



Bayou Park Archaeological Site: Unearthing Florida's Past at Eglin Air Force Base

The Bayou Park Archaeological Site (80K898)

The Bayou Park archaeological site (80K898) is a prehistoric village that was home to some of Florida's earliest inhabitants. The site's main occupation was about 4000 years ago during the Elliott's Point phase of the Late Archaic Period. Based on radiocarbon dates from across the site, Bayou Park was widely used between 2528-1985 BC.

Analysis of artifacts, faunal remains, and site features (post molds from structures, hearths, a large earth oven, numerous refuse pits) revealed evidence that small family groups utilized Bayou Park during the spring, summer and fall months to fish and collect shellfish from Choctawhatchee Bay, Weekly Bayou, and Boggy Bayou. They also hunted game, gathered plants for food and medicinal purposes, and possibly had small gardens. During the late fall and winter, they traveled north into the interior to hunt and collect stone for making tools before moving back to the coast again during the late spring.

Life at Bayou Park was concentrated on a small ridge where most residences were situated in a semi-circle around an open plaza or common area. The structures were small and not very substantial in terms of construction. One small closed structure may have been used during the cooler fall months, while a second larger and more open structure would have been suitable for warm weather living. Cooking was mostly performed over open fires in shallow pits. A large earth oven, some possible storage pits, and several large refuse pits were located in and around the plaza.

It is noteworthy that no burials have been encountered at Bayou Park. This suggests that the deceased were interred elsewhere, possibly in a communal cemetery or burial mound, or possibly cremated.

Right: Excavating a clay lined hearth at Bayou Park.



Below: A hydraulic excavator was used to remove disturbed soils and expose living areas and features.



Archaeology at Bayou Park

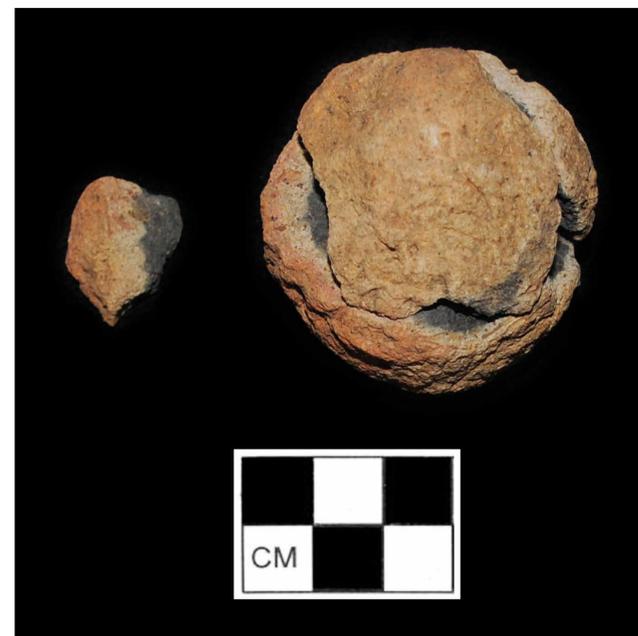
Several archaeological projects have been conducted at the Bayou Park site since it was first identified in 1993. In 2011 and 2012, a large-scale excavation was conducted by SEARCH for the USAF. The investigations included a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey, mechanical stripping of the upper, previously disturbed soils, and traditional excavation using shovels, trowels, and screens. About 4,670 cubic meters of earth was excavated by mechanical stripping, nearly 75 cubic meters excavated by hand, 131 features were identified and recorded, and more than 513,000 artifacts, ecofacts, and faunal material was recovered. Specialized studies such as C-14 and AMS dating, X-ray fluorescence spectrometry, lipid analysis, and phytolith and starch grain analysis (microscopic plants) were conducted. This investigation is the largest and most complex yet undertaken on an Elliott's Point site, and the information collected here will help researchers better understand Florida's past.

Animals and Plants

Animal remains such as deer, rabbit, squirrel, raccoon, turkey, crow, ducks, alligator, turtles, gopher tortoise, salamander, and lizards indicate these were harvested from the nearby forest. Plant remains include the burned shells of hickory nuts and acorns, and microscopic evidence of bottle gourd, hackberry, coontie, and wild grasses. Because bottle gourd is not native to the New World, it must be cultivated to grow, which suggests the Elliott's Point people possibly had small gardens at Bayou Park.

Elliott's Point Artifacts

Elliott's Point sites are characterized baked-clay objects, sometimes called Elliott's Point Objects. These fist-sized pieces of clay that molded into a variety of shapes and used in dry-heat cooking. More than 11,000 of these, mostly small fragments, were found at the site, and many were found in and around a large clay-lined hearth inside a deep pit that was probably used as an earth oven. These objects may be the earliest manifestation of ceramics in Florida.



Above: Elliott's Point Objects: left, EPO fragment; right, fired clay ball.

Below: Water screening with fine mesh screen to find small bone and shell fragments.



Coastal People

This site's inhabitants relied heavily on local marine resources such as oysters, scallops, quahog clams, and a variety of fish species, particularly jacks.

Above: Shell deposits, and a large refuse pit.

About 289,000 animal bones and marine shells were analyzed, and an additional 500,000 bone and shell fragments were saved for future research.



Stone tools were made from Tallahatta Quartzite from southern Alabama and include bifaces (spearpoints, knives), unifaces (scraping tools), microliths (small retouched flakes), and utilized flakes (waste flakes used for cutting or scraping). Many tools were heavily used and their edges had been resharpened. Broken tools were often salvaged and recycled in an attempt to conserve raw material since no useable stone outcrops are located within 100 km of the site.

