive of the story; it can not be addressed in the abstract or divorced from the historical production. Power is the ability of a person or of a group of persons, either collectively or acting as individual agents, to have influence or control over others (Wolf 1990:585). It enters at different times and through different angles. For the interpretation of the archaeological record, knowledge is power. This knowledge includes the locations and access to archaeological sites (especially those on State and Federal lands), access to notes, maps, drawings, field sketches, and other recovery information, and access to the artifacts themselves.

McKercher and du Cros (2002:153) introduce the concept of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are the intermediaries between the public and the archaeological record. Archaeologists, historians, re-enactors, and park personnel can all function as gatekeepers. They convey the message to the public that forms the basis of their expectations and preconceived notions about what they will see, how they will view it, and how authentic the experience will be.

Myth and memory strongly affect tourist expectations and notions of authenticity (cf., Chambers 2000:96). Notions of heritage and history influence what stories are told

and which ones are silenced. Tradition allows the status quo to perpetuate, making the day-to-day evens seem comfortable and familiar. Each of these categories, when combined, effects that whole that we consider the past. Archaeologists have always claimed the notion of scientific imperative or scientific benefit to justify their monopoly over this past.

### The Players

There are several groups who are involved in the interpretation of archaeological sites to the public. They include professional archaeologists and historians, avocation archaeologists and collectors, heritage tourism and ecotourism operators, state, county, and local park employees and workers, and Native American groups. Of these, professional archaeologists have had to greatest influence; Florida's Native American population has had the least influence.

Professional archaeologists and historians typically exercise the greatest amount of power and privilege in Florida archaeology. Professional archaeologists and historians include university professors, CRM professionals and business owners, museum professionals, and those who make a living excavating and managing archaeological sites. This group has traditionally interpreted the archaeological sites in the state.

Archaeologists and historians usurped the efforts of early antiquarians, like Clarence B. Moore and Montague Tallant, to restrict access to Florida's past. Since the passage to the Antiquities Act of 1906, archaeologists have used laws and regulations to limit who can conduct archaeological research. Two reasons are generally cited for the need to restrict access: to restrict the plundering of sites to recover "treasures" and other material remains of monetary value, and to insure that the scientific value of the materials are fully

documented and available to other researchers, typically meaning to other archaeologists (Thomas 2000:140-144). Most archaeologists are busy conducting their own research, publishing papers, attending symposia, and teaching. Most have little time for and are disinterested in interpreting the past to the general public, although many state otherwise.

Artifact collectors and avocational archaeologists form a separate, but very active group interested in Florida archaeology. Avocational archaeologists, artifact collectors, hobbyists, re-enactors, and avocational historians are all individuals who have a strong interest in the prehistory and the archaeological record, but that have no formal training in either archaeology or history. Most make the artifacts their primary object of study (e.g., Knight 2004; Munroe and Thulman 2004) and many, but not all, buy and sell prehistoric artifacts. These individuals often get together for “Indian Artifact Shows” or “Bottle Meets” where both prehistoric and historic artifacts, and sometime the locations of archaeological sites, are bought, sold, and traded. Many artifact collectors have a strong interest in a growing “primitive technology” movement. Primitive technologists make and use stone, wood, and bone tools, fire pottery in open kilns, and prepare animals skins for decoration and for clothing. Many of the historic and prehistoric re-enactors are also primitive technologists.

Re-enactors and lay historians are often called upon to provide interpretation and present public displays of historical events. This is often call “living history.” Some of the more popular en-enactments in west central Florida are the Dade Massacre, also known as the Battle of Wahoo Swamp, Camp Uzita at the Desoto National Memorial and the Fort Foster historic site. The Dade Massacre re-enacts the battle between Seminole Indians and the U.S. Military the precipitated the Second Seminole War in 1837. The re-

enactment of the Fort Foster historic also commemorates its Second Seminole War (1837-1842) actions. Camp Uzita was the Native American village occupied by Hernando Desoto in 1539. Nearly all of the re-enactments concern Euro-American intrusions into American Indian lands, and nearly all of the re-enactors are Euro-Americans playing the roles of Spanish conquistadors or Second Seminole War soldiers. American Indians, women, and non-white participants are often underrepresented; American Indians and non-white participants are sometime enacted by white males.

Heritage tourism and ecotourism businesses focus primarily on Florida's natural environments, including plant, animals, landforms and landscapes, but they have become increasing involved with interpreting Florida's prehistoric and historic past. Many are members of the Florida Master Naturalist program, but no formal training in archaeology, history, or anthropology is required to operate or own a heritage/eco tourism business. Many focus on the Euro-American interaction with Florida's environment. They paint early Florida as a harsh and inhospitable place, full of swamps, snakes, dangerous animals, bugs, and oppressive heat. Heritage tourism often portrays Florida's prehistoric past according to popular history, legend and myth and are strongly influenced by the "noble savage" mentality. Florida's first peoples are typically seen as having lived in complete harmony with the land and each other, hunting, fishing, and gathering shellfish in a Garden of Eden-like setting. Mound-builder myths, native life in paradise tales, and Indian princess stories, like the City of New Port Richey's Chasco Fiesta legend, are very common.

Native Americans have interacted with the interpretation of Florida's past in numerous ways. Some actively pursue their archaeological past, while others hire Euro-

American go-betweens and refuse to speak of the dead (past) because of the act's detrimental social and cosmological ramifications. Of the six Federally-recognized tribes in Florida, only the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida are based entirely within the state. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians all have social, political and economic ties to Florida, but are based in other states. The Independent Traditional Seminole Nation of Florida retains traditional Seminole beliefs, but has little involvement with groups beyond its land holdings near Immokalee in Collier County (Laduke 1999:36-38). The Seminole Tribe of Florida has taken an active role in those aspects of Florida archaeology that deals with their particular aspect of Native Americans and have actively conducted surveys to identify both early Seminole sites and material remains left behind by earlier groups (Cypress1997:160; Cypress et al. 2002:115). The Seminoles have established the Ah Tha Ki Museum and have appointed a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), the first tribe in Florida to do so. Although they have actively identified early Seminole Indian sites in Florida, they have been reluctant to excavate, promote, or interpret any of these sites, and have chosen instead to focus on a form of heritage tourism that includes alligator wrestling, air-boat rides, and gambling.

The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida are a Mikusaki-speaking people, who are related to both the Seminoles and other Creek peoples. They actively promote themselves as the decedents of the Calusa and other contact-period Native American groups (Dayoff and Terry 2002:112). The Miccosukee do not actively pursue the identification of archaeological remains and have long held that any excavation of any

archaeological site, whether it contains human remains or not, is tantamount to grave robbing. They feel that no additional archaeological research is necessary and hold strongly to the belief that the disturbance of archaeological sites is unnecessary (Dayoff and Terry 2002:111).

Native American groups that are not federally-recognized, but that do often voice opinions concerning archaeological sites include groups like the Muskogee Nation of Florida and the Perdido Bay Tribe of Lower Muskogee Creeks. These groups have not yet achieved official federal recognition, but have a strong oral tradition of group unity and established kinship relations. Other multi-tribal groups are made up of individuals who are of mixed ethnic heritage or whose Indian heritage has been obscured or denied in some way. Other members are from recognized tribes, but chose to live in Florida, away from their affiliated groups. These intertribal groups, like the Spirit People of America in Pasco County (Drapkin 2006; Spirit People of America 2006), meet regularly and often host powwows and other public events. The Spirit People of America have joined with the Starkey Flatwoods Adventure Ranch in Odessa, Florida, a now defunct eco-tourism operation, to provide education with Native American crafts and story-telling. Powwows are held on a regular basis and attract dance groups and performers from around the country (Drapkin 2006:1; 6).

Oral history and oral traditions are two things that the federally-recognized tribes in Florida, particularly the Seminole Tribe of Florida, feel that they can contribute to the interpretation of the archaeological record (Cypress et al. 2002:115). But, until recently, archaeologists have ignored Florida's Native American groups and most Indians in Florida have approached archeology with objections, indifference and isolation.

## West Central Regional Center Outreach Examples

Public outreach at the West Central Regional Center has taken many forms, some we anticipated and planned carefully for and other opportunities that quite simply fell into our laps. Our initial efforts focused on the schools and school groups. In Florida, this includes public schools, private (charter) schools with public funding, private schools and academies, and children who are home-schooled. Public parks have also been a focus of our efforts, as they often try to provide ecological and sometimes archaeological outreach and interpretation to their guests.

Outreach to the Hillsborough County magnet school program has focused on the Dowdell Middle School near Palm River in south-central Hillsborough County. Coordination with Barbara Brown, the magnet school coordinator, and Susan Ferrell, the curriculum integration specialist with Dowdell Middle Magnet School, have focused on a grant-funded program that incorporates archaeology into an intensive reading program.

The Center has assisted Ms. Ferrell by conducting a variety of hand-on activities with in-class talks and artifact demonstrations, organizing the assisting with a field trip to the Weedon Island Cultural and Environmental Center on the Weedon Island Preserve, and conducting an on-campus excavation experience that reflect archaeological goals and techniques, and develop hand-on activities that both explain archaeology and encourage reading.

The highlight of the outreach program includes a classroom presentation and demonstration of archaeological laboratory techniques, a mock excavation on the Dowdell school campus. The lab demonstration included the analysis of the materials the students brought back from the Rattlesnake Ridge site, a teaching excavation on the

Weedon Island Preserve. A small excavation unit (1 meter square) was placed within the Dowdell Environmental Center next to their pond. Students took turns excavating two levels and screening the matrix. The artifacts found were collected and bagged by level. After the “excavation” was complete, a new “culture” was introduced into the unit and buried for the next class to find and excavate. The class returned to MOSI for the final fieldtrip of the semester. They attended Rae Harper’s Archaeology and Material Culture of Pre-Contact Florida class and spent the rest of the day visiting at MOSI.

The success of the Dowdell outreach has been our ability to build a level of trust with the students. Once the students realized that we intended to be involved with the class for more than a single lecture or demonstration, their attitudes and desire to participate in the program increased dramatically. Perhaps the best measure of our success has been the former students. The class runs for a single semester and when the students found out that they couldn’t return to the class for the Spring semester, eagerly brought around their friends and neighbors to see if perhaps these new students might get into the “archaeology” class. All of the Fall semester students returned in the Spring to help the “new” students excavate the new culture that they had themselves created and buried not three months previous.

The Center has also been involved with the recent fossil discovery at Boca Ciega Millennium Park in St Petersburg. A high school student walking along a creek looking for opportunities to photograph nature came upon the jaw of a now-extinct Columbia Mammoth. This and subsequent finds form the basis of one of the largest, and perhaps most significant, late Pleistocene fossil beds discovered in west Florida in nearly 80 years. Now, admittedly, the archaeological component of this find is limited to about

half a dozen waste flakes and a single stone tool, and that the association between the fossils and the artifacts found thus far tenuous, at best, but that not what is at issue here. These finds were openly exposed in a stream bed within a very popular urban park. Once word got out about these finds, it was going to be difficult, if not impossible to secure the area or the fossils. An impromptu site “management” committee decided to recover the larger specimens using park personnel and then to open the site up, explain the find to the public, and secure public participation in the recovery of the remaining fossils within the creek bed.

Opening the site up to the public solved several potential problems, not the least of which was how to mobilize enough people to recover literally hundreds of pounds of fossils strewn along nearly a half a kilometer of creek bed. Once the story of Sierra’s fossil discovery hit the papers, the park was flooded with phone calls and visitors all wanting to help. A location grid was established, screens were built, drying and staging areas setup, and with a few weekends groups of from 20 to 35 volunteers per shift per day have secured most of the remains.

Opening the site to the public had some unexpected results. Many of the volunteers began to refer to the site and to specific fossil find as “theirs’.” Ownership of the resource and specific finds within the site was also evident at the Park’s annual Nature Day and Discovery Festival. While in years past a typical even might attract 500 to 600 people, nearly 3,500 people showed up at the park to see the fossils on display earlier this month. Many were interested in what was going to become of the finds once they were cleaned and cataloged, and most appeared to be very supportive of housing the remains within an interpretive center that was to be constructed within the park.

## Conclusions

For the past 100 years, archaeologists in Florida have enjoyed a position of power and privilege with respect to Florida's past. They have been the primary interpreters and one of the primary gatekeepers to these materials. This privileged position is now being challenged by avocational archaeologists, heritage and eco-tourism operators, re-enactors, and Native American groups who all now have a stake in how the past is interpreted and presented to the public (Pinter 2005:10). Today, eco-tourism operators, heritage tourism operators, re-enactors, school teachers and park personnel now provide much of the information available to the public about Florida's pre- and post-contact archaeological sites.

There are several small things that archaeologists could do today that would both add a significant new dimension to interpretations of the past and allow for multiple voices in the interpretation and create a sense of place with archaeology (Shackel 2005:35). This includes taking all voices into consideration and to consult with various stakeholders to be as inclusive as possible.

Public outreach needs to expand to include community archaeology. There will always be the need for the traditional public outreach components, like tours or archaeological sites, public lectures and presentations, and booklets, pamphlets, and coloring books, but we have to do more. Community archaeology provides an opportunity, and only a brief opportunity, to engage the public and to express what they collectively feel is important about their past.

Finally, public archaeologists must always keep in mind Chamber's distinction of doing archaeology not only in public but with the public (Chambers 2004:207). It is

sometime too easy to simply excavate, analysis, and spoon-feed the public archaeological information. Engaging the various stakeholders in site preservation and interpretation is the best way to educate and inform the public about their prehistoric and historic archaeological heritage.

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