

Local Archaeology

Grade:	4
Locale:	Ruskin
When:	Prehistoric times – Present Day
Spark of Interest:	Local Archaeology
Timeframe:	Two 45 minute sessions
Content Areas:	History/Science
Sunshine State Standards:	SS.A.1.2 SC.H.3.2

Abstract:

Students will learn about the Thomas Mound, a significant archaeological excavation site located along the north shore of the Little Manatee River in Ruskin. Development has overtaken the original site but students will take part in some of the very same techniques and methods used by archaeologists and paleontologists in their search for information about the past. In this activity students will conduct a surface survey, which is used to gauge any visible clues to the past lying on the surface of the ground.

Materials:

- Spool of twine (At least 350 ft.)
- 1 Clipboard per pair of students
- 40 12'-18' stakes
- Tape measure
- Hammer or mallet
- Scissors
- Graph paper
- Toothpicks
- Odds & ends such as paper clips, pencils, etc.

Vocabulary:

- Archaeologist
- Survey
- Excavation
- Vertical axis
- Horizontal axis

Lesson Outline:

*This activity is an excellent pre-cursor to the activity [Archaeologists in Action!](#)

1. Before the lesson set up the stakes to establish grid squares 1ft. x 1 ft. for a small area or 1 yd. x 1 yd. for a larger area.

2. If you are sure that there are items that students will see that are examples of human existence in the grid such as pencils, paperclips, coins, lunchroom leftovers, etc. then you are ok. If not, then you may want to “plant” some of these items in what will become the grid before beginning the lesson.
3. Set the stage by reading the information on the Arial View of the Thomas Mound sheet.
4. Inform the students that they will be archaeologists conducting a surface survey. A surface survey is used to determine if there are any archaeological remains above ground that will give clues about the past. It could also determine whether they decide to conduct an excavation.
5. Tie the twine to a corner stake. Create the perimeter outline of the grid. At each corner stake loop the twine around it. When you return to the original corner stake cut the twine and tie it to the last stake.
6. Use the twine to create each horizontal and vertical line. Tie the twine to the outside stakes, loop it around the inside stakes.
7. Students should have a 10 x 10 grid.
8. Distribute clipboards and graph paper.
9. Determine which will be the vertical and horizontal axis.
10. Assign student pairs to a square.
11. Direct them to place tooth picks next to items that display human existence.
12. Draw an outline for the entire 10 x 10 grid on graph paper.
13. Student pairs should outline their assigned grid.
14. Create a key for each item found.
15. Draw a symbol for each item found in the appropriate grid.
16. Discuss what students found and what information it could tell an archaeologist. If plastic trays, wrappers, and sporks were found that area was most likely a cafeteria. Discuss how items can give clues to the time, were sporks used 100 years ago?
17. Discuss if this might be a worthwhile place for an archaeological excavation.

Arial View of the Thomas Mound

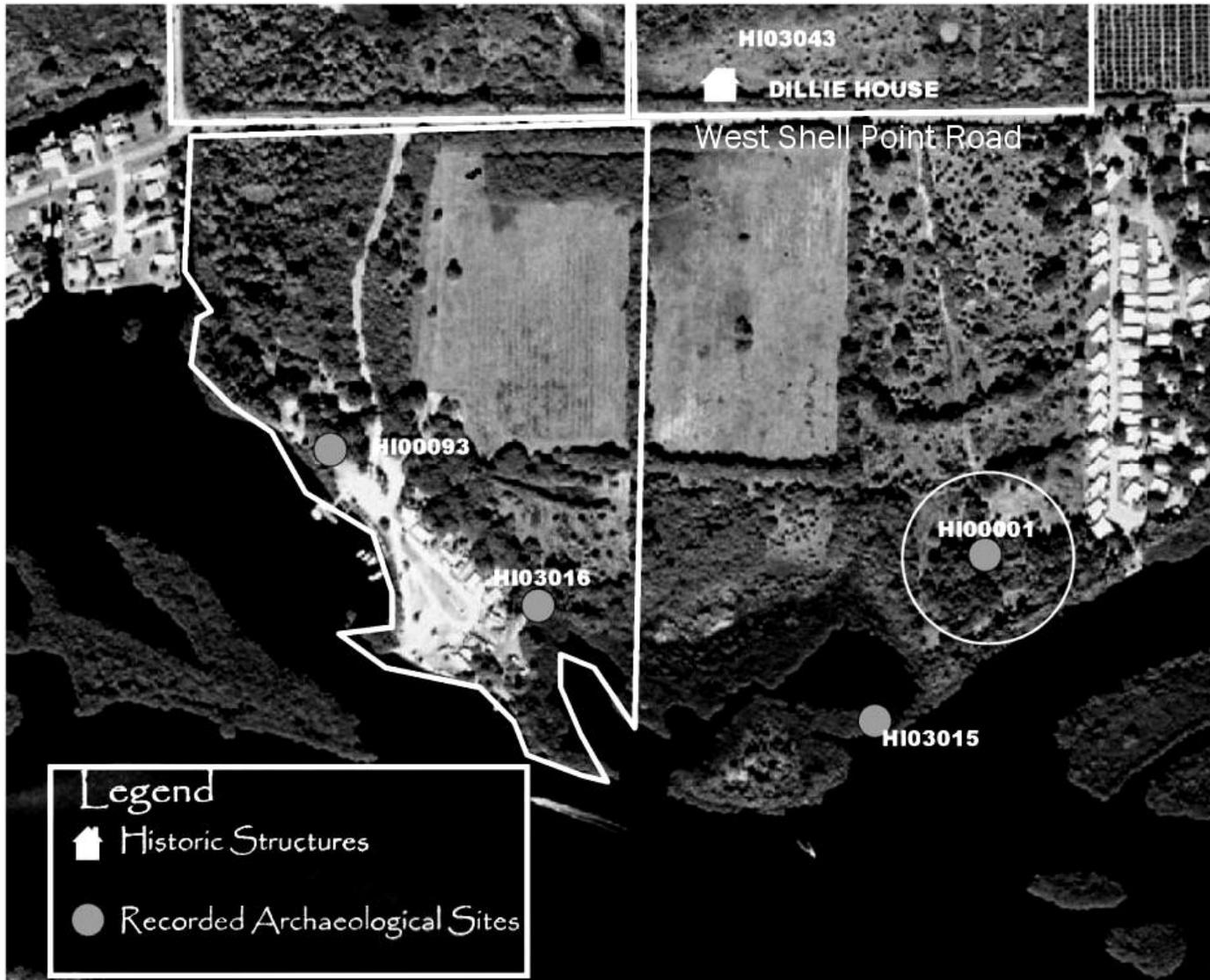


Photo Source: WWW.RuskinHistory.org

Above is an aerial view of the Thomas Burial Mound site. It is located on West Shellpoint Road in Ruskin. It is one of the earliest sites of human habitation in the area and the first documented archaeological resource located in Hillsborough county. The

site consists of several shell middens, sand middens and burial mounds. It was first tested by Thomas Moore in 1900. A WPA project excavated part of the mound in December 1935 and January of 1936. Another WPA excavation took place in 1937. The aerial photo above indicates four documented archaeological sites. The site also included two canals, one of which was probably dug by hand to for sand and soil to build up the mounds and was 64 feet wide at its greatest width. The actual burial mound itself measured 60 feet in diameter and 6 feet high.

Many artifacts were discovered in the three excavations, among them were more than 400 burials, numerous pottery sherds, glass beads, pieces of looking glasses, spear or knife points, stone tools, pieces of shell tools, and fossils worked into tools, and more.

Based on artifacts discovered at the site it is believed that people inhabited this site for 900 years, from about 700AD to 1600 AD. The time when people first lived at this location was 800 years before Columbus arrived at North America to about 100 years afterwards. Farmers in the mid to late 1900s used this land for growing crops and raising livestock. New homes are planned for this very spot.

Interestingly enough this is the possible site where a ships captain was about to be killed by the ruling chief of the village. Just as the chief was about to put him to death his young daughter came to the captain's rescue. The girl pleaded her father to spare the captain's life...And he did!

Does this story sound like Pocahontas? This happened many, many years before John Smith's episode took place. Perhaps you will learn about the actual events in another history lesson!