



Mound Key, a state park on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, is the ceremonial capital of the Calusa. A guided tour of the island is offered during Calusa Coast Days. SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Learn about the lives, times of ancient Calusa people



Field Notes

Amy Williams
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLA.

Sure, you may already know that March is National Celery Month, National Cheerleading Safety Month and National Umbrella Month, but did you know it's also Archaeology Month?

For Tropicalia's purposes, that's the one that really counts – and counts year 'round, because this region's archaeological heritage is as fascinating as it is rich. But during March, it gets special focus during Calusa Coast Days, highlighted at sites throughout Southwest Florida, from Marco Island to Estero Bay's Mound Key. The celebration culminates with a program at Fort Myers' Calusa Nature Center featuring renowned archaeologist Bill Marquardt, who's contributed mightily to our understanding of the Calusa, this place's early residents, over his distinguished career.

Long before Midwestern snowbirds arrived, Southwest Florida was home to these indigenous people who developed a complex society before vanishing, leaving only scant glimpses of their lives buried below mounds of shells and sunken in muck.

One of the most iconic pieces of their work is the Key Marco Cat, a lovely little wooden feline discovered in the muck near Marco Island. Archaeologists have also found painted masks, rope and shell tools.



Volunteers excavate a section of a Calusa shell mound on Pine Island. They found cordage, shells used as tools and net weights, bones, pottery and wood fragments. AMANDA INSCORE/THE NEWS-PRESS

We know they made thatched buildings, engineered canals and earthworks, held spiritual beliefs and practiced burial customs, established a wide-reaching empire, and crafted tools, utensils and artwork from bones, shells, clay and wood. Wooden bowls and cups; pottery; painted, carved-wood masks; tools and hunting equipment; fishing hooks and nets; and simple, decorative paintings all have been uncovered at archaeological sites in their heartland stretching from Marco Island to the south and Pine Island to the north

See FIELD NOTES, Page 19E



The Mound House on Fort Myers Beach will be offering a variety of programs in celebration of Calusa Coast Days. ANDREW WEST/NEWS-PRESS.COM

Field Notes

Continued from Page 2E

These worldly goods were made of locally available, natural materials and when the Calusa incorporated artistic design, it was inspired by the wild animals around them: deer, woodpeckers, dolphins, alligators, birds and panther.

Most clues about the Calusa – who called Southwest Florida home for thousands of years before Europeans started arriving in the 1500s – come from the remains of their civilization buried in shells and mud of the huge mounds for which they're known. Others come from the writings of the Spanish explorers and evangelists who tried fruitlessly to win them over.

Jan Brown, one of the event's organizers sees the month-long series as a panoramic trip through the Calusa heartland – from beginning to end, with each site's unique features serving as a huge outdoor museum with many rooms.

Here's some of what's happening during Calusa Coast Days:

March 19: The Mound House on Fort Myers Beach will be offering a variety of programs to celebrate. The museum will be open from 9 a.m.-4 p.m., with programs including guided kayak tours, an interactive Calusa tool program and a Calusa shell mound tour. For more information on the programs or to register for a kayak tour, visit moundhouse.org or call 239-765-0865

March 19: Lovers Key State Park hosts Calusa-centric activities on the

observation deck of the Welcome and Discovery Center, featuring ecosystems the Calusa once ruled, self-guided hikes or paddles to see an authentic shell midden located inside the park's canal system. At 3 p.m., Florida Public Archaeology Network's Southwest Outreach Coordinator, Natalie A. De La Torre Salas, MA, RPA, will host a lecture on the archaeology of the Calusa. Space is limited for the lecture, and reservations are required. To register, visit www.LoversKey.Eventbrite.com.

March 19: Join the Koreshan Museum curator and the Estero Bay Preserve environmental specialist for a unique tour of Mound Key at 9 a.m. to explore the island capital of the ancient Calusa. Reservations required. www.FloridaStateParks.org/events/tour-mound-key

March 26: Join renowned archaeologist, Dr. Bill Marquardt, from 10:30 a.m. to noon at the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium in Fort Myers for a program about the history of the Calusa and on his research on the ancestors of Southwest Florida as well as a screening of the short film, "The Domain of the Calusa." Admission is free but seating is limited. <https://fareharbor.com/embeds/book/calusanature/items/365387/calendar/2022/03/?flow=244411&full-items=yes>

To help: Donations may be made to the Southwest Florida Archeological Society by mailing a check to Charlie Strader, SFWAS, 27655 Kent Road, Bonita Springs, FL 34135 (note: Calusa Coast in memo section) or via Paypal by going to <https://swflarchaeology.org> and selecting "Donation"(note Calusa Coast in notes option)