

An Archeological Study of Pre-Columbian Lucayan Inhabitation Near an Eleutheran Blue Hole

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(figure 1) Photo of a Blue Hole By Wes C. Skiles. Shown here is a blue hole, which is a cave that had been submerged in water after the last ice age around 6000 years ago.

Hypothesis
Lucayans formed large permanent settlements in close proximity to blue holes.



(figure 2) Hole Punch Conch: Conch shells that have a small distinct hole near the spire. They are commonly found in Lucayan sites. This particular artifact was also used as a hammer due to use wear on the spire of the conch.



(figure 3) Palmetto ware: A distinctly Lucayan pottery that has not been able to be replicated to this day. It is made of mud, clay, and is tempered with shell fragments.



(figure 4) Shaft Abrader: A tool that was used to scrape the bark off of trees.

Introduction

In October 1492, Columbus made landfall on North America. Historians are not able to conclude the exact area as there is no clearly reliable written record of the time. What historians do know is that the islands which he came across were home to an unbelievable culture: the Lucayan Indians. The roots of this culture have been traced back to the banks of the Orinoco River in Venezuela. Archaeologists have been able to trace Lucayan migration from their point of origin all the way to the Islands of the Bahamas. The Lucayans are now known as having been an advanced civilization for their time. Eventually, with the arrival of the Spaniards, the entirety of the Lucayan population had been enslaved or died off. The remains of the Lucayan people were swept away by storms and the tides, covered over by windblown sand, and buried under plantations and dune ridges. It was not until the past forty years that archaeologists started to uncover this forgotten culture.

Rationale

Blue holes (see figure 1) are known to have served spiritual importance to the Lucayan community as an entrance to the "otherworld". The focus of the research was to establish a greater understanding as to whether Lucayans valued blue holes when creating settlements.



(figure 5) Digging Implement: A tool used to garden and dig. It was made from the underside of a conch shell.

(figure 10) 50m

Methods I

The meandering transect is a method of surface survey in which researchers are placed five meters apart and meander in a corridor parallel to shore. The point is to see all of the ground surface in the area of the transect.



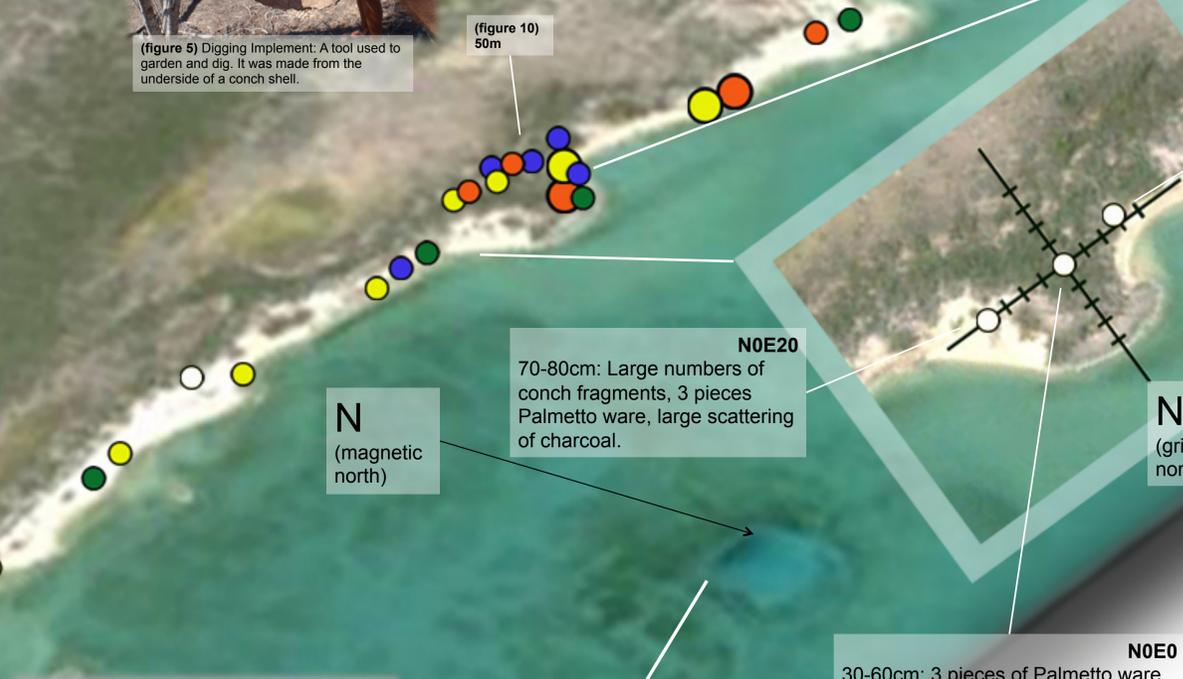
(figure 7)



(figure 8)

Methods II

A gridline was established in the heart of the site with datum points in intervals of 5 meters. Test pits of 50cm diameters were dug (see figure 8) at three of the datum points. Findings were then sifted through a quarter inch screen (see figure 7) and recorded.



N (magnetic north)

N (grid north)

N0E20
70-80cm: Large numbers of conch fragments, 3 pieces Palmetto ware, large scattering of charcoal.

N0E15
10-60cm: Conch and other shell fragments, few charcoal fragments, slight discoloration of soil.

N0E0
30-60cm: 3 pieces of Palmetto ware, large scattering of charcoal and shell material.

Blue Hole

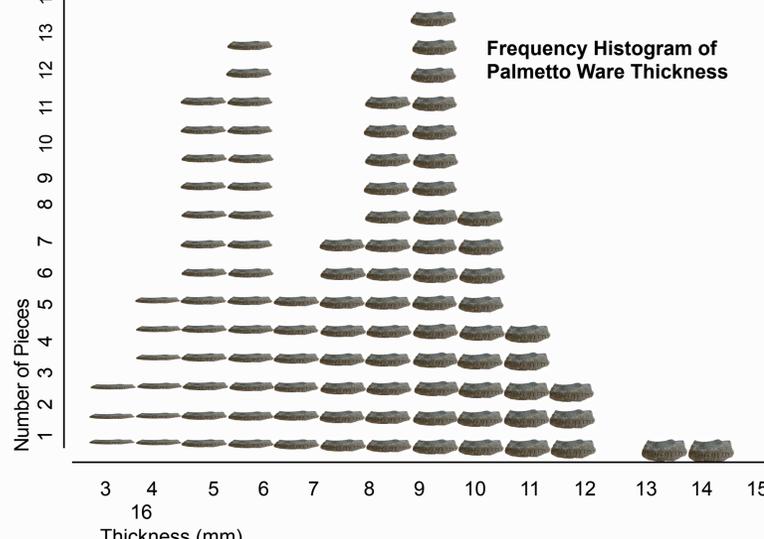
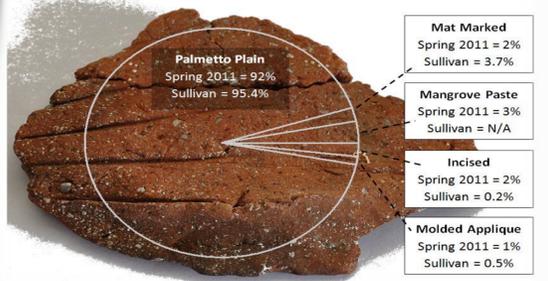
LEGEND	QUEEN CONCH	TOOL
	● >25	● HEARTH
	● <25	● TEST PIT
	P. WARE	● OTHER
	● >25	
	● <25	

(figure 6) The Lucayan Bead: A diligently made artifact which is created by breaking away at a piece of conch until the ideal shape is formed. Thought to prominently have been made for trade purposes as well as jewelry.

Discussion

Based upon the findings it can be concluded that a site was indeed discovered that was used by the Lucayans as a living area. The results show two significant areas of interest. The first is towards the beginning of the project area (see figure 9) laden with hole punched conch as well as two conch hammers. It has been concluded to be a resource procurement area. The second is almost directly adjacent to the blue hole on a point (see figure 10) where the large majority of the Palmetto ware was found along with a midden. These results are supportive of a living area. The conch bead as well as foreign rocks that were found at the project area are suggestive of trade with other groups of people. It is suggested that future Archaeological research be conducted with further excavations along the established grid line. An investigation of the blue hole for signs of Lucayan interaction is also an interesting possibility that should be explored.

Palmetto Ware by Type



Results

The majority of results found at the Broad Creek Blue Hole site included large quantities of hole-punched Queen conch (see figure 2), Palmetto ware (see figure 3), a scattering of shell material, a variety of tools (see figures 4 & 5), and other ecofacts and artifacts. Possibly the most exciting discovery was that of a Lucayan bead (see figure 6) made of conch found in a test pit, which is significant of a living area.

Literature Cited
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Sullivan, Shaun D. 1974. Archaeological Renaissance of Bahamas, Eleuthera. Master's Thesis, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL.