



Know Before You Go: Mound House Background Information

No matter which Mound House field trip programs you decide to embark on with your students, there are three big topics that will always be covered during your visit – Archaeology, the Calusa people, and the estuarine ecology of Southwest Florida. Our hope is that the background information provided below will help you and your students feel more prepared and excited about your upcoming field trip to the Mound House!

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please email us at moundhouse@fmbgov.com.

Archaeology

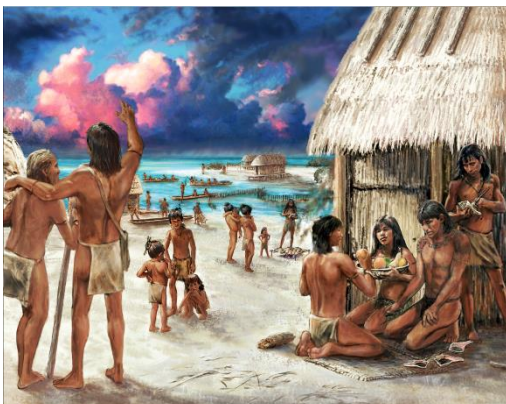
Archaeology is the scientific study of people and cultures through material remains (i.e. artifacts). Many people have misconceptions about what archaeologists do and what they study, so it is important to clarify this up front. Archaeology is not the study of dinosaurs – that's paleontology. Archaeology is not the study of rocks – that's geology. Archaeology is not the study of treasure hunting either. As scientists, archaeologists use artifacts as clues into the lives and cultures of folks long gone.

The Mound House is a historical home turned museum. It sits atop an archaeological site, known as the Estero Island Site, which was excavated in the early 2000s. The mound itself is a midden, meaning it is made up of discarded items, and was purposely piled up by the Calusa Indians starting roughly 2000 years ago. Archaeologists study the materials found in the mound to gain insight and understanding about the Calusa people, how they lived, and their culture.



Calusa

The Calusa were indigenous people who lived in southwest Florida for many years prior to Europeans arriving in North America. They were a powerful people and their influence could be felt far beyond their homeland on the southwest coast of Florida. They received tribute – a payment of goods or services to show loyalty to a political leader – from as far away as Lake Okeechobee, present-day Miami, and the Florida Keys. According to Spanish records, “items of tribute to the Calusa leader included foods, mats, hides, feathers, plunder from shipwrecks, and sometimes captive people” (MacMahon & Marquardt 2004, pg. 82). MacMahon & Marquardt continue, “although captives were put to work, there is no evidence that the Calusa had large numbers of slaves” (MacMahon & Marquardt 2004, pg. 82). The Calusa were





also very dependent on natural resources to meet their needs. They were fisher-hunter-gatherers, relying heavily on the fisheries of the estuaries and waterways for their food instead of converting to an agricultural, or farming, lifestyle. Following many years of ongoing conflicts with the Spanish and other native cultures, European-introduced diseases, slavery, and displacement, the Calusa culture is considered extinct by the mid-1700s.

The Mound House is located on a shell mound that was the site of a Calusa village. Construction of the mound began about 2000 years ago and was an active Calusa village for almost 1000 years. Throughout the time the Calusa people were living here, they were slowly but surely building up the mound using primarily shells from meals and broken tools.



Estuarine Ecology



The environment and the natural resources of southwest Florida were vital to the Calusa's survival. Much of their societal success can be contributed to the bounty of fish and rich biodiversity found in the estuaries (MacMahon & Marquardt 2004, pg. 8).

Several Calusa village sites, including the Mound House site, are located on the Estero Bay. The Estero Bay is an estuary with several distinct communities contained within, the most dominant and influential being the mangrove forest. Mangroves are trees that can grow in fresh or salt water and are very common and important in south Florida. An estuary is

where two bodies of water meet – here, it's where the fresh water from rivers and streams meets and mixes with the salt water from the Gulf. When water is a mixture of fresh and salt water, it is described as brackish water. The Estero Bay is home to a diverse array of wildlife and its resources have provided for humans for thousands of years. Estuaries are often called "Cradles of the Ocean" due to the number of marine (ocean) animals that start their lives in, and depend on, estuaries for some part of their life cycle.

Reference

MacMahon and Marquardt. *The Calusa and Their Legacy*. 2004. University Press of Florida.