

1,100-Year-Old Prehistoric Canoe Found in Pinellas County, Florida



Archaeologists and volunteers work to reveal the prehistoric dugout canoe.

Buried in the sand along the shoreline, a prehistoric pine canoe was found on Weedon Island Preserve, located on the southeast region of the peninsula that is Pinellas County on Tampa Bay.

An early mode of transportation, the canoe is attributed to the late Weedon Island Culture (alternative spelling) of Florida Gulf Coast dwellers. Measuring 39-feet, 11-inches in length, but believed to have been upwards of 45 feet in total, the pine canoe holds the distinction of the longest prehistoric canoe ever found in Florida. The canoe features a raised bow that indicates the canoe was used on open water. Under the canoe, a pine pole, used perhaps for paddling, poling, and/or docking the canoe, was also unearthed and dated to the same prehistoric period, approximately 1,100 years ago.

The principal archaeological investigator is Phyllis E. Kolianos, M.A., R.P.A, manager for the Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center. She worked with local Pinellas County resident, Harold Koran, the first to discover the canoe while fishing among the Weedon Island Preserve's mangroves. Other investigators included professional archaeologists across the State of Florida and numerous volunteers. Since the discovery, Pinellas County has arduously taken every step to document, conserve, and protect

the canoe and pole as well as the non-peat environment that is the archeological site. Only a pre-excavation dig was performed, along with thorough radiocarbon dating and wood sampling, which confirmed the wood as pine, a prevalent local timber after which the county of Pinellas is named.

A comprehensive excavation and museum preservation of the canoe have not yet been determined as numerous resources, both financial and equipment, are needed. The canoe is on State-of-Florida land protected from vandalism and governed by provisions of Chapter 267.13, F.S. This project was conducted under the terms of an archaeological research permit issued by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Archaeological Research.

“This discovery expands our understanding and the significance of the not-well-known people of the Weedon Island Culture,” said Dr. Bruce Rinker, Environmental Lands director for Pinellas County. “A tremendous thank-you is owed to the team involved with the research and documentation of this discovery, including Dr. Robert Austin, Dr. Donna Ruhl, and the Friends of Weedon Island, who helped provide supplies and radiocarbon dating.”

History

Lasting some 800 years, the Weedon Island Culture evolved out of a segment of the Manasota Culture, an ancient population that settled along Florida's rich estuaries and central Gulf Coast 2,500 years ago. The society increased in population and eventually changed in social structure to become the Safety Harbor Culture that met the first Europeans to the area. By the mid-1700s, the Creek Indians entered Florida from Alabama and Georgia and became known as the Seminoles. After the Civil War, Weedon Island became the homestead of early settlers and entered a colorful modern history until recognized and established as an important ecological and historical Pinellas preserve for Pinellas County.

About Weedon Island Preserve and the Cultural and Natural History Center

Today, Weedon Island Preserve is an expansive 3,700 acres, comprised of marine habitats with some uplands—a site rich in Native American history. Managed by the County's Environmental Lands Division (in the Department of Environmental Management), the preserve is open to the public from 7:00 am to sunset seven days a week and offers many outdoor activities. The 17,000-square-foot Cultural and Natural History Center is open Wednesdays to Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., but closed on Mondays, Tuesdays, and holidays. Admission is free. The preserve is located at 1800 Weedon Drive N.E. in St. Petersburg. For more information on the Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center and the Environmental Lands Division, call (727) 453-6500 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/environment. For further information regarding Pinellas County, visit www.pinellascounty.org.



The canoe is carefully measured and documented.