

METROPOLITAN DADE COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD

DESIGNATION REPORT - INDIVIDUAL SITE

Site Name Arch Creek Archeological Site
(Da23 and Da1657)

Designation No. _____
Date of Filing 11/7/84
Date of Designation _____

Site Address 1855 N.E. 135 Street and Biscayne Boulevard

Owner and Address Metro-Dade Department of Park and Recreation, 50 S.W. 32nd Road,
Miami, Florida 33129

Site Location - Legal description or district boundaries (see attached map):

Beginning at a point at the SE corner of Arch Creek Park at the intersection of U.S. 1 and NE 135th Street, then 675' westly along the park's southern boundary to the ROW of the Florida East Coast Railroad, then 950' northeasterly along the Florida East Coast Railroad ROW, then 300' southeasterly along the park's northern boundary to the NE corner of the park, then 895' southwesterly to the Point of Beginning.

Dade County Historic Survey Findings:

The survey rated this site's archeological preservation quality as a 3 for the prehistoric midden, and the mill sluice as a 2.

Other Surveys:

Natl. Reg.
Other:

H.A.B.S.

H.A.E.R.

Title Verification (attach copy): Book _____ Page No. _____ Deed Type Warrenty
State of Florida, on lease to Metro-Dade County.

Current Zoning (describe):

Current Use (describe): Public Park

Current Condition (describe): Undeveloped, restored hammock, some subsurface disturbances from previous trailer park.

Special Standards for Certificate of Appropriateness:

Impacts - Impact of the designation on proposed public improvements, renewal projects or private development.

The site will be affected by a number of proposed projects. These projects include the reconstruction of the destroyed natural bridge, the widening of Biscayne Boulevard, and the possible construction of Metro-rail along the FEC railroad right-of-way.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends designation of the Arch Creek Archeological Site as an individual historic site.

Physical Description of Site (attach 1 or 2 photos):

The Arch Creek Archeological Site is located in north Dade County, Florida, within a physiographic region known as the Atlantic Coastal Ridge. The site includes two major components: a prehistoric Indian midden and an historic mill sluice. Both are situated along Arch Creek, which transveres the coastal ridge, and historically drained eastward from the Everglades into Biscayne Bay. The midden is located to the northeast of the creek; the mill sluice is directly opposite on the westerly bank.

No description of either components' original physical appearance would be complete without reference to the natural limestone bridge which spanned the creek. Approximately 40 feet long and 20 feet wide, the bridge was undoubtedly one factor which made the area so attractive to prehistoric Indians and later, to the pioneers of the Arch Creek area in the 1800's. Presumably, the creek's drainage eroded the oolitic limestone in such a way as to have created a natural bridge that joined both banks across the creek. Unfortunately, the bridge mysteriously collapsed into the creek in 1973. The rocky remains of the bridge were subsequently dredged and placed on the east side of the creek. An historical marker, presented by the Historical Association of Southern Florida, is now situated near the site.

According to Carr (1975:6) the black dirt prehistoric midden originally encompassed about five acres, extending 300 meters along the northern bank of Arch Creek and approximately 200 meters inland. It is located within a tropical hardwood hammock, adjacent to the creek, where native Florida plant species may be found including live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), gumbo limbo, (*Bursera simaruba*), pigeon plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*), and strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*). In the past, a slash pine (*Pinus elliotii*) forest grew north of the hammock and a mangrove swamp lined the creek to the south. Arch Creek provided access to the interior Everglades, and Biscayne Bay which is less than half a mile away from the hammock.

The second component of the Arch Creek Archeological Site is the location of an historic coontie mill and water sluice. The roots of the coontie plant (*Zamia integrifolia*) were processed by early Miami pioneers to produce a high quality edible starch. The sluice is located on the westy bank of Arch Creek between the Florida East Coast Railroad and the creek (Figure 1).

The mill sluice was excavated in 1981 by Irving Eyster, under contract with the Metro-Dade Historic Preservation Division. The sluice laid directly beneath the asphalt of the Old Dixie Highway. Presently, the mill sluice stands empty and uncovered, spanning approximately eighty feet by four feet in a semi-circular shape. It has been well preserved due to the large quantity of fill that was deposited within it. The sluice has remained in excellent condition since its excavation, although erosion and weather have caused crumbling in several areas of the walls. The northern end is clearly visible from across the creek to the northeast.

Significance - Brief summary including documentary evidence that indicates the historical, architectural or archeological significance of the site.

The significance of the Indian midden at Arch Creek is that it contains data about the prehistoric culture of the extinct Tequesta Indian culture. This site may be likely to yield information in the future which will prove important to our understanding of south Florida prehistory. Previous excavations at the site have all ready contributed to knowledge of prehistoric sites in southeastern Florida.

John K. Small (1930:44) first described the site as having "... evidences of much activity, in the way of kitchen middens, village sites, and burial mounds." The site was first recorded by John Goggin in 1952 in the Florida Master Site File.

Numerous excavations by amateur and professional archeologists have been conducted in the midden during the past 30 years. Laxson (1957) excavated eight pits in an area adjacent to northeast 135th Street in 1956. Arthur Marler, an amateur archeologist, excavated nine pits in 1967 in the same vicinity as Laxson's investigations. A joint project was undertaken by the Broward County Archeological Society and the Miami West-India Archeological Society in 1972, in which eight pits were excavated. The most extensive archeological work was conducted by archeologist Robert Carr in 1975, for the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management. All of these excavations have resulted in the recovery of at least 10,000 pottery sherds, and the discovery of a single human burial. A large quantity of shell refuse, faunal bone and charcoal was also collected.

Although evidence of Paleo-Indian and Archaic occupation is lacking, the ceramic assemblage and radiocarbon dates indicate the site was in use between 500 B.C. and A.D. 1300 (Carr 1975:34). Spanning approximately 1800 years, this stretch of time covers the entire Glades Culture sequence. The data can be effectively used to reconstruct

prehistoric subsistence and technological activities, particularly for the Glades I and II periods (500 B.C. - A.D. 750 and A.D. 750-1200).

Glades I period use is indicated by the radiocarbon dates analyzed during Carr's excavation (1975:Table 4). The dates range from 400 B.C. to A.D. 600 and all occur within the Glades I period. Also indicative of this period are such key ceramic types as the Ft. Drum decorated ware, Cane Patch Incised, and Opa Locka Incised, which are common in the lower level of the midden. According to Carr, intensive occupation of the site probably began between 300 B.C. and A.D. 1 (1975:36).

A Glades II period occupation (circa 700 A.D. - 1250 A.D.) is well represented throughout the midden. The stratigraphy and ceramic time markers encountered by Laxson (1957) indicate occupation during this time. Over 6,000 pottery sherds from the Glades II period were recovered by the Broward County and Miami West-India Archeological Societies in 1972. Shell tools, bone points, and worked shark vertebrae and teeth were also found. Carr's report (1975) suggests a lesser degree of occupation during this stage than the previously mentioned studies.

Evidence of occupation during the Glades III period (A.D. 1250-1700) may have existed at the site, but bulldozing and other disturbances over the last 50 years probably account for the almost total lack of such indicators. Laxson (1957) reported recovering only one sherd from this period and only a few Glades III time markers were found during the Broward-Miami West-India Archeological Society excavations (1972:8).

A major prehistoric component associated with the Arch Creek Site is a burial mound, referred to earlier by Small (1930). This may be the mound that was excavated by a pioneer resident, Florence Miller in 1899 (Miller n.d.). She found, "skeletons buried on a level in a circle, heads in, feet out." The mound was located west of the natural bridge but has since been destroyed (Carr 1975:18).

Human burials are associated with the Arch Creek midden. A human burial was partially uncovered by Carr on the last day of the project in 1975, however, wet weather and a lack of time prevented a complete recovery. The date of the burial was not determined, but it appeared to be associated with a Glades II Period soil zone. Carr estimates the skeleton was of a 30-45 year old male. No quantitative measurements or analysis has been undertaken to date.

The second level of significance regarding the Indian midden concerns the information which may result from future excavations and research at the site. Although many of Dade County's coastal sites have been subjected to various archeological investigations, aside from the salvage excavations of the Granada site (Bonath 1980), there has been very little indepth analysis of these sites. Arch Creek is one of the last remaining examples of coastal sites in Dade County.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Historical significance at the Arch Creek Archeological Site is present within every feature of the tract. The mill sluice, the natural bridge, the tree hammock and Arch Creek are all connected with the history of southeast Florida. The area was the focal point of much human activity throughout history (Carr 1975; Parks 1977; Peters 1976, 1981).

The Arch Creek mill is important because of its association with the flourishing of the coontie starch industry in southeast Florida. It is well documented that Indians of the historic period and possibly of the prehistoric period, used coontie roots for making bread or pudding (Sleight 1953; Fix 1963; Austin 1980). The knowledge of preparation and cooking with coontie starch was absorbed by white settlers in South Florida in the 1800's. (Burkhardt 1952; Gearhart 1952; Moya 1957; Peters 1976, 1981). Not only did the pioneers enjoy the culinary rewards of the coontie plant, but they turned the process into a profit-making business which endured almost a century. According to Gearhart,

"manufacturing starch from the coontie root is probably the earliest known industry in Dade County...it has been established that white settlers engaged in the industry some time prior to 1840" (1952: 55).

The coontie starch industry was the major commercial activity, besides wrecking, in southeast Florida during the early to mid-nineteenth century. The mill at Arch Creek, although relatively unsuccessful in the starch business, was certainly unique in operation. It is the only known mill to use a sluice and the only uncovered site of a starch mill in south Florida.

The site was also traversed by Dade County's earliest road. The road was a military trail built in two stages by Captain M. Brannan, Captain Abner Doubleday, and Lieutenant Weber in 1856 and 1857 (Brannan 1857). Having served its purpose, the trail was abandoned and in many places became obliterated. The following year the mill and water sluice were established at Arch Creek, and the mill sluice was constructed through the road, possibly making the road impassable for wagons or carts.

Another county road was completed in 1892 and a hack line (stage coach), consisting of a springless wagon drawn by mules, with boards to sit on and canvas for shade, began operating in 1893. Peters reports "the stage coach...made the last rest stop southbound at the arch--there were no facilities but plenty of bushes and good water if one had a long reach" (1981:182).

The military trail of the Seminole Wars, the first county road, and later the Dixie Highway, all followed almost identical routes crossing Arch Creek at the natural bridge. Peters calls it the "Check Point Charley of the Bay country, the welcome mat for early tourists, and a natural phenomenon that all South Floridians came to regard with pride, even awe" (1981:167).

The Arch Creek tract has always been a popular source of enjoyment, rest, and relaxation. During Miami's pioneer period, the area was a favorite picnic spot. One of the first large picnics was held at the natural bridge in May, 1897. The occasion was an end-of-school celebration by the pupils of Miami's first downtown school. According to Peters, "barbecues, fish fries, political rallies, Easter egg hunts, community Thanksgiving dinners, and even on one occasion a baptism, were held there" (1981:183).

The beauty of the Arch Creek tract was admired by early south Floridians, and several pioneers sought to prosper from it. The Metropolis (February 12, 1897), reported that Clarence Billings was operating a sightseeing trip on Arch Creek. "It was a good tourist trip because of the deep gorge near the Natural Bridge, the bridge itself, the tropical foliage covering the banks of the winding streams, the trees covered with immense orchids, the alligator's sunning along the banks..." Caroline Washburn-Rockwood provides a detailed description of her sightseeing trip to the natural bridge in her book, In Biscayne Bay, published in 1896. Commodore Alfred Monroe, a 19th century naturalist and historian, was probably the first to photograph the Arch Creek area. He wrote that the beauty of Arch Creek "makes pictures that are worth coming down here to see" (Parks 1977:53).

A refreshment stand was built at Arch Creek in the early 1900's by George Hinckley, a wealthy restaurant owner and nature lover (Peters 1981:183). The refreshment stand was later enlarged and was commonly referred to as "the shell house", for the outer walls were covered with conch shells. Peters reports,

"during Prohibition when tea rooms were in vogue this building was known as the Arch Creek Tearoom (Metropolis, October 27, 1921). The tea room almost overhung the stream near the arch and was itself the subject for many souvenir postcards" (1981:183).

No remains of this building presently exist.

Tremendous community pride and local interest has always been associated with the Arch Creek tract. This was undeniably the major factor which led to the purchase of the tract by the state of Florida in 1973. The property was leased to Dade County in 1978 and the Park and Recreation Department began planning to develop it into a passive recreation park. Cleanup of the property and construction of a facility began in 1980. Arch Creek Park was officially dedicated on April 25, 1982 (Figure 4).

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Draft Resolution Designating the Property:

Whereas, the Arch Creek Archeological Site is a significant prehistoric habitation site in Dade County, and
 Whereas, the Arch Creek Archeological Site contains an unknown number of Indian burials, and
 Whereas, the Arch Creek Site contains a nineteenth century coontie mill site and sluice, and
 Whereas, this coontie mill site is the only preserved coontie mill site in Dade County, and
 Whereas, the Arch Creek Site was the location of the natural bridge, one of the most important natural landmarks in southern Florida, and
 Whereas the preservation of archeological and historical sites is in the best interest of Dade County and its citizens, and
 Whereas, the Arch Creek Archeological Site is located beginning at a point at the SE corner of Arch Creek Park at the intersection of U.S. 1 and NE 135th Street, then 675' westly along the park's southern boundary to the ROW of the Florida East Coast Railroad, then 950' northeasterly along the Florida East Coast Railroad ROW, then 300' southeasterly along the park's northern boundary to the NE corner of the park, then 895' southwesterly to the Point of Beginning.

Be it resolved, that the Historic Preservation Board on Wednesday, December 5, 1984 has designated the Arch Creek Archeological Site as an individual archeological site pursuant to the Metropolitan Dade County Historic Preservation Ordinance (81-13) and that the Arch Creek Site is subject to all rights, privileges and requirements of that ordinance.

Designation is approved as evidenced by the signature of the Historic Preservation Board Chairman.