



SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - APRIL 2023

THE ANCESTORS' CANOE

In November of 2019, Park Ranger Tom Watson found a canoe washed up on the shore of Egmont Key, a small island in the mouth of Tampa Bay. While remnants of canoes left behind by the Seminole are not uncommon, this one proved to be a much different case. When Pedro Zapeda, a Tribal member and canoe crafter, examined the cypress frame he identified traditional techniques used in its making that are still taught today. However the canoe is over 18 feet long, from one end to where it is broken off, and could have been much longer. The size, along with a circular notch in the frame that could have been placement for a mast, showed that it was meant for deep waters such as the Gulf of Mexico and the broader Caribbean. This would place the Egmont canoe as having been crafted over 500 years ago!

A piece of the canoe was sent for carbon dating, and determined that the canoe was made around the year 1410, plus or minus twenty years. In that time there was regular travel between the indigenous people of Florida, those along the Gulf Coast, and into the Caribbean. Canoes like the one found on Egmont Key were the sea-going part of a much broader network that tied indigenous America together in communication, trade, politics, and sometimes war.

The marine network came to an end not long after the arrival of colonizing powers in the Caribbean. Conquistadores who conquered one community could then learn of others it traded with, giving the invaders new targets. When Spain conquered Cuba, Taíno refugees fled to the Calusa and Tocobaga towns in canoes much like this. It would be the last sea voyage for most of them, as the Spanish Caribbean became too dangerous to travel.

The Egmont Canoe is a legacy of the Ancestors of the Seminole people, an example of the societies and people who called Florida and the waters around it home.

TO LEARN MORE

About the Egmont Canoe: seminoletribune.org/hugely-significant-canoe-found-at-egmont-key/
About the history of Egmont Key: stofthpo.com/egmont-key/

Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at stofthpo.com or use the QR code
For more Seminole history resources

