

A major event: Naples Backyard History sponsoring archeological research of the Ancient Indian Canal

- ◆ November 2011 - City of Naples storm sewer construction, 1st samples obtained
- ◆ September 9, 2013 - Naples Daily News guest article, *Rediscovering Naples' Ancient Indian Canal* by Judy Bishop
Funding obtained from the Schaub charitable fund
- ◆ January 10, 2014 - Ground Penetrating Radar analysis, 9th Ave. South at the Gulf and along Gulfshore Blvd.
- ◆ February 13, 2014 - Archeological excavation leading to radiocarbon dating, Gulfshore Blvd. at 10th Ave. South
- ◆ March 7, 2014 - News conference followed by standing-room-only fundraising cocktail reception, 8-9 pm
- ◆ March 8, 2014 - Naples Daily News, page 2 article, *Archeologist: Indian Canal could be more than 1,000 years old*

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AN ANCIENT SHORTCUT

*Ancient Indian Canal Historical Route courtesy of ocean engineer
Todd Turrell of Turrell, Hall and Associates, Inc*

Shortcuts – we’re always looking for that shortcut to save us some time, especially during our “delightfully” busy season here in Naples. There was one ancient shortcut that wasn’t used just to save some time, it was vitally important to the native Indians that resided on the Old Naples peninsula. Today, a boat can travel from just north of Naples Pier to the City Docks in about 20 minutes. That transit is at a speed of 30 knots or more including slowing to no-wake, idle speed upon entering the Bay through Gordon’s Pass. It’s a distance of about 6 miles. Paddling a canoe, at about 3 miles per hour, will take 3 or more hours.

Hundreds of years ago native Indians created an incredible shortcut. They dug a canal from 9th Avenue South to a point on the bay just south of Naples City Docks. It’s estimated to have been over 1 mile long, slashing their canoe paddling time to about 30 minutes. Another advantage of the shortcut would have been to avoid a tidal inlet (today’s Gordon Pass) which would have been rough and difficult to paddle at times.

Naples Bay provided an abundance of fish, oysters and clams that made up the bulk of the Indian diet. This food source was vital to their survival. Frequently referred to as the Calusa Canal it was constructed by a tribe of Indians dominated by the Calusas. The canal is believed to have been up to 25 feet deep and almost 50 feet wide. Unfortunately, because most of the canal was covered over in the 1920’s, present day Neapolitans do not know much about it.

The actual canal may be hidden from view, but we’re in the

process of getting to the bottom of it – literally. This month Naples Backyard History working with renowned Archaeologist Bob Carr and Marine Engineer Todd Turrell will finally establish the age of the Naples Indian canal. Last month, after ground penetrating radar verified the canal’s location, a site was selected to secure soil for radiocarbon dating. The results of the dig will be announced in March at Naples Backyard History.



*1877 Smithsonian map
of the Indian Canal*

In 2011 a City of Naples project gave Bob Carr and his team their first glimpse of the long buried canal. Taking advantage of excavation for the new storm sewer system along Gulf Shore Blvd., archaeological technician Scott Faulkner had just 20 minutes to scurry down 8 feet to obtain soil and wood samples. Ironically, Faulkner’s grandfather was involved in the work that filled the canal in the 1920s.

The oldest part of the sample dated to A.D. 1670, but because the sample was taken from the top of the canal, experts estimate that the canal could have been dug between A.D. 1200 and 1400. The canal is similar to four others that have been discovered across South Florida, the only place outside of Mexico where such canals have been found.

The man-made canal has been known to scholars since the nineteenth century when it was first documented in an 1874 survey. The Smithsonian Institution’s annual report of 1881 stated, “Those canals were not erected by our indolent Indians, and in my opinion they were made by another race.” In 1883 Archaeologist Andrew Douglass described the canal as a work of great antiquity. Many scholars found it difficult to believe that such an engineering marvel could have been dug by Na-

tive Americans, believing it had been dug by Europeans.

In 1888 the Naples Company promotional brochure stated, “One of the most curious of the (relics) is a canal about one and a half miles long. Extending from the Gulf to the Bay, across the lower end of the town site. It is forty-seven feet wide, twenty-five feet deep, and an excellent piece of engineering work, but who built it, for what purpose, is a matter of conjecture.”

We at Naples Backyard History are proud to be a part of the team that is discovering more details about this unique Naples antiquity. We hope to work with the City of Naples to erect historical markers illustrating not only the route but also updated canal facts.

On March 7, starting at 6 p.m. we will be hosting a cocktail reception at our Old Naples

Museum to announce the results of our February dig. Admission, as a donation to Naples Backyard History, is \$100.00 per guest. Bob Carr and Todd Turrell will be

present to answer questions about the canal. Mr. Carr is currently leading a significant archeological excavation in downtown Miami on a Tequesta Indian village, comprising a whole complex of buildings, dates back to 500-600 B.C. which was occupied until the 1700s.



*Artists renderings of the Ancient Indian Canal by renowned local artist
Paul Arsenault on loan from Todd Turrell*

Contact us at 239-774-2978 if you wish to attend or to contribute to our ongoing efforts to “unearth” the facts about our canal. Naples Backyard History, a 501(c)3 organization, is located in the Plaza at 1170 Third Street South; the entrance is on Broad Avenue South.

The museum is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and select Thursday evenings. Stop by to learn more about Naples’ history and the Indian Canal. Our April 2012 press conference about the canal is available on our website, www.naples-backyardhistory.org.

