

SCIENTISTS UNRAVEL MYSTERIES OF ANCIENT INDIAN CANAL IN NAPLES, FLORIDA

A team of archaeologists followed a backhoe as it dug trenches for a new water line in downtown Naples. They hoped to catch a view of an ancient canal buried under roads and fill for over half a century. The canal extended 4150 feet from east to west crossing old Naples and once provided canoe access from the Gulf of Mexico to Naples Bay.

The man-made canal has been known to scholars since the nineteenth century when it was first documented by a survey in 1874. In 1883 Archaeologist Andrew Douglass described the canal as a work of great antiquity. Most scholars found it difficult to believe that such an engineering marvel could have been dug by Native Americans, believing it to have been dug by Europeans.

After months of digging the backhoe uncovered the canal at the intersection of 10th Avenue and Gulfshore Boulevard South on November 10, 2011. With less than a 20 minute window before the hole was refilled, archaeological technician Scott Faulkner scurried into the eight foot deep hole and secured a soil and wood sample that would allow archaeologists a means to obtain a radiocarbon date. Ironically, it was Scott's grandfather, Naples pioneer James Ernest Carroll Sr., who was paid to infill the canal in the 1920s.

The width of the canal base at the discovery site is about 12 feet. Early investigators reported that the top of the canal was as wide as 40 feet.

The sample's oldest organic fraction had an intercept of AD 1670, with newer intercepts up to modern times. Because the sample was recovered from about 1.5 feet above the canal bottom it is estimated the canal itself may have been dug around circa AD 1200-1400, when the area was likely under the dominion of the Calusa. A similar canal bisecting Pine Island in Lee County was constructed by the Calusa.

Archaeologists hope to be able to conduct an archaeological dig on a portion of the canal on city-owned property, first using ground-penetrating radar to precisely locate it, followed by a controlled dig that will allow more documentation on the exact age of the canal and its importance. We will also request that historic markers be placed along the canal marking its path.

Locating the canal was aided with maps from Todd Turrell's book *Naples Waterfront History – Changes in Time*. Funding for radiocarbon dating was provided by Mr. Turrell and by Mrs. Lavern Norris Gaynor and her Naples Backyard History Old Naples Museum.

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