

THE AIS TRAIL

Welcome to Spruce Bluff!



This trail will lead you to evidence of a past civilization, and the earliest documentation of human habitation in and around Port St. Lucie. While on the trail you will discover the life of the AIS (pronounced: Eye ees) people.

1) While there were many indigenous cultures in the area prior to European colonization, the earliest known people to inhabit Florida were the Paleo Indians. Present from 10,000 - 6,500 BC, the Paleo Indians were nomadic, traveling intermittently between water sources and hunting areas. During the Malabar period (750 BC to 1750 AD), the indigenous peoples became less transient. Many of these peoples inhabited the coastal areas of Florida. The relatively abundant resources of the area as well as plentiful freshwater supplies made the area ideal.

2) Most information about the indigenous people that lived in this area prior to the Seminoles, is *“Johnathan Dickinson’s Journal or GOD’S PROTECTING PROVIDENCE; Being the narrative of a Journey from PORT ROYAL in JAMAICA to PHILADELPHIA August 23, 1696 to April 1, 1697”*. He was one of twenty-five crew & passengers aboard the ship, Barkentine, and was shipwrecked by a hurricane in September of 1696 in what is now the Hobe Sound area.

Dickinson writes, in “vivid detail” what these Indians looked like as well as how they lived. He was the first to describe these people. The main town of the AIS, Dickinson refers to as “Jece” and also Santa Lucia, was located on the barrier island a little to the north of the Fort Pierce Inlet. Their territory ranged from Jece northward to just west of Cocoa. The Jeagas lived from St. Lucia (Stuart inlet) south to the Hobe Sound. The main village was located on the north end of Jupiter Island. The Jeagas turned Dickinson and his group over to the “Casseekey”, or local chief of the AIS, October 1, 1696. They were described as a primitive group that did not plant crops but survived on collection of plants, animal and marine life.

3) Willow - It is believed that several native peoples including the AIS used the inner bark to reduce pain and fever. The bark is easily stripped to make baskets and would have been a pliable material to use as

the framework for smaller structures that were called “caciques” which would be no more than small poles stuck in the ground, bent one to another, making an arch, and covered with small palmetto leaves.

4) Wax myrtle - Wax myrtle & mangrove leaves were used in and around the camp to produce a thick smoke to help control the mosquitoes.

5) Saw palmetto - Palmetto berries were eaten by the Indians and described by Dickinson as tasting of “rotten cheese steeped in tobacco”. Their fan branches were also used as food paddles to prepare and serve food. Baskets were made from the fronds for carrying, storing and gathering purposes in addition to drying racks and thatching for buildings. In addition to the practical items the plant was also used for ceremonial purposes for dance fans and rattles.

6) Oak - Different parts of the oak was used not only for utilitarian purposes, but for “analgesics”, “dermatological” conditions, “love” medicines, in addition to being a food source.

7) Slash pine and all manner of pine and oak were used for bows and arrows, basketry, caciques structures, and logs for larger buildings. Pine sap is suspected to be used for its adhesive properties and waterproofing for basketry and structures.

8) Silk grass - Their hair was “tied in a roll behind in which stuck two bones shaped one like a broad arrow, the other a spearhead.” The men were described as “being naked except a small piece of platted work of straws wrought of diverse colors and of a triangular nature, with a belt of four fingers broad of the same wrought together, which goeth about the waist and the angle of the other having a thing to it, coming between the legs, and strings to the end of the belt; all three meeting together are fastened behind with a horsetail, or a bunch of silkgrass”.

9) Airplant - Airplants were used during dry times as a water supply for cooking.

10) Wiregrass - Men entwined their hair with grass or moss. Many grasses such as these were used to weave baskets.

11) Grape Vine - The berry was used for food, while the vines were used to fasten timbers together for their living structures, woven baskets and for bow strings.

12) Loblolly bay - Bows and arrows may have been used from this tree in which to hunt for fish, bear, deer, birds, turtles, shellfish and manatees as an addition to the gathered plants and herbs. The tannic extracts from its bark were used for tanning hides.

13) Wetlands - Wetlands were very important to early inhabitants as a source for food, The AIS were collectors and harvested snails, turtles, frogs, alligators and freshwater clams from the water. They fished with a “staff” and “got as many fish as would serve twenty men” in 2 hours which indicates how plentiful resources

14) Red Bay - Leaves were used in funeral rites, “burned to keep the soul of the recently deceased from returning home”, to make spoons, also as a drug for “sun sickness, eye disease, headaches, body aches, fever and many other things.

15) Dahoon Holly - (*Ilex cassine*) Dickinson’s describes what appears to be ceremonial “black” drink of the AIS as “cassena”. Research has revealed Dahoon Holly (*Ilex Cassine*) was used for soap making by later Indians or Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*). Further study finds “cassena” being used among the Alabama, Cherokee, Creek and Natchez Indian populations as a curative, but no references were located further south. Do we believe the Dahoon or Yaupon Holly is the plant in question? This is a guess at best! This is what he writes : ““Cassena” leaves from a *shrub are parched in a pot, boiled; then with a gourd having a long neck at the top, a small hole which the tip of one’s finger could cover, and at the side a round hole of two inches diameter, they take the liquor out of the pot and put it into a deep round bowl, which being almost filled containeth nigh three gallons. With this gourd they brew the liquor and make it froth very much. It looketh of a deep brown color. In brewing of this liquor was this noise; for the pressing of this gourd gently down into the liquor, and the air which it contained being forced out of the little hole at top occasioned a sound and according to the time and motion given would be various. This drink was cooled, put in a conch shell and given to the Casseekey, who threw part of it on the ground, and the rest he drank, then would make a loud “He-m”; afterwards passing to the rest of the Casseekey’s associates. No other man, woman nor child must touch or taste of this sort of drink. It was made into a “black” ceremonial drink as well as smoked.”

**The Seminoles reference the same mixture which they call “Asi-Yaholo”, that means “black drink singer”, referring to the serving attendant who sang during the purifying ritual of the Black Drink)*

16) Spanish moss - Spanish Moss was used for a variety of things from being plaited for clothing coverings to stuffing for platted balls used as pillows. It was smoked to rid it of bugs prior to working. It was also a tanning agent for animal skins.

17) Wetlands - Most mounds and villages were located near wetlands. In addition to utilizing the wetlands as a food source, water was important for drinking, cooking and cleaning.

18) Blueberry - This edible berry was also used as a dye in clothing.

19) The mound (8SL10) is approximately 180 feet in diameter and 20 feet high. It took great effort to construct it considering they had none of our modern day “earth moving equipment”, this had to be a very difficult and time consuming process considering all they had were fiber baskets in which to hand carry all the fill! How much fill do you think that is? 20,000 gallons?

20) The mound, as well as others of the area, most likely belonged to either the AIS or Jaegas people. It is believed that mounds on this coast were used for burial purposes. Early excavations indicate that the Indians “would bury their people in a sitting position alongside, and on top of one another, then would pile baskets of sand on them.” A man’s possessions would be smashed and placed in the mound with him so “the spirits of his tools could join his spirit” in the afterlife. The descendants of these people believe that anyone that walks on these mounds will desecrate their ancestors. *To observe their wishes and prevent erosion. Please stay off the mound.*

21) Looting - This area has had signs of destruction where people have dug into the mound to find artifacts. Several “authorized” digs were performed on the mound, yielding a few small bone fragments. *To preserve archaeological and cultural features of the Preserve, no digging is allowed.*

22) The mound was first “discovered” in 1853 by Mr. M.A. Williams, a surveyor that was surveying for settlers who would be homesteading the area because of the free land available under the “Armed Occupation Act” of 1842.

23) The AIS population in the area suffered a sharp decline in the decades following Dickinson’s contact with them. One main reason for this is undoubtedly diseases introduced by Europeans.

Another significant factor is related to the destruction of the Spanish mission system in northern Florida. Removal of the Spanish allowed Creeks, Yamasee and other English-armed Indians (aligned with the English) to extend their domain to South Florida. The “English-Indians” made frequent raids of the AIS, killing many and carrying even more to Charleston, South Carolina where they were sold as slaves to the English.

By 1715 most of the AIS were gone so that when the British took possession of Florida in 1763, the AIS were nearly extinct. After their disappearance, the Seminoles (a mix of Micossukee, Creek and Choctaw) occupied Florida.

24) Dickinson continues to write that “these people have no compassion on their own aged declining people when they were past their labor, nor on others of their own which lay under any declining condition; for the younger is served before the elder, and the elder people both men and women are slaves to the younger”. This may have also led to their decline. Mmmmmmm...Don’t think I would want to be one, aging or declining!

This trail has only covered just a small portion of items the natives used that are actually at this site. The AIS had to be extremely resourceful and creative to survive the hardships of outdoor living. Other materials used for cooking, hunting and fishing tools, arrows, bows, musical instruments, ceremonial items, clothing, medicines and drugs include Pond Apple, Marberry, Giant Cane, Hickory, Sugarberry, Cocoplum, Sawgrass, White Stopper, Strangler Fig, Florida Privet, Yaupon Holly, Cedar, Bottle Gourd, Stagger Bush, Red Mulberry, Simpson Eugenia, Red Maple, and the list is just endless!

So next time you go hiking or traveling in and around Florida take a few minutes to reflect our humble beginnings!

A FEW THINGS FOR YOU TO REMEMBER:

While hiking the trail you may encounter animals indigenous to this area. Please observe from a safe distance and remember- you are in their habitat.

For your own safety:

Please remain on the trails

Carry an adequate amount of drinking water. There is no potable water on site.

In case of lightning, seek a low area away from trees, fence lines and tall objects.

Visitors use this site at your own risk.

In case of emergency, call 911.

The site is located on Lookout Blvd., Port St. Lucie

Site purchased with funds from the South Florida Water Management District’s Save Our Rivers (SOR) Program and St. Lucie County’s Environmentally Significant Lands (ESL) Program

Sources include:

Johnathan Dickinson’s Journal or GOD’S PROTECTING PROVIDENCE; Being the narrative of a Journey from PORT ROYAL in JAMAICA to PHILADELPHIA August 23, 1696 to April 1, 1697

www.umd.umich.edu/cgi-bin/herb or Sturtevant, William 1954, *The Mikasuki Seminole: Medical Beliefs and Practices*. Yale University, PhD Thesis



AIS TRAIL



Spruce Bluff contains 100 acres of relatively undisturbed natural communities including scrub, scrubby flatwoods, mesic flatwoods, bay gall and depression marsh in addition to an early Pioneer settlement and an Indian mound.

Two trails cover the site and are accessed individually from the parking lot.

Be sure to pick up the appropriate brochure for the trail you’re planning to visit and enjoy your stay!

**St. Lucie County
Environmental
Resources Department**

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