Thanks to the generosity of the Jane C. Waldbaum foundation, I was able to attend field school at the Mound Key site in Florida. While I was researching field schools, I was constantly being told that Mound Key was an amazing site. In fact, my professor, Dr. Thompson, even boasted that it was one of the most incredible sites he had ever worked on. Despite the enticing idea of going to field school abroad, I understood that this would be an opportunity I would not want to miss out on.

Our project at Mound Key was an interdisciplinary effort designed to look at the multifaceted life of the Calusa and to understand this complex hunter-gatherer chiefdom. While our field school focused mainly on archaeological side of the puzzle, we were able to meet and learn from a multitude of different people in disciplines such as environmental science and marine biology to create an in-depth understanding of the Calusa's past. These 2017 excavations looked to shed light on the contact between the Spanish and the Calusa.

As for my personal experience, field school began with a day of Tetris. Our first day mainly consisted of figuring out ways in which we could fit our large bounty of field equipment into our vehicles. The acquisition of this skill proved to be valuable throughout our experience on the island, especially when transporting our supplies to and from the site by boat.

Stepping onto the site, it was difficult to process the idea that every inch of the island could be considered an artifact. There were shell tools, bones, pottery, and even a large lithic simply sitting on the surface for as far as the eye could see. Yet our goal was not to go around surface collecting, but instead to do excavations on Mound 2. For this task, we first had to clear the area and create a path to our units with the assistance of some machetes and root clippers. While some of our work ended up being for naught, as we cleared slightly more than necessary, it seems the goats at least appreciated the effort.

Once completed, we were able to bring out the GPR and determine the best location for our excavation units. Based on the GPR results, it was decided that there would be two major excavations units, a 3x3 on the flatted top of the mound and a 2x2 on the downward slope. In addition to these major excavation units, we also excavated a series of test units beyond Mound 2.

We first chose to focus on the large 3x3 unit. Our plan was to dig several 10 cm levels down, but the reality of the excavation made this difficult. As we broke first ground, the earth below was noticeably abundant in two things: artifacts and roots. The amount of roots below slowed down the

excavations, challenged our ability to create clean walls, and forced us to build some muscle in our hands. Yet despite these obstacles, the fascinating milieu of artifacts below made each unbearable root and each plunge of our troughs worth it. We were able to find prehistoric and historic pottery, an owl effigy, a multitude of bones, nails, beads, and numerous other artifacts that made excavating and sifting seem like an exciting treasure hunt. We were all aware of that there was an abundance of history beneath our feet but none of us were prepared for just how amazing it would be to see. Of course, this quickly turned into a competition to find the most dazzling artifact among our peers, but it made each day seem like a new adventure.

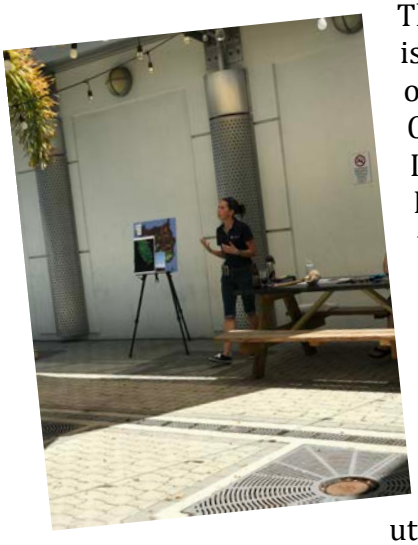
While the artifacts that we pulled out of our units were impressive, it was the find that we could not remove that was the most spectacular. While excavating, I noticed a change in the soil. Being an overly nervous novice archaeologist, I immediately called over to my instructor. At first, it seemed similar to shell midden, a common occurrence on an entirely man-made shell island, yet the mix of crushed bone seemed to be odd. After further investigation, Dr. Thompson informed us that it was actually a crude tabby used by the Spanish in the early 1500's. Additionally, there were other areas of this tabby on the site that were actually viewable on the surface and lead to the creation of the field school. Since the tabby was found within the first level of excavations, it compromised our original excavations plans. We were, therefore, only able to go down three levels at most, teaching us how flexible and adaptable one must be in fieldwork.

The excavation of the tabby structure was something out of a movie, allowing the stereotypical image of an archaeologist, brush and all, to prevail. Knowing that this was a rare occurrence in most digs made it all the more exciting. The structure extended down to the 2x2 unit on the hill as well, so we were able to gain a decent amount of exposure to the excavation of delicate architecture in different contexts.

In addition to the discovery of the tabby, we found it had a clear series of post holes. This allowed us to learn more about distinguishing features as well as plotting and excavating them. Through the combination of GPR and photogrammetry, we believe the tabby structure to be the remains of a fort describe in some Spanish accounts.

Upon satisfactory completion of our excavation units, we switched our focus to shovel tests. Since many of the test units were away from the structure and the mound, they were more consistent with the usual findings of dense shell midden. After learning to dig through such conditions, I feel I am prepared to excavate just about any site.

While the technical skills I learned through field school will be extremely valuable in my career as an archaeologist, I feel that Mound Key was especially important in shaping my understanding of archaeology on more of a grand scale. Through this field school, we were able to visit sites outside of simply Mound Key.



The major site we focused on was Pineland, another Calusa site that is vastly different from Mound Key. The use of comparison sites has opened me up to a completely new understanding of how the Calusa interacted with each other and with the world around them. In addition, we had the pleasure of interacting with the Florida Public Archaeological Network (FPAN). FPAN is dedicated to teaching the public the importance of archaeology and how they can be more involved. FPAN constantly fights the stigma surrounding archaeology in the United States and help to ensure its continuation in our future.

My summer at field school has helped me to develop an even deeper passion for archaeology. The lessons I learned from Mound Key have been an invaluable resource that I plan to utilize in my future as an archaeologist. I am also pleased to say that my journey with Mound Key will continue as I intern with Dr. Thompson to help analyze and curate the artifacts we have retrieve this summer. I sincerely appreciate the support of the Archaeological Institute of America's Waldbaum Scholarship in helping me build my future in archaeological sciences and I look forward to the years to come.