

Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

October 2017



1860s Minié Ball
THPO 2016.246.MD 26

1 cm

When you're searching for a needle in a haystack, how do you know when you've found it? The THPO Tribal Archaeology Section (TAS) recently set out to locate a Seminole occupation period on Egmont Key. Egmont Key is a small barrier island off the coast of Tampa that was used to intern Seminoles during the 3rd Seminole War in the 1850s. In order to locate where the Seminoles lived during their imprisonment, the TAS systematically surveyed promising areas of the island. While our field crew was unable to locate exactly what they were looking for, they were able to identify several diagnostic objects that helped guide them along their way. Archaeologists often use artifacts that are called "diagnostic" in order to determine exactly what time period they're working in.

The October Artifact of the Month is Minié Ball that was identified during this survey. Firearms have been in use for several hundred years, and the evolution of ammunition can help pin point when an artifact was made. This type of ammunition is specially designed to work with firearms manufactured after the 1850s. The three rings that wrap around the diameter of the ball were designed to increase the trajectory (or distance) of each round. An inventor by the name of Claude-Etienne Minié perfected the design, and "minie" balls became the ammunition of choice during the Civil War. From this one tiny artifact, our crew was able to determine that they had not identified a Seminole presence from the 1850s. The crew will have to expand their search to find this sought after area.

Egmont Key is currently listed as one of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation's top 11 most endangered sites. There is much more work left to be done to reveal the Seminole story on Egmont Key.

