

Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

January 2020

Our highlighted artifact this month comes from an animal that is highly recognizable in Florida, the Alligator. This reptile, from the family Alligatoridae, has been previously featured as an artifact of the month with the highlight going to its most feared portions (its jaws and teeth). However, this month, we would like to steer your attention to a different part of this dangerous animal, its tail. The tail of an alligator is useful for locomotion in the water and it allows the gator to launch itself out of the water when trying to go after prey. On the flip side, the tail also acts as a means of defense when the gator is pitted against one of its predators, such as humans.

The tail of an alligator is incredibly dense and with an animal that can move in quick short bursts on land, you can guarantee that the tail will pack a punch if you're hit by it. If an alligator feels threatened, it will not only lunge, using its tail to propel itself forward, but it will also whip its tail around causing a lot of force to come at you very quickly. But don't take out word for it! Come check out the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's new exhibit *Alligator Wrestling: Danger. Entertainment. Tradition* which will be up until November 29, 2020. There you can learn not only about the different skeletal parts of an alligator but also about the strong traditions the Seminole Tribe of Florida has with alligator wrestling.



THPO Collection 2014.9.76



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Lately all of us have gotten good at being inside and staying socially distant. Did you know that artifacts sometimes need to isolate too? When artifacts come from the field, they go to a special isolation room. There, they are isolated from the rest of the collection for a minimum of two weeks, to make sure they don't bring along any unwanted friends into the collection. Any bugs from outside won't survive the 2 week quarantine, and we keep the rest of the collection safe. Also while in the isolation room, certain cultural requirements are satisfied, then the artifacts can make their way into the lab for processing. Artifacts like these pottery sherds will be washed, catalogued, and accessioned into the collection.

These three sand tempered Glades Plain sherds are part of a recent project we have continued to work on during the pandemic. Dating anywhere from 500 BC to 1763 AD they refit, and are most likely the rim piece of a bowl. While a lot of the pottery we have featured before is decorated, the majority we find looks like this. Living in the swamps of Florida is rough, and a lot of the time artifacts we find are more utilitarian and functional.



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When you think about archaeology what comes to mind? Old, ancient artifacts stuck in time, right? Well, archaeology is a lot more complex than that, as our artifact this week displays. This week's artifact is a brass .22 rimfire cartridge casing, either from a .22 Long Rifle or a .22 Long. Both were developed in the late 1800s with a slight variation in overall length and subsequent weight, although they use the same casing for both ammunition types. The .22 Long Rifle has a slightly longer overall length (1.0 inches vs 0.888 inches for the .22 Long) with a heavier bullet. This meant the .22 LR had more inertia than the .22 L and performs at higher velocities. Both are still in use today, and are very useful for small game hunting and recreational shooting.

Although this particular artifact has not been dated, it represents something important to highlight when it comes to archaeology. It comes from the same site on the Brighton Reservation as our most recently featured artifact, the Glades Rim sherds. This is a perfect example of a multicomponent site, where occupation is fluid and long term. In this case, you have both the historic .22 cartridge and pottery dating from 500 BC to 1763 AD.

Archaeology is not static, and we are adding to it even now. In this case, sites like these are still in use, and a good reminder that the Seminole story is being added to every day.



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What is better going into Fall than an archaeological mystery? Many times, the artifacts that come out of the field are not like what you would see in a museum. They're fragmented, broken, and sometimes burned. This can make it hard to identify them, and sometimes we do not succeed, or we have to consult outside sources for help. Like a puzzle, we try and put the pieces together to see the larger picture.

This week's artifact of the month is one of those pieces. Heavily melted due to heat, it has a slight scalloped edge that is consistent with an ashtray or small plate. The glass is also imperfect, with bubbling and pitting, and the surface has a slight iridescent quality to it possibly due to weathering or even intentionally during manufacture. These qualities are consistent with Depression glass which was cheaply produced and highly distributed. The distinctive light green color was also popular.

During the Depression companies would use the glass plates, bowls, and settings to incentivize people to buy their products. You may have gotten one with a bag of flour or sugar, or even for buying gas. If you had the funds, you could purchase the rest of the set by mail. While not definitive, these qualities point towards this ID, despite it being melted. What do you think?



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Over the years, we have featured a few different beads for our Artifact of the Month. This week, we are looking at a whole handful! Found on the Brighton Reservation during a project to assess the damage from Hurricane Irma, these brightly colored beads represent an significant facet of the Seminole story. Before contact, beads would have been made from bone or shell, much like the shell bead we see here.



After European contact, glass and ceramic beads quickly replaced shell and bone beads due to easy availability and low labor cost. Beads were a valuable trade item, and they are still important in Seminole craftwork today. In the 19th century beads like this would have been used to make jewelry like necklaces, as well as to intricately decorate and pattern objects. Although they are worn these beads still show the vibrant colors and shapes that made them so attractive for jewelry and decoration.



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Found on the Brighton reservation, this little sliver of bone is a lot more important than it looks! It may not mean much to you or I, but this is a fragment of a bone pin. Bone was often used to make needles, pins, hooks, and awls. A bone pin like this could have been used to sew clothing, make a fishing net, or as a fastener or adornment. While decorated pins are occasionally found, something practical like the one we are featuring today are much more common. Unlike the decorated pins you may see in a museum, the importance of this tiny artifact is found in its functionality.

Looking closely we can see it is highly polished and shaped into a point, most likely made from bone from a larger animal like a deer. Bone was readily available, and especially in Florida we see it utilized often to make tools. While bone still does break down over time, it is significantly more resilient than wood when it comes to surviving the swamp, making it an attractive material source. Can you imagine making this? What would you use it for?



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Our Artifact of the Month for this episode in our Quarantine series is this 1938 Canada Dry bottle, which was a surface find at a site on the Brighton Reservation. Holding 28 Fl Oz, this particular bottle is colorless glass, meaning it most likely held sparkling or tonic water instead of the iconic ginger ale. Like those you can buy today, the Ginger Ale bottles would have been green.

The glass bottle itself was produced in Streator, IL by Owens-Illinois, and features a 1938 date code. These private mold bottles would have been made in bulk, then bottled by the customer, in this case Canada Dry Ginger Ale Co., NYC.

Originally developed in Toronto in 1890 by John J. McLaughlin, Canada Dry Ginger Ale is a highly recognized brand name for many of us. Touted as a lighter ginger ale, it was a popular mixer during the Prohibition as it masked the taste of the alcohol. Both the Ginger Ale and sparkling water were marketed as high class mixers, and Canada Dry was trademarked as the "Champagne of Soda"



Image via Wikimedia Commons

Artifact of the Month

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MEOOW! Our artifact this week is a cervical vertebra fragment from a bobcat. One of only two big cats in Florida (the other being the iconic Florida panther) *Lynx rufus* is about twice the size of the common domestic housecat. They have distinctive brown or black spots that are more defined on juveniles, and a black tipped stubby bobbing tail. With tufted, triangular ears, the bobcat closely resembles others in the *Lynx* Genus, although it is the smallest. Like other cats, bobcats “directly register” when they walk. This means in order to be efficient and not disturb their environment, their back paws step in the same spot as their front paws previously were when moving. They often hunt rabbits, rodents, birds, fish, and even juvenile deer.



"florida bobcat coming" by russimages is licensed with CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

In Florida, the status of the two big cats could not be more different. While the Florida Panther is an Endangered Species, the bobcat is considered of Least Concern. The most abundant wildcat in the US, the bobcat can be found in Florida’s swamps, forests, hammocks, and even suburban areas. While abundant, they are solitary and private animals. Have you seen a bobcat where you live?



2017.15.350



Artifact of the Month

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Made of orangey-brown chert, this point is relatively large in comparison with most of the points we have in our collection. Almost 2.5 inches long, it is complete except for a small chip off the tip. It most closely resembles an Alachua projectile point from the Bullen Typology (FMNH). Found primarily in North Florida, this point type dates from the Middle Archaic to Transitional periods. It is made from high quality chert that would most likely not be found in South Florida, meaning someone would have had to travel to find the raw material farther north, or traded either for the raw material or the point itself.

Flint knapping is a very skilled craft, and requires certain materials and training to produce a quality point. It is much harder than it looks, and represents a high energy cost. After the material itself is procured, random percussion flakes are taken off of a solid core in order to shape the bulk of the point, then fine pressure flaking is used on the edges to sharpen the blade. Percussion flaking is hitting the rock with another rock, or sometimes even bone, to break off a piece of the core. Due to the material, the stone will break in a predictable way and you can shape your point. Pressure flaking is finer detail, where you press a sharp tool to flake off a tiny area. Can you see those small pressure flakes nibbling on the edge of this point?



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For our LAST Quarantine Edition artifact, we are bringing you this complete amber glass bottle! Manufactured in Streator, IL and showing a date code of 1946, this bottle was found by our HIM grant crew earlier this spring on the Brighton Reservation. Originally only manufacturing milk bottles, the Thatcher Glass Manufacturing Co. eventually branched out to soda and alcohol bottles, advertising for these non-milk bottles starting in 1944. This bottle is a great example of how much historic glass can tell you when you know where to look, and what different makers marks mean. A 4/5th quart amber glass liquor bottle, the shoulder reads “Federal Law Forbids the Use or Resale of this Bottle”



This marking was required by law on all liquor bottles from 1935 until 1964 except those containing beer or wine. The intention was to discourage the reuse of bottles when producing at-home alcohol, and to protect government liquor revenue. Even though Prohibition ended in 1933, regulations such as these were kept in place for significantly longer to discourage bootlegging. These laws also required a Distiller’s permit number, which for this bottle is “D-9” and can be found on the base.



Artifact of the Month

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November 2020

Our artifact of the month for November is another one of our Collections mysteries, but this time it could be a plant! When looking at an archaeological site, we don't just look at the artifacts we collect. While those are important, we also have to note the environment the site is in. What are the plants? Trees? Is it in a hammock or a pasture? This can help us understand the whole context of our site and give insight into how it was used, what changed over time, and other environmental impacts like cattle trampling and flooding. It also allows us to notice things that are a little out of place, like the remnants of an old garden vs. plants growing wild. Context is a cornerstone of good archaeology, and this extends to the site environment.

Additionally, sometimes plant material gets mixed up and looks like an artifact. Initially when this artifact was collected, it seemed like bone. The shape is similar to the shape of some bones, with a flat oval cross section. But upon further inspection and cleaning, we can clearly see that it is not bone. Our current best guess is part of a piece of palm that has degraded – possibly part of the frond. This mystery still has us stumped – what kind of plant would degrade and look like this? Do you know what it is, and can help give our site context?



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December 2020

This year, the holidays may look a little different, with fewer parties and more video calls. Hopefully despite these challenges, everyone out there is figuring out how to spend time with your loved ones this holiday season, even if it is virtually. Like a punch you might find at a past holiday party, our artifact of the month for December is a 1948 Delicious Delaware punch bottle!

A fruity, iconic soft drink, Delicious Delaware punch was non carbonated and originally formulated in 1913. Described as incredibly sweet the punch was predominantly grape flavored. This punch bottle was only part of the vast assemblage found at a multicomponent site on the Brighton Reservation, which ranged from prehistoric to historic. Named after the Delaware grape, and not the state, this punch was very popular until around the 1960s and inspired a cult like following. It is now owned by the Coca-Cola Company, and is only produced in small batches, making it hard to find.

Happy Holidays from us here at the THPO, and have a (virtual) glass of punch on us! We will be back in the new year with more artifacts to help share the Seminole story.

